

Letters

Right and Wrong

Ms. Polgreen's article, "The Death of Local Radio" (April 1999) could not miss the point more. She states that the important result of consolidation has been that playlists are selected by researchers who live and work hundreds of miles away and that new artists have difficulties getting their music played on radio stations. Life as we know it will not end because an artist doesn't get his or her music on a radio station. It is ending because consolidation has led to the public being bombarded with only an extreme right-wing point of view.

In one way or another, the message is always anti-public and pro-deregulation, privatization and corporate welfare. Most of all it is foaming-at-the-mouth, rabid Clinton-hating. During Monicagate, Jacor called itself "Impeachment Radio" in many parts of the country and took time out from urging people to contact their representative and demand he or she vote to impeach only to talk sports. Having failed in their attempt

to lynch the president, they have moved back to accusing him of multiple murders in the United States and Yugoslavia to divert public attention from his "selling out the United States to China".

CHARLES LEACH
Lynchburg, Ohio

Pay the Freight

I am more than willing to pay my share of educating and training Latinas, those who have entered the country legally ("Left Behind," April 1999). Anything less is short sighted.

But while we are fulfilling our moral and social duty in helping these women who are already here it is not unreasonable to suggest a moratorium on admitting more of them who will simply compound the problem.

We have 26 million immigrants in America today. No one can accuse us of turning our backs on the huddled masses and no taxpayers on earth are as generous to immigrants.

HENRY CLIFFORD
Wainscott, N.Y.

Overcautious

Jonathan Chait, in "Giving Away the Farm" (April 1999), misrepresents some aspects of the argument to partially privatize Social Security. First, he says, people who invest their money wisely will get better returns than those who do not. Well, of course. I fail to see why that should make the blood run cold. We already accept vast inequalities in salary, investments, perks, and, yes, even Social Security checks, which right now give bigger checks to higher earners. Intelligence should have its reward.

Second, he says if you privately invest your retirement funds, then the state of the stock market in the year you retire "would have an enormous impact." Nonsense. I first became a small investor in 1992, when the market was at 3,000. Even if it fell by half this year, I have still gained 66 percent on my initial investment. Say the market does tank the year you retire. Unless it drops below the point is was when you first began working 45 years ago, you will come out ahead, perhaps

a bit less, but far ahead anyway. (Needless to mention that the market has never fallen over the average 45-year working life.)

Finally, Chait echoes the dire warning of so many defenders of Social Security: in a private system, you may outlive your savings. You may, and preventing that would be up to you, just like preventing yourself from running out of groceries already is (my God, why do we trust the people with such an important task? Surely the government should step in!). But what if you don't outlive your savings? What if your savings outlive you? Unlike Social Security, which stops at your death, your accumulated private retirement funds could be handed down to your spouse or children. That would enrich your family, maybe giving your kids a chance for college or for a better life than you could afford. Over a generation or two, it could substantially improve your family's standard of living.

ARLYNDA LEE BOYER
Staunton, Va.

Now You See It ...

With regards to Charles Peters' item ("Tilting at Windmills," April 1999) in which he chastises *The New York Times* for burying Mr. Clinton's pledge of \$18 million to the Troops for Teachers program: I have some first hand insight that may be of interest. I retired from the United States Air Force after 20 years of service in October 1998. During my transition assistance seminar, I was told, after inquiring about the Troops to Teachers program, that the program's funding had been pulled and this was no longer an option.

JEFFREY W. TRAUTNER
via email

The editor replies: The program was allowed to lapse. That's why I thought its resurrection was worth more than one line.

Book Bribes

[Re. the April 1999 "Memo of the Month," about an unsuccessful effort to donate a book to the White House]:

Position Available

The *Monthly* is looking for a business manager. The job offers an opportunity to learn all aspects of magazine publishing. Duties include handling circulation, subscriptions, direct mail marketing, and budget. Send resumes to:

Lydia Polgreen
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ingtonmonthly.com"

What a gem! The ethics in government act has become the ignorance in government act. The first amendment guarantees the right "to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." If a book about politics doesn't fall into that category, precious little does.

An extremely valuable book—say, a Gutenberg Bible—might reasonably be considered a bribe. Any standard, hardbound edition of a book still in print is clearly communication, not a bribe. The mentality of the lawyer who advised White House staff to return that book is a wonderful example of bureaucracy at its worst.

DAVID GRANT M.D.
San Antonio, TX

Say it Loud

There is something fundamentally amiss with Jason DeParle's article, *The Silence of the Liberals*, in the April 1999 *Washington Monthly*.

The headline is correct. Liberals are far too quiet nowadays, and when they do speak they usually bitch and moan instead of offering solutions. But for DeParle to suggest, "There's nothing inherently wrong with a strong conservative voice" and liberals "should challenge, in a thoughtful way, conservatives' instinctive hostility..." is simply absurd. When have conservatives ever been thoughtful or accepting of the liberal point of view?

It would be a tragic mistake to play patty cake with conservatives. By following DeParle's suggestions, liberals would only be applying band-aids to gross, open sores. The decay would go on, shuffled around, as in welfare to work, from an agency with some accountability (the government) to one with none (private industry).

If the left truly wants to get involved with this debate, it should offer some revolutionary ideas such as forming unions for the working poor, insisting on day care availability, health insurance, paid vacations, a way to pursue grievances, a way to hold private companies accountable to their employees, and a livable minimum wage.

STEPHEN J. DICK
Muncie, IN

Over-protected

After reading Robert Worth's "Guess Who Saved the South Bronx?" (April 1999), I'm sure I wasn't alone in welcoming the steady comeback of this gritty but proud borough.

The revitalization efforts going on in the South Bronx are a testimony both to the determination of local residents not to give up on their neighborhoods and to the willingness of government officials not to repeat the costly mistakes of the past.

But if the South Bronx is to maintain its momentum against what still are great odds, community leaders are also going to have to avoid the mistakes already being made by the institution Mr. Worth credits with saving the borough: big government.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) may soon wreak the same havoc in the inner cities that "urban renewal" programs did a generation ago. In a bid to promote "environmental justice"—the belief that poor, mostly minority neighborhoods are disproportionately exposed to sources of pollution—EPA is proposing a scheme guaranteed to drive businesses out of or to discourage them from locating in inner cities, including the South Bronx. For companies planning to expand existing plants or build new ones in the inner cities, it will no longer suffice for them to comply with applicable environmental statutes. Under the procedure under consideration by EPA, the agency will determine whether a permit issued by a state environmental agency will have a "discriminatory impact," "disparate impact," or "other cognizable impacts" on a nearby minority community. These highly subjective terms are left conveniently undefined by EPA.

One could hardly think of a better way to force companies to abandon the inner city for suburbia's more congenial regulatory climate. And while Mr. Worth may not put much faith in "economic development," pointing out that Manhattan is only a 15-minute subway ride away, not everybody in the South Bronx is going to find a job on Broadway or Wall Street.

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Tilting at Windmills

BY CHARLES PETERS

A Possible President • Celebrity Journalism • Credit Card Companies Crow •

The Toilet Paper War • The Case of the Missing Plutonium

IF YOU WANT EVIDENCE THAT treating drug addicts is more effective than locking them up, take a look at Arizona, the first state to try treating all of its nonviolent drug offenders. The program saved the state more than \$2.5 million in its first year of operation, according to a report issued by the Arizona Supreme Court.

A REVEALING DIFFERENCE between "You've Got Mail" and the 1939 movie upon which it is based, "The Shop Around the Corner": The leading characters in the latter, played by James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan, were salespeople in a small retail store. In the 1990s version, the screenwriter, Nora Ephron, elevated their status. The Sullavan character, now played by Meg Ryan, is a bookstore owner and the Stewart character, now Tom Hanks, is the head of a mega bookstore. Could this be because Ephron felt today's audiences couldn't identify with anyone who loved a lowly salesperson, that to be a romantic object today you have to be glitzier, or at least the credible possessor of a nice apartment in Manhattan?

\$80,000 FOR EVERY 21 YEAR OLD, to be financed by a 2 percent tax on the property owned by the richest 40 percent. That's the proposal presented in *The Stakeholder Society* by Bruce Ackerman and Anne Alstott. I am sympathetic, but I wouldn't give it all to them at 21. Samuel Butler—I think it was either in *Erewhon* or *Erewhon Revisited*—discussed a similar idea

and observed that even the brightest 21 year-olds are capable of behavior that reminds one of how close they are to adolescence. So why not give half at 21 and the other half at 30? Or maybe, unless the money is used for education, hold it all 'til 30. Judgment usually matures by that time and a stake can play a magical role. This magazine would not have happened if

The White House Correspondents' Dinner has become an embarrassment to the profession of journalism.

my parents hadn't given me \$20,000 to help start it. Being able to invest my own money convinced other investors that I was serious.

TO GIVE YOU THE FLAVOR OF the White House Correspondents' Dinner, this year's guests included Larry Flynt, Sean Penn, Colin Powell, Claire Danes, Betty Currie, Henry Kissinger, Lucianne Goldberg, Val Kilmer, Vinny Testaverde, Melanie Griffith, and Bill Clinton. At the high point of the festivities, Susan McDougal sat on Flynt's lap.

THE TOWN OF SOMERSET, MD., located just outside Washington, is populated with the kind of affluent suburbanites who usually frown on those who take handouts

from the government. That is, of course, unless the handouts are going to them.

The town had a swimming pool that was supported by membership fees. Then someone figured out that if the pool was turned over to the town, the fees would be paid in the form of town taxes that could be deducted from the federal income tax. At a town meeting where the idea was proposed a few idealists objected that it was wrong to transfer the cost to the average national taxpayer, who was less well-off than the citizens of Somerset. But that argument proved unpersuasive. In fact, the town voted in favor of adding its tennis courts to the package so that they too would be paid for not by the people of Somerset but by the people of the United States.

BURIED ON PAGE 79 OF THE 616-page second volume of the four-volume annual budget put out by the White House on Feb. 1 was a proposal to tax the investment income of trade associations. What happened next was that the fur—or more precisely the faxes—flew. The trade associations are lobbies. No group is more skilled at expressing indignant opposition. The National Food Processors Association called the proposal "an anti-food safety tax." The U.S. Chamber of Commerce called the tax an attempt by the administration "to punish and silence its critics." "The American Society of Association Executives ... hand delivered a letter to every congressional office urging opposition," reports *The Wall Street Jour-*