

By John Dentinger

Tom Paine Meets the Walkman

He was named after Oliver Cromwell, but the resemblance stops there. O. C. ("Crom") Carmichael III not only makes a living in the marketplace, he sells some of the better products of the marketplace of ideas through his Audio Classics cassette series.

Carmichael majored in business and minored in economics at Vanderbilt University, but he confesses that "what I now know about economics is self-taught. My economics professors would be disappointed to hear that I didn't learn anything from them, but they'd probably agree."

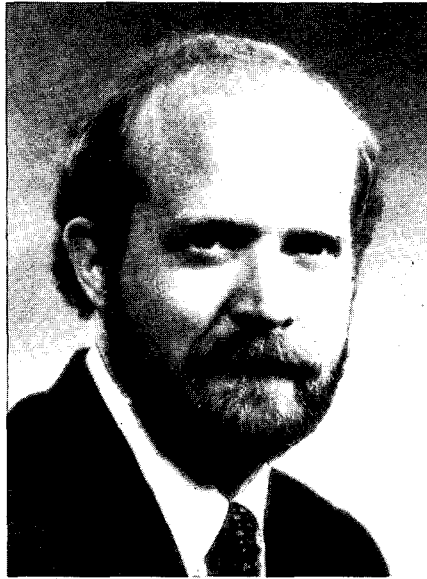
After graduating from Vanderbilt University in 1971, Carmichael went to work for First American National Bank in Nashville, where he spent five years working in various departments as a trouble-shooter, helping them straighten out multimillion-dollar loan problems of different subsidiaries.

In the mid-'70s, remuneration in the banking field was proportional to the amount of imagination needed to survive in the then-heavily regulated banking environment. Carmichael moved on to areas where an individual could make more of a difference—and be rewarded accordingly.

He bought into a small company, Sports Industries of America, which has, over the past eight years, grown to distribute products in 28 states. That firm is now a subsidiary of Carmichael & Carmichael, which Crom owns with his brother. Their various subsidiaries include wholesale distribution of sporting goods, bowling supplies, and other merchandise.

Dealing in tangible goods and brand names was a whole new ball game from marketing something fungible, like bank loans. He was soon to diversify further, however, into retailing the tangible embodiment of something more intangible than cash: ideas.

Six or seven years ago, in the course of reading financial newsletters, Crom became interested in the Austrian school of economics. What set it apart from other economic theories, he says, is that "it made sense. Economics is a function of human motivation—of the way people



O. C. ("Crom") Carmichael III

are, not how we'd like them to be. When it comes to capital investment, that's almost all there is to it. In free enterprise, a loss is limited to the amount investors had to put in—but with government, the loss can be infinite. Prosperity takes human endeavor."

Meanwhile, trying to make use of time spent commuting, Crom experienced the advantages of instructional audio cassettes. In his case, he could drive and listen to talks on financial analysis and other topics. The concept became the basis for Crom's next venture.

A couple of years ago he was at a seminar hosted by the Washington, D.C.-based Cato Institute. He heard libertarian scholar George H. Smith lecture on the American revolution, and the two of them began to talk about producing a series of audio tapes discussing the ideas of the great thinkers of history. The fruit of the discussion was the Audio Classics, a series of tapes edited by Smith that hit the market in the fall of 1985.

The tapes weave historical narrative together with the words of the thinkers Smith selected for the series—an eclectic group spanning the spectrum from Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and Adam Smith to Karl Marx, Edmund Burke, and Machiavelli. Audio Classics,

advertised in think magazines as diverse as *National Review*, the *New York Review of Books*, and REASON, has grown to 700 subscribers in its first several months of existence.

Crom contrasts the tapes' approach with the usual approach to teaching history: "When I was in school and studied history, I heard the who, the what, the when, the where—but not the why." The Boston Tea Party, for example, was not simply a protest against a small tax on tea but a protest against the principle that Britain had the authority to levy such a tax at all—and a protest under circumstances in which the tea would shortly have been seized by the colonial government anyway. As Carmichael notes in reference to his twelve-year-old daughter, "The cassettes give her a different perspective on what she's hearing in school."

Carmichael's successive business ventures have been a constant learning experience—learning tied in with his reading of economists. "What Adam Smith says about the wealth of nations is just as true for a business. Each individual business has characteristics different from other businesses," he notes. "That's why division of labor is so important to prosperity. If you don't have someone in charge of each of these specialized functions who really knows that function, you won't be as competitive. A lot of the basic business principles are relevant to the audio publishing field; but there's a lot new, too. It's harder to define the target market as a retailer than as a wholesaler, but we are producing a quality product and making the consumer aware of it."

Carmichael, who is divorced, enjoys spending time with his two children. He also likes golf, playing tennis, skiing, reading—and listening to audio cassettes. He is planning on producing a series of tapes on economists, as well as tapes covering different periods of history. Perhaps if enough of us hear a more-rounded recounting of history than the government-school version, we won't be condemned to repeat it.

John Dentinger is a free-lance writer.

The Spy Who Found Honor

By Craig M. Collins

James Bond fans know that no one but Sean Connery has ever brought dignity to the role. George Lazenby, one of the others who have portrayed Her Majesty's best secret agent, managed an uninspired but sincere portrayal—which is unquestionably better than anything done by Roger Moore. Moore's presumptuous attempts at the role can be dismissed as broad farce. Pee Wee Herman could capture the essence of the role better than Moore. James Bond is a hired killer, a highly efficient and very deadly machine completely amoral except for his absolutely unshakable loyalty to the Crown. His body is like rich, brown leather stretched taut over braided steel-cable muscles. Even if Roger Moore's entire body were run through a juicer, it wouldn't squeeze out enough machismo to fill one of Sean Connery's shoes.

Connery's eyes, like a panther's, are incessantly alert, but his face reveals something about the man within the machine. He's devoted his entire lifetime to developing himself as an agent of death, not for pleasure or money or love or hate, but solely in the name of patriotism. His duty to his country is the *sine qua non* of James Bond. Since emotions are a handicap in his profession, he has exorcised himself of them completely, thus incapacitating him for normal life. If it were somehow important to national security, James Bond could calmly saw through a live kitten with a dull kitchen knife. He has permanently encased in ice that part of his soul which, in other people, allows them to enjoy feelings such as compassion and sympathy. Printed somewhere on his heart are the words, "Keep frozen when not in use."

Although, or perhaps because, he is unable to ride the emotional roller coaster of life, his face perpetually reveals traces of his only remaining emotion: the sadness of realizing, only after it is irrecoverable, what he has lost. Bond is never happy—the closest he could ever come to laughing is an occasional smirk in appreciation of the irony of a particular situation—and for positive emo-

tions he must be content with the self-respect and satisfaction of having done the right thing. All of Bond's personal sacrifices, however, are made understandable, even heroic, because of his all-consuming devotion to the most noble of causes—the triumph of good over evil.



The Equalizer: No longer in service to the state, ex-spy Robert McCall (portrayed by Edward Woodward) now helps equalize the odds for the underdog.

But imagine the extent to which the tragedy of this character would be amplified if, late in life, he not only realized what he has lost but also began to question the sole justification for his entire existence: his patriotism. Perhaps he had not been fighting on the side of good against evil but instead had spent his lifetime committing the most abominable acts imaginable against others, all on behalf of what he now sees is a self-serving, morally ambiguous political entity. His innumerable crimes might not, after all, have been justified by honorable ends. Perhaps his consummate loyalty had been misdirected. *This* tragic figure has found embodiment in Robert McCall, the central character of the CBS series *The Equalizer*.

McCall, portrayed by Edward Wood-

ward (the star of the acclaimed 1980 Australian movie *Breaker Morant*), once worked for a spy ring known only as the "agency," which undoubtedly is intended to be the CIA. In his conversations with an ex-comrade who still works for the agency, McCall hints that he left the agency because, much to his horror, he finally realized that he had committed his many unpardonable sins, all in the name of espionage, for an agency that favored pragmatism over principle and put honor and decency far lower on the list of priorities than face-saving and political expedience. He now suffers the inescapable guilt of an executioner who one day discovers that the judges have been sentencing prisoners not for moral offenses but simply for being inconvenient to the judges' personal interests, and that for most of his life he has sent hundreds of innocent people screaming to their deaths.

It is out of a desperate but pathetically futile attempt to cleanse himself that the now-retired McCall spends all of his days selflessly assisting the world's underdogs, or at least those who answer his newspaper advertisement offering his assistance in equalizing the odds against them. This "good guy to the rescue" stuff sometimes has the flavor of a mouthful of granulated sugar, but in McCall's case the pathos of his situation is compelling.

James Bond and Robert McCall could have been friends except that neither is capable of feeling anything like friendship. Given the type of company they usually keep, their survival depends upon their ability to regard everyone with a coldly analytical degree of suspicion. The warmest interpersonal relationship that either man would ever allow himself is probably something similar to a cordial *détente*. Both are exceedingly self-confident, and McCall, like Bond, speaks with a British accent. In the figurative sense, they share a common enemy—evil.

One difference between the men, however, is that Bond richly rewards his physical body for faithful service by regularly enjoying fine dining, beautiful women, and other luxurious accommodations. McCall, on the other hand, has transcended these material pleasures. He lives a relatively simple life in a comfort-