

CURRENT WISDOM

New Republic

Observations of a sociological nature from Miss Margaret Carlson, tomorrow's Mother Teresa:

I went to visit one of George Bush's thousand points of light three weeks ago bearing blankets and canned goods collected in the neighborhood. I was hoping to play Lady Bountiful for a moment but instead I got a look at Yuppie Philanthropy in action. All around were people like myself thirsting for a seasonal fix, reassurance that their lives of wretched excess and self-absorption had not drained them of all mercy. Soup-kitchen turns as a way of making reparations aren't to be discouraged just because they make yuppies feel good. They are better than nothing at all. But as you see leather-bound datebooks being pulled out to make lunch dates, and overhear conversations about the best frequent flier programs, you know how slim Bush's vision thing really is. The light of those to whom much has been given is a low-wattage bulb at best; it's no substitute for government programs to feed and clothe and house people.

[January 23, 1989]

Nation

Out on the lunatic fringe, a movie critic contemplates the life of jazz virtuoso Charlie Parker, and into his hallucinatory mind pops Mr. Jesus Christ (1-33 A.D.):

It is not necessarily sacrilegious to say that the two lives, taken as narratives, are remarkably similar. Both stories combine national epic, intense psychological drama and spiritual transcendence. In Parker's case, the story involves a major turning point in the history of black Americans: in their sense of identity, their social and political relations with whites, their self-assertion as artists. Parker, as the key figure in the development of be-bop, was more than a mere symbol of these changes. He lived them; he pushed them further; and he paid the price. By age 34, he was dead—martyred, some would say—only a year older than Jesus. And he was resurrected no less promptly, in graffiti that insisted "Bird Lives."

[October 31, 1988]

New York Times

A little-known scientific debate waged by the Galileos, the Newtons, and the Betty Friedans of our incomparable age:

Scientists disagree on what to call the cold cycle. It was first dubbed La Nina, Spanish for "the girl," to distinguish it from El Nino, which means "the boy," or Christ Child, so named because the warm cycle appears near Christmas. Some scientists objected to La Nina as sexist, however, and substituted El Viego, "the old man," as in Old Man Winter. Still others prefer to avoid all this by simply calling the cycles warm events and cold events.

[January 3, 1989]

Newsweek

Taxing literary commentary from the book pages of *Newsweek* occasioned by the publication of a gob of spit:

Most recent American fiction has been what we're pleased to call realistic: objective narratives of ordinary (though sneakily meaningful) events in the lives of people who are neither heroic nor grotesque. Then what do we call Nicholson Baker's *The Mezzanine*. . . ? Here's the plot: Howie, a young businessman, buys shoelaces at a CVS store on his lunch hour. The subplots? He chats with a secretary, goes to the john and eats a cookie. And thinks about things: the squiggly mark you make after "and 00/100" when writing checks, the lines of dust that never quite disappear when you ply the broom and dustpan. We ask art to hold the mirror up to life: isn't this how most of our days really go? . . . Most of "The Mezzanine," though, simply pays open-eyed, open-ended attention to "the often undocumented daily texture of our lives." It never switches on the rhetoric to bathe details in fake luminosity; it peddles no unifying vision. Some readers may have a problem with that: art, they'll say, must do more. More than show us our lives afresh? Maybe in Baker's next book. But most writers never get *this* far.

[January 2, 1989]

San Francisco Chronicle

The shocking condition of health among students of both major races at Stanford University as reported by Mr. Bill Workman of the "Chronicle Peninsula Bureau":

Several students who live at Ujamaa House, one of several ethnic dormitories, said they felt that their home had been violated by the poster incidents.

Two white freshmen who formerly lived at the dormitory admitted that they defaced the Beethoven poster as a practical joke after dorm students had held a hallway discussion two weeks ago on the possibility that the 19th century composer had black ancestry.

The white students, who have been forced to leave the dormitory, set off an emotional scene at the dormitory Sunday morning when they met with scores of black and white residents, ostensibly to offer an apology.

However, the two students outraged the others even more when they allegedly offered a flippant apology. They recited in unison "One, two, three—We apologize," and tried to pass off the poster as "avant-garde art" according to campus officials.

Although the white students said they had been drunk when they defaced the Beethoven poster, the tension at the meeting became so high that a number of black and white residents became hysterical.

Many students "hyperventilated, people were retching, not just black students by any means, and men and women both," said Rachel Wiesen, a resident assistant at Ujamaa House.

[October 18, 1988]

University of Michigan Course Guide (School of Literature, Science & Art)

Greek studies in the modern manner for New Age classicists:

110. *Practical Feminism*. (1) (Excl). Offered mandatory credit/no credit.

LESBIAN STUDIES. This mini-course will be held the last seven weeks of Winter Term, 1989. Women's Studies 110 will be a broad introduction to the field of lesbian studies. The class will discuss the following topics: lesbian history, lesbian feminist thought, coming out, contemporary lesbian culture, issues of racism and classism within the lesbian community, sexuality, and future visions. Students are expected to take an active role in directing and facilitating the course, as it will primarily center on student discussions of reading and projects. Students will be asked to keep a weekly journal that integrates critical analysis of the readings, classroom discussions, and personal reactions. Grades will be based on class participation, weekly journals, and a final project/presentation to the class.

[Winter 1989]

Vancouver Sun

Whilst visiting greater Vancouver the American actor Martin Sheen offers substantial proof that, as he puts it, he comes from "a land of lunatics":

American actor Martin Sheen has a few words on the free-trade agreement.

"Know who you are dealing with," he tells a Canadian questioner.

"I come from a land of lunatics. When I come to Canada, I see a country that represents the way it is possible to live. But you're stuck with us by virtue of the land mass and we can destroy you in a minute, politically, economically, culturally. . . .

"It's not that we don't love you, it's because we don't trust you. And you aren't our equal partner and never will be.

"We are an empire. Our president is the leader of an empire. . . ."

Sheen mourns all that he believes his country lost with the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

"If the events of November 22, 1963, had occurred in any other country, the United States would have been under martial law. We would have called the Kennedy assassination a military coup, because that's what it was, a coup by the military-industrial complex and we've been living in a police state ever since."

[November 5, 1988]

Washington Post

The thrill of scientific discovery as reported from the digs of historic Virginia:

In what some scholars are describing as a major discovery, archeologists at Colonial Williamsburg have found an artifact that they believe is one of Jefferson's discarded toothbrushes.

[December 16, 1988]

Village Voice

Midst a discourse on the scortatory undertakings of the degenerate Mr. Michael Alig, the *VV* falls prey once again to the Reagan Magic:

At the party, people were able to buy dates with 16-year-olds with play money, the kids getting \$50 from Alig to go through with the dates. "There was nothing illegal about it," he says. "I was paying the kids to go out with somebody else—that's not prostitution. Of course I got paid by the club for throwing the event." Alig is a master exploiter, but no more so than Ronald Reagan, whose administration relentlessly whittled away at various forms of aid to dependent children (there haven't been so many homeless kids since the Depression), while cranking up public hysteria over their sexual exploitation. Alig, in his own jaded way, is trying to make fun of hypocrisy rule while desperately trying just to make fun.

[December 20, 1988]

Princeton Spire

Princeton University joins the national transformation of the American university into one vast day-care center:

"Last night, we had a chance to experience what the Creation felt like," says a Princeton student who has been attending a pottery-making workshop on campus led by Princeton's first artist-in-residence, Sasha Makovkin. "We made dust out of dry clay, added water, made lumps of clay, and then formed whatever came to us. . . . We were asked to think, feel, and create with our souls. . . ."

Recently Princeton University exhibited [Makovkin's] work, including Sasha's ceramic mural called "A Ceramic Comic," which he describes as "the story of two blobs who . . . find themselves in a dependency relationship. . . ."

[Winter 1989]

New York Post

A magisterial new film, elucidated by the philosophical John Carpenter, its Shakespeare:

"I had this idea for a pair of sunglasses you could look through and see the truth," says the 40-year-old Carpenter, who based "They Live" on an early '60s science-fiction tale. . . . "The sunglasses show things in black-and-white," explains Carpenter, sitting in his hotel suite. The so-called real world is in color. "Sort of like Ted Turner colorizing the classics. You see, the aliens have colorized us.

"Then I thought, why not just do this message about the Reagan Revolution being controlled by free-enterprising aliens from outer space? They're dismantling the middle class, the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer. Planet Earth is the Third World to these people. They're Republicans."

[November 2, 1988]

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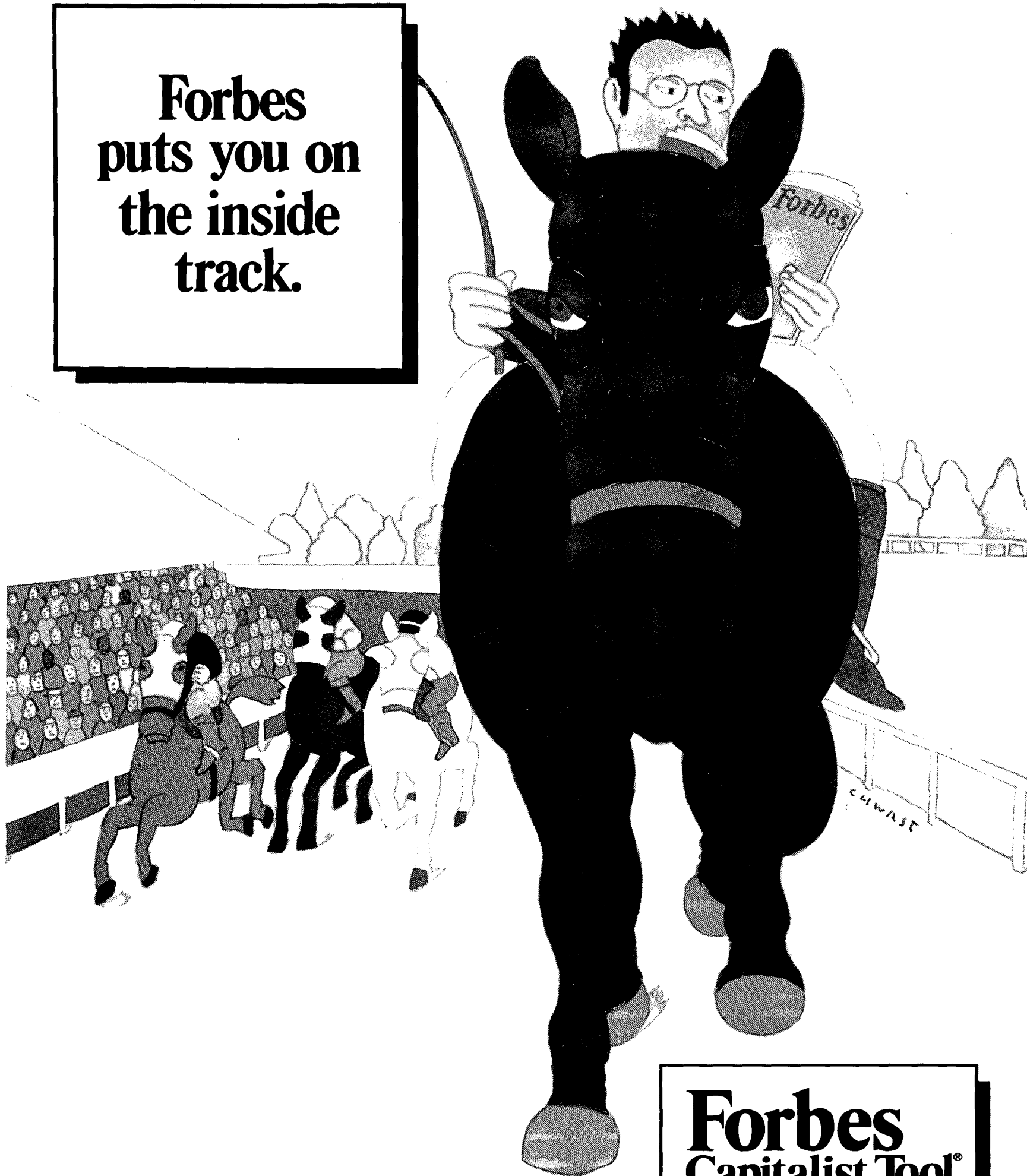
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Despite a media brownout, this book fought its way onto the bestseller lists.

And when you read what it reveals about Teddy and Chappaquiddick, you'll see why.

Ray Kerrison explains it all in his *New York Post* column:

"The biggest surprise — and scandal — of the publishing season is the public's extraordinary demand for a book exposing Sen. Edward Kennedy's fatal escapade at Chappaquiddick, despite a review blackout by the nation's media giants.

This book is titled *Senatorial Privilege: The Chappaquiddick Cover-Up* (Regnery Gateway, \$21.95). Written by Leo Damore, it made the *New York Times* non-fiction best-seller list yesterday for the eighth straight week.

Yet the . . . *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Time* and *Newsweek* have all boycotted it.

The media blackout is all the more suspicious because Damore's account is a meticulous examination of what happened at the bridge and the aftermath. It was written with the cooperation of Joseph Gargan, a Kennedy cousin, who was involved in the nightmare. . . .

Damore's book leaves no doubt that: a) Kennedy left

the party for a romantic interlude; b) he was drunk; c) he drove off the bridge at considerable speed; and d) his license had expired five months earlier.

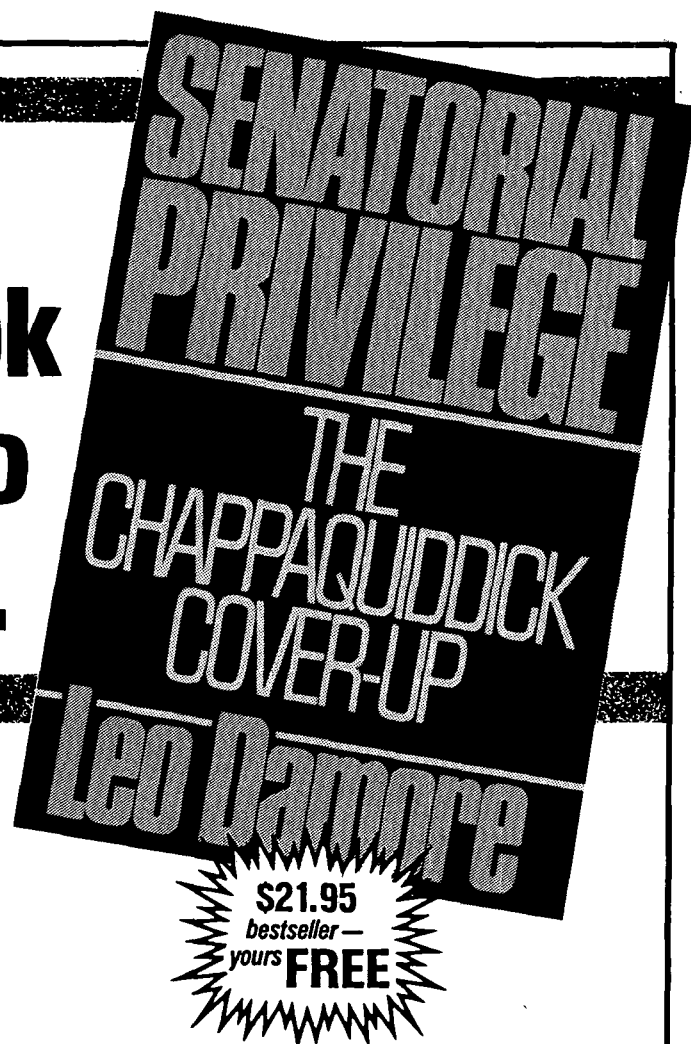
It discloses how Ted Sorenson, President John F. Kennedy's speechwriter, drafted Sen. Kennedy's fictitious explanation of the tragedy for a national TV audience."

People Magazine shares the enthusiasm:

"An achievement of reportorial diligence, this book tells a story that the most imaginative crime novelist would have been hard put to invent. It is a tale of death, intrigue, obstruction of justice, corruption and politics. It is also one view of why Sen. Edward M. Kennedy was never indicted in connection with Mary Jo Kopechne's death . . . readers will find it hard to put down."

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