

last pages even now are being written." He was practically alone in making that argument in 1983. Today we know he was right.

I draw three conclusions from *The Turn* that Oberdorfer doesn't state explicitly. One is that the Soviets, after initial misgivings, found Reagan to be a capable, credible, tough, and honorable figure with whom to do business. Oberdorfer cites the impressions of Aleksandr Yakovlev, an influential Gorbachev adviser who was "as skeptical of Reagan at the end of the Geneva summit [in 1985] as he had been at the beginning." He thought Reagan was playing a role like an actor. At Reykjavik the following year, Yakovlev changed his mind. "It seemed to me he wasn't acting," he later told Oberdorfer. "I saw his internal hesitation, his battling back and forth in his mind what to do. On the one hand, as it seemed to me, he was interested in the idea of universal nuclear disarmament, on the other hand sticking to the idea of such a funny toy as SDI. . . . He could be seen from a different angle as a human being and as a politician."

A second conclusion is that Reagan's firmness during negotiations paid off. At Geneva, Gorbachev tried to bargain SDI out of existence. He failed, in the opinion of Shultz, when "confronted with the unyielding depth of Reagan's conviction." Gorbachev made another futile pass at SDI at the Reykjavik summit in 1986. When the summit broke up over that issue, reporters wrote that U.S.-Soviet relations had reached a stalemate that only a Reagan reversal on SDI could break. Wrong. At the Washington summit in 1987, it was Gorbachev who backed down, agreeing to disagree on SDI while moving ahead on other issues.

The third conclusion is that Reagan's insistence on moving ahead with SDI had a salutary effect both on arms negotiations and on Soviet thinking. By upping the ante with SDI, Reagan forced Gorbachev into concession after concession. Oberdorfer says, correctly, that Reagan adopted SDI "out of longstanding and strong convictions rather than any considerations of strategy." Nonetheless, Reagan "later found SDI useful in dealings with the Soviet Union." It proved to be, Oberdorfer says, "a catalyst for a critical assessment in Moscow of the place of military power in the security of the Soviet state."

Oberdorfer is explicit on one key matter. The Reykjavik summit wasn't the disaster it was cracked up to be, but "a turning point in the relations between the two countries . . . a success of major impor-

tance." It set Reagan and Gorbachev on the path of nuclear arms reductions (with SDI kept alive) and political accommodation (with the Soviets promising to pull out of Afghanistan and cut off military aid to the Sandinistas). Not bad.

In face-to-face talks, Reagan was adept at broad generalities, weak on specifics. He drafted his own talking points for his 1984 meeting at the White House with Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko and later for the Geneva summit with Gorbachev. He was skilled at express-

ing empathy, and it sometimes got in the way of substance. Reagan was supposed to make an arms control point when, after aides left, he was alone with Gromyko. American officials were surprised when Soviet officials later said Gromyko had told them nothing about the point. Oberdorfer found out why. A security aide had watched the two through a secret peephole. Reagan asked Gromyko if he needed to go to the john. When Gromyko returned, Reagan went. They then rejoined their aides. Strange as it may seem, we won the Cold War anyway. □

## SCANDAL: THE CULTURE OF MISTRUST IN AMERICAN POLITICS

Suzanne Garment

Times Books/336 pages/\$23

reviewed by STEVE MUNSON

Once upon a time, a politician or government official risked scandal if he did something illegal, like take a bribe, or morally improper, like have an affair. If exposed, he faced censure, or ruin, or jail, depending on the nature and seriousness of the offense. More importantly, whatever his transgression, and whatever the penalty, neither he nor the public at large would have had any doubts as to why what he had done was scandalous.

But times have changed. Today a political figure can end up impugned, impoverished, or imprisoned simply for doing his job. As Suzanne Garment writes in her compelling new book, "When we look down the list of recent political scandals that have embroiled executive branch officials, we quickly see that many of them involved offenses that would never have become known at any other time in our political history or would not have been considered worthy of serious sustained attention."

How has this situation come about? According to Garment, the roots of today's scandal politics lie in the 1960s. That era, she argues, ushered in a radicalism that has since come to pervade our national life, in-

cluding the political life of Washington, D.C. At the heart of this radicalism was "the conviction that the people governing this country were fundamentally illegitimate in their claims to authority and criminal in their behavior. It followed that the job of driving out the menace posed by such officials could not be done through conventional American politics, because the old political system entailed too much ordinary electoral activity, endless negotiation, and vitiating compromise." Instead, to achieve their goals the Vietnam-era radicals and their spiritual descendants created what now amounts to a parallel political structure composed of ideologically motivated interest groups, friendly congressional staffs, activist lawyers, and willing journalists.

It is this informal structure that undergirds what Garment calls "our modern scandal production machine." Her book is a systematic attempt to explain how each element of this machine—from "ethics" laws and congressional hearings to the office of the independent counsel and the mass media—operates, and she recounts with riveting clarity the major and minor political scandals of the past decade.

One of these is the story of former assistant attorney general Theodore Olsen. In 1985 Olsen was accused of having lied two and a half years earlier when he testified

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before a congressional subcommittee investigating the Environmental Protection Agency. At the insistence of the subcommittee chairman, Democrat Peter Rodino, Attorney General Edwin Meese asked for an independent counsel to investigate. The investigation was requested even though by 1985 Olsen had already left the government. Within six months, the independent counsel, Alexia Morrison, announced that Olsen's testimony "probably did not constitute a prosecutable offense because it was literally true, even if potentially misleading in certain respects." But with that the Olsen case did not end; it was only just beginning. Morrison was apparently determined to find some evidence of criminality and, unlike ordinary prosecutors, as an independent counsel she was unhampered by time, money, or any other constraint. So she pressed on, at one point threatening to indict Olsen if he refused to waive his rights under the statute of limitations law. Her search took four more years and, predictably, she came up empty. Olsen wound up with legal bills in excess of \$1 million.

Garment writes that the Olsen case showed how "an independent counsel could use the office's vast discretionary power to visit harshly discriminatory law enforcement on individual government officials." Indeed, in reading *Scandal* one cannot help feeling that, in these matters, the rule of law has been thoroughly corrupted. Those involved in the pursuit of Reagan Administration officials showed few if any qualms about what they were doing, even after it became clear that the only criminal activity they were investigating was that which they themselves had concocted. As Garment puts it:

Today's ethics police practice scorched-earth warfare of a sort readily recognizable from Vietnam days. . . . They display impressive inventiveness in not simply catching criminals but trying to ensure that what is offensive or imprudent behavior today can be treated as scandalous or even criminal behavior tomorrow. They display the same awesome skill as the most radical antiwar activists did in ignoring the question of whether the pain they cause in individual cases is worth the good they do.

The good they do is, in fact, nil. As Garment's book makes clear, the record is replete with cases that never get into court, that get thrown out of court, that end up in coerced little plea bargains, and that serve only to damage decent and dedicated men,

while promoting the careers of unscrupulous Washington lawyers, nihilistic journalists, and publicity-seeking congressmen.

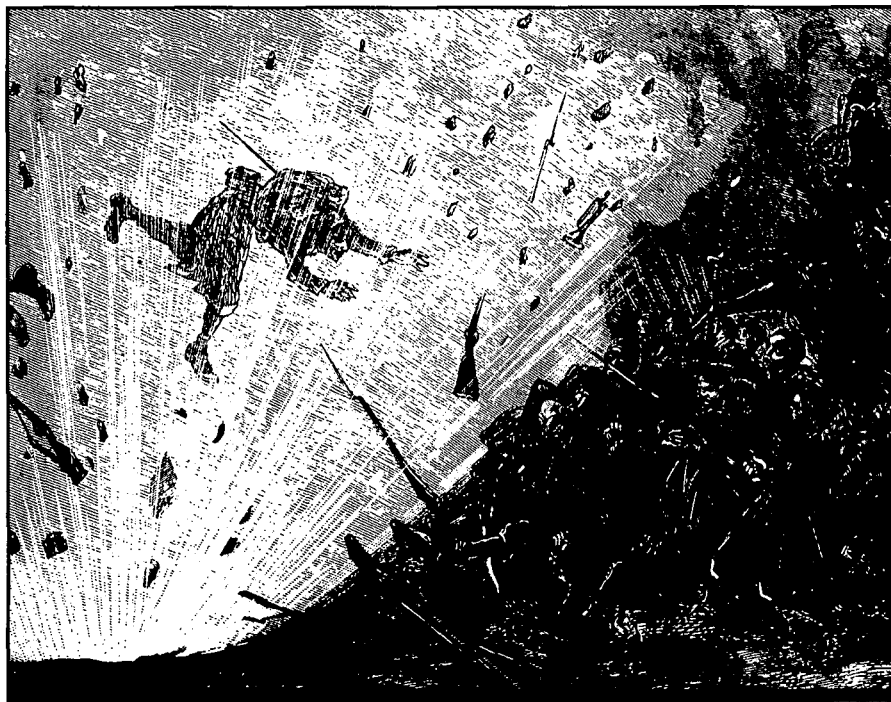
The fact that so many of the "scandals" examined by Garment should never have been investigated to begin with reminds us that, although the law is the instrument of their resolution, these cases have nothing to do with criminal behavior by people in high places. Some, like the prosecution of Raymond Donovan, President Reagan's first secretary of labor, and the Wedtech-related indictments of Lyn Nofziger and E. Robert Wallach, were inspired by standard partisan motives. Others, however, were outright ideological vendettas. As Garment points out, the Theodore Olsen case began as a battle between Reagan and Congress over environmental policy. Likewise, when Edwin Meese was nominated for attorney general, he was immediately targeted by Democratic senators opposed to Reagan's civil rights policies. Foreshadowing the tactics they would later use against Supreme Court nominees Robert Bork and Clarence Thomas, they sent their staffs looking for dirt and within days produced a Meese scandal involving allegations of cronyism and questionable loans.

And then there is the Iran-contra affair. So far, the investigation by independent counsel Lawrence Walsh has taken five years and has cost, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, more than \$100 million—all to investigate and prosecute men who did nothing really wrong. For as everyone in the world—including Lawrence Walsh,

his staff, and their cheerleaders in the press—knows, it was not withholding information from Congress, or taking an illegal gratuity, or any of the other trumped-up charges against them that brought down Oliver North and John Poindexter and Elliott Abrams and Alan Fiers and Claire George et al. Their crime was to refuse to allow congressional Democrats sympathetic to the Sandinistas to dictate U.S. policy toward Nicaragua.

Garment notes that the Iran-contra case exemplifies the post-Watergate habit of turning fundamental disputes over policy into matters for criminal adjudication. (And, of course, in the eyes of those under the sway of the kind of ideas about America and its foreign policy that took root in the 1960s, the Reagan Administration was no less criminal in supporting the anti-Communist struggle in Nicaragua than the Johnson or Nixon Administration had been in fighting the Vietnam war.)

As *Scandal* suggests, this development is a response to the inability of the radicalized left—whose point of view remains influential in Congress, the media, and elsewhere—to win power in presidential elections through the Democratic party. Thwarted by the electorate, the left has turned to destroying its executive branch adversaries through the misuse of our legal institutions. In illuminating the true character of these modern political scandals, Suzanne Garment has made an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the current scene. □



## CITY LIMITS: MEMORIES OF A SMALL-TOWN BOY

Terry Teachout

Poseidon Press/204 pages/\$19

reviewed by GEORGE SIM JOHNSTON

Terry Teachout grew up in a small town in Missouri and, after brief improvisations here and there, made his way to the big lights of New York City. Now in his thirties—not exactly his dotage—he’s written a memoir of this pilgrimage, *City Limits*. It’s an account of what William James called the twice-born soul, of a person who somewhere between adolescence and maturity grows a second soul in order to keep moving forward. Even so, he cannot help but trail what Teachout calls the broken cobwebs of the past. These cobwebs make up much of this fine book, which can readily be put beside such quiet contemporary classics as Truman Capote’s *A Christmas Memory*.

Teachout was born and raised in a place called Sikeston, which, so far as I can tell, has not had its 1965 yet. What do I mean by this? I grew up in New York City, and in 1965 *everything* began to get weird. Spray-paint vandals who signed themselves COOLJET200 began to redecorate the subways, people stopped using garbage receptacles on the sidewalk, newsstands sprouted pornography, and every neighborhood became a theater of operations for psychopaths. New York, it has been observed, was once all superego, and now it’s all id. Freudian terminology aside, Sikeston, Mo. appears to be one of those unvisited pockets of decency out there in the heartland, a place where you can still leave the backdoor unlocked at night. Without such places—so it seems anyway to an exasperated New Yorker—the republic could not possibly keep muddling on.

Like Evelyn Waugh, if Teachout ever got hold of a time machine, he would set the engine Slow Astern. His father’s leanly edited home movies, he writes, “cannot satisfy my longing for a movie made up of nothing but wasted film, a prosy, common-

place, uneventful movie whose only purpose is to show how Sikeston looked on an average day in 1950 or 1960 or 1990 . . .” So Teachout uses the opening chapters to produce a kind of prose home movie, in which the camera lingers on childhood landmarks “lightly touched with mystery.” Evocative without being cloying, these shots of an enclave of bustling self-sufficiency, complete with A & W Root Beer stand and local Elks Club, make the reader wonder why the author did not follow the path of least resistance and set up shop as a small-town lawyer. The descriptions of his childhood family life resonate with that elusive thing called happiness, which, if we but knew it, often resides in a “normality” that requires a fair amount of effort.

The main problem with childhood, of course, is that it eventually turns into adolescence. For Teachout, this meant a “prig’s progress” into the library stacks or behind a closed door at home, where he would spend hours listening to jazz records. One way for a painfully shy teenager to loosen up a bit was to get involved in theater (“Give a man a mask and he’ll tell you everything,” as Wilde put it), and there’s a wonderful account of a high school production of *Fiddler on the Roof* in which Teachout, having misplaced his glasses, comes crashing down from the upper reaches of the stage set, desperately holding up a violin to keep it from breaking.

Adolescent shyness often pays its dividends decades later. In Teachout’s case, it seems to have provided a protective membrane which allowed his intellect and character to travel well beyond the city limits of Sikeston. But the trajectory was slow and uncertain. After two catatonic semesters in one college and a successful stint in another, Teachout spent more than half a decade burning holes in his résumé. First, there were four years as a bank teller in Kansas

City. Not the stuff of great narrative, you might think, but he paints a portrait of post-adolescent disaffection that will strike deep chords in many readers. And there is an account of a bank robbery with bullets flying and blood on the floor that is a perfect set piece.

Shucking off the bank work, Teachout fell into what computer people call a default mode. It’s what happens automatically to a body between the ages of 20 and 30 if no other instructions are given to it: it ends up back in school. As a psychotherapy student in Illinois, Teachout found himself manning a Crisis Line for deranged people in the middle of the night. Sitting in a kitchen (surprisingly, calls were taken at home) after midnight, beneath “the tight cone of light of a pull-down ceiling fixture,” talking to anonymous strangers about their “bad night between doses of Thorazine and Valium” would seem as close to the contemporary heart of darkness as you can get.

Teachout soon came to the conclusion that must eventually catch up with most dispensers of Freudian analysis: while it’s not totally useless, it’s not very effective either. A mentor with a sardonic knowledge of the whole range of gestalts and therapies persuaded him that psychoanalysts with medical degrees were no better at curing their patients than laymen who had been given month-long crash courses in nondirective therapy. “I understood at last why my love affair with psychotherapy, the great secular religion of our time, had gone sour.”

Which makes the last stop in the book Grand Central Station. “Nobody comes to New York by accident, least of all the stray children of the small towns in America who flock here like stubborn pigeons.” A chain of coincidences leads him to an enviable editorial job, but there had been, he writes, “a single bright thread of fascination” pulling him there all the time. Such are the paradoxes of literary life: In order to really see New York and Boston, Henry James had to move to moldering old Europe; and in order to get down on paper indelible impressions of prelapsarian small-town America, it was probably necessary for Teachout to be sitting in an apartment in Bronxville in the middle of the night, listening to car burglar alarms wailing over the hum of his word processor.

Among the delights of *City Limits* is an elegant prose style that never calls attention to itself. There are whole chapters that give the pleasurable ache of one’s earliest memories. But like any first-rate memoir, there

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