

The Front Line

(Continued from page 5)

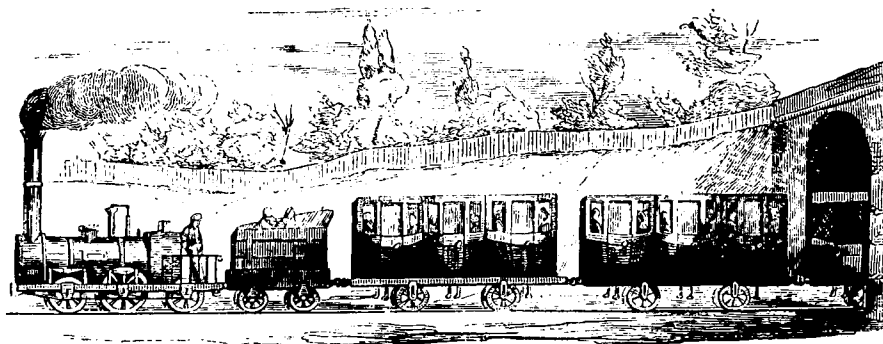
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There are no short-term solutions. A centralized California GOP grassroots effort, which the Lungren campaign at least began to try to create in 1998, is unwieldy, especially in such a large and diverse state, and it increases local resentment. Decentralization, with central support by the California Republican Party's "Technology Project" (computers, databases, and soft-

ware were given to selected counties during the 1998 election) was a useful move toward localization. But it would be greatly enhanced if long-term field staff were on the ground in these counties for at least one full cycle to secure for the young permanent organizations a firm foundation.

Republican elected officials should take political "ownership" of their geographic turf, particularly now that GOP legislation is not boiling on Sacramento's front burner. They will have a greater impact on policy later if they imitate Democrats now by spending additional time concentrating rebuilding local political infrastructure.

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Correspondence

(Continued from page 27)

argue your position after it has been challenged. The Party needs more like you. You say, regarding abortion, that the issue "has reached a point where it can no longer be rationally addressed by any sector." This, of course, is the objective of the left for every issue. They did regarding Vietnam, nuclear weapons, the Cold War, Ronald Reagan's suitability for any office whatever, the war on poverty, Proposition 13, tax cuts, budgets cuts, regulation, and above all anything remotely having to do with race — the very affirmative action and bilingual education you point to as areas we should address.

Not long ago (and still in many Republican circles) it was simply unthinkable to contest the conventional wisdom on

these issues. Thank God Ward Connerly, Glynn Custred, Ron Unz and a relatively few others ignored the conventional wisdom.

And Ronald Reagan ignored it when in 1982 he said: "Simple morality dictates that unless and until someone can prove the unborn human is not alive, we must give it the benefit of the doubt and assume it is. And, thus, it should be entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Can we not rationally discuss the issue along these lines? And to Hell with the left-wing clowns who want to intimidate us out of our role as sentient beings.

And anyway, the point is not to find an issue to ride into office, but to find an office to ride to better times regarding issues. The GOP has allowed the tail of elections to wag the dog — issues — to so great an extent, it is all but irrelevant to average voters. CPR

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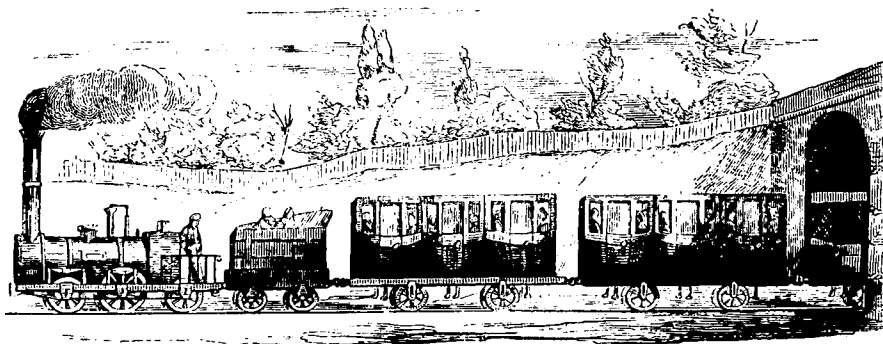
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ARTS & CULTURE



C R I T I C U S

Christened on Tuesday

B Y G . B . T E N N Y S O N

*Solomon Grundy,
Born on a Monday,
Christened on Tuesday ...
— Anonymous*

AND WHAT is your Christian name?" asked an Oxford college recording clerk of the American exchange student. "Well, er, I don't have one. I'm not Christian." "Come, come," said the clerk. "Everyone has a Christian name. What do they call you?" "Noah." "Ah, you see. As I thought." Then writing in the register and speaking mostly to himself, the clerk, said, "Yes: surname Greenberg, Christian name, Noah."

Our hypothetical student could just as easily have been named Thomas Williams or William Watt and yet have offered a similar answer. Noah, Thomas, and William can perhaps be forgiven for lack of familiarity with the still current English term "Christian name," as it has not been used in this country outside of parish registers for several generations. Americans say, as essentially do the French (*prénom*) and Germans (*Vorname*),

G.B. Tennyson addresses students by their surnames in the English Department at UCLA. His latest book, A Barfield Reader, was published in January by the Wesleyan University Press.

simply "first name" or, less often, "given name." Americans have also largely lost the word "surname," using instead "last name," or, less often, "family name." Criticus likes to attribute all this, as he does everything he disapproves of, to ignorance, stupidity, malice, and general apostasy. In retaliation, he has long enjoyed tormenting students by asking them to provide a surname rather than accepting "I'm Kaitlyn" or "I'm Mike," for Criticus is one of those dinosaurs who still address students as Mr. or Miss followed by the surname. Once a Mike innocently replied, in the spirit of the exchange student, "But I'm not a 'Sir.'" To be sure

The evanescence of the term "surname" doubtless falls under the categories of ignorance and stupidity, but the disappearance of the term "Christian name" doubtless stems from the malice of those who have banned religion from public life and the apostasy or quiet falling away from belief of all the rest. For, even prior to the current widespread veneration of the idea of diversity, the linkage between a given name and the source of it, namely the christening ceremony, had been lost. "Name this Child," reads the Prayer Book baptismal service, at which point the godparents (yes) provide a name. And in earlier times this ceremony would most often occur on the third day after birth.

The third-day tradition is how the birthdates of such as Shakespeare were inferred, there being no specific, independent record of his birth. And the names were indeed *Christian* names as sanctioned by the Church. Now the names are recorded at the hospital, passed on to state authorities, and the christening, if any, will take place later, probably very much later. As for the names, well, they have changed too.

CONSIDER THE following: Coleman, Connor, Grant, Hayes, Hunter, Mason, Morgan, Ryan, Tyler, Wade, Wilson, Wyatt. What do these all have in common? You may well answer: they are all surnames or last names. True enough. But they are all also "Christian" names, given names, first names. That can no doubt be accommodated into your thinking. But the further and rather more surprising fact is that half of them belong to girls, and I defy any reader to choose which ones. All of these names have been bestowed on children five years of age and younger, all known, more or less, to Criticus himself. That is to say, Criticus has encountered these names in the past few months among relatives and acquaintances and a nursery school enrollment register. Of course, this also means that all of these names are being carried about by members of the well-to-do white middle class. But what does it all tell us?

In the first instance, the popularity of any given name is a function of shifting trends and fashions, even when the shifts were among the more traditional names. Saints, biblical figures, kings and queens, lords and ladies, characters in tales and legends, adventurers and courtesans all might influence the popularity of names during earlier periods. In more recent times, public figures of every sort — military leaders, entertainers, professional athletes, miscellaneous celebrities, rock stars, rogues, barmaids, and such like — would contribute to the rise and fall in popularity of certain first names. To say nothing of sheer zany invention, such as the late Frank Zappa's naming his hapless children Moon Unit and Dweezil. At the same time, the old standards usually held their ground. But in America some things new have entered the mix, at least

among the white middle class.

One somewhat new thing is the increasing use of surnames as first names. This is not absolutely new and not solely American. The British deride it as peculiar to the United States, but one need not look far to find examples in the United Kingdom, though there it tends to be more upper-class than middle. A certain celebrated Poet Laureate named his first son Hallam because of his reverence for the memory of his college friend who died young and became the subject of the poet's *In Memoriam*, namely, Arthur Henry Hallam. Subsequently there was a great grandson of the Laureate also named Hallam, which does seem to be overdoing it. The guilty parties' surname was Tennyson. Then there is the case of P.G. Wodehouse, which is shorthand for Pelham Grenville. Now we know why some folk use initials. Still, the surname as first name has reached its greatest vogue in the United States. America has had presidents first-named Millard, Rutherford, Grover, and Woodrow (and two borderline cases named Franklin), all of them born in the

nineteenth century, not to mention that other (regional) American president with the first name of Jefferson. The South has generally been more given to the use of surnames as first names than most other sections (Meriwether Lewis, Wade Hampton, Ross Perot) but the practice can be found throughout the country (Washington Irving, Sinclair Lewis, Rockwell Kent). It probably emerged for dynastic reasons, that is, to establish connection with a related, usually the mother's, family, a practice more common yet in middle names where it continues to abound nationwide. To move a family name to first name status may also have been a way to avoid the cumbersomeness of hyphenation, so much favored over the centuries by Europeans (and pretentiously by American female athletes and professional women in the present). The European practice tends to lead to some weighty names (de la Motte-Fouqué, von Droste-Hülshoff, von Thurn und Taxis), and in some extreme instances to triple hyphenation (the much loved von Saxe-Coburg-Gotha), or by a further convolution to double but unhyphenated surnames, as in Lloyd Weber or Parker Bowles. Criticus once encoun-



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tered a triple unhyphenated surname but it has been lost in the dark backward and abysm of time.

ALL OF the above, however, is but an intensification of established albeit uncommon practice. Moreover, many surnames were themselves originally Christian names, but until lately time and convention have operated to separate them. What seems truly new is the unisex character of the current wave of surnames as given names. It is not absolutely clear how this fad got underway. A probable influence is the increasing frequency of surnames as first names among actresses. Even Criticus, who tries to keep his mind unspotted from such ephemera, can think of actresses with first names like Cameron, Hunter, Lindsay, Meredith, Morgan, and Tatum. No doubt there are many others. Even were these all what they used to call stage names, the choice of surnames as first names tells us something about contemporary mores and points to a future that is already here. It is one thing, and often an engaging thing, to have men going about with names that sound like Confederate officers, especially when they are little boys wearing tricorne hats and brandishing toy sabres at birthday parties, as Criticus recently witnessed. It is quite another to have women going about with the same names.

Criticus believes that the hidden culprit in all this confusion is nothing less than the feminist in the woodpile. While there are surely cases of surname-as-first-name women before the women's movement, they are relatively infrequent. Do not cite Her Grace the Duchess of Kent, who goes by the name of Princess Michael: she took on that name on her own, perhaps to obscure the fact that she was the daughter of a German general and had a predictably German general's daughter's name, which, however, I have forgotten — Irmgard? Helga? As Bob Dole would say, Whatever. It does seem perverse of her to have taken the same Christian name as her husband, thus giving us Prince Michael and Princess Michael, which sounds like a marriage made in *La Cage aux Folles*. And cite not the authoresses Clemence Dane and Radclyffe Hall: the first was a pseudonym, the second the suppression of a Christian name, Marguerite, in favor of a middle

name. (I omit George Eliot because she chose an unmistakably masculine pseudonym, not a surname-as-first name; but I do look with deep disfavor upon Currier, Ellis, and Acton Bell, surnames-as-first-names and

pseudonyms adopted for a time by the Brontë triad.) No, the proliferation of females with surname-as-first names looks suspiciously like part of the vast feminist left-wing conspiracy to convince little girls that they should abandon Barbie for GI Joe and the doll house for the mud puddle so they can be like little boys.

Generally pessimistic, Criticus nevertheless sees a ray or two of sunshine behind this cloud and is a bit doubtful that this latest assault on human nature will really work. What is more likely to happen is what has happened in the past whenever a boy's name has been bestowed upon girls. A Gresham's law comes into play. Consider, for example, the fate of such as Beverly, Evelyn, Hilary, Marion, and Shirley, all in the past masculine names. Once they were transferred to girls, they ceased being assigned to boys. Somewhat later Leslie and Robin suffered a similar fate, though the British strove for a

time to distinguish a feminine Lesley and a feminine Robyn from the traditionally spelled male names. It never caught on in the colonies. And one can see why. Quite apart from the American tendency to spell names every which way, thus obscuring any male-female distinction, unisex names are simply confusing. When Evelyn Waugh wooed and then married Evelyn Gardner, friends took to referring to them as the "He-Evelyn" and the "She-Evelyn," rather like beasts in the jungle. The two Evelyns later divorced, though presumably not because of their names, and the He-Evelyn married a woman named Laura. On the other hand, that couple went on to name one of their sons Auberon, which appears to be the French spelling for the name of the King of the Fairies. No wonder he chooses to be known to his friends as Bron.

CRITICUS, WHO has a cousin for every occasion, has one for name confusion. About 20 years ago this worthy cousin brought into the world a son she named Justin. But from the start he was addressed by his middle name, not for the usual reason that Justin was his father's name (it



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wasn't) but because, as cousin explained it, "If you're in the supermarket and you call out 'Justin!' every little boy in the place will come running." Criticus suspects that the same may be true of Jason, which became popular around the same time. Both of these J-names are still on, and doubtless in, the market, but their sell-by date has largely passed. This will surely happen also to the Morgans and Lindsays as mothers call for them from the ladies' room and find a ragtag gaggle of girls and boys pouring in.

WHETHER THE sorting out from unisex names will signal a return to traditional names is not clear. Everyone has probably read that *Jose* is now the most common name for newborn boys in both California and Texas, for obvious reasons, and that this reveals a resurgence of ethnic names, even though nationwide Michael is still the number one boy's name. (Kaitlyn [*sic*] is, believe it or not, the number one girl's name) So, along with surname-as-first name, ethnic names are becoming popular. There is already an established history in the black community of made-up, bizarrely spelled, distinctively black names. Criticus will reserve that topic for some future eyebrow raising. But, unlike the surname-as-first-name, these ethnic names are usually sexually distinguishable. And by the time this generation of *Jose's* has its own children, the parents may not want all of them to sound like your gardener. They may even move to that other, so far unnoticed trend, that Criticus has observed running in a small quiet rivulet alongside the torrent of Tylers, Grants, and Ryans, namely a re-emergence of truly traditional names. Again, drawing on his familiarity with that one, admittedly limited but still trend-setting, stratum of childbearing society that he knows, Criticus is acquainted with little ones named as follows: John, Katherine, James, Henry, Emma, and Luke. Some are even in the same families as the surname-as-first name children, suggesting that the shift is occurring right now. Even across the water this may be happening. Although it was widely reported in Britain that for the first time in centuries John was no longer among the top 50 names for newborn boys, Jack stood

at number one, followed by Thomas, James, and Daniel. On the other hand Mohammed occupied the number 34 spot. Every country seems to have immigration problems.



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As Constant Readers know, Criticus has long been anything but niggardly on the subject of names (see most recently the May/June 1998 *CPR* column, "Naming Names"), so in addition to my present animadversions on Christian names, I can hardly resist a comment or two on the much reported "Niggardly" issue out of the nation's capital. That brouhaha has above all to do with political correctness, but political correctness has above all to do with words, especially with words for group names and group designations and these in turn impinge even on proper names, as we shall see.

All readers will recall that a white official of the District of Columbia government so offended black workers when he accused himself of being niggardly that he was fired by the black mayor of that three-quarters black city. Once again ignorance was in the saddle. It appears that the multitude thought the word "niggardly"

had to do with what is now known as the "N-word," when in fact it has no relation to it. Even the media, normally ready to beat any white person with the stick of racism, came forth with explanations of the two quite different words. The one comes from old Germanic sources for miserly, the other from Romance languages, especially Spanish and Portuguese, for black. Chaucer used "niggardly" in the fourteenth century; the N-word is first recorded at the very end of the eighteenth century. If the two words have anything at all in common it is the fact that English, unlike its purer Teutonic sisters and Romance cousins, is an unusually hospitable language, taking words from any and all sources, and therefore often enough coming up with similar sounding words that have totally different ancestry and meaning. It is the price English speakers must pay for the richness of the English vocabulary and all the resulting puns.

Naturally, none of the learned explanations satisfied those who objected to the useful word "niggardly." They claimed that, regardless of the meaning of the word, it *sounded* offensive and was therefore unaccepta-