

termination of whether a law affecting property rights has “substantially advanced” legitimate state interests. The majority in *Santa Monica Beach* denied the apartment owner his opportunity to show at trial that the rent control law didn’t satisfy this standard.

The U.S. Supreme Court will have the final word in this case, as in *Thomas v. Anchorage Equal Rights Commission*, because rights protected by the U.S. Constitution are at stake. As property rights expert Ronald Zumbun points out, *Santa Monica Beach* “is the latest in a series of anti-private rights decisions by California’s High Court, which consistently has failed to follow strict guidelines for evaluating takings claims set down

by the U.S. Supreme Court over the past 12 years.” The California Supreme Court cannot usurp the supremacy of federal law by resorting to “independent state grounds” under the California Constitution, as it did in the parental consent case. The lengthy and eloquent dissents of Baxter, Chin, and Brown increase the likelihood that the U.S. Supreme Court will grant review. If so, you can bet that we’ll hear from the “people’s lawyer,” who will undoubtedly support Mosk’s ruling. After all, tenants living in rent controlled apartments in Santa Monica are just his kind of people. Apartment owners, parents, Christians, and other politically incorrect Californians are not.

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THE MIDNIGHT ECONOMIST

Saving us from *Saving Private Ryan*

A harrowing pornography of carnage and gore, burdened with inaccuracies and portrayed by its authors as an anti-war message movie — no wonder Siskel and Ebert loved it.

W I L L I A M R . A L L E N

I AM NOT an official movie critic. I could not hope to match the wit and wisdom, the sophistication and erudition of Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert. But that does not mean I am not critical of movies and of the geniuses who make them.

The Motion Picture Establishment has much difficulty in finding good stories to tell and in telling them well. This includes war stories. One can feel unclean in watching precious, pampered, pretty boys of Hollywood play soldier. Feelings of wariness and misgiving can be engendered even by such talkie icons as Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks and their *Saving Private Ryan*.

Ryan is a striking product which has strained the vocabularies of reviewers. The picture tells us of “patriotism, shock and horrific sacrifice.” It is “a bravura visual achievement” with “the terrifying, furious immediacy of its battles,” “an unfashionably wrenching spectacle.” Audiences were not attracted by promises of subtle insightfulness; it was not interpretation of vexing philosophical conundrums they sought, even if Siskel and Ebert profess to be intrigued by undistinguished dia-

logue about how men can be induced to kill other men. Customers were lured to the theater with promises of seeing arms and heads blown off and entrails spilled; presumably they were not disappointed. And, once there, they could watch a German bayonet pressed slowly into the chest of an American.

Why this harrowing pornography of mayhem, savagery, carnage, shock, and gore as setting to tell a quixotic story poorly? Not commercialism, Mr. Spielberg says, for he supposed that the ghastly orgy would not “be tolerable to audiences.” (In supposedly supportive analysis, Mr. Hanks observes: “This film is not like a big blanket that is palpable to everybody.”) He assures us of nobler motives — and of great surprise that it has brought in so much money. His movie was to be a (largely unwatched) memorial to veterans of his father’s generation by being the very first to show combat as it is. So now, after 6,000 years of recorded bloody human history, finally an honest movie establishes the fact that war is hell.

But memorials and history lessons are best based scrupulously on accurate accounts. An entertainer can reasonably assume some marginal fictional license, but it is awkward to claim while doing so high seriousness of pur-

William R. Allen, now guarding the gate from the vantage point of the UCLA Department of Economics, won World War II with very little help from Hollywood.

pose and refined respect for depicting historical truth.

We find, along with various other peculiarities, a captain (with conspicuous insignia of rank) leading a small patrol to seek a private whose paratrooper unit, in historical accuracy, had been dropped in an area far away in a different sector; the members of the patrol bunched together and loudly conversing like Boy Scouts hiking in open ground to a picnic behind enemy lines; and the intrepid leader taking the initiative on two occasions to flaunt orders by the Chief of Staff (!) not to jeopardize the mission by engaging the enemy.

In a grossly discordant grace note, the aging rescued Ryan asks at the end of the picture if he has been “a good man” in the half century after the heroics. We may hope so, for, from his own account in a heart-warming eve-of-battle reminiscence, he and his brothers had been repulsive and unrepentant hellions.

It may be unrealistic to suppose that any movie will be highly significant either as sophisticated memorial or profound history. Even feelings of patriotism engendered in the audience comfortably nibbling on popcorn and Milk Duds will be shallow. As commentator John Gregory Dunne has put it: “... bravery in combat has been extolled as the *sine qua non* of patriotism. It is not. Patriotism is the acquired devotion to an abstraction — the nation — while bravery under fire is personal and instinctive.”

And what are the ruminations of Mr. Hanks on why *Ryan* was made and what it means? Well, the post-1945 world is different and less clear-cut. “... all of us could project ourselves very easily back into that sort of [World War II] mind-set There is something comforting and easy and secure about knowing who the bad guys are and who they aren’t. We simply don’t have this any more.” This combination of words suggests that he is not sure that the United States should have been supported in Korea, Vietnam, and the Gulf. Now, many of us have raised questions as to *whether* we should have been on all those battlefields, *how* we happened to get there, and, after arriving, *how* the battle should have been conducted. But only a Hollywoodian philosopher could doubt that North Korea, the Viet Cong, China, and Saddam Hussein were genuine enemies, powerful forces of evil who wished us great ill.

A FINAL APPROACH to the significance of the movie is provided by historian Stephen Ambrose. Books compiled by Mr. Ambrose supplied much of the raw material for *Ryan*, and he participated in a reception prior to the mo-

vie premier. “I think it’s a good thing,” he told a reporter, “that the American people have a look at what war is. I think they’d be a little more hesitant to send the kids off.” So now *Ryan* is an educational anti-war picture. *Ryan* has its setting in World War II, the subject of much of Mr. Ambrose’s work. If we had foreseen the full horrors of Guadalcanal and Schweinfurt and Normandy and the Bulge and Iwo Jima, would we have sat out World War II? Would we have been wise to do so?

A parallel has been suggested between *Ryan* and the book (1928) and the movie (1930), *All Quiet on the Western Front*. This raises two points.

FIRST, WHAT is the *likely influence* of such books and movies? *All Quiet* did not handicap Adolf Hitler. Indeed, to the extent that the famous novel and the acclaimed movie had influence, they played into Mr. Hitler’s hands — as did the “ever-shameful” (Winston Churchill) Oxford Union pledge of 1933, “That this House refuses in any circumstances to fight for King and Country.” (Mr. Churchill later noted: “Little did the foolish boys who passed the resolution dream that they were destined quite soon to conquer or fall gloriously in the ensuing war, and prove themselves the finest generation ever bred in Britain.”) Evidently, Mr. Hitler was convinced, with reason, that the cowardly, decadent democracies would not stand up to him, or, if they did, they would do so only ineffectually. Mr. Churchill was in despair through the 1930s, for fear that this contemptuous assessment was correct.

Second, do we *want* “the kids” and their parents to be utterly frozen in fear? I stand in little need of persuasion of the gruesome and devastating waste of war. Economists do not like waste — but they understand that achieving goals entails the bearing of costs and the paying of prices. Only pacifists refuse to fight at any time under any circumstances. We wish that wise statesmen appropriately avoid war. But if a Neville Chamberlain (who was decent but commonly not very wise) fails, we had better hope that a Winston Churchill (who was decent and generally very wise) is available. If, through our bumbling or the belligerence of others, the trumpet sounds, then we must call upon our boys and young men to do their duty well, as the boys and young men of preceding generations have done.

I doubt that that expectation can be significantly nourished by the likes of *Saving Private Ryan*. Mr. Spielberg and Mr. Hanks bear little resemblance to Mr. Churchill.

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More moderate than thee

Editorialists urge 'moderation'; special interests await pay-offs; liberals yank left; and conservatives wait to pounce — Gray Davis should deliver us an interesting several years.

T I M W . F E R G U S O N

CALIFORNIA'S FREE-SPIRITED capitol press corps has reached another near-unanimous verdict, that Gray Davis is one moderate fellow. The *Los Angeles Times* editorialized that he'd better be, lest those Demo partisans who now rule the Legislature (most of them from the LA area endorsed by the yin-yang *Times*) go on a spending spree. Journalistic den mother Sherry Bebitch Jeffe assured us on the paper's op-ed pages that the Dems are too politically smart to "throw themselves off the deep end." Besides, as the *San Francisco Examiner* and others complained, "Davis will be hamstrung" by the 25 percent reduction in the vehicle tax that Pete Wilson (really, Tom McClintock) got enacted — "a tax cut that will cost the state \$1 billion this year." More, if we're lucky!

So is the guv as Gray as they say? Well, with every scribe but Dan Walters giving him a honeymoon, he was whatever you wanted him to be. He let a reformed murderer fry in the Big House, so we can erase those Dan Lungren ads about Rose Bird from our minds. He did a dance of wills with the teacher union on accountability. Same with the state employees clamoring for a big raise. So there were early reasons to hold right-wing fire.

Of course, he does have interest groups to attend to. The *LA Times* noted that Democrats were 16 years behind in their judicial appointments. (Davis won't name "ideological crusaders," an adviser said.) Latinas in the Legislature want more public spending on their sisters' health care. And the gays want same-sex benefits and marriage rites. Illegal immigrants will get the prenatal care that the nasty Wilson took away. Welfare recipients got a small "raise." Organized labor will turn back the clock on mandatory overtime pay. The trial lawyers want freedom from caps on damage awards. The public-works lobby demands \$16 billion in transit bonds. The enviros got their favorite, Mary Nichols, in as Resources secretary, and Jose Medina, a San Francisco supervisor

with no background in transportation, was named to head Caltrans as a favor to Willie Brown. (Credit Scott Winokur of the hometown *Examiner* with a nice column explaining the machinations of that deal.)

The savvy left, which knows the real score, is going to try to force Davis into something meaningful: attacking Proposition 13 for a honey pot of revenue. The *LA Weekly's* Harold Meyerson was quick off the ball on that one. It's going to be an interesting several years. The press room may have trouble keeping its story straight.

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On the silly side of the Mall, there's a horse race for vacuous self promotion between reigning champion Kathleen Connell, the re-elected state controller, and Phil Angelides, the new treasurer. Angelides-elect wasted no time in burning reporters' fax machines with a self-important pronouncement on his 19-person "transition team"; an advisory of the swearing in of "the first Sacramento native elected to statewide office since Hiram Johnson"; a letter to Gray Davis advising him on how to revise the state budget, and a scroll of "second phase" appointees of such merit that they included, as the new executive director of the School Finance Authority, the Southern California head of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League. (She's obviously qualified to solve the classroom crowding problem.) This tinhorn pain in the tush may soon wear out his welcome even among his fellow earnest liberals in the media.

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Los Angeles experienced a serious dust storm for several weeks as publications local and national called into question the work of Marxist pseudo-historian Mike Davis. He's been the toast of the literary establishment for his books *City of Quartz* and *Ecology of Fear*, which paint LA not as a bustling center of multi-ethnic entrepreneurship but as a cauldron of racial and class warfare and a particularly egregious rapist of

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