

# APPALLO-O-METER

THE IN THESE TIMES INDEX OF INDECENCIES



By **David Futrelle**

## Double Dealey 7.8

If you've ever wondered what it would be like to star in your very own Zapruder film, Dallas entrepreneur Paul Crute has got a deal for you. For only \$25, you can take a ride in a vintage open-top limo down the route of John F. Kennedy's ill-fated motorcade, accompanied by recorded sounds recreating the original ride.

Tacky? No. "I view it as history, and there's nothing tasteless or tacky about history," Crute told the Associated Press. Magic bullets, umbrella men and second gunmen presumably cost extra.

## Deep thoughts 4.2

Convicted rapist and champion boxer Mike Tyson is now expressing some remorse for his past actions—specifically, for the time in prison he

spent reading serious literature. "When I was in prison I was wrapped up in all those deep books," he recently complained. "That Tolstoy crap. People shouldn't read that stuff."



## Moments of harmony 8.7

Italian wife-beaters are getting a second chance, due to a new ruling from Italy's highest court. As the *Chicago Sun-Times* recently reported, the court ruled that a husband couldn't be charged with a crime because he was only a part-time beater. His "occasional episodes" of violence were "inter-

persed with moments of harmony between the couple." One wonders if a similar protection will extend to murderers whose occasional episodes of murder are interspersed with weeks and months that are completely murder-free.

## Duped! 6.6

Several weeks back, newspapers around the world (and a certain *In These Times* column) reported that singer Mariah Carey had told a reporter she wanted to be skinny like "starving kids all over the world ... but not with all those flies and death and stuff." It turns out the quote was a, er, hoax engineered by the online magazine *Cupcake*. At least that's what we read in *Newsweek*, and we're pretty sure they're not making it up.

## Appallo-O-Meter

1. Martha Stewart Living Dead
2. Yeltsin-healthy
3. Dole-orous
4. Below the Beltway
5. PRI-posterous
6. Ralph Reed-iculous
7. Netan-yahooish
8. Morris Dicked
9. Taliban terrible
10. Unabombastic

Rabin, may he rest in peace, and Shimon Peres, who during the last four years raised the number of Jews in Judea and Samaria by 40 percent. ... We should also praise the Israeli left, which didn't utter a word about this for four years, and the American government, which knew but didn't care. And also we should give thanks to the Palestinian Authority, which saw that we were building but did not permit this to disrupt the peace process."

Meridor goes on to promise that Likud will continue and amplify these policies, and there is little indication that Washington will withdraw its tacit support of them. If nothing in this equation changes, we can be sure of many more deadly clashes like those in late September.

—Stephen Siegel

# CLINTON AND ABORTION

As Bill Clinton partied down at his inaugural bash in 1993, pro-choice advocates breathed a collective sigh of relief: finally, a chance to fight back after 12 years of defending abortion from attack. But after four years of our long-awaited Democratic president, the most one can say about abortion rights is that the Reagan-Bush status quo has been maintained. Abortion may be formally legal, but for many women it's totally inaccessible: Eighty-four percent of counties in the United States don't have even one abortion provider, and hundreds of thousands of poor women are unable to pay for an abortion.

The first weeks of the Clinton administration gave pro-choice Democrats good reason to be elated. In his first two days on the job, Clinton issued a rapid-fire succession of executive orders overturning various restrictive abortion policies. He rescinded the "gag rule" prohibiting doctors in federally funded clinics from discussing abortion with their patients, and lifted the ban on abortion in overseas military hospitals, though the woman still had to pay out of her own pocket. During Clinton's

tlers of Shilo and Shvut Rachel in the West Bank. Other protests have erupted around the construction of bypass roads linking Jewish settlements, which entails the confiscation of large tracts of Palestinian land.

The construction of settlements, perhaps the most inflammatory Israeli policy, has continued at a rapid pace. A common myth has it that settlement construction was frozen by the Labor government. In fact, Labor had a very

aggressive settlement policy, but this went largely unreported and uncriticized. The silence of critics of the Israeli government—in Israel, in Palestine and in the United States—allowed it a free hand in the Occupied Territories, and they therefore share responsibility for the inevitable outcome.

The current (Likud) minister of finance, Dan Meridor, suggested as much in a recent interview: "In this regard we have to praise Yitzhak

first year in office, congressional Democrats were able to reverse a prohibition on covering the abortions of federal employees with health insurance provided by the government.

Yet overall, Clinton's record seems rather weak, especially considering the much stronger measures that were being contemplated in Congress at the time. In 1993, House Democrats proposed the Freedom of Choice Act, which would have codified *Roe vs. Wade* as a federal statute, preventing any further erosion of abortion rights on a state-by-state basis and removing *Roe* from the reaches of a conservative Supreme Court. But the Freedom of Choice Act sputtered out in committee. Clinton made no effort to rally support among recalcitrant members of Congress; on the campaign trail he pledged to sign the bill, but once in office he barely mentioned it publicly.

More significant was Clinton's lukewarm position on the 1976 Hyde Amendment, which prohibits the use of federal Medicaid dollars to cover the abortions of poor women, except if the woman's life is in danger. Congressional Democrats made a serious push in 1993 to reverse the Hyde Amendment, but, lacking strong support from the Clinton administration, they were unable to do more than extend Medicaid coverage to abortions in the case of rape or incest. No one from the administration was sent to testify before the House Appropria-

tions Committee on abortion funding. What's more, in a move that outraged pro-choice organizations, Clinton advocated classifying abortion as an "optional" procedure, meaning that while states would be reimbursed for 50 percent of the costs of funding abortion if they chose to do so, they would not be penalized if they chose not to fund abortions. So even if the bill had passed, the number of states funding abortion probably would not have increased.

After the 1994 elections, freshmen Republicans promptly set about ending coverage of abortions for federal employees and reinstating the ban on abortion in overseas military hospitals, attaching both measures to appropriations bills. Even though anti-abortion Republicans didn't have enough votes to override a presidential veto, Clinton signed both bills in early 1996, anti-abortion riders and all. He did apologize, of course.

"Clinton may not have been a staunch advocate of everything the pro-choice community could want, but he's the best we can hope for," says Terry Sol-lum of the Alan Guttmacher Institute, a pro-choice think tank. Attitudes like

this—widespread among pro-choice organizations—are a main reason that Clinton has been able to get away with doing relatively little to expand abortion rights, despite their importance to so many of his supporters. Of course, Clinton has made a real effort to protect late-term abortions, and he's pledged not to appoint pro-life judges to the Supreme Court (although he's appointed at least one anti-choice jurist to a federal appeals court in Wyoming). But while *Roe vs. Wade* will be safe under another Clinton administration, we're unlikely to see any expansion of access—especially for poor women—and there's no reason to believe that restrictions at the state level won't continue to spread. Maybe Clinton wants to keep abortion safe and legal, but he also seems to be doing his part to make sure it's rare.

—Kim Phillips

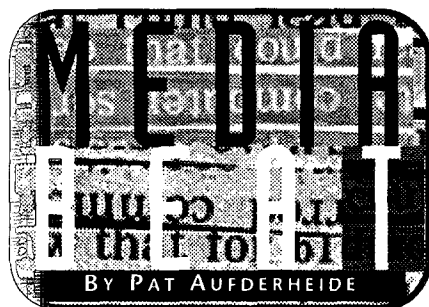
## Would you like fries with your wiretap?

IN BRITAIN, THE MCDONALD'S CORP.'S LIBEL SUIT AGAINST

Helen Steel and Dave Morris has entered its third year. At issue are pamphlets the two unemployed anarchists distributed accusing McDonald's of destroying rainforests, exploiting child labor and selling unhealthy food. In recent testimony, agents formerly employed by McDonald's have provided details about the burger behemoth's efforts to collect information on London Greenpeace, the group that put out the pamphlet. (London Greenpeace is not affiliated with Greenpeace International.) The company now admits that for several months, beginning in October 1989, it deployed seven McSpies, who, according to court testimony, broke into London Greenpeace offices, stole letters and compiled dossiers that included the photos and addresses of all group members. One McSpy, Roy Pocklington, testified that he put together a package of baby clothes for the son of libel defendant Dave Morris "in an attempt to discover Mr. Morris' address." Another infiltrator, Frances Tiller, expressed remorse. "I felt very uncomfortable doing that particular job," she said. "I did not like the deception, prying on people and interfering in their lives. I did not think there was anything wrong with what the group was doing. I believe people are entitled to their views." —J.B.



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## A broader spectrum

Listeners' and viewers' rights come before corporate rights: That's the verdict from a three-judge panel in the District of Columbia Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals in *Time Warner vs. FCC*. The decision has far-reaching consequences because it creates virtual space for non-profit activities in tomorrow's media.

The judges were ruling on whether or not providers of direct broadcast satellite TV service, or DBS (which comes to you via a pizza box-sized satellite receiving dish), have to make room for non-commercial and educational programs. A 1992 law had reserved 4 to 7 percent of the space on any DBS service for such programs. But a lower court decided in 1993 that the set-aside told DBS operators what to program, and so violated their First Amendment rights.

The appeals court judges argued, however, that new technologies hadn't changed the fact that there were still more people who wanted to use a public resource—broadcast spectrum—than could do so. Even though DBS operators carry perhaps hundreds of channels, the court ruled, they control which channels will be carried. Therefore, they must leave at least a little space on their system for expression that is not profit-motivated.

Setting aside space doesn't guarantee that anyone will make good use of it. But without a set-aside, no one would even get to try. Public radio and public TV only came into existence because government reserved spectrum for non-commercial broadcasting. Even then, neither was able to offer a viable alternative to commercial broadcasters until 1967, when the government put in some money and created a national organization. More recently, of

course, public broadcasting has been put on a starvation diet and made to beg from corporations and individuals, hobbling the largest national experiment so far in public electronic media.

The action now shifts to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which will have to regulate the terms of the set-aside (exactly how much? who qualifies? how much can they qualify for?). The FCC will begin a process, or docket, open to anyone who wants to write or e-mail comments. The more potential users there are—such as labor unions, educational, community and religious organizations—the more space the FCC is likely to clear out on the viewing menu.

## Synergy in action

Will the lead of Disney/ABC's weekly sitcom *Ellen* come out as a lesbian? Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. has been busily stirring up rumors, with hints dropped in the info-empire's *TV Guide*, the *New York Post* and *Fox News*

*Sunday* on the Fox News Network. This deployment of conglomerate synergy has fueled speculation about Rupert's agenda—is it political, financial, or both? Religious conservatives, including Pat Robertson (interviewed on Fox's news show), warn they might stage a protest or boycott of Disney, one of Rupert's mega-rivals.

## Scandal sheets

Magazines have been the advance guard in the emerging media universe, characterized by ever more highly defined niche markets. The latest magazine to search out a new market niche is *Divorce*, pitched to the million-plus folks who break the knot each year. Publisher Dan Couvrette—who earlier scored with *Wedding Bells*, a magazine for the bridal market—has found attorneys, real estate brokers, therapists and hair-replacement specialists eager to advertise in his new venture. Can the launch of *Deadbeat Dads' Digest* be far behind?

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## TOMORROW'S NEWS TONIGHT

By Steve Brodner



*As predicted, Dole finds himself outmatched in debates.*