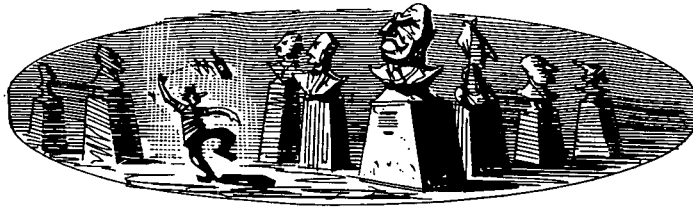


EMINENTOES



WE LIKED IKE

by Richard Brookhiser

Publishers marked the centennial of Dwight David Eisenhower's birth last year a little listlessly. Stephen E. Ambrose's standard biography appeared in a one-volume condensation, a publisher in Minnesota brought out a book of reminiscences by fellow moderate Republican Harold Stassen, and a third firm produced what is essentially a picture book, with text by the young historian Michael R. Beschloss.¹

Eisenhower: Soldier and President, by Stephen E. Ambrose, Simon and Schuster, \$29.95; *Eisenhower: Turning the World Toward Peace*, by Harold Stassen and Marshall Houts, Merrill Magnus, \$22.95; *Eisenhower: A Centennial Life*, by Michael R. Beschloss, HarperCollins, \$29.95.

Richard Brookhiser's most recent book is *The Way of the Wasp: How It Made America and How It Can Save It, So to Speak* (The Free Press).

The best of these is the picture book. Stassen throws some interesting lights on the character of the man, mostly unwittingly, but his book is limited to Ike's years in the White House. Ambrose gives the most information of the three, but he also gives you prose like this: "Eisenhower and Patton immediately became and remained fast friends, despite their much different personalities . . ." Beschloss includes most of Ambrose's good anecdotes, highlights the important issues, and keeps things short and sharp. Besides, there are the pictures. Eisenhower was as preoccupied with appearances as Douglas MacArthur, but had a much better sense than MacArthur of which appearances would influence the people he sought to lead. Whether he led them effectively is another question.

Eisenhower grew up in Abilene, Kansas. His parents were members of the

River Brethren, a pacifist reformation sect. Like many successful American men, he switched out of his odd religion on the way up and married a girl from the better side of the tracks. Mamie Doud, the daughter of a successful Denver meat-packer, had grown tired of "lounge lizards with patent leather hair." The "secret of our marriage," she would later joke, was that she and Ike had "absolutely nothing in common." Some joke. The frequent illnesses that marked her married life and her habit of staying in bed till noon, ill or not, suggest a depressed spirit as much as a delicate constitution.

Like Grant, Eisenhower brought to his military career a mind that was initially un-martial. His main interest at West Point was football, until a knee injury sidelined him. He spent World War I stateside, training volunteers for the newly organized Tank Corps—a task he had to accomplish without any tanks. He impressed a series of superior officers, including MacArthur, with his administrative abilities, and they kept him in administrative jobs, until the last of them, George Marshall, gave him his first battlefield assignment: command of Allied operations in North Africa.

The next three years, which took him from Algeria to the Elbe, were his finest. He had a clear and obvious task, imposed by reality and his political leaders, and he did everything he had to do to beat the Germans. "In a war such as this," he wrote, "when high command invariably involves a president, a prime minister, six chiefs of staff, and a horde of lesser planners, there has got to be a lot of patience . . ." He had a knack for keeping willful allies in harness and essential subordinates out of the doghouse. He saved George Patton's neck on two occasions, not because of their old friendship but because he needed Patton's abilities as a warrior. When Patton committed his last indiscretion, post-VE Day, Ike let him swing.

One conservative myth that we can junk is that, if Eisenhower had been more of a fire-eater, the Allies could have raced to Berlin ahead of the Soviets. Given the relative position of the British and American armies along the western front, the racing would have had to be done by Field Marshal Montgomery, whom it is impossible to imagine racing anywhere. Montgomery's competence waned as he went from Africa to Europe, even as that of the Americans waxed. He bungled the Falaise Pocket, he bungled the Battle of the Bulge, and he would have bungled a push to Berlin. Patton said it best: "Monty is a tired little fart."

Eisenhower's record as chief executive was more problematic. The judgment most often made of it, sometimes admiringly, sometimes dismissively, is that his was a "caretaker presidency," and the goal he seemed to set the most store by—balancing the budget—was a caretaker's ideal. "I'd like to know what's on the other side of the moon," he snapped after Sputnik, "but I won't pay to find out this year!" Liberals, it is amusing to recall, howled to have defense spending increased—not just hawks like Nelson Rockefeller and John F. Kennedy, but even doves like Adlai Stevenson. Eisenhower resisted as best he could.

Yet his fiscal holding operation left the structure of the modern state intact. The Old Guard of the GOP, notes Stassen, wanted to "repeal . . . programs put in place by the New Deal," while "we wanted to keep the ones that made sense over the long haul." After the debacle of deposit insurance, who makes the most sense? Turning to foreign affairs, it is still hard to read about Eisenhower's response to Suez and his non-response to Hungary without grinding the molars. (Since Hungary became free in 1989 anyway, one may ask what was lost by not doing anything in 1956? Nothing, except thirty-three years in the life of half a continent.)

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The spring of his achievements flowed from a rock of self-control. Eisenhower had a wild temper as a boy. In one notable tantrum, he beat his fists bloody against a tree-trunk after his parents forbade him to go out trick-or-treating. As his mother salved and bandaged his wounds, she told him, "He that conquereth his own soul is greater than he who taketh a city." Eisenhower's temper stayed with him all his life, along with a tendency towards extreme depression, but he showed the first only when he wanted to, and the second not at all. "I firmly determined," he wrote, "that my mannerisms and speech in public would always reflect the cheerful certainty of victory."

His success was also based on a cool self-centeredness. Power was the goal of his mature years and his means of gaining it was the appearance of modesty. He took in practically everybody. He had "a rather naive wonder at attaining the high position in which he found himself," wrote an English admiral after World War II. Wonder, possibly; naive, never. His 1952 correspondence with Truman, who was trying for the second time to persuade him to accept the Democratic nomination, is a grave comedy of disingenuousness, climaxing, on his part, with the wonderfully evasive line, "This answer is as full and frank as I am able to devise."

The only man who ever tied him at his own game (no one beat him) was Richard Nixon. The occasion was the Checkers speech. When the scandal of Nixon's secret trust fund blew up, Eisenhower's backers, who had let Nixon on the ticket only as a bridge to the Old Guard, wanted him lynched. Eisenhower recognized that, if his running mate left the ticket in disgrace, "we can't possibly win," but was determined that Nixon save himself. Nixon's TV agon not only turned Eisenhower's flank by appealing over the hero's head to the GOP rank and file, but forced all the candidates, including Eisenhower, to disclose their finances. Eisenhower made Nixon pay for his victory for the next eight years. The anecdote about Ike, asked by a reporter to give an example of a "major idea" that the vice president had come up with, replying, "If you give me a week, I might think of one," has become folkloric. But my favorite example of torture was the moment, in the home stretch of the 1960 election, when Mamie, via Pat Nixon, begged Richard to ask Ike *not* to go on an expanded campaign swing, for reasons of health. So two of the people that Eisenhower had slighted found themselves conspiring to ask him not to do something that one of them desperately needed, so potent was Ike's hold on them. What tan-

gled webs we weave, when first we practice to . . . be modest.

Popularity can be measured at the polls. Reputation, which is the plaything of intellectuals, is more fickle. Eisenhower's, during the first glow of Camelot and the Great Society, was quite dim. But as the reputations of his successors tarnished, his bright-

ened. Beschloss marks the turning points: a 1967 article in *Esquire* by Murray Kempton, which hailed him as the "great tortoise on whose back the world sat for eight years," and a 1982 book, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, by Princeton political scientist Fred Greenstein. Paul Johnson's account of the Eisenhower years in *Modern Times* was rapturous.

Let's hold the applause, at least for

the second of his two careers. President Eisenhower was indeed a caretaker. He left no will to resist the continuing expansion of the state at home, and no clear principles for foreign policy—none that the sixties followed, anyway. His greatest service came in uniform. When history and FDR and Churchill told him what to do, he was superb. He conquered his soul, and he took cities. □

Why Rent Control must NOT be abolished



As former owner of a small townhouse in Manhattan, I used to think that rent control was a law that would be abolished just as soon as enough people found out what a rip-off it was. I even wrote a book poking fun at New York City's fifty-year-old "temporary wartime measure" in the hope that sardonic ridicule would accelerate its demise. I now realize I was wrong. Far too many people benefit from rent control for it to EVER be abolished.

Without rent control causing thousands of perfectly usable buildings to be abandoned, the city's drug pushers would not have all those safe, rent-free apartments in which to conduct their business.

Without rent control's active participation, the city's Bolsheviks and rabid tenant activists would have to postpone their Marxian agenda to destroy all private property. Then pity the inept, do-nothing bureaucrats who pretend to administer that rat's nest of gobbledygook statutes. Without rent control, they might have to go out and get REAL jobs.

And don't forget those poor political hacks who can only get elected by continuing to give the tenant lobby "something for nothing." Confiscating an owner's property with rent control fills the bill because buildings are the ONLY things in the city that can't be transported over the State line.

Even more catastrophic, without rent control, Mayor Dinkins, ex-mayor Koch, and hundreds of judges, politicians, and upper-income renters would then have to give up the cheap apartments they've enjoyed for years. These staunch idealists continue to pretend--and expect us to believe--that rent control is vital to protect the homeless from all those greedy, unscrupulous landlords.

But most important of all, without the heart-warming, inspirational experiences I had as a New York property owner, I never would have written my book, "Live Rent-Free For Life," which makes me the first landlord in the world to actually make money out of rent control. If this law gets booted, my book becomes obsolete and I'm out of business.

Since you now see the chaos that would ensue if rent control were abolished, you can assuage your disappointment (and laugh yourself silly) by reading the first book ever written that reveals the wild and wacky world of rent control as it really is: a socialist's dream, an economist's nightmare, and a blatant government scam too lucrative to give up. It all adds up to a vast untapped field of comedy for YOU to enjoy. But order a copy now, before the political hacks, inept bureaucrats, enterprising pushers, rabid Bolsheviks, and upper-income renters decide to abolish yours truly. Learn how you too can "Live Rent-Free For Life." Send \$11.95 (postage incl) to:

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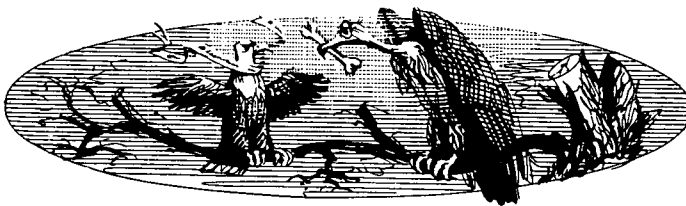
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THE NATION'S PULSE



THE MALIBU PLAN

by Benjamin J. Stein

Well, it had to happen. In the 1980s, taking a cue from the big boys—the Trumps, the Belzbergs, the Icahns, the Farleys—and everyone else who got a museum wing named after him, I led my own little family into the wonderful world of leverage. We borrowed for everything, sold and leased back everything, bought multi-disc CD players, trips to Kenya, houses in Malibu, thoroughbred German short-haired pointers, Beemers, Benzes, and a heluva lot of fresh salmon fillets.

All of this was “supported” by the single slender toothpick of one very vulnerable man’s earnings and the certainty that it would all be saved by an everlasting tide of prosperity, rising property values, and still more borrowing. I would leave it to Tommy, my three-year-old, to work out the payments

Benjamin J. Stein is a writer and actor living in Malibu, California.

sometime in 2020 or thereabouts, when everyone was on the cover of *People* for being a billionaire. I wanted not only the fifteen minutes of fame that Andy Warhol had promised me, but also the middle age of living like a Trump.

Now it’s 1991 and, like everyone else, I’m busted. Property here in Malibu can’t be sold for love or money (unless you’re willing to take less than a million dollars for a 2,000-square-foot house a mile from the ocean, and that’s just plain insulting). The Beemer’s battery is dead. I’m drinking tap water. You get the picture.

The worst thing is that the creditors are baying at my heels. The stereo store. The BMW dealer who was supposed to have fixed the generator. The bank that leased me the Beemer in the first place. The bank that insanely gave me a mortgage on this house in Malibu.

If I were the me of ten years ago, I

might be worried. But not today. Not since I learned my lessons from Trump and Farley and the people who run some of the big retail chains. If I can’t pay my bills, if I’m overextended, that’s not *my* problem. That’s the problem of the fools who loaned me money.

Here’s my plan. First, I blithely tell the people at the bank that holds the mortgage on my house that I can’t pay it anymore (even if I can). If they want to repossess my little shack and add it to the mountain of houses they already have, good luck to them—I’ll move into my RV. Then I tell the same thing to the people who made the lease on my car. If they want a repossessed car that gets about three miles to the gallon to try to sell in today’s world of two-dollar gasoline, hey, guys, get the battery charged up and go for it. Likewise with all my stereo equipment: if you guys want to try to resell my CD players in a retail environment where stores pay customers to take new ones, do it.

Then I invite them over for some smoked salmon (I still have a lot of it in my freezer) on my deck, and tell them that they can either eat the salmon with worthless collateral for dessert, or they can listen to my “prepackaged” bankruptcy plan, which I have worked out with my lawyers, who double as German short-haireders.

For the mortgage holder, I will need a loan of about a hundred K, to be used (of course) for the mortgage payments on my house for the next ten years. Those payments, in turn, will be far less than they had been, because the package calls for my mortgage to be reduced by half. In return, the bank mortgage holder will get a new issue of stock in Stein Family, N.V., a Netherlands Venture which is a subsidiary of Benjyrama, L.P., a Bahamas Partnership, which in turn is held by Trixie-Ginger Partners, of Zug, Switzerland. The new issue, unless called, allows the bank to have a 15 percent dividend, payable in the shares of yet another corporation, GSP Associates, which holds as assets

fertilizer products manufactured by Trixie-Ginger Partners (there is presently no public market in these shares). The mortgage holder’s shares of Stein Family, N.V., also allow a 50 percent share in any capital gains from the sale of my house, after I have made 20 percent a year on the whole price of the house.

You guys at Bank of America don’t like it? Here are the keys. And watch out for those ants near the refrigerator.

For the BMW lender, I simply cannot allow such generous terms. My deal for them is that I get a new 850, gasoline and insurance for a year, and an eight-times-oversampling NAK CD player for the dashboard. In return, they get 49 percent of any proceeds from the old BMW, a new preferred in Benjyrama, L.P.’s main subsidiary, Rejectron, which holds as its main assets certain written materials in my files for which no ready use has yet been ascertained, but which is sure to find some market in the future, according to Benjysuncle Partners, a management consulting firm of Hackensack, New Jersey. Rejectron pays 20 percent dividends of the actual raw material manufactured by Trixie-Ginger Partners, which will be appraised by Benjysuncle Valuation Partners, of Passaic and Pacoima, and delivered weekly in large green bags.

If they don’t like it, let them have the car with its permanently dead battery in their garage, and let them try to sell it to buyers who won’t give them the kind of deals I’m offering.

As for the stereo dealers, well, they can come over and listen to the great KEFs they sold me on credit any old time. That is, any old time I’m not at home and need someone to, uh, manage Trixie-Ginger Partners.

I have to say that I like it a lot. In fact, I’ve been talking about it at my health club (membership bought on credit, of course), and a number of my fellow health fiends have offered me generous retainers to help them out with their own packages, many of them

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