

New York Times

Tammany is restored! The incomparable *Times* endorses Hillary, noting her record as a bully, a liar, a corrupt fundraiser, and a stonewaller—in sum: possessed of all the political talents necessary for honest graft:

The hesitancy among some voters, however, has been understandable, and we share some of those concerns. Her health care task force failed to deliver the promised reform. The investigative literature of Whitewater and related scandals is replete with evidence that Mrs. Clinton has a lamentable tendency to treat political opponents as enemies. She has clearly been less than truthful in her comments to investigators and too eager to follow President Clinton's method of peddling access for campaign donations. Her fondness for stonewalling in response to legitimate questions about financial or legislative matters contributed to the bad ethical reputation of the Clinton administration.

[OCTOBER 22, 2000]

New York Times

Professor Sean Wilentz—he who would be A. Schlesinger—proffers still more proof that the letters-to-the-editor page is a paradise for cranks:

In his acceptance speech, George W. Bush joked about George Washington—"or, as his friends called him, George W." (transcript, Aug. 4). For a self-declared patriot and would-be president, Governor Bush had better bone up on his American history.

Washington was famous for his stern public bearing and punctilious manners. Had anyone, even a friend, ever called him "George W."—or, as the candidate pronounced it, "George Dubya"—the august general would have cut him dead with a dignified glare.

—SEAN WILENTZ
Princeton, N.J.

[AUGUST 5, 2000]

Rolling Stone

Another unfortunate misunderstanding leaves Vice President Al-Gore, Campaign 2000's intellectual colossus, sounding like a hansdoodle. Asked by RS where he was when he heard of the death of "Lennon," surely the Vice President of the United States thought his interviewer was referring to Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich. From St. Albans to Harvard to the Temple of Buddha, Al-Gore walks with giants:

I was at home, in Arlington, Virginia, and it was just devastating. Because it was not only the loss of a great man, it was the loss of a true genius. And I have to say that I'm sure that I'm not the only one who felt the loss of all the music that he had yet to write. The loss of any chance the Beatles would come back together and bring us a new sensibility, from the standpoint of that incredible gestalt that they had.

[NOVEMBER 9, 2000]

Washington Post Book World

And while on the subject of the great Vladimir Ilyich, a Professor Lars T. Lih reviews Robert Service's biography of the great musician and erupts into moral idiocy:

Service also treats the key question of Lenin and violence in superficial fashion. Service is shocked by Lenin's belief in the use of state-administered mass violence to achieve political ends. Do only totalitarian dictators believe this? No: The most admired 20th-century political leaders—Churchill, say, or Roosevelt—not only believed the same thing but are celebrated for it. What is the difference between them and Lenin? Mainly this: He believed in the legitimacy of class war while they believed in the legitimacy of national war. For a political end such as the defeat of Nazism or Imperial Japan, most of us accept mass violence and the death of innocent people as a justified means.

[OCTOBER 15, 2000]

Cape Cod Times

Another Olympian feat—the idealist columnist Miss Susan Reimer adduces evidence that athletes at the Sydney Games engaged in 70,000 acts of sexual congress with strangers, or the large water-balloon fight of all time:

The most remarkable statistic to come out of the Sydney Olympics? Not the 15 world records that fell during a furious week of swimming. Not the ratings for NBC's telecast, lowest in 32 years.

Instead, it was the fact that 70,000 condoms were distributed in the Olympic Village. In fact, Ansell International, which supplied free condoms, had to make an emergency supplemental shipment of 20,000 before the games ended.

The most wonderful surprise at the Sydney Games was not the upset of Russian wrestling champion Alexander Karelin, undefeated in 13 years, by American farm boy Rulon Gardner.

It was the fact that so many young people believe in using condoms.

The biggest shock was not the gold medal victory of the American baseball team, not the first Olympic loss ever by the U.S. men swimmers in the 4x100 relay and not Norway's victory over the World Cup champion U.S. women's soccer team.

And it was not that some of the 10,000 robust young athletes living in the cloistered quarters of the Olympic Village found the opportunity for sex. It was that they had protected sex.

The most uplifting message to the youngsters watching the Olympics was not found in the profiles of athletes who have overcome great heartbreak or great hardship to earn a place on an Olympics team nor in Cathy Freeman's win in the 400-meter race.

It was the unspoken lesson that all those physically gifted young men and women were smart enough to protect their future and their lives by using condoms during sex.

[OCTOBER 9, 2000]

The Great Books Series

an aesthetic milestone—the Hon. Bill Bradley establishes communication with he Johannes Brahms of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania:

This personal commitment to racial unity filled my Senate years with purpose.... In 1992, on the day after the Rodney King verdict, which exonerated white police officers who had beaten King and been caught on video doing it, I gave a speech in the Senate calling the acquittal of his attackers a travesty of justice. At one point in the speech, I stopped talking and simply lit my lectern fifty-six times to symbolize the blows King had received at the hands of members of the Los Angeles Police Department. Afterward, the predictable happened—I got a lot of hate mail. But among the positive letters was one from a man in Philadelphia who told me he had written a symphony called 56 Blows in honor of my speech.

[from: *The Journey From Here*,
by Bill Bradley.
Artisan, 166 pages, \$18]

Salon

Prof. Todd Gitlin of New York University and alumnus of the Summer of Love beholds Governor George W. Bush and is beset with grim visions of Governor Ronald W. Reagan circa 1980. Happy Days are here again:

For anyone with an open eye and ear, Al Gore revealed himself to be an intelligent, thorough and confident figure who one could imagine—without much difficulty—mastering the Oval Office. And George W. Bush revealed himself to be a shambling, evasive babblers. Now it's evident that there are a substantial number of Americans, especially in the contested states, who want their president stupid. If there are enough of those people, then Bush won his debate by losing it, by demonstrating his hapless incompetence and almost daffy incapacity. If the majority of the American public is unstampeded by the argument that this empty-headed jokester is a "uniter and not a divider," then they will see that Al Gore is up to the task of governing, and W. should return to running ball teams, especially with public subsidy.

I'm aghast at the shallowness and sheer incompetence of the man. I was trying to figure out how he could have been so dopey, and I'm wondering if he got some disturbing news or a punch in the head before the debate, because he struck me as surprisingly feeble and diminished. He couldn't budge from his script, and he seemed like a drugged Stepford husband.

That this man could be close to the presidency is appalling beyond words. How any serious person could find him persuasive is beyond me. I think the mindless repetition of Republican pieties is what he has to offer. And if there are enough Republicans out there who think intoning "tax and spend, tax and spend" is the answer to the problems of the modern world, then Bush wins. And God help us all.

[OCTOBER 18, 2000]

The Nation

Once again the venerable *Nation* plays liberalism's historic role of the forlorn truth seeker, against the mob. Once the beneficiary was Alger Hiss, perjurer, this time Bill Clinton, perjurer.

The six-year investigation of an obscure Arkansas land deal that occurred fifteen years before the Clintons arrived at the White House is indeed over. But it ended not with a bang or even a whimper but, appropriately enough, with a five-page press release from special prosecutor Robert Ray. Bottom line: The evidence is insufficient to show criminal wrongdoing by President Clinton or First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Whatever the First Couple's duck-and-cover games, they pale beside the huge partisan blasts of the ultraright Clinton-haters, which were accorded respectability by the Congressional Republicans. We can expect no regrets or self-scrutiny from the latter. Well aware that the voters are sick of the whole thing, they have flushed impeachment down the Orwellian memory hole. It was not even mentioned at their convention, where the Henry Hydes and Bob Barrs were kept out of sight like the crazy uncle in the attic. George W. Bush had no comment on the Ray report.

Minimal decency would suggest that those who committed oceans of ink and eons of airtime to premature conviction

of the President and the First Lady would now confess error or at least tip their journalistic hats to Joe Conason, Gene Lyons, Lars-Erik Nelson and the handful of others who turned out to be right after all.

[OCTOBER 16, 2000]

New York Times

Another example of that revelatory imbecility that Tom Wolfe calls the Aha! Phenomenon, a flash of insight that hits the dumbfounded recipient, and everything else falls into place, in this case, the wrong place:

The unconscious actions of the presidential nominees in Tuesday night's debate may tell us more than their stated positions.

During the debate George W. Bush consistently called women—and a black man—by their first names. When answering a white man, however, he used "sir."

Al Gore never used first names when responding to questions, preferring, if anything, more formal forms of address.

While Mr. Bush may assert that it is part of his folksy style, I wonder if his use of language highlights a patronizing attitude toward women and black men but a serious attitude toward white men.

—ROY R. ROBSON
Philadelphia

[OCTOBER 19, 2000]

www.spectator.org

R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.'s
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John Corry's At Large

Wlady Pleszczynski's
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Jackie Mason &
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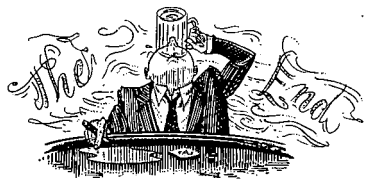
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The Pope, Politics, and Christmas

PROSPECTS FOR A MERRY CHRISTMAS IN St. Peter's Square dimmed a bit at news that Jörg Haider would be bringing the tree. A visit by the Austrian politician infamous for his praise of the Third Reich is bound to recall the Pope's meetings in the late 80's with Austrian President Kurt Waldheim (veteran of a German army unit that committed atrocities in World War II). This year's encounter may be even more embarrassing to the Holy See; Haider is not a head of state, nor is he known to be especially religious. Yet there was no diplomatic way for the Vatican to back out. It accepted the pledge of a tree from the province of Carinthia, which Haider governs, back in 1997—long before his party joined the Austrian government, bringing on sanctions from the rest of the European Union. For the governor, of course, the trip to Rome is a magnificent chance to claim international respectability.

CHRISTMAS TREES ARE TRADITIONAL rallying points for politicians, and not just in Europe. Every December the president of the United States lights the National Christmas Tree on the Ellipse in Washington. Even in this secular age, no one seems much bothered by the chief magistrate of the Republic associating himself, however indirectly, with religion. The Tannenbaum's origins lie in German paganism (as a winter symbol of immortality), but it's safe to say that most citizens take it as an emblem of Christianity's inescapable holiday. If I were an American Muslim or Jew, I think I would feel at least slightly estranged by the spectacle.

HISTORICALLY, THOUGH, IT'S NOT JEWS, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, or members of any other faith who've had the most problem with Christmas. It's Christians themselves. Many early Protestants rejected the holiday not only because it coincided with the ancient Roman feast of Saturnalia—and occasioned gluttony, drunkenness, and debauchery in the best pagan tradition—but because it overshadowed Sunday, the only festival they deemed divinely ordained. Making the Yuletide gay in Calvin's Geneva could get you fined or imprisoned. Puritan England under Oliver Cromwell outlawed Christmas along with its traditional foods. (I like to imagine the seventeenth-century equivalent of a dope dealer peddling mincemeat pie and plum porridge on a London street corner.) Anti-Christmas sentiment prevailed along with Nonconformism in some of England's American colonies, including Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania; whereas the southern colonies under Anglican domination kept up the "Popish" tradition. It was only in the late nineteenth century, as immigra-

tion made the United States an increasingly Catholic country that the 25th of December became the truly national observance it is today. (I stole most of these facts from Christmas.com, an attractive and well-organized Website with information on how the day is marked around the world.)

SOME CHRISTIANS ARE STILL NOT reconciled to Christmas. A quick Internet search turns up an array of sites attacking the holiday on the basis of scripture and theology. One I found concludes a generally sober and learned disquisition with this blatant inaccuracy: "Christmas remains a monument to the superstition of the Church of Rome. If anyone doubts this proposition, he may turn on a television and watch the Papal Mass on Christmas Eve; the Pope struts around the altar, chants the prescribed words, and holds up the elements so they may be adored by a fawning multitude." Now I doubt that Pope John Paul II has ever strutted anywhere, certainly not in church; but in any case the ailing pontiff won't be doing so this year. He walks slowly and with an effort painful to watch. No one whose heart isn't wholly poisoned against him for sectarian or political reasons can fail to admire his fortitude and manifest love for his flock. Notwithstanding the recent contretemps over a Vatican document stating that churches not in communion with Rome are "not Churches in the proper sense," this pope has presided over unprecedented strides toward Christian unity. (To those who regard the pope as the Antichrist, of course, unity with Rome isn't anything to be thankful for.)

I REMEMBER WATCHING MIDNIGHT mass at St. Peter's, on the TV at my grandmother's house, when I was eleven or twelve years old. I can't remember being terribly interested. It was only six in the afternoon where we were, which robbed the event of much of its drama. I might have been more excited by the sort of New Year's Eve party the pope threw last year to usher in the third millennium. There was a rock concert the first ever in St. Peter's Square, featuring the clean-cut, conservative singer Claudio Baglioni. Some 120,000 showed up to hear the music, watch the fireworks, and hear John Paul's greeting, which he delivered from a window in the apostolic palace above the square: "A happy new year to everyone in the light which shines out from Bethlehem upon the whole universe." More than his words, it was the mere presence of the man, one of the great leaders of the century just ended, that for a brief moment revived Rome's ancient claim to be the center of the civilized world. ❧