



THE HOOSIER SPECTATOR



A STATE ON THE BRINK

by Kent Owen

When my mother was a child, she used to complain to her brother that the family reunion at Basses' Ford had become as tiresome as all get-out, and she didn't want to go. "Well, it ought to do us a lot of good," Uncle Bill observed, "because it should take some of the conceit out of us."

That homely advice still works. And it's especially apt now that we Hoosiers are so full of ourselves, what with Indiana University's NCAA basketball championship, the appeal of the movie *Hoosiers*, and the cussed success of *A Season on the Brink* for those who can't get their fill of Bob Knight. People who find basketball dull or whose idea of Indiana is a reticule of interstate highways must be baffled by all this fuss. Why should Indiana suddenly become The Great Good Place? Does this signal the onset of the New Dark Ages? Is this a common yearning for a better, simpler, freer America?

Hoosierocentrism is not only a theory about the tendency of all persons, events, and things to be related in some way to Indiana, but also a specific condition that afflicts those persons who believe the theory. Though farfetched, it is not self-evidently invalid, no more so than Marxism (Groucho, not Karl). Because Hoosiers believe themselves divinely appointed as the truest Americans, the slightest instance is held to confirm the wondrous if mysterious workings of God's plan.

Take Don Mattingly. The Yankee first-baseman from Evansville hits better than almost anyone in baseball, and his fielding is up to that of the late Gil Hodges of Petersburg. As an all-round player, he's the best to come out of Indiana since Edd Roush of the Reds, who, by the way, is still the squire of Oakland City, stalwart as an oak at 94. Take Larry Bird of French Lick and the Celtics. He makes pro basketball, that harum-scarum sport of the overpaid and underdisciplined, a miracle of uncanny passes and startling shots. For all his oafish ways, Bird is the finest at the game since Oscar Robertson of Indianapolis, whose unexcelled talents set the standard.

Hoosiers are quick to light upon

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such heroes as proof of superior merit, the triumph of Indiana's essential character over those without the law. Too quick, more often than not. As if a few extraordinary persons could endow the commonalty with their singular excellences. And contrariwise, as if the special talent of any individual Hoosier were the product of the Total Indiana Experience, thereby the result of everybody's mixing in. Which it well may be.

But it's hard for Hoosiers to realize that if they hurry to claim IU's Steve Alford of New Castle, the cleanest-living, purest-thinking, straightest-shooting basketball player, then they must do the same for IU's Jonathan Jay Pollard of South Bend, whose dishonor is as much the Hoosier's lot as Alford's shining victory. In a more complex way so is the predicament of Rear Admiral John Poindexter of Odon, whose shame is not his ouster as national security adviser because of the lamentable Iran-contra affair, but his refusal to tell the House's investigative committee in a manly, forthright way what he did know. That the committee's chairman should be Rep. Lee Hamilton of Gnow Bone exceeds the bounds of irony, for it is he who, despite the usual complaints of leftward lapses, is the Old Democracy's leading ethicist and practicing scrupler.

In all of this an unstated, unexamined assumption pushes itself along: if you were born and raised in Indiana, you are bound to grow up knowing the right thing to do, how the game is supposed to be played. But before Americans at large rush to emulate Indiana—or Hoosiers get the idea they are the chosen people—the state of mind that is as much Indiana as the territory itself needs a thorough inspection.

Since about 1965 the quality of public education throughout the state has fallen steadily, and now barely manages to attain mediocrity in all too many schools. Conventional excuses are trotted out: erosion of academic standards throughout America (viz., SAT scores), promiscuous television-watching, pernicious influences within the youth counterculture, toxic substances in the air, food, and water, and maybe the inability of Indianapolis to capture a ma-

jor league baseball franchise. Why should Indiana be struggling to stay out of the cellar in practically every category of educational accomplishment? After 175 years of hybridizing, has the poor white Appalachian strain—the Ur Hoosiers—been so inbred and diffused that the whole state now suffers from a preponderance of ignoramuses? What happened to oratorical contests, debating teams, spelling bees, school newspapers and yearbooks, French, German, Spanish, and Latin clubs? (For many years Indiana was second only to Massachusetts in the number of high schools that offered Latin courses, usually through Horace and Vergil.) How could a state that prized Edward Eggleston's *Hoosier Schoolmaster* as an exemplum of how the lowly could be taught and uplifted let itself down so badly?

Although Hoosiers seldom go in for desperate remedies (the Klan proved the folly of that in the twenties), Governor Robert D. Orr has set before the General Assembly a comprehensive program of educational reforms stressing evaluation, accountability, performance rewards, smaller-sized classes, and a longer school year (Indiana has the shortest at 175 days, which actually averages 167). The Indiana State Teachers Association was predictably all for higher salaries, but opposed to standardized testing of pupils and teachers. Nor did they like the idea of rewarding improved accomplishment in successful schools any more than they did singling out superior teachers with merit pay raises. The ISTA is big and tough enough to bully the General Assembly into getting its own way, but ordinary Hoosiers may be able to buck up their legislators so that the principle of accountability will at long last prevail.

The State House of Representatives mangled the governor's "A plus" bill with 23 amendments, which varied wildly in worthiness, but included free textbooks for poor children and specialized instruction for pupils deemed "at risk." Ignoring the \$372.5 million cost of the original 31-point bill, the House provided no means of raising the revenue necessary to cover all the desiderata. Because the Republicans

hold a slight margin in the House and a ten-seat advantage in the Senate, the governor is at odds largely with his fellow Republicans, who are reluctant to raise taxes in any form. Incidentally, this is an old story in Indiana because the state's first constitution in 1816 proudly instituted free public schooling, but gallantly declined to pay for it. The next constitution in 1851 did pretty much the same thing, and it wasn't until well into the 1870s that the noble intentions of Indiana's elected leaders were realized through a balance of state and local support for the schools.

Showing a passionate conviction previously undetected in his courtly manner, the governor scoured the state for whatever help he could summon to lobby the General Assembly. Even in the State Senate the lengthened school year provision was dropped, and the increased funding cut back sharply, leaving accountability as the program's salient feature. Whether or not the governor succeeded in making the General Assembly understand how scandalously poor public education has become, he did get President Reagan to mention the matter during a visit to Purdue University and Secretary of Education William Bennett to endorse the "A plus" program in a nationally publicized speech in San Francisco and then at an appearance in Indianapolis. What actual impact the strong words of the President and the secretary will eventually have on the progress of the bill through the General Assembly will come out in the event that the governor calls a special session of the General Assembly, which he will probably be obliged to do, styling it "summer school for legislators who need remedial work."

Once again, the Hoosiers have an opportunity to put their collective character to the test, this time with the urgent problem of repairing and improving the state's system of public education as the purpose. Games are fine and dandy for amusing the multitudes, claiming bragging rights, and raising morale. But if the fostering of character is really the paramount value of such intense exercises, then it is time to find out what the Hoosiers have learned from playing the game. □

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CURRENT WISDOM

Washington Post

Shocking findings from Margaret Engel and Molly Peter, two stalwart feminist agents just back from Middle America:

What is it about the female form that strikes some men as funny? And why do the rest of us continue to tolerate the manufacture and sale of objects and postcards that ridicule women's bodies? . . .

Anti-women icons graphically point out the physical differences between the sexes. In the struggle to eliminate racism, a key element has been the similarity of all races, the inherent human characteristics common to all people. But the natural differences between men and women give the necessary leeway for spoof and jokes to continue. . . .

How about the Sexy Apron, an item that resembles a woman's torso and includes round removable potholders shaped like breasts? The copy is filled with double-entendre references—for example "its generous proportions let you make a clean breast of kitchen chores." Also offered are swizzle sticks of six "strippers" whose clothes disappear when a drink is stirred.

[April 5, 1987]

Daily Trojan

In the salubriously named newspaper of the esteemed University of Southern California, auspicious news of sexual hygiene and gymnastic love:

"Show how much you care. Keep a rubber on hand" was the logo on T-shirts sold Wednesday at the university's National Condom Day festivities in celebration of National Condom Week.

From 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. in front of Tommy Trojan yesterday, volunteers from the School of Pharmacy handed out 1,600 condoms and distributed pamphlets about sex, AIDS, and drug abuse.

The condoms were donated to the university by Mayer Laboratories, and the literature was supplied by the Student Health Center and the Red Cross.

[February 19, 1987]

New York Times

Another surprising exhortation from the New Age—Swami Anthony Lewis comes out for an American Official Secrets Act! a Closed Society! a Police State!:

For six years President Reagan and his Administration have carried on an obsessive campaign for secrecy in government, trying to keep information from the press and the American public. Meanwhile, real secrets—intelligence secrets—were pouring out to the Soviet Union in a flood.

That is the wonderful irony in the Russian spy scare that now grips Washington. The zealots who thought up new ways to keep Administration policies secret, hounding suspected leakers and threatening the press, sat by in seeming indifference or incompetence as espionage reached record levels.

[April 10, 1987]

Rocky Mountain News

Theological gibberings from a New Age holy cleric splendid in jester's cap and clown's bladder:

On May 13 you should take your spouse to dinner, and tip your bartender on July 8.

This advice comes to you courtesy of the St. Thomas Episcopal Church, which for 15 years has published a calendar that may be unique in the history of Christendom.

Too many people take religion too seriously, a problem that dates back to the Puritan idea that religion is a ticket to heaven, said the Rev. Marion Hammond, the 59-year-old rector at St. Thomas.

"This calendar is about religion as play. Making love is certainly closer to the Christian concept of religion than is the idea of work. Faith is making love, not making money." . . .

The daily notes on Bible verses frequently undercut traditional views of miracles, he said, "because I don't think God needs to resort to a kind of 'Zot!' magic." . . .

Others may also question a Christian calendar that includes Marx and Lenin.

"Well, those guys are heroes for a whole lot of people," Hammond said. "We need to learn that the world is bigger than America, and that there are viewpoints other than our own. . . ."

[February 1, 1987]

Wellesley News

Metaphysical reasoning as to why the gals at Wheaton College ought not to be treated like the guys everywhere else in Amerika, and probably will not in this liberty-loving land:

It is not that women's colleges feel that men are "icky." It is that we wish to experience the unique benefits that an all women's community provides. The personality of the school that its alums and present students value most will be forever lost at Wheaton, including full access to leadership positions, pajamas at the breakfast table, and a growing awareness of the global women's heritage.

[February 13, 1987]

Washington Post

A cautionary note, steeped in geopolitical savvy, from a moral colossus: If the sons of the upper and middle classes had been sent to Vietnam, "the war would have ended a hell of a lot sooner," Oliver Stone told a luncheon crowd at the National Press Club on Tuesday.

Stone, whose Vietnam epic *Platoon* took four of the eight Academy Awards it was nominated for this year including best picture and best director, began his speech with a 30-minute indictment of U.S. foreign policy and likened the Vietnam conflict to the present U.S. involvement in Central America, which he called a sinister repression of revolution in El Salvador.

"It's a shady war run by people with gangster morals. We are becoming as rotten and corrupt as the Russians once were."

[April 10, 1987]

New Woman

The tactile prescription for sexual fortissimos from the learned Sherry Suib Cohen, the Autolycus of the Berkshires or wherever else she might perform:

Our generation is supposed to be one of sexual sophistication, yet insidious double standards continue.

Touch is then relegated to a sexual provocation instead of being a mutual and enduring pleasure in its own right. If one doesn't love to experiment with touch as a conveyance of affection and friendliness, one may never reach the zenith of sexual achievement. Sensual touches must precede sexual intents for both men and women.

[April 1987]

Ms.

Feminist dithyrambs from another *Ms.* Milk of Magnesia quaffer:

The appalling article "New Theory: AIDS and Women," by Ann Hornaday (November, 1986), filled me with revulsion and anger. My immediate thought was: When will women control their own bodies? Another quickly follows: Did we ever control our own bodies, and, if we did, why did we lose control?

But my anger comes without knowing (for sure) who invented these ceremonies. Women or men? And why?

Current fiction portrays women in the near future as baby-making machines without self-will.

Are we paying attention?

—Ann Ford

Union Lake, Michigan

[February 1987]

American Medical News

In a leading literary periodical, the depressing genital count continues:

I find myself forced to take issue with the overtly sexist presentation of the pediatric trauma service as described in a recent edition of *American Medical News*. . . .

In the author's account, the pediatric surgeon, surgical resident, anesthesiologist, and pediatric resident are male. The ICU nurse, ER nurse, and nurse administrator are female. The respiratory therapist, an ICU nurse, and the ER nurse-in-charge are unspecified.

In my own institution, also a regional pediatric trauma center with a similarly constituted team available, it's a little bit different. For starters, roughly 33% of the pediatric surgeons are women, 66% of the pediatric residents are women, and 20% of the ER nurses are male.

While I will readily plead ignorance to the sex distribution of the anesthesia and surgical services at Children's National Medical Center, I know that many of the pediatric residents there are female. The author appears to lack an understanding of the traditional sexually stereotyped roles in medicine and the difficulty men and women have had in surmounting them.

—Jonathan D. Klein, MD

Boston

[January 23/30, 1987]

Bikes Not Bombs

A hand-out sheet, intercepted by our agents at Washington, D.C.'s pestiferous Lafayette Park, vindicates this venerable journal's abiding suspicion of the bicycle and the la-di-da types who pontificate about them:

Over 900 bicycles have been sent to date by the Bikes Not Bombs Campaign to aid Nicaraguan development workers. A flood of bikes in the past four months has helped the campaign almost reach its goal of 1000 bicycles.

"Volunteer efforts by North Americans working together in small groups have sent bicycles and organized for peace while the U.S. government sends weapons and organizes war," said Michael Replogle, national coordinator of the group. . . .

The Bikes Not Bombs Campaign is part of a growing movement promoting affordable and environmentally-sensible transportation that meets human needs. In many developing countries, bicycles, tricycles, and carts are among the most appropriate transportation modes for moving people and cargo short distances, yet they are often ignored by those setting transportation policies.

The Bikes Not Bombs workshop in Managua now employs six Central Americans and is training new bicycle mechanics.

[March 12, 1987]

Esquire

The things a freelancer has to do to make a buck these days! In *Esquire's* "Ethics" column, the bashful Mr. Mark Jacobsen shares with his readers the rough time he and the missus had while conjuring up little Mark, Jr.:

I remember the "trying" days. . . . I remember how one of our doctors took a rubber model of the female reproductive system and brutally contorted it into a facsimile of my wife's "tipped" uterus. The vocabulary of those times was remote, fear-intensive; terms such as *endometriosis* and *hydrocele* became commonplace. . . . Once I had to drive a bottle of my newly deposited semen to the hospital—motility and clumping were to be tested. We were living in coastal Florida at the time but were in the midst of a cold snap. I had to clutch the bottle between my legs as drawbridge after drawbridge opened to allow the ChrisCrafts through.

But mostly, there was the trying itself. The synchronized sessions on the couch, the scheduled dalliances in the bed, the programmed tumbles in the backyard. These rendezvous were well delineated on our omnipresent charts and graphs, marked with arrows labeled SCREW! It was ecstatic, untamed, tender screwing; we wanted the best of ourselves to come forth. There always was the sense that this one was going to be the one. That raised the stakes, redoubled the hope. We'd be in the supermarket thinking about how it was growing, one cell, then two, then . . . then my wife's period would come. It became a wrenching cycle.

[May 1987]