

The First Lady of Anti-Anti-Communism

Tricky Dick and the Pink Lady: Richard Nixon vs. Helen Gahagan Douglas

Greg Mitchell

Random House / 316 pages / \$25

REVIEWED BY

Stephen Schwartz

This is a work of politically correct historical narcissism. “America at mid-century experienced a year like no other. It has been called savage, traumatic, a time of crisis—‘the year it all fell apart,’” it begins. The claim is a familiar one: that “McCarthyism” was more significant than anything else that ever happened in this country. Bigger than the Revolution, the Civil War, the Depression. Bigger, even, than the upheaval of the sixties!

Greg Mitchell’s credentials essentially tell the story: former editor of the “peace” journal called *Nuclear Times*, contributor to the long-misnamed *Progressive* magazine, and co-author of a book attacking Harry Truman’s decision to drop the atom bomb on Hiroshima. He has also written book-length chronologies of two of the defining confrontations of twentieth-century American politics. Both contests took place in California; both involved fierce fighting between left and right; and both became legendary.

The first, treated in Mitchell’s 1992 book *The Campaign of the Century*, pitted socialist Upton Sinclair against Republican Frank Merriam in the state’s 1934 gubernatorial race. That campaign, with its pioneering use of film as electoral propaganda, changed U.S. politics forever. The second, discussed in this new volume, was the 1950 election that put Richard Nixon in the U.S. Senate and on the road to the White House.

STEPHEN SCHWARTZ is the author of the newly released *From West to East: California and the Making of the American Mind* (Free Press).

In both books Mitchell’s method consists of chronicling the day-to-day activities of these campaigns, without offering much if any background and almost no interpretation or analysis beyond the usual liberal-left shibboleths about corporate and conservative evil.

This made his book on Sinclair a handy chronological reference, but it is useless for any understanding of Sinclair, his appeal, or his EPIC program for state socialism in California. But since it’s the only book around on the Sinclair campaign, it has gained a certain credibility. Nixon, alas, is much better known to American readers and scholars, who will expect more than a compendium of clichés.

Though Mitchell claims to eschew a simplistic “Beauty and the Beast” approach to his subject, Nixon remains the villain, and Helen Gahagan Douglas, the liberal-left queen bee and wife of actor Melvyn Douglas (who wisely avoided all but perfunctory involvement in the whole mess), the victim. Nixon, we are told for the umpteenth time, smeared her for her naïve liberalism, thus boosting his career as the prince of American political darkness.

Still, Mitchell’s plodding account, like many similar books, is also unintentionally revealing. Though he obviously set out to contribute to the ever-lengthening bookshelf of Nixonophobic pamphleteering, he also exposes a curious and forgotten item—namely, that Helen Gahagan Douglas was undone in the 1950 senatorial race in California as much by critics and opponents within her own party as by Nixon. Indeed, two of the men who most contributed to her downfall, and who even acted as unofficial “Democrats for Nixon,” were former associates of the socialist Sinclair: Los Angeles liberal newspaper owner Manchester Boddy and Sen. Sheridan Downey, the retiring incumbent whose seat Douglas hoped to win.

This gives rise to a provocative question: What could have so changed California politics that two prominent Sinclairites,

after sixteen years, would come to support Richard Nixon? Mitchell’s only answer is that they were corrupted and bought-off. As he writes of Downey: “By the mid-1940’s, while maintaining a mainstream New Deal record on national programs, he began to side with corporate interests on important California issues.” For Mitchell it’s all very simple. It never dawns on him that Downey, as a U.S. senator, might have had larger—indeed global—matters in mind in opposing Douglas.

Incapable of explaining such phenomena, Mitchell leaves them mainly unaddressed. He even ignores the Douglases’ background as opponents of Stalinism during the period of the Nazi-Soviet pact, which if anything spoke well of them and arguably made Helen Douglas a more attractive figure.

Instead, Mitchell frequently cites Boddy and Nixon’s charge—articulated in Nixon’s famous “pink sheet” handout—that Helen Douglas’s voting record as a member of Congress closely paralleled that of Rep. Vito Marcantonio, a Communist marionette from East Harlem who became the standard-bearer of the so-called American Labor Party (ALP). Mitchell never explains who Marcantonio was, or anything about his record, or the nature of the ALP. (One of its luminaries was Ewart Guinier, father and mentor of the unfortunate Lani.)

The real story of Helen Douglas—which won’t be found in this book—begins with the fashionable leftism she and her husband embraced in Hollywood at the end of the 1930’s when both were minor cinema personalities. The couple was prominent in the California Popular Front linking Communists and “liberals.” The Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 1939 led to a split in the front, with the Douglases among the exceptional few who chose to view Stalinism and Hitlerism as equally baneful forms of totalitarianism. Melvyn Douglas openly fought the Communists in Hollywood.

The wartime alliance between the U.S. and the USSR changed everything. In 1944 Helen Douglas was elected to Congress, with the backing of Communists who’d become so submerged in New Dealism that they had dissolved the Communist Party in favor of a “political association.”

Helen Douglas thus rose to political power not as an anti-Stalinist, but as an ally of the Stalinists. Once pitted against Nixon, she clearly preferred to forget her "finest hour" when she and her husband had fought Communism in Hollywood. Her trajectory was the exact reverse of the path taken by such anti-Stalinist counterparts in the eastern U.S. as Sidney Hook, James Burnham, and Irving Kristol. These men began World War II as believers in "moral equivalence" between Western imperialism and fascism, but by 1950 arrived at a clear understanding that Stalin was no better than Hitler and that resistance to Soviet expansionism was a matter of extreme urgency.

Ahead of the liberal-left pack in 1940, by 1950 Douglas was arguing, as Mitchell notes, that "on domestic issues conservative Republicans, not liberal Democrats, were the ones doing the dirty work of the Soviets, such as halting projects intended to provide cheap electricity." In all seriousness, Douglas attacked "those persons who opposed public [utility] development in the last five years" as "among the most effective saboteurs of our national strength that the Communists could hope to enlist. I nominate for the Order of Stalin those Republicans and private power executives who... have obstructed the development of this vital source of energy."

However quaint Douglas's fumings about "electrification" may seem today, they reflected a serious early form of moral equivalence. The litany went like this: America could not effectively oppose Communism until, say, the sharecroppers of Alabama were succored; Communism would not exist but for continued social injustice under capitalism; the threat to peace came from the "arms race" and therefore from both sides. America was, according to Helen Douglas, equally threatened by "communism, Nazism, Nixonism." Talk about smears.

Douglas's views played very poorly in 1950, a time when Stalinists were clamping down on Eastern Europe and Mao's victory in China was followed by Communist aggression in Korea. Sidney Hook and other anti-Stalinist liberals were entitled to their opinion that the most effective way of fighting Communism might be to embrace social democracy—i.e., to show that democratic capitalism, rather than

Communism, did more to secure the prosperity of ordinary people. But they did not say that resistance to the Kremlin had to wait until after the arrival of a "just" society in the West. They recognized the immediacy of the danger, which Douglas and her ilk did not.

Simply put, the American people returned to the same opinion of Stalin they had in 1940 (and of Hitler, too): they were anti-American rats and enemies of humanity. Notwithstanding the boilerplate reissued by generation after generation of American intellectuals, "the masses" in the U.S. were not "afraid" of Communism; they were outraged by it.

The anti-Communism of that era has been consistently painted as a provincial reaction by American yahoos. In truth, it was the *anti-anti-Communist* view that was provincial, in holding that America could better ignore the fate of the Czechs and Slovaks, the Koreans, and ultimately the Vietnamese and Cambodians and Cubans, putting our immediate local needs first. And unfortunately for Douglas, in 1950 the American people certainly did not want to be told that everybody in rural California had to have an indoor privy before we could act to stop Muscovite aggression in Korea or elsewhere.

What, then, of the so-called "smears" against her? Most of them, as described by Mitchell, originated not with Nixon or the Republicans, but with legitimate Democrats like Manchester Boddy and Sheridan Downey, whose understanding of Communism was much closer to that of Sidney Hook than that of Helen Douglas. According to Douglas and her partisans, Nixon substituted concern about the Kremlin for discussion of "the issues." No doubt later McGovernite Democrats would think her ahead of her time.

If she was ahead of her time, it was in the nutty, conspiratorial streak she occasionally displayed. During the campaign she asserted, "Joe McCarthy is going up and down the state campaigning secretly for Nixon, but the Republican press is so ashamed of McCarthy they don't publish a word about it." Asked how campaigning could be secret, she insisted, "You just check and you'll see I'm right."

She was wrong, her supporters were wrong, and she deserved to lose. ❀

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with Mitchell) had planted a seed in the president's mind that remained rooted for the rest of his life. Pressed three days later to pin Watergate on Mitchell and fire him, Nixon said, "I can't do that. I won't do that to him. I'd rather, s--t, lose the election. I really would."

Convinced that Mitchell had either approved the Watergate break-in or permitted it to happen through managerial negligence, Nixon wondered aloud many times why his friend refused to come forward and take the rap. His concerns were fed by Ehrlichman, who blithely assured the president that Mitchell's underlings could demonstrate that he had been "in eighteen meetings where this was discussed, ratified, authorized, financed." One gets the impression from such damaging exaggeration that Ehrlichman, who had tacitly approved Hunt's Los Angeles break-in, quickly decided that it might be better for everyone, but especially Ehrlichman, if Mitchell took responsibility for Hunt's Washington break-in.

For his part, Mitchell went to his grave in 1988 insisting that Ehrlichman and the president were wrong. He was the single most important source for *Silent Coup*. On a central point of history—who sanctioned or ordered the break-in that broke a president?—the record remains intriguingly muddied. More clarity may come if Dean's role is ever probed anew.

Some may say: It's over, Nixon's gone, and the details about what he said to one aide or another twenty-five years ago don't matter. Kutler's own oddly defensive mantra is that the only thing that really counts about Nixon is that he quit, which presumably means that even if the accumulation of evidence absolved him totally he wouldn't be entitled to a shot at redemption. The opposite dynamic operates with Nixon's 1960 opponent. A recent Associated Press report on "The Kennedy Legend" begins by listing some of JFK's transgressions—philandering, sanctioning of political assassinations, misleading the public about his health, links with the Mob—and then states, "People concede all that about John F. Kennedy,

and it doesn't seem to matter." Beyond Kennedy's tragic death, the reporter credits his persistent popularity to his grace and style and his mastery of television. So while Nixon increasingly gets no credit for what he did and is clobbered for what he said in moments of extreme tension, Kennedy is excused for what he did because he looked and sounded so darn good while he did it.

He is also credited by many, continues the AP, for saving the world. "The idea that Kennedy saved us from nuclear war is fixed," said one historian, "and I don't think that will ever go away." But had Nixon taken office in January 1961, would there have been a Cuban missile crisis? Nikita Khrushchev considered Kennedy amusing, handsome, and—after their summit in Vienna in 1961, at which the president himself admitted he did poorly—weak. Having met Nixon in 1959 during the Kitchen Debate, Khrushchev reportedly considered him a "son of a bitch." Would Khrushchev have risked slipping offensive missiles into Cuba under the nose of President Son-of-a-Bitch? If the answer is no or even maybe not, then what is important in a leader—style and grace, or something else?

Think too of the statesmanship Richard Nixon exhibited by resigning before a House impeachment vote and the Senate trial to which he would have been entitled. Just as he had concluded after the 1960 election, which was tainted by Democrat fraud in Illinois, Missouri, and Texas, that it would hurt the nation to demand a recount, he also believed that he should spare the nation the trial of a president. Many argued his resignation proved that the system worked. It really proved that Richard Nixon worked, because he relinquished power before he had to but precisely when his gut told him he should. Since he never got his day in court, history still owes him one, conducted with the dispassion of the passing years. Howard Baker, who knew the prior Watergate record as well as anyone, has argued that the president might not have been convicted in a Senate trial. Had even these truncated transcripts been available to his attorneys, his prospects would have been even brighter.

For now, the historical Nixon is in a purgatory where massive new evidence

about his role in Watergate doesn't even make the book reviews. But this may mean nothing other than that the true history of the Vietnam-Watergate era will be written by true historians, not journalists or indeed the president's friend and staunch admirers. Nixon himself said that history would take fifty years to judge him fairly. He may have been precisely correct. He also said that he wanted his administration to be the best documented in history. Journalists report this fact as though it is laughingly ironic but yet again, the boss may have been playing nine or ten moves ahead of us all. No world leader in history has ever left a more detailed record, at least for the period between February 1971 and July 1973, when his voice-activated taping system was in operation. If he is to be rescued from his purgatory, it will be by his massive record—especially the tapes which will now come out in chronological segments beginning with those recorded between February and July of 1971. There is so much record that it will be harder and harder for Kutlerization to succeed.

Could the Nixon-haters actually be in denial about the prospect for a bear market in their beloved field? Late last year a trio of scholars who oppose the idea of the Nixon Library becoming part of the National Archives complained to the *Washington Post's* George Lardner that access to records would be restricted if the Nixon White House materials are ever moved to Yorba Linda. Lardner purportedly the *Post's* archives expert reported this complaint with painful solemnity. Surely he knows that thanks to the Nixon family and estate, virtually all the most sensitive and potentially damaging White House materials, both taped and written, are now out. What of substance is left for us to try to restrict?

The Nixon side having done its part to open the record, now it's the spooks' turn. While we now know everything Nixon said to Chuck Colson in February 1971, we will evidently have to wait years to learn everything he said to Mao Tse-tung in February 1972. A prominent writer with a summer 1998 deadline for a book

on Sino-U.S. relations was recently told by NARA that he would have to wait up to two years before the "memcons" of President Nixon's meetings with Mao and Zhou En-lai could be declassified. This is especially ridiculous in view of the extensive use both Nixon and Kissinger made of the documents in their memoirs. Hundreds of hours of this foreign policy president's taped conversations about Russia, China, the Mideast, and Vietnam are also still classified.

The tacit foes of full disclosure are federal government officials who are too slow in declassifying materials relating to Richard Nixon's interactions with dead Communists, his maneuvers in the Middle East, his efforts to end the war he inherited in a way that would preserve U.S. honor and validate the sacrifices made by the three million Americans who served. At his funeral in April 1994, President Clinton said, "May the day of judging President Nixon on anything less than his entire life and career come to a close." But so long as hatchetmen such as Kutler and Scheer command so much attention by prosecuting the ideological battle that President Clinton claims to have abandoned while the full documentary record is kept from legitimate historians, President Nixon's reputation will suffer unfairly. Mr. President, unleash your declassification gnomes. To judge President Nixon on the full record, we shall have to see it. ❀

Shiflett/Nashville

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songwriter and producer who has been in Nashville sixteen years, is inspired by the experience of a song he wrote that contained a deeply spiritual theme. He'd had little hope it would be recorded, but the song did surprisingly well. The song's story line, he explained, finds Jesus returning to Earth as a crack baby.

Hope is also fueled by anticipation that Internet marketing can diminish radio's influence, but perhaps the greatest expectations have sprung from what would initially appear to be a bad omen. *Radio & Records* recently reported not only that country record sales have dipped 10 percent over the past few years, but in some

markets country radio's ratings have declined as much as 32 percent. Deep in what may be Nashville's darkest heart—the heart found in John Moffat's chest—the news brings a flicker of delight. The market is finally repudiating the apostate form of country music, Moffat argues. "You can feed people cotton candy for only so long before they demand meat." In anticipation of the resurrection, he has started up a publishing company whose name reflects Moffat's full disdain for Nashville's current penchant for conformity: Blithering Gibbon Productions.

The Bluebird Cafe is probably Nashville's most famous listening room, a venue for both established songwriters and the thousands of wannabes who come seeking their envisioned glory. Recently, singers from as far away as Great Britain and Australia cued up for the Monday night open mike lottery, hoping to be one of the thirty-five or so musicians chosen to play, and with any luck heard by an industry executive ready to offer a deal.

At the bar, a man identifying himself as Emmylou Harris' tour manager buys a large shot of tequila and a Corona beer, then leans against a nearby wall to make a well-received observation: "I could write a good song with those lyrics," he laughs, then begins reading from a sign posted on the wall—"According to the Surgeon General, women should not drink alcoholic beverages when pregnant..." Mark Skinner, a songwriter from Wilmington, North Carolina, recognizes this minor legend and tells him he wants to pitch a song to Emmylou.

At 42, Skinner is older than most of those present. He has paid his mortgage up a few months, explaining that his family bid him farewell by saying "Go get a hit, Daddy." This may be his last effort, and he realizes what he is up against. A song he might consider to have high artistic merit could be doomed by commercial standards, while a lesser song could serve as his economic salvation. While songwriters in other genres traditionally make a similar complaint—commercialism requires the lowest common denominator—Skinner echoes his peers by saying that country music is different. "You're

supposed to write from the heart. But this radio music is all cookie-cutter stuff."

Skinner is not chosen to perform tonight, but he is not discouraged. "I think a big change is coming," he says. "I have good songs. I want to be here when country music finds itself again." In that spirit he asks that I come outside, where he pulled an old Gibson from his van and limbered his fingers. If Shania Twain could play half so well, she wouldn't need to shake her tail a tenth as much. Or in a better world, anyway.

Then Skinner sang his song, a beautifully rendered story with all the right elements: longing, pain, a passing train—and not a smiley face in sight. ❀

Correspondence

(Continued from page 12)

around chatting up the opposition on the subject of wind chill factors is just not part of the process. Only someone who's never been there and done that could suggest otherwise.

Maybe the soccer team Hillary played on was the one Larry Lawrence put together to break the tedium on those long voyages to Murmansk.

— M. WOODS
South Hero, Vermont

Who's the Filthy Lunatic?

In your December 1997 issue, on page 8 (The Continuing Crisis), you made a "passing smear" at Mrs. Shirley Allen: "For five weeks, the heavily armed lunatic resisted both a barrage of pepper spray into her filthy domicile and the dreadful din of Barry Manilow being incessantly broadcast through bull horns..."

Fortunately, I have other sources of information. It was her family that wanted her mental health evaluated. (I understand that her husband of many years had recently passed away and, incredible as it may seem to you, people who are grief-stricken sometimes behave differently than normal.) The fact that her 47 acres of land contained two oil wells probably had nothing to do with her family's concern. Right?

The deputies came for her and she refused to go. They shot "tear gas" into her house and she shot her shotgun over their

heads. The state police arrived September 22 and the siege began. An attack dog was sent in after her and she wounded the animal. I believe that in most states you will find that it is lawful for a citizen to defend himself or herself against excessive force by law-enforcement personnel. Has *The American Spectator* ever heard of the right of self-defense?

You refer to her "filthy domicile." She was deprived of water, plumbing, food, electricity, heat, and she could not go outside. Try that yourself for five and a half weeks and see how clean your "domicile" remains....

This gutsy lady, alone, held off the forces of an increasingly oppressive state for five and a half weeks and you should have investigated her case instead of writing a glib and "witty" paragraph designed to provoke chuckles and scorn. You did not promote chuckles from me; you provoked disgust.

Shame on you!

—MICHAEL BARRERA
Miami, Florida

Hatch Once More

I raise neither a pitchfork nor a toast to David Brock for his not-so-gentle scolding of conservatives who grind their teeth over Senator Orrin Hatch ("The Real Orrin Hatch," *TAS*, November 1997). Is the senator an eloquent and normally reliable defender of conservative principles? Yes. A time-tested asset to the GOP and the nation? Absolutely. All too often hell-bent to sell his conservative birthright for a mess of pottage? Without question. Mr. Brock hints that because of the stellar nature of the first two qualities, conservatives should give Senator Hatch a pass on the third. Maybe, but not without first wanting to kick the dog and shout at the walls.

I cite, for example, a legislative catastrophe to which Mr. Brock devotes a single sentence. Mr. Hatch "played a key role" in inflicting the Americans With Disabilities Act on a nation too enchanted with the symbolic beauty of the ADA bottle to grasp the malevolence of the genie within. I shake my head in bewilderment when a Republican of Senator Hatch's credentials fails yet again to grasp the predictable effects of

handing a blunt instrument to the liberal troika of trial lawyers, federal judges, and bureaucrats. Disabilities ex nihilo, a phalanx of new victim groups, and even more imaginative and absurd class action suits are hardly the stuff to generate a warm glow of appreciation for the well-intentioned senator and his high-minded colleagues.

Mr. Brock appears to endorse Mr. Hatch's belief that pragmatic or "governing" conservatism requires varying degrees of compromise. True enough, but to what end? Many conservatives toiling in flyover country simply can't fathom why agreeing to a daily poke in the eye is the best outcome possible when dealing with the school bully. Must we applaud Mr. Hatch's ability to help tone down reprehensible bills into laws only slightly less awful? Should we be relieved that only most, rather than all, of Clinton's judicial nominees have been approved, thanks to Mr. Hatch and his GOP buddies? As these same judges rend the little remaining fabric of our Constitution over the next two or three decades (the true Clinton legacy), should we take solace in knowing that at least judicial vacancies were filled promptly while Mr. Hatch was on watch?

Too often our conservative leaders remind me of men who repeatedly gasp "So far, so good!" as they tumble from a highrise balcony. They ought to know better than to approach a railing where a Clinton, a Daschle, or a Gephardt stands waiting with the Cheshire grin of "bipartisanship."

My long and deep respect for Senator Hatch will always be tempered by the knowledge that he and too many of his GOP cohorts are maddeningly susceptible to the Kultursmog. I would kindly ask Mr. Brock's indulgence as I shout course corrections to the all-too-frequently misdirected captains of our GOP Congress.

—ALLEN W. MEIER, DDS
Hickam AFB, Hawaii

Letter Rip

An old college professor of mine once remarked that one of the side benefits of an education is that one learns to "cuss a fella' out" in words that are printable.

To this end I would like to compliment your magazine not only on the editorial commentary and great feature stories but also on the colorful and descriptive correspondence letters.

James Perry's letter describing Jeffere Bernard in your January issue exhibited the most creative and colorful lexicon that I have seen since the demise of *Spiral Agnew*. I laughed for a good solid five minutes as I pictured Mr. Perry venting with such creative artistry.

Jude Wanniski's letter in the same issue brought back some laughable moments from the Jerry "Moonbeam Brown Governorship Era. I was a university professor in California at the time and, along with thousands of other professors, was forced to go for several years without a cost of living raise, even though the inflation index was about 7.5 percent per annum. Mr. "Moonbeam" indicated to the teachers that they didn't need a raise, that teaching provided them with "psychic" pay. Well, when the next election came Mr. "Moonbeam" once again requested campaign contributions from the teachers, to which they promptly replied that they would instead provide "psychic" support.

—C. J. PLUNKETT
Black Rock, Arkansas

Show Them the Money

Don't believe Ze'ev Chafetz's snake oil ("Whose Country Is It?" by Tom Bethell *TAS*, January 1998). There is no secular versus religious divide in Israel. And there never has been. The secularist radical left attacks the orthodox only to drum up votes and diaspora money. The same is true of the orthodox parties: they only attack the far left to win votes for the next election. Each side is preaching to the choir.

Just as American leftists frequently portray each election victory for the right as a fundamentalist Christian conquest and the next step in abandoning the First Amendment, in Israel, the election of a right of center government with religious parties in the coalition is portrayed as the end of civilization. Of course, for the first forty years of Israeli history, the same religious parties were in Labor led governments. Then the left saw no threat to

humanity. But when the right formed its first government under Begin in 1977, the broke secular left found that portraying domestic rabbis as extremists was a sure opportunity for free media and Western think-tank funds. It's all just one big con. Don't be snookered by Ze'ev Chafets. If he didn't have the nonexistent secular/religious divide to write about in *Moment* and other American Jewish journals, he'd be just another out of work journalist. Not one national Israeli election has ever been influenced by this issue. Israeli governments have uniformly had religious parties as coalition partners. Only in the fantasies of former Americans like Chafets (why don't you ask *him* if he ever gave up U.S. citizenship? Now that would be investigative journalism!) and the *New York Times* editorial page is the alleged cultural divide a pressing issue.

The sad truth is not the differences between the far left and the religious right, but the extraordinary similarity. The far left still manages to extract state funds from the Israeli treasury to subsidize "kibbutzim." These failed businesses are a tremendous drain, morally and financially. The religious parties do the exact same: participation in the govern-

ment, at the expense of any political or moral principle, is the means to extract funds for favored yeshivas and seminaries. The drain on Israeli society is staggering. In large and influential segments of the religious community, accepting state subsidies for yeshiva studies has become a way of life that inhibits developing any marketable skills. Indeed, self-support is looked down on in some quarters. Thus has Israeli socialism, not unlike the American welfare state, made havoc on the left and right.

As for the peace process, as long as the U.S. government gets photo opportunities that are useful for the next domestic election, our government will continue the money spigot to Israel and the Palestinian Authority. And as long as the money spigot continues, the Israeli government will continue the peace process. On this point, Labor, Likud, and the religious parties are no different.

Just follow the money.

— SETH BARRETT TILLMAN
Brookline, Massachusetts

Stein Symposium

"I am telling you, if your parents are still living, honor them and cherish them,"

invokes Benjamin J. Stein threateningly ("Memories Are Made of This," *TAS*, January 1998).

Does this media star live such an existence that he is unfamiliar with children of parents who—as a result of emotional damage from, say, war—have had to learn to move forward only by separating themselves from toxic parents?

Maybe he doesn't see them from his perch as host, star, and pitchman. After all, Nielsen doesn't yet report unstable and soon-to-be unstable parent ratings. But I'm working on it.

Clear your eyes, Mr. Stein. Please.

— WILLIAM M. STERNBERG
New York, New York

Like many others, I enjoy Ben Stein's *Diary* (I overlook his occasional attacks on Michael Milken). Despite his undeniable intellect, I have noted his relative deficiency when it comes to scientific and technical matters. For example, in his January entry he implied, with apparent seriousness, that a nuclear power plant might explode. Mr. Stein, please note that it is physically impossible for a nuclear power plant to produce an atomic explosion. Who knows, this



JOHN SPRINGS

knowledge may help you one day on "Win Ben Stein's Money."

—N. STEPHAN KINSELLA
Houston, Texas

When asked why he worked on television, Malcolm Muggeridge once said it was like being a piano player in a whorehouse: once in a while he had a chance to play something beautiful that might edify his clients. Mr. Stein should not be too discouraged about being on "Politically Incorrect" (*TAS*, January 1998). In discussing critically the "self-evident truth" of overpopulation and the rapid depletion of the earth's resources, he might just have enlightened some viewers; for however short a time the media's monopolistic presentation of this issue was broken. No small accomplishment! So Mr. Stein take heart; the "dog fight" may not have been "a waste of your good time." Keep up the good work.

—ROY WIEBE
via the Internet

I have just finished reading a monstrosity of an opinion piece in today's (January 12, 1998) *USA Today* entitled "Calif. smoking ban clears air for rest of us." Shockingly, its author is none other than Ben Stein. Apparently, Stein is gleeful that California bar and restaurant owners no longer have the option to permit their patrons to smoke or not; instead, government has decided for them: smoking is bad, and entrepreneurial freedom (and the market) be damned.

Henry Waxman would be proud of his fellow Californian's political "growth." Is Stein making an early run at the 1998 "Strange New Respect" award?

—CRAIG MILES
Houston, Texas

P.S. You can tell Mr. Stein that I, too, detest cigarettes and cigarette smoke, but that, of course, is not the point.

As a regular reader of your magazine for several years I have the following question: What's the deal with Ben Stein?

In every entry of his diary he makes reference to having been recognized as a showbiz celebrity and what a lovefeast it was for all concerned. Most every issue we are treated to delightful little episodes

featuring his perfect boy, his perfect car, his perfect blah, blah, blah.

Am I missing something here? Is there some sort of post-modern irony or deep conservative-based figure satirizing the self regard and hyper-smugness of the degenerate Hollywood culture? Or what?

I know why I can't help reading him every month—he makes me so damn mad I can go without coffee for a couple of days. But what are other people getting out of this? I'd be curious to hear.

—LANE BINKLEY
Jersey City, New Jersey

Bury My Part

In "Murphy Brownout" (*TAS*, January 1998) Mark Steyn comments that "Murphy might yet become the first to put its lead character into the casket." Sorry, but that's been done. In the early 1970's, NBC introduced a show called "Nichols" starring the pre-"Rockford Files" James Garner. Garner played a laid-back, easy-going, nice guy sheriff named Nichols in a small western town also named Nichols. A few weeks into the series' first and only season, NBC apparently determined that a happy sheriff was going nowhere in the ratings so they had him shot and killed right on screen. His heretofore unacknowledged twin brother, also played by Garner, came into town to take over as sheriff, only this Nichols was a brooding tough guy with an attitude and a gun. He strongly resembled Garner's Wyatt Earp of "Hour of the Gun."

If Murphy Brown dies of breast cancer, she will be the second lead character to meet her demise. Ever conscious of the ratings, I'm sure the network has a plan to deal with this in all political correctness.

—ALBERT R. FREVELE, JR.
Vallejo, California

Name This Tune

I just had to send in a few comments regarding Anne Lewis's response to your January issue (Correspondence, *TAS*, February 1998). Oops, I spelled her name wrong. Contrary to Ms. Lewis's response, *TAS* never suggested that she was planning on leaving. You simply reported that she would "be moving on."

I suspect Harold Ickes was not planning on leaving either. Furthermore, she points out that her position at the White House was Director of Communications, not spokesperson. Although you never called her a spokesperson, I wish that she would have explained the difference between a spokesperson and Director of Communications. In my opinion, she sure acts like a spokesperson. And if the DNC did not like her before, just wait until they find out that she does not consider them to have even been a significant client. Finally, how do you like her new look? Is this the kinder, gentler Ann Lewis?

—JAY TOLAND
via the Internet

The Editors reply:

Any sister of Barney Frank is okay by us.

"Dear Bill & Hillary Bashers"

I didn't open your disgusting missive daring me to open it.

As a 100 percent Liberal Democrat since 1936 (my first voting year), I have no truck with the religious right—the conservative Reagan, Nixon, Dewey Republicans. We'd been 100 percent better off with Adlai Stevenson than with Eisenhower, in whose administration the "statesman" McCarthy flourished.

Do us all a favor and take my name off your mailing list.

—ARTHUR L. SADLER
*College of Wooster-Medica
Osterville, Massachusetts*

P.S. This letter reflects only my views, not the College of Wooster, whose student body wildly supported Alf Landon.

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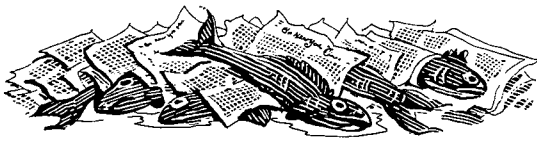
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USA Today

Ill-timed ponderings from Larry King, fox-hunter:

I'm afraid *The American Spectator's* movement to impeach the president will turn out to be a dog that won't hunt.

[JANUARY 12, 1998]

The Nation

John Leonard slips into his frilliest lingerie and commits literary criticism upon Toni Morrison, leaving no precious metaphor untapped:

So abundant, even prodigal, is Toni Morrison's first new novel since her Nobel Prize, so symphonic, light-struck and sheer, as if each page had been rubbed transparent, and so much the splendid sister of *Beloved*—she has even gone back to Brazil, not this time to see the three-spoke slave collar and the iron mouth-bit but to check out can-domblé—that I realize I've been holding my breath since December 1993. After such levitation, weren't all of us in for a fall? Who knew she'd use the prize as a kite instead of a wheelbarrow?

[JANUARY 26, 1998]

Nashville Banner

A carefully worded statement from Phyllis Warner of Nashville, Tennessee:

If Bill Clinton has an affair, that's his business. It might be that in his value system, aiding poor people around the world is more important than being faithful to his wife. So be it. If I were his wife, I would be honored. I really wouldn't mind sharing him with others.

If anyone needs to be impeached, it's the Republican Congress. It is trying to starve Americans and deprive them of health care. Only Bill Clinton has the courage to face and defeat these dangerous monsters. So shut up about the man's personal life! He's our only guard against becoming a totalitarian state.

[JANUARY 27, 1998]

San Francisco Weekly

In the City by the Bay, where local aesthetes grow blasé toward Monet after their first drug bust and towards the entire Renaissance after their respective sex changes, an announcement of a forthcoming event sure to tickle the afflatus:

Hasmat Alert: Nine artists examine how we continue to suffer from technology we originally created to help ourselves in the group show "Biohazard." Results include Stomach Acid Dream, painter Mia Brownell's series on synthetic food production and consumption created with symbolic and pop art imagery. Audible Mello Dronic Studio founder Cari Campbell, meanwhile, meditates on the way we sully our own air in a repetitive five-minute audio piece featuring the sounds of one person breathing interrupted by short blasts from aerosol spray cans.

[DECEMBER 3-9, 1997]

San Francisco Chronicle

The public-spirited Marion J. Woods finds still more work for Hillary Rodham Clinton in the twilight years of her estranged husband's administration:

I have been opposed to preferences all my life. The historical facts are that preferences for white men and their families have been the practice in America for 300 years. Affirmative action has been around for 30 years, but the problem of prejudice and discrimination continues to exist

We admit that affirmative action has its flaws and the best example of that is George Bush's affirmative action appointment of Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court. That was affirmative action at its worst.

We must begin to work on the white problem in America. Maybe the president should appoint a commission to study why white people are as they are. For how can we attack the so-called race problem in America if we continue to allow the white problem to persist?

[DECEMBER 20, 1997]

Washington Post

The Lover Boy President ingratiating himself to yet another authority figure and serving once again as a moral paragon to the Nation:

President Clinton would not respond to reporters' questions about the case of today citing an order issued by Judge Susan Webster Wright of Federal District Court to limit discussion of the case.

"You know, the judge asked us not to talk about it, and I think at least somebody involved in it ought to follow her instructions," Mr. Clinton said.

[JANUARY 20, 1998]

Chapel Hill Herald

Hagiolatrous blubbering from a Tar Heel columnist of rare libidinal dynamism:

All this talk about John F. Kennedy's sex life leaves me cold. None of it diminishes Kennedy's importance as the greatest leader of our time. All sorts of politicians have accomplished more in real terms, but none has ever made us feel the way Kennedy did. He appealed to all that was ennobling in the human spirit and he gave us a sense of strength and dignity, of greatness, that no other leader has in our time. Who knows? Maybe that was not in spite of but because of his healthy sexual appetite. We need to keep in mind that the most immoral president in history, Richard Nixon, never even took off his tie.

[DECEMBER 27, 1997]

News Journal

(Wilmington, Delaware)

A great Delaware daily rises to the defense of its favorite son and of the money changers in the local temple, slandering a new organ whose only vice is Truth:

With the magazine's usual scorn for liberals, the arch-conservative *American Spectator* this month slays Joe Biden as "The Senator From MBNA."

Delaware's Democratic senator has cozied up to MBNA Corp., Biden's leading