

not the contents.

But all this is nitpicking. The book remains a worthwhile investment and it is hoped that many more similar ones get published—and not just on UFOs. Chances are that this will indeed be the case: the publisher, Prometheus Books, has started a Critiques of the Paranormal Series, headed by Dr. Paul Kurtz, who is connected with the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. This committee has exploded the blatant hoaxes of the charlatans von Daniken and Uri Geller. Robert Sheaffer, incidentally, is a member of that organization's UFO subcommittee.

Armando Simón is a research psychologist.

Mandatory Vehicle Inspections Under Fire

Vehicle Safety Inspection Systems: How Effective?

By W. Mark Crain.

Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute. 1980. 70 pp. \$4.25 paper.

Reviewed by Brian Summers

It all seems so obvious. Mandatory vehicle inspections mean safer cars. Safer cars mean fewer accidents. Anyone who challenges mandatory vehicle inspection must be a misanthrope.

Or an economist. W. Mark Crain, associate professor of economics at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, compared the accident records of states that have mandatory vehicle inspection programs with those that don't have such programs. He found "no evidence that vehicle inspection systems are effective in reducing highway deaths or accidents." Crain reached this conclusion through statistical analysis. He compared state accident records (death rate, nonfatal injury rate, nonfatal accident rate) with nine variables: (1) the existence and nature of inspection systems, (2) population density, (3) median family income, (4) fuel consumption, (5) federal highways, (6) population age, (7) procedure for driver's license renewal, (8) alcohol consumption, and (9) minimum damage required for reporting an accident. Only the first, the existence and nature of state inspection systems, yielded counterintuitive results.

Crain offers two possible interpretations of these results. First, periodic inspections don't improve the inherent

safety characteristics of vehicles. Second, periodic inspections do make vehicles safer, but this potential for improved highway safety is dissipated by adjustments in driver behavior.

The former interpretation is supported by several types of evidence. First, only a small portion of highway accidents—2 to 6 percent—are conclusively attributable to mechanical defects. In addition, no single mechanically related factor stands out as a cause of accidents. Thus, diagnostic attention cannot be concentrated on particular problem areas. Finally, as several studies have shown, the detection rate of real defects is often less than 50 percent.

The role of incentives is particularly important in Crain's analysis. In the absence of mandatory inspection, vehicle owners certainly have incentives for maintaining their vehicles. They also have incentives to seek out inspection stations that ignore borderline defects. Inspectors have incentives to minimize "hassling" and to "discover" non-existent defects.

Adjustments in driver behavior are difficult to document, but Crain offers two plausible possibilities. The first (drawing on the work of economist Sam Peltzman) is that the perception of safer cars leads to more risk taking by drivers. The second is a belief by drivers that government responsibility for safety maintenance makes cars safer and thus less in need of maintenance attention.

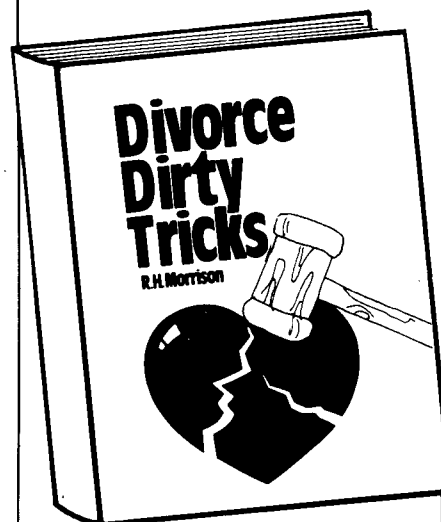
Incentives also play a role in identifying the supporters of mandatory periodic inspection:

The theory of economic regulation which stresses the gains to special interests offers useful insights here, a point of particular interest because the theory has been developed primarily in the analysis of economic regulation and has not been applied to social regulation (including consumer-protection regulation). This special interest approach would predict that the primary proponents of a nationally standardized inspection program are those trade associations of industries involved either directly in providing inspections or indirectly in manufacturing and distributing vehicle parts and accessories.

This, Crain shows, turns out to be the case. The supporters of government regulation are the special-interest beneficiaries, not the general public. Shouldn't that be obvious?

Brian Summers is a member of the staff of the Foundation for Economic Education.

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HEALTH & WELFARE

(Continued from p. 62)

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you and that unpreserved fats and oils spontaneously turn into immune-system suppressive carcinogens when exposed to air. We hope that widespread public knowledge of these facts will lead to the return of routine antioxidant preservative use and to the development of even more effective new antioxidants.

A list of scientific literature on this topic is available through REASON. Send a stamped, self-addressed envelope and ask for H&W references, June. Durk Pearson and Sandy Shaw are consulting scientists and authors.

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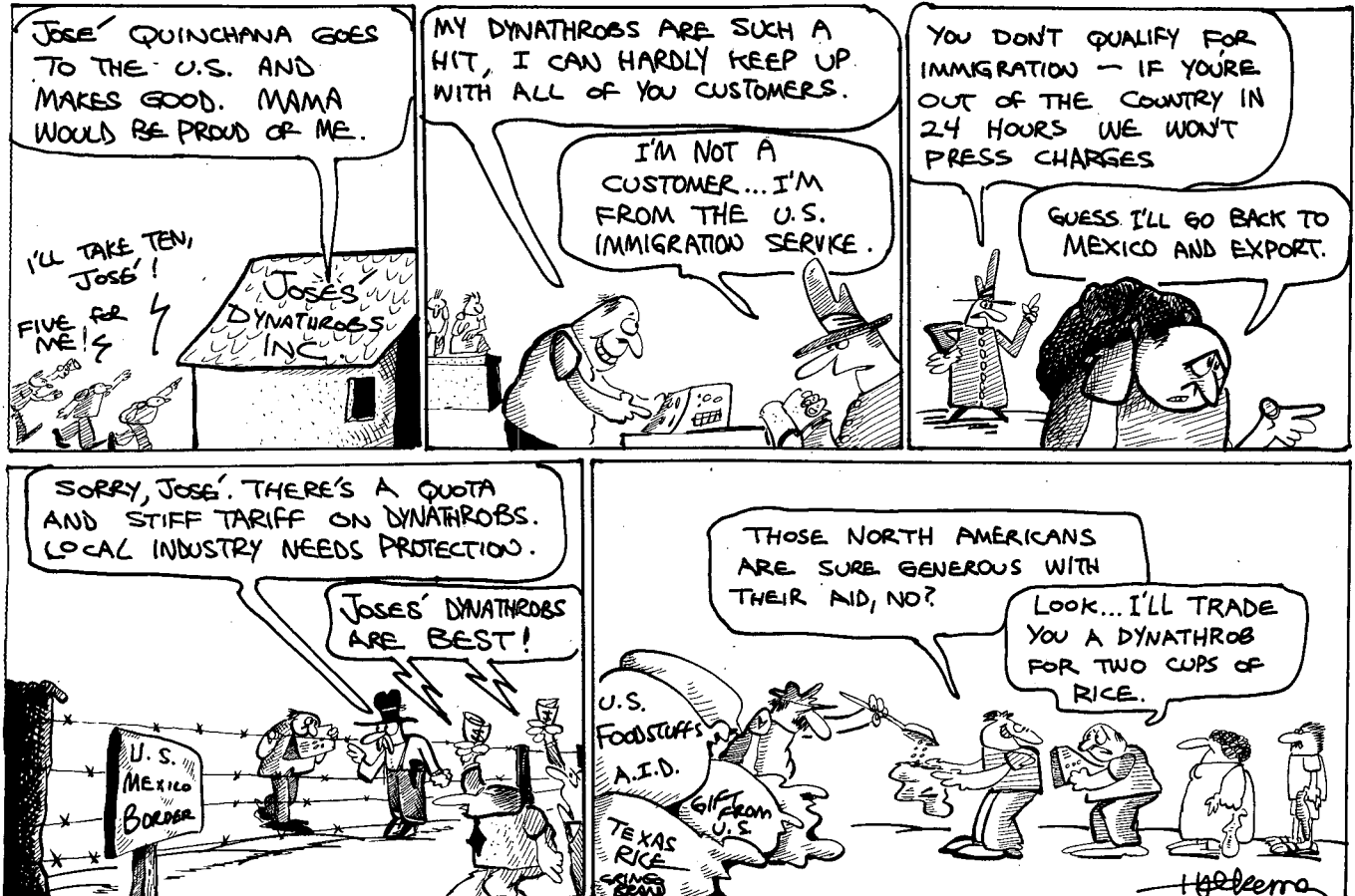
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Free Inquiry

**A Call for the
Critical Examination
of the
Bible and Religion**

We are confronted today with a situation of imbalance. Tens of millions of people are exposed daily to exhortations about religion and the Bible. Fundamentalist preachers and missionaries claim that the Bible's teachings are literally true, divinely inspired, and the ultimate source of human salvation. In this, the centenary year of the death of Charles Darwin, the issue of whether scientific inquiry or biblical revelation should serve as the basis of knowledge and of political and ethical conduct is as controversial and relevant as it was in Darwin's day. Countless millions of individuals in modern society are largely indifferent to the claims of the fundamentalists. They reject the claims of biblical religion as superstitious and irrelevant to their interests. They believe in the secularization of society and the use of scientific methods of inquiry. Committed to tolerance, they hold that religion should be a private matter rather than a public one and that one can live an ethical life without being a devout believer. The Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish sects that abound in America have deep ethnic roots. Supported by ties of kinship and tradition, individuals born into these religions often accept them without much thought. It is often a question of birth, not conviction, of ceremony, not commitment. Religious extremists are not content to leave the rest of us alone. They feel compelled to save souls and they condemn unbelievers as "sinners." Formerly this message was heard only from the pulpits of private churches. Today the situation is radically altered. The

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R. W. Bradford & Company is the successor to Liberty Coin Service, a pioneer in the precious metals brokerage field. It was founded by R. W. Bradford in 1971 to specialize in the sale of hard assets to investors. It regularly advertised in libertarian periodicals since its inception in 1971. From 1972 to 1981 it was operated in Lansing, Michigan, in conjunction with a retail precious metals and coin store.

Its first advertisement promised, "LCS hopes to prosper by offering the small and medium lot investor first quality coins and services at prices as low as those available to larger and more sophisticated investors." During the ensuing decade, the firm has prospered by handling transactions from 2 figures to 6 figures for its clients, ranging from college students to corporation presidents.

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