

# Flashback

*To know nothing of what happened before you were born  
is to remain ever a child—Cicero*

## Frank and Nat

In the summer of 1821, two young men met on a stagecoach bound for Bowdoin College and struck up a fast friendship that would last throughout their lives. Fourteen-year-old Henry Wadsworth Longfellow may have impressed his classmates as Bowdoin's "Most Likely to Succeed," but stagecoach passengers Franklin Pierce and Nathaniel Hawthorne did all right for themselves too.

As midlife approached, Pierce was elected to the U.S. Senate from New Hampshire, while Hawthorne scratched along as a purse-poor writer of fantasies. The author had a recurring dream: "I am still at college...and there is a sense that I have been there unconscionably long, and have quite failed to make such progress as my contemporaries have done; and I seem to meet some of them with a feeling of shame and depression that broods over me as I think of it, even when awake."

Eventually things got better. Hawthorne's tales began to earn notice, if not royalties. And the solicitous Pierce sought a government position for his friend, finally helping Hawthorne land the post of surveyor in the Salem Custom House.

The fortunes of the Bowdoin buddies peaked in the early 1850s, when one wrote the imperishable *Scarlet Letter* and the other secured the Democratic nomination for president in 1852. After the candidate asked the now-estimable novelist to bang out a quickie campaign bio—surely an *infra dig* assignment for a genius—Hawthorne nobly acceded to his old friend's request, toiling for ten weeks to produce *The Life of Franklin Pierce*.

If the book was a dutiful production, it did evince a genuine fondness for its subject. Hawthorne, who was a conserva-

tive Democrat and generally disdainful of politicians, told a friend, "I have come seriously to the conclusion that [Pierce] has in him many of the chief elements of a great ruler.... He is deep, deep, deep.... Nothing can ruin him."

In the end, the "Young Hickory of the Granite Hills" defeated the Whig candidate, General Winfield Scott, whose supporters jeered that the bibulous Pierce was the "hero of many a well-fought bottle." Hawthorne later said, charmingly, of his powerful friend, "I do not love him one whit the less for having been President." But virtue has its rewards, too. A grateful Pierce named Hawthorne to the lucrative consulship in Liverpool; never again would the author want for money.

As a Northern man with a genuine respect for the South, Pierce might have averted the great calamity of the Civil War, but his administration was doomed from the start. In January 1853, as the Pierces prepared to move to the White House, their beloved son and only child Bennie was killed in a freak train accident. Mrs. Pierce, an extremely morbid woman on her best day, told her husband that Bennie's death was God's exaction for Franklin's ambition.

Pierce was paralyzed by fear that his wife was right. The First Lady would spend the next four years secluded in her room, writing notes to her lost boy, while the oft-drunken and guilt-wracked Pierce sleepwalked through his presidency.

The war whose coming Pierce had been powerless to stop filled both Pierce and Hawthorne with dread. As faithful New Englanders, they were Unionists, but halfheartedly so, for as Hawthorne wrote, "The States are too various and

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too extended to form really one country. New England is quite as large a lump of earth as my heart can really take in."

Both men were suspected of disloyalty; Pierce was eventually so execrated that Hawthorne's publisher tried to talk him out of dedicating his 1863 volume *Our Old House* to the former President. The author's reply was a classic statement of friendship. "I find that it would be a piece of poltroonery in me to withdraw" the dedication, he declared, for if Pierce "is so exceedingly unpopular that his name is enough to sink the volume, there is so much more need that an old friend should stand by him."

Hawthorne stood by him until the end. In May 1864, Pierce escorted an enfeebled Hawthorne on a carriage tour of New Hampshire's White Mountains. Death came to the author in middle-night, as Pierce slept in an adjacent room at a Plymouth, N.H. inn. In gathering the deceased's possessions, Pierce found an old pocketbook in the bottom of Hawthorne's valise. Its only content was a picture. A picture of the best Presidential friend a novelist ever had: poor desolated Franklin Pierce.

—Bill Kauffman

# Beat the Press

*The hand that rules the press...rules the country—Judge Learned Hand*

## Where Are Free Speech Zealots When We Need Them?

Censorship in Israel is draconian by American standards. Journalists can be jailed for defying military censors, and publications have occasionally been shut down (temporarily) for defying the rules that require approval of articles on security matters prior to publication. It wasn't until 1996 that the name of the head of the Israeli General Security Service could even be mentioned in news accounts. Understandably, this has fueled a decades-long debate in the Israeli press and government over conflicts between the public's "right to know" and national security.

Foreign media have pushed for press freedom. In the late '80s, Israel tried to force journalists to participate in a pool system for covering activities in "the Occupied Territories." Bob Slater, *Time* magazine's Israel bureau chief and head of Israel's Foreign Press Association at the time, spearheaded a lawsuit against the Israel Defense Forces. He won an order from the Supreme Court, demanding the army show due cause why journalists shouldn't be allowed to travel alone.

Israel's policy on the press is marked by constant compromise among principle, necessity, politics, and the rule of law, as befits a democracy. The Palestinian Authority, on the other hand, just threatens to murder journalists.

By now everyone has seen the images of Palestinians cheering, ululating, and dancing in the streets like winners on the Arabic "Price is Right" after images of the World Trade Center attack were beamed across the world. Those celebrations were inconvenient for Palestinian leaders, who are dedicated to a Big Lie campaign that they are "shocked" and "horrified" by terrorist attacks (despite the fact that over 70 percent of Palestinians tell pollsters they strongly support continued suicide

bombings in Israel). So when a second spontaneous rally broke out in Nablus on the West Bank the day of the attacks, the Palestinian Authority's solution was to allow it to continue with the stipulation that journalists not cover it. When some journalists resisted, they were arrested. One AP cameraman who managed to film the cheering crowd waving a giant poster of Osama bin Laden was told bluntly by the official PA security forces that he was putting his life in jeopardy.

Later, higher-ranking officials of Arafat's Fatah organization came by the AP office. Not to apologize, but to emphasize: We cannot "guarantee the life" of the cameraman if the footage is released. The chief of the AP bureau and the current head of the Foreign Press Association decided not to release the tape.

Facing the prospect of having one of your employees summarily executed will inject a healthy dose of realism into even the most zealous free-speech nut. And I can't second-guess the AP's decision from my position of relative safety here, especially since I never fetishized free speech. But, as criticism of Israel intensifies across America and the world, it's worth pointing out the difference between these two approaches. Israel, judged by our standards, is less than perfect, but our standards still apply; courts and criticism play a central role in protecting press freedoms.

The Palestinian Authority is a completely different story. In October, PA officials again forcibly blocked the media from reporting on demonstrations in which Palestinians waved signs lionizing Osama bin Laden, this time in Gaza. In fact, the PA has arrested and imprisoned authors for writing articles that weren't even published. Yasser Arafat has thrown journalists in jail for giving him good

coverage but not on the front page. Maher Al-Alami, editor in chief of *Al-Quds*, was arrested and imprisoned when he refused an order to run a story about Arafat meeting with the Greek Orthodox Patriarch.

The American press, normally a font of self-righteous platitudes about free speech, doesn't seem particularly troubled that the Palestinians have threatened the most severe form of censorship possible: executing the journalist.

The *New York Daily News* appears to be the only major newspaper to speak vocally against the PA. "Blackmail must be defied," declared the *News*. "The news agency must not surrender the precious right upon which the very foundations of journalism rest: free speech. America is hated because of our commitment to upholding democratic rights. Thousands of Americans senselessly perished this week because of that. Bowing to the Palestinian Authority's wishes diminishes the deaths of all those slaughtered."

Meanwhile, the *New York Times* editorial response has been more typical: complete silence. Arafat did give an interview to *Times* reporter James Bennet as part of the PA's relentless campaign to "deny, deny, deny" that untold hundreds of Palestinians throughout the West Bank and Gaza celebrated the deaths of Americans. "For your information," Arafat told the *Times*, "it is clear and obvious that it was less than ten children in East Jerusalem, and we punished them."

"It was unclear how this assertion could be squared with photographs suggesting that there were more people," writes Bennet in the closest thing to criticism of the Palestinians the *Times* can muster.

Unclear indeed. —Jonah Goldberg