

Sidelights

In an effort to deglamorize fur, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) is providing fur coats to the poor. A group spokesperson stated that only the destitute should wear furs. ... New York City is considering housing the homeless on decommissioned luxury cruise ships. ✎ Berkeley mayor Tom Bates stole and trashed about 1,000 copies of the college paper that endorsed his opponent. ... As a time-saving measure, Mayor Jay Lee of Virgin, Utah charges residents \$25 to speak up at zoning and planning meetings. ✎ A seven-year-old Minneapolis boy stole two cars in 11 days. Children under the age of ten cannot be charged with a crime in Minnesota. ✎ Krowbar, the U.S. Customs Service's most efficient drug-sniffing dog, retired after seven years of working the U.S.-Mexico border. During his career he uncovered more than 30 tons of narcotics valued at over \$300 million. At one point a Mexican drug cartel placed a \$50,000 contract on the dog. ✎ Sixty-four percent of American men would kill Osama bin Laden personally given the chance, according to a Fox News poll. Only 29 percent of American women would.

Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, leader of the Islamist terror group Hezbollah, is urging a global suicide bombing campaign: "Martyrdom operations—suicide bombings—should be exported outside Palestine....I encourage Palestinians to take suicide bombings worldwide. Don't be shy about it." ✎ Former South African president Nelson Mandela apparently believes U.S. plans to remove Saddam Hussein from power are racist: "What we know is that Israel has weapons

of mass destruction.... Why should there be one standard for one country, especially because it is black, and another one for another country, Israel, that is white?" Iraqis, of course, are not considered black. ✎ Around two thirds of Germans are unhappy with the euro, according to a European Commission poll. Germans blame the euro for rising prices and the bad economy. ... The German capital is currently \$60 billion in debt. Berlin's mayor, Social Democrat Klaus Wowereit, expressed hope that the federal government "won't let us starve." ... An average of 200 protest marches and demonstrations take place in Berlin every month. ✎ There are more than 10,000 Italian soldiers involved in peace-keeping missions around the world, making them the third-largest contingent after the United States and Great Britain. ✎ China is campaigning to prevent Westerners from calling the world's tallest peak "Mount Everest," and instead use its Chinese name, Mount Qomolangma. According to a Chinese newspaper report, "British colonialists raped the sacred mountain of the Tibetans by giving it a false name...the world is still persistently humiliating Mount Qomolangma with English-language hegemonism." ✎ Singapore is considering lifting its ban on chewing gum. The government



hopes gum-chewing will help smokers quit their habit.

Israeli police prevented an Arab porn actor from being lynched. He lived in an Arab town within Israel, and his fellow villagers were angered that, by starring in a porn film, he was "harming the honor of Islam." ... San Francisco strippers went on strike, picketing strip clubs and chanting "Two, four, six, eight, pay me more to gyrate!" ... An estimated 5 to 6 percent of middle-school girls in Japan are allegedly involved in some form of prostitution. They ply the trade in order to afford trendy items, especially shoes and handbags. ... Dutch and German scientists believe a birth control pill for men will be available within five years. ✎ The University of Missouri-Columbia is selling official school coffins. Prices range from \$1,590 to \$2,390. ... Students at Lindenwood University, Missouri can pay their tuition with any commodity that the school dining hall can put to use. Six students have received scholarships in exchange for pigs. ✎ The U.S. Postal Service is missing \$65 million worth of white plastic delivery crates. —BB

Scan

STILL BATTLING

In late December, the United States Historical Society dropped a bomb on Richmond, Virginia. It announced plans to erect a statue commemorating Abraham Lincoln's April 5, 1865 visit to the defeated city. The statue, of Lincoln seated on a bench next to his son Tad, would be placed near the National Park Service's Richmond battlefield visitors' center. The design calls for a granite slab bearing the inscription, "To Bind Up the Nation's Wounds"—but instead the idea has ripped the scab off some old ones.

Within roughly two picoseconds of the story appearing in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, e-mails began flooding the newspaper's offices denouncing the idea. Many compared it to placing a statue of Hitler in Jerusalem or one of Osama bin Laden in Manhattan. Brag Bowling, commander of the Virginia Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV), called the proposed statue a "government-sponsored and -sanctioned act of insensitivity." (Actually, the U.S. Historical Society is a private, non-profit group.)

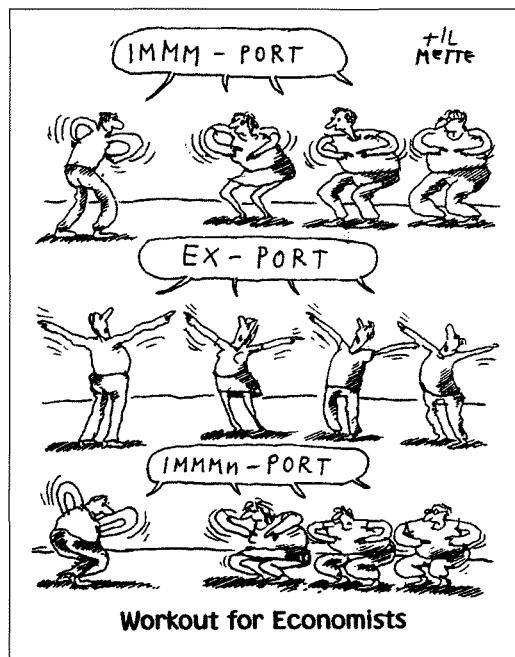
Richmond, the former capital of the Confederacy, is never far from a shouting match over its past. The last big uproar occurred in 1999, when city councilman Sa'ad El-Amin demanded and achieved the removal of a mural depicting Robert E. Lee from a canal-walk restoration project by the James River. El-Amin contended that the mural (one of 29 showing scenes and figures from Richmond's history, including Gabriel Prosser, who led a

slave insurrection) insulted the sensibilities of African Americans. "If Lee had won, I'd still be a slave," El-Amin said. A different mural of Lee was eventually hung, but only after months of controversy.

Earlier, a months-long battle had raged over whether to place a statue of black tennis great Arthur Ashe on Monument Avenue, which boasts famous memorials to Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and other Civil War notables. There have also been dust-ups over gubernatorial proclamations of Confederate History Month, the renaming of city bridges, Confederate-insignia vanity license plates, and more.

It could hardly be otherwise in Richmond, which has both a majority-black population and a large number of residents whose ancestors fought for the Confederacy. Strangely, both the NAACP and the SCV lay claim to the mantle of victimhood: the NAACP because of slavery, and the SCV both because the South lost and because all Southern war heroes are now tarred, rightly or not, as slavedrivers.

For many blacks, slavery is the most important fact about the South. For many descendants of Confederate ancestors who never owned slaves, slavery is a side issue. Each camp insists on holding fast to its own heritage while downplaying the importance of the other. Confederate partisans are fond of recalling Lee's behavior in St. Paul's church, when a scandalized congregation stood frozen because a black man had approached the altar. Lee rose and knelt beside him. It



was a graceful act one might wish had been matched more often since.

—Bart Hinkle is a columnist at the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

WHAT IS QATAR?

As America prepares for war in Iraq, we have been hearing more about the tiny Arab emirate of Qatar. Home to several thousand U.S. troops, the largest stash of pre-positioned American military gear in the region, and a new alternate headquarters for our forces in the Middle East, Qatar has become our key ally in the Persian Gulf. Despite some initial hesitation, Qatar now seems supportive of a war against Iraq. But how reliable is our new friend?

A traditional monarchy run by an emir, Qatar has been independent since 1971. It was long allied closely with Saudi Arabia, which it borders. Roughly 4,400 square miles in area, it has a population of approximately 600,000—of which only a quarter are actually Qatari, the remainder being predominantly Pakistanis, Indians, other Arabs, and Iranians.

Oil fires its economy. Recently, tremendous natural gas reserves have been discovered under its territorial waters. Qatar has used its natural riches to jump rapidly into the twenty-first century, modernizing its society, building up a