

city hospitals down for 24 hours a month—but to be brutally honest in a way no “serious” politician ever can. To quote Mailer and Breslin’s campaign slogan, these are campaigns with *No bullshit*.

So Mailer and Breslin were on the level about overthrowing the city bureaucracy and restoring power to the neighborhoods. Thompson was dead set on stopping the gentrification of Aspen. Bifra was out to show up the local corporate-state interests and to make fun of the police. Stern’s was a populist thrust at the two most common complaints about life in New York: crime on the streets, and the streets themselves.

And that is why this invisible college is, if not important in its own right, at least more significant than the soul-less civic faith it challenges. Even if Stern had not dropped out of the race, he would not have been elected governor. He *would* have gathered a lot of votes, though—not so much from people who like the death penalty and hate potholes as from those who think that Stern is funny and the other candidates are slime. After all, what does “don’t waste your vote” mean, if not “do something special with it”?

Jesse Walker is assistant editor of *Liberty* magazine.

Forbes–Funded Marxism

by Todd Seavey

Steve Forbes may not have won the Republican presidential nomination, but the Forbes millions are helping to shape the political culture of Brown University. The Forbes Foundation donated \$2 million to Brown’s most Marxist department, Modern Culture and Media.

When Tim Forbes announced the donation in 1991, just as I was graduating from Brown, the irony of the notoriously capitalist family giving money to the department was obvious to everyone at Brown. Even at this very liberal Ivy League school, MCM was often considered a leftist joke. That’s something, since it took a lot of effort to stand out as politically absurd at Brown. Relativism was a basic assumption of most humani-

ties classes and many students dressed as hippies over 20 years after Woodstock. The Brown student mentioned in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* who never heard of hippies is an impossibility—going to Brown in the 1980’s, he would have met hundreds.

Even in that milieu, MCM was special. Valued by most students mainly for its film production courses, MCM was also one of American academia’s great strongholds of deconstructionism, the French-spawned brand of film/literary theory that uses relativism—and just plain intellectual inconsistency—to weave together radical feminism, Freudianism, and hardcore Marxism. MCM was notorious for black-clad, pseudointellectual students, jargon-filled texts (hermeneutic patriarchal signifiers, etc.), and professors who humorlessly denounced all capitalism. One such professor, Duncan Smith, even wrote of the relief he felt when driving from West to East Berlin, escaping the crush of commercialism.

Deconstructionists spend most of their energy attacking Western capitalism, but the odds are they would hate—and attack—the foundations of any society of which they were members. The *reductio ad absurdum* of Enlightenment rationalism, deconstructionism treats every belief as suspect, every tradition as oppressive, and every idea that was not the conscious product of ideology as a sort of evil subliminal command to be rooted out and destroyed. No functioning society—of necessity a thing built on history, tradition, implicit assumptions, and market transactions—could ever be satisfactory to deconstructionists. Those civilizations that do exist must be subverted, through calculatedly strange art, scathing political criticism of anything insufficiently egalitarian, and film studies classes that treat all conventional movies as propaganda. Forbes’ money now aids this cultural mission—or anti-cultural mission.

I returned to Brown at the end of the ’95-96 school year for my five-year class reunion. I had abandoned my plan to wear my “Forbes for President” button to the reunion when Steve Forbes dropped out of the race (go ahead and call me a neocon—at least he talked about shrinking government and instituting school choice). The Forbes name was present elsewhere at Brown, though. Tim Forbes was being awarded an honorary degree, five years after the MCM donation. And

the new, snazzier MCM building bears the legend: “Malcolm S. Forbes Center, Department of Modern Culture and Media.” While visiting the building, I wondered if the Forbes money had worked any magical ideological transformation on the department. I noticed that in this bastion of feminism, some thoughtless perpetuator of patriarchy had left a toilet seat up. Beyond that, the most striking thing about the new building was the fancier, upgraded production equipment it housed.

When the donation was first announced, members of the department downplayed the seriousness of the ideological divide between the communist sympathizers at MCM and America’s most notorious family of “capitalist tools.” Moreover, since communism’s collapse, Brown has backpedaled a bit on its enthusiasm for socialism. Course catalogues that a year or two earlier had touted courses’ “Marxist perspectives” now advertised “postcommunist” and “postmodernist” perspectives.

The changing political times and the new production equipment will probably hasten MCM’s move toward emphasizing filmmaking instead of arcane theory. What students tend to want most out of the department is the praxis they can put to use in film school or in the nonacademic world. As Ali Kokmen (Brown class of 1992), who majored in MCM and now works with a New York City book publisher, puts it: “I suppose spending my college years in the MCM department wasn’t a total waste of time, but I’m thankful I’ve gotten better.”

The theory wears off. It should not be lightly dismissed, though. Deconstructionism—if only because of its extremism and the fundamental nature of its assault on civilization—was the philosophy to which I most felt the need to *respond* in college. As such, it probably helped inspire me, initially an English major, to pick up philosophy as a second major, and as intellectual self-defense. Having the deconstructionists’ complaints and the standards of academic philosophy in the back of my mind has, I think, helped keep me from being complacent in my views and kept me from being satisfied with the pat, often smug answers of mainstream conservatism.

I cannot blame paleoconservatives for being suspicious when capitalist millions flow—seemingly without regard to political and cultural consequences—to people dedicated to the undermining of the

very system that made the accumulation of those millions possible. Places like Harvard are still thought of as staid, conservative institutions by much of the general populace (and by aged alumni), but Harvard also produced the Unabomber, with help from Berkeley and Montana. The Ivy League has become a strange and wealthy ideological playground, and people concerned with preserving civilization (such as, say, Tim Forbes, editor of *American Heritage* magazine, or a man who wanted to be President) ought to watch carefully how the family fortune is spent by such institutions.

True, Steve Forbes can hardly be expected to watch every dime himself, and I would not want him to be so culturally uptight that we were robbed of entertaining moments such as him introducing the militant black band Rage Against the Machine on *Saturday Night Live*. And admittedly—as Steve Forbes must be well aware after his campaign—mainstream media are more dangerous to the culture than obscure Marxist critics. Still, a glance at the MCM textbooks in the Brown Bookstore should suffice to show there is something *wrong* with the Forbes media empire aiding MCM. When I examined the shelves on my reunion visit, typical textbooks included *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon, the socialist whose inclusion in Stanford's notorious Western Civilization survey bumped John Locke from the lineup; Michael T. Taussig's *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, with a quotation on the back cover calling the book "superb ethnography, a Marxist critique of world capitalism, a lesson in analogical and dialectical techniques (some of them bordering on the mystical)"; Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, Volume 1; and, perhaps most ironically (given Steve Forbes' anti-communist radio work under Reagan), *Cuban-American Radio Wars*, a book which criticizes Voice of America, noting that "In the United States, the paragon of the liberal tradition, the interests of the minority elite classes are paramount and are safeguarded by a representational structure favoring those classes."

Perhaps the book is correct, but if donations to the MCM department are any indication, those elite classes are not being too farsighted about preserving their own social system.

Todd Seavey writes from New York City.

FILM

Mondo Quasimodo

by Marian Kester Coombs

Last June, the 19,000 delegates to the Southern Baptist Convention voted to boycott the Walt Disney Company for its "promotion of homosexuality" and the other "anti-family" values. The convention pointed to Gay and Lesbian Days sponsored by Disney theme parks; to such twisted fare as *Priest*, *Powder*, and *Kids*, all films produced by Disney's Miramax; to such books as *Growing Up Gay*, published by Disney's Hyperion subsidiary; and to the company's granting of marital-type benefits to homosexual employees' partners.

President Clinton, a "lifelong Southern Baptist," promptly had his mouthpiece mouth the usual objection: "He doesn't agree with that particular position. That doesn't change his faith or membership in that denomination." While the two segments of this statement are typical Clinton in their mutual exclusivity, it does not follow that Clinton really is on both sides of every either/or. In his actions, at least, Clinton always favors the immoral, amoral, and abnormal. At this late stage of the game, it is no longer possible to put into words what is wrong with the Clintons and their associates. It is a wrongness so fundamental that one either grasps it profoundly, intuitively, or one cannot be brought to grasp it at all. This sense of wrongness beyond words has begun to define a physical boundary between the America of our fathers and another, entirely incompatible one.

More illuminating was Disney's retort to the Baptists, which justified the benefits policy as necessary in view of the intense competition for top talent in the entertainment industry. Thus it would seem that Disney equates "top talent" with homosexuality. This may begin to explain why the company's attitude toward society has changed so markedly.

Compared with the toxic products of most studios, the creations of the Disney Company always seemed righteous, up-

right, and wholesome, at least until the consolidation of the new executive powers that captured the company after Walt Disney's death. Each time Michael Eisner introduces himself on television as "chairman of the Disney Company," he appears to dance a little jig on Walt's grave and toast himself with a draught out of Walt's skull. Conservative, traditionalist, and pro-family critics have looked on in dismay as the old playful, good-hearted Disney anarcho-cosmic subversion—Four Legs Good/Two Legs Bad (*Bambi*), Underdog Good/Overman Bad (*Dumbo*), Red Man Good/White Man Bad (*Tonka*), Children Good/Step-parents Bad (*Cinderella*, *Snow White*, *The Sleeping Beauty*)—has marched further and further astray, rewriting classic literature as it goes.

In 1987's *The Little Mermaid*, Ariel gives up her family, identity, and environment, literally becoming a "fish out of water" to pursue her infatuation with Prince Eric. The mer-folk are shown ignorantly demonizing the land-dwelling humans, like a bunch of Texas skinheads disparaging Mexicans, while Ariel persists in dreamily championing humans despite the pain this causes her father, the ruler of the sea. Though the original Andersen tale ends with the protracted death of the mermaid, out of her element and condemned to watch her beloved marry another human, in the Disney version Ariel turns her back on her native ocean and switches species by magic. In 1993's *Beauty and the Beast*, it is not the father who opposes Belle's love for the Beast, but the traditional community of townsfolk led by tall, handsome, vigorous Gaston, who in a classical fable would have been Belle's natural match. There exists no such character in the 18th-century *La Belle et la bête*; he has been added both to rub in Belle's rejection of a natural match and to be the "dumb and dumber" butt of her sarcastic feminism.

There are many interpretations of *Beauty and the Beast*, and many meanings, no doubt, to the tale. One thing it does symbolize is the need for nubile girls to overcome their fear of men, to recognize the human tenderness that lurks beneath the alien, sometimes frightening exterior of the male. The Disney version focuses not on this leap of faith but on Belle's preference for a "monstrous" mate over a (despicably) "normal" one. For this is the new specialty of Disney films: the subversion of