

I'm not even sure it was a liberal bias. . . . I think Nixon was somewhat right, it wasn't just paranoid. Sometimes people really are after you and sometimes that was the case with Richard Nixon."

The members of the fourth estate reacted with disbelief when confronted with a quotation from Bryant Gumbel of NBC's *Today* show. Mr. Gumbel called Pat Buchanan "Mr. Puke-anan" on the February 20 broadcast of *Today*. NBC anchorman Tom Brokaw said, "I didn't hear him say that. I mean I never heard him say that." Bill Plante had the same reaction: "Did he actually say that? I never heard him say it. Was it on the air?" Deborah Norville, former *Today* show coanchor, expressed shock at Mr. Gumbel's comment. Her face conveyed disbelief as she asked, "On the air?" She then added, "I don't think I want to comment." Dee Dee Myers of CNBC, formerly Clinton's spokesperson, was not surprised at all about Gumbel's reference to "Mr. Puke-anan." She stated, "I think reporters all the time say things similar to that. Not necessarily on the air but behind the candidates' back. . . . They don't have much respect for the people they cover." Al Roker, the weatherman of the *Today* show, would not address the question directly. Instead he stipulated, "I've never worked with a liberal anchorman. They're all very conservative." Presumably this would include Mr. Gumbel, who besides the "Puke-anan" reference once promoted an NBC News special on racial attitudes by stating, "This is not going to tell you whether or not you are a racist or a liberal."

The recent Harris survey that showed Americans to be increasingly distrustful of network news did not seem to concern the journalists. Bob Schieffer of CBS News shrugged it off and asked, "What's new about that?" Dan Rather put a positive spin on the lack of trust. He stated, "I think the American people are very smart . . . they're skeptical. That's the way they should be." Juan Williams of CNN explained that people don't trust the news anymore "because people see with their eyes and know that too often we angle stuff and have too much of an edge to it and aren't honest." Mike McCurry, President Clinton's press secretary, feigned shock that trust in the news is down. He asked, "You're kidding?! Surprise! Wake up! These guys need to understand that Americans want to understand what's going on in their

lives."

The new novel *Blood Sport* by James B. Stewart on the Whitewater controversy was dismissed as old news. Tom Brokaw commented, "I don't think that there is any real big smoking guns or big explosions." Bill Plante lamented that, "The problem with the media coverage of Whitewater is it has been done over and over again." John Cochran suggested that Whitewater was not even an important story. He admitted that he had not read *Blood Sport*, but he was reading a "fascinating" book by Elizabeth Drew on the Republican Congress. He related that Ms. Drew's book "had nothing to do with gossip or Whitewater or what happened to Vince Foster or any of that. It has to do with what's happening with the issues of importance to the American people."

Bernard Goldberg's criticism had at least momentarily forced a myopic media to engage in a much needed self-examination. In today's newscasts, sensationalism has replaced sober analysis. The network news media and the political left in America share the same *modus operandi*. Both set out to identify a "crisis," exaggerate the extent of the "crisis," and then invariably point to a lack of government spending or regulation as the chief cause of the "crisis." As a result of this incestuous relationship, the mainstream press has virtually given a leftist bent to almost every issue. Liberal elected officials and advocacy groups have perpetually been able to look to the media as an extension of their public relations efforts. Whether it is the network news hyping the latest environmental "catastrophe" or sounding an alarm about GOP policies that they claim will result in "mean-spiritedness" or "starving children," the mainstream media and the national Democratic party are in lockstep. The orthodoxy of most of today's network news reporters does not allow them even to question the premise of government-sponsored "compassion." Unless the fourth estate is willing to heed critiques like the one put forth by Mr. Goldberg, network news trust and ratings will continue to decline. Talk radio and other alternative news and information sources will continue to prosper as network news becomes increasingly irrelevant.

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## FOREIGN AFFAIRS

### The Cuban Cash Cow

by Mario R. Sanchez

When the Cuban air force shot down two unarmed civilian planes, killing four men, there followed yet another round of senseless debate over how to handle Fidel Castro and his aging revolution. Cuban exiles renewed their call for vindication of still more deaths, while *Time* magazine ran Castro's justification of the "defensive" act. The Clinton administration condemned Cuba and sought the counsel (i.e., political support) of the self-proclaimed leaders of Cuban-Americans. The Republican hopeful(s) denounced the atrocity and assured a disbelieving public that Castro would not survive *their* administration. Congressmen of select districts clamored to condemn the inhumanity. The interested media pontificated while the disinterested media shifted the blame.

To promote the status quo, indisputable acts are endlessly disputed. There are those who justify the murders, for after all, the four dead men had in the past flown missions over Havana to drop leaflets; for the planes were "over" Cuban territory (wrong: they were in international airspace, one flying toward the United States and the other in a parallel course); for the dead were merely Cuban troublemakers (wrong: two were Americans, one with two tours of Vietnam as a U.S. Marine to his credit). There are those who ask rhetorically why the murdered "Cubans" did not go back to Cuba, though this is precisely what Cubans have been trying to do for the past 37 years. So endlessly we analyze acts of brutality until . . . the next act of brutality, when the debate begins anew.

And yet, how do we treat Castro today? Like visiting royalty. During his five-day visit to New York to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, Castro received over 200 invitations beseeching his presence (not counting the invitations from those who wanted to kill him), lunched with the Council of For-

cign Relations, met with legions of business tycoons, preached to a gathering of over 100 religious leaders, generated audience-pleasing diatribes at assorted churches and cafés, graced every major network's "news" programs with interviews (including a one-hour speech-athon with CNN), visited the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *Time*, touted the editorials from five major newspapers supportive of his economic and political policies, and was the focus of every tabloid and journal in the capital of capitalism. Jeff Greenfield on *World News Sunday* said that "protestors gathered . . . to denounce alleged repression [in Cuba] because he [Castro] is a communist only 90 miles away." The implication was that if Castro were 9,000 miles away, or a Republican, but in both cases still a murderer, there wouldn't be protestors. The "alleged" is there solely to further delude the delusion.

Couldn't we simply ignore Castro, our de facto secretary of state to the south? Perhaps not, for his foreign and domestic policies have cost us many lives and untold billions. The Eisenhower administration in effect ignored the absconding of American capital and businesses in Cuba. The Kennedy administration gave us the Bay of Pigs and solved the Missile Crisis by releasing pictures and leaving missiles on the island. The Johnson administration accepted Cuban-exported revolution into Latin America, meeting the threat with billions in foreign aid, then cautiously taking credit for the hunting down of Ernesto Guevara, despite the fact that it was Castro who alerted the Bolivian army as to his whereabouts. The Nixon administration ineffectively thwarted Cuban expansion into Central America and Angola, again costing us lives and billions. And who can forget the Mariel boatlift, courtesy of the Carter administration? A humanitarian act no doubt, since Castro eliminated, at our expense, the overcrowding of his prisons and asylums for the criminally insane. The Reagan administration fought the communist threat by eliminating a heavy-bomber runway in Grenada and ignoring the same type of runways in Cuba. The Bush administration tolerated the drug trafficking by Cuba, placating the American public by pointing to the show trial of the Generals LaGuardia, despite the fact that drug trafficking by the Cuban government remains one of the biggest sources of revenue on the island.

Normalizing relations with Cuba, although popular with the media, is not imminent, as long as a protected sect stands to benefit from the present state of affairs. The Castro regime tortures and murders and exports revolution and drugs, but as long as money is being made under the status quo, the tortures and the murders and the exporting of revolution and drugs merit nothing more than lip service. Heaven help the reelection (or election) bid of anyone who seriously proposes dealing strongly with Castro, for this would mean harming the sugar, tobacco, tourist, produce, and profitable drug war industries. Could these politicians justify the thousands of unemployed drug enforcement personnel? Could they accept thousands of sugar, tobacco, and produce workers joining the ranks of the unemployed because the prices of these commodities had dropped? Could they tolerate the screaming by the airlines, which even under the Helms-Burton bill pays a fortune to Cuba for use of her airspace, but who would have to pay much more to fly around the island? Simply put, there is no financial incentive to remove Castro.

Could we negotiate with Castro? A better question is, why should Castro negotiate with us? After all, he gets what he wants right now. Both our trade and immigration policies regarding Cuba are directed by him. The embargo is a porous shell that enriches many and delivers what is deemed acceptable by the regime. Our conservative radio talk show hosts decry the abominations of Castro while lighting up yet another Cuban cigar, as if it matters that they were purchased overseas, as if that would make any difference to the thousands of individuals still rotting in Cuban prisons. One of the biggest trades in Miami is the sending of goods to Cuba, and since virtually all of the people performing these so-called humanitarian gestures are retired Cuban-Americans (the ones who claim to have lost everything in the exodus), they receive Social Security and Medicare/Medicaid benefits. They use the Social Security money to buy goods, shipping the products along with the free medicines and medical supplies provided at taxpayer expense to an embargoed Cuba. Visit any clinic in Miami, and one would swear an epidemic had struck the entire Cuban-American population of retirement age. In essence, the embargo enriches many and prohibits little, and therefore negotiations will be of ques-

tionable benefit to all. As with the War on Drugs, we have a knack for doing things quite ineffectively as far as the stated goals are concerned, but quite effectively in securing the unstated goals of financial and political rewards.

The mass held in Miami for the four men brought out a small group of family members, zealots, and the curious. The event itself was quite insensible and torpid, keeping in line with a Miami archdiocese desperately wanting to placate Castro. But what was startling was the expression of one of the mothers, who lost her son for no real reason. She exuded a despair, a condemning stare, not at any people or any government, but perhaps for believing that she had escaped the influence of a despot, only to find that she had not escaped at all. Like a bad dream, as lived by the solemn mother, the demented in Havana control those who are there as well as us here.

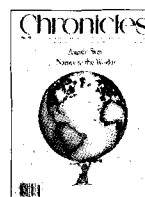
As the only solution to this problem, we should regain control of our foreign and domestic policies, and act purely for the benefit of our national interest. Our national interest includes equitable agreements with cooperating governments and humanitarian assistance when such assistance is used exclusively for humanitarian purposes. Our national interest entails fiscal soundness, which is not gained by maintaining artificially high prices on certain commodities and trade. Our national interest does not include the pursuit of folly at the expense of lives or massive foreign aid (read: tax dollars) or by draining local resources to the point of annihilation. Base our domestic and foreign policies on these sensible goals, and Castro and other despots like him will eventually fall.

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## EDUCATION

### Refuge by Peter Laurie

When still relatively small, I sang in a church choir whose quality was the envy of our whole capital city diocese, so that its members, who included a chorus of boy sopranos like myself, were recruited, auditioned, trained, and paid. This last feature helped reconcile to plain song and Palestrina my career army officer father who would have seen me in the Scouts, out on the diamond, or headed for West Point instead.

Two afternoons a week after school, I got what was still then an awkwardly attenuated leg up the step of a rusted bus at the edge of the boonies, rumbled across the rivulet into town, transferred, and stepped off at the jewel in pearl-grey English Gothic granite on its velvet lawn in my grandparents' genteel neighbor-

hood. But there were also the Sundays at daybreak for preritual run-throughs, plus the Thursday evenings with the grown choir—not needing, evidently, our regimens of diction, intonation, vocalize, ear-training, sight-singing, and Latin. Nevertheless, a night of Thomas Tallis or Vaughan Williams might have been expected to prove a little intense, exhausting, for children, so at the right moment our truly masterful choirmaster would masterfully thank us for our grown-up efforts at music and deportment. Then we were, about 20 of us, and all but me in easy position to foot it on home under streetlights, joyfully—noiselessly—dismissed.

Of course it all had a name, then. We called it The Christian Life. It appeared undetachable from what we also thought of as American life. We could not imagine not taking it for granted, hardly aware that we were becoming relics (so to speak) of its dissolving disappearance, relics with our own nonnegative-growth unpopulation-controlled offspring to try and raise as wholesomely as may be in an immoralist, if ecologically smug, war zone.

I was 30 when I came up from my de-

sign loft in the big city to be a pallbearer at my grandmother's funeral, the one who had helped me into the choir of happy memory that in turn had helped me lay the foundations of an artisanal, musical, literary, philosophical life. The church I had not seen since my voice changed had been refurbished in the manner of Episcopal Woodstock, Tudor altar cloths, damasks, silks, and tapestries whisked away and upstaged by psychedelic eyesores mocking the meditative majesty of lives of the saints in their harmonies of garnet and topaz leaded glass; our minister, now frail and venerable and white, actually going so far as to ask permission—out of deference to the deceased's term of service—to say the prayers a "last time the good old way." I, together with virtually everyone else there, a full house, as it were, mostly descendants of the founders of our obscure provincial capital that happened, on occasion, to have harbored a Washington Irving, a Herman Melville, a Henry James whose grandnieces went to school with my mother, had little trouble plopping the recently renovated travesty of a prayerbook back in its rack behind the pew, falling as one to our knees and making confession from indelible memory. A last time. The good old way. Even the psychedelic eyesores rippled with reverberant reverence.

It all came back to me at the gloomy end of the summer, as I threaded through the drizzle and the cobbled maze of Old Amsterdam paying belated homage to the wraith of my one Dutch friend, an old fellow teacher of Latin at what was once Melville's academy, a well-known resistor who on the way to the usual session in the galley of the usual yacht at the usual wharf on the usual evening became so overwhelmed with nausea he turned back home and missed the SS trap that meant torture and death to his fellows. It came back on the night train to Basel, the young Swiss matron with her half-Italian heritage from the isle of Capri commenting, "They try to make a big cookie of all Europe. Soon it will be all just crumbs!"

It came back as my succinct cab nosed up and down smooth stone lanes of Lausanne under pelting rains, through herds of beaded vehicles, at the moment of the commencement of a celebrated trade fair I knew nothing about. "Had I not come for the trade fair? Had I not even reserved a room? Was it not a sad end of summer?"

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