

CURRENT WISDOM

The Great Books Series

The youthful pleasures that shaped the character of the weirdest rogue to live in the White House since Prof. Woodrow Wilson:

For more serious offenses than pranks like these, I was whipped with a spirea or peach switch. At the age of four, my first such punishment was for taking a penny out of the Sunday School collection plate instead of giving my offering. So unforgettable was the experience that I've never stolen anything since. A few years later I got a switching for shooting my sister Gloria in her behind with my BB gun, and another time for hiding in my tree house, refusing to answer Daddy's calls, and pretending that I had run away from home. The few whippings from him—perhaps half a dozen in all—were truly memorable events. I admit now that I deserved them, but at the time I resented the severity of the punishment.

[From *An Outdoor Journal*, by Jimmy Carter, Bantam Books, \$18.95]

Philadelphia Daily News

Ethnic soap opera from the city of Brotherly Love:

A headline on one of your news stories has greatly disturbed me.

What comes to mind immediately, when you read in bold print: "Florida State Greeks Suspended in Frat House Rape Probe"? Right! That's exactly what I understood until I read the entire article, and not a single Greek name was mentioned.

I called and asked for an explanation and was given the excuse that this is how fraternities are known, as "The Greeks."

This is ignorant, malicious, in very poor taste, vulgar in nature, bottom-of-the-barrel reporting and a thoughtless splurge of sensationalism which gives the opportunists the chance to exploit a definitely misleading comment. What makes matters even worse is the fact that it appeared right before the primaries. This is nothing short of slanderous!

You owe the Greek Community here a retraction and an explanation that you were referring [sic] to Greek letters and not to individuals of Greek descent but members of the fraternity.

—Bessie Sarris
Philadelphia

Editor's Note: On many campuses, fraternities are known as 'Greeks' because they have Greek-letter names. Nevertheless, the headline was, indeed, insensitive.

[June 1, 1988]

Patriot-News

(Harrisburg, Pennsylvania)

Dr. Ralph Abernathy addressing 200 students at Dickinson College, apparently without notes:

"Martin Luther King Jr. will probably go down in history as being the most significant personality who not only lived during the 20th century, but who has lived throughout the centuries of the history of mankind," Abernathy said.

[March 4, 1988]

Times Record (Brunswick, Maine)

In the correspondence section of a great local gazette, Herschel from Brunswick sounds like Michael Dukakis's future secretary of state:

Does Public Broadcasting deserve your support? After watching the MacNeil-Lehrer Report on Tuesday, Feb. 2, the night before the vote on Contra aid, I became convinced that PBS is nothing more than a public platform for right wing murderers. They started with a supposedly "even-handed" report from Nicaragua, interviewing at considerable length a large cattle rancher, a right wing member of Congress and a conservative American priest . . . all speaking English. They then had 10 seconds with a low-level Sandinista official speaking Spanish. Not one word from a peasant or a worker or an American from Witness for Peace.

This was followed by an interview with that sublime idiot, Olympia Snowe, and some throwback Democrat from Oklahoma who kept repeating that they had to "keep military pressure on the Sandinistas," which we all know is an excuse for the Contras to use children and women for target practice. Not a word for compassion. Not a word for peace. Not a syllable for reconciliation. Not from Olympia, not from the rancher, not from the stupid Democrat, not from the Nicaraguan congressman and absolutely nothing from the priest. And all this just before the Contra aid vote.

I for one have had it with PBS. I'll not give them another penny for the perpetuation of fascism in America. They can keep their Buckleys and McLaughlins and McNeil-Lehrers. When they get some humane and objective journalists, maybe I'll come back.

—Herschel Sternlieb
Brunswick

[February 11, 1988]

Nation

Christabel Hitchens covers the art scene for the armed camp what reads the *Nation*:

All across the District of Columbia, in these waning days of the most corrupt and brainless Administration in not-so-recent history, you may find members of the Third Generation. This is the self-designation of a group of young people, too tender in years to remember the Goldwater campaign or the Vietnam War, who came to Washington in the footsteps of Ronald Reagan. They populate the better-healed right-wing think tanks and the Congressional offices of men like Jim Courter and Henry Hyde. They show up for Heritage Foundation lunches and "Ollie North: American Hero" soirees. Some of them, like Gregory Fossedal, have made themselves a name in boondoggle campaigns like S.D.I., all the while declaiming against the gross public sector. Others provide a sycophantic audience to laugh at the daring of R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr. when he uses the word "fuliginous" in *The American Spectator* to describe the country's largest minority.

[May 14, 1988]

Daily Californian

Another learned University of California psychopath clears up an old misconception by simple deduction and perhaps a few doses of LSD:

The ancient myth of Noah and the ark, about a worldwide flood that destroys the earth and begins the human race anew, evolved from male envy of female reproduction abilities, according to a UC Berkeley professor.

The Genesis flood myth is only one of 1,000 stories that relate to the world's destruction by mass flooding, said Alan Dundes, professor of anthroology [sic] and folklore and editor of a new book titled "The Flood Myth."

These stories are similar in the sense that they all use floods as a symbol for urination—the male substitution for the female's amniotic fluid that is produced before the birth of a child, he added.

Dundes said "men have for centuries had tremendous envy toward women for their ability to re-create." Therefore, by creating the flood myth, men can portray themselves as true procreators of mankind, he said.

[June 10, 1988]

Santa Barbara News-Press

Philosophical ramblings occasioned by Mrs. Michael ("Kitty") Dukakis, alight and unmoved by enlightened Santa Barbara's prohibition against Demon Tobacco:

Thanks to Barney Brantingham's column on May 29 ("Mrs. Dukakis blows smoke in county's face"), we have been given some insight into the attitudes held by our prospective first lady. Clearly, Kitty Dukakis seems rather arrogant in her disrespect for our local non-smoking ordinances.

The larger issue here goes beyond a mere violation of law and speaks to apparent insensitivities expressed by Mrs. Dukakis. We Santa Barbarans are fiercely protective of all aspects of our environment, from clean water to the right not to be exposed to another person's cigarette exhaust. We pride ourselves on being a friendly town that eagerly rolls out the red carpet to all of our visiting dignitaries and VIPs. Kitty Dukakis and her gang have muddied that red carpet and smudged our pride by her selfish and inconsiderate actions in the County Administration Building.

Even the homeless contingent Mrs. Dukakis arrived to exploit had the decency to confine its mushroom cloud to the outdoors.

As we have seen recently, the behind-the-scenes activities of a first lady can often embarrassingly overshadow the national agenda.

Is this the kind of personality we would like to see residing in our White House? Perhaps a closer look should be taken at Kitty and Mike's words and actions before we mark our ballots next November.

—Maurice J. Kane
Tom Campbell
Santa Barbara

[June 15, 1988]

Spy

The humor magazine of the urban sophisticates serves up still more hilarious commentary for its knee-slapping readers and quite possibly the residents of many of America's finest morgues: So, despite the few remaining plebiscites (yes, California, we really really *do* care), it's all over but the shouting. And the cynical deal cutting. And the pandering to Jesse Jackson. And the rewriting of the Mario Cuomo profiles. *President* Michael Dukakis? He suggests more a very, very competent internist (or college admissions director, maybe) than a commander-in-chief. *President* Al Gore? The *faux* conservatism is almost unforgivably transparent. *President* George Bush? Well, hey, *sure*—and why not *President* McLean Stevenson and . . . oh, *President* Conrad Bain and *President* Hal Holbrook, while we're at it? *They're* ineffectual white men; *they're* 60-ish; *they're* friendly; *they're* good-looking.

[May 1988]

Black/Out

More trouble for the Melting Pot, as reported in "the magazine of the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays":

There are those who say that the urge to have children is a sign of encroaching despair, a last desperate outcry before the leap into darkness. I disagree. I believe that raising children is one way of participating in the future, in social change. On the other hand, it would be dangerous as well as sentimental to believe that child rearing alone is enough to bring about a livable future. For unless we develop some cohesive vision of the world in which we hope these children will participate, and some sense of our own responsibilities in shaping that world, we will only raise new performers in the masters' sorry drama.

So what does all this have to do with lesbian parenting? Well, when I talk about mothering, I do so with an urgency born of my consciousness as a lesbian and a black African Caribbean American woman staked out in white, racist, sexist, homophobic America.

[Vol. 7, No. 314]

Washington Post

The Queen's English put to elegant effect by another astonishing Hollywood intellectual:

"Poltergeist" star Zelda Rubinstein, who has been performing at the Arena Stage in "The Cherry Orchard," slipped quietly out to suburban Virginia Friday to see "Poltergeist III." . . . Rubinstein, who plays the eccentric clairvoyant who battles the spooky apparitions in the "Poltergeist" films, said it was also her first time seeing Heather O'Rourke since the child actor died Feb. 1.

"It was real painful for me," Rubinstein explained. "I loved that child. I met her when she was 5, and she was 12 when she terminated."

[June 14, 1988]

Restores the original meaning of our Constitution —just in time for the Bicentennial

Professor Forrest McDonald of the University of Alabama is conservatism's foremost Constitutional authority, and perhaps America's. The Pulitzer Prize committee generally sticks to safe, respectable liberal authors. But they couldn't ignore this major book. The praise is pouring in from conservative heavyweights — and also from historians with imposing credentials:

RUSSELL KIRK, *Reflections*: "Vigorously and wittily written, and it makes the framing of the Constitution interesting all over again, even for people who have read much on the subject over the years. Its portraits of the individual Framers are careful and candid, and healthily iconoclastic when there is need for correction of pious errors."

STANLEY N. KATZ, Princeton: "This is McDonald's best book and, indeed, the best single volume on the origins of the U.S. Constitution and the accomplishment of the Constitutional Convention of 1787. . . . Most of *Novus Ordo Seclorum* is devoted to a rigorous analysis of 18th-century thought (political theory, political economy, and law). It is solidly grounded in the most recent scholarship and based upon a very original reading of the primary sources. McDonald writes with uncommon grace; the book is a pleasure to read, but it is nevertheless densely and vigorously argued. . . . no reader will regret the hours devoted to this work."

M. E. BRADFORD, *National Review*: "The stature of Forrest McDonald as an interpreter of the confluence of language, thought, and action that issued in the United States Constitution was extraordinary even before the publication of his most recent consideration of that subject. Now . . . his authority is unequalled — magisterial . . . of inestimable value . . . McDonald's masterpiece is

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LANCE BANNING, author of *The Jeffersonian Persuasion*: "More enjoyable and more provocative than anything I've seen on the Constitutional Convention for a very long time. . . . finely crafted, humorous, and learned."

CHARLES R. KESLER, *American Spectator*: "Like all of his works, this one displays at once an encyclopedic learning and a biographer's sense of character that make his retelling of a familiar story always new, vital, and unexpected. Somehow he finds angles to work that no one else has seen or seen so well."

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