

their action was likely to be given national publicity by the media.

In a word, what was involved—at Nantes and Carpentras—was an act not only of profanation, but of provocation: not only against a particular community or against “respectable” society, but against the notion of the divine and all that is held to be sacred. But this question of the “sacred” and of how it can be preserved, and civilization with it, in an age of declining faith—the problem that so preoccupied André Malraux during his final years—is so momentous that I shall have to return to it in a later letter.

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Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

Official State Business



Perhaps you heard the howls (actually, more like hollers) a while back when some hapless Texas bureaucrat proposed that the Lone Star State be known henceforth on its license plates as “The Friendship State.” You’ve got a friend in Pennsylvania, according to that state’s plates, but it sounds as if Texans want to check you out first. Texas is, after all, the state where a major-party gubernatorial candidate recently observed that we need to keep our guns because “We may have to march on the government one day if it doesn’t straighten out.” It’s where anti-litter signs say “Don’t Mess With Texas.” Some of us—not just Texans—believe it’s bad enough that the state makes you register your car without making it a medium for tourist advertising.

Actually, though, as Dallas columnist Molly Ivins pointed out, “The Friendly State” probably wouldn’t have raised any hackles. Texans *are* friendly, for the most part, and don’t mind people’s saying so. But many who would have found the adjective unexceptionable somehow felt that the noun was a little—well, wimpy. Last I heard the sobriquet had been shelved, but the controversy was good for some laughs

while it lasted. Ms. Ivins evoked a few of them with reflections on the whole business of license plate slogans. She suggested, for example, “Oklahoma—Land of Recruitment Violations.” Like me, she believes that the only plate a real man would put on his car voluntarily is New Hampshire’s “Live Free or Die.”

North Carolina’s sure isn’t one. Our plates say “First in Flight,” which some of us believe is too easily construed as “First to Flee.” This isn’t a happy rendering at best, and it’s especially unfortunate given that “Tar Heel” is said to have originated as a reference to the staying power of North Carolina’s Confederate troops. Our plates used to say “First in Freedom,” a reference to the so-called Mecklenberg Declaration of Independence. It doesn’t behoove an employee of the state of North Carolina to comment on the historicity of that event (also commemorated on the state flag), but what we’ve done is to drop a reference to a doubtful but inspiring event to commemorate the undoubted but boring fact that two bicycle mechanics from Ohio made use of one of our empty beaches to test their flying machine. At least “First in Freedom” used to annoy some of the right people, one of whom put masking tape over the slogan—and wound up in court for it, which actually sort of proved his point. “First in Flight” isn’t worth covering up.

Anyway, last year one of our legislators proposed an equally baffling exercise in banality, when he introduced a bill to make something called the Plotthound our Official State Dog. He was not deterred by our past experience with Official State totems, which has not been altogether happy. Our O.S. Bird, for instance, is the mockingbird, a standing—or flying—contradiction of the state motto, *Esse quam videro*, “To be and not to seem,” a bird whose sweet song disguises a foul disposition and obnoxious habits.

In any case, the Plotthound bill didn’t get very far, largely because no one had ever heard of this animal. When it was revealed that the creature is German, one commentator asked whether anyone knew what part of Germany it comes from, hinting darkly that we might be about to elevate a communist dog to Official State status. (This was before the Berlin Wall came

down.) Once the subject was broached, champions of other dogs came forward (the blue tick hound had a number of partisans), and the debate kept our legislature from doing anything foolish for days on end.

For my part, I think we’ve just scratched the surface here, and I hope our legislators will put their minds to this O.S. matter. An O.S. Food, of course: pork barbecue (with tomato optional, to prevent civil war). But that’s too easy; we need something to keep our legislators busy for a *long* time. How about an Official State Disgrace? I suggest the North Carolina State University basketball program.

Once you get started, it’s hard to stop. Why not an Official State Roadkill? The sleeping drunk is a possibility (longtime readers of these letters may recall that North Carolina leads the nation in lying-in-the-road deaths), but if the legislature balks at that there’s really only one other candidate. The skunk has a way of pressing its claim, but for sheer numbers the possum has no competition. Other states may feel that they have an equal or greater right to the possum (Texas has the armadillo, of course), but come on: we thought of it first.

And every state needs an Official State Bug. We can leave the boll weevil to Mississippi, the fire ant to Georgia; let the Land of a Thousand Lakes have the mosquito, Maine the black fly, New York the cockroach. North Carolina still has all sorts of possibilities. Some homeowners, for instance, might nominate the termite. Perhaps it would be some consolation when your floor caves in to know that the Official State Bug has been on the job. There’s also a case to be made for the black widow spider: most years we lead the nation in spider-bite deaths. (I know, spiders aren’t insects. That’s why I said “bug.”) But my own nominee would be the common tick. We have a special claim to that critter, too, since we’re always #1 in Rocky Mountain spotted fever cases. And just think: if we made the tick our Official State Bug, next time we redesign our license plates we could make them say “First in Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.”

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LAW



Jeanne Berg

Your Papers, Please

by R. Cort Kirkwood

Nearly every film using Europe as a backdrop for international intrigue, especially those featuring Nazis in black leather trench coats, employs a scene in which the hero is crossing transnational borders on a slow-moving train. As he nervously exhales a cloud of blue smoke from an unfiltered cigarette, the authorities move from berth to berth checking identity papers. The Gestapo man flings open the door to a private car, letting in the roar of rolling train wheels grinding against the rails. He arrests the subject of his inquiry or turns back the identification papers with a silent yet suspicious or even knowing smirk, then slams the door shut, his two machine-guns toting subalterns in tow. The main problem for the men making *The Great Escape*, for instance, was forging credible identity papers to travel unmolested behind German lines until they reached the Underground. The plot of *Casablanca*? Saloon keeper Rick Blaine must procure travel documents for concentration camp escapee Victor Laszlo.

But Nazis are hardly history's last government officials to force citizens to carry some form of national identification card or work permit. Most European countries require it today, and

because illegal immigration in these United States has reached crisis proportions, some people, including one influential Republican senator, want to import the idea.

Leading the charge is Senator Alan Simpson, author of the Immigration Reform and Control Act, more popularly known as Simpson-Mazzoli, the genesis for the identity card proposal. Though Simpson-Mazzoli penalizes employers with fines and jail terms if they hire illegal aliens, it's had some side effects Mr. Simpson didn't anticipate: to avoid any chance of a federal penalty, many employers simply stopped hiring Americans who were foreign-looking and sounding, mostly Hispanics and Asians. The GAO reports that such discrimination is "serious" and "widespread," which has set off alarm bells in our racially sensitive Congress.

Mr. Simpson has answered them with Senate bill 2446, which would authorize the Health and Human Services secretary to issue a new Social Security card "resistant to counterfeiting and tampering" that can "reliably determine" that the "person with the identity claimed by the bearer is eligible to be employed in the United States." The card would contain a photograph and other improvements, but would "not be required to be carried on one's person," its only purpose being to determine an individual's eligibility to work in the United States.

Senator Daniel Moynihan has introduced similar legislation that would require new Social Security cards to be made of "tamper-resistant material such as plastic or polyester" and carry the accoutrements of a credit card: "magnetic stripes, holograms and integrated circuits." These brave New World cards might also carry "biometric" tools like fingerprints and retinal scan systems. Though staff member Ed Lopez says Senator Moynihan's point was to "have a better symbol of" the Social Security program—in other words, a nifty looking card to make a financially and philosophically bankrupt program look more prosperous than it really is—the legislation says it

must be "developed to provide a more reliable means of verifying eligibility for employment under" Simpson-Mazzoli. The bills are awaiting action in the Judiciary and Finance committees.

The goal is to close our open southern border by enhancing an employer's ability to determine whether he unknowingly hires illegal aliens. Employers wouldn't discriminate because they'd know they were hiring real Americanos. For their part, the illegals would stay home because they wouldn't be able to find work.

Supporting the idea, David Simcox of the Center for Immigration Studies warns, "the national problems [of illegal immigration] have reached the point of severity that we must ask for public cooperation" in using "secure" documents to prove work eligibility and perhaps even citizenship. Mr. Simcox says four million Social Security numbers were fraudulently used in 1986 and, quoting immigration scholar David North, says that "1.9 million amnestied aliens had either no Social Security number or had bought numbers from shady operators or made up their own numbers." Moreover, "nearly a fifth of the 1.8 million who applied for [Simpson-Mazzoli's] general amnesty originally entered the country not by sneaking across the border but by passing legitimate ports of entry using documents that were altered or obtained under false pretenses." Nearly six million foreigners reside illegally in the United States, a number growing by 250,000 annually, and 500,000 of them carry false identification. In short, employers need a way to prove they're hiring American citizens that will also discourage illegal immigration.

A more novel rationale for a federal work permit is that European countries have adopted such permits or national identification cards. Says Mr. Simpson, "nearly all Western nations, including Canada and Mexico, have employer-sanction laws. . . . And if you're going to classify countries that have a national identification card as a totalitarian government, how do you describe