

## THROWING THE RASCALS OUT by Odie B. Faulk

Note September 18, 1990, as a historic date. On that fateful Tuesday, people in the Sooner State stuck their heads out their windows and, in that great line from *Network*, shouted at politicians, "We're mad as Hell, and we're not going to take it anymore."

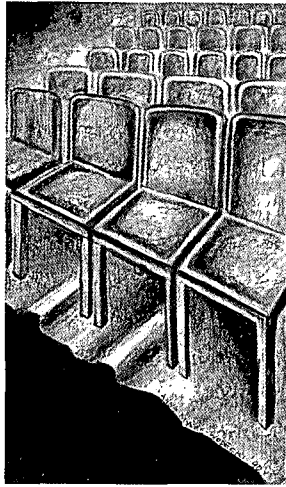
The object of this anger was politicians entrenched in office and seemingly impossible to dislodge through the normal election process, politicians who use lobbyist dollars as well as numerous self-voted tax monies to push their reelection campaigns. According to numerous sources, 98 percent of congressional incumbents seeking reelection are returned to Congress every year, and those holding state offices are not far behind.

That percentage will change for politicians in the state legislature of Oklahoma thanks to oil man Lloyd Noble II. He spent thousands of his own dollars to finance an initiative petition to limit Sooner legislators to 12 years in office: six two-year terms for members of the House and three four-year terms for senators. The 12-year limit begins on January 1, 1991, meaning anyone serving on that date will have to retire from office by December 31, 2002.

Those who volunteered to circulate these petitions were not partisan; Democrats vied with Republicans for the honor. These hundreds of volunteers fanned out across the state last spring—to find that getting the necessary signatures of more than one hundred fifty thousand voters was remarkably easy. One angry citizen gave voice to the feelings of thousands when he said about politicians, during a "man on the street" interview for a television news show, "It's time to send them all home."

Naturally those politicians long entrenched at the statehouse in Oklahoma City, as well as those who aspire someday to win office, thundered that this initiative would be bad legislation. "Experience counts," was the gist of their argument, but a majority of Oklahomans seemed to agree with another angry voter who shouted at one political rally, "Experience counts in learning to feather your own nest."

Despite cries about the value of experience and seniority, Oklahomans by a vote of 436,347 to 212,318 passed this legislation that, because it originated through the initiative process, was not subject to the governor's veto. The morning after the vote State Senator Ben Brown (D-Oklahoma City) told a reporter, "This is an effort by the rich and powerful to take away the rights of the ordinary citizen," explaining that this law denied voters the right to choose their legislators regardless of the number of years they had served. John P. Keast of the Free Congress Foundation in Washington, D.C., viewed the outcome



differently. When informed of the vote, he said, "This is democracy in action. Oklahomans recaptured their legislature."

Since that fateful vote on September 18, various pundits have waxed in print about this legislation. David Broder of the *Washington Post* argued in a nationally syndicated column that the result would be an increase in the power of legislative staffs, those faceless bureaucrats who haunt the halls of power and who work their own agenda. Thus to limit the terms of congressmen and senators would bring about less democracy, not more. Others have said that state legislators should not be the object of such time limitation because most of them do not serve long before aspiring to higher office. A political scientist making this argument noted that two-thirds of the legislators in Oklahoma have been in office less than 12 years.

Yet a start must be made somewhere to "throw the rascals out," and the Oklahoma vote is a beginning. It doubtless is true, as some critics argue, that this law is imperfect. However, it is inspiring movements in other states. Moreover, the Free Congress Foundation is trying to do at the national level what Oklahomans did at the state level. It is coordinating an effort to limit congressmen and senators to 12 years—and polls conducted for the *Washington Post* and ABC News show that 70 percent of Americans support a limitation on congressional terms.

Perhaps on September 18, Oklahoma's voters metaphorically tossed a few bales of tea into a presently murky legislative harbor, the start of a revolution to throw out life-tenured politicians and to return to the Jeffersonian ideal of citizen-lawmakers. ©

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*Odie B. Faulk is emeritus professor of history at Northeastern State University in Oklahoma. He lives in Waco, Texas.*

## 'TIS THE SEASON by Harold O.J. Brown

In late September, with eighty-degree temperatures and the foliage still almost totally green even in northern Illinois, it is hard to think Christmas thoughts. And as Nebuchadnezzar's would-be successor—or reincarnation—raves about imitating that energetic neo-Babylonian empire-builder and destroying Jerusalem, the approach of the Jewish High Holy Days reminds one of the fact that another Arab nation, 17 years ago, took advantage of Yom Kippur to launch a surprise war against Israel. Will the season be jolly this Christmas? Well, that depends on quite a



few things. Speaking Christianly, of course one can say that from the perspective of faith, the same reason will exist for being happy at Christmas 1990 that has existed ever since that unique Nativity in Bethlehem just about two thousand years ago. But knowing reasons for being happy in principle does not always guarantee being happy in practice. However, leaving aside the many bad things as well as the good things that could happen between a late September magazine deadline and a December publication date, let us cast an eye on some of the lesser reasons for hope and happiness that we can discern on what Herman Dooyeweerd called the temporal horizon.

Over twenty years ago I returned to Harvard's Widener Library—it was in the summer of 1968—and met John H. Finley, Jr., the professor of classics whose teaching fellow—one of many—I had been a few years earlier. Even then, approaching retirement, Mr. Finley already represented the “old Harvard,” where the “stock of the Puritans” was still alive, as “Fair Harvard” says, and the university could still make some claim to be a “bearer of truth and a herald of light,” if no longer “the bearer” and “the herald.” Looking out of his study window at the newly trashy condition of once-verdant Harvard Yard, Mr. Finley asked me what I thought of the changes. Then, without waiting for an answer, he continued, “It’s exciting—all these brilliant young men and women, such questioning, so much imagination. If only it weren’t all so sordid. . . .”

Mr. Finley is now very old, and quite thoroughly retired, in a genteel nursing home. Visitors have reported that his old wit frequently still shines through. But he is no longer up to making visits to Widener Library, or to the Harvard Yard. The grass is verdant once more, and such sordidness as there is is no longer so superficially apparent. Unfortunately, he cannot travel to the hinterland, and therefore he probably will not see what can be seen from library windows here.

I hope that this does not sound too much like an argument *pro domo*. But while Professor Bloom laments the closing of the American mind and the State University of New York publishes *The Moral Collapse of the University*, there are signs of new life. In *The Decline of the West*, Oswald Spengler predicted that the 1980’s—just closed out—would be marked by an “increasing primitivism of the political process.” Nineteen eighty-eight did nothing to refute him. He also predicted that international politics would begin to be dominated by monetary concerns (set “oil” for “money” and he is right on target). But what he did not predict was increasing numbers of young men and women turning, with zeal, enthusiasm, and vigor, to the study and propagation of the Christian tradition. There are 15 theological schools in the Greater Chicago cluster. One of them, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, has 40 percent of the total number of students.

The late Samuel Sandmel, a noted rabbinic scholar, once criticized his celebrated contemporaries Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann, *et al.*, with the remark that he had always thought that Christianity made sense if one really believed its doctrines to be true, but only then. Conservative evangelical schools such as Trinity, Gordon-Conwell, and Westminster, to name but three, and renewal-oriented Roman Catholic schools such as the Franciscan University of Steubenville, by no means have the luster and prestige of

Harvard, Yale, or even Notre Dame and the Catholic University of America. But they do have the students in theology and related disciplines, “brilliant young men and women” who really do believe the Christmas story to be true.

Students who peruse the Books of Daniel and of the Apocalypse, and observe Saddam Hussein masquerading as the new Nebuchadnezzar, may well wonder if we are not witnessing the “signs of the times” that herald the End. But—as Martin Luther said—if you know that the world will end tomorrow, you should still plant a tree today. Among the many ominous signs of the times, there are also positive ones, and among the most positive, in my evaluation, is the existence of such an energetic throng of young students who don’t have a closed mind, who reject the “moral collapse” of the academy, and who are serious about their faith. It would be wonderful, from an evangelical perspective, to have a foothold in the older universities, but lacking that—at least for the moment—it is encouraging, and a sign of hope for the future, to see where so many of the students are. ◊

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*Harold O.J. Brown teaches Christian ethics and theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois and is editor of The Religion & Society Report.*

## DOWN, NOT OUT

by John Shelton Reed

The editor has asked for “a few lines on some sign of hope, some change for the better, some reason for optimism” from my territory, so here are three cheery news items, two more or less having to do with the South, one with my trade of sociology.

For starters, how about the fact that National Public Radio has opened a Southern bureau? Since I’ve said some hard things in the past about the bicoastal bias of NPR, I’m happy now to give them credit for trying. True, they’ve set up shop in Chapel Hill, which doesn’t provide much of a challenge to the dominant NPR sensibility, but at least they’re not in Atlanta. NPR’s Southern correspondent, David Molpus, apparently hasn’t got entirely above his Mississippi raising; he got off to a good start by explaining that he chose to locate in North Carolina for its basketball and barbecue.

But in fact you can now get decent barbecue in Cambridge, Massachusetts. That’s my second piece of good news: right there in the belly of the beast, in the heartland of secular humanism, they’re deconstructing pigs at Jake & Earl’s Barbecue. When I first heard about Bay State

