

words." So that makes them stupid? Or crazy? Listen, it's English—American English at that—these kids are having to learn. Maybe they think their way is a nifty shortcut. After all, no one ever proposed that the author of *Winston Tastes Good Like a Cigarette Should* was learning disabled—though he bent grammar to his own meaning and usage. I do, however, remember snide remarks about the destruction of the language wreaked by ad-speak.

The author of the primer does point out that labeling a child LD is tantamount to saying he has a dread disease which can only be treated by the supertrained. And this, she adds, is untrue. Her prescriptions for the prevention of LD look to me like common sense that used to be, as little as 25 years ago, how children were ordinarily raised. For example, the guide recommends, among other things:

Speaking to your infant so that he or she will begin to recognize human speech. (Anyone for raising the kid with wolves?)

Providing your child with paper and crayons in ample supply, as well as puzzles and other amusements of early youth.

Avoiding encouraging "baby talk"; rather, she says, one ought to repeat semi-gibberish in complete sentences, so the child will learn.

Making sure the child has games that foster coordination. (Hint: The New York child's parents did not play ball, or much of anything else, with him. They did hire an "occupational" therapist at \$80 an hour at the taxpayers' expense.)

Watching the child's diet; he may be sensitive to sugar (hyperactive kids, it has been known for more than 20 years, usually are) or something else, particularly chemical additives in food. In other words, feed the kid food, not chemicals, and limit sweets. This used to be the most common of common sense.

Developing a program to control behavior. (I assume this might include liberal use of the word No. Modern mommies appear to need their own remedial course in this simple Anglo-Saxon syllable.)

Ignoring tantrums is also recommended. (Think about it. How many modern mommies have you seen buy-

ing off Junior with a toy when he was trying out for the Eddie Munster award in the supermarket?)

Belatedly, I don't mean to imply that learning disability doesn't exist. It possibly does, in a few extreme cases. The rest, as far as I can tell—and as far as the few traditional good teachers I know can tell me—is all fluff designed for the parents who like to feel their child is "different." If they can't have a genius, a learning disabled will do. This in itself smacks of the parents being rational discrimination disabled.

At its heart, then, is learning disability anything more than the kids' brains and bodies developing at different rates? Must we make a "disease" out of what is a completely ordinary process? A book editor I worked with once told me she was dyslexic. But she had managed to graduate from Mount Holyoke before anyone ever thought up the term. Her dyslexia, however, got her out of a lot of proofreading. She chose this excuse-path in adulthood—kids don't have that choice. However much we may natter about kids having rights, the one fundamental right they do unarguably have is to their own selfhood. Denigrating that selfhood for adult convenience is unwise at best and immoral at its base.

I argue for simplicity, common sense, and good teaching. I argue for a return to a world in which smart kids could do it all, whereas other kids were magnificent at math and poor at poetry and vice versa, while still others were average, and a few, just a few, needed extra help to reach their potential. That, after all, was what teaching was all about.

*Bryce Webster is author of In Search of Modern Ireland: An American Traveler's Odyssey (Dodd, Mead).*

## Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

### Fightin' Words

Perhaps you heard something of the furor evoked down here a couple of years ago when it was reported that a

speech pathologist in Chattanooga, one Beverly Inman-Ebel, was conducting a class for those who wished to shed their Southern accents. (That's how the news stories put it. One could as well say, of course, that they wanted to acquire a Northern—or, as it's known in the speech biz, a "standard American"—accent.) On investigation, it turned out that Ms. Inman-Ebel's course was just one of many; such courses were available in several other Southern cities.

Alas, despite ridicule and abuse from regional chauvinists like me, the abomination continues to spread, showing how irresistible is even a bad idea whose time has come. Now my own university has gotten into the act. Our department of "speech communication" offered such a course last fall. When I ventured to inquire whether the taxpayers of North Carolina knew that their money was being spent to deracinate their children, the department's chairman tried gamely to put the best face on it. She offered the pragmatic argument that actors and media personalities and businessfolk need to be able to speak in "standard American." (A friend observes that it's too bad our alumnus Andy Griffith didn't take such a course. No telling what he might have amounted to if he could speak properly.)

People should take these courses, in other words, for the same reason that people teach them: because there's a mess of pottage in it. Or, if "mess" is on the list of condemned Southernisms, we can say: because it will help them make a buck. My colleague the chairman did not venture to say whether it is right that there are occupations where this is so, or whether students should be encouraged to enter them. She just offered it as a fact of life.

And, unfortunately, she's correct. Some non-Southerners—prospective employers, customers, clients, and voters among them—simply find Southern accents unpleasant. Billie Sue Knittel of Atlanta, for example, enrolled in a lose-your-accent course taught by an Ohio migrant named Shelly Friedman, and told a UPI reporter that the Yankee dentist she works for made her do it. "I talked too Southern for him." This jerk didn't want her answering his phone until

she clipped her vowels and pronounced her terminal "g's."

But at least he gave her a job in the first place. It was revealed a few years ago that some Congresspersons had specified "no Southern accent" as a criterion for hiring folks to work in their offices. You know, some Southerners find non-Southern speech ugly, too: In a 1971 survey, about one white North Carolinian in eight and one black in six agreed that "I don't like to hear a person with a Northern accent." *Chacun a son gout*, and perhaps someone's entitled to have his phone answered in whatever accent he prefers. But recall that these are the same legislators who pass federal anti-discrimination laws.

And there's more to this than aesthetics. Apparently some believe that

slow speech indicates slow thought—or so we might conclude from laboratory studies showing that the average non-Southern college sophomore assumes a Southern speaker to be less bright than a non-Southern one, even when the two are saying exactly the same thing. Since college sophomores occasionally grow up to be employers, their prejudices are of more than academic interest, and it may make sense to take them into account.

While it may be canny to cater to somebody else's bigotry, though, it's a risky business. If you come to accept his standards for your own, it can be downright degrading. Maybe the miserable wretches who engage the services of speech pathologists know what they're doing, in a sense. But maybe black folks who invest in skin-lightener

or hair-straightener do, too. When it comes to regional accents, I side with Atlanta journalist Lewis Grizzard, who wrote that "if you are going to classes to lose your Southern accent you are turning your back on your heritage and I hope you wind up working behind the counter of a convenience store with three Iranians and a former Shiite holy man."

So what can we do about it? Well, Mike Royko inadvertently suggested an answer, in a column written at just about the same time that Ms. Inman-Ebel's sinister activities were being exposed. Royko wondered idly why it is that Joseph William Namath of Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, has a Southern accent and was known for a time as "Joe Willie" Namath. He speculated that since Namath's longtime occupation "involved being chased and fallen upon by gigantic linemen, most of whom seem to be either black or white Southerners," perhaps "Namath thought that if he talked like them, they wouldn't fall on him as hard."

Royko also noted the prevalence of Southern speech patterns in popular music, pointing to the career of Bob Dylan, a Jewish boy from Minnesota who did all right once he learned to sound like an Okie, and to the delightful spectacle of English rock singers bawling, "C'mawnn all you pee-puhhhlll, let's git togayder." (Royko's attempt to reproduce a Southern accent as rendered by English rockers may not be entirely satisfactory, but you get the idea.)

Finally, Royko wrote, a co-worker of his affected "Yuppabilly dialect" because he discovered that he could impress more females in singles bars if he spoke with a drawl. It provided him with a more "rakish, macho, good old boy personality than did his Yale background."

Now, frankly, I find Royko's picture of big-city MBA's in Tony Lama boots saying "Mah place or yores?" about as pathetic as that of Billie Sue Knittel trying to enunciate. But the basic point remains. When Southerners are good at something—football, singin', picking up women—they don't have to shed their accents. If anybody's at a disadvantage, it's those who *don't* drawl. Shelly Friedman's course is for the Billie Sues of this world. You don't see Ted Turner signing up for it. And I

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look forward to the episode of *Dallas* in which J.R. Ewing meets Beverly Inman-Ebel.

The best solution for us all would be pluralism. Why should all radio announcers sound as if they come from Iowa? Why should Shakespeare sound less strange in "standard American" than in a Southern accent that's probably closer to the Elizabethan anyway? But if pluralism isn't realistic—if non-Southerners continue to give Southerners a hard time about their accents—Southerners' only alternative may be to take over. Then we could set up courses to teach Yankees how to talk right.

*Late News Flash: The Wall Street Journal reports that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has prohibited "job discrimination because of a person's accent or manner of speaking." The story goes on to say that "an employer must show a nondiscriminatory reason for denying a job because of a person's foreign accent or manner of speech." I can hardly wait for the first test case.*

*John Shelton Reed is a diglossal professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.*

## Letter From the Heartland

by Jane Greer

### Government Jerky

My husband, a beef jerky aficionado, tells me that C & I Jerky, Ltd. makes some of the best he's ever tasted.

Ileene Nodland and Cheryl Knutson produce it themselves in Dunn Center, North Dakota, which had 170 residents during the 1980 census and has fewer now. Knutson started out making her special venison jerky, and then the two neighbors began using one or the other's kitchen: spicing the meat, drying it (originally in an oven, later in a dehydrator), cutting it into strips with scissors, and giving it to family and friends. They perfected their recipe, and people loved it.

Then they got the idea of making a little more and selling it—starting a small business that wouldn't cut into

the hours they spend working their ranches with their husbands.

"We thought we'd probably need a license," says Nodland. They called a lawyer, and he told them that since there was no sales tax on such food in the state and they wouldn't need a sales tax license, they wouldn't need any other kind of license, either. They called another lawyer, and he told them to call the State Health Department, and they said to call the U.S. Department of Agriculture—but the man they needed to talk to was on vacation. By that time they had decided to just go ahead and sell some jerky. "We figured that if we needed a license, they'd tell us and we'd get one," says Nodland.

All this happened in the summer of 1984. In September of that year, after Knutson and Nodland had about \$1,000 worth of jerky in 39 bars and stores spread over several counties, a USDA inspector called to say that their jerky was illegal because it hadn't been inspected or approved by the USDA. Nodland and Knutson met with him and were told that they could get 10 years and a \$10,000 fine for selling jerky outside the law. "They said we could give away all we wanted, but if we sold just one stick to a neighbor, we would be breaking the law—and they made it clear that they would prosecute," says Nodland. The two were told to remove their jerky from the establishments that were selling it and advised that it would take from \$50,000 to \$100,000 to set themselves up in business correctly—figures that Nodland says are pretty close to the truth.

Here's a short-form version of what C & I had to do, once they decided to take the plunge. First, they had to kiss goodbye all that companionable kitchen manufacturing and build a plant to government specs. Their building, finished in January 1987 after two years and a thousand miles of red tape, is 30 x 40 feet, and by law had to contain 11 steel doors. The building also had to include a meat inspector's office of at least 70 square feet; just to be on the safe side, they gave him an extra two square feet, which means that his office takes up 6 percent of their floor space. They had to put in a men's bathroom for him, even though he's there for only a few hours a month,

and their only employee is a third woman. His office had to contain a file and locker, both kept locked against Nodland and Knutson, and a desk.

"We put in the locker," Nodland says, giggling a little, "and then one day the inspector that was over *him* came to inspect and told him that regulations say we also have to put up a coat hook, so he came and told us, and we had to put one up. We've also had the inspector over *that* inspector [i.e., the inspector's inspector's inspector], and I understand that we may soon be paid a visit by *his* inspector [the inspector's inspector's inspector's inspector]."

One day the inspector told C & I that they needed a rodent-proofing plan. Nodland reminded him that their foundation went down eight feet into the ground, four more feet than the law required, and that Dunn Center had no rodent problem. He told her to draw up a plan showing where she would put rodent traps. "He said I had to put an 'x' on the blueprint wherever I would put a rodent trap, and that I could never put a rodent trap where I didn't have an 'x' on the blueprint. So I cover that blueprint with 'x's, trying to be safe. Then he told me that I had too many traps on it," Nodland sighs.

C & I is usually open from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.; the hours after 5:00 p.m. are spent cleaning up. Business is terrific, and Nodland would like to hire a second shift. "But," she says, "the law reads that if we're actually processing the meat outside of eight-to-five weekday hours, we have to pay the inspector ourselves for his time." At \$24 an hour, that could really eat into their already small profits. C & I hasn't had to pay the inspector yet because they don't do any actual placing of jerky strips in jars after 1,700 hours or on weekends or federal holidays.

The meat they use has already been approved at the approved slaughterhouse, but "they also make us use approved products for everything connected with the processing, and that includes paper products, like waxed paper," says Nodland. "We have to get a letter from the product manufacturer guaranteeing that the product is USDA-approved for use in food processing. But it's very hard to find com-