

number of pages to Mencken's anti-Semitism, which triggered a scandal when passages in his diary and other embargoed writings became public in 1989." Teachout notes that while Mencken had "deeply equivocal feelings about Jews, that he was an anti-Semite cannot now be reasonably denied."

In our victim-obsessed society, in which certain objects of remorseful concern get better treatment than others, an enterprising publicist, and in this case one who writes for *Commentary*, might prosper by uncovering Mencken's alleged anti-Semitism. After all, Lingenmann does describe this figure as being in the "libertarian camp of American conservatism," and he was additionally an avowed Teutonophile, who married a non-leftist Southerner. Mencken ferociously mocked all kinds of groups, including white Southerners; and in his essays he contrasted what he called "wop opera" to Wagnerian music drama, which he took to be a higher art form. His references to Jews were relatively tame and almost entirely confined to scattered social remarks in his diary. According to Teachout, Mencken went out of his way to help both Jewish and black writers; and some of them, like the journalist Lawrence Spivak, came to Mencken's defense when cries went up about the political incorrectness in his posthumously published diary. (Are we really supposed to fume over Mencken's quip that "anti-Semitism is disliking Jews more than is absolutely necessary"?) Clearly Mencken's widely distributed insults about tasteless Italians, redneck Southerners, and boobish Methodists are now less interesting expressions of prejudice than his unkind descriptions of Jewish fellow-diners, who had the temerity to show poor table manners in Mencken's view. Not all victims of prejudice are to be treated equally, any more than PC ethnic authenticity entitles Southern whites, with a fondness for the

Stars and Bars, to the same exhibitionist rights as blacks.

As for Goldhagen's willingness to take on hard topics, only a self-deceived fool could imagine this to be the reason for his publishing success. A German friend of mine, Johannes von Bieberstein, a Prussian aristocrat who lost family in the resistance to Hitler, has just published a book examining the role of Eastern and Central European Jews in socialist revolutionary movements in the early twentieth century and, moreover, the relation of that fateful fact to interwar anti-Semitism. Although there is nothing here that would suggest that Bieberstein is any kind of anti-Semite, and if anything he exaggerates the hopeless condition of Jews in Tsarist Russia, his bold study will not bring him the loot and fame that Goldhagen has earned for his dishonest, sweeping indictment of *goyim*. Indeed, Bieberstein could only find a very aca-

demie press, with conservative connections, that would publish his non-PC investigation of Jewish radicalism and its impact. The same tepid reception awaited a Polish scholar who undertook a meticulously researched study on the Nazi murder of Poles during World War II. Always around to enlighten us, Alan Dershowitz explains in his autobiography *Chutzpah* that millions of Poles were "selectively murdered" but in no way should be viewed as victims of "genocide." As any sentient being would notice, not all victims have the same propagandistic value, nor are all researchers who take on big topics deserving of praise in the *Washington Post* or *Boston Globe*. ■

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Docile Fourth Estate

A cynical press prepares for war.

By George Szamuely

THE PURPOSE OF THE weapons inspections is not to disarm Iraq but to ensure that the U.S. gets its war. Given the credulity with which journalists treat the pronouncements of government officials, the outcome of the UN inspection regime cannot be in doubt. Sooner or later the UN team, desperate to find Iraq's secret hiding places, will demand that Saddam and his associates subject themselves to a full body cavity search. Since it is probable—though by no means certain—that Saddam will balk at this, the administration will

finally have its *casus belli*. An attack on Iraq is inevitable because no mainstream outlet will dare to give voice to the obvious: whether Saddam is good or bad for Iraqis it is up to the Iraqis themselves to decide. Whether Saddam does or does not have weapons of mass destruction, his possession of them is a perfectly reasonable response given the bombing, sanctions, and threats Iraq has been subjected to for more than ten years.

Criticism of administration policy rarely gets more vehement than that of

Bill Keller in the *New York Times*. He's a UN man, mulilateralist to the core, a "liberal" who prefers nonmilitary to military options. In his column, he boldly declared, "[T]hose who believe overthrowing Saddam is the only way to contain him ... have a stake in giving these inspections some time to work ...

If you are contemplating sending troops into Baghdad, wouldn't you rather do that after the UN has spent time pinpointing and destroying some of Saddam's most lethal weapons of retaliation?" What's good about Hans Blix's mission, then, is that it will make war on Iraq more winnable, and hence more likely. Keller concludes, "Bush should continue doing all the things he would be doing if we were going to war, because on one point everybody who has had anything to do with Iraq agrees: That is the only thing Saddam takes seriously." This is the kind of nonsense that passes for serious analysis in the tonier papers. Who doesn't take war seriously? A madman—the kind Saddam is invariably described as being. Another ostensible *Times* liberal, Nicholas D. Kristof announced on Nov. 15 that, while he was unhappy about invading Iraq, he was all for assassinating Saddam. However, "the real problem is finding Saddam to kill him." True enough.

The media are already on standby to go with the Saddam is cheating and prevaricating story. This will run concurrently with the "Hans the Hopeless" Blix story. Even before Saddam had agreed to allow the UN in, *Agence France-Presse* was running a story with the lead, "Even if he agrees to conditions imposed by the United Nations, [Saddam] likely will try to maintain his weapons arsenal by playing a bit of hide-and-seek with UN inspectors, U.S. experts and officials say. And that strategy ... now runs the risk of putting Iraq on track for war with the U.S. administration." No real point in having the

inspections, then; one should just prepare for war, just as Bill Keller says. Note the facile and false reversal of roles. Impoverished Iraq is on track to fight a war with the greatest power in the world. Any attempt to stand up to a bully is obviously to pick a fight with him.

As for poor Blix, Charles Krauthammer has already given us the lowdown on him, doubtless to be repeated *ad nauseam* in countless editorials in the *New Republic* and on the Sunday talk shows: "Blix is an international civil servant. Does he want to go home to Sweden as the man who blew the whistle that triggered the invasion of Iraq?" William Kristol and Robert Kagan repeated the mantra in the *Weekly Standard*: "What are the chances that Mr. Blix will want to blow the whistle on Saddam—knowing that he may thereby signal the start of a war that he and his backers at the Security Council want to avoid?"

In the coming war the media will accept almost any administration assertion at face value. Though they may suspect they are being lied to, it will all be in a good cause. Hence, they are morally duty bound to follow the government lead. Who can oppose the overthrow of Saddam? *USA Today* recently ran a story under the headline "U.S. Hopes Inspectors Will Find Proof for War" informing us that "U.S. officials expect Iraq to give them plenty of ammunition—by obstructing inspections, denying the existence of facilities inspectors will uncover, and continuing to fire on U.S. and British aircraft." Remarkably, the reporter does not actually expect the inspectors to find weapons of mass destruction. He is as cynical as the officials he quotes. The objective is to provoke Saddam, and he knows it. ■

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Arts & Letters

FILM

[*The Emperor's Club*]

A Classical Education

By Steve Sailer

KEVIN KLINE, WHO stars as a beloved classics teacher in the gentle prep school drama "The Emperor's Club," is a near dead-ringer in looks, but not persona, for Errol Flynn, that Golden Age of Hollywood emblem of rampant masculinity.

While playing a fictionalized Flynn in "My Favorite Year," Peter O'Toole reacted in horror to the suggestion that he perform live, famously exclaiming, "I'm not an actor, I'm a movie star!" In contrast, the mild-mannered family man Kline has always been too much the actor to ever become quite the movie star that so many had expected.

The leading men of Hollywood tend to be more macho than their counterparts on Broadway. That is partly because fans want deeply masculine heroes, and that is harder to fake in close-ups than when projecting to the second balcony.

Also, emotionally needy theatre folk live for their nightly dose of applause, while male movie idols are a little more like slugger Barry Bonds, who does not care if he is loved so long as he is feared. The Jack Nicholsons and Michael Douglas can get by without daily ovations. They do not mind performing in front of bored gaffers so long as they ultimately get their power, glory, and staggering paychecks.

It was not until after Kline had won two Tony Awards that he made his big screen debut at the age of 35 in "Sophie's Choice." (Hard as it is to believe, the boyish actor is now 55.) He's occasionally been hilarious in supporting roles, such as his Oscar showing in "A Fish Called Wanda," but as a leading man, he's been less galvanizing.

Kline's natural style is ultra-theatrical. He won a Tony playing the Pirate King in "Pirates of Penzance" and another one playing a Flynn-era movie star named Bruce Granit in "On the Twentieth Century." Unfortunately, when he gets top billing in a movie, he seems afraid to let his histrionic side rip, so he often turns in a bland effort. Thus, Kline has fallen behind Spacey in the struggle to be Hollywood's top thespian named Kevin.

Here, Kline stars in a worthy little film that cost only one quarter of the typical studio movie's \$50 million budget. While the cinematography and sets are sumptuous, like most low budget movies "The Emperor's Club" moves at merely a stately pace through its simple—and slightly clunky—plot (adapted, not surprisingly, from a short story—"The Palace Thief" by Ethan Canin).

Viewers will argue over how fresh "The Emperor's Club" is. If you have only seen a few movies about caring teachers opening the minds of their students, this will seem like all the others. If you have seen them all, however, you will notice some intriguing differences.

For example, the high school boys actually look like fourteen-year-olds, not actors who had been tending bar on Cahuenga Blvd. until they got their big breaks. It helps that Kline is 6'-2" and headmaster Edward Herrmann, playing another of his bespectacled *uber*-WASP roles, is 6'-5".

Further, Kline does not play an English teacher. Teacher flicks are normally about English class, as in "Dead Poets Society," because screenwriters loved English. (I am still waiting for a movie about the great trigonometry teacher who instills a lifelong love of cosines.)

Kline teaches Greek and Roman civilization, which is not the trendiest of subjects. When asked by a job interviewer what his studies had prepared him to do, a classics major supposedly once answered, "It trains you to be a Roman emperor."

Kline's real calling, however, is transforming the callow lads of the Class of 1976 into young men with characters staunch enough to lead America in war and peace. The plot centers on his struggle to get a U.S. senator's hell-raising son to buckle down and qualify for the school's annual "Mr. Julius Caesar" Roman trivia contest.

In "Dead Poets Society," Robin Williams taught the preppies to rebel against stifling conformity through the soul-uplifting challenge of literature and so forth and so on. "The Emperor's Club" sets itself the harder task of showing a good but outdated man trying to teach the cool kid the value of duty, discipline, and honor—and finding it not quite the rewarding experience he had expected.

Of course, a middle-aged bachelor who takes such a profound interest in a youth is a little worrisome, especially after Kline played an English and drama teacher coming out of the closet in "In & Out."

Still, even though the old East Coast prep schools were modeled on the famous English boarding schools that were excessively devoted to aping the ways of the unseemly Ancient Greeks, those kind of "Brideshead Revisited" goings-on were always much less com-