

Liberty

May 2004

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The Truth
About
WMDs

The Passion of Mel Gibson

by Jo Ann Skousen

What is War Good For?

by Alan Ebenstein and R. W. Bradford

Orwell Lives!

by Richard Kostelanetz

Life in the Death Star

by Gene Healy

Armenian Splendor

by Alec Mouhibian

America's War on Religion

by Andrew W. Jones

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Letters

More Praise for Gridlock

I read Stephen Cox's article on Bush's liberalism with some amusement. It amazes me that a libertarian could believe that major political parties have a consistent ideology. Trying to find ideological purity in modern politicians is a waste of time. Political parties determine policy by randomly calling a thousand people or so, and doing whatever the majority of them want. I'm sure the RNC and their doppelgangers in the DNC laugh at anyone's attempt to find ideological reasons for their actions.

So why was Cox's Democrat friend so enraged by Bush? It's really no different than Republicans' rage against Clinton. Party feeling causes irrational hatred of other parties; any Sovietologist could tell you that. Republican ire only subsided when they found a rational reason for it; Clinton, apparently unlike all other men, lies about adultery. When the Democrats concoct a similar excuse to hate Bush they will calm down a bit.

You'll note that I haven't used the words "conservative" or "liberal." A recent issue of *Liberty* quoted George Orwell's warning against using political metaphors in common circulation, since such things are used to control the populace. Thus left, right, conservative and liberal have all been removed from my political vocabulary. I've found that it's cleared up a lot of misconceptions in my mind about politics.

For instance, legislatures always spend money. This is why we have presidents, to rein them in. However, presidents can't veto legislation passed by their own party, because such a veto would look like an attack on their own party. So Democratic presidents allow Democratic legislatures to spend as much as they can, and Republican presidents allow

Republican legislatures to do the same. Thus, Bush cannot and will not veto Republican pork. Now of course Kerry is going to promise his party faithful the sky; he knows that he will face a Republican legislature that will enact none of his plans. I would prefer Dean, who at least has a history of balancing budgets, but I'll take divided government over one-party rule any day.

David Stanley
Arlington, Va.

Hi From the Abyss

I always enjoy Stephen Cox's comments on our native tongue(s). It is done with lightness and compassion and is entertaining as well as illuminating. Years ago my English teaching mother gave me a copy of Hayakawa's (of anti-digit-dialing fame) *Language in Thought and Action* and got me hooked on semantics — but only in an amateurish way. Now, in my declining years, I find myself less pleased with these smart-ass upstart journalists who must use the latest buzz words du jour to show, I suppose, that they are very well educated even though the usage is often marginally appropriate (e.g., paradigm). Am I not alone or am I just an old fuddy-duddy?

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Erratum

Because of a proofreading error, a sentence on page 47 of the April issue read that "the Privileges and Immunities Clause of Article IV and the Privileges or Immunities Clause of the 14th Amendment . . . was largely restored by appeal to the Fifth Amendment's Due Process Clause." Author Leland B. Yeager was referring to the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment, not the 5th.

Liberty sincerely regrets the error.

— The Editors

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Legislating Liberty

by Michigan State Representative Leon Drolet

Can a libertarian state legislator stick to his principles yet still be effective? Can he significantly change the substance of laws, yet still vote every time to reduce the size, scope and cost of government? Must a libertarian lawmaker be merely a protester, or can he also be a participant? I had to answer these questions when an unexpected special election made me a member of the Michigan House of Representatives on March 27, 2001.

The very first vote was a matter of principle: a budget for the state's education bureaucracy that was slated to increase well beyond the rate of inflation – not a nickel of which would ever go to an actual classroom. One-hundred and six state representatives said “yes” – lighting up our vote tally board with a sea of green names surrounding a conspicuous, lonely, name in red: DROLET. I had stuck to principle, but I hadn't changed a single mind. Was principled protester to become the limit of my role as a lawmaker? It sure looked that way three years ago.

Fast forward to earlier this year.

Our Senate decided, by a 24-14 vote, to put under-age drinkers in jail if a breath test detected any level of alcohol in their system, regardless of how much and where it was consumed. Just across the Canadian border, where the drinking age is lower, twenty-year-old Michigan residents would be able to drink legally, moderately, and responsibly, and then face jail time upon their return home.

Most expected this bill to pass the House as easily as it had breezed through the Senate (where only a single Republican had opposed it), but a funny thing happened after I stood up and stated my objections: *other Republicans got up and agreed with me!* The bill was then overwhelmingly rejected by the House. The media who cover the state Capitol attributed the bill's demise to my opposition.

I had come a long way from being the only “no” vote to being the leader of the “no voters,” and there were a lot of successes – big and little – along the way.

Just shortly after that first “no” vote in early 2001, former Republican Governor John Engler introduced a proposal to collect a sales tax on Internet purchases. Rather than just vote “no,” I stuck my head up and took to the newspapers to publicly attack the governor's plans and lead the opposition. Eighteen months later, Engler left office with no Internet tax law and not a dime collected. And on a personal note, I had earned a little respect from less vocal anti-tax Republicans who followed my lead and helped me beat back this tax increase from their own governor.

Even though my relationship with Engler and many Republican state senators deteriorated substantially while I was blasting him and them for their Internet tax scheme, I did manage to create my first law during this fight. Public Act 399 of 2002 made it easier for the Libertarian Party and other smaller parties to gain and retain ballot access in Michigan – a state that had previously been one of the nation's toughest for gaining ballot status.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 also occurred during those early months, followed shortly thereafter by a number of hastily drafted anti-terrorism proposals from our Senate that threatened civil liberties. Most objectionable was a definition of ‘terrorism’ that could have ensnared anti-tax groups, labor unions, gun rights groups and other passionate participants in legitimate political disagreements.

Seeking to restrict ‘terrorist’ penalties to genuine terrorists, I organized



the ACLU, NRA, labor unions, Right to Life of Michigan and various lawmakers from left to right into a coalition that was so effective that the Majority Floor Leader in the House refused to move the bills until they were redrafted with a terrorism definition that was acceptable to me. A frustrated Senate was forced to work with our coalition to draw up a significantly tighter definition.

Statist ideas from the Office of the Governor continued when Democrat Jennifer Granholm replaced Engler in 2003. One of her first proposals was a multi-billion-dollar mass transit plan for metro-Detroit that few metro-area residents would use or be willing to pay for. Her advantage was that lawmakers of both parties from outside the Detroit-area could be persuaded to vote for a plan that didn't affect them. My advantage was that I could rile up the lawmakers from the Detroit suburbs who were affected.

I successfully attached an amendment that allowed local governments to opt-out of the proposal, causing the governor to promise a veto if the amendment stayed in. It did, and after more than a year she still doesn't have her mass-transit bill.

But once again, I managed to get one of my bills signed into law by a governor whose best laid plans I was frustrating. Public Act 306 of 2003 prohibited public education institutions from holding 'stealth elections.' Prior to this, public school bureaucracies won approval for higher taxes by scheduling special elections on days when turnout would be low. (I nearly missed one such election when my local school district arranged for a vote shortly before Christmas in 2000).

None of the successes described above mean that I am having my way in Lansing. Too often, I am still the lone 'no' vote on bills expanding the drug war or increasing penalties on adult prostitution. Remaining relevant is difficult because it often puts me in opposition to anti-freedom legislation proposed by fellow Republicans. As noted earlier, Republican Governor Engler and I had a strained relationship. My interference with his Internet sales tax was just the beginning – and a very rare defeat for him.

Our relationship got testier after his 2002 State of the State address, where he announced a big-government plan to take over the deployment of broadband infrastructure. The legislation was explicitly hostile to the free-market, stating the following in its preamble: "The Legislature finds that the conditions described above have not and cannot be remedied on a timely basis by the ordinary operation of private enterprise without supplementary public participation."

When the media asked me what I thought of the speech and his idea, I told them that it was my desire to give the *Republican* response to the State of the State address. Gov. Engler probably didn't appreciate seeing that in print the next morning, but his annoyance was nothing compared to a few weeks earlier when *The Wall Street Journal* published an editorial naming me as his principle opposition and trashing his broadband proposal before the entire world: "*Perhaps on Planet Engler higher taxes and increased regulatory burdens attract business and encourage investment. Here on Earth, however, they have just the opposite effect.*"

The *Journal* encouraged my legislative colleagues to sup-

port the fight against Engler's broadband plan. Alas, most did not and he got much of what he wanted (though the national pressure did force him to strike out the blatantly statist preamble about market failures).

Democratic Governor Granholm's election in 2003 has made it easier to find matters of principle where I can agree with my fellow Republicans. A Republican-controlled Legislature squaring off against a Democratic governor provides many opportunities for a critic of bigger government to be useful. I was given a committee chairmanship (Employment Relations), made vice-chair of the powerful Government Operations Committee, and put on the Commerce, Tax Policy, and Local Government committees.

As chair of Employment Relations, I successfully guided two very contentious issues through my committee, over the ob-

jections of big labor bosses and public sector unions. One bill prevents local govern-

My opponents consider my votes against the drug war and other victimless crimes to be vulnerabilities that they can exploit when I run for re-election.

ments from forcing businesses to pay a minimum wage (a.k.a.: "living wage") that is higher than the state level (that one got the private sector unions mad at me). The other bill would consolidate all of the state's 16 human resources departments into one agency (this one ticked off the Democratic governor and the state employee unions). Both bills passed the full House and await attention from the Senate.

But in many ways, other lawmakers are still adjusting to my libertarian views. After a Lansing newsletter rated me one of the most "conservative" legislators in 2002, I came back in 2003 and confounded conservatives by sponsoring a bill to repeal Michigan's felony prohibition against sodomy between consenting adults (see: "*Michiganistan?*" in *Liberty Magazine*, June 2003). Likewise, I am one of only a very few Republicans opposing Michigan's pending constitutional 'marriage protection' amendment mandating discriminatory treatment of gay contract rights.

Still, it's been quite an improvement from those early days. An old House tradition requires a new lawmaker to bring a food offering to the rest of the legislators as an inducement for them to pass his very first bill. The box of candy that I distributed for my first bill was angrily flung back at me by a member of the Appropriations Committee, with a note that said: "Thanks, but, no thanks." He was still angry because I had voted against one of his big-spending budgets.

Since that day, I have worked hard to explain to each of my colleagues that my opposition to most legislation is based on the core principle of limited government. I have also spent a greater amount of time socializing with fellow lawmakers between work hours; having a good sense of humor, talking in the evenings about ideas and values, attending events with them. This approach has worked and has resulted in support for my legislation and – more importantly – more support for my opposition to other bigger-government bills.

But this growing effectiveness has come with a price. Anti-freedom forces that once ignored me as irrelevant now are targeting me for defeat. They have seen that when I speak against a bill, fellow legislators are listening. One example: my annual amendment to end state subsidies to Amtrak which used to receive

six or seven votes is now supported by 31 Republicans – over half of the Republican caucus. Another example is when the governor proposed a new set of fees to ‘make polluters pay’ for environmental inspections. I researched and exposed the names of the ‘big polluters’ that would end up paying those fees: trout farms, Girl Scout camps, churches, mom-and-pop convenience stores and laundromats were on the list. Those fees went down in flames and have not resurfaced.

I am also focused on building our movement, both here in Michigan and throughout the country. Two years ago, I formed a political action committee called the Michigan Liberty Club to act as a Club for Growth for candidates for state office. Last year, I organized the House Taxpayer Protection Caucus consisting of those lawmakers willing to sign the Americans for Tax Reform pledge to never support any tax increase.

The left is especially up in arms now that I am spearheading a ballot initiative to amend the state constitution to prohibit government race and gender preferences in affirmative action programs. With the help of California businessman Ward Connerly, whose similar initiatives in California and the state of Washington were approved by voters, the Michigan ballot initiative is going very well (you can find out more about the initiative at www.mcric2004.org).

Those whose livelihood is dependent on government handouts are directly threatened by my proposal to lower and constitutionally cap the state income tax. Their concern has become panic, because the House Speaker and the Senate Majority Leader have publicly endorsed my legislation and made its passage one of their priorities.

But I haven’t exactly become the darling of some ele-

ments of the political right, either. My bill to repeal the sodomy law and opposition to amending the constitution to define marriage has sent some religious fundamentalist leaders looking for someone to take me out in the Republican primary. They are even discussing launching a recall effort. My opponents consider my votes against the drug war and other victimless crimes to be vulnerabilities that they can exploit when I run for re-election.

A libertarian can win office as a Republican and be effective without compromising the principles of liberty. But he cannot do this and stay in office with support from the lobbyists who benefit from big government or those on the right who believe that restricting personal freedom is a more important goal than protecting the pocketbook. They will close ranks against a common enemy who conspicuously attacks their positions, and I have been working very hard to earn their wrath.

The money that I need to continue these battles is going to come from a lot of people like YOU! My campaign mantra from the beginning has been that I am working to reduce the size, scope and cost of government. You most likely share these values if you are reading *Liberty* magazine. I need you to support these values by sending a donation to my campaign.

Here are the government-mandated legal requirements for contributors: contributions cannot exceed \$500 per person (any amount will be gratefully received), and contributions over \$100 must include the name and address of the contributor’s employer. Checks can be made out to: CTE Leon Drolet and mailed to 16820 Edloytom Way, Clinton Twp., MI 48038.

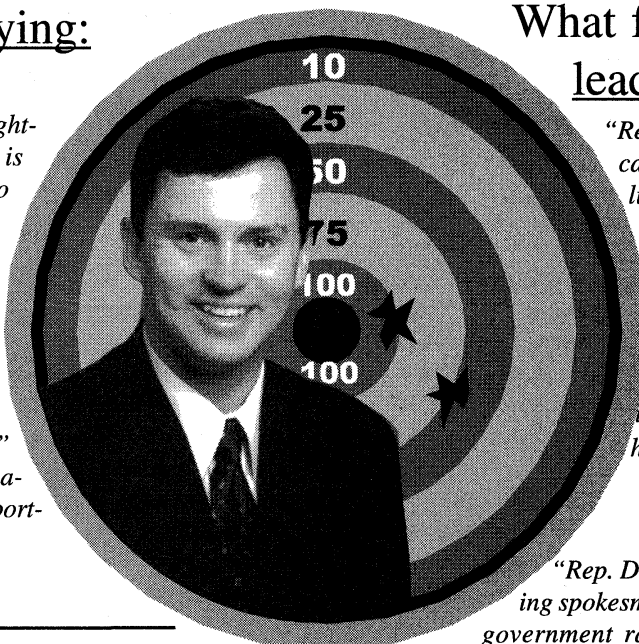
Thank you for your assistance, and for your commitment to Liberty!

Rep. Leon Drolet: Statists’ Top Target in MI!

What statists are saying:

“Drolet is also a member of the right-wing, anti-tax Libertarian Party. It is no coincidence that Drolet also successfully sponsored amendments to the DARTA bill making it easier for suburbs to opt out of the transit system and he is the chief sponsor of a bill to overturn living wage laws...The success of Drolet’s legislation does not bode well for future efforts at regional cooperation.”

M.O.S.E.S., a coalition of left-wing organizations supporting new taxes for mass transit.



What free-society leaders are saying:

“Rep. Drolet proves that libertarians can get elected and be effective. More libertarians should follow the lead of Congressman Ron Paul and Rep. Leon Drolet.”

R.W. Bradford, Liberty

“Rep. Drolet has shown bold leadership in fighting against tax hikes in Michigan, and taxpayers ...owe him a debt of gratitude.”

**Grover Norquist,
Americans for Tax Reform**

“Rep. Drolet is a huge asset and a convincing spokesman for the petition drive to prohibit government race preferences in Michigan and throughout the nation. He is a true leader for the principle of equality in America”

Ward Connerly, American Civil Rights Inst.

Your dollars spent advancing liberty go farthest when you help reelect Rep. Drolet! Keep liberty’s voice at the table!

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Reflections

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

— If Jesus Christ were alive today He would be committed to a mental hospital, diagnosed as schizophrenic, injected with major tranquilizing drugs and shocked with electricity to "cure" his "false beliefs" (delusions) and "self-reported imaginings" (hallucinations).

— Jeffrey A. Schaler

Safety in obsolescence — A friend of mine was worried that terrorists might try and hit trains in the United States now, and wondered whether he could cancel a planned Amtrak excursion. No worries.

The terrorists try and maximize their casualties, and if you could blow up an entire Amtrak train, you still wouldn't kill more than two dozen people.

— Tim Slagle

A boon for trial lawyers

— How surprising to see in a "neoconservative" magazine a call for a Constitutional amendment limiting state-licensed "marriage" only to one man with one woman. Given all the recent intelligence about the ambiguities of gender, may I predict that one likely result of such an amendment, if imposed, will be a flood of lawsuits benefitting no class as much as litigious lawyers whom neo-cons and regular cons are forever trying to retire to the poorhouse?

— Richard Kostelanetz

More straw for the camel

— Trade deficits, Social Security's looming bankruptcy, federal budgets . . . it is natural for people to focus on the "big picture" and not on the multitudinous ways in which local, county, and state bureaucracies are going to nickel and dime you into destitution in the coming months. City Halls are facing the same sort of fiscal crunch as every other level of government and they have only *you* to fleece, on a most personal level, to make up any shortfall. And I'm not talking about the higher "sin" taxes that are being slapped on everything from cigarettes to hunting licenses. Look for the more subtle taxes. The methods

local officials can and will devise to part you from every thin dime are almost limitlessly inventive. In Indiana, for example, one town is beginning to bill nonresidents for police time consumed in traffic accidents on highways within a dozen miles of the town. Philadelphia has also applied its Yankee know-how: Among other measures, the city is proposing to charge people "to apply for city jobs." Next year, it may well cost \$35 to fill out an employment form.

What the heck . . . anything that discourages people from becoming podlike civil servants has an upside.

— Wendy McElroy

SO HERE'S THE DEAL: NO LONG-TERM COMMITMENTS. A WEEK, MAYBE TWO. NO PROMISES. NOTHING REALLY SERIOUS — JUST A NICE, LITTLE WAR, MR. PRESIDENT. CALL IT A "QUICKIE."



SHCHAMBERS

How many stores is your name worth?

— When Martha Stewart was found guilty, the value of KMart immediately dropped by 1.1 percent. That's a very interesting statement on the value of a brand. It is interesting to realize that the market value of Martha Stewart's name simply appearing on products sold there is roughly \$342 million, as much as the entire inventory and real estate of twenty fully stocked KMart stores.

— Tim Slagle

The right to lie

— Martha Stewart was not convicted of insider trading. She was convicted of several procedural things, one of which was lying to the government. To put a finer point on it, she was convicted of lying to the government about an act for which charges were dropped. And that means we must assume she was lying to the government about an act that was lawful.

What's wrong with that?

Why can't the citizen of a free country, not under oath, lie to a government employee about an act that's lawful? Some things are none of the government's damn business. I mean, assume you're not under oath. Some guy from the government comes around and asks you about your stock trading. You can refuse to talk. You can tell him to get lost. That's okay (at least for now). But if you tell him, "I don't know anything about that," when you do know, then you have just committed a federal crime.

A simple Internet search finds the law, and commentary on it. The law is 18 U.S.C. 1001, material misrepresentation to the federal government. The lie must be "material" — that is, substantial — but it does not have to be in pursuit of a crime. The law was apparently written in its modern form during the New Deal (thank you, Franklin!) to be able to prosecute people who falsely applied for government benefits. Like RICO and the Patriot Act, it has become a tool for other prosecutions.

The damndest thing is, the law doesn't apply to the government. Its employees can lie to you. Like a cop dressed up as a streetwalker, they can trick and mislead you. You can't lie to them. Think of what that says about the relationship between citizen and state. — Bruce Ramsey

Put up and shut up — A recent ruling of the Washington Supreme Court illustrates the bias of the courts in favor of government.

This matter concerned Sound Transit in Seattle. Proposals to fund this agency's work, building of a light rail line, had been on the ballot twice. In 1995 it failed; focus groups said it had asked for too much. It cut the proposed tax increase and the length of light-rail line was sliced in half, to 21 miles. Its terminals would be the University of Washington north of downtown and Sea-Tac airport south of downtown. The measure passed.

Seattle is a hilly city, and is bisected by a ship canal. The light rail would have to go under a hill and under the canal

to get to the university. The eventual plan called for a deep tunnel five and a half miles long.

The taxes approved by the voters couldn't cover the cost. In 2001, Sound Transit came out with a new plan. The taxes would be the same, but the line would be one-third shorter. Instead of 21 miles, it would be 14 miles. It would not go to the university or under the canal, and it would stop one mile short of the airport. Critics called it "the train to nowhere."

Opponents filed a lawsuit. They said the project had substantially changed, and that according to Washington case law, Sound Transit would have to go back to the voters. They were right about the case law. It was pretty clear on that, though the cases were old, one of them dealing with streetcar lines in the 1920s.

The court ruled in March 2004. Yes, the court said, the case law said generally that substantial changes had to be resubmitted to voters. But back in 1996, the Sound Transit board had voted out a Resolution 75. In this Resolution 75, Sound Transit had reserved for itself the right to change its plan in any way it liked. It could shorten the 21 miles of light rail to 14 miles, or one mile, or zero miles. Because voters had approved Resolution 75, the case law did not apply.

Had voters approved Resolution 75? The agency hadn't mentioned it, or anything about the power to change plans, in the eight-page disclosure statement it had mailed to voters. The official ballot title mentioned Resolution 75, but didn't say what it was or where to find a copy of it. In fact, copies were available at the auditor's office if anyone had asked. As far as I know, no one did.

So we voted for system A, and are told now we're getting system B, which is one-third shorter and goes nowhere useful. If we complain, the government pulls Resolution 75 out of its hat and says, "Read this. You agreed to it."

"No," I want to say, "I didn't."

"The court says you did."

Imagine if a business had sold something that way — a home remodeling job, for example. They sell you a kitchen and then say, "We decided we can't afford to replace the sink or the floor, like we promised. We reserved that right in a contract provision we never showed you, but there was a small asterisk on one of the papers, and you could have asked about it. And — by the way — you still owe us the same amount of money."

Try to imagine a business doing that. I can't.

— Bruce Ramsey

The pot calls the kettle lavender — Getting the problem right but the answer wrong, President Bush declared that marriage is in danger and the solution is an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to ban same-sex marriages.

It's true, of course, that marriages are being destroyed right and left, but they're not being destroyed by anything gay or lesbian couples are doing. Long before San Francisco issued its first marriage certificate to a same-sex couple, American heterosexuals were busting up marriages at the rate of over 1 million per year.

So here we are now with over 20 million divorced heter-

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osexuals in America and the only people hitting the streets to sing the praises of marriage are gays and lesbians — and President Bush says the answer is to put gays back in the closet. It reminds me of Germany in 1935. “Non-Aryans” were made ineligible for military service after the Aryans lost a war and put the country into a nosedive. Here, 70 years later, heterosexuals have put marriage on the rocks and we’re told the answer is to make Ellen DeGeneres ineligible.

“The defense of marriage requires a constitutional amendment,” explained President Bush. “Government, by recognizing and protecting marriage, serves the interests of all.” What that meant was a call for the only constitutional amendment in American history that is aimed at restricting the liberties of a particular group (unless you count whiskey drinkers as a group). If the president’s goal were really to defend and protect marriage, if he were really interested in reversing the decline of what he calls “the most enduring human institution,” he would call for some constitutional amendments aimed at restricting the liberties of heterosexuals. A decade or two in jail for adultery, for instance, to serve “the interests of all,” might well put a lid on some of the monkeying around that goes on every night. The same with cohabitation and out-of-wedlock childbearing, maybe with some public stoning added on, like in Iran. Or he could have called on Congress to pass an amendment that required a five-year cooling-off period with mandatory federal marriage classes and abstinence training before anyone could get a marriage license, or an amendment that called for zero divorces, or at least no divorces until all the kids

are grown and gone.

Instead, we got a ploy, a wedge, something that’ll do nothing to strengthen marriage and everything to divide Americans from each other and from their own families. Dick Cheney, the night before Bush’s speech, boasted during a speech in Kansas that he and his wife, Lynne, “have a Republican marriage.” Closer to home, Sen. Rick Santorum warned about “judges and vigilantes — people taking justice into their own hands.” Laura Bush explained that many people find the idea of gay marriage “shocking.”

It wasn’t that long ago, of course, that people found marriages between blacks and whites “shocking” — and anti-God. In a *New York Times* column last December, Nicolas D. Kristof drew the connection between those times and today: “A 1958 poll found that 96 percent of whites disapproved of marriages between blacks and whites (Deuteronomy 7:3 condemns interracial marriages). In 1959, a judge justified Virginia’s ban on interracial marriage by declaring that ‘Almighty God did not intend for the races to mix.’ Someday, we will regard opposition to gay marriage as equally obtuse and old-fashioned.”

Meanwhile, Jerry Falwell is all over TV being shocked about San Francisco and warning about slippery slopes. Next it’ll be polygamists, he cautioned, and moms marrying their sons, and goats. What he hasn’t talked about is the slippery slope of combining religion and government, of letting guys like him call the political shots, and how that’s enslaved and killed a million times more people than all the sex that’s ever been had, whether authorized or unauthorized by all the world’s priests, rabbis, mullahs, senators, presidents, and other assorted theocrats and busybodies. Here, for example, is the Koran’s prescription for half the human race: “Shut them up within their houses till death releases them.” And the directive if she ever gets out, described by Muslim philosopher al-Ghazali: “She should put on old clothes and take deserted streets and alleys, avoid markets, and make sure that a stranger does not hear her voice or recognize her.” That sounds like a closet to me, and a situation that calls for some vigilantism.

— Ralph Reiland

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The worst defense is a good offense —

The other day, I saw George Carlin interviewed on one of the morning shows on Fox News. The interview was about some movie he’s in. My attention was drifting in and out — mainly out — when it was suddenly arrested by a new topic: the government’s attempt to get tough with “dirt” on the “public airwaves.”

Carlin is famous for incorporating his opposition to censorship into his comedy routines. He is also an intelligent guy. I looked forward to hearing a strong, logical argument on behalf of liberty, delivered by a popular, articulate person.

I didn’t hear that argument. Instead of delivering it, Carlin illustrated the characteristic that makes me despair of virtually all the spokesmen for liberty who get on TV. Instead of talking about liberty, and talking in a persuasive way, he insisted on talking about other topics, and precisely the topics that would prevent people from being per-

suaed.

First he threw away his Republican audience by announcing that demands for censorship were just so much "red meat" that the right wing was throwing to its core constituency.

Then he threw away most of the rest of his audience by claiming that religion is responsible for censorship because religion (all of it, I guess) is opposed to "the body." So much for all those religious Democrats.

Then, for a grand finale, he threw away the good will of his host, and of everyone who cares about manners of any kind, by making himself look like an ungrateful lout who deserved to be censored, if only on grounds of decorum. His interviewer — a nice young woman who obviously had a commercial break rushing upon her — tried to shut off Carlin's anti-religious rant, but Carlin kept talking over her. Finally she said, cheerily, "My religion didn't teach me that," and indicated that she had to stop the interview.

What did Carlin say? Did he politely apologize for drifting away from his topic — which, I repeat, was supposed to be liberty, not religion or party politics? Did he smile and wish his host a kindly adieu?

Certainly not! He imputed a sinister motive to her desire to end his speech. "You're a right-wing network," he said, "and you don't want to hear this stuff."

Nice going, George. Why bother to talk to that slimy old network, anyway? All that's at stake is the liberty you are supposedly trying to advance.

The host made one more try. "Good luck with the movie!" she smiled. Carlin looked away, obviously too incensed at her rudeness to return a civil answer.

Score another round
for the censors.

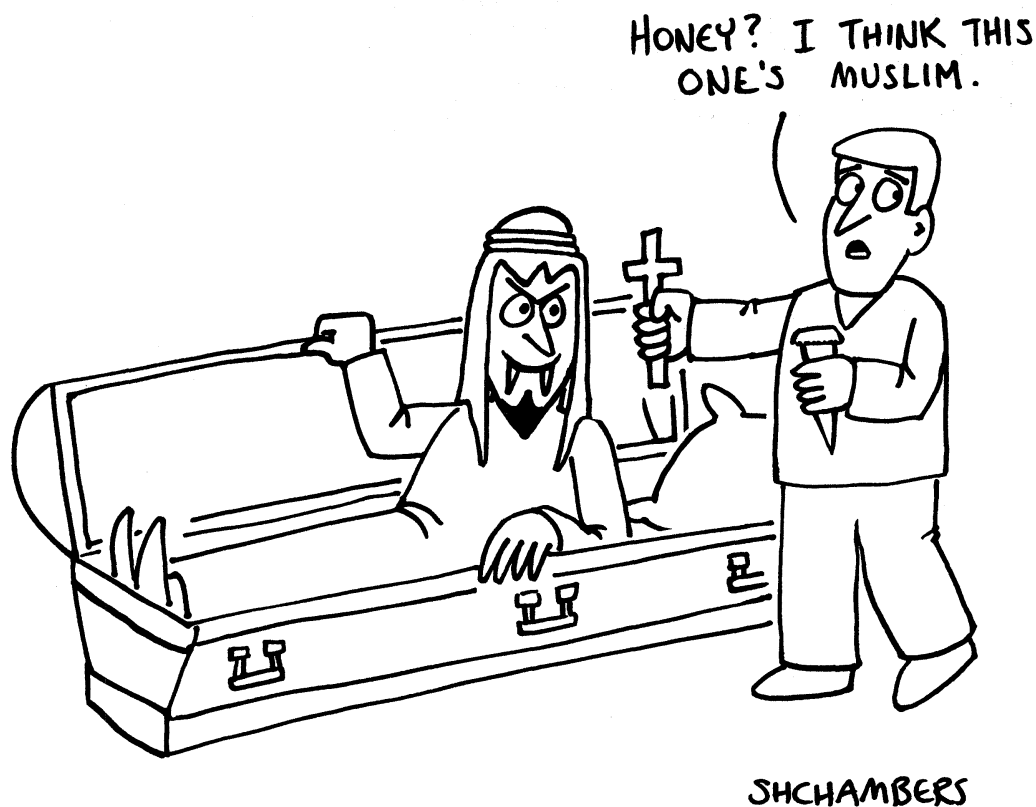
— Stephen Cox

All the news that's fit to fabri- cate

— A few days ago, major American media were reporting that Pakistan's troops had cornered a "senior" al Qaeda figure, with everyone suggesting heavily that it was No. 2 man Ayman al-Zawahiri. The *Washington Times* stated flat out, "Pakistan says it has cornered al-Zawahiri." Meanwhile, non-U.S. media were saying "it ain't so" — at least, not the al-Zawahiri part. The *Times of India* stated, "Al Qaeda leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri were safe and 'on this side of the border,' an Afghanistan-based Taliban

spokesman said on Friday." A headline in the Pakistani *Daily Times* reads: "CNN ends up with 'much egg on its face.'"

After providing blanket coverage of the imminent capture of al-Zawahiri, CNN abruptly dropped the story and barely mentioned it for hours. The background on what happened is an instructive glimpse into the media's mindset and the influence it exerts. Aaron Brown — CNN's lead anchor and host of *NewsNight With Aaron Brown* — was in Pakistan to cover U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's "anniversary" visit when the opportunity to interview President Pervez Musharraf arose. Musharraf told Brown about a military operation in south Waziristan, stating that the resistance being offered suggested militants might be defending a high-value target. He said it was "very likely" the possible target had been surrounded. Sensing they had a global exclusive — the biggest story since the capture of Saddam Hussein — CNN ran with it, sensationalizing both the form and substance. Suddenly, al-Zawahiri by name was surrounded and about to be captured any moment, thus raising worldwide expectations and tensions. As events unfolded and non-U.S. media began to comment, it became clear that nothing about the battle was "imminent" and that the conflict might rage for days or weeks. And, so, in live satellite broadcasts, Brown began to backpedal, lowering time expectations. It became unclear whether al-Zawahiri was still among the besieged or ever had been there. At this point, top news executives at CNN apparently made a decision. No retractions. Just bury the story as though it had not been reported. It was a blunder of biblical proportions that made the world a little more nervous and



news a lot less trustworthy.

The manhunt comes on the heels of another interesting shift: the Bush administration is beginning to downplay the importance of capturing Osama or other high-level al Qaeda members. (Remember when that was the goal? Remember Tora Bora?) The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reports U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz as stating, "They [terrorist groups] are very decentralized operations . . . so you've got to go after them one by one." U.S. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice also stressed that even if al-Zawahiri were

captured, it "wouldn't end the terror." A recent headline in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* read, "Rumsfeld: Bin Laden Irrelevant." The story: "Capturing or killing al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden would not 'change the problem' of international terrorism, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said yesterday in an interview at the Pentagon with WTN radio in Nashville." Given its embarrassing failure at the endeavor, it is undoubtedly prudent for the Bush spokespeople to make

like a Wurlitzer and change their tune. If al-Zawahiri is actually captured, expect another dime to drop into the music machine.

— Wendy McElroy

Short time horizons, backward as well as forward

— A common observation of the Public Choice School is that politicians have short time horizons, being more concerned about the next election than about the long-run consequences of their policies and promises. Well, something similar is true of many voters: they are swayed by the latest news and tend to forget the longer-run records and orientations of the competing parties. This shortcoming of democracy was illustrated by the outcome of the March 14 Spanish elections, so different from what the polls had forecast only a few days before. What made the difference was evidently the terrorist massacres of March 11 and the interpretations and suspicions swirling around them. (A Spanish friend comments that al Qaeda, if it was indeed responsible, has learned that it can influence electoral outcomes by suitably timed attacks.)

My point is not that the Spanish elections turned out wrong. Rather, they illustrate how transient considerations can determine the policies chosen, perhaps inadvertently, for years ahead. This arguable irrationality of the demo-

cratic process enters into the case for constitutionally limited government, as opposed to subjecting more and more aspects of life to the outcome of popular vote.

— Leland B. Yeager

Money for nothin' — I'm not convinced there really is a trade deficit. I think more American goods are being purchased than are reported. It's just that they're things that don't show up when these calculations are made, things like stocks, tourism, movies, or concerts. (One reason that outsourcing will never destroy the U.S. econ-

omy: Have you ever seen a Japanese rock band that didn't make you laugh?) But if there really is a trade deficit, it means the world is giving us things like cars, wine, and precious metals, in exchange for slips of paper with pictures of famous Americans on them, which we can print *ad infinitum* for next to nothing. In playground terms, they are essentially trading us their bicycle for a bunch of baseball cards. Sounds to me like we have the better side of that deal. — Tim Slagle

Green meanies

— It wasn't very long ago that I thought Paul Hawken was an all right guy. Maybe you've heard of him: he wrote *The Ecology of Commerce* and co-authored *Natural Capitalism*. He endorsed Howard Dean. He's one of the "new paradigm" liberals tooting the "social justice and ecological sustainability" horn, but I thought the tune he was playing on it sounded markedly more market than Marxist. And, it is, I suppose. Hawken's somebody on the left to take at least a little seriously, and he's all about the healing power of "green business." Not exactly a libertarian, but at least someone who understands where wealth comes from. A health-food and garden-tools millionaire from the '70s, with some good ideas about taxing pollution rather than profit.

Then, I was idly turning the gaudy pages of a stale *Utne Reader*, and came across a polemic of his, a hackneyed antiglobo Martin Luther King Jr. ripoff number titled "Dreams of a Livable Future." It took about two minutes for me to read from "[Globalization is] fascist in the sense that it is an attempt to create a meta-order for people, with the assumption that a small group of people know better than the larger group" to "I dream of having a U.N. arms control and inspection team coming to the United States to remove assault weapons from the hands of all National Rifle Association members. I dream of another U.N. team shut-



ting down the 15,000 chemical plants in this country that are essentially biological weapons waiting to happen."

Oh. Neat. I guess I had thought that kind of thing a paranoid right-wing fantasy, but here's Mr. Democracy just plain saying it, right out in public: U.N. troops to take away your guns and lock your factory gates. Okay, I'm young and naive . . . but I was, frankly, shocked. I suppose the whole episode is just another lesson in the character of the Green totalitarianism that has apparently displaced the Red Menace as the premier threat to freedom on the home front. I have a soft spot for "sustainability" rhetoric, but small isn't all that beautiful when presented at gunpoint. Maybe libertarians have some allies on the Left: I'll now be a lot more careful of looking too hard for them.

— Max Orhai

Courage in retreat — The Bush administration has responded to the Spanish "flu." Predictably, Bush proclaimed that "Spain would be sending out a 'terrible message' if it let terrorists influence its policies."

The terrorists have profoundly influenced policies in Spain, in America, and worldwide. The question is in what way that influence will be manifested. The Bush people prefer the reactive path they've taken to the path chosen by Spanish leader José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero. An overwhelming majority of the Spanish people want their soldiers out of Iraq. They never wanted to become part of the occupation in the first place. Why should Zapatero be so influenced by terrorists that he dismisses the clear and collective voice of the Spaniards who just elected him? The suggestion is that Zapatero should show machismo and say "Damn the will of the people! Let's kick some sandy butt!" This may well reflect Bush's own attitude, but for the rest of the world, machismo resides in standing up to the current foreign policy juggernaut of the United States. Zapatero is actually displaying maraca-sized balls. Zapatero is a raging socialist, who heads a nation that has some familiarity with colonialism. To him — and it is a fair analysis — the occupation of Iraq is nothing more than 21st century colonialism driven by oil and Halliburtonian cronyism. He thinks it is morally wrong. Why should he let terrorists influence him to do what he thinks is wrong instead of what is right?

I could run on . . . but the most interesting aspect of the White House's announcement was the hint that it might propose a fresh resolution on Iraq to the United

Nations, thus answering one of Zapatero's major demands. (Hmmm . . . would the U.S. be sending out a 'terrible message' if it let a dissenting foreign leader influence its policies?) Officially, the Bush people are maintaining their SOP bluster with General Sanchez — the top U.S. general in Iraq — declaring that the lack of the 1,300 Spanish troops would not hurt the coalition. He's right: if you consider the coalition to be solely defined as the physical occupying forces in

News You May Have Missed

Hollywood Gets Religion

LOS ANGELES — In Hollywood, a box-office smash usually starts a trend, and Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* is no exception. *Dude, Where's My Cross?* (with Adam Sandler and Ashton Kutcher) will hit theaters on Memorial Day weekend, just in time for the start of the summer blockbuster season, but it's going to have to compete with *Good Friday the 13th*, opening in mid-June, *There's Something About Mary: The 0 B.C. Version*, due out July 4, and *Jesus' Disciples: Full Throttle*, slated for mid-July. While attempting to duplicate Gibson's box-office magic, all of these movies are sticking to less provocative, tried-and-true Hollywood formulas. As one studio executive was overheard saying into his cell phone, "Okay, what the fuck, let's make a Jesus flick, but for Christ's sake lose the fucking controversy."

The major lesson that Hollywood seems to have drawn from the success of Gibson's movie is that historical probability is something to be avoided at all costs, either by following the Gospels literally, like Gibson, or by ignoring them altogether. For instance, another project, *Fast Times at Nazareth High*, skirts theological controversy by concentrating on a period, Jesus' high-school years, that the Gospels unaccountably left out, despite their obvious adaptation box-office potential. The "divine gross-out comedy," in which the teenage Jesus, a loner persecuted by the kids in the popular cliques, ends up turning them all into a herd of swine right in the middle of the prom, is expected to draw record audiences by targeting the crucial 16-to-24-year-old illiterate dropout drug-addled psychiatric-outpatient demographic.

Meanwhile, controversy has continued to swirl around *The Passion of the Christ*, as a group of art critics, movie critics, and liberal editorialists denounced the film. The same people have on numerous occasions spoken out strongly in defense of works like Andres Serrano's "Piss Christ," Chris Ofili's porn-and-excrement-embellished Madonna, Robert Mapplethorpe's sadomasochistic photographs, and the violent movies of directors like Quentin Tarantino, arguing that the very essence of the artist's mission is to provoke strong reactions and challenge complacency. But in this instance, as they put it in an indignant public letter published in *The New York Times*, "the offensive art offends us, which means that it's an extremely bad movie — aesthetically bad, morally bad, politically bad, spiritually bad, plus the popcorn was stale." They concluded the letter by demanding that the film be "immediately suppressed and publicly burned."

— Eric Kenning

Word Watch

by Stephen Cox

Jesus said, "Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man" (Matthew 15:10-11).

He wasn't talking about the FCC's hunt for "indecent" in the dirty words that come out of "shock jocks," nor was he urging that network executives be hailed before congressional committees so they could engage in orgies of "confession" about having allowed Howard Stern and Bubba the Love Sponge to violate "community standards" on the "people's airwaves." In fact, he was speaking against the kind of community standards and regulations that make people ceremonially "unclean" for doing things that harm no one but the supersensitive. He called the enforcers of such regulations "hypocrites."

All "indecent" codes are tools of hypocrisy. They punish the snapshot while absolving the film. Viewed in its entirety, Janet Jackson's tawdry Super Bowl performance was much worse for the culture than her split second of breast-baring, but censorship is about finding something to pick on, not gaining a perspective on the whole. And Howard Stern's performances would probably benefit from a few momentary explosions of profanity. At least that would break the tedium of his oddly clinical deliberations on the female anatomy.

Of course, the pretense that someone, somewhere, can actually define "indecent," let alone "community standards," is itself almost indecently hypocritical. Everybody knows better. There is an even worse pretense: the idea that

Say what you will against prudery, inhibitions, hypocrisy, and all the rest of it, strong language, like every other useful thing, loses its value when it's used too much.

people should be protected from knowing about words and actions in which they themselves indulge.

My email program is trained to that pretense. When I press the "send" button after typing such indecent words as "shit," a warning box pops up. It says, "Your message is the kind of thing that might get your keyboard washed out with soap, if you get my drift. You might consider toning it down."

"If you get my drift," indeed. I keep that function of my

program turned on, just to remind myself of what hypocrisy looks like. It's a coy sniveling over "shit" and "asshole," as if those were the important things in life, and as if even I couldn't bear a direct recital of the horrid words I use.

Well, then, what are the legitimate uses of "indecent" in speech and writing? How can you tell when to use it and when to leave it alone?

The answer is, judge "indecent" words just as you would any others. Just as you would with any other words, "you might consider" the following issues.

1. Audience. Unless the purpose of your writing is to cause offense, there's no reason to write an article for the church bulletin as if you were writing an invitation to a hip-hop party. Everyone really knows that; the problem is that some writers are moralists in reverse, people who think it's their moral duty not to compromise with the hypocrites' phony sensitivities, no matter what the purpose of the immediate piece of writing is.

If you consider it your duty to offend, by all means do so. But why not follow your logic to its conclusion, and refuse to compromise with anybody, on any occasion? You know that some people in your audience won't know what you're talking about unless you define certain words. But why give in to their laziness? Don't define a thing for them! Just let them be confused. You also know, or else should know, that a lot of anyone's audience consists of simple fools. Again, why compromise? Why sacrifice your candor and openness? Begin everything you write by saying, "I hope you're not too stupid to understand what I'm saying, but I suspect you are." Then you'll feel that you've done your duty — if, as I say, you think it's your duty to offend. Otherwise, watch your audience.

2. Context. "The patient was shitting all day" would look bad in a medical journal. "I defecated all day" would look bad in a personal letter.

3. Emphasis. *What* do you want to emphasize? Your casual, open, free-spirited nature? Perhaps. But if you want to emphasize something else, don't make the signs keep pointing back to your own spontaneity, or your own bad temper. "Congressman Griswold is such a miserable, lying, stupid sack of shit, I can't imagine who could be dumb enough to vote for the Goddamned son of a bitch." There are at least seven terms of abuse in that sentence, two or three of them "indecent." But once the author got past the first two out of seven, it didn't matter very much whether they were indecent or not. The signals kept pointing more and more at the author's mentality, and less and less at Congressman Griswold's.

There are a number of reasons why people forget about

the issue of false emphasis. Some of them are trying to imitate H.L. Mencken or Tom Wolfe or P.J. O'Rourke (none of them masters of "indecent," to be sure, but all of them masters of recurrent emphasis), not realizing that most people lack those authors' ingenuity. The imitators fail to realize that they are piling up expressions in a feckless attempt to find one that really works.

Others forget that there is such a thing as understatement, and that it's almost always more effective than overstatement, if only because it focuses attention on the subject instead of the writer or speaker. When Rosie O'Donnell said that she had decided to marry her lesbian lover because President Bush had remarked that marriage should be reserved for "a man and a woman," she described his comments as "vile and vicious and hateful" and maintained that she was profoundly shocked that anyone could possibly say such a thing. In effect, she said nothing about Bush; what she said was, "I'm hysterical." If she had said, "The president's comments leave a little something to be desired — what is it? Fairness, perhaps," she would have won almost everybody's heart. Usually, saying that someone is "vile" makes you look vile, whether or not you add "vicious" and "hateful" to the list.

4. Surprise. If I write, "Objective assessment indicates that Congressman Griswold has done a pretty good job, for a lying sack of shit," my change of tone, from highly formal to rudely colloquial, will take almost everyone by surprise and probably attract a lot of attention to the point I'm trying to make, which is that I don't like Congressman Griswold. But if I write, "Congressman Griswold, that lying sack of shit, must be considered, on objective consideration, to have done a pretty good job," the surprise is only that I've let the sentence trail off into a banal anticlimax. What was my point, anyway?

5. Don't f*ck#! up a good thing. I didn't spell out "the f word" in that sentence, because (A) I wanted to draw attention to how silly the absence of such words can look, once you have the appropriate context for them, and (B) I don't want to wear such nice words out. Say what you will against prudery, inhibitions, hypocrisy, and all the rest of it, strong language, like every other useful thing, loses its value when it's used too much. And strong language is definitely used too much. I am sorry that I had a standard, old-fashioned, sexually repressed youth, but I'm unhappy when I hear today's young people talking casually about "hooking up" for the night. Everything's too easy for them; they don't feel the drama of sexuality. They're missing something. By the same token, I cannot imagine why would-be censors regard the constant stream of profanity in hip-hop "music" as indecent. At this point, it's nothing but noise.

Anyway, those are my comments on "indecent," the burning linguistic and social issue of the hour. What comes out of your mouth, defiling or not, is entirely up to you. There's no necessity for you to heed my advice. As Isabel Paterson wrote, "When I say 'free speech,' I mean free speech, even if you don't know what I mean."

Iraq, then the absence of Spaniards will not be noticed. If you consider the coalition to consist even partially of international support and goodwill, then Spain's withdrawal could be devastating. Why else is Bush rushing to prop up support from others within the coalition? *The New York Times* reports, "With the prime minister of the Netherlands beside him, President Bush said today that it was essential that Dutch troops remain in Iraq, both to ensure peace there and to press the campaign against terrorism. . . . Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende was cautious in his remarks, about troop commitments and other issues."

How angry is the U.N. at the U.S.? The answer is important because the level of hostility will affect how cooperative and generous the U.N. is during negotiations on a new resolution. (And, whatever the White House says, negotiations are underway right now. Bush will not go to the U.N. without reason to believe he will not be coldly rejected and embarrassed domestically and internationally.) Around the globe, public regard for the U.S. seems to be at low tide. But I do not know if this is an indication of how the U.N. would respond to Bush. The U.N. is a political body of unelected elitists. Even Tony Blair — who has the corrective feedback mechanism of popular elections — has flouted the will of those he "represents." It is not clear that the U.N. will reflect global opinion as opposed to its own perceived interests. The U.N. has been pushing Bush hard on a number of non-Iraq issues, such as U.S. support for the U.N.'s campaigns on AIDS and "women's reproductive health." Some interesting backroom deals may be on the horizon.

— Wendy McElroy

The train in Spain smacks plainly of the Dane

— After I saw the stunning capitulation of Spain to terrorist demands before the actual culpability of al Qaeda had been established, I was about to write something on the subject. But I remembered that Rudyard Kipling had already written the article for me almost a century ago, pointing out every lesson to be extracted from the experience.

In the 8th and 9th centuries Viking invaders, called "Danes," raided a patchwork of small squabbling Saxon kingdoms in the east of Great Britain, seized their land, and settled in. Growing more and more aggressive with each concession from the British, the Danes demanded tribute, called the Dane-geld, in exchange for a promise to leave the local inhabitants alone — with predictable results.

Kipling, in "The Dane-Geld," was attempting to warn the appeasers of his time of the certain results of their policy.

It is always a temptation for a young and agile nation, to call upon a neighbor and to say,

"We invaded you last night and we are quite prepared to fight, unless you pay us cash to go away."

And this is called asking for Dane-geld, and those who have asked will explain,

That you've only to pay them the Dane-geld, and then you'll be rid of the Dane.

It is always a temptation for a rich and lazy nation, to puff and look important and to say,

"Though we know we should defeat you, we have not

the time to meet you, we shall therefore pay you cash to go away."

And this is called paying the Dane-geld, and we've learned this again and again,

That once you have paid him the Dane-geld, you'll never be rid of the Dane!

It is wrong to put temptation in the path of any nation, for fear they should succumb and go astray,

So when you are requested to pay up or be molested, you will find it better policy to say,

"We never pay anyone Dane-geld, no matter how trifling the cost.

For the end of that game is oppression and shame and the nation that plays it is lost!"

Many of my friends have opposed the Iraq war for honest and thoughtful reasons, and I most certainly hope that free men will always demand good and sufficient reasons for making a decision as terrible as the decision to go to war.

But I must ask, does anyone believe that granting such a huge concession to men who have just killed several hundred of your citizens will cause them to renounce violence? Or to go away and bother somebody else? They have learned that they can sway the outcome of an election and cause a shift in government policy in their favor, by a strategic act of terrorism. Just war, unjust war — either way this is a terrible precedent to set.

In this case there is no need to argue about it. We shall

know the effects of this for certain — and very soon, I think.

— Stephen Browne

I want my MTV — I really feel sorry for Dish Network, in their recent dispute with Viacom. Viacom wanted to raise their licensing fees. Dish Network refused, and pulled the plug on Viacom rather than pay the price. Within twenty-four hours, the phone calls and cancellations were so overwhelming that Dish Network relented, and paid the price.

I can't imagine subscribing to any service that doesn't have MTV. Neither, apparently, can millions of others. So they can pretty much ask what they want, and the service providers have to pay up. The funniest part is, rates will now have to increase to pay for the larger license fees. So all the idiots who called Dish Network, and demanded their MTV back, are going to have to pony up over the next year or so. The better tactic would have been to just ignore the drop in service and wait for the advertising rates to fall once the new ratings were released, so Viacom would give in. Unfortunately, though, the average consumer looks at MTV as his friend, and the provider as the enemy, because one makes him happy, the other makes him pay. A very interesting study in market perception.

— Tim Slagle

The Kerry Report — It is tempting to view John Kerry as the "Anyone But Bush" or "Anyone But Cheney" candidate and, so, give his presidential bid a lesser-of-two-evils endorsement . . . but I've been burned before. I detested the political correctness and identity politics cultivated by Clinton's administration so deeply that, when the hanging-chad scandal arose last time, I hoped Bush would win. "He couldn't be worse than Gore," I said — infamous last words that rank right up there with Socrates' "I drank what!?"

I realize how little I know about Kerry. For example, I have no clear sense of specifics on his recommendations about the occupation of Iraq. Unlike Dennis Kucinich, Kerry voted for war when saying "no" really mattered and, so, failed to distinguish himself on the issue. Kerry has won the Democratic presidential nomination on the basis of being electable rather than on his policy stands. Into this vacuum the Bush administration sagely strides with negative ads that have a real chance of defining Kerry to the American public either through their message or by putting him always on the defensive. It is a risky strategy because negative ads can backlash but — hey! — we are talking about the Shock and Awe administration that yelled "Let's Roll!" Besides which, they can always pull back to positive ads just before the elections.

One of Kerry's few remarkable accomplishments is not likely to be used in his campaign: The Kerry Report, aka "Drugs, Law Enforcement and Foreign Policy." As the Memory Hole website states, "In 1987, two subcommittees of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations held three days of

News You May Have Missed

PETA Moves to Ban Words

NEW YORK — Ingrid Newkirk, the president of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, has announced that her organization will go beyond demanding that people stop eating meat, poultry, fish, and dairy products, stop wearing fur, stop wearing leather, stop wearing wool, stop hunting, stop fishing, stop riding horses, stop going to zoos, and stop keeping pets. PETA has now launched a new campaign to silence anyone who "insults and degrades mammals, birds, reptiles, and insects by comparing people to them." Among the words and phrases that PETA wants banned are: "going ape," "making a monkey out of someone," "monkey around," "pig out," "road hog," "swan dive," "horse-faced," "sheepish expression," "quiet as a mouse," "stubborn as a mule," "dead as a dodo," "dirty rat," "snake-in-the-grass," "dog-in-the-manger," "cold fish," "something fishy," "can of worms," "bug-eyed," "stop bugging me," "stop hounding me," "eats like a horse," "eats like a bird," "weasel out of," "ferret out," "loan shark," "lone wolf," "outfoxed," "hog-wild," "elephantine," "crabby," "dogged," and "catty."

"People who use such expressions," Newkirk said at a PETA demonstration in front of a Manhattan bookstore accused of selling dictionaries containing the words, "are nothing but brutal bigots who are acting like a bunch of animals."

— Eric Kenning

hearings on drug trafficking. Headed by Sen. John F. Kerry (D-Mass.), who has since become a candidate for President, the panel heard evidence of official corruption in Central America, South America, the Caribbean, and the United States. The next year, the government published the transcripts in a 4-volume set that has remained a touchstone for anyone interested in narco-corruption, particularly as it involves US intelligence agencies." What are the odds that Kerry will run on a record of linking the drug war to American corruption?

— Wendy McElroy

Making the world safe for terrorism —

The al Qaeda terrorists who perpetrated the Madrid bombings are not stupid, and their timing was not random. Certainly, they anticipated Prime Minister Aznar's defeat; it was most likely their objective. Why?

If the Socialists in Spain and Kerry in America are right, and terrorism is most effectively fought with police tactics, why would the terrorists time their attack to occur just prior to the Spanish elections? And yet, in the immediate aftermath of the Madrid bombings, the media was full of speculation as to whether the terrorists would attempt to affect the November Presidential election, virtually all commentators taking for granted that Osama and his boys would prefer Kerry to Bush. The American public agrees. In a recent poll, 60% thought the terrorists would prefer Kerry, while only 25% Bush. If, as the Left claims, fully utilizing the U.N., diplomacy, and intelligence driven police work are far better strategies for insuring peace with the Islamic world, why would those committed to suicidal jihad desire them?

Radical Islam, like communism before it, thrives on disorder and chaos. The more the Islamic world suffers at the hands of Western armies, the more bomb fodder the Islamists can amass. If Bush's and his allies' policies have really been a fiasco, making Iraq into a breeding ground for terrorists and strengthening al Qaeda's hand, the political motives of the attacks in Spain seem irrational. Would it not make more sense for the terrorists to try and maintain an aggressive West, to try and instigate more wars, and thus bring the great battle to the death between the West and Islam that they seek?

But, then again, maybe Aznar's critics are wrong, and the war in Iraq has not been a disaster. Maybe the terrorists believe that a democratic, peaceful, and stable Iraq is a real possibility. Such "westernization" would be a tremendous cultural defeat and serve to drain the Middle Eastern swamp of suffering in which they currently recruit their sad jihadists. They are fighting desperately in Iraq to inflict as many casualties as possible and draw out the war for as long as possible, hoping that Americans will grow war-weary, and the Western armies will retreat. Such a withdrawal would most likely leave Iraq in chaos and civil war — a perfect situation for the utopian fantasy of al Qaeda to take hold. If this is their concern, the attack in Spain makes sense.

— Andrew W. Jones

A time to walk away, and a time to run

— I have a mixed reaction to the Socialist victory in

Spain, which is widely viewed (and accurately so) as a response to the terrible train bombing at Madrid. I applaud the new leader's resolve to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq by the end of June unless the United Nations assumes control of military operations there. In this, José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero is not only expressing the wishes of the vast majority of Spaniards, he is also removing Spain from al Qaeda's target list. This has implications for other nations, such as Italy, Britain, and Australia, where leaders have committed troops to Iraq despite public opinion, a move that is likely to backlash against them in upcoming elections. Interestingly, commentators almost unanimously predicted that a 9/11-style terrorist attack on European soil would cause a surge of conservatism, as it did in the States. That is, they expected Europeans to call for blood and rise up in support of the War on Terrorism, including the occupation of Iraq. The opposite happened. I think commentators underestimated (and still do underestimate) the depth of international resentment at the arrogant and unilateral manner in which the United States is redefining the world. Given that Spain has only 1,300 troops in Iraq, the withdrawal makes little difference in the strength of operations, but it is a tremendous symbolic and diplomatic slap in the face for the Bush Administration. I note that there is a glut of silence from that direction on the Spanish "upset."

Spain is another indication that Europe is shifting

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toward a pro-socialist, anti-U.S. consensus. I am anti-Bush, but I am not anti-American. And I cannot applaud the polarization that is occurring between the U.S. and the rest of the world. The U.S. has self-created a new Cold War of us-against-everyone, and the attitude is spilling over from the war to the economy. For example, the hue and cry against outsourcing jobs. If the world responds in kind, then we are headed toward borders that are fortresses and barriers to both freedom and prosperity. My main hope for this not happening resides with individuals acting privately (for example, with the Internet, which respects no boundary). Thank God for technology and the power it gives to the individual.

— Wendy McElroy

Sam Konkin, RIP

— Sam Konkin, of Los Angeles, Calif., was best known to the libertarian world as publisher of several idiosyncratic periodicals. For nearly two years during the mid-1970s, he published a weekly magazine of libertarian news and commentary, which still, I believe, holds the record for longest continuous weekly publication of that sort, *New Libertarian Weekly*. *New Libertarian Weekly* featured his unique graphic style (lots of different typefaces, and type sizes) and his curious practice of inserting his own comments inside the writing of others, correcting their errors.

As the 1970s wore on, Konkin's influence ebbed, and *New Libertarian Weekly* was rechristened *New*

Libertarian Monthly. Contrary to its name, it was published aperiodically during the next two years, with perhaps a half dozen issues in all. (I myself was a lifetime subscriber, but only received two issues from my subscription; when I mentioned this to Sam, he suggested I purchase back issues.) In the 1980s and 1990s, Konkin became more and more irrelevant to libertarian debates and activities. The thinking of other libertarians had matured and evolved, while he remained true to the curious neo-leftist libertarianism of 1969.

Even by libertarian standards, Konkin was an extraordinarily strange person. He considered himself a left-libertarian and claimed that he wanted to spread libertarian ideas among leftists, but he costumed himself in black boots, black clothing, and an armband with some arcane

symbol on it and promoted Holocaust denial. He was certainly no Nazi, but this regalia and these ideas didn't earn him much sympathy with the Left.

He saw the libertarian movement as a remodeled version of the radical Left of the Vietnam War days. He christened the movement that he fancied he had founded "New Libertarianism" and regarded its relationship to conventional libertarianism as similar to the relationship of the New Left of the 1960s to the old-line Left of the 1940s and 1950s. He had an overarching theory about almost every political subject, and wrote his opinions ex cathedra, as if he had a huge following that was awaiting his every word. In fact, the circulation of his grandiose publications never exceeded a few hundred.

One suspects that he saw himself as the logical successor to Ayn Rand and Murray Rothbard — especially the latter — but never had the kind of cult following that those gurus acquired. This did not prevent his acting as if he did.

His politics were pretty much conventional Rothbardianism, model 1969: that is, he believed in natural rights, Austrian economics, anarchism, and the leftist foreign policy analysis that Rothbard fancied at that time, though in the 1980s, Konkin repudiated Austrian economics because its predictions had supposedly not come true. Actually, what hadn't come true were Konkin's own predictions, which he based on his

own understanding of Austrian economics — an understanding that did not include Mises' argument that economics was absolutely useless as a tool for making economic predictions.

Despite his certainty that he possessed the only right line on every issue libertarians faced, his publications were open to a wide variety of opinion — although he did not balance his hospitality with those inserted corrections that I mentioned. It is not clear how many people he actually influenced, but there is no question that he was a unique and curiously ingenuous individual.

On Feb. 23, Sam Konkin was found dead in his shower, presumably from natural causes. He left behind many friends, who loved him dearly. He was 56 years old.

— R.W. Bradford

A MOMENT OF CANDOR



Armenian Splendor

by Alec Mouhibian

Traveling to Armenia is like going to another world, where religion is serious, life is rough, and history is real.

I recently returned from Armenia (“where the chicks dig unibrows”). Of all the post-senior summer destinations I could have visited — England, Italy, the Greek Isles — I chose Armenia because I wouldn’t have to change my watch. Changing my watch is the only thing worse than Paula Zahn in the morning. Ass-backwards is Armenia, the bald spot opposite the chin that is Los Angeles on the three-dimensional head of earth, twelve hours ahead, smack dab on the other and darker side of the world.

The real reason why I went was to visit the garden of my roots. I wanted to see the Motherland, the Fatherland, the Holyland. To be sure, present day Armenia is a wholly circumscribed version of that Land. Both in area and in prominence, it is an invisible fraction of what it once was: the first country to adopt Christianity as a national religion, the country that Jesus visited after the Resurrection, the ally of the Romans. (A painted map of the world, in which all but two empires, Armenia and Rome, is black, still sleeps on a wall in the Coliseum.) A mere hundred years ago, Yerevan was a town of 30,000; today it is the capital and home of a cool mil.

That’s what makes it possible for me to be the first in my family to visit the approximate location of our roots. Modern Armenia is a mere daisy patch of the ancient garden. The stems on both parents’ sides soak in the soil of two villages which, along with about 90 percent of the old Armenia, now reside in Turkey. Still more is now a part of Azerbaijan, Iran, or Georgia. The remaining spit-puddle constitutes the country I visited in August.

The full day’s worth of travel awaiting me, both to and fro, was not a pleasant prospect. But I figured that if Jesus

thought the place worthy of a comeback — overcoming death and worldly distances to make it — I could handle a six-hour layover in Vienna. Call it curiousness, if you wish. I prefer to call it curiosity.

Three and a half hours after learning, very pleasantly, that the Vienna airport has a sex shop — and three and one-quarter hours after learning, very unpleasantly, that they sell \$75 videos — I arrived. It was brown.

If I had to describe the Republic of Armenia in one word, that’s what it would have to be. Brown. I expected as much going in, just as anyone would who found Armenia on the map or looked it up in the almanac. Both suggested the POS (piece of shit) category and POS countries are ordinarily brown. The air is brown. The streets are brown. The buildings are brown. The people are brown.

The air is hardly surprising. Combine the patent dust of underdevelopment with the sky-covering sun of the region, and you get the overall tint of spaghetti westerns. Equally unsurprising are the urban buildings — dilapidated Soviet contraptions scattered about in a way that makes the city look as if it were designed in a game of pin the tail on the donkey. Many of these buildings are only half there, horizontally.

The fact that the people are brown — a tanned brown —

may be more of a wonder, considering that Armenians are Aryans (or half Aryans, depending on which school of thought you listen to). Either way, Armenian history is covered with many strands of blonde hair and pairs of blue eyes. It took a book written by a political figure living in Bulgaria to persuade Hitler that Armenians are Aryan rather than Semitic, thus saving them from his hit list. And sure enough, Armenians did used to be white — before the time when, as it is often phrased over there, they were “fucked by the Muslims.”

My arrival at 5 a.m. was greeted by a crowd of wide eyes gathered at the terminal exit. I forced myself through. “Are you sports player?” they asked, the last two words actually in English. It so happened that the Third Pan-Armenian Games were about to begin — a big deal convocation of teams from all-Armenian amateur leagues, coming from all over the world to compete in sports tournaments. Yes, I was in a place where the stuff of park leagues and rec centers was a major national event.

It didn't take me long to realize that I was also in a place where one must abandon all American concepts of the street sign — and the street. As for the former, there simply aren't any. At least not that I could see. And Armenian streets are as rough and full of potholes as Armenian prostitutes, making every ride the equivalent of the Indiana Jones experience at Disneyland. Some of the potholes stretch across the entire street. It's too bad they don't also stretch down the street, so they could serve as traffic dividers, since none but the most town-centered boulevards have any of those either. Obviously, this sort of thing isn't a contribution to driver-pedestrian relations, of which, as I soon learned, self-assertiveness is the reigning characteristic, even when it's raining.

You see, what needs to be psychoanalytically comprehended about Armenian drivers is that *they won't stop*. They are in stark contrast to the pedestrians, who *won't stop either*. Both of them *never stop*, yet somehow, somehow, they never collide. At least in Manhattan one of the parties eventually

Ass-backwards is Armenia, the bald spot opposite the chin that is Los Angeles on the three-dimensional head of earth, twelve hours ahead, smack dab on the other and darker side of the world.

gives way. In Armenia, they combine to make road conditions a geometric enigma.

I was unlucky to arrive when I did. This hit me the night after my first historical site, Garni, a pagan temple wisely preserved for its beauty after the coming of Christianity. It lies on the edge of a cliff, right in front of a harrowing and gorgeous gorge, waterfalls and all, the whole combo a mythical relic from a very real past. This is not the only pagan construct remaining. Until it was tragically too late, I was ignorant of the valley of the Phalluses, 16 of the longest lasting erections in history, still standing tall and frolicking after

all these years. But this was the only example of erotica available. Because of the Pan-Armenian games, the government had launched massive attacks on human rights by temporarily outlawing porn and prostitution. And because an enormous social backlash awaits any girl who loses her virginity before marriage, this amounted to total sexual deprivation.

So I learned that there is only one reason to go to Armenia in the present, and that's the past. Over there, the superiority of the past is a matter of mind more than just a matter of fact, but we'll delve into that later. For now, let's go to a church. There are plenty of them, and they are plenty old. Up to 1,800 years, in some cases.

Take Gheghart. It was built into a mountain eight Strom Thurmond lifetimes ago, and is half cave. To get to it, you travel up a steep dirt path, past the hornblowers and souvenir vendors, wondering why the latter are selling I ♥ NY T-shirts. You see a mini-stone palace of prayer holes, with narrow, curving, and inverted staircases along the outer sides, leading to the smaller prayer holes, straight out of a video game. You look at the stairs and they speak to you, in soft ancient whispers, their words faint but their message clear: *there are obviously noooooo lawyers in this country.*

Then there's the first and most aesthetically beautiful church, Khorvirap. Khorvirap lies on the edge of a hill at the edge of Armenia, with the Turkish border and voluminous Mount Ararat a few miles away. The hill is on its own, so it is an isolated landmark visible from afar. The story behind this church involves Gregory the Illuminator: the man who brought Christianity to Armenia. (Though it would be fallacious to say he “illuminated” it, as Armenia didn't get full-time electricity until 1995.) He took his case to King Trdat, suggesting that there was a lord higher than thou, lord of the land, and King Trdat, as anyone would in his position, got a little peeved. So he threw Gregory into a dark pit. Luckily for him, not only did water run in that pit but a widow living in a fortress nearby was commanded in a dream to drop a loaf of bread into it every day. Thirteen years passed. King Trdat was divinely punished for his sins by becoming a wild boar. Then his sister had yet another Martin Luther King moment of revelation. She released Gregory, who then cured Trdat of being a boar. The dungeon and surrounding fortresses became a church, and Armenia became the first nation of The Book.

I climbed down into the historic pit, a little cylinder-shaped hell now lit by a bulb. It was spooky, and it might even have sent a chill down my spine, were it not also hot, muggy, and airless. Looking up at the small, barred window, down which St. Gregory's daily eats were sneaked, one couldn't help but wonder what it must have been like to live an Atkins' nightmare for 13 years. One also couldn't help but wonder if that widow was a babe. The fact that the latter crossed my mind after I had been in the country for only 13 days just shows how valid a question it was.

Khorvirap lacked the usual holy entourage of horns, beggars, and bread barons. There was a little boy who temporarily tagged along and made little squeaky sounds while I climbed up the hill. And there was an old lady begging at the bottom, who yelled “Don't give him anything!” when we slipped the boy a note. He turned around and snickered at

her. It was funny.

My final heavenly stop was Edjmiadsin (pronounced Edjmiadsin). This was the site of Jesus' post-resurrection appearance and the apex of the Armenian church scene. Architecturally, it is the most elaborate as well as the best site, beating out some tough competition among the ancients. An area on the ground near the church is high-

The air is brown. The streets are brown. The buildings are brown. The people are brown.

lighted as the exact point of Christ's appearance. It is said that if you stare down at it really hard — and really, really concentrate — you can see a footprint.

The expansive surroundings of the cathedral, as well as the cathedral itself, have been kept in pristine shape, supposedly in hopes that it will be the choice spot if Jesus ever decides to pull a Michael Jordan. Greenery and plant life preserved in all their color and vividness; vast lawns kept fit and trim; refined buildings kept clean, appropriately tarnished, and in operation as monasteries; an astounding mansion inhabited by the present head of the Armenian church; . . . in short: an oasis in the first world, seen through a portal to the past.

It is not uncommon for young Americans to visit unseemly nations and return with glazed eyes and love-struck voices trembling in adulation, speaking of how wonderful the *peeeehhhople* are, how soulful and charming the *aaaatmmmuuhhsphere* is, et myriad cetera. This after spending a few days in some plantation estate with a hot, young rice picker who knows no English, to whom they've gotten through but not through to. Or in the case of exchange students, after spending six months in the confines of an American university isolated on some tropical landscape, making indigenous contact only with papayas or the sons and daughters of connected elites. Going in, I had thought — and hoped — that my situation would be just as illusory. After all, I was moved from the airport by one of three drivers employed by the parents of a friend, and I was moved to a big, beautiful house with a balcony view of the entire city. But while the house was new and great, the surroundings were as desultory as the rest of the country. I was informed that in Armenia all neighborhoods are mixed: there are no good or bad ones. You can have a mansion right next to a mud shack with one toilet and as many walls. For better or worse, one gets a feel of things.

Most of the feels were gotten from discourse in the Midnight Van, a white 1971 Peugeot that sinks about two feet at the witching hour as the neighborhood locals gather for some nightcap jive. Communication was no easy matter. My translator would translate only what he felt like, and my Armenian is a highly unfluent version of a completely different dialect from what is spoken in the modern homeland: the western dialect of a nation with only the east remaining. Not only has my grasp of the language progressively degenerated since I was three, but the tongue I was pierced with in the first place tasted of hybrid stew: a dash of Bulgarian

here, a tablespoon of Turkish there, all marinated in a pint of gibberish with a sprinkling of Saxon to boot.

What does all this amount to once it hits the toilet in Armenia? In terms of clarity, I would estimate a very generous 30 percent word comprehension. At times, this yields basic understanding. Example:

BLAH BLAH I BLAH BLAH WANT BLAH BLAH BLAH PROSTITUTE

Really means: I want a prostitute.

My reaction: amused chuckle.

Many times, however, it doesn't. Example:

BLAH BLAH I BLAH BLAH WANT BLAH BLAH BLAH PROSTITUTE

Really means: The woman I married left me for a wanted Belarusian prostitute.

My reaction: amused chuckle.

Regardless, the formula revealed some quirks and facts.

One of them was how truly atrocious their dirty jokes are, so bad it's not even funny. This was surprising, since communist oppression usually breeds great nasty joke-making and joke-telling; there's nothing else to do. Eastern Europeans (especially Bulgarians) mastered the art, although it died as soon as they became free to complain about the lousy situation that they were now free to rid themselves of. But it never caught on in Armenia. Some things are bad in a forgettable way, merely lacking in force and salience. But the badness of Armenian dirty humor is of a Yoko-Ono-shrieking kind, the kind you unsuccessfully try to shake off, hoping to retain some level of respect for its perpetrator. It is out of that respect that I won't repeat any of the jokes here.

This was only one of a number of oddities encountered. Others ranged from the personal to the atmospheric, from the benign to the cultural; from men smoking slims to the fact that marriage is a bloody mess. Literally. A delegation of women check the newlywed couple's bed for blood, lack of which results in expulsion, either of the wife by the groom, or — if he's not willing — of the groom by his family.

Atmospheric: the gas stations look like casinos. The casinos look like miniature Reno wannabes. Personal: the people are very hospitable. *Excruciatingly* hospitable. I'm talking every-two-minutes hospitable. As a guest, you're supposed

Gheghart was built into a mountain eight Strom Thurmond lifetimes ago, and is half cave. To get to it, you travel up a steep dirt path, past the hornblowers and souvenir vendors, wondering why the latter are selling I ♥ NY T-shirts.

to be constantly happy. And you're supposed to display this constant happiness with an ecstatic smile. Let the edges of your lips off guard for even a second, and you're hit with:

"Are you sad?"

"No," you say.

"Why are you sad?"

"No, really. I just have a cheek cramp."

"If you're sad, then I'm sad."

Such irritations aside, the hospitality exemplified a charming quality in the people. Everyone I met was hospitable, even though most of them were poor to the pore, and all of them knew full well that I was an infinitely better off American, pampered to the puss. They still put my well-being over anything else. They had no envy.

And while we're still in Laudland, another thing: when the only two kinds of people in a country are the filthy rich and the dirt poor, it is usually a recipe for squalor. Not so in Armenia, which is dirt poor but not dirty, at least in a certain sense. It's dusty, but dust is the dirt of poverty, not of persons. The streets of Armenia aren't swimming in trash like those of other third-world countries, such as Mexico. And the streets in Yerevan don't reek of urine, like the streets in other third-world cities, such as Santa Monica. In fact, the chief difference between Armenia and Santa Monica is that Armenia is no longer a Soviet republic. It still has a Communist Party, but unlike the communist party of Santa Monica, it has practically no power.

There is a quiet charm to Armenia's freedom from envy and freedom from squalor. Collective pride is an abhorrent, racist trait. Yet to say that I didn't feel a small, pointless pride — if even in the involuntary way in which I feel a flash of humiliation upon hearing of an Armenian-perpetrated murder — would not be completely honest.

I spent some time feeling the charm. Filling the other 359 hours and 55 minutes of my trip was a problem. Historic sightseeing is the only thing to do in Armenia, although it's a great thing to do. Once it's done, a wealth of time remains to be spent on a poverty of product.

Not a single cultural sight in the whole country, not even the museums, requires more than 45 minutes to exploit. In Armenia, boredom descends long before the sun. Sure, the capital city has a vibrant nightlife — on paper. Countless discos and strip clubs decorate the moonlit plain. But what with the virginity taboo and the language difference, there wasn't much potential for connection, other than some damn serious eye contact. You can drink Nescafe and dance to a few techno-Russian acid trips, the main instrument in which sounds like a ham-radio signal, but nada thereafter.

The horridness of the music was no surprise, even though Armenia may boast of composer Aram Khachaturian, who made some substantial contributions to the highly unsubstantial collection of bearable 20th century classical music. One just can't expect a pop culture to run on

that. And when there's barely anything for automobiles to run on, what chance does such an abstraction as pop culture have?



Two months before I visited Armenia, the president of the republic and his inner circle paid an evening visit to a popular cafe. Because of his visit, the place closed a major section to the public, upsetting a gentleman on the other side who started making loud, unfavorable remarks to his friends. This disturbed the conscientious president. After all, here was a man who ran for public office so he could serve his people; how could he possibly enjoy his dinner when it was directly affecting one of them in such a strong and visible way? So the President ordered a few members of his staff to address the man's concern. They approached him, asked him what he found so bothersome, led him to the restroom so he could explain without embarrassing anybody, and beat him to death.

Politically, Armenia is in a mess holier than its history. Its most recent presidential election was operated like a super chef competition, with ballot boxes playing the role of Butterballs. Every international watchdog overseeing the process gave it an F-minus. Hijacked by the incumbent and his cronies, the ordeal drew protests exceeding 100,000 people, over 10 percent of the population. All prominent opposition to the incumbent was either exiled or threatened with exile prior to the election. Political opposition, in effect, was outlawed. The most popular challenger was forbidden to run: he had been a citizen for four years, and a rule existed enforcing a ten year minimum. Existed, mind you, under an incumbent who *wasn't even a citizen* until assuming the presidency.

All of this happens for the simple reason that judges and members of Parliament vote the way of the gun — specifically, the gun pointed at them by the president's mafia. Thugocracy of this nature obviously results in chaos, since there's only one way to fight it, and that begins with two asses. So it was that in 1999, a man with a machine gun stormed into Parliament and opened fire, killing eight and injuring six.

The minimum threshold of "civil" government can fairly be determined as the point at which politicians are more afraid of the public than the public is of politicians. Like other post-Soviet nations, Armenia falls short of this threshold. Eighty years of communism left the psyche (and structure) of the post-Soviet world highly uncondusive to freedom.

Armenia lies in the middle of an ocean of oil. Which is just the problem; there's oil all around it, but none actually in or crossing it. Pipelines endure great pains to evade Armenia, circling it when it would be much shorter to just go through. To ask why would be to touch on another unique aspect of the Armenian situation. Armenia is also surrounded by people who hate it. By "surrounded," I mean *on all sides*; and by "hate it," I mean *passionately*. Its culture, religion, and very existence are detested to death by the Islamic nations that dastardly historical circumstance has left Armenia starkly in the middle of. Its precarious positioning can be compared only with that of Israel, though the latter



B2/00

"Order one with anchovies — I've never *seen* a fish."

has only been around for half a century, whereas Armenia has been dealt its unfortunate hand for one and a half millennia.

Adding to Armenia's oddity is the fact that it is the only non-U.S. country other than Israel to record a decisive military victory during the last 35 years.

Nagorno Karabagh was an autonomous, 95% Armenian-populated territory, a sort of island in the lake of Azerbaijan.

You look at the stairs and they speak to you, in soft ancient whispers, their words faint but their message clear: there are obviously noooooooooooooo lawyers in this country.

Its inhabitants were massacred on numerous occasions in the early years of World War I, with the help of the Ottoman Turks. When the USSR emerged, Karabagh was recognized as part of Armenia. Less than a year later, Joseph Stalin, always a man of ideas, came up with a doozy: how better to "divide and conquer" than by pitting nationalities against each other? Birth was given to the "nationalities policy" — a sort of gerrymandering. To lay the foundation for this new policy, Karabagh was annexed to the SSR of Azerbaijan.

To make a 75-year-long story short, pogroms, massacres, and other strong measures were applied by the Azerbaijanis to dilute Karabagh of its hefty Armenian element. When the USSR finally died, Karabagh was owed a proper and lawful independence. The new government of Azerbaijan disagreed. Sovereignty had to be fought for. With the assistance of Armenian armament and warriors who checked in from America, Lebanon and the world over, that it was fought for successfully.

Technically, this was the triumph of a small, autonomous state; actually it was a victory for Armenia. It took some grit, some heart, and a lot of arms. Armenia is massively armed. Many of the arms are Soviet leftovers, shoveled under the table to the favorite dog. The rest are the very first things that any Armenian government money was spent on, and very wisely so. But no victory would have been possible were it not for an adversary who was, at the least, intensely dumb.

All that said . . . now what?

It's still a ghastly conflict, now ghastly on a larger scale. Karabagh is being blockaded by the Biajan from Armenia and the world and getting past the blockade is a constant struggle. And Armenia itself is still a political disaster, with no window into the future revealing anything different to even justify hope.

Hold that thought for a moment. Time. Timeline. History. That's always full of answers. Answers, perhaps, to its own question: as deep a history as Armenia has, how did it arrive at this pathetic point?

Yerevan, after all, has been an urban center for 2,785 years. That's a lot of years. And there is significance to that enormous length of time, to the fact that the Armenian people survived it. Before Armenia arose, the region was populated and surrounded by a plethora of peoples with cave-

speak names: Hurrians, Gutis, Kassites, Mitannians, Hittites, Phrygians, and Biannili, from the Kingdom of Urartu.

Uga-buga indeed. All these distinct cultures, with their respective peoples, vanished like mini-weenies from a wedding tray. Completely. Not that there is anything magical about this; the key is that there isn't any magic. For just as mini-weenies vanish via the hands that pick them, there are explanations for the disintegration of cultures, especially when those are as closely tied to kingdoms as they were in prehistoric times.

Geographic Armenia, before Armenians came into existence, was ruled by the empire of Assyria and the kingdom of Urartu. Assyria was an intolerant military state, which, according to one history text, "prided itself on its centralized bureaucracy." In 610 B.C., the capital of that centralized state was attacked, and the entire empire disappeared. Urartu, conversely, was largely decentralized and reliant on trade, borrowing from other cultures. It survived. And the characteristics it bore were adopted by the successor it begat, Armenia.

These characteristics of political disunity and trade, combined with a fierce identity-unity in culture, caused Armenia to metamorphose into an empire by the 4th century A.D. But even as an empire, Armenia was the juggler instead of the juggler. Between Rome and Parthia, then between Rome and Persia, then between Byzantium and Persia — its allegiances made it a constant tennis ball, bouncing back and forth, pending the issue of the moment. This is because Armenia was where east met west, which is why it eventually went south. Two things enabled its existence: its usefulness to one of the neighboring hegemonies, and the sympathy of those neighbors to its own culture. The kind neighbor was primarily Rome (later Byzantium), which saw Armenia as a shield against its eastern rivals.

So while Armenia's values led to its dominance of the east-west intersection, the reality of that well-inhabited location doomed it to puppetdom. Armenia was a self-sufficient puppet with a mind and mechanism of its own, to be sure,

An area on the ground near the church is highlighted as the exact point of Christ's appearance. It is said that if you stare down at it really hard — and really, really concentrate — you can see a footprint.

but still a puppet, helplessly vulnerable to an unfriendly hand. Rulers of church and state were appointed or maintained essentially at the discretion of the neighboring empires; Armenians had no choice in the matter, and little recourse if they opposed any such intervention. There were the occasional successful insurgencies, but they were few and far between.

The fatal folly of Armenia was not to realize this. Some civilizations, you see, are meant to be conquered: so read the laws of geohistorical precedent. Puppets are up for grabs. The lucky ones can choose who their conquerors will be.

Fifteen hundred years of relative independence made the Armenian psyche callous to the vulnerability of that independence. When the Ottoman Turks swallowed the Middle East in the 14th century and approached Armenia and Byzantium, the latter tried to abolish Armenia's autonomy, producing a rift that caused them to fight the invading Turks separately (some Armenians even siding with the enemy), at a severe cost to effectiveness. They lost. The Turks swept Armenia and the entire Byzantine Empire. While such things can never be known for sure, it is widely believed that had the Byzantines and Armenians cooperated, the Ottomans could have been held off.

Blame this on the Byzantines, and you miss the point entirely. Whether or not they were wise has nothing to do with the fact that the Armenians were painfully unwise in not following along. Bottom line: push came to shove, and Armenia knelt, and has bent over on its knees ever since.

But that was then, this is now. Or to phrase that shocking fact a little differently: past geological constraints are now much easier to overcome. The technology of modern trade has enabled any resource to go anywhere, without imperialism tagging along as a travel partner. All that's needed is a little structure. Set the circuits to maximize the energy flow, and even the tiniest mechanism can vibrate to a horny frenzy. See Japan and Hong Kong. They've shown how much more vital structure is than natural resources, and how quick a fix it can be for thousands of years of economic dementia. All Armenia has to do is drop a tablet of capitalism in its own glass of water, gulp, and the remedy will start. In her current state of armament, it's not as if any of the surrounding enemies would dare attack. And as for the blockades, foreign investment tends to have much more penetrating power than aid.

But ability and possibility are two different things. Just because something *can* happen doesn't mean there is a real chance that it will. I can get a smiley-face tattoo on my left testicle, but there is zero possibility I will do it. Likewise, even though a country can fix itself, try to point to a case in which a non-Western country has done so completely from within and all you will get is a fidgeting finger. Japan and Hong Kong, after all, were introduced to their structure by the West (and deserve immense credit for accepting it). And

In Armenia all neighborhoods are mixed: there are no good or bad ones. You can have a mansion right next to a mud shack.

Western imperialism — much to the benefit of the potential imperialist and detriment of the imperialized — has gone irreversibly out of fashion.

Sadly, however, one can see that what helped Armenia survive was the same thing that caused her to fall: that separate cultural identity, ever so fierce . . . ever so stubborn.

It is evident, in Armenia's failure to cooperate with Byzantium, that this fierce identity trumped reason and perspective. The cultural rigidity that was necessary to survive

ancient times never evolved into the cultural adaptability necessary to prosper in modern ones. (Ring a bell, World of Islam?) The staple of success for any society has been tolerance of trade, and not only of goods, but also of values and methods. There's a reason I'm 18 and not XVIII years old. Furthermore, there's no reason for a dichotomy to exist between adapting a culture to superior values and losing it completely.

One dame is a grand testament to all of this. America, America. A casual cast of the eye upon her fruited plain reveals a myriad of cultures that adopted the moral and

The chief difference between Armenia and Santa Monica is that Armenia is no longer a Soviet republic. It still has a Communist Party, but unlike the communist party of Santa Monica, it has practically no power.

intellectual aspects of Americanism while retaining the better aspects of themselves.

Generally speaking, one can neither say that the Lebanese in America are culturally indistinguishable from other Americans, nor that they are comparable to Lebanese in Lebanon. Ditto for so many others (in various degrees). The Irish, who didn't accomplish much in Ireland, have made enormous achievements in the United States. Blacks in America have invented art forms, heavily influenced popular culture, and are themselves the 16th wealthiest nation in the world; whereas Africa is a hotbed of carcasses, tribalism, and slavery. Meanwhile, all kinds of Americans take part in all kinds of ethnic availabilities: eating a Peking duck, dancing the Naguila Halva, taking a Turkish bath. It is this general metaphor — "Leave the turbans, keep the tabulae" — that has made America thine alabaster babe she is.

Armenians in America followed the same pattern. The first major boatload (as I think of it) arrived from 1915 to 1920, with immigrants bound mainly for New York and Fresno, Calif. These people, with their solid conservative values and notable inroads to success, are the epitome of balanced Americanization. Ninety years later, and they still speak their ethnic language fluently and throw their massive weddings. The second boatload of immigrants arrived 30 to 40 years ago from a broad range of places (Iran, Beirut, Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, Egypt, et al.); they were generally destined for Los Angeles. They shared, by and large, the characteristics of the first immigration, if somewhat less consistently.

The stench of "cultural pride" seeps somewhat regularly from the pores of these Armenians. My eyes are forever sensitive to the -ian suffix, because I was raised to think there was something special in spotting an Armenian. Always an exciting surprise, seeing those three letters, which when reared in a last name would hit the pupil like a dollar bill on the pavement. I'll bet my Firing Line DVD collection that in *The Simpsons* episode that revealed Principal Skinner as an

impostor whose real name was Armen Temzerian, it was an inside joke on some Armenian gofer in the staff.

Despite the various "my people are a good people" pap that so activates the gorge, this empty pride is countered by a hard realism. In other words, being "Armenian" is considered important, but not necessarily good. I mean, what else can you conclude when the first reaction to a good-looking guy at an Armenian party or convention is, "You don't look Armenian." With a hint of pleasure, too. Obviously, the degree to which the realism trumps the pride and vice versa varies from person to person. Overall, though, these Armenians have melted well into the pot while holding on to the festivity, the food, and even the hairiness.

Then comes Boatload #3. In the 1990s, the third major migration arrived, this time from post-independence Armenia. It is best characterized by the slew of medical supply shops in Hollywood. Shops that give away padded underwear with pink ribbons to old people and charge Medicare for it. Oh yes, these Armenians are fully equipped with the Soviet squeeze-the-system mentality that was a means of survival in their old country. They are not only oblivious to the American ethical-political system, but actively so. Reaping welfare with no remorse. Sending wedding invitations with no postage, the invitee written as the return address. What's more, most of these immigrants came with money (how else could they afford to move?) — and there were only two ways to acquire that in Soviet and post-Soviet times — corruption and corruptness.

As people tend to do, they arrived with offspring. Spoiled little brats though these kids may be, they aren't ignorant of their ethnicity. So high is their cultural awareness that some of them created a street gang called Armenian Power (AP), which gets in constant squabbles with Latino Power (LP), squabbles that often involve bullets and are the main source of both the victim and the perpetrator categories in the LA Armenian murder column. Coming from AP (the cynical among us would say) the first category can never be large enough.

These groupings, to be sure, contain the flaws of any widespread generalizations. Nevertheless, the picture they project is accurate. What we have are three quantitative sets of the "same" people — ethnically and genetically speaking — who fall into two qualitative categories. These categories are not merely *different*; they exist on distinctly separate moral planes. While it certainly doesn't help that Boatload #3 had the added influence of having lived under the greatest evil in history, a case of mental inbreeding — with consequences metaphorically tantamount to its physical, er, brother — is present as a talisman.

Perhaps this boatload's members will change, given a few generations of growing up in America. Some people, such as a man I spoke to on my flight back from Yerevan, aren't so sure. "We," he said, referring to himself as part of Boatload #2, "had to live and work with Americans. We were forced to change. These people never have to leave their community."

It is true that the community in certain quarters is now large enough to operate within itself, but I find it hard to believe that it has the ability to overpower the mending qualities of time. Either way, the important thing to note about

these Armenians is that they have no qualms about abusing government programs. Why not take what's there? "Why don't you do it?" they ask in sincerity.

They cannot *conceive* of what they're doing as wrong.

While Armenians in Armenia do not share the disgusting characteristics I have described about those who recently left it — the latter were beneficiaries of Soviet thuggery, whereas the former were victims — they do share that obliviousness to Western political structure. They can't even conceptualize the only solution to their eternal mess.

So the solution must be introduced from without, by the only people who give two shits: rich western Armenians with sentimental feelings toward their heritage. Such people exist, and a few of them even know what's required if any change is to occur. But even then, knowing what's required doesn't always mean knowing how to make it happen. This is where the unparalleled post-Soviet corruption comes back in, like an anchor glued to the bottom of the sea with an indestructible rope. Setting the sail, fueling the ship, following the compass — information about all this is readily available if not readily accepted. But nobody has figured out how to cut that rope.

Sure, it has only been about a decade. Sure, it's too early to get fatalistic. Sure, there's still hope. Sure, sure, sure, Diane Schuur. But for people to feel hope, the window to the future must reveal at least a thin ray of it. Perhaps I'm going at this with a fractured middle retina, but when I look into that window, all I can see reminds me of the most famous author of fairy tales. Given the present view, it would take an undue amount of optimism to see anything else.

And as far as I know, there aren't any Armenians named Panglossian.



Oblivion. Not just a country. An oblivion.

This is the feeling one gets when visiting Armenia. It is a different world. I don't mean just a foreign world or a poorer world, both of which might share our basic concerns, only in different shapes and sizes. I mean a different world, "different" being an adjective just as vague as the oblivion it describes.

The people don't seem hungry, nor desirous, nor happy, nor particularly angry, nor worrisome . . . just occupied. Like the rest of us, they are totally indifferent to world politics,

Armenia is surrounded by people who hate it. By "surrounded," I mean on all sides; and by "hate it," I mean passionately.

and unlike the rest of us, they don't pretend otherwise. That is, with the exception of one issue . . .

By the 19th century, the consequences of Armenia's fatal folly half a millennium earlier were in full effect. Recognized in the Ottoman Empire as "Christian infidels," Armenians were more mongrels than citizens under the Islamic law. In a

conflict with a Muslim, they were completely defenseless, being forbidden both from testifying in court and from bearing arms. (All a Muslim had to do was swear on the Koran.) They were uniquely subjected to an extortion-based tax-farming system; a "hospitality tax," entitling government officials to free lodging and grub for three days a year in an Armenian home; and a winter-quartering obligation, which allowed Turks and Kurds to quarter their families and cattle in an Armenian home for the whole winter. Obviously,

Sadly one can see that what helped Armenia survive was the same thing that caused her to fall: that separate cultural identity, ever so fierce . . . ever so stubborn.

those first two prohibitions against any form of self-defense effectively entitled Turks and Kurds to even more. Hence the frequent rapes, abductions, and robberies — and the gradual debeatification, as many Armenians regard it, of the Armenian race.

Banning free speech is one thing, but in some districts *no* speech was allowed — speak Armenian and your tongue would be confiscated. In such areas, generations of Armenians only learned Turkish. P.H. Massey, the British vice-consul stationed in the Ottoman region of Adana, summed things up with the type of political reasoning typical of British statesmen in those days:

The Armenian population is everywhere oppressed by a system of government which takes from them the means of circulating freely, of earning a livelihood, and of enjoying a feeling of security to life and property, even on the most frequent highway. Taxes are levied without mercy, even from the poorest. The prisons are filled with innocent men, who lie there for months without trial.

Naturally, this generated a good deal of unrest among Armenians, as well as all the other infidels subjected to similar treatment: Greeks, Serbs, Albanians, and Bulgarians, all of whom eventually and bloodily won independence. Since the infidels, mainly Greeks and Armenians, were also the most productive and successful groups despite their persecuted status, oppressive regulations amounted to cutting off the most vital blood supply of the Ottoman empire, which became, as Mark Twain described it in 1867, "a blot upon the earth — a degraded, poverty-stricken, miserable, infamous agglomeration of ignorance, crime, and brutality" with a "government whose Three Graces are Tyranny, Rapacity, Blood."

Yes. So an Armenian movement demanding security for life and property arose. This was a desperate plea for reform, and when the formal efforts to achieve that failed, what persisted was the plea. Only a small sect of this movement sought independence; the majority were loyal to the Turkish government. (Goodness knows why. One has to wonder if an element of the Stockholm Syndrome — or in this case, the Constantinople Complex — wasn't in play.)

It was this plea that gave birth to the Armenian

Question.

Ruling the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century was one Sultan Abdul Hamid II, a man who "hated the word 'constitution' and everyone who approved of it." A paranoid loon, he was the laughingstock of the world. The British and French prime ministers and press referred to him as "the bloody sultan" and "the great assassin." He had a hateful, despising, loathsome abhorrence of Armenians; he strictly censored all A-words and other symbols of You Know Where. In one case, a visiting Dr. Clarence D. Ussher had his dictionary taken away because it contained the words "liberty" and "revolution"; meanwhile maps were cut out of his Bible because the word "Armenia" appeared in them. (One hilarious instance of Hamid's lunacy was an episode in which he outlawed all references to H₂O from science textbooks, because he feared the symbol could be read as "Hamid the second is nothing.")

Along with a burgeoning debt, a series of revolts among Christian minorities, and a growing Young Turk movement for constitutional reform, the Armenian Question became one of many thorns in the ever-expanding ass that was the Ottoman Empire by the 1890s. Compound this with the sultan's visceral hatred, and you get a particularly agitating situation in which the horns of an approaching scapegoat are firmly in view.

Ergo, a campaign of terror involving precisely measured false pretenses and careful provocations that were framed as insurrections. A lot of blood was spilled. Well, not quite spilled: it wasn't as if somebody knocked over a cup of Dracula's Delight or something. More like splattered, squirted, expunged. From 1894–1896, about 250,000 Armenians were massacred.

But the desolation of 2,500 towns and villages, the pillaging of 645 churches and monasteries, the forced conversion of 559 villages, the reduction of half a million people to destitution — that was only a prelude.

Armenian frustration grew and grew while Ottoman stability fell and fell, and the Young Turk movement emerged full of liberal promise. But political parties are like frat parties: promises in the former usually share the fate of kegs in the latter. In 1913, five years after the Young Turks came to power, the liberals within the party were killed in a coup and a strong Turkist-Islamist platform of nationalism was put in place. By this time the Ottoman Empire's territory in Europe had shrunk by 85 percent, in the wake of the Balkan Wars. This further intensified the spread of propaganda for pan-Turkism, a "mystical vision of blood and race" that saw racial and religious purification as the only solution to Turkey's decay. The phrase "Islam mandates domination" made many rounds, as did the labeling of non-Muslims as "microbes," "germs," and "bacteria" that needed to be eliminated. In a direct appeal to envy, a national boycott was declared against Greek and Armenian businesses: the "infidel bourgeoisie."

The scapegoat was now trapped in a land where bestiality became the official policy. In December, 1914, with the onset of world war, the Ottoman minister of war made the brilliant move of invading Russia during the winter. By January of the following year, he had lost 75,000 of 95,000 men. The underwear-around-the-ankles humiliation of this

defeat was blamed on Armenians, who were said to have sympathies with Russia. Armenian men 20 to 60 years of age had been conscripted to the army (where they were given menial jobs so as never to acquire warrior skills). A month after the defeat, they were thrown into labor battalions and methodically executed. With the testosterone of an already disarmed Armenian population now subdued, the stage was set for what historian Richard Rubenstein has called the "first full-fledged attempt by a modern state to practice disciplined, methodically organized genocide."

By strict government order, a "systematic race extermination" — as 145 *New York Times* articles on the subject in 1915 alone described it — was carried out against the Armenians, in the form of mass slaughters and deportations to death. In the ten-point secret government mandate, later recovered by the British and dubbed "The Ten Commandments," point number five read: "Apply measures to exterminate all males under 50, priests and teachers, leave girls and children to be Islamized."

Women were raped in front of their husbands, who were then butchered in front of their wives and families; members of whole towns were forced into churches, which were then burned down, a two-in-one cultural elimination; piles of skulls rested all around invaded villages. This is just a sampling. Describing the graphic details of the genocide would require the many volumes and eyewitness accounts that have been written about them. When most was said and done, the minister of interior who orchestrated the holocaust boasted to the enraged American ambassador: "We have already disposed of three quarters of the Armenians . . . we have got to finish with them"; and soon after, "I have accomplished more toward solving the Armenian problem in three months than Abdul Hamid accomplished in 30 years!"

From 1915–1916, 1.3 million Armenians were massacred. In sporadic attacks for six years thereafter, another 200,000 were killed as well. Only a few Armenian towns succeeded in fighting back and fending off the attacks.

The staple of success for any society has been tolerance of trade, and not only of goods, but also of values and methods. There's a reason I'm 18 and not XVIII years old.

This issue has been the central focus of the average Armenian scholar, special-interest group, politico, and person everywhere, ever since. Why is it even an issue? Because it took me 1,357 words to refer to it, when only three would have been necessary to call up the Jewish holocaust. The Turkish government has adamantly denied the genocide to this very day.

In light of the recovered state documents ordering genocide, the post-WWI Ottoman courts-martial confessions made by the officials who oversaw it, the recorded statements of the Turkish leaders who directed it, and the endless eyewitness reports of American, British, and European

consuls and missionaries (the most instrumental of them being American Ambassador Henry Morgenthau) — this denial is ludicrous beyond belief. Still more remarkable is the fact that it comes from a government that claims to be modern, secular, and West-friendly. Unfortunately, Turkey's similarities to Germany do not extend past 1945.

Turkey has had marginal success in its denial, because of three things.

First, the government spends millions each year on foreign propaganda generated to keep truth hidden. The prop-

From 1915–1916, 1.3 million Armenians were massacred. In sporadic attacks for six years thereafter, another 200,000 were killed as well.

aganda has succeeded in the American media. On April 24, 2002 — the annual memorial of the day in 1915 when 250 of the most prominent Armenian intellectuals and artists were arrested in the Turkish capital and later mostly killed — NPR Morning News had this to say: "In 1915, some Armenian intellectuals were executed who were accused of giving aid to Russia."

Second and third are Turkey's strategic location and the general ball-lessness of the U.S. State Department. Geographically, Turkey is vital to American military bases and interests. Every Congressional resolution to recognize the genocide officially is faced with hyperventilating Turkish threats to restrict all air and ground bases, and is then shot down by State Department heads for purposes of national security. What's more, Turkey's convenient location has earned her billions in aid and loans from the U.S. each year (the going price for "alliance" to America seemingly everywhere), including a multibillion dollar loan in 2001 that rescued her from economic crisis. (The Turkish lira is currently 1,413,000 to the U.S. dollar — which means it's officially worth less than toilet paper.)

But, as this and the recent betrayal in Iraq coincide to demonstrate, the Turks need us far more than we need them. As our relationship with Germany also demonstrates, there is no reason why a mutually beneficial alliance cannot coexist with an accurate historical record. Indeed, it would seem essential that such a human rights travesty be openly regretted. The moral cop-out is one of the many effects of the pussy-pulpit that has characterized American foreign policy since World War I. As H.L. Mencken noted way back then:

The same Armenians who were exterminated in 1896 are now being exterminated again. The only difference is that in the present case the accommodating Secretary Lansing has given the atrocity-mongers a life by addressing a moral note to the Turkish Government. The circulation of such notes now constitutes one of the chief duties of the State Department.

In 2001, France passed a resolution recognizing the genocide. The Turkish government got very, very mad. Boy, did it get mad. It cut off all contracts and withdrew all business

and pulled its consulate out and then . . . within six months resumed everything. Replace *six* with *one*, and *months* with *hot, pleading second*, and you'll get the Turkish government's response if the same resolution is passed by the United States.

What results can be expected from trying to buy alliance with a potential enemy? (Yes, potential enemy. Ninety percent of the Turkish population opposed letting the U.S. use Turkish bases for the recent war.) After all the American tax dollars that have been poured into Turkey for years and years, the one time when we actually, concretely needed Turkey — what happened? Turkey found herself on home plate, thinking she had hit a homerun, when in fact she had never even swung the bat. After the United States put Turkey back on its collective feet, it proceeded to kick us in the proverbial butt.

Armenian American efforts to expose the genocide have had their faults as well. The scholarship is extensive, but it has a noticeable lack of analysis, being very exposé-style and narrowly geared toward gaining sympathy. It has sought to make Armenians pitiful. This is understandable and excusable, considering the silent nature of the genocide. What isn't nearly as excusable is the tendency for Armenian scholars and advocates to display an Armocentric political immaturity, often acting as if American interests were completely irrelevant. Such single-mindedness does nothing but make people sound like another whining ethnic faction.

And Armenian art about the genocide has been assawful. There hasn't been any *Schindler's List* to rock the modern social conscience, or anything even close to it. The one documentary available on home video is simply preposterous, consisting mainly of interviews with survivors who scream like maniacs when recalling their experiences. High school students who watch this can't help but crack up in laughter. No good novel has emerged; the one exception, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, was written by a Jew. What Armenian art has come out in the mainstream — such as the Broadway play *Nine Armenians* — has been rather pathetic and food-centered. While it would be inaccurate to deny that food is a central focus of the Armenian existence — one of the more essential aspects of the seven-course meal that is

life — the fact that no Armenian-themed artistic production can find anything deeper to talk about gets a little annoying after a while.

All modern attempts to get the genocide heard are shadowed by one looming, immutable obstacle . . .

Who cares?

In an abstract sense, we all should. The reasons become painfully evident when you consider the words spoken by Hitler to his elite generals nine days before he invaded

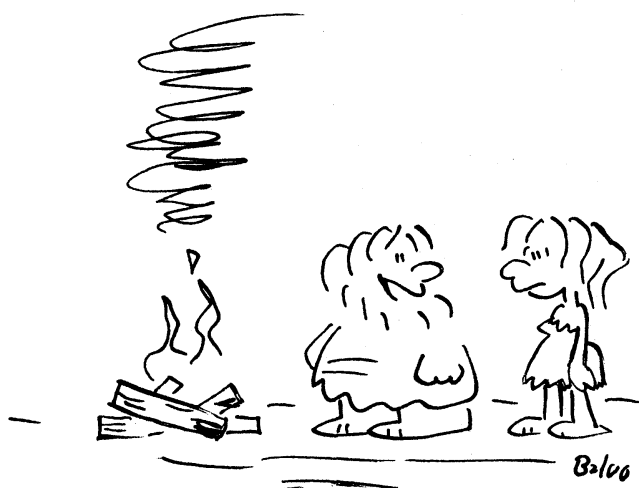
All modern attempts to get the genocide heard are shadowed by one looming, immutable obstacle . . . Who cares?

Poland: "Genghis Khan led millions of women and children to slaughter — with premeditation and a happy heart. History sees him solely as the founder of a state. It's a matter of indifference to me what a weak western European civilization will say about me. Who today, after all, speaks of the annihilation of the Armenians?"

But abstract notions need concrete reminders. Between the time of the first massacres and the all-out genocide, the Armenian issue was a big deal in America, one of the biggest of foreign deals. As Herbert Hoover said, reflecting on 1919, the "name Armenia was in the front of the American mind . . . known to the American schoolchild only a little less than England." Since then there have been so many atrocities that it's hardly possible for all of them to hold a firm place in the present consciousness. Shelf room only exists for those pertinent to current concerns: terrorism, Israel, the Middle East. The rest get stashed in that neglected mental sale bin, where all items are significantly marked down and indistinguishably blended together. What else (other than political correctness) explains the silence about the genocide of two million black Christians in Africa that's gone on from 1980 to now?

So you have the Armenian political *raison d'être*. Of course, if you sense an aura of futility surrounding this whole issue, you're not alone. War is not the answer, if the question is what would benefit present-day Armenia. The answer, really, is nothing. Say the United States officially recognizes the genocide, or ultimately, the Turkish government admits it: then what? Reparations? Hah! Returning former lands? Puh! Both are fantasies, held by activists wishing to claim an empirical purpose for their careers. I'm not exactly sure what the "Armenian Question" is now, other than "You want seconds?" But whatever it is, it's no longer a problem for Armenians in Asia Minor, whose real problems aren't solvable by apologies.

Coming back to those persons among whom I was recently situated for 15 days: one can add a subtle bitterness to my picture of the esoteric oblivion in which they live. Perhaps even a deep-seated will for vengeance, somewhat justifiable under the circumstances of having had



"Don't worry — if we run out of wood, we'll move."

continued on page 53

The Prudence of Conquest

Two editors of Liberty continue their debate over the U.S. government's invasion of Iraq.

Santa Barbara
March 18

History

strongly

suggests that

the conquest

of Iraq has not

made the

world a more

peaceful place.

Dear Bill,

I await your prudential justification of the position that the world is not more peaceful with the removal of Saddam Hussein.

With respect to weapons of mass destruction, among my greatest fears is that sometime during the next few decades some eco-terrorists who believe the world would be a better place with no (or very few) humans will have the technological ability to develop a strain of bacteria that might be able to kill almost everyone. We are not at this point at this time, but do you think this will be a circumstance the world will face within the next 10 to 40 years or so?

This is in large part why I think emphasis on preemptive elimination of weapons of mass destruction generally is so important.

Regards,


Lanny

Port Townsend
March 19

Dear Lanny,

Thank you for goading me to get back to you. It's been three weeks since my last letter, in which I promised to explain why I answered "yes" to your very provocative question — "Do you believe the world now or in the future would be a more peaceful place had the United States, Great Britain, and other nations not removed Saddam Hussein from power?"

But before I tackle the main question, I cannot resist the temptation to respond to what you say about the risk of eco-terrorists committing mass murder by means of biological warfare.

I'm not sure how much this has to do with the conquest of Iraq. Iraq did not possess any chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons (though the U.S. possesses them), so it's unlikely that eco-terrorists could have gotten them from Iraq had the U.S. not conquered it. So I don't see that this threat has much to do with the Iraq war.

But it is still an interesting question. Just how much should we fear high-tech terrorism?

The history of the human race is very much the history of one "supreme weapon"

after another being developed, only to be made obsolete by stronger weapons or stronger defenses. There was a time when the whole world quivered before "Greek fire" used by the Byzantine navy, and there were times when it quivered before the longbows of northern European armies, the first gunpowder-powered weapons, and the first machine guns. But all these supreme weapons were made obsolete.

I note that two of the three classes of "Weapons of Mass Destruction" demonized by Bush and U.S. law have never been particularly effective in warfare, and may never be effective. You worry particularly about one of these: biological weapons. You wonder whether I fear the possibility of germ warfare by eco-terrorists.

Well, I guess I do, a little, but no more than I fear other fairly unlikely possibilities. So far, almost all the research that has resulted in effective biological weapons has been done by the U.S. government — let's not forget that the anthrax strain that terrorized America in the wake of 9/11 was produced at a U.S. Army facility — and I have to admit that there are days when I fear my government, or at least worry about the fact that its security measures are sufficiently lax to allow deadly anthrax spores to be stolen and used to attack the *National Enquirer* and the U.S. Senate.

Of course, it is possible that one day biological or chemical agents will be used to kill huge numbers of people. But this has been the case for a long time, and I don't see that the situation has changed in any material way since 9/11. When I was a kid in junior high school, my biology teacher talked about how deadly botulism can be, telling us that a teaspoon of the deadly poison (which can be cultivated from microorganisms present almost universally in ordinary topsoil) is enough to kill more than 100,000 people. We discussed its potential as a terrorist weapon and concluded that if it were used to contaminate a city's water supply without warning, it could kill thousands or even millions.

I don't recall this happening, and if I'd spent a lot more time worrying about it, I don't think that my time would have been profitably spent.

Anthrax has been around a long time as well, and except for a few governments which you seem to think are not ter-

Like many leaders in the Arab world, Saddam talked very tough on the issue of Israel and her chief supporter, the United States government. But he was almost all talk with very little bite.

rorist organizations, no one has done much to use it for terror.

Back in the Stone Age, pretty much the only way known to kill a person was by cutting him with a knife chipped from rock, piercing him with a sharp stick, or beating him to death, perhaps by using stones as weapons. That was pretty much the limit of technology, so "mass destruction" wasn't really possible. But practically every technology developed since can be employed to kill people on a broader scale than the technologies that preceded it, yet world population continues to grow.

So I guess I'd have to say that while improving technology means that mass murder is increasingly technologically feasible, I'm not losing very much sleep over the problem. This is, after all, an inherent part of human progress. More potent technology means more possibilities of slaughter. Possibilities, however, are not probabilities.

To return to the main question of whether the world is likely in the long run to be a more peaceful place because the U.S. conquered and now occupies Iraq.

Obviously, Saddam is less likely to interrupt world peace as a prisoner of the U.S. Army than he was as dictator of Iraq. But that doesn't mean the world is a better place. All

There were fewer casualties in these two wars combined than there were in the recent civil war in Burundi, which hardly got a headline in the U.S. press.

actions have a variety of consequences, some of them unintended and unanticipated.

To provide a definitive answer to your question about whether the world is more peaceful with Saddam in captivity would require us to track down all the consequences of the conquest of Iraq, both intended and unintended, identify a means of measuring the impact of each on the peacefulness of the world, and add up the totals. This is impossible. Not only are there substantial epistemological impediments; there is also the problem that some of the unintended consequences are not yet evident to us.

But we can do what sensible human beings always do when faced with an issue of such complexity: we can speculate about it, and speculate intelligently. Which is what I attempt to do here.

On the positive side of the ledger — that is, on the side of peace — is the aforementioned fact that Saddam is no longer able to commit acts of violence that disturb world peace. This is no small matter. In his long career, Saddam twice disturbed world peace: first by his war against Iran during the 1980s, then by his invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The U.S. supported the first of these violations — we were still very angry about the capture of the U.S. embassy in Iran by Islamic revolutionaries in 1980 — and opposed the second, to the extent of organizing and executing an invasion of Iraq in 1991.

All wars are terrible, and these were no exceptions. But to be fair, their cost in terms of human lives was relatively small, at least in comparison with other recent wars, wars that haven't seemed to us to be particularly disruptive of the world's peace. I note that there were fewer casualties in these two wars combined than there were in the recent civil war in Burundi, which hardly got a headline in the U.S. press.

Like many leaders in the Arab world, Saddam talked very tough on the issue of Israel and her chief supporter, the United States government. But he was almost all talk with very little bite. The only real action taken against Israel or the U.S. that I can recall was his firing a few ineffective so-called "Scud" missiles toward Israel in the first days of the Bush I invasion of Iraq. He did far less mischief than, say,

Moammar Gadhafi of Libya, who financed a wide variety of anti-American and anti-Western terrorist campaigns — let alone the Soviet Union, Cuba, and China, which financed countless acts of terrorism, murdered millions of innocent people, and instigated civil and international wars that resulted in millions of deaths.

These communist powers were obviously much more a threat to the U.S. than Saddam ever was. Unlike Saddam, they possessed huge arsenals of nuclear weapons and the means to deploy them. Their hostility to the U.S. went far beyond the obnoxious words that Saddam hurled our way: the Soviet Union financed and directed a conspiracy to destroy the U.S., pouring millions of dollars into subversive activities every year for more than a half century, as well as organizing and financing anti-U.S. revolutionary groups in more than a hundred countries.

Curiously, the U.S. managed to prevail against this pernicious social system and the evil men who managed it without going to war — or at least without going to war and *winning*: Twice the U.S. engaged in broad military action against the communists, in Korea in the early 1950s and in Vietnam in the 1960s. The Korean War resulted in a stalemate, and the communists won the Vietnam War.

It wasn't America's military that prevailed against the communists. It was our ability to produce. Our victors were McDonald's, Microsoft, and MGM. The vast communist empire began to collapse as it became increasingly obvious, even to its subjects, that the market system grossly outperformed socialism — and the subjects realized that the dictators who ran the empire were not omnipotent, as they had seemed to be from the time of the Russian Revolution in 1917 until communist armed forces failed in Afghanistan in 1980, in exactly the kind of war that we lost in Vietnam.

This raises a curious question: if we could afford to respond to the threat of communism in such a relatively measured way — that is, without all-out war — why was this policy not pursued against Iraq?

I mentioned Gadhafi, whose recent renunciation of terror and abandonment of his nuclear weapons program is counted by some as a positive consequence of the U.S. invasion. This claim is dubious: according to a lengthy report in a recent *Wall Street Journal*, Gadhafi was negotiating an agreement with the U.S. to abandon terror and nuclear weapons long before the invasion of Iraq.

But Gadhafi's renunciation of terror and nuclear proliferation illustrates, I think, the main positive consequence that advocates of the invasion espouse: putting down Iraq will discourage other Arab leaders from disturbing the peace and make them, in general, more subservient to America's will.

To me, this is an open question. Surely, there may be some Arabs who fear that if they get uppity enough they will face Saddam's fate. This is always the case when a country engages in an act of terror, like the U.S. conquest of Iraq. Some potential opponents of that country will quiver in fear, just as some who supported Texas independence quivered in fear after Mexico's victory at the Alamo. But others will be inspired by such a loss and become even more devoted to their cause, as were the Texas patriots who shouted "Remember the Alamo!" and defeated the Mexican army at San Jacinto.

Here the evidence is sketchy, though to date it appears that the U.S. conquest of Iraq has neither made us friends in the Arab world nor terrified Arabs into submission to American might. I recently heard Ben Stein, in the course of defending the war on a television talk show, wonder at how people freed from tyranny could be so hostile to their liberators. The reason, of course, is that Iraqis do not necessarily see Americans as their liberators. In fact, many see them as foreign conquerors, bent on undermining their culture and religion, just as many Americans during the Revolutionary War did not see British and German troops as their liberators from the lawless kakistocracy of the Continental Congress.

My own guess is that in the long run, more Arabs will become more anti-American and more inclined toward anti-American violence as a result of the conquest of Iraq than will be terrified into submission or see it somehow as Arab liberation. I think that human experience supports my view, but of course, there is always a possibility that Arabs will react in a cowardly fashion, like those in the American Revolution who supported the British, and whom we now remember as traitors, or those Texan-Americans who supported the Mexican suppression of the Texan Revolution. (I

It wasn't America's military that prevailed against the communists. It was our ability to produce. Our victors were McDonald's, Microsoft, and MGM.

have read the autobiography of one such American, Elias P. Bean, and it is a very enlightening document.)

To sum up, I think it is impossible to know for certain whether the world will be a more peaceful place as a result of the American conquest of Iraq, but I think the evidence, both from what is now happening in the world and from history, strongly suggests that it will not. Time will show us.

The way you posed the question seems to suggest that you are convinced that the world is a safer place. I've told you why I think it probably is not. Could you tell me why you think it is?

Regards,

Bill

Santa Barbara
March 18

Dear Bill,

I cannot agree with the initial thrust of your letter that the new generation of weapons of mass destruction is similar to weapons of the past — just bigger in scope — and something over which not to lose much sleep. It is a new moment in history when weapons are capable of killing as many people as the new generation of weapons of mass destruction is.

It is true that humanity has held this power since the end of World War II, when the atomic bomb was first used. What

is different now is the potential proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

As I have earlier argued, we are reaching the point — whether in a few years or a few decades — when a few terrorists, literally anywhere in the world, may be able to kill tens of millions, hundreds of millions, or even billions. I think you underestimate the change that this will require in values and institutions.

With respect to whether the world is or is not a better place with the removal of Saddam Hussein, I appreciate that it is never possible definitively to answer a question of this sort. However, as you say, “we can do what sensible human beings always do when faced with an issue of such complexity: we can speculate about it, and speculate intelligently.”

You ask, while comparing the current war against terrorism with the Cold War against the Soviet Union, “if we could afford to respond to the threat of communism in such a relatively measured way . . . why was this policy not pursued in Iraq?”

I do not think that the comparison of the war in Iraq with the absence of an all-out war against the Soviet Union is apposite. As you note, the United States fought battles with worldwide Communism in, among other places, Korea and Vietnam.

The military engagement in Iraq should be seen in this light — as a battle in the worldwide war against terrorism. It is a battle in a larger war, just as Korea and Vietnam were battles in the larger worldwide war against Communism.

I do not agree that it was not our military that prevailed against Communism. Had the United States pursued policies of unilateral disarmament — as advocated by many during

We are reaching the point when a few terrorists, literally anywhere in the world, may be able to kill hundreds of millions, or even billions.

the 1960s through '80s — it is entirely possible that the Soviet Union would still exist and be more dominant than ever, notwithstanding our vastly more effective economy. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.

In the new world of the potential mass proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the United States will have to be more vigilant than ever. A dozen years ago, in a letter to *Commentary* magazine, I wrote that “Islamic fundamentalism combined with nuclear weapons is a prospect worthy of the most profound consideration” (May 1992, p. 4). This remains, in my mind, an essentially correct outlook, though I should now define the threat the United States and the rest of the civilized world faces from weapons of mass destruction more broadly.

I disagree with you that “the U.S. conquest of Iraq has neither made us friends in the Arab world nor terrified Arabs into submission to American might.” In the first place, the United States has not conquered Iraq — it has liberated Iraq. All people in Iraq, including ethnic minorities and women, will be far freer under the new government that is emerging

there than under Saddam Hussein. Moreover, the same can be said with respect to Afghanistan.

The new governments in Iraq and Afghanistan will not be perfect and they will not be like the United States, but they will be much better than what preceded them. As President Bush has said, America is once again leading armies of liberation. These are most assuredly not armies of conquest. I do not see how, on libertarian grounds, you could contend that the 50 million people in Iraq and Afghanistan are not better off following the military operations led by the United States.

As to the more general effects of the liberation of Iraq and Afghanistan, these will undoubtedly be favorable for the entire region. While you depreciate the effects of the Iraq war on Libya's recent decision to renounce weapons of mass destruction, I think this is simply inaccurate. Your argument here is similar to those who argued, for example, that the Strategic Defense Initiative and other military actions during the Reagan administration were not vital in the defeat of communism. They were wrong then, and you are wrong now.

While you say that Iraqis do not see Americans as liberators, I do not think this is exactly correct. Actually, the most recent opinion polls in Iraq show that the majority of Iraqis think that things are better now than they were under Saddam Hussein, though, understandably, there is not universal praise there for the United States. A stubborn minority of terrorists remains. These terrorists in Iraq should, and if the United States continues to show resolve will, be rooted out.

I see potentially a very favorable outcome of United States involvement in Iraq. Prediction, whether in the realm of science or in the realm of society, is of vital importance in argument and debate. Accordingly, I should like to make several predictions of the likely outcomes of the war in Iraq, or, at the least, of what the future is likely to hold in this area of the world, now that the war in Iraq has occurred: 1) United States military losses in Iraq and Afghanistan will be less than 2,000, likely less than 1,000. This is a grievous burden, but a burden that is worth the price of liberty. 2) Most American forces will be out of Iraq before July 2005, likely before December 2004. 3) An independent, semi-democratic Iraqi government will be established by July 2005. 4) Libya, Iran, and other nations will continue to move in the direction of dismantling weapons of mass destruction programs. 5) Notwithstanding the ever-present cycle of violence and military response between Palestinians and Israel, there will not be a war between Israel and any Arab nation, and Israel will withdraw from major portions of Gaza and the West Bank.

I have, in closing, two questions for you: a) Do you think the above are likely to occur, and b) if they do (granting you may not think this likely), will the effort in Iraq have been worth it?

The future is, I think, far brighter than you now believe, Bill. Continued United States leadership in and of the world is necessary for world peace. Military involvement in Iraq was and is a vital step in the worldwide battle against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Best,

Danny

Life in the Death Star

by Gene Healy

Washington is a graveyard of petty ambitions, and deeply held ideals are sold for the glory of the occasional lunch meeting with Denny Hastert.

There's more than a little irony involved in being a libertarian who's put down roots in Washington, D.C. After all, how do you "put down roots" in a transient and artificial city whose main "industry" has always been redistribution? If you're committed, as I am, to a government small enough to be run out of a double-wide trailer, how can you stand living in a city that's a concretized insult to your ideals?

Every day I commute to work through vast corridors of ostentatious federal buildings that, if I had my way, would be converted to condos. I live surrounded by people who think it's the birthright of the clever and ambitious to run the lives of those Americans decent enough to mind their own business. People complain about second-hand smoke. But the second-hand political opinions of earnest idiots, wafting over from adjacent restaurant tables, have done more damage to my digestion and blood pressure than smoke ever could to my lungs.

And yet . . . I like it here. I won't defend the place. But I'll try to explain. What I like about D.C. is inextricably intertwined with what I don't like, so I'll start there.

The political reasons to hate D.C. and all that it stands for are obvious, particularly to readers of this magazine, so I won't belabor them. But there's plenty more to dislike, things that your amateur D.C. hater doesn't really appreciate. Anyone can belittle the place from afar; but you need to live here awhile before everything else that's wrong with the city becomes apparent.

Unlike most cities, D.C. didn't grow up spontaneously around a center of trade or industry — it was a planned endeavor from the start. It's the American Brasilia, the Brazilian capital used by Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* as her antipode to the organically

evolved, healthy metropolis. French engineer Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant, who designed the original plan for the capital, had no conception of the city as a place for human beings and a center of commercial life. Instead, the new capital would be a place of "majesty — physically embodied in its court, its display, and its monuments." But, as Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick ask in *The Age of Federalism*:

What of the daily life behind all this? What was to bring people, resources, prosperity, refinement, and vitality to this place? What sorts of people? Why should they come at all, and what were they to do? In the "Observations" and "References" attached to L'Enfant's plan there is much about "grand fountains," "grand edifices," and "grand avenues," but not a word about works for the facilitation of commerce. . . .



In consequence, there was "not a single great mercantile house" in the District of Columbia, observed a foreign dignitary in 1811–12; "no trade of any kind" (1828); a "total absence of all sights, sounds, or smells of commerce" (1832).

Not much has changed. Today, downtown D.C. is made up of broad avenues, stately buildings, and less genuine enterprise than you'd find in a healthy Third-World shantytown. The K Street corridor, in particular, is ineffably sad, populated by harried lawyers, slipping off the clock for half an hour to scarf a sandwich at Au Bon Pain or Così or any of

Washington is every awful thing most libertarians think it is: a metastasizing tick of a city grown fat and sleepy on what it drains from the body politic.

the other indistinguishable high-end fast food joints that dominate downtown lunch fare. On weekend afternoons, when everybody's gone home to the Maryland and Virginia suburbs, it's utterly desolate. Walking from the Metro stop to the office on a Saturday, one sometimes feels like a character in a sci-fi dystopia, awakened from a slumber to find the world depopulated by a sudden disaster.

It would be an exaggeration to say that there's "no trade of any kind" in downtown D.C. today. But what passes for a commercial center in the heart of the capital is as antiseptic and lifeless as an airport mall. Our "Chinatown" consists of about a dozen Chinese restaurants, a Ruby Tuesday's, a Fuddruckers, a Starbucks, and a Hooters (complete with Chinese characters that translate to "Owl Restaurant."). Fado, the local "Irish" bar, is, like much of D.C., an Epcot-Center simulacrum of the real thing. You could parachute into Manhattan or Chicago anywhere north of the Loop and land two blocks away from at least one bar and one restaurant that's better than almost anything this city has to offer. Spend enough time in the District's downtown and you start to appreciate certain postmodern critiques of corporate America; you might even find yourself mouthing phrases like "a lack of authenticity." South of Dupont Circle and north of the Capitol, you'll search in vain for anything the least bit interesting or quirky.

And yet, D.C. has pockets of genuine charm, even if you have to leave Gucci Gulch to find them. Outside of the Washington of GS-umpteens and white-shoe law firms, you'll find vibrant neighborhoods that seem to have sprung up in defiance of the bland uniformity of the city center's grid, like flowers busting through cracks in the asphalt.

My Neighborhood

One such blossom is my neighborhood, Mount Pleasant, situated less than three miles north of the White House. Most of the housing stock — workaday rowhouses set high off the street — was built between 1900 and 1925 as the neighborhood grew up around the end of the D.C. streetcar line. Mixed in with the middle-class housing are gorgeous, ramshackle plantation-style houses from the late 19th century.

Bordered to the west by Rock Creek Park of Chandra

Levy fame, and to the east by the high-crime area of Columbia Heights, Mount Pleasant combines a country-village feel with the kind of bracing urban menace that keeps you on your toes and reassures you that you haven't yet moved to the suburbs.

Today, the population's a mix of Salvadorian, Guatemalan, Asian, and African American, along with a white population made up of spiky-haired WTO protesters, urban hipsters, tattooed bike messengers, and ordinary gringo yuppies pushing baby carriages. Ravaged by a vicious race riot in 1991, Mount Pleasant's since recovered and seen an influx of what David Brooks has termed bourgeois Bohemians, or "bobos." The bobo temperament, according to Brooks, combines the bohemian, countercultural perspective of the '60s with the acquisitive, ambitious, bourgeois ethos of the '80s. Wherever the bobos gather, quaint coffeeshops and artsy little taverns spring up, transforming once-rough neighborhoods into what Brooks calls Latte Towns. You still can't get a latte in Mount Pleasant, but it is starting to change.

Luckily, it's not changing fast enough to obscure the local charm. Last summer's Mount Pleasant Festival was a riot of color with some genuinely talented (and some hilariously untalented) local painters, D.C. rock bands, homemade tamale stands, and an imposing-looking Central American gentleman sporting a large lizard on a leash. He may be the same guy that my friend saw at a D.C. United soccer game, who had tied a piece of string around his lizard's tail so that whenever the home team scored a goal he could twirl the poor beast rapidly above his head, screaming "Vámanos muchachos!"

If you've lived in D.C. for most of the last 15 years, as I have, you've watched a city slowly come back to life. Stand at 13th and Euclid Streets in Columbia Heights, looking down at the swamp basin D.C. sits in, and you'll see more construction cranes than you can count, fighting the Washington Monument for skyspace. Intellectually, I know that much of that is an indirect result of government growth — but my inner Rand can't help but cheer at the sight of so many buildings going up.

Despite the fact that D.C. is booming, and attracting young professionals in droves, D.C. residents still have a serious inferiority complex vis-à-vis New York. I can understand

If you're committed, as I am, to a government small enough to be run out of a double-wide trailer, how can you stand living in a city that's a concretized insult to your ideals?

that. New York is glorious. But it's also menacingly bigger than life. D.C., by contrast, is a city on a human scale, with a population a little bit bigger than ancient Athens, and a little bit smaller than that of imperial Rome. Here you're not lost and anonymous — you often run into people you know, from college, grad school, former jobs.

Moreover, in New York, unless you make several million

dollars a year, you're consigned to living in a walk-in closet with a Murphy bed that folds out over a stainless-steel prison toilet. I'm anything but rich, but I have a lovely rowhouse built in 1919, with a garage, a basement rental unit, and a front porch. I can come home on a nice summer evening, relax on the porch, and then walk downhill to the Adams-Morgan or U Street neighborhoods, where you can still have a cigarette in a bar without calling the local Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice down upon your head.

Sure, there are inconveniences involved in urban life, like rats the size of wiener dogs, and waking up to find that someone's used your front yard for a Cheetos-and-blackberry-brandy party. But there are also moments of beauty, like the candlelight vigil held the Friday after September 11th, when our little drug dealers' park was filled to bursting with first-generation Americans holding candles. It was left to the native-born white lefties to politicize the thing, holding signs like "War is not the Answer." (Doesn't it depend on the question?)

Many of the liberal urban pioneers in my neighborhood frequent a place on Mount Pleasant Street called the Marx Café, which offers "Revolutionary Cuisine." "Revolutionary Cuisine" seems to be a euphemism for eight-dollar quesadillas, but near as I can tell, the name's not post-cold-war kitsch — the cafe hosts readings from earnest anti-globo tomes and uses its window space to decry institutionalized racism and the like. However, the owners seem to have missed the irony in their attempt to drive off panhandlers by posting a "no loitering" sign, in both Spanish and English. (Whatever happened to "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs"?)

Better yet, in terms of obliviousness to irony, last summer one of the Marx Café's owners was quoted in a *Washington Post* piece about local businesspeople's conflicts with local activists and regulatory bodies: "Do you know what a communist country is? Well, this community is like that," Pasikhani said. "They want it run like they want it. We have no choice because they come in here saying they'll arrest us all the time."

Politics Writ Small and Large

Hypocritical though they may be, the Café Marxians are right about local politics. The D.C. city council governs the city at least as poorly as Congress and the president govern the country. City officials have plenty of time to harass local businesspeople. But when it comes to the first duty of government — protecting the citizenry — our city government could hardly do worse.

The District, as everybody knows, is a dangerous place to

live, with the highest number of murders per capita of any large city in the country. And "good enough for government work" doesn't even begin to describe the lackadaisical attitude D.C. officials take toward making the city safe. In 2002 D.C. Police Chief Charles Ramsey lowered his department's goals for solving homicides; where once D.C. aimed at a 65 percent clearance rate, Ramsey decided that solving around

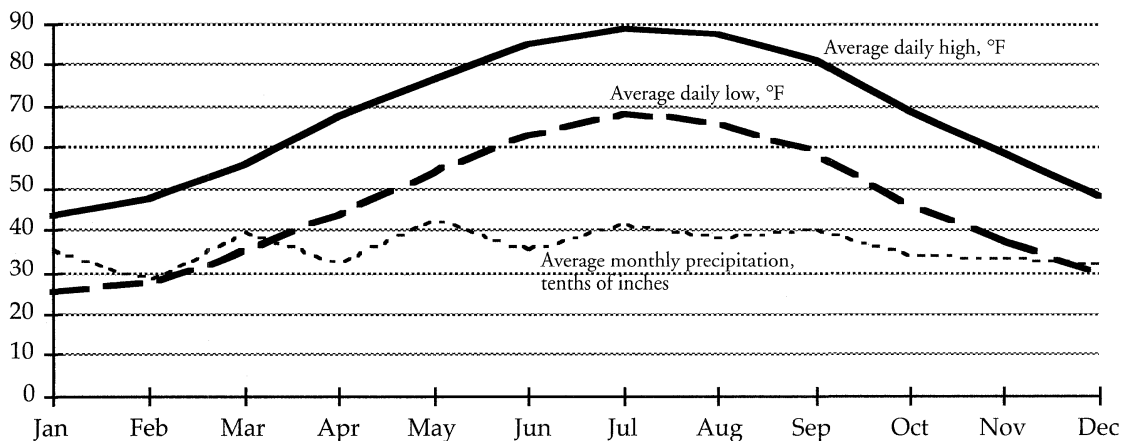
Mount Pleasant combines a country-village feel with the kind of bracing urban menace that keeps you on your toes and reassures you that you haven't yet moved to the suburbs.

half of the city's murders was more realistic because, as he told the *Washington Post*, "It's more encouraging. . . . You get these stretch goals, and when you don't even come near it, you get hammered for it." Meanwhile, according to City Council member Phil Mendelson, in 2002 nearly one in five 911 calls was abandoned when the caller failed to get through promptly.

Many District residents would like to have other options to protect themselves. Standing in their way is a gun control scheme of almost comic rigidity. You can't own a handgun without a registration certificate and you can't get a registration certificate, because the District stopped issuing them to ordinary citizens in 1976. If you do happen to own a pre-1976 handgun that you registered back when disco was king, you cannot lawfully carry it from room to room in your own house without a license. And you can't get a license.

Support for this insane policy knows no bounds of race or class. When Senator Orrin Hatch contemplated introducing a bill to get rid of the District's gun ban, the *Washington Post*, the voice of establishment D.C., squeaked its disapproval. In an editorial no doubt written by a guy who lives in the safety of suburban Bethesda, the *Post* noted that lifting the gun ban would "turn the capital into an armed camp." My! That *would* be frightening. I'll keep that in mind next time someone gets shot in the head two blocks from my house, as happened last

The Weather in Washington, D.C.



December.

I had a surreal experience earlier this year that seemed to confirm my intuition that most political debate only randomly coincides with real political solutions. One Tuesday night last fall, shortly after a daylight gun battle on Mount Pleasant Street ended with a bus driver and a gangmember shot, I attended a community meeting with D.C. police at the local library. Almost every proposal floated by my neighbors was either despotic (police curfews, holding parents liable for their kids' truancy) or daft (self-esteem programs and midnight basketball).

I got up the next morning to crash a meeting of high-powered conservative activists. But for the suspenders and bow ties, it might have been the same meeting. I learned from various attendees that the most important thing for limited government types to do was get behind the president's Medicare bill, which would cause "a plate-tectonic shift in the architecture of the welfare state" or something. I also learned about other vital issues for our times — that the new book *The DaVinci Code* contained dangerous anti-Christian heresies and the latest Abercrombie and Fitch catalog was full of "teenage porn." One wag at the center table

exclaimed, "Hey, let me see that!"

It's not so much that all politics is local, as it is that local politics is politics writ large. It's hard, living in D.C., to shake the notion that people — in the aggregate — get the government they deserve. But if you have a sense of humor about it,

Sure, there are inconveniences involved in urban life, like rats the size of weiner dogs, and waking up to find that someone's used your front yard for a Cheetos-and-blackberry-brandy party.

and you manage to avoid getting shot or jailed, it can be per-
versely amusing.

A Contrarian's Paradise

That, I guess, is part of the appeal of being a libertarian in D.C. If you're a born contrarian, it's hard to get more con-

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Washington, D.C.: By the Numbers

Population (year 2000): 572,059

Males: 269,366 (47.1%), Females: 302,693 (52.9%)

Median age: 34.6 years

Median household income: \$40,127 (year 2000)

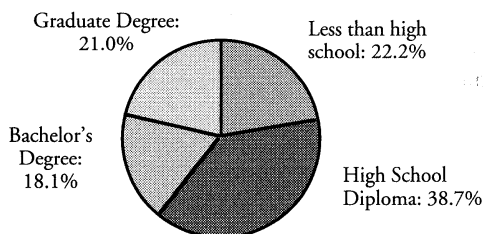
Median house value: \$157,200 (year 2000)

Unemployed: 10.8%

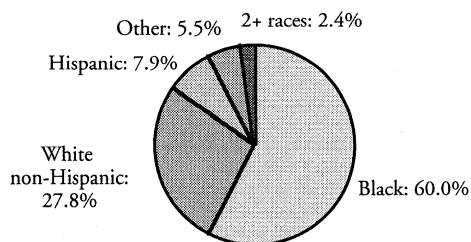
12.9% Foreign born

6.5% Latin America, 2.3% Europe, 2.2% Asia, 1.6% Africa

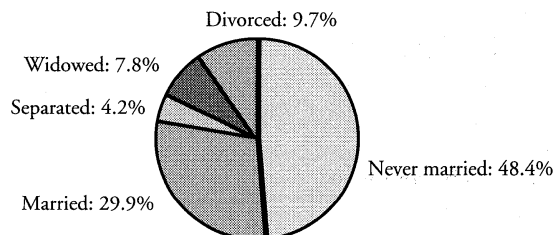
Education (highest level completed, population 25 years and over):



Ethnicity:



Marital status (population 15 years and over)



Crime in Washington, D.C. (2001):

232 murders (40.6 per 100,000)

188 rapes (32.9 per 100,000)

5,009 burglaries (875.6 per 100,000)

3,940 robberies (688.7 per 100,000)

5,568 assaults (973.3 per 100,000)

21,434 larceny counts (3,746.8 per 100,000)

7,670 auto thefts (1,340.8 per 100,000)

City-data.com crime index:

773.4 (higher means

more crime, US average =

330.6)

Nearest airports: Ronald Reagan Washington National (5 miles),
Baltimore-Washington International (30 miles)

Largest colleges and universities: George Washington University
(16,045 full-time students); Georgetown University (11,674 full-time
students)

Library: District of Columbia Public Library. Operating income:
\$28,575,128; 2,471,510 books; 4,463 serial subscriptions

Elevation: 30 feet

God, Man, and Tyrants

by Dave Kopel

In the political upheavals of the High Middle Ages, as kings and popes vied for power, an idea was reborn: all earthly authority is conditional, and tyrants are to be killed.

Who said "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God"? Pat yourself on the back if you answered "Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin." They proposed placing the motto on the Great Seal of the United States. Pat yourself even harder if you knew that the phrase was created by John Bradshaw (1602–1659), the lawyer who served as president of the parliamentary commission which sentenced British King Charles I to death. But who thought up the idea?

The idea is implicit in much of the Old Testament, which is full of righteous Hebrews overthrowing tyrants. Certainly the histories of Republican Rome and classical Greece contain many similar stories. But in the first millennium of Western Christianity, Christians fell under the sway of the law of the Roman Empire, which emphasized absolute obedience to government, and claimed that the government was above the law. Cicero, who lived in the last days of the Republic, was the last great writer to articulate the right of revolution.

The man who restored the right to Western political thought was an English bishop named John of Salisbury. In 1159, he wrote *Policraticus* ("Statesman's Book"), which became the best-seller of the century. Although *Policraticus* is mostly forgotten today, it is one of the few books which truly changed the world.

In 1075, Pope Gregory VII had started the Investiture Contest, by claiming that the pope, not monarchs, had the sole authority to appoint bishops. He had further announced that he had the authority to depose monarchs.

In the decades of war that followed the assertion of papal authority, a variety of pro-pope writers articulated

theories supporting the pope's position. For example, Manegold of Lautenbach, a scholar at a monastery destroyed by the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, argued that the pope had the authority to release subjects from their obedience to a ruler, as Gregory VII had done. Manegold analogized a cruel tyrant to a disobedient swineherd who stole his master's pigs, and who could be removed from his job by the master. So:

"[I]f the king ceases to govern the kingdom, and begins to act as a tyrant, to destroy justice, to overthrow peace, and to break his faith, the man who has taken the oath is free from it, and the people are entitled to depose the king and to set up another, inasmuch as he has broken the principle upon which their mutual obligation depended."

But the book that changed Western political thought forever was *Policraticus*.

John of Salisbury was a cosmopolitan and very well-educated English bishop, and "the most accomplished scholar and stylist of his age." (David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought*).

Policraticus was perhaps the most influential book written since Byzantine Emperor Justinian's legal code had been compiled six centuries before. *Policraticus* "created an immediate sensation throughout Europe," explains Harold

Berman in *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition*. Berman observes that "For over a century *Policraticus* was considered throughout the West to be the most authoritative work on the nature of government."

In the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas, whose work displaced Salisbury's, consciously built on Salisbury's foundation. Throughout the Middle Ages, John of Salisbury's writings were carefully studied by political reformers, lawyers, priests, and scholars.

As an English bishop, John of Salisbury saw firsthand the tremendous church vs. state struggle then underway in England. King Henry II (1154–89) was determined to rule the church. Although *Policraticus* did not mention Henry II by name, the book was dedicated to Thomas Becket, the great English bishop with whom Salisbury served for many years.

Policraticus was published around 1159, as the English struggle was intensifying.

In 1162 the king appointed Thomas Becket as archbishop of Canterbury, the highest position in the English Church. In 1164, King Henry forced Becket and other leaders to proclaim the Constitutions of Clarendon, which reasserted extensive royal authority over the church. The Constitutions of Clarendon were contrary to canon (church) law, Becket later asserted, and he repudiated the Constitutions. He publicly declared that King Henry was usurping power.

A bitter conflict ensued, and in 1170 an enraged Henry roared, "Will no one rid me of this pestilential priest?" Four knights heard the king's remarks, and promptly rode off to assassinate Becket, at Canterbury Cathedral. (The story is retold in T.S. Eliot's short play *Murder in the Cathedral*.) Eleven years after *Policraticus* was published, John of Salisbury was present in Canterbury Cathedral when Becket was murdered.

The murder of Becket horrified public opinion, and Henry accurately saw that his throne was in grave danger.

Policraticus turned the discussion to the rights and duties of government, and to people's remedies when the government exceeded its rights and failed to perform its duties.

He did penance, allowing himself to be scourged by some monks. He worked out a compromise with the church in which he revoked the Constitutions of Clarendon, was allowed to claim that he never wanted Becket killed, but did take responsibility for indirectly inciting Becket's death by proclaiming the Constitutions in the first place.

Before Becket's death, *Policraticus* was already the best-seller of the century. The author's personal witness to the most infamous tyrannical crime of the 12th century doubtless caused even more interest in what John of Salisbury had to say about resistance to tyranny.

Policraticus broke away from the old Two Swords debate, in which monarchs and the church argued with each other about who had supreme power — that is, whether the temporal sword was supreme over the church's sword, or vice versa.

The Two Swords metaphor came from Jesus' Last Supper instructions to the disciples, telling them to start

John of Salisbury was the first Western writer to provide a detailed theory of tyrannicide. He went even further, and made tyrannicide a positive duty.

carrying swords. They responded, "Lord, lo, here are two swords." (Luke 22). *Policraticus*, though, turned the discussion to the rights and duties of government, and to people's remedies when the government exceeded its rights and failed to perform its duties.

The book was a direct shot at contemporary monarchs who oppressed the Catholic Church: Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (the *teutonicus tyrannus*), Roger II (the harsh Norman king of Sicily), Stephen of Blois (who ruled England, more or less, from 1136 to 1154 after starting a civil war to usurp the throne from his cousin Matilda, and who plundered the church and imprisoned bishops), Eustace (Stephen's son, who was killed while pillaging the abbey of Bury St. Edmunds), and Henry II (Matilda's son).

"All tyrants reach a miserable end," John announced. To prove this, he pointed to contemporary examples, such as Eustace, Geoffrey de Mandeville (the plundering Earl of Essex, who was killed in 1144), and Ranulf of Chester (another participant in the Stephen/Matilda war, killed in 1153).

And then there were plenty of stories from the past: the anti-Christian Roman Emperor Julian the Apostate was said to have been stabbed to death with a lance by the martyr Mercurius "on the command of the Blessed Virgin." The Danish tyrant Swain, who imposed the Danegeld (a land tax) on the British was slain by "the most glorious martyr and king Edmund." And "Where is Marmion [another contemporary Briton] who, pushed by the Blessed Virgin, fell into the pit which he had prepared for others? Where are the others whose mere names would consume a book? Their wickedness is notorious, their infamy is renowned, their ends are unhappy . . ."

John of Salisbury lauded the military arts, and described Christian knighthood as an especially holy vocation.

Citing Biblical examples, he explained that "one may frequently kill and still not be a man of blood nor incur the accusation of murder or crime." Citing King David and the prophet Samuel, he wrote, "This is indeed the sword of the dove, which quarrels without bitterness, which slaughters without wrathfulness and which, when fighting, entertains

continued on page 52

The War on Religion

by Andrew W. Jones

With "Freedom of Religion" as its slogan, the American state suppresses freedom and religion.

On Feb. 27, the California Supreme Court ruled 6-1 that Catholic Charities, the social action wing of the Catholic Church, must include contraception in the prescription drug benefits it extends to its employees, even though the Church maintains that the use of contraception is a sin.

One might think that the American Civil Liberties Union would be the first to defend the Church. After all, it is dedicated to freedom of religion, and when the state forces religious organizations to act in direct opposition to their own beliefs, religious freedom suffers.

But don't expect to see the ACLU rallying to the defense of Catholic Charities anytime soon. While civil libertarians are quick to fight against any intrusion of religion into government, as of yet they have not made a peep about this blatant intrusion of government into religion.

This actuality betrays a reality that most American Christians have accepted for quite some time: with regard to religion, the aim of ACLU-type organizations is not the protection of religious freedom, but the elimination of all its public manifestations. Their ideology much more closely resembles the rabidly anti-clerical, socio-economic egalitarianism of Robespierre, than the measured libertarianism of Jefferson. These modern Jacobins have worked tirelessly to eliminate every sign of religion in ever increasing circles of secularization. Take, for example, the blitz the ACLU has unleashed on the Boy Scouts. According to the ACLU's definition of "civil liberties," people whose beliefs and behaviors are considered to be immoral by religious groups still have a right to join them, or to be employed by them.

To ACLU-type organizations and their supporters, the

primary purpose of the establishment clause seems to be the protection of government and society at large from any interaction with religion, especially Christianity. With such an interpretation and in an era where the government increasingly meddles in every aspect of social and private life, the separation of church and state becomes a weapon in the suppression of the very thing it was intended to protect.

The case brought by the New York Civil Liberties Union against the Salvation Army illustrates how this is done. The NYCLU argues that because the Salvation Army has received approximately \$89 million in federal funding as a part of Bush's Faith-based Initiative, it has lost the right to promote its religion.

One might think the same logic would imply that the leftist organizations that previously got federal money to address social problems should have had to abandon their leftist beliefs. But during the decades when most of this federal money went to leftist organizations, no one even proposed this. The reason is that the Left's political beliefs are deemed to be non-religious, and therefore not relevant to the separation of church and state.

By drawing this distinction between religious and social beliefs, civil libertarians end up arguing that the govern-

ment should subsidize one while punishing the other. Clearly, this is not what Jefferson had in mind when he proposed the First Amendment, or what the Founders had in mind when they enacted it.

The prohibition of establishment of religion enshrined in the First Amendment was intended only to prevent the federal government from interfering with the individual's ability to worship following the dictates of his conscience. Government establishment and protection of specific religions, such as Catholicism in France or Anglicanism in Britain, was contrary to this goal. Current civil rights activists are right that government sanctioned or funded religion is an affront to this principle, even if often a symbolic or indirect one. Take, for example, the recent hubbub concerning Alabama's Ten Commandments monument. Such a monument violates individuals' freedom of religion only indirectly, in that they have to pay for it. Yet from the reaction of many civil rights organizations, one would think Chief Justice Roy Moore was conducting the forced baptisms of kidnapped Jewish babies. Judge Moore was wrong; the monument was inappropriate. However, it obviously did less, just sitting there in the corner, to restrict individual religious freedom than the California ruling, where, in the words of the lone dissenter Justice Janice Rogers Brown, "we are dealing with an intentional, purposeful intrusion into a religious organization's expression of its religious tenets and sense of mission."

Part of the problem here is the growth of government power. When the scope of government is limited, relegation of religion to the private sphere does not limit the ability of people to peacefully practice their beliefs, but rather guards them against potential abuse and restrains them from forcing their beliefs on others. As government becomes omnipotent and omnipresent, however, that private sphere is systematically attacked. With every extension of government there exists a corresponding reduction in the scope of private society — including the realm of religion. The inten-

The First Amendment's prohibition of establishment of religion was intended only to prevent the federal government from interfering with the individual's ability to worship following the dictates of his conscience.

tions of ACLU activists are betrayed when they advocate strict enforcement of the establishment clause as imperative, while simultaneously ignoring the rest of the Constitution. In a political reality in which the government is actively involved in social engineering and the redistribution of wealth, demanding the religious neutrality of recipients of government funding amounts to legal religious discrimination. Is it a violation of the separation of church and state for a person on welfare to put a dollar in the offertory plate, or more to the point, to hang a cross on the wall of his government-funded apartment? The government's

financing of overtly secular organizations such as Planned Parenthood and simultaneous denial of funding to religious organizations amounts to an antireligious social-engineering project.

But plans such as Bush's Faith-based Initiative hardly seem an antidote. The initiative further blurs the line between state and church, and gives ACLU types reasonable ammunition with which to attack religious organizations. Eventually, those institutions which wish to retain

Millions of Christians are currently forced to finance thousands of abortions a year — an act they believe to be murder.

their religious mission will have to refuse government funding, while all their competitors are subsidized. Some might make it, but as the disposable income of those who would support such truly private institutions is eaten up in rising taxes, they will be increasingly unable to operate. The end result of such a process is the elimination of private charity — a result that would not upset the ACLU spokesperson who stated in a Fox News interview that these charities are providing services that the government should be doing anyway. That's a remarkably revealing statement, isn't it? Voluntarily doing good, he was claiming, is inferior to forcing people to do good, via taxation and bureaucracy.

The reality is simply that religious freedom is incompatible with a ubiquitous state. This belief lies at the heart of conservative Christian resistance to policies such as state licensed and sanctioned homosexual marriages. While some elements of the Christian Right subscribe to the social engineering program of the ACLU, and, if given a chance, would use the coercive power of the state to force their moral convictions on all, many more Christians are motivated in their politics by the fear that the state's coercive power will be turned against them. And given what we know about government, why shouldn't they be afraid? Is the next logical step after legal gay marriages the illegality of churches that refuse to recognize them? Could the tradition of the Roman Catholic male-only priesthood (or the similar prohibition of woman preachers of many fundamentalist Protestant sects) be attacked as a violation of the Civil Rights Act? These concerns are not far-fetched. Millions of Christians are currently forced to finance thousands of abortions a year — an act they believe to be murder.

The practice of using the state for the purposes of social engineering and the redistribution of wealth is well established and shows no sign of waning. In this environment, cultural struggles over morality become struggles for political power. As the California Supreme Court has demonstrated, the government is going to be used to construct *someone's* vision of a perfect society. Is it any surprise the American people are lining up and taking sides? □

Orwell Lives

by Richard Kostelanetz

1984 was two decades ago. So why read George Orwell today?

When I visited Warsaw two decades ago, just as Solidarity was undermining the Communist dictatorship, I met the sister of a young man in New York who had fixed my computer. When escorting us around Warsaw, she commented without prompting that the most accurate description of life in Poland then was a book written not in Polish but English decades before — George Orwell's *1984*. How extraordinary, I thought, that her spontaneous testimonial corresponded with sophisticated Western opinion at the time. (The Polish book she could have mentioned was, of course, Czeslaw Milosz's *The Captive Mind*, which I read in college, when I also first read Orwell.)

About a decade ago, I had a girlfriend who had grown up in Moscow, where her parents belonged to the artists' union and were thus privileged within the Soviet hierarchy. As a child of the Moscow intelligentsia, she was accustomed to expressing her opinions, though her grasp of English was limited. One day she told me in passing that George Orwell's "Politics and the English Language" was among the most profound essays ever written, especially for its exposé of language meant to obscure reality, rather than illuminate it. Since reading English was not easy for her, I knew she must have struggled merely to finish the Orwell essay. I recall that whenever we heard an artist speak in attitudinizing jargon, as we did often a decade ago, she simply said "Orwell" as an honorific shorthand for her complaint.

Orwell is my hero because he saw clearly; he wasn't easily deceived. In my recent thinking about a variety of things, I find myself returning to this sentence: "One has to belong to the intelligentsia to believe things like that; no ordinary man could be such a fool." What makes the sentence useful is that for "intelligentsia" I can substitute many other categories — and so can you, I suspect. From editors, academics, lawyers, psychologists, football coaches, we so often hear lines that might make sense to people within a closed world, to people

who have or pretend to have a certain authority, but sound like nonsense to those outside it. Such fantasizers usually depend upon a barrier that isolates them from reality, whether it be membership in an exclusionary union, a tenured position in an otherwise insecure hierarchy, or power within a communications channel.

Orwell saw clearly because he didn't regard himself as an intellectual or a professor or anything else other than a human being trying to understand and communicate his intelligence. As for his most famous fiction, the most profound question is this: how did someone who had never lived in a totalitarian country understand them so profoundly? One of the best explanations for the imaginative intelligence of Orwell's *1984* is from Christopher Hitchens, a British journalist long resident in the U.S., in an essay published in the literary magazine *Grand Street* and reprinted in its 1986 anthology:

Orwell knew what the actual texture of dictatorial collectivism would be. He knew because of a variety of things he had already seen — the toadying of the English boarding school (in his case, Eton), the smell of the police court, the betrayal of the Spanish Republic (reported in his *Homage to Catalonia*), the whining and cadging of the underclass, the impotent sullenness of the colonized natives (in Burma), the lure and horror of war fever, and the special scent given off by the apologist. Others may have had the same experiences, but in our time it was Orwell who knew how to codify his impressions into something resembling a system.

With such admiration for Hitchens on Orwell, I eagerly read Hitchens' *Why Orwell Matters* (Basic Books, 2002), only to be disappointed. Hitchens' passion here is less an admiration for Orwell than for exposing the opportunistic misuse of Orwell, usually by people who are less impressed by the clarity of Orwell's vision than its purported resemblance to their own. What an irony it is that someone who saw so clearly should be admired by those whose vision is so easily blurred.

The most important truth to remember about Orwell is that he was not deceived. He didn't need to be, because he wasn't a politician or an academic. He didn't even have a regular book publisher whose obligations he had to respect. Rather, he was an independent writer who told the truth because he wanted to tell the truth at a time — the '30s and '40s — when, not unlike now, too many writers were urged to publicize one or another lie, when so much political commentary was compromised by ulterior motives. What made him different from so-called "New York intellectuals" was his refusal to make stuff up. Pardon my lack of cynicism, but Orwell made you think he was telling the truth because he wanted to tell the truth, not because he assuaged your prejudices or had ulterior agendas. When he complained that the British working classes, the avatars of socialism, stank unnecessarily, he was talking about people who bathed only once a week. What impresses me, now in my 60s, is that Orwell displayed such tough independence in his 30s and 40s when his own financial situation was far from secure. Perhaps he was born mentally independent in the same way that others are born physically strong. Though Orwell called himself a socialist and worked as an editor of a British magazine, *The Tribune*, that called itself socialist, socialist critics have forever pointed out the limitations of his socialism, such as his disparaging the working classes. He certainly lacked a socialist vision, unless you consider his implicit utopia to be the bucolic animal farm before the pigs took over. To my mind, Orwell represents the politics of writing the truth, which is a politics understood by all, which has a genuine constituency, even though it lacks what is oddly called a "party." What makes Orwell a hero to me is the acuity of his critical vision. That's why my book of *Political Essays* (1999) is dedicated to him.

Who's the best successor to Orwell now? Not Hitchens, who is too much of a drinker, though I admire his courage, which perhaps is fueled by alcohol. Not Chomsky, who can be extraordinarily informative, but is intellectually compromised by his *idée fixe* that America is always wrong. (Orwell,

How did someone who had never lived in totalitarian countries understand them so profoundly?

a critical patriot, never would have fallen into that pit.) Nor can Orwell be found now in Alexander Cockburn, who still hasn't forgiven Gorbachev for betraying Communism. Nor the *New York Review of Books*, which has persistently favored authors and books from a single conglomerate of publishers. Nor *The Nation*, which seems to be fixated on extracting large amounts of money from wealthy patrons. (Whenever you see anything peculiar in its pages, guess if any patron is being

milked.) Nor any number of academics who fall too easily into jargon that makes sense only to their kind. Too many of these guys become, as Karl Marx would have recognized, *lumpen* cultural workers opportunistically undercutting the professionals who, like me or like Marx himself, aren't institutionally subsidized.

My own suspicion is that Orwell couldn't break through the then-current dominance of smelly orthodoxies, as he

The most important truth to remember about Orwell is that he was not deceived. He didn't need to be, because he wasn't a politician or an academic.

memorably called them. Orwell is out of favor in America now (and for different reasons, so is H.L. Mencken). The most Orwellian commentators I know began somewhere else, in the left fields of our cultural life. No magazine of opinion has such a strong reputation for telling the truth as *Consumer Reports*, even though it began as a communist front. It is trusted to a degree that Ralph Nader isn't, his pretensions notwithstanding. No independent book publisher nowadays has as strong a reputation for truth-telling as E. Haldeman-Julius, whose inexpensive little booklets influenced a generation of radicals and skeptics a half century ago. I admire the books of Thomas Sowell, because he sees race and economics clearly, combining as he does the ideas of Milton Friedman with the intelligence of Malcolm X. His exposé of the perils of racial preferences (aka affirmative action) is a masterpiece of persuasive polemic. I am less enthusiastic about most of Sowell's newspaper columns, however, because of his conservative blinders on social issues. His left field, so to speak, was being the token African-American in conservative magazines who dropped him because of his independent truculence.

The greatest truth-teller I know in the electronic media is John Stossel, who began as a consumer reporter, so that he had to tell the truth or lose credibility. How he gets away with what he does on the ABC Network News never ceases to awe me. You might recall that he was portrayed in *The Nation* as a lackey of corporations, which are that magazine's favorite enemy (rather than rich people, whose support is courted); but the writer there apparently didn't know that the principal government mooch in Stossel's feature *The Freeloaders* was Archer Daniels Midland, which is a hell of a visible corporation. During the Clinton administration, Stossel broadcast an exposé of the government's building a large airport in the middle of Arkansas, purportedly for military purposes; but its principal user would be large cargo planes exporting frozen Tyson chicken. Stossel also exposed how Ikea had persuaded the city of New Rochelle to condemn a residential neighborhood that could then be an Ikea parking lot. This was broadcast on ABC at least twice before Ikea was eventually defeated.

My own Orwell for now is, you see, not one figure but a combination of several. □

Remarks on George Orwell to the Socialist Scholars Conference, Cooper Union, N.Y., March 2003.

Reviews

The Passion of the Christ, directed by Mel Gibson. Icon Production, 2004, 127 minutes.

The Passion of Mel Gibson

Jo Ann Skousen

Drama has its foundation not in art or entertainment but in religion. Long before the advent of passion plays recreating the final days of the life of Christ or nativity pageants portraying his birth, primitive cultures retold their legends through the chorus, a combination of dancing and chanting designed to address the gods and teach the people obeisance. During the Golden Age of Greek theater, the government sponsored a three-day festival each year dedicated to the worship of Dionysius, the Greek god of wine and fertility, who became the patron saint of Athens during winter, when Apollo oddly vacated to the lands northward. Seated in huge marble amphitheaters, audiences would watch three long tragedies, a short farce, and a comedy each day. At the end of the three-day festival the playwrights were awarded prizes. Audiences returned to their homes invigorated, with a renewed determination to honor their gods and accept their fates.

Hundreds of plays were written, although only a handful remain. These early plays tended to present different versions of the same legends over and over again. Consequently, audiences could be expected to know the stories inside and out. They knew, for exam-

ple, that Oedipus was destined to kill his father and marry his mother, no matter how desperately he tried to avoid his fate. From year to year the plays might focus on different aspects of the stories, but ultimately it would be the same familiar legends each time.

So why did audiences continue to come? What is the point of seeing yet another play about the same old story? For that matter, why do we attend

Most brilliant, perhaps, was Gibson's decision to insert a spooky, androgynous Satan into the story.

movies like *Titanic*, *Miracle*, *The Alamo*, or *The Passion of the Christ*? We already know that the ship is going to sink, the U.S. team is going to win, the Texans are going to run out of ammo, and Jesus is going to die on the cross. We return to these familiar tales of larger-than-life heroes not for the what but for the why and the how of the story. What motivates a hero to risk his life, his wealth, his sacred honor in pursuit of a cause? What tragic "if onlys" lead to a hero's downfall? We imagine ourselves in the situation and wonder:

could I have measured up? Could I have avoided the tragic flaw? The best playwrights in ancient Greece, and the best screenwriters today, are those who bring a fresh twist to the story, who cause audiences to see the situations and the characters, and thus themselves, from a different angle.

For this reason it is often the fictionalized side stories added to a historical drama that attract our greatest attention. We can relate to the pretty young socialite or the pacifist farmer drawn reluctantly into the Civil War, for example, and experience history through their eyes. Factual history, then, becomes a backdrop for the greater story of how ordinary people are changed by extraordinary events. From the comfort and safety of a darkened theater, we can experience those events vicariously through the actors onscreen or onstage.

Consequently, the very best of passion plays or movies about Jesus don't just recreate the story step by agonizing step. Films like *The Robe*, *The Silver Chalice*, and *Ben Hur* focus on how an ordinary person is affected by an experience with Christ. In *Ben Hur*, for example, Jesus is seen only from the back, as he tenderly offers the parched, imprisoned Ben Hur a drink of water. We know it is the Christ by his symbol, a carpentry shop in the background,

but we see his face only through the stunned look on the face of the Roman soldier who pushes him away. It was a brilliant move on the part of director William Wyler, for the face created in our imagination is more personal and more real than any celluloid image could have been.

These two principles — creating a foil for the audience to identify with and withholding the most ineffable of images — are the underlying reasons why Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* is at once gloriously compelling and wretchedly unwatchable. When Gibson departs from the stations of the cross to insert his own imagined characters and events, the film soars. But when he remains focused on the brutal, relentless, bloody facts of the story, it staggers. In flashbacks we see tender moments between Mary and the toddler Jesus, Mary and the carpenter Jesus, Mary Magdalene and the forgiving Jesus. In a moment of agony Jesus looks up to see a dove, symbol of the Holy Ghost, hovering overhead, reminding him that he is not alone. A single teardrop falls from heaven at the moment of Christ's victorious death, simultaneous with Satan's outraged cry. Gibson beautifully recreates Rembrandt's "Descent from the Cross" as Jesus' followers reverently retrieve his body, and Michelangelo's "Pieta" as Mary cradles the bloodied body in her lap. These moments are wonderful.

Most brilliant, perhaps, was Gibson's decision to insert a spooky, androgynous Satan into the story, played unexpectedly by an actress, Rosalinda Celentano. Satan is not mentioned by the four gospels as having been present at the scourging and crucifixion, but of course it makes perfect sense: the crucifixion was, after all, the

culminating battle for humanity. If Jesus prevails, he becomes the Christ and Messiah, savior of the world. If he gives up, Satan wins, and all of humankind becomes his. Surely Satan would have been there, observing, hoping, taunting. At the foot of the cross, two mothers stand watching: Mary, symbol of true motherhood, and Satan, cradling a hideous man/baby as if to taunt: "Give up. You can't do it. In a matter of moments, they will all become mine." This eerie image makes clear just what is at stake for us, more powerfully than the image of the bruised and bloody body.

These moments in the movie are inspired and inspiring. But they are far too few and too brief. Most of the film is devoted to recreating the brutal scourging. This was, indeed, Gibson's purpose for making the film. Gibson focuses on the carnal aspects of the crucifixion, rather than on the glorious aspects of the Atonement, or reconciliation with God. Glenn Whipp of the *LA Daily News* reported, "It's as if Gibson is measuring God's love by the amount of blood he shows on the screen." But Whipp got it backward, I think.

Gibson seems to be using the blood instead as a measure of his own devotion to God. Gibson's focus on the brutal final twelve hours of Jesus' life reminded me of the passion parades I have seen in Latin America during Easter week. Bloody, bare-backed men walk penitently through the streets, scourging themselves with leather whips tipped with metal hooks that tear at their flesh. Like Gibson, their intentions are good; they want to take upon themselves a small part of what their savior experienced for them. But in so doing, they miss the point. Because of the crucifixion of Christ, and

more importantly because of his resurrection, we don't have to spill our own blood at all. Jesus already experienced it completely, infinitely, on behalf of all mankind. In a way, self-flagellation is an additional slap in Jesus' face, as if to say: I know your Atonement was infi-

nite, but here, let me do it to myself, just in case yours wasn't enough.

Mel Gibson's film, though well-intentioned, is a similar slap in the face: it virtually ignores the life-changing teachings of Jesus Christ, gives a 20-second nod to the Resurrection, and focuses instead on the most humiliating

One of the traits I admire most in Jesus is his majestic power as he stands up to his accusers in the face of their torment. But Gibson's Jesus can barely stand at all.

moments of his life. It barely tells us why he endures this torture. We don't see the love in Christ's eyes for those whom he saves (indeed, we can barely see his eyes at all, they are so swollen) nor do we see love for him from others, aside from a small handful of followers. Christians can bring this knowledge to the movie with them, experiencing the ineffability of the Atonement in their own way, and that's why the movie has been so popular.

But I don't need to look at Jesus' bleeding body to appreciate his teachings and his sacrifice. Enthusiasts have lauded James Caviezel's portrayal as the first Jesus strong enough to withstand the brutality of the scourging, but the Christ I saw in this film was a man so badly beaten and exhausted that he could barely stand, much less support the weight of the world on his shoulders. One of the traits I admire most in Jesus as I read the New Testament is his majestic power as he stands up to his accusers in the face of their torment, and the tenderness with which he speaks to others as he suffers. But Gibson's Jesus can barely stand at all.

Ultimately, Gibson directed Jesus as he would play the role himself — not the movie role, but as though he could be the actual Messiah. If he spills enough blood on screen, perhaps he can atone for his own sins, and ours too. He becomes *Braveheart*, *The Patriot*, and *Lethal Weapon* all rolled into one. One needs only to review Sophocles to know that such hubris is just itching for a fall. □



"There's nothing unconstitutional about discriminating against bank robbers!"

Disarming Iraq, by Hans Blix. Pantheon, 2004, 285 pages + index.

Frontier Justice: Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Bushwhacking of America, by Scott Ritter. Context Books, 2003, 206 pages.

Prospecting for Anthrax

Bruce Ramsey

Here are two books, each by representatives of the United Nations who inspected Iraq for chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. Each now says there weren't any such weapons. Each opposed the U.S.-British invasion.

There the similarity ends. These two accounts are as different as a meatball-and-tomato-sauce grinder is from a stack of crackers.

Let us start with the crackers.

That would be *Disarming Iraq* by Hans Blix. Blix, a Swede, is a diplomat through and through, and it ruins him as an author. Consider, for example, how he describes a meeting with Condoleezza Rice, Bush's national security adviser. A good writer would pick out a turn of phrase, a strategic pause, a mannerism — something to fix her in the mind. Blix tells us what *he* said. He is justifying his own work. In two pages, he tells us only two things about her: that she did "not react visibly to my description of the possible timetable" and that she "showed little understanding for our qualms" about another thing. Two negatives.

He has similar meetings with French President Chirac, with Prime Minister Blair, and others. None of them comes alive.

Blix is better on the issues of the weapons. The official reason for the war was that Iraq had failed to comply with UN resolutions that demanded that it give up its "weapons of mass

destruction." The thing to focus on, says Blix, is whether Iraq *had* any such weapons, but as war approached, the U.S. government began to focus on whether Iraq had *accounted for* weapons that it had once had.

Iraq had not accounted for them. Iraq said it had destroyed the weapons in 1991, that there had been no international witnesses, no filming, and no surviving documents. That was because having to destroy these weapons was a shameful thing, and they didn't want to commemorate it.

The United States said Iraq had not accounted for its weapons, a phrasing that made the failure of accounting and the possession of weapons into the same thing.

Blix says he thought maybe the Iraqis did have weapons, but as war approached he became more irritated at the American professions of certainty. He recalls Undersecretary of State John Wolf saying that the only thing that could stop the invasion was for Iraq to "voluntarily take inspectors to the secret hide sites." In a bit of uncharacteristic color, Blix characterizes this as, "The witches exist; you are appointed to deal with these witches; testing whether there are witches is only a dilution of the witch hunt."

Blix also discusses Bush's statement that Iraq had attempted to buy yellowcake uranium from Niger, an accusation soon discredited. Blix said he hadn't believed it anyway, because yellowcake needs to be reprocessed in

order to make bomb uranium, and Iraq had no reprocessing plant. "But I never publicly voiced my doubt," he says.

The diplomat again.

Blix does voice a doubt about the idea that Iraq sent its weapons of mass destruction to Syria, or that they are hidden in Iraq and not yet discovered. First, he says, it is unlikely that Syria or any other country would accept such "a poisoned chalice." And if the stuff were in Iraq, someone would have betrayed it by now, as they betrayed Saddam Hussein and his sons.

So why did the United States invade Iraq? Blix says the American government really believed there were such weapons, and the reason they believed it was that there was "a deficit of critical thinking" at the top.

On the last page comes Blix's political conclusion: "The action taken against Iraq in 2003 did not strengthen the case for a right to preemptive action." To the diplomat Blix, this is strong stuff.

Now, the meatball grinder.

The author of *Frontier Justice* is an American, Scott Ritter. I listened to him speak in Seattle in May 2001, and I interviewed him briefly afterward. He is a former Marine and looks as American as a football player. He said he was a Republican, though he was already being denounced by Republicans and would later be tarred by *The Weekly Standard* as Saddam's American apologist.

Four months before 9/11, Ritter had said flatly, "Iraq has been disarmed. There are no Weapons of Mass

The United States said Iraq had not accounted for its weapons, a phrasing that made the failure of accounting and the possession of weapons into the same thing.

Destruction of any meaningful significance." And he said, "From a military standpoint, Iraq presents zero threat to the United States."

Ritter has been radicalized since then, at least in his manner of speaking.

He writes in the language of nationalism, appealing to fellow Americans to save their country from recklessness, error, rogues, and fools. The most urgent job, he says, is to rise up in

The men Bush had recruited had an ideological predisposition for war. They wanted a war because they wanted to project American power and change the world with it.

November 2004 and eject "Sheriff Bush" and the "PNAC Posse." The PNAC is the Project for a New American Century, a neoconservative imagination of empire. The posse is the neocon officialdom: Vice President Dick Cheney, his chief of staff Scooter Libby, Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld, his deputy Paul Wolfowitz and others.

Colin Powell was not part of the posse. Ritter sees him as the one person with the stature to have stopped the rush to war. Instead, Powell's speech to the U.N. silenced the doubters. Ritter rips into him for this. Ritter takes a whole chapter to dissect Powell's speech, which he proclaims to be "a farce, full of satellite pictures that show nothing."

For example, Powell said Iraq had been buying "high specification aluminum tubes" and that "all the experts who have analyzed the tubes in our possession agree that they can be adapted for centrifuge use." But all the experts had not said that. Only some of them had.

The allegations about anthrax were baloney, too, Ritter said. In the 1980s, Iraq had had the ability to produce anthrax in liquid form only. The last batch had been produced in 1991 "and in any case," says Ritter, "we blew up the factory in 1996." Given that the shelf life of liquid anthrax is three years, none could have been left by early 2003.

Powell's speech to the U.N. was, Ritter says, "the greatest mistake of his professional career."

Ritter sums up: "The sad fact is

that, on the issue of Iraq's disarmament, a brutal dictator named Saddam Hussein has proven to be more truthful than the elected government of the people of the United States."

So why does Ritter think America went to war? He offers two explanations. First is that "a rookie president from Texas got lassoed into a war with Iraq by the PNAC posse." In other words, the men Bush had recruited — his dad's men, several of them — had an ideological predisposition for war. They wanted a war because they wanted to project American power and change the world with it.

The second explanation is this: "War with Iraq was very much driven by domestic political considerations. By my calculations, as long as President Bush and his advisers believed that they would gain more politically by going to war with Iraq

than they would lose by holding back, war was inevitable."

These could be both true, but they are two different reasons. Ritter doesn't parse that out.

Ritter is a man with a deep sense of caring and honesty, and a deep experience of this one subject. He has a piece of the truth. He tells you what he sees, and what seems obvious to him. If it looks like a lie, he says it's a lie. This is good as far as it goes, and refreshing after the arid world of Hans Blix. But when Sen. Joe Biden repeatedly reminds Ritter that decisions are made by persons "above your pay grade," I think: yes, and that refers not only to money.

Of the two books, Ritter's is the better. But neither is definitive about the "weapons of mass destruction," or the war. They are first cuts only. The stronger accounts will come later. □

The Soul of Capitalism: Opening Paths to a Moral Economy, by William Greider. Simon and Schuster, 2003, 384 pages.

The Market for Morals

George Squyres

On picking up *The Soul of Capitalism*, I expected another tired leftist rant against the evils of money and the soulless greed of capitalism. I was pleasantly surprised to be wrong. At last, Greider seems to be learning something about economics. He understands that free markets are engines of prosperity and that private property enables the most efficient use of resources. He realizes that markets allow for the best conservation of natural resources and writes that capitalist economies are demonstrably better than planned economies. All this coming from a influential popular writer with a history of doctrinaire leftism

suggests that the dominant economic thinkers are not totally without hope. Perhaps it is even a harbinger of progress.

Greider is dissatisfied with what he calls "the philosophy of more" as not addressing deeper, intangible needs of society. He acknowledges, though, that there is only one solution to the larger needs of society, and that it will not come from government. In fact, he argues, government is distinctly unable to provide that solution. Indeed, he acknowledges that government in many ways is the source of those failures rather than the answer. The way to see that these deeper needs are fulfilled, Greider says, is for consumers to demand as much from the

market. Pressure from government is impotent to create a solution where the market has not demanded it.

Greider supports many of the same social goals as others on the Left, but rather than proposing that those goals be reached primarily through legislation, he suggests that the owners of capital, whether they are workers' pension plans or finance capital, can achieve these goals by either investing or not in a company, depending on that company's efforts to help achieve those goals. The owner of a company can vote with his dollar. Free markets even deal better with wealth inequality, he observes, citing a number of small companies owned by the workers.

Greider suggests a reappraisal of how to report companies' finances legitimately. He reiterates the commonly acknowledged fact that the omission of substantial long-term costs gives a false picture of many companies' balance sheets. Air pollution is the familiar example: a firm that pollutes the air as a byproduct of its operations makes every breathing individual pay a proportionate share of that firm's cost of doing business. This is a language that libertarians speak.

To be sure, though, he does not make the complete leap to embrace the free market. What Greider calls American capitalism is not true capitalism. Republicans collaborate illegitimately with business, and Democrats collaborate illegitimately with labor

Pressure from government is impotent to create a solution where the market has not demanded it.

and with trial lawyers. Political favors that unfairly benefit their supporters are doled out by the party in power, reducing the power of the market to efficiently allocate resources and thereby giving lie to the label "capitalism."

He does recognize the inevitable and chronic problems of government: failures to achieve goals that are rooted

in systemic flaws, pork-barrel corruption, and the alienation of citizens from the political process that is caused by corruption. He ultimately recognizes that the only permanent solution comes from social, not political, reform. Consumers must be re-educated to understand the power that the consuming public wields in the marketplace and the power that this in turn has to improve society. Politics, to

the extent that it impedes the public from doing this, must also be reformed. Heady stuff for a leftist!

Some will see only Greider's failure to abandon completely political solutions as a sign of latent statism, and maybe it is. But it is far more important that he is treading new ground for a leftist. His evolution is a significant sign of progress. □

Lost in Translation, directed by Sofia Coppola. Focus Features, 2003, 102 minutes.

Love's Language Lost

Jo Ann Skousen

In the 1964 comedy *What a Way to Go*, Paul Newman plays an American living in Paris who has fallen in love with a young widow (Shirley MacLaine). After Newman goes on for several rapturous sentences in French describing his new girlfriend to a fellow Parisian, the subtitle translates simply: "She's pretty." Newman's friend responds with an equally impassioned and lengthy rhapsody about MacLaine, also in French, followed by the subtitle, "Very pretty." Obviously, a lot was lost in the translation.

Sofia Coppola borrows this trick in her Oscar-winning film, *Lost in Translation*. Bill Murray plays a nearly washed-up actor who has flown to Japan to make a whiskey commercial. He must communicate with the commercial's director through a translator, who listens to the very detailed instructions and then tells Murray only, "Turn your head." The point of the interchange explains the title and theme of the film: much is lost in trans-

lation when we don't speak the same language.

But what constitutes "the same language?" Coppola implies that there is more to it than simply using the same vocabulary. When Murray's character calls his wife to say "I miss you," what he really means is "I miss the sensation of missing you." When his wife nags about home decor and problems with the children, she says "I want you here," when what she really means is "I want you to want to be here."

Murray's character notices a young woman (Scarlett Johansson) at his hotel who has accompanied her photographer husband to Tokyo on a photo shoot. She, too, is a victim of miscommunication. To her, "come with me to Tokyo" meant "let's have a second honeymoon;" to her husband it meant, "I'll do my thing and you do yours." Murray and Johansson, two lost souls, spend time together — trying to get in touch with themselves by connecting with someone else. But words are inadequate to express the yearning each feels. Certain thoughts are simply ineffable, no matter how

hard we try to translate them into words. Fittingly, the most important words of the film are muffled, whis-

Fittingly, the most important words of the film are muffled, whispered in Johansson's ears so that the audience must "translate" for themselves.

pered in Johansson's ear so that the audience must "translate" for themselves. Though we may long to know what Murray actually said, we know instinctively that whatever it was would be less satisfying if we knew. "I love you" would seem as flat as "she's pretty" or "turn your head."

An unexpected subtext of the film is that in today's free-wheeling society, sex has become an inadequate substitute for the more complicated language of love. Once called "sexual intercourse" because it was the intimate, private communication of two lovers using a language created and shared by them alone, "having sex" seems to have become a recreational activity devoid of true intimacy, no more personal than "having dinner." Recently, I overheard two friends talking about men. Sue wants very much to find a true love, get married, and start a family. Kate said to her, "Let me set you up with Steve — he likes petite brunettes like you." Kate totally missed the point. Sue doesn't want someone who likes to have sex with

"someone like her;" she wants to meet a man who will create a private language with her, who will engage in lifetime intercourse, not just have sex. Thus, it was completely appropriate and instructive that Coppola never cheapens her characters' relationship

with a gratuitous roll in the hay. Their one physically romantic act — a kiss — occurs only after the whispered exchange of their privately understood communication. In that whispered moment, true intercourse occurs. Perfect. □

Notes on Contributors

Alec Mouhibian is a freshman at UC Santa Barbara. He dedicates his article, in loving memory, to Sonia Mouhibian, a woman who played her hand.

Baloo is a *nom de plume* of Rex F. May.

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Tim Slagle is a stand-up comedian living in Chicago whose website is www.timslagle.com.

Advertisement

"Almost every Jew in America owes his life to *laissez faire* capitalism. It was relatively *laissez faire* America that welcomed Jews in unlimited numbers and *progressive*, New Deal America that turned them away by the boatload and back to Auschwitz. For Jews especially, God Bless America should be God Bless *laissez faire* capitalism." For The Jewish Debt to the Right, see Intellectually Incorrect @ intinc.org

Girl With a Pearl Earring, directed by Peter Webber. Lions Gate Films, 2003, 95 minutes.

A Portrait of Servitude

Max Orhai

Girl With a Pearl Earring is a motion picture about a still picture of the same name, one of the most famous ever painted by the 17th century Dutch master Johannes Vermeer. The painting is a simple portrait of a young woman against a dark background, her hair wrapped modestly in a blue turban, her head turned, bathed in light. Her earring is a luminous accent in the center of the picture, although painted with only the most delicate strokes. She stares out at us steadily through the centuries, a timeless, nameless representative of feminine reserve — distant, although clearly present. Like anyone in any masterful portrait from long ago, the viewer can't help but wonder what she was thinking about, what her life was like. Understandably is the painting sometimes called "the Dutch Mona Lisa."

The transformation from painting to movie comes by way of a novel, also of the same name, by Tracy Chevalier. By Chevalier's conjecture, the girl's name is Griet. Scarlett Johansson portrays her in the film. She is the junior maid in Vermeer's middle-class household, of little social standing, tossed about bravely in the drama between the women of the house, the master himself (played by Colin Firth), and his lecherous patron, Van Ruijven played by Tom Wilkinson. Johansson has very few lines throughout the movie, but her nuanced portrayal of the teenage Greit conveys by cold stares and side-long glances the wonder, hope, disappointment, and resignation common to

anyone coming of age in any time or place. She is fascinated by the paintings in the studio and begins to learn the mysteries of pigment and form. But her beauty catches the eye of her master's patron, who, unable to possess her sexually, commissions her portrait, which disrupts the delicate power balance of Vermeer's household.

Greit's world is a rather more limited one than what we now enjoy. Her destiny is firmly set by her culture, and the story is largely that of her dawning awareness of, brief and restrained struggle with, and inevitable abandonment to that destiny. Her eye for color and composition will never guide her hand as a painter in her own right: she will marry the butcher boy, do a lot of laundry, cook a lot of meals, wash a lot of dishes, raise a lot of children. Her freedom, we find, is in the end not much less than that of her master: Vermeer himself must defer to his degenerate sponsor and paint what he is commissioned to paint. He is left to deal, as best he can, with his jealous and pregnant wife, mean and impudent child, whiny and manipulative cook and nursemaid, shrewd and overbearing mother-in-law. The bond that develops between Vermeer and Griet is less a romance than a kind of spiritual kinship, although nobody else can recognize or accept it as that.

What really struck me about this movie is the economic background. Delft was a regional metropolis, and in the 1660s the Netherlands was still recovering from the collapse of the boom (which included the infamous tulip bubble) of the early part of the century, — but not yet to experience

the crash of the art market during the later wars with France. Things were going okay for most people, although the fear of poverty which drives many of the film's characters is well conveyed by the neighbor's bankruptcy. This isn't the Middle Ages — nor is it, by a long shot, our modern industrialized Europe.

I got the distinct sense that the extras playing the men poling the boats in the canals didn't really know what they were doing: they seemed clumsy. The sheer effort of the women's work required to maintain the simple dignity of a civilized house is alien to modern sensibilities. People toiled so that some wealthy few might enjoy a pitiful fraction of what everyone nowadays takes for granted. The prosperous, pompous, cultured merchant villain is a material pauper compared to any trailer-park-dwelling, lower-class American. Technology obviously makes a huge difference in terms of the real wealth and freedom we enjoy. Somehow, this difference is more striking in this film than in other historical dramas I've seen, set in poorer, more miserable places. The culture is similar enough that an accurate portrayal is possible, and it's this subtlety that makes the story so real and gripping.

This is a quiet, refined film which will be enjoyed by moviegoers who can appreciate understatement. Those, like myself, who tend to slip into false

People toiled so that some wealthy few might enjoy a pitiful fraction of what everyone nowadays takes for granted.

nostalgia and idly romanticize "simpler times" will do well to watch it carefully. Given the choice between our world and Greit's, I'll take the complexities of modern society and modern relationships any day. □

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Booknotes

Giving readers a break — John Stossel has more direct influence on the political thinking of ordinary Americans than any other person alive today, thanks to his successful career as a broadcast journalist. Now he has collected his thoughts into a book.

In *Give Me a Break* (Harper Collins, 2004, 294 pages), Stossel stays very much in character. He remains the bright-eyed naif who is shocked — *shocked!* — every time he discovers that government has failed to solve a problem it addresses, usually making it worse in the process. He covers the same stuff he's done on television: junk science, junk law, political correctness, welfare for the rich . . . and he does it in pretty much the same way. So while *Give Me a Break* is probably a pretty good book for ordinary readers, it offers little for libertarians.

Yet Stossel does offer the libertarian something substantial. *GMAB* starts autobiographically, and we learn how young ambition-driven John Stossel overcame a serious handicap (stuttering) to become a successful television newsman and eventually a TV personality. What's interesting is that his nascent and growing libertarian political beliefs never became a handicap for him. This portion might be read very profitably by young libertarians who believe that their political beliefs seri-

ously retard their likelihood of success in the "real world."

And at times Stossel is genuinely eloquent. I sometimes think I am jaded when it comes to professions of libertarian belief, but I think his very brief concluding essay "Freedom" is masterful. — R.W. Bradford

The powerful outsiders — The Jews are a part of, and apart from, Western Civilization. Not only have the ethical and philosophical systems of Judaism directed the development of Western thought, but the Jewish Diaspora extended into the far reaches of Europe long before Christianity. In fact, it was probably among this Diaspora that Christianity spread through the Roman Empire, eventually becoming its state religion. And yet, it seems natural to separate the Jews from Western Civilization — to discuss what they gave it, what it learned from them. They have always maintained, or had forced on them, a separate identity that goes well beyond religion. Paul Johnson's *A History of the Jews* (Perennial, 1988, 656 pages) is a sweeping view of 4,000 years of this identity from Abraham to Shimon Peres.

The overtly religious, medieval notion of the Jew as nonhuman agents of Satan who conspire to destroy Christendom through well-poisoning, cultural and religious pollution, and

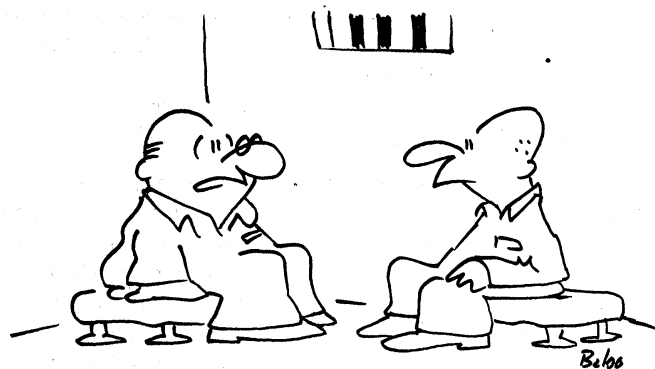
magic, led to the first wholesale attempt to eliminate the Jews from Europe in 1348, on the occasion of the Black Death. As Europe experienced the Renaissance, and then the Enlightenment, the justification for hatred of the Jews transitioned with

ease. As God gave way to reason, Satan gave way to capitalism, communism, cosmopolitanism. The Jew has always been behind the evil in society, always the powerful outsider. European culture has always seen in the Jew its ugly reflection. Any understanding of modern sentiments toward Israel, toward the Jewish "neocons," or the "Jewish lobby" that does not take this into account is missing a central issue of great importance in Western history.

Hitler did not make anti-Semitism up, and nor did it die with him in that Berlin bunker. Hitler's simplistic, racial anti-Semitism was an especially destructive deviation from the centuries-old refinement of hate based not on race or religion but on Jewishness. And what it means to be a Jew is flexible, able to transition and evolve in history, as much a creation of the Gentiles as the Jews themselves. That Jews have lived in Europe for over 2,000 years and have not entirely assimilated is a testament not only to their tenacity as a culture, but also to the tenacity of hate. The Jews were forced into the ghettos of Medieval and early modern Europe and then hated for their exclusiveness and anti-social clannishness. In the last century anti-Semitism, aided by the power of the modern state, and amplified by the radical ideologies of fascism and socialism, drove the Jews out of Europe entirely, and yet their "Zionism" is hated and decried as the greatest threat to world peace.

No understanding of Western Civilization is complete without an understanding of the Jewish element within it. *A History of the Jews* provides an introduction that is expansive and yet eminently readable. As in all Johnson's books, the overriding thesis is that the present is justifiably understood only as a continuation of the past. There are no fresh starts and very few entirely original departures. While such a historical interpretation of civilization seems obvious, it is amazing how many deny its reality, and attempt to understand the present as if in a vacuum. — Andrew W. Jones

Day trader, day tripper — Ten years ago, Jim Rogers combined his



"My firm was like one big happy family, until I spanked my secretary."

two favorite activities — investing and motorcycle travel — into *Investment Biker*, a book telling the story of traveling around the globe on a motorcycle seeking investment opportunities. It was a fun book, teeming with adventure and insight into how the world works, insight that could come only from a real-world libertarian like Rogers. Not surprisingly, it became a modest best-seller.

Now comes *Adventure Capitalist* (Random House, 2003, 368 pages), a similar account, except that this time Rogers and his girlfriend and wife (they marry part way through the book) are traveling in a fancy-dan Mercedes SUV. He scopes out places (and investment opportunities) in a way in which people who travel by air simply cannot do.

The book reeks with insight, though at times I was tempted to dismiss some of its comments as, well, a bit superficial or even flippant. But I didn't. After all, Rogers spent nine months on the ground in Africa, in its biggest cities and its most backward places. His observations are the real thing. He is an honest traveler, commenting on the socio-political realities he actually observes. Aside from Paul Theroux, I cannot think of another.

— R. W. Bradford

And on the eighth day He created the Mac — If you're a Gen X-er, you know what it's like. If you're older than that, maybe you still wonder what everybody's so worked up about.

"It" is the internecine divide between Macintosh users and

Windows users, with a few Linux acolytes squawking from the sidelines that both of those groups are deluded.

Nobody really knew what to do with microcomputers when they were invented. Bill Gates came up with the brilliant idea of selling an "operating system." It wasn't a new idea; relatively powerful OSes had long been used on the big mainframe computers that businesses and universities had. Gates just had the good sense to see that you could make them for the new microcomputer market, too — and that people would actually buy them.

Then Apple came along with the graphical MacOS. The first OS that Gates sold, DOS, required the user to type cryptic commands to make the computer do something. The Mac was based upon the revolutionary idea of using pictures to represent the workings of a computer, making it more intuitive for the average user. The PC-Mac divide set off a debate that still rages today about how to provide computer end-users with the best interface and user experience.

Today we take it for granted that the way a computer works is that you turn it on, a "desktop" comes up on the screen, and you can double-click on Internet Explorer to get online, or double-click on a folder to see the files in it. But that's a fairly new way of looking at things.

What were computers like a couple of decades ago — and why weren't people back then worried about spam and computer viruses and pop-up ads? What do today's computers do, with their tons of memory and hard drive space and super-fast processors and ultra-complex, expensive operating systems, that computers

didn't do a couple of decades ago? Why was it that people could be perfectly productive using a command-line interface on a computer with only a floppy drive, no hard disk, and less memory than a calculator has today — yet now we need gigabytes of hard-disk space, tons of memory, and we still get "blue screens of death" and annoying computer crashes?

Neal Stephenson, in *In the Beginning . . . Was the Command Line* (Avon Books, 1999, 151 pages), asks questions like these and then summarizes them: "What the hell is going on here?" With humor, passion, common sense, and not a little ranting, he tries to figure it out.

Stephenson's rich, over-the-top metaphors and copious digression, which have made his novels a hit among hackers, are in top form in this nonfiction work. Penned as a long essay in the late '90s, *In the Beginning* traces the history of operating systems from, well, the beginning, up to the present. It does so in terms a non-technical person can readily understand and care about, shining light on a subject that's interesting not only in its own right, but to anyone concerned with free trade, antitrust litigation, intellectual property law, or the reasons for the sometimes baffling choices that consumers make.

Best of all, it's free. Like any decent hacker, Stephenson would rather put his work online, where more people will read it, than make another buck or two off of book sales, so you can download the full text. To get the full experience, though, buy the paperback. It's cheap, highly re-readable, and eminently collectible.

— Patrick Quealey

Letters, from page 2

About this same time (1947), just after getting out of the Navy, while I was waiting for the spring semester to start, I became a habitué of the local brothel. That was before the crusading attorney general, Pat Brown, shut them all down. The madam of that enterprise surprised me with a copy of *Human Destiny*. I guess that was the initial push which started my long

decline into the abyss of libertarianism.

Skip Premo
Camp Nelson, Calif.

Ebenstein Unmasked

I believe your purported correspondent on foreign policy — Alan or Lanny — is in reality Bill Bradford!

I recognize Bradford's writing style, and know he likes to use *name de plumes* to spice up *Liberty*.

In this case, he presents weak arguments for policies with which he

disagrees, allowing him devastating ripostes.

Kevin Bjornson
Seattle, Wash.

Bradford responds: I had hoped to keep this secret, but Bjornson's research has found me out, even after I went to all the trouble of covering my tracks by getting a doctorate in the name of Alan Ebenstein from the London School of Economics and writing two well-received scholarly books on the life and thought of F. A. Hayek.

God, Man, and Tyrants, from page 38

no resentment whatsoever." This is similar to what St. Augustine had written in the 5th century about the proper attitude for just war; in the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas would elaborate along similar lines.

Hunting, theatre, gambling, and music were all approved as forms of recreation, provided that they were pursued in moderation.

John explained that a good Christian should not be expected to obey the law or a superior's order in all circumstances, for "Some things are . . . so detestable that no command will possibly justify them or render them permissible." For example, a military commander might order soldiers to deny the existence of God or to commit adultery.

Similarly, if a prince "resists and opposes the divine commandments, and wishes to make me share in his war against God, then with unrestrained voice I must answer back that God must be preferred before any man on earth."

John argued that intermediate magistrates — such as local governors — had a duty to lead forcible resistance if necessary, against serious abuses by the highest magistrate — such as the king.

Interestingly, the theory of "inferior magistrates" not being bound, under all circumstances, to obey the supreme magistrate was also developing in canon law, as many bishops argued that they were not in all circumstances required to obey the pope.

Policraticus drew heavily on Bible stories, and on examples from ancient Rome. John announced, "That by the authority of the divine book it is lawful and glorious to kill public tyrants . . ."

John of Salisbury was the first Western writer to provide a detailed theory of tyrannicide. He went even further, and made tyrannicide a positive duty:

[I]t is not only permitted, but it is also equitable and just to slay tyrants. For he who receives the sword deserves to perish by the sword.

But "receives" is to be understood to pertain to he who has rashly usurped that which is not his, not he who receives what he uses from the power of God. He who receives power from God serves the laws and is the slave of justice and right. He who usurps power suppresses justice and places the laws beneath his will. Therefore, justice is deservedly armed against those who disarm the law, and the public power treats harshly those who endeavour to put aside the public hand. And, although there are many forms of high treason,

none is of them is so serious as that which is executed against the body of justice itself. Tyranny is, therefore, not only a public crime, but if this can happen, it is more than public. For if all prosecutors may be allowed in the case of high treason, how much more are they allowed when there is oppression of laws which should themselves command emperors? Surely no one will avenge a public enemy, and whoever does not prosecute him transgresses against himself and against the whole body of the earthly republic.

In short, "As the image of the deity, the prince is to be loved, venerated, and respected; the tyrant, as the image of depravity, is for the most part even to be killed." Thus, tyrannicide was "honourable" when tyrants "could not be otherwise restrained."

There were two important limits: First, poison could not be used. Second, a person could not rebel against a person to whom he legally owed fealty.

The political theory of the Dark Ages had insisted that obedience to God required obedience to any ruler, no matter how awful. John of Salisbury turned this theory on its head: "it is just for public tyrants to be killed and the people to be liberated for obedience to God."

At great length, *Policraticus* denounced tyranny and justified tyrannicide. A few passages did counsel patient reliance on deliverance by God, warned against taking drastic actions based on small or isolated offenses, and urged prayer as the method of ending tyrannical oppression. These cautionary lines, however, did not undermine the revolutionary impact of the book.

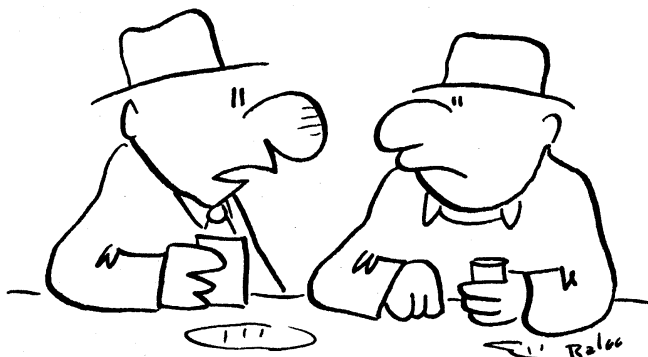
Going beyond political tyranny, John of Salisbury explained that tyranny could occur in many forms; "many private men are tyrants." "[E]veryone is tyrant who abuses any power over those subject to him which has been conceded from above." A father, a landowner, or a merchant could be a private tyrant, to those over whom they abused their power.

An ecclesiastical tyrant was a priest, bishop, or other church official who abused his power, harming rather than protecting the people in his spiritual care.

One of the problems of the tyranny of petty officials was that it was illegal to resist their depredations, even though, according to Justinian's code of Roman law, "it is otherwise lawful to repel force with force without blame if one has safeguarded moderation." However, tyrannicide was appropriate for only actual rulers of governments, not for private tyrants.

Over the next half-millennium, the right of revolution would be defended by Scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas and Francisco Suárez. Lutherans and Calvinists would initially adopt a limited form of the theory. Then the Calvinists, acknowledging that they were building on the Catholic intellectual heritage, would advance the full right of revolution. The "black regiment" of New England preachers would bring the right to its greatest fruition, exhorting their congregations to their sacred duty to overthrow King George and establish a free republic.

John of Salisbury never knew that there was a Western Hemisphere. But he did know that God wants man to be active and free, not passive and enslaved. All of us who enjoy civil liberty in the New World owe a debt of gratitude to the intellectual revolution set off by John of Salisbury. □



"Our eyes met across a crowded room, and she called the cops."

Armenian Splendor, from page 28

two-thirds of one's ancestors wiped from the earth. Eighty years is not long enough to mend such a wound, whatever the bad effects of rubbing it may be. And the effects are bad. That wound has acted like a magnet, pulling the attention of Armenians back to the finished past, when all of that attention is preciously required by the future, if the future is to be savory.

A sad story? Well, yes. Misery seemingly does underlie the whole Armenian psycho-abyss, so long as we don't ignore the *seemingly*. For some Armenians actually like Armenia; at least they would never leave.

In Armenia, as everywhere, happiness is found in the simplicities of life, which may be just enough to sustain apathy toward the complications. Two weeks before I arrived, a neighbor friend had lost his virginity to a prostitute. "It's better than eating," he said — no small compliment if you were to see him.

The day before I departed for home, a highly educated English-speaking young man asked me, in earnest, whether

I liked America or Armenia more. Contemplating the answer, I forged some odd expressions, twisting my facial muscles every which way so as to prevent myself from bursting into hysterical laughter. *Are you fucking kidding me?* I felt like asking. *I mean, really, come on. By what measure conceivable to man in even his most wasted state could you possibly expect me to prefer this hell hole to the United States?*

But seeing that he was serious, I asked instead if he'd ever been to America.

"Yes."

"And you like it better *here*?"

"Yes. I would never move."

Shocked, and thinking this was entirely outside my intellectual jurisdiction to comprehend, something suddenly hit me.

"What part, exactly, of the United States did you visit?"

"Washington, D.C."

"Ah."

Some things aren't so confusing after all. □

Life in the Death Star, from page 36

trary than that. D.C. is every awful thing most libertarians think it is: a metastasizing tick of a city grown fat and sleepy on what it drains from the body politic. It's a city built around the narcissism of small differences — the embodiment of a long-running argument so screechy and grating that you're almost convinced there's some matter of principle at stake. It's a graveyard of petty ambitions, and deeply held ideals are sold for the glory of the occasional lunch meeting with Denny Hastert. It is also — both despite and because of all that — a relentlessly interesting place.

In most other parts of the country, if you follow politics, and make a living writing about it, you're considered weird and vaguely disreputable. That's probably a healthy attitude. A fascination with the political process — which has rarely, if ever, done much good for people — at best indicates a morbid absorption with human folly. But if you've got this sickness, as I do, this is a great place to live.

I have little doubt that you can find plenty of intelligent people to talk politics and books with, almost anywhere in the country. But in a lot of places, you have to seek interesting conversations out. Here, you're more than likely just to stumble into them. Say what you will of the political animals that crawl our streets — I'll echo most of it. But at least they read the newspaper. What's more, not all of them are irredeemably evil. Some of them will even listen to you, and grow deeply unsettled by the fact that much of what you say seems to make sense.

In Washington, it's possible for a libertarian to — dare I say it? — to do good. By doing good, I don't mean working within the system. I don't expect much from the political process, and it generally meets my expectations. And I don't mean gaining power. I can't think of anything I'd like less than becoming yet another data point supporting Acton's Axiom. (This is one of the reasons I maintain a weblog. It's a sort of personal precommitment device, precluding me from employment within this or any future

administration. Anyone contemplating hiring me for a political appointment is but a quick Google search away from several hundred reasons why I'm temperamentally unfit for the job. I've set things up so that I couldn't be corrupted if I wanted to.)

Instead, I think it's possible to do good by being here in the center of politics and political journalism, asking the sorts of questions that would otherwise never get asked, like: Where in the Constitution are you granted the authority to do that? Who's going to pay for the grand promises you've made for these programs, and what will happen when the bill comes due? How satisfying will our lives be when we have given up yet more freedom in return for the promise of government benefits? Plant enough such seeds of doubt, and skepticism about power begins to bloom.

I am justifiably modest about my own contributions to the cause of liberty. But I'm convinced that it does the country and the cause tremendous good for principled libertarians to maintain a presence here. If you're neither Red Team

Today, downtown D.C. is made up of broad avenues, stately buildings, and less genuine enterprise than you'd find in a healthy Third-World shantytown.

nor Blue Team, loyal to no particular faction but to the principles that animated our revolutionary forefathers — you stick out like a sore thumb. And if you structure things right in your professional and personal life, you can greet each day with the glee of the kid who gets to point out — repeatedly — that the emperor is starkers. For that reason and others, I wouldn't live anywhere else. □

Ansbach, Germany

Solomonic court decision in the Fatherland, from a dispatch in the *Times of India*:

A 35-year-old unemployed man took his local authority to court claiming that officials are keeping him apart from his Thai wife, with whom he has a son, by refusing to pay her airfare from Thailand, and ought to compensate him for their lack of sex. He wanted the social welfare office to fund his four visits a month to a brothel, including transport, as well as eight pornographic movies and two monthly contact magazines, claiming in his application, "I require the brothel visits for my physical and psychological wellbeing." The administrative court turned him down on the grounds that any such activities should be paid out of what he already receives in benefit.

Seattle

Why you may see a seeing-eye pony at the supermarket, from instructions given Safeway store security guards:

Always assume that *all animals* accompanied by a customer are Service Animals. Common Service Animals include dogs, cats, birds, ponies, etc.

Washington, D.C.

Note on bent twigs and growing trees, from a report in *The Wall Street Journal*:

When David Solomon, chief of enforcement for the FCC, was a child, his mother threatened to wash his mouth out with soap if he used words like "liar" or "shut up."

Hartland, Maine

Curious religious practice in the Pine Tree State, reported by the *Portsmouth (N.H.) Herald*:

After nailing one of his hands to a cross, a man attempting to crucify himself realized he could not nail down the other hand and called 911. Emergency workers were unable to determine whether he was seeking assistance for his injury or advice on how to nail down his other hand.

Istanbul

Advance in political science from the Muslim world's most modern country, from a Reuters dispatch:

Turkey's army has asked local authorities for information on individuals who could undermine the state, including ethnic minorities, necromancers, magicians who summon spirits from the dead, people who practice meditation, and freemasons.

Seoul

Evidence of democracy's vibrancy in East Asia, from a Fox News story:

South Korea's parliament voted to impeach President Roh after hours of scuffles and protests that included one Roh supporter setting himself on fire and another trying to drive his car up the parliament steps and into the building.

Olympia, Wash.

Progress of the language arts in the Evergreen State, from a dispatch in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*:

The Washington state legislature unanimously enacted a "Respectful Language" law that requires the state and its agencies to "put people first" by replacing phrases like "disabled people" in regulations with phrases like "people with disabilities."

New York

Curious business development, from a report in the *Washington Post*:

Virgin Atlantic Airways scrapped plans to install bright red urinals shaped like women's open lips at N.Y. John F. Kennedy International Airport, saying it had received complaints they were offensive. A spokesperson said that no offense was intended.

Aliso Viejo, Calif.

Prudent local government from America's model state for reasoned and principled decisionmaking, from a report in the *Los Angeles Times*:

City officials were so concerned about the potentially dangerous properties of dihydrogen monoxide (DHMO) that they considered banning foam cups after they learned the chemical was used in their production. When they learned that dihydrogen monoxide — H₂O for short — is a scientific term for water, they dropped the proposal. City Manager David J. Norma explained, "We had a paralegal who did bad research."

Hollywood

Insight into the problems Americans face, from russoforpresident.org, the official website of Libertarian presidential candidate Aaron Russo:

"A big part of the problem in America is the Federal Reserve really controls everything, and very few people even know that. People don't know the Federal Reserve is a private bank, because it has the word federal in front of it, people think it's a government agency. Well so does Federal Express have the word federal in front of it. But it's a private company just like Federal Reserve is. Federal Reserve is a private bank, and it's a for profit bank.

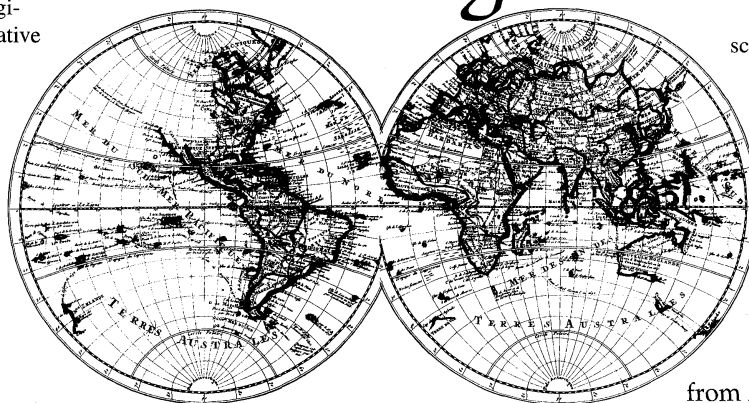
"And this private bank in 1913 got the right, the concession to make money for America. Think about that. . . . They own everything."

London

Vindication of John Locke's famous statement that "No man's knowledge here can go beyond his experience," from a dispatch from Reuters:

A scientist dubbed the "Safeway poisoner" and jailed for trying to poison his wife has been employed by the University of Manchester to lecture students on ethics. A university spokesperson said criminal convictions and teaching ethics were not necessarily mutually exclusive.

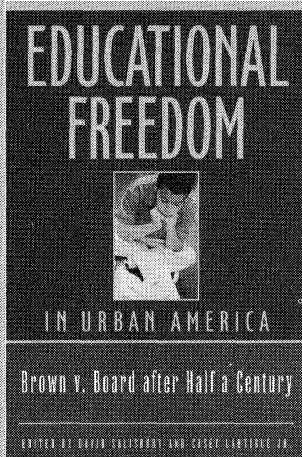
Terra Incognita



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(Readers are invited to forward news clippings or other items for publication in *Terra Incognita*, or email to terraincognita@libertysoft.com.)

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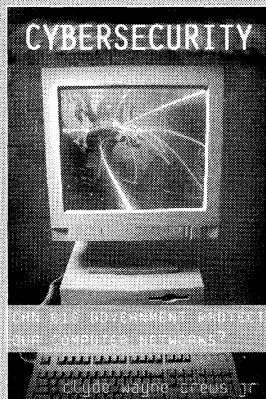
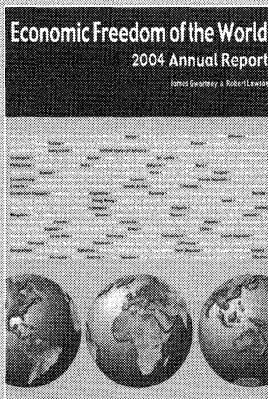
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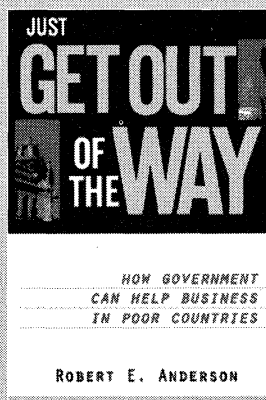
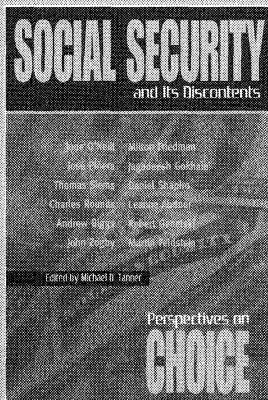


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