

Sidelights

A Minneapolis library has banned chess playing due to the rowdy behavior of those who come to watch the games. ♣ A Pennsylvania high-schooler was disqualified from running for junior class president after joking during a speech that he would give everyone in his grade a cookie were he elected. School officials said the cookie pledge was a form of bribery. ♣ Doctors in many Melbourne, Australia hospitals now refuse to perform potentially life-saving procedures such as lung and heart transplants, artery bypasses, and coronary artery grafts on smokers. ♣ The Virginia House of Delegates declined to apologize for the state's former policy of forced sterilization. As part of Virginia's eugenics program, thousands were sterilized between 1924 and 1979. Victims have been unable to sue the state for damages because the U.S. Supreme Court upheld Virginia's eugenics law in 1927. ♣ Only 21 percent of workers believe a business-lunch cocktail is acceptable, according to a recent survey. Dinner cocktails are acceptable 68 percent of the time. ♣ Women now account for 46 percent of the U.S. workforce, according to the Employment Policy Foundation, and may outnumber men by 2025. ♣ One out of every seven California voters declines to name a party preference when registering to vote, an increase of 50 percent over the last decade. ... 95 percent of Californians vote for either a Democrat or Republican in gubernatorial or Presidential races. ♣ Vandals in San Gabriel Valley, California used BB and pellet guns to shoot out the windows of over 300 vehicles, mostly SUVs. ♣ Students at Ferndale High, Washington elected a lesbian student as prom king. ... A memorial to gay veterans is planned

for Desert Memorial Park in Palm Springs, California. 🌿 **John H. Rogers**, a Massachusetts politician, proposed a bill that would count jails and prisons as low-income housing. 🌿 The Information Office of China's State Council issued a report entitled "U.S. Human Rights Record 2000" condemning America, "the only country where carrying a private weapon is a constitutional right," as a "society ridden with violence."

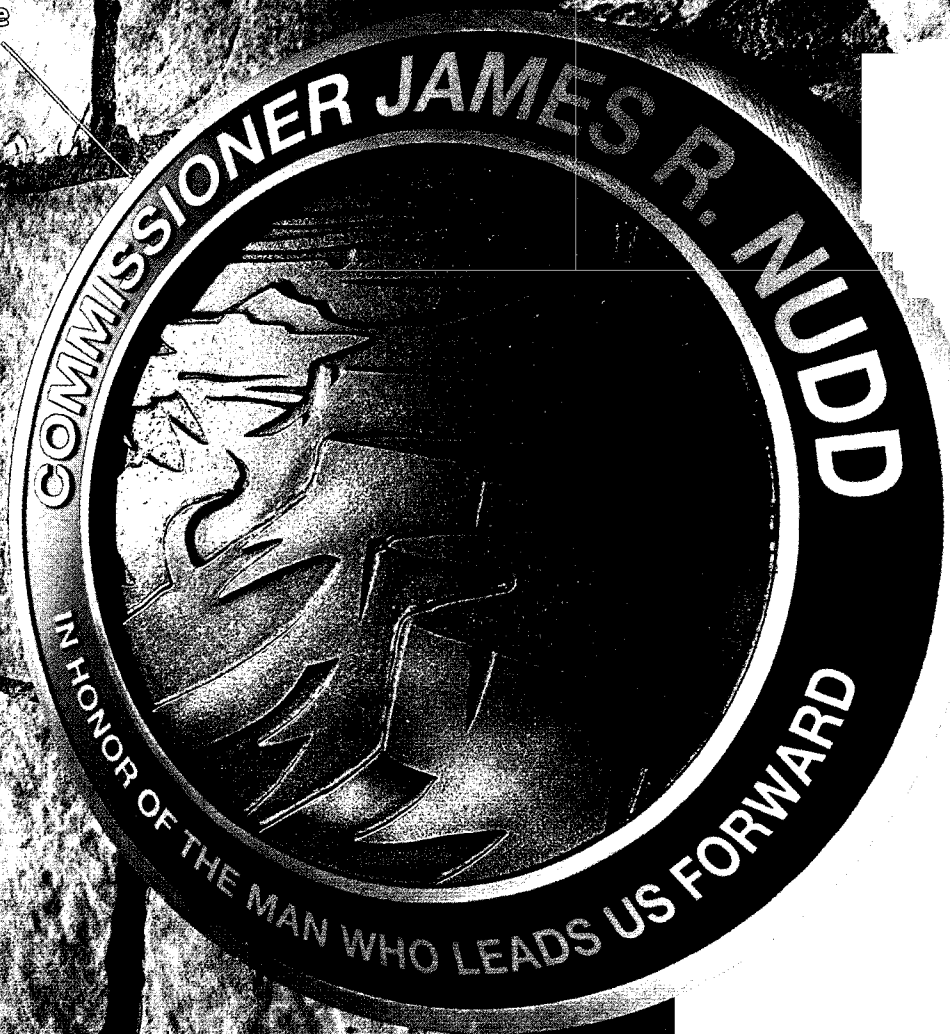
Taxpayers may be overpaying as much as \$311 million to the IRS due to their own errors, according to the General Accounting Office. . . . Over half of all Americans now pay to have their tax returns professionally prepared. . . . H&R Block's revenue for tax preparation services totals \$1.3 billion . . . IRS chief **Charles Rossotti** predicts an increase in tax audits. ♣ 85 percent of Americans think at least one quarter of the federal budget surplus should be used for tax relief. ♣ A retired trucker won a baseball bat signed by **Babe Ruth**, but had to sell it because of the \$35,000 in taxes he'd have to pay to keep it. ♣ Nicaragua has banned afternoon siestas for federal employees. It is estimated the

measure will save the government \$40 million. ♣ A financial officer of the U.S. Postal Service was given a relocation package of \$142,000 to move a distance of 15 miles. . . . A federal audit shows that the Postal Service wasted over \$1 billion over the last four years. . . . During the last three years of **Bill Clinton's** administration, the Department of Education lost track of \$450 million. The department's chief inspector attributes the losses to waste, fraud, and errors. ♣ Over 40 percent of Americans surveyed believe the FBI "knowingly withheld" evidence in the **Timothy McVeigh** case. ♣ While appearing together on "Politically Incorrect," talk-show host **Dennis Prager** asked **Whoopi Goldberg** why fighting communism is morally different from fighting Nazism. She responded, "I'm not sure that communism is necessarily a bad thing." . . . The Socialist Party plans to create a non-profit think tank called the American Socialist Foundation. "We like to think of this as our Cato Institute," said **Greg Pason**, the party's national secretary. ♣ According to former Democratic senator and Presidential candidate **Eugene McCarthy**, the three greatest outrages of his political life were **Joe McCarthy's** Communist witch hunt, the Vietnam War, and the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform bill. ♣ 79 percent of Americans would be interested in attending a speech by **Colin Powell** according to a recent Gallup poll. He topped a list which included **George W. Bush** and **Oprah Winfrey**. . . . The poll showed that more Americans would be interested in hearing a speech by **Jimmy Carter** (66 percent) than one by Bill Clinton (51 percent). ♣ A Thai farmer has invented a mini-treadmill to aid in the training of roosters for cock fighting. —BB



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UNLIKELY PRO-FAMILY THEMES FROM L.A.

Usually outsiders have to plead with Hollywood to honor family values. This summer, however, two movies appeared that, in their own way, resonated with surprising pro-family themes.

Steven Spielberg's *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, about a robot boy in the future who yearns to feel real love, is one of the most debated movies of the year. One of its central themes is the value of familial love. David, the robot played by Haley Joel Osment, is adopted by Monica and Henry Swinton because their biological son has been cryogenically frozen while they wait for a cure for his disease to be found. At first a fixture in their loving home, David is cast aside when the Swintons' son miraculously recovers. David's ensuing journey—a fascinating adventure through a futuristic world, part dreamy fairy tale, part harrowing science fiction—is driven by his desire to become a “real live boy” so he'll be accepted by his parents. The film is partly a warning about the dangers of evolving reproductive technology, but under Steven Spielberg's direction it's also a testament to the idea that family love is a defining element of what it means to be human.

Baby Boy is a very different movie, set in the strife-ridden streets of contemporary South Central Los Angeles, which is also where writer-director John Singleton's first film, *Boyz n the Hood*, took place. On the surface just another “gangsta” flick touting misogyny and mayhem, *Baby Boy* eventually suggests that a responsible family life is the way to escape those very things.

Twenty-year-old ne'er-do-well and unmarried father Jody (Tyrese Gibson) is still living with his mother, has no job,

and no plans to find one. His future looks as dim as that of thousands of other young black men in America's low-income neighborhoods. Yet rather than blame society and give Jody further reasons to sulk in his room, Singleton issues his character a challenge. Eventually worn down by the infantilism of his carousing lifestyle (there's a great shot of this man-child riding a bike next to a passel of kids because he doesn't have his own car), Jody decides to embrace his responsibilities by finding work and devoting himself to Yvette (Taraji Henson), the mother of one of his sons. To his surprise, contentment and love are his rewards.

That all of this comes from a director actually raised amidst the decay of ghetto L.A. makes its message all the more meaningful. Like *A.I.*, *Baby Boy* ends with a portrait of familial love, as Jody, Yvette, and their son bundle together on a couch, content just to be in each other's arms. That's a comfort not enough American families experience—and one Hollywood rarely embraces.

—Josh Larsen is a TAE contributing writer.

GRAY DAVIS GENERATES HEAT, NOT LIGHT

California Governor Gray Davis is not one to let a little energy crisis get in the way of his political ambition. He's learned from the woes of fellow New Democrat Bill Clinton, who proved that any situation—no matter how damaging it may at first seem—can ultimately be turned into a partisan advantage. Give Davis a black-



out, he'll start selling flashlights.

He managed for a while to deflect his misfortunes at the man he hopes to defeat in 2004, President George W. Bush, by casting the blame for California's predicament on a vast lone-star conspiracy. “What's going on here, pure and simple,” he complained in May, “is unconscionable price-gouging by the big energy producers—most of them, incidentally, located in Texas.”

Pity Davis spokesman Steve Maglivio, who, in July, had to explain that comment to reporters who had just gone over the state's energy contracts—and found that Texas companies accounted for less than 10 percent of them. Left with little other recourse, Maglivio simply extended the attack to the other red states that backed Bush on the notorious 2000 electoral map. “Anywhere they wear cowboy hats,” the flak blustered, “they probably have handkerchiefs across their face because they are robbing us blind.”

Actually, the suppliers that have helped the Golden State keep its lights on (albeit intermittently) are based all over North America, including Vancouver and Seattle. But there are no political points to be scored by blasting snowshoe-wearing Canadians or slicker-clad, Starbucks-slurping Pacific Northwesterners.

And for Davis, it's all about scoring political points.

To aid him through the tough times, the governor briefly added political con-