France and Germany? Because they do."

Whatever the gravity of illegal immigration, thinking Americans might ask some questions before they begin cooperating in a scheme that would vastly improve the federal government's ability to code and trace their daily business. Mr. Simcox admits that suddenly "asking" Americans to carry a national identification card would be politically intolerable, adding that more severe forms of internal identification control would require "back door" proposals like Mr. Simpson's. They sound benign—the card won't be used by the IRS, you won't have to carry it, etc.—yet something about recent history forebodes an expanded program by which Congress might increase its ability to collect taxes from "delinquents," to cite just one grim possibility. And if this federal work permit can't sweep back the tide of immigrants from Mexico, wouldn't Congress be encouraged to adopt stronger measures?

The problem with the idea is that the only people who will use this card aren't breaking the law. Like gun control laws, a national work permit will affect only those who obey laws to begin with. Criminals don't care about gun control statutes or about civil and religious codes forbidding murder and robbery. Why should anyone expect illegal aliens to stop flooding the country because Uncle Sam issues a new improved Social Security card? Anyone who uses it won't need it.

As for the "Europeans are doing it" argument, Mr. Simpson and his followers haven't told the whole truth. France, which uses its national identification card for everything from immigration control and collecting taxes to handing out welfare, hasn't been able to stop the illegal immigration of North Africans. And whatever Europe's success with national identification cards, or any other policy for that matter, it shouldn't necessarily serve as a paradigm for the States. Mr. Simpson might recall that our ancestors not only left Europe to escape the kind of government philosophy a national identification card represents, but also staked their lives and fortunes on a war to cast off the legalistic and petty intrusions of the British Crown. If they like the European way of doing things, Mr. Simpson and his followers should return whence their ancestors came.

When Jerry Seper of the *Washington Times* landed in Chula Vista, California, for his five part series on illegal immigration, one evening he visited an illegal entry point with a border control officer. After about four hundred Mexicans gathered at the hole in the fence, the officer told Seper they'd have to make tracks because "they'll come up here and drag the three of us across the border and kill us."

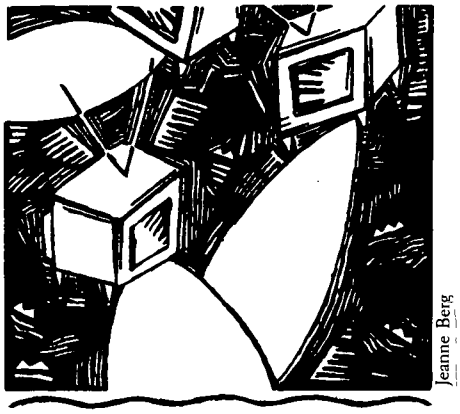
That story is emblematic of the simple truth that Congress and the President have abdicated their constitutional responsibility to protect the lives and property of American citizens and defend our national borders from a foreign invasion. As with laws respecting murder and robbery, our leaders have failed to enforce immigration laws, so to make things easy they're prepared to "ask" American citizens to bear the burden of reporting to state and federal governments. Simcox and his adherents reply that Congress won't appropriate enough money to enhance the Border Control authorities, which is true enough. But that's only because Congress is too busy spending money elsewhere.

If our elected officials want to stop illegal immigration, they can do so without forcing—or "asking," as they put it—the rest of us law-abiding citizens to carry identification papers. A few simple rules would suffice: no work permits for foreigners; no visas for Mexicans except government officials and businessmen; all travelers must present return plane tickets or travel plans at the point of entry, plus an address and phone number where they can be reached; anyone cutting through a fence or illegally crossing an open border will be shot.

If the last sounds draconian, at least it is a protective measure for the citizens of this country, which cannot be said about expanding the federal government's power to meddle in people's lives with snooping devices like identification cards and retina scanners. Or do you look forward to the day when a federal agent comes into your Amtrak sleeper to demand: "You're papers, please"?

R. Cort Kirkwood is an editorial writer for the Washington Times.

TELEVISION


Jeanne Berg

The Queen Is Dead

by Janet Scott Barlow

Perhaps you heard that Roseanne Barr recently sang the national anthem at a Padres-Reds game in San Diego. If not, then you're one of maybe three people in America who missed it, so let me fill you in. Looking like she had just rushed over from an all-day garage cleaning, Barr took the field in Jack Murphy Stadium and proceeded to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" badly—aggressively badly, in-your-face badly. When she finished what she obviously had thought would be an endearingly awful performance—indeed, an *ironic* performance ("They knew they weren't getting an opera star," she said later)—she grabbed her "private parts," as some journalists phrased it, then spat on the ground. She was loudly booed, and two days of media frenzy followed, every minute of which I enjoyed.

One of the many interesting aspects of this episode was its context. Roseanne Barr was asked to sing the national anthem on "Working Women's Night" because the San Diego Padres management considered her an obvious and fitting representative of American working women. That made a certain kind of sense, since some very serious-minded people in this country also consider Roseanne Barr an obvious and fitting representative of working women, especially blue-collar women. What's more, such publications as the *New York Times*, the *New Republic*, and *Time* have certified this

view of Barr, which means it was just about carved in stone—at least until she riled up thirty thousand people in Jack Murphy Stadium.

The lasting image from the whole affair—the one of America's Blue-Collar Queen singing the national anthem fingers-in-ears to block the sound of public rejection—was compelling to me, in part because I'm the product of a blue-collar home and know my share of working-class women. These women, waitresses and factory workers who go off in the morning just like their husbands, are consequential, substantial, almost imposing. They are as vocal as men, as funny as men, and as resilient as men, while remaining appropriately unlike men. Some of them are susceptible to the politics of class resentment. A few hold political and social views that would curl your hair (which is why it's a big mistake to romanticize the Common Man). But the majority have come through hard lives with a singular nugget of psychological strength: they know how to pursue happiness without demanding it, and thus, resistant to alienation, they possess the capacity for both pleasure in the present and hope in the future—all in all, no small feat, but not particularly rare. (Which is why it's a big mistake to underestimate the Common Man. Liberals, of course, don't know *what* they think about the Common Man. They pay tribute to his innate wisdom while simultaneously telling him he's the victim of manipulation, exploitation, and deception. And they wonder why they can't get a President elected.)

These are the same women described by Barbara Ehrenreich, in an adoring piece on Roseanne Barr for the *New Republic* as "the hopeless underclass of the female sex . . . the despised, the jilted, the underpaid." The trouble with that description, of course, is that most working-class women hate it. They hate it first because it's a lie, second because it's an insulting lie, and third because it's an insulting lie that is supposed to be some sort of homage. Most working-class women are proud of the work they do and the money they earn. And you don't become consequential, substantial, or imposing—you don't even become funny or resilient (though you can become vocal)—by feeling "despised." When you get right-down to it, a blue-collar life doesn't even mean you have to be fat or act stupid. None of the working-class women I know would ever say, as Roseanne Barr's TV character does, "You always manage to say the most perfectly wrongest thing," because 1) they all know better and 2) if any of them did speak that way, the working-class people around them would ask, "Why are you talking like a dope?"

Having experienced the real thing, I was completely disinclined to check out Roseanne Barr's sitcom version of working-class life when it burst on the TV scene. First of all, a "realistic situation comedy" is a contradiction in terms. Second, I figured it would contain lots of references to beer and bowling. But when Barr appeared on the covers of three magazines in one week, I gave in. I watched the show twice, the first time to check out this radical new working-class icon everyone was talking about. I watched the second time because I figured I must have missed something the first time. The show is the very essence of sitcom TV: it has the properties of comedy—and thus can evoke laughs—without actually being funny. And the same is true of its star.

Beyond that, both the show and its star operate on at least one assumption that runs contrary to human nature: slobs see themselves in other slobs. (Go ahead, ask ten overweight, unkempt women this question: do you identify with the slovenliness of Roseanne Barr? You'll get eight indignant denials and two punches in the mouth.) Here's what I learned about the character of Roseanne on *Roseanne*. She is an obese woman who wears what appear to be her obese husband's work shirts—and they fit. She enjoys prole-type snack food, makes noises when she eats, and talks with her mouth full. She tells her kids to go play in the traffic. Her grammar (like her singing) is definitely atrocious. She tells off officious, heartless people who go around dumping on the Little Guy. (She seems to get dumped on a lot, which is, I take it, the TV definition of a Little Guy. No wonder liberals love this show.) She spends a lot of time being ticked off.

At the same time, Roseanne's politics and social consciousness are . . . perfect. That is, not one of her political or social views is meant to curl your hair. Her class resentments aren't a waste or a burden, they're a badge of honor and her strength. She proudly embodies a world view in which female strength and class power spring from anger, anti-elitism, and coarseness: life's a bitch, we all get shafted, and moral authority begins with a big mouth.

An angry slob, a porker with an attitude. That's the revolutionary, "realistic" new image of blue-collar womanhood so many entertainment critics and social analysts are in love with. And why is this repellent figure considered a worthy symbol of working-class women? Because she has so much pride, that's why! As for Roseanne's appearance, everyone knows that working-class women are too oppressed to look presentable; and besides, their sloppiness (as well as their obesity) is part of their reality, just as their tackiness, when they do decide to dress up, is part of their charm. Everyone also knows that working-class folks go around scarfing Cheetos and scratching themselves, so Roseanne's demeanor and habits aren't uncouth, they're authentic. (As Barbara Ehrenreich put it in the *New Republic*, "Yeah, she's crude, but so are the realities of pain and exploitation she seeks to remind us of." See how it works? To be effective, we must personify the essence of the things we hate.) And when Roseanne tells her kids to go play in the traffic, it isn't suggestive of her character's self-indulgence (or just a cheap TV laugh line), it's an understandable but maternally harmless expression of both female frustration and the anger—pervasive yet justified—of the working class. Also it's ironic.

Admirers of the Roseanne character are saying that we should expect less of her because so much more is demanded of her. If that's a patronizing view of blue-collar women, too bad and too late. *Time*, that well-known voice of the working class, has already decided *Roseanne* is "an honest portrayal of blue-collar family life."

In truth, nothing on entertainment television is "honest," and viewers understand this, even if critics don't. *Roseanne* is popular for the same reason *The Cosby Show* is popular.

Though they depict families at different ends of the economic spectrum, both shows present a mass audience with characters and situations that are recognizable without being realistic. (When people want reality, they turn the set *off*.) Whatever *Roseanne*'s pretensions (or offenses), it was conceived by its creators and is perceived by its consumers *as television*—the entertainment equivalent of fast food—and therefore has all the "social impact" of a stop at McDonald's.

Something vital has been ignored in the many deep-thinking analyses of Roseanne Barr's sitcom character and professional persona. For feminists and other social philosophers who think large truths are revealed when a blue-collar TV character handles an insensitive boss by telling him he has "a little prize hanging out of [his] nose," it's easy to overlook the fact that Roseanne Barr is first and last a part of the big American pop-entertainment machine—which just happens to operate right in the middle of the commercial marketplace. Barr is an agent not of politics or art but of commerce, and therefore the only philosophical question with any relevance to her comedy goes something like this: if a comedienne tells a joke in the forest and there is no one around to hear it, is she funny? If that question comes up often enough, the comedienne ends up declaring herself a "survivor" and working on a comeback.

When Roseanne Barr sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" in San Diego, there was an instantaneous shift in public attitude toward her—not because she sang it badly (lots of people have messed up that song without getting booed), but because she was so pleased to sing it badly. The commentators who compared her performance to flag burning were as off base as the feminists who defended her as the victim of a double standard. There was no political message in her actions, just as there is no political significance in her television show. Her performance of the national anthem was a case of celebrity ego run amok, a vocal mooning in which thirty thousand people were made the captive objects of a private joke. And because audiences don't take kindly to being left out on the joke (not to mention that it's a bad idea to moon the national anthem), the gears began to turn ("boo!"), the big machine began to hum ("booooo!"), and Roseanne Barr took her first step toward the silent show-biz forest.

The day after she discovered that irony and the national anthem don't mix, Barr held a press conference to explain herself. The event showcased the Blue-Collar Queen as a case of arrested development. She was petulant, evasive, and defensive. In fact, she displayed the behavior of one who feels "jilted" and "despised." She demonstrated her usual command of the language by explaining that, you know, she did, like, the best she could and everything. She said more or less that the Padres fans had been mean to her, and she defiantly asserted, though the question hadn't come up, "It's my national anthem too." When told that President Bush had called her performance "disgraceful," she responded, "I'd like to see him sing it." (That Bush was ridiculed for his comment was amazing. What was the President of the United States supposed to say about such a performance—that he *liked* it?) The crotch-grabbing and the spitting? The players had suggested it. And she said she would do the whole thing again, "but I'd do it for a hipper crowd. If this is the worst thing they've ever heard, then their lives have been pretty easy." That's it! All those boos

came from irony-deficient yuppie scum.

Personally, I think the remark about "a hipper crowd" was the most perfectly wrongest thing Barr could have said. But overall, I found her press conference gratifying. By making plain that she really *doesn't* know any better (if people tune in your ironic TV show and buy tickets to your ironic comedy act, why wouldn't they enjoy your ironic rendition of the national anthem?), she thereby made plain, for all who somehow have missed it, the difference between Roseanne Barr and the women she supposedly symbolizes. And there was still more to come! Later, her husband turned up on *Crossfire* and loudly labeled as "sexist" the idea that men can grab their crotches and spit but women can't. "Women can do that stuff too, pal!" he shouted in support of his wife, and I laughed so hard I woke up the cat.

When she sang the national anthem on that memorable evening in July, Roseanne Barr went one-on-one with the big American entertainment machine and she lost. She also struck her first and only blow for working-class women by freeing them from the critically imposed working-class role model of Roseanne Barr. Behind every celebrity cloud there's a silver lining. As for the heavy thinkers who helped crown her Blue-Collar Queen, they're now stuck with her, so let 'em squirm. Michael Kinsley, for instance, discovered what can happen when you write serious political commentary about a woman who excels at snot jokes: you just might end up—you want irony?—hosting her husband on *Crossfire*. And what a show that was. Upon hearing Barr's husband defend, with all the intelligence of a radish, an idea about female scratching and spitting that had all the intellectual weight of (yes!) a Cheeto, Michael Kinsley, the man often described as having "the best mind in Washington," the pundit who, only a week earlier, had written that the popularity of *Roseanne* is "a direct challenge" to the Republican Party—*that* Michael Kinsley—got a look on his face of such pain, such humiliation, such *defeat* that . . . well, the cat woke up again.

Janet Scott Barlow covers popular culture from Cincinnati.

MUSIC

Jeanne Berg

The 'Theft' of an American Classic

by Theodore Pappas

Country music has never been shirked in the pages of *Chronicles*, as any faithful reader knows. John Reed's June column concerning the Far East's fascination with country music, however, left out one pertinent mention: the story of Toru Mitsui.

Mr. Mitsui is a fifty-year-old professor of English at Kanazawa University; he is also Japan's foremost scholar on country music. In 1967 he wrote what some have called the first scholarly study of bluegrass, *Burugurasu Ongaku* (*Bluegrass Music*), and his 1971 *Kantori Ongaku no Rekishi* (*A History of Country Music*), twice reprinted, is the Japanese equivalent of Bill Monroe's standard, *Country Music, U.S.A.* He has even compiled an eleven-album set of re-recordings of "hillbilly artists" for Japanese Victor, which includes songs by Tex Ritter, the Carter Family, and the Sons of the Pioneers, as well as rare recordings by such performers as Riley Puckett, the blind virtuoso of the banjo who is credited with the first recording of yodeling. Mr. Mitsui has also traveled widely in the United States, principally for reasons of general research. His 1989 visit, however, had a specific purpose. He sought the origin and author of America's most famous folk song, the one George Jones once called the most perfect song ever written, the one widely considered to be the third best-known song (right after "Happy Birthday" and "White Christmas") in the world: "You Are My Sunshine."

Mr. Mitsui first went to the office of Georgia State University professor Wayne Daniel, who has long researched the history of American country music. Professor Daniel concluded in a 1984 article that the origin of the song would probably never be ascertained, a conclusion he repeats in his latest book, *Pickin' on Peachtree: A History of Country Music in Atlanta, Georgia* (University of Illinois Press, 1990): "So like some of the works ascribed to Shakespeare, the authorship of 'You Are My Sunshine' probably will never be decided to everyone's satisfaction."

A familiar story of the song's origin goes like this. The song was first recorded by the Pine Ridge Boys on August 22, 1939; the Rice Brothers Gang recorded it on September 13, 1939; country music star and former Louisiana governor Jimmie Davis, along with one Charlie Mitchell, bought the "rights" to the song from Paul Rice for $35 in late 1939; Jimmie Davis published it, with "words and music by Jimmie Davis and Charles Mitchell," with the Southern Music Publishing Company of New York on January 30, 1940, and recorded it on February 5, that being the recording most country music fans remember and the one that placed the song among the top five country music recordings of that year. Gene Autry and Bing Crosby then made separate recordings of the song in 1941, solidifying its status as an American classic. According to Professor Daniel, neither the Pine Ridge Boys nor Jimmie Davis ever claimed to have written "You Are My Sunshine," but not so with Paul Rice; he claimed to have composed it in 1937.

There are still people alive, however, who remember hearing the song long before 1937—in particular, a mid-1930's performance of the song by Riley Puckett himself—and what these people remember is the name of the musician with whom both Riley Puckett and Paul Rice played in the *early* 1930's: Oliver Hood of LaGrange, Georgia.

Oliver Hood was a soft-spoken, self-taught man of simple pleasures and