



Washington Monthly

Recalling all that he has witnessed in his years of foreign travel, Sydney H. Schanberg proves again what has so long been noted about the American progressive, to wit: travel narrows the mind:

My first taste of newspapering came when I wrote for an army weekly during my military service in Europe. Afterward, in 1959, I went to work at *The New York Times* as a copyboy. In the years to follow, I covered the state government in Albany and was then posted overseas to India. Eventually, I went to Southeast Asia, where the people of Cambodia, helpless pawns in the crossfire of the Vietnam War, became my beat and my obsession.

I learned that a reporter's life is a continuum. Cambodia's horrors were staggering, but there are horrors in America, too. We have poverty and discrimination; we have our share of public officials and private lords who rule with a callous hand. Cambodia's suffering was on a grander scale, but it's really the same basic story.

[MARCH 1996]

New York Times Book Review

Liberalism's new standard of excellence! Boy Clinton has been "stupid but not criminal." He and his lovely wife Bruno have been naive, evasive, foolish, misleading, but—what luck!—not criminal. Four more years!

Blood Sport is by far the most complete, the best and the fairest account of the Clintons and their troubles to date, and it concludes that the Whitewater grab bag of scandal, controversy and unanswered questions does not justify the attention it has received. The land deal was stupid but not criminal; the Clintons and especially Mrs. Clinton, did many things in Arkansas and later that were stupid but not criminal; and their attempts to respond to the hailstorm of charges against them have been variously naïve, impetuous, evasive, foolish, misleading and stupid, but not criminal.

[MARCH 24, 1996]

Reliable Sources

On a formal televised pabulum powwow, host Bernard Kalb indulges in a little wishful thinking:

GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS: Well, I'm not suggesting that we didn't cooperate, but I am suggesting that James Stewart, in the new introduction in *Time* magazine, says there's no smoking gun here, there is no new allegation. What you have is many pages of recycled gossip, some minor new details, but nothing that adds to the overall story.

BERNARD KALB: George, what you have given us is possibly the last word.

[MARCH 17, 1996]

Cincinnati Enquirer

How Krista Ramsey, columnist, found America's most sexist institution just before Christmas and led a revolution in the boys' aisle:

My daughter sits on Santa's lap, her hands gesturing the size and shape of the gifts she wants, her eyes bright with the joy of pure consumption.

Later I ask what she requested. "Baywatch Barbie and Princess Wishing Star," she answers, so excited she shivers.

Compare my shopping list with hers and we have what's known as dissonance. I admit I have trouble buying her a doll so anatomically unrealistic that, were she a real woman, she would surely launch forward and fall on her face.

To a lesser extent, I have trouble buying her a doll that encourages young girls to wish for their future. I teach my daughter to work for her future.

Nevertheless, Jessa may very well get Princess What's-Her-Face. It's a compromise between a mother's principles and a daughter's television-induced dreams. Baywatch Barbie, however, will just have to tug her swimsuit a bit more closely around her shapely thighs. She's staying at the North Pole.

I can keep my good humor about single entries on my daughter's Christmas list. I lose it massively, however, every time I walk into a toy store. This, not professional sports or the military, must surely rank as America's most sexist institution....

"Let's look down this aisle," I tell my daughter, steering her toward soccer balls and shin guards. "We can't," she tells me. "That's the boys aisle."

So I take her hand, sweep past the Baywatch Barbies, and show her that we can shop—and live—as we please.

[DECEMBER 16, 1995]

News Tribune

(Waltham, Massachusetts)

Newell Davis, of nearby Newton, tells us there are two kinds of women:

Run me up the nearest yardarm, tar and feather me, excommunicate me, or accuse my mother of wearing combat boots, but I like Hillary Clinton. She's my hero. I'm not going to be shouted down by a bunch of pudding-headed yoyos who think that every woman should remain in her place, in a typing pool at the local insurance company or home and pregnant, shopping and cleaning house. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with housewives who stay home. That's good. What I am saying is there's room in this country for two kinds of women, and Hillary, while she is a member of an often despised minority, is a nice person, and I like her. I like her a lot. I don't like her hair style. She looks like Rebecca of Sunny Brook Farm, but you can't tell a book by its cover. She's gutsy. I must admit, sometimes I think she is kind of a "holier than thou" type of individual, a super-moralist that makes me feel like a perfect skunk for just being my sinful self, but still she has it all. She has fame, fortune, position, power and looks. I hate fame, fortune, position, power and looks, largely because I have none of those things, but I will admit I'm a prejudiced person, but I'm not going to let my prejudice dictate my behavior. I like Hillary Clinton.

[FEBRUARY 1, 1996]

Business Ethics

One Mary Scott reports on her human rights fact-finding tour of China, the land of smiling babies:

As I boarded the 727 bound for China, I brought with me the media-imposed images of the world's most populous country: child and prison labor, abandoned babies left to die in orphanages—a freedom-less place where people were surely to be cold, tough, and withdrawn.

Rather, what I found were warm, friendly, and caring people who seemed oblivious to living in a country trapped between communism and capitalism, and filled with dire social and economic problems.

I was in China to help my sister, Anne, bring home her eight-month-old daughter, Grace Zhi Fan, from Nanchang.

It was on Nanchang's packed streets that I experienced first-hand the affable nature of the Chinese. Westerners are an anomaly in this region and hundreds of eyes followed us as we walked the streets. The brave ones offered a loud "hallo." When we responded, they burst into laughter. When Gracie was with us, the attention magnified. Restaurant servers, shop employees, hotel workers—even well-heeled business men—smiled warmly in her face, took her hand, and thanked us for providing a future to one of their abandoned babies. Everyone wanted to touch her because in doing so, some of the luck bestowed on her would be carried to them. These people love their children.

[MARCH/APRIL 1996]

San Francisco Chronicle & Examiner

Joshua Kosman, music critic for the incomparable *Chronicle*, laments the countless bigotries practiced against the world's black Beethovens and Red Indian Tchaikovskys:

A more telling statistic is the count of living composers whose music will be played—a measly seven. It's also worth noting that for the second year in a row, the composers included in the subscription season are 100 percent white and 100 percent male. You can give that fact as political a spin as you choose, but it's certainly a reflection of over-reliance on the tried and true.

[MARCH 10, 1996]

The Nation

Espied on the Amusement Page of the agelastic *Nation*, more evidence of why lefty can't laugh:

In a speech at an award ceremony sponsored by the National Press Foundation, William Safire of *The New York Times*, still feeling the heat from the controversy surrounding a column in which he called the First Lady a "congenital liar," claimed that the epithet was the result of a typographical error, according to *The Hill*, a Congressional newspaper. Safire insisted that the phrase should have read "congenital lawyer." He explained that rather than filing electronically, he had dictated his column to a *Times* stenographer, who misunderstood him. Sure, Bill, we believe you. Say, that steno's name wasn't Rosemary Woods, was it?

[APRIL 1, 1996]

The Nation

Espied on the Editorial Page of the socialist *Nation*, more evidence that socialists can't operate an efficient economy:

Could the relations between Wall Street and everyone else ever be made clearer than they were on March 8? At 8:30 A.M., the Bureau of Labor Statistics announced that 705,000 new jobs had appeared in February, far more than anyone expected. The Dow Jones Industrial Average retreated 171 points in fright. Prosperity is tastiest when it's reserved for the few.

[APRIL 1, 1996]

Washington Post

Richard Cohen, the fantasist, equates tobacco companies with the Soviet Union, a poet's hard-earned cigarette habit with the Gulag—still trying to impress Peter Jennings's wife, Richard?

PBS's Charlie Rose devoted part of his show Tuesday night to the poet Joseph Brodsky, the Nobel laureate who died in January. He was a genius who wrote originally in Russian and, later, after he was exiled from the Soviet Union and came to the United States, in English. He was a sick man with a heart condition and a habit he could not break. At only 55 he died—still a smoker....

In a way—how can I say this?—it was fitting that Brodsky could not stop smoking. As a Russian (born in St. Petersburg), as a Jew (both parents suffered on that account) and as a poet ("Who said that you were a poet?" demanded the Soviet judge who sent him to a labor camp), he must have been a congenital ironist, someone who recognized that much of life is absurd.

Such a person could appreciate the legions of corporate executives and lawyers insisting that what we all know to be truth is, they do so solemnly swear, false. In its tacky way, this is almost a theatrical version of a communist state. In this case, truth is determined by lawyers, not commissars, although they would be the latter if they had been born in a different place.

Now, a small number of cigarette industry scientists have stepped forward to say that, yes, nicotine is addictive and, yes, the industry manipulates the amount found in various cigarettes. These confessions of what we already know, these acknowledgments of the obvious, have become front-page news. They are like the candid remarks of Soviet-era officials who, toward the end, acknowledged what everyone outside the Kremlin already knew: The system wasn't working.

[MARCH 21, 1996]

AdWeek

In awarding its sought-after Editor of the Year trophy, *AdWeek* alights on the most beautiful man in Washington, D.C., Andrew Sullivan, for whom mothers lust:

A Thatcherite running a magazine with a long history of liberalism, a devout Catholic who has excoriated the Church for its position on homosexuality, a homosexual who has angered many gay activists by appearing to be too puppy-doggishly eager for mainstream acceptance (notably with his recent book, *Virtually Normal: An Argument About Homosexuality*), Sullivan himself is a mass of contradictions. Amid the paunches and pinstripes of media types in Washington, he is rumpled and rather beautiful, with the kind of melting eyes that would make my mother shake her head and tsk, "He doesn't like girls? Such a waste."

[MARCH 4, 1996]



by Wladyslaw Pleszczynski

Nobody's Perfect

LIKE ALL GREAT AMERICAN SPORTS metaphors, "March Madness" isn't simply about basketball anymore. In a typical recent sampling, one hockey writer used it to characterize a goalie's three shutouts in four games; a local resort organized a weekend March Madness Ski Festival (snow volleyball, anyone?); two analysts, rather predictably, wrote about "this year's March madness in the Taiwan straits." Very predictably this time—in the same spirit that has turned Al Franken's surprisingly witless *Rush Limbaugh Is a Big Fat Idiot* into a number one bestseller—Senate minority leader Tom Daschle applied the term to his friends from the GOP. In fact he did so twice in three days, accusing Republicans of giving new meaning to the concept in their budget proposals. "And the madness continues," he warned on March 13. How right he was. The NCAA tournament was about to start, and CBS had forty-eight games to televise in four days—starring sixty-four teams, many of them as underserving as the beneficiaries of Daschle's spending programs. And all of them feeling just as entitled.

TAKE THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND TERRAPINS, the ACC's fifth-place team that finished 17-12, having defeated maybe one major opponent on the road in a season that saw it lose most every other game that mattered, home or away. Mediocre was the kindest word to describe the performance of its key seniors, one of whom was suspended for several games after taking out a fishy loan to pay off thousands of dollars in campus parking fines—this before it turned out that two of his teammates owe thousands of their own in similar fines. (No word yet on what they owe the library.) "They came back from a lot this season, and they dealt with a lot of off-court distractions," Terrapin coach Gary Williams said before his team was selected, adding that he wanted his "guys to get the respect they deserve." And that's just what they got. In an early afternoon game in the middle of nowhere in the tournament's opening round, they lost to an obscure Santa Clara University squad led by a British Columbian.

AS IT TURNED OUT, SIX ACC TEAMS were chosen, and only its best two survived into the final sixteen. Selection inflation also affected five Big 10 teams, none of whom lasted the first weekend. The inclusion of Indiana University, our former Bloomington neighbor, was particularly unnecessary. Bobby Knight is a great coach and all that, but if it isn't time that's passed him by, then surely a lot of faster players have. Two years ago his Hoosiers played in the NAAs in nearby Landover—a friend who was in attendance thought they were using a medicine

ball. This year's edition was the slowest in memory—but more importantly didn't win against a single top opponent, winding up 19-12. A team like that might have reason to compete in the Ivy League, but not for a national championship. Twenty years ago, another Knight team set a different standard, winning the NCAA in the last undefeated season in college basketball. Twenty-five years ago, something even more remarkable occurred. The top team in the country turned out to be UCLA, led by the mephistophelean Sidney Wicks, which finished 29-1. The second-best team that year wound up 24-2, and for a time was ranked number one—until it played Pacific Eight rival UCLA on February 6, 1971, and lost 64-60, having led 59-50 with nine minutes left. Five weeks later it had another shot at UCLA, but lost 73-62, the winner going on to take the NCAA tournament. The near-perfect loser was USC, and it went nowhere. In those days, only league champions competed in the post-season. The rules were clear—coming close still mattered only in horseshoes.

THE STAR OF THAT USC TEAM was Paul Westphal, who would flourish in the NBA as a player and coach, most recently in Phoenix, where he also won fame as an original Limbaugh dittohead. I'd first heard of Westphal when we were high schoolers, and he was maybe the only right-handed high school guard in southern California who could dunk with his left hand. Recruited heavily by UCLA, he opted for the less crazed environment of USC. He was stylish and he could play, a not unnatural condition for conservatives since time immemorial. I mention this, having recently seen a press release for *Backward and Upward* (Vintage Books, \$13), a new anthology of off-beat conservative writing edited by David Brooks. "Smart, savvy, hip, and hilariously irreverent," the publisher hyped, "these writers define the conservative movement and shatter its stodgy blue-serge-suit image." Since at least half of the contributors have written for this magazine, some since the 1970's, who's calling whom stodgy? At a lively reception for the book I even picked up some basketball trivia. The wife of one of our finest contributors, for instance, is friends with Dean Smith's niece, and was absolutely thrilled to run into an admirer of that outstanding North Carolina coach. (His trendy support of ERA and the nuclear freeze a few years back is another matter.) I asked one writer whether the coach of his favorite college team, which had a dismal season, was going to be canned. Turns out the fellow was nearly fired a year ago, after leaving his wife for the cheerleader he'd impregnated. I forgot to inquire whether that came before or after his team had won a slot in last year's tournament. ❀