

New York Times

Anna Quindlen, retiring cacograph for the *New York Times*, once again displays her literary gifts as she beholds a "moral compass" with a "prospect," a "terrifying prospect":

This is my new motto: Keep Al Gore Healthy.

Because when Newt Gingrich becomes Speaker of the House, that puts him third in the line of Presidential succession, after Mr. Gore. And that is a terrifying prospect for the moral compass of this country.

[November 16, 1994]

Washington Post

The Vice President of the United States speaks out, somewhere above Arkansas:

"Anyone want some Vitamin C?" the vice president of the United States inquires. Not bothering to doff his blue pin-stripe suit jacket, Albert Gore Jr. is wedged snugly behind the vice presidential worktable in the vice presidential cabin aboard Air Force Two. He is holding out a bottle of chewable tablets to the two lonely national reporters—the first to travel with him in many a day—who've come to find out just where he's been keeping himself these last few weeks of the 1994 campaign. He spills a few of the tablets on the table.

Won't they cause stomach acid? one of the reporters asks.

"I don't know," the vice president replies.

Then he emits a most vice presidential belch.

In due course, it becomes apparent that this is a shtick vice presidential belch, not a real vice presidential belch, and the vice president's guests are ultimately chuckling appreciatively.

"I've gotten a laugh with that since sixth grade," Gore confides.

[October 29, 1994]

New Republic

More arty thoughts from patient #3741 of St. Elizabeth's mental hospital writing under the pen name Leon Wieseltier, literary editor of the *New Republic*:

I sit in my room, a white man, and listen to *East St. Louis Toodle-oo* and *Lull at Dawn* and *Things Ain't What They Used to Be* and *Blood Count*. I am certain that I do not hear these pieces the way a black man hears them. But I am also certain that I hear them rightly, that I hear them as music. If you prize Ellington for the reason that he was a black man, you do not have to listen to him. You would prize him just as ardently if you were deaf.

[November 28, 1994]

The Spectator

(London, UK)

America's Cromwell, the Rev. Michael Kinsley, instructs the British reader:

The real American value on display in this election is hypocrisy—and I mean of the voters, not the politicians (well, the voters *and* the politicians). The voters want lower taxes and smaller government—provided that doesn't include any government benefit they happen to be receiving. They want guaranteed health care—but they don't want to pay any more for it, or be inconvenienced in any way. They want the United States to strut as the world's only remaining superpower and to preen as the great champion of democracy and capitalism—as long as this can be done with no risk of American blood or treasure. They want 'change'—they're fed up, they're against the 'status quo', they're not going to take it any more, etc. etc.—as long as their tranquillity isn't disturbed. No doubt this kind of hypocrisy is an element of democracy throughout the world, but it really does seem worse in America these days. I blame Ronald Reagan . . .

[November 5, 1994]

New York Times

Good News from the prissy Anthony Lewis:

With victory, would Newt Gingrich move from street fighter to statesman? It only took a few days to learn the answer: No.

[November 14, 1994]

Washington Post

A medley of nonsensical bathos from Democrats in defeat, and published as a public service to demonstrate to tax-paying Americans that the National Endowment for the Arts is not needed to ensure the existence of amateur acting in America:

There was no bigger winner-loser than Kennedy, who managed a stunning come from behind victory but won't be chairman of the Labor and Human Resources Committee anymore. "One tries to figure out how to put this to oneself," says a Kennedy aide.

"On a personal level it's a great victory, but that's narrow thinking," says another. "Think of Orrin Hatch on the Anita Hill hearings. Or Jesse Helms on anything. Foreign aid, support for governments in El Salvador that slaughter people, gay rights, reproductive rights—you name it. . . . It's a very depressing day. I was hoping we would have come through a little better than we did." . . .

Economic adviser Gene Sperling grieved especially over the loss of New York Gov. Mario Cuomo—who had been his boss and mentor before he joined the Clinton campaign. "I knew Democrats would lose, but I had already digested in my own mind that Governor Cuomo was safe," Sperling said in the East Room before the president arrived.

"People in politics have all gone through the ups and downs at some point in their lives, but I think the sadness I feel is the kind I felt even before I was in a political government job," Sperling said. "You see people you really admire like (Pennsylvania Sen.) Harris Wofford lose, or Governor Cuomo lose; and you just hurt as a person. . . ."

[November 10, 1994]

Amherst Bulletin

In the enlightened pages of a college town gazette, the Rev. Donna Schaper, a certified minister from the United Church of Christ, makes this messy business of life comprehensible:

We have a cat named Hudson who killed off a litter last month. She had a litter in the spring and enjoyed herself immensely. When the second litter came in the fall, she refused to care for it at all. Often animal mothers and human mothers who refuse care know exactly what they are doing. They are acknowledging their own limitation. It is, as regular people often say, "for the best."

While not arguing for virtue in infanticide, I have to argue at least the plausibility of withdrawing maternal care. Pushing your children into a lake is hardly that. But Susan Smith was making an announcement: she couldn't care for her children. Instead of making their lives permanently miserable, she drowned them. There is a strange, cruel mercy in the act.

[November 11, 1994]

Amherst Bulletin

A glimpse at the kind of cerebral dialogue that is carried on in historic Amherst between such intellectual giants as Father Donna Schaper and Harold Kulungian, founder of the anti-hamburger movement:

The ideas put forward by Rev. Donna Schaper in the Sept. 16 *Bulletin* that "We must make our own burgers" bemused me. What is the difference in the contents, and in the effects, of burgers that we make at home vs. the famous Big Mac? I can't imagine it is very much.

Yet Schaper finds some sort of philosophical consolation in the "do-it-yourself" independent approach to burgers. . . .

Let's take just a couple of recent celebrity cases, to observe the effects of the Big Mac Way of Life in America.

When Lorena Bobbitt was on trial last spring for cutting off her husband's penis, you could see in her some symptoms that are actually widespread in our society. In one of her photos, her face was so tense that her eyes were virtually popping out of her head. You could see the whites of her eyes both above and below the iris. The enormous pressure behind her eyes, causing them to protrude so much, is coming from dietary excess, and shows her whole nervous system to be under immense strain.

Lorena's carnivorous diet made her

very excitable, sexually aggressive, and regularly drove her to anger. Anger is coming from an overburdened liver and spleen, making one bilious and splenetic.

Lorena's favorite food, indicated when she was released from her 45-day psychiatric surveillance, in answer to a reporter's question: "What are you going to do now that you are free, Lorena?" "The first place I'm going is to McDonald's . . ." she exclaimed joyfully. . . .

And no one better exemplifies this new dietary behavioral syndrome than O.J. Simpson. Simpson had just gone to McDonald's for a Big Mac an hour or two before the murders took place.

[November 11, 1994]

Washington Post

The venerable *Post* reports on what is to be encountered by health care crusaders when traveling through the American Midwest:

Daniel Lumley, a student from Seattle with a particular interest in health care—he'd lost an arm and a leg in a motorcycle accident—says he encountered abuse all along the way.

"They were calling me communist, faggot, all kinds of things," he says. "A lot of the people were just seething with hate. I felt they were just using this issue, health reform, as a vent."

In Indianapolis, police had to bring out SWAT team members. As the buses approached, a white Dodge Caravan blocked their path and gun control opponent Linda Thompson jumped out, wearing a shoulder holster with a loaded Colt .45. Inside the van police found another pistol and a military-style assault rifle with 295 rounds of ammunition.

"In parts of Missouri and Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, I feared for the lives of the folks that were on the tour," says trip organizer Kevin Howard.

"Demonstrators would show up with vicious signs . . . with no reference to what we were trying to do, which is reform health care," says Ed Emerson, who organized a disastrous event in Springfield, MO. "They literally were throwing things—tomatoes—spitting, making vile and vulgar gestures. . . . Ultimately it's sad, especially when they bring their kids."

"I don't know what it was they hated so much," says Howard. "It wasn't just anti-Bill and anti-Hillary and anti-health care. I'm not saying that's not a part of it, but there's got to be more to it than that. How much can you hate a president?"

[November 7, 1994]

THE QUOTABLE

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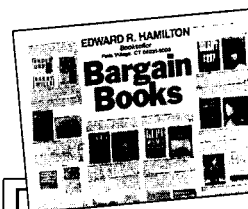
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The Politics of Pleading

by Byron York

Last June I received an elaborate mailing from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. The fold-out cover featured a dramatic picture of Bill Clinton with the large-type heading: "How you can best help President Clinton in the 2nd year of his term."

Inside was the "Annual Legislative Agenda Survey." I was asked to complete a questionnaire and send a contribution of at least \$20; in return, I would receive an autographed picture of the President and Tom Foley, with the inscription, "To Byron York, Thank you for the leadership you've shown for many years within the National Democratic Party."

The survey asked twenty basic questions about the Clinton program. "What is your opinion of President Clinton's Administration after its first year?" I checked the box marked "very good." "Do you believe there is a health care crisis in this nation?" I checked "Yes." I also answered yes to the question of whether the current welfare system should be replaced with "a new system of education, job training, and child care."

A final question asked for personal comments. I wrote "Keep up the good work!" and slipped a \$20 check into the envelope (at the time, I was researching an article on the Democrats' vast "soft money" fund-raising operation and thought the mailing and photo would be useful). Postage was prepaid—but a note said "Your stamp will help defeat obstructionist Republicans!" I licked a 29-cent stamp, dropped the envelope in the

mail, and waited for my Clinton-Foley photo.

It never came. Instead, I got a postcard from Vic Fazio. "Welcome!" it said. The card enlisted my support in stopping the coming "Republican onslaught." Fazio promised to stay in touch and "keep [me] up-to-date on the 1994 races."

In late July I received the "confidential results" of the Legislative Agenda Survey. They seemed to have read my answers, because according to the letter, those surveyed "voiced strong support for the President, and gave him very good grades for his first year in office." It appeared that my responses contributed to a mood of optimism among party leaders. But more money was needed, they said, and the letter was accompanied by another "Your stamp will help defeat obstructionist

Republicans!" envelope. This time, I did not answer.

September brought another letter from Foley. By then, he seemed to know there was a problem. "Our situation is critical—but not terminal," he wrote. Offering a ray of hope, he continued: "If you, Mr. York, and other leaders within the Party act now, we can catch up with the Republicans." Again, I did not respond.

By the third week in October, the letters began sounding desperate. "The latest polls show that, regrettably, we will lose seats to the Republicans," Foley wrote in the last mailing I received before the election. "I hope you will rush a generous contribution."

Then it happened. The Democrats, despite having spent my \$20 and millions more, still lost miserably. The defeat apparently demoralized the party's direct-mail writers as much as the politicians themselves. A week after the voting, I received a letter from a depressed-sounding Richard Gephardt (no mention of Foley now). "On election day, the Democratic Party sustained its worst defeat in almost half a century," he wrote. What now? Gephardt seemed at a complete loss. "In the coming weeks, we must adapt to our new role in Congress," he continued. "We must try to find some type of common ground with the new majority."

Then it was back to begging. "Please, for the sake of the party, its principles, and President Clinton, please step forward today." But he won't get any more money from me—at least not until I get my autographed picture. □

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Byron York is a writer and television producer in Washington.