

Theo Lippman, Jr.

## CAMPAIGN FUNDAMENTS

Pieced together from piles of evidence.

If, like most people, you would rather read someone's medical records than his love letters or income tax returns, the February 18 issue of *Medical World News* is for you. One of its articles lists the workings and non-workings of the vital organs of John Anderson, Howard Baker, George Bush, John Connally, Philip Crane, Robert Dole, Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, and Edward Kennedy. (Jerry Brown refused to "volunteer his medical records.") You can learn all the details upon reading there, but my concern here is limited to the candidates' hemorrhoids, for this is a *political* essay, not a personality profile or "character" study.

Having hemorrhoids is political? No, but admitting to having them is. Until 1976 no presidential candidate had ever done so. It had always been a badge of shame and invited ridicule. Badge is not exactly the right metaphor, but you know what I mean. Presidents since George Washington have all denied having them, not only to their contemporaries, but to posterity. You may search the literature of the presidency and find no mention of them. In fact, Rudolph Marx, M.D., has done this with great thoroughness in *The Health of Presidents*. And I mean *thoroughness*. Franklin D. Roosevelt suffered from polio, of course, but also, according to Dr. Marx, from near-sightedness, tonsillitis, appendicitis, lumbago, high blood pressure, flu, small strokes, abscessed teeth, measles, mumps, scarlet fever, and bowel and bladder problems that cannot be properly described in a family magazine of this kind.

Dr. Marx's FDR did not suffer from hemorrhoids. I know, however, that FDR did. I saw a medical record to that effect at the FDR library a couple of years ago.

This makes me wonder about the earlier presidents, particularly the very early ones who often rode horseback. The saddle contributes greatly to the awful condition. A proctologist I know (only socially, of course) once told me that in today's America cowboys are the group most afflicted by hemorrhoids. He also told me

that half or more of all adult American men are sufferers. I think it is not undue cynicism to surmise that George Washington may have told a lie about his health. Or maybe Jefferson. The odds are that one of the two had what Jimmy Carter said he had in 1976, which is hemorrhoids. In fact, the odds are that about half of all the presidents who preceded Carter also did. Considering the odds, and recalling that even Rudolph Marx, M.D., was misled about FDR, one has to wonder. (Dr. John B. Moses, of Scarsdale, New York, has a book on this subject coming out later this year—*Presidential Courage*. He says he also found out about FDR and suspects from indirect evidence that Andrew Jackson had the dark secret.)

Carter broke precedent in 1976 by confessing publicly to having the ailment—and he was elected. This year he's still suffering, according to Dr. William Lukash in *Medical World News*. Philip Crane has "an external hemorrhoidal tag at about 7 o'clock." John Connally has a "small external hemorrhoid." Everybody else is okay. Or their doctors *say* they're okay. Remember, the odds suggest that of these nine men, four or five should be troubled, not just three. Two or three denials are probably lies.

You are doing the arithmetic in your head. Three of nine admit it. Four or five should. Why do I detect "two or three" false denials? Because, if the truth be known, Jimmy Carter *does not have hemorrhoids*. He only claims he does. It is all part of the brilliant political strategy spelled out in a still-secret postscript to Hamilton Jordan's famous 40-page memorandum of 1974, the audacious plan by which Jimmy Carter rose from unpopular Southern governor to President of the United States. I am one of the few journalists to have seen it, and luckily the only one not sworn to secrecy.

Jordan reasoned that by claiming to have hemorrhoids, Carter would accomplish two important things as a candidate. First, he would appeal to those Americans, like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who wanted a

"less imperial" presidency. Wearing blue jeans, carrying your own suitcase, cleaning out a pond—on a scale of one to ten these are twos and threes when it comes to unimperialness. Admitting to having hemorrhoids is a ten. That is true even though *having* them is almost by definition imperial, the Emperor Napoleon I being the most famous sufferer in the history of the world.

Second, by "admitting" to his condition, Carter would appeal to those millions who suffer similarly. Misery loves company, and like favors like, as they say in Georgia. People stick with their own kind. Many Southerners who voted Republican in 1968 and 1972 voted for Carter in 1976, as did many people suffering from the condition under discussion here.

This targeted group was called the "Preparation H vote" in Carter planning sessions, by the way, and is not to be confused with the so-called "asshole vote," which was an even more important element in the Carter coalition but is not related to what I am talking about.

Some political scientists and ministers may object to a candidate's deceiving the voters about his health, but in this case I believe the end justifies the means, so to speak. I am not referring to Carter's getting elected, but to a more important effect of his campaign: his making a large group of Americans feel, for the first time in history, that they are just as good as anybody else, despite their affliction. Elections and the campaigns that precede them are not just a part of a political process. They are part of our cultural well-being. It is more important that candidates reveal their human qualities to be like yours and mine than that they have "policies" or "programs" or "ideas." If a candidate has to lie to make us feel better about a quality or condition that most of us have and are concerned about, what's wrong with that?

Jimmy Carter's saying he has hemorrhoids is the best, most helpful lie an American president has told the American people since Dwight Eisenhower said he was a Presbyterian, a lie which Carter's closely resembles, and he should be praised for it. □

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## THE TALKIES

## CRUISING

by John Podhoretz

Since the collapse of the internal censorship system in Hollywood, American movies have become increasingly explicit in their portrayals of sexual practices and violent acts. In 1967, there was an outcry over the ending of *Bonnie and Clyde*, in which the title characters are massacred in slow-motion by machine-gun fire; today such a scene would certainly merit only the slightest of reactions from its audience. In 1970, *A Clockwork Orange* received an "X" rating; today it is quite possible that it would be given a "PG" rating. Each time a certain level of explicitness is reached, it seems, Hollywood outdoes itself. The master of this one-upmanship is Sam Peckinpah, whose brilliant and violent *The Wild Bunch* led to the merely violent *Straw Dogs* and finally to the grotesque excesses of *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, in which said head is toted about in a saddlebag, out of which it frequently tumbles.

And now, with *Cruising*, it appears that William Friedkin has been playing the watch-me-top-this game as well. First, *The French Connection*; then *The Exorcist*; now *Cruising*. The new movie is almost assuredly the most sexually explicit and possibly the most violent movie yet to come out of big-money Hollywood. It appears now that Friedkin has one goal only: to make his audience sick. And he is an extremely gifted filmmaker. Is it praise to say he has achieved that which he set out to do?

Steve Burns, the protagonist of *Cruising*, is a patrolman on the New York City police force who is given a special assignment: to attract, and apprehend, a murderer whose victims are exclusively homosexuals who are "into leather" and whose sexual behavior is, to say the least, bizarre even for the mainstream of the "gay subculture." Burns, who must affect homosexuality and dress in the leathered garb of the little society he has been assigned to infil-

trate, finds himself falling into its dark and awful way of life. Even after he catches, and stabs, the murderer, he is unable to get away from the Greenwich Village waterfront that is the center of the sadomasochistic homosexual world. There is even the suggestion, at the film's end, that he may have taken over the role of murderer from Stuart Richards, the schizophrenic Columbia University student responsible for the killings.

The movie misses no opportunity to capitalize on the juiciness of its subject matter. Burns cannot enter a room which is not populated by dozens of homosexual couples kissing or engaging in some disgusting sexual practice. He cannot cross a streetcorner where there are not scores of muscle-bound men scantily clad either in strips of black leather or in garb vaguely resembling the uniform of a Hell's Angel. The camera prowls around like a beserk voyeur, pausing lovingly on men whose tongues are touching, panning across the contorted face of someone being buggered, stopping magisterially over a figure, being whipped, whose arms and legs are bound together. And the murder scenes are dramatized with especial flourish: We hear the knife enter the victim's back, we see the victim's agonized face, we

see the knife raised up and plunged down again and again into the victim's body, and at last we see the victim dead, lying amid quarts of his own blood.

*Cruising* is a movie, then, that derives all of its gruesome fabric from its camera alone, and thus it is not surprising to note that it comes across almost as a silent film with, of course, the necessary musical accompaniment. There are perhaps a hundred lines of dialogue, recited by a cast, headed by Al Pacino as Burns, that seems halfway asleep. In fact, the only performers who stay in mind at all are the obviously homosexual extras, doing that which they almost certainly do even when cameras are not fixed upon them.

Despite the performances of the extras, *Cruising* is not a convincing depiction of this sadomasochistic, unnatural world. It seems clearly the product of a writer-director who has had little or no contact with the real "subculture" he is attempting to portray in such a realistic fashion. And so his movie comes across as the work of a peeping Tom who is peeping at a world he himself has created. *Cruising* shares none of the stomach-turning honesty and conviction of

Larry Kramer's satiric novel *Faggots*, nor does it exude the kind of self-hating knowledge that a little British film called *Nighthawks* does. It tells us nothing about the world it shows us at such obscene length. It only shows us what men look like in leather underwear.

What is driving Steve Burns to homosexuality and murder? What has driven Stuart Richards to murder? Why are these people drowning in bestiality and cruelty? Does Friedkin even care? There is, it is true, one moment when Burns' girl friend tells him that his father called. The music pounds ominously, Pacino's eyes drop and his face hardens—but never again is any mention made of the father. Richards kills on command from his father, who we subsequently learn has been dead for ten years. So Richards is psychotic. Why then must he be homosexual? What leads him to kill homosexuals? What about Richards himself leads Burns to take over the killing?

There are no answers. There is only the camera prowling incessantly, watching people whose behavior is repellently incomprehensible. In this day of "tolerance" and of easy psychologizing, Friedkin refuses even to give lip service to the irksome questions the movie raises. He refuses because his movie is a work of pornography, in which logic and clarity disappear and sensation becomes everything.

*Cruising* is surely a landmark in the history of cinematic unpleasantness. Just as the destructive strains in the rock-music world led to the rise of punk-rock and groups like the Sex Pistols, whose lead singer bit the necks of live chickens on stage, so have the escalating trends of sexual "honesty" and "realistic" violence found their apex in the sheer gratuitousness of *Cruising*. The movie forsakes plot, characterization, accurate detail, and all the other things that make movies worthwhile for a two-hour look through a telescope at your neighborhood S-M bar. How entertaining. *Cruising* wants only to nauseate, and it succeeds; in the process, the air is necessarily and evilly befouled. □



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