

Tidbits & Outrages

Not worth it



A 110-year-old Oklahoman, who was recently crowned the world's oldest man, revealed the secret of his longevity to be eating a big bowl of oatmeal every day and crying as often as possible.

The Father, the Son, and the Middleman

An Italian woman created an agency to represent men for those whose busy schedules do not afford them the time to say their own.

Mistaken for Shirley MacLaine

An unemployed Dutch construction worker has ruled nearly 40 villages and more than 100,000 people in Ghana since he was declared to be a reincarnated king.



Better than Law School



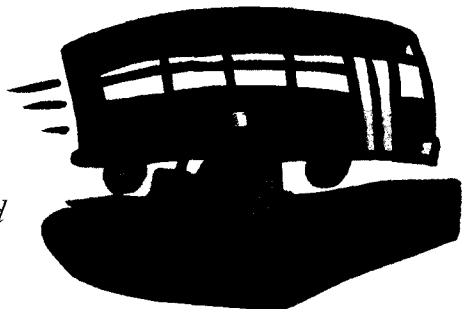
Over 800 college graduates applied this year to be the official driver of Oscar Mayer's promotional car, the Wienermobile 2000, which is in the shape of a giant hotdog.

Extended Coverage

Using her estranged husband's health insurance, a New York City woman arranged to have her lover receive a penile implant.

His wife takes the subway

A Brooklyn school bus driver was arrested after he took children on an eight hour ride. The marathon trip occurred after the driver could not locate the school and refused to stop for directions.



action were labeled “Nazis” and Vice President Al Gore opined, “The winds of hate are blowing in Washington.”

Ward Connerly withstood all this insult and injury and was instrumental in helping expose the mendacity of university officials who said race was a small factor, “a bump,” in admissions, when in fact Asians and whites needed to score 7,100 or more out of 8,000 possible points to be admitted to Berkeley while blacks and Hispanics were often admitted with scores of 6,000 or less. Connerly exposed a system under which the University of California at San Diego Medical School made race such a significant factor that the average affirmative action admittee had scores on the Medical College Admissions Test in the lowest one percent when compared with admitted Asian and white students.

Solutions

For a person so influential in dismantling preferences, there must be some obligation, especially in a post-affirmative action world, to participate in dialogue about the future. Three major alternatives have emerged. Some conservatives say we should try to fix K-12 education so that minority and poor children can compete without preference of any kind. Skeptical that such efforts will bear fruit any time soon, a number of states—including Florida, California, and Texas—have moved to a form of geographic affirmative action, where every student who ranks in the top 20 percent (Florida), 10 percent (Texas), or 4 percent (California) of each high school is admitted to a state university—regardless of SAT scores or skin color. A third approach is economic-based affirmative action, where preferences are provided in admissions to low-income children of all races, a disproportionate number of whom are children of color. Obviously, one can favor elements of each of these plans, but in the end there are clear tensions between priorities. Where does Connerly come down in the new debate?

From much of Connerly’s rhetoric, one would assume he’d favor an aggressive program of preference for low-income people of all races. In arguing against race preferences he complains that they do nothing to help poor whites, who need “a boost too,” and often help less deserving affluent minorities. He writes to Colin Powell, “Under the current system at the University of California, the son of a black four-star general would receive a preference over the daughter of an Asian dishwasher.” Connerly says the most effective advertisement in California was one featuring Janice Ingram, a white widow and mother of two young children who was ejected from a vocational re-training

class at a California junior college on the basis of race.

But Connerly never endorses class-based affirmative action; in fact, he barely discusses it. When George W. Bush says to him, “Did you see I’m talking about need-based affirmative action now rather than race-based?” Connerly does not tell us what he thinks of Bush’s stand. Connerly mentions in passing that voters in Washington state (including 54 percent of union households) supported I-200 while also supporting a large increase in the minimum wage. But he misses the political significance of framing issues in terms of class and not race.

Connerly does not appear particularly enamored of the Florida 20 percent plan. He’s concerned that Gov. Jeb Bush was promoting the idea in order to “disarm our effort” to abolish racial preferences through a ballot initiative. But Connerly doesn’t take the opportunity to comment more fully on the plan, which has been receiving rave reviews from prominent editorial boards, but is in fact seriously flawed. The geographic plans appear to provide an easy way to promote racial diversity without using race, since black students in all-black high schools may qualify in larger numbers than they would if test scores counted. But Connerly never asks whether it really makes more sense for universities to use admissions standards than to take account of high school grades and indirectly give a leg up to students attending bad schools while ignoring the other 50 percent of what’s important: standardized test scores and family environment.

Connerly’s silence on this issue is significant because the recent salience of geographic affirmative action plans is taking the wind out of the sails of the much more far-reaching class-based affirmative action alternative. For a brief period, it appeared that the end of affirmative action might give rise to something better—individualized, economic affirmative action. Instead, three leading states have emphasized a class rank approach that takes the radical promise out of the post-affirmative action discussion.

The Story

Though disappointing in its truncated discussion of alternatives, Connerly’s book does tell some interesting insider stories about the fight over Prop. 209 (and Washington’s Initiative 200) and complements Nicholas Lemann’s superb chronicle of the 209 fight in *The Big Test*, which is told primarily from the perspective of opponents of the proposition. Connerly outlines how very close Prop. 209 came to not getting on the ballot at all, had media tycoon Rupert Murdoch not pitched in \$1 million to hire signature gatherers.

He confirms that there was a "tacit understanding" (outlined in Lemann's book) that "the Clintonites would not try to overwhelm us by pouring huge sums into our opponents' war chest and, in return, we would not use their man's flabby support of preferences to campaign against him." And he also helps shed light on the role of big business in supporting affirmative action in initiative battles in California, Washington, and Houston. Businesses not only plowed millions into the opposition coffers (helping opponents in Washington to spend three times the amount of proponents), they also fired employees who favored anti-preference efforts.

Although the initiatives in California and Washington both ended up passing by comfortable margins, Connerly notes how close those races were. Prop. 209 opponents in California made major inroads until they ran an ad linking the initiative to David Duke, a ploy which backfired and, says Connerly, "halted our slide in the polls." Likewise, in Washington state, a 20-point lead shrank to just one point by late October 1998 until initiative proponents began airing ads featuring Katuria Smith, a white woman raised in a low-income single-parent home who'd been hurt by the University of Washington Law School's racial preference system. All sides agree, says Connerly, that this ad was "the

coup de grace of the campaign."

Connerly's book raises a central unplumbed curiosity: Why do so many leading Republicans—presidential candidates, members of Congress, and governors—recoil from his anti-preference crusade, despite its success in the polls? The conventional wisdom is that the Republicans are worried about alienating Hispanics and white women—a view that is not supported by polling which finds that values play as important a role as interests in the affirmative action debate. Jeb Bush gives another answer. He tells Connerly he won't support a California-style initiative in Florida because, pointing to a picture of himself surrounded by black children, "I'm committed to helping them." Whether or not Bush is genuine in his sentiment, Republicans surely know that Americans do want to give a leg up to disadvantaged black kids—along with disadvantaged whites like Janice Ingram and Katuria Smith.

Connerly says he was offended by Bush's insinuation that he was the only one committed to poor black kids. "So am I, Governor," the author responds. In writing this book, Ward Connerly had an opportunity to demonstrate precisely what he would do for disadvantaged children. Unfortunately, he missed the chance.

THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION ANNOUNCES THE FIRST PRESENTATION OF THE



PAYNE AWARD FOR ETHICS IN JOURNALISM

The Payne Awards are dedicated to honoring journalists and news organizations who make ethical decisions in the face of political or economic pressures.



YEAR 2000 RECIPIENTS

STUDENT JOURNALIST AWARD

The award was presented to Erin Becker, editor-in-chief, and Corey Lewis, managing editor, *The Western Front*, Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington, for taking seriously journalists' obligation to maintain autonomy and independence from law enforcement. In the face of strong legal pressure to turn over a tape made by animal rights terrorists who had vandalized campus research labs, they refused, deciding instead to uphold their ethical obligations and to honor the highest professional standards of journalism.

INDIVIDUAL JOURNALIST AWARD

News Staff of the *Los Angeles Times*

Bill Boyarsky, city editor, and David Shaw, media critic, accepted the award on behalf of all the editors and reporters who placed their own careers in jeopardy to protect the editorial integrity of their newspaper. Rather than accept a business decision to share profits of a special edition of the newspaper's *Sunday* magazine with a source, the staff stood up for the principles of editorial autonomy and integrity.

NEWS ORGANIZATION AWARD

The Union Democrat, Sonora, California

Patty Fuller, editor, and Geoff White, publisher, accepted the award on behalf of *The Union Democrat*. For more than two months in the face of nearly overwhelming, economic, political and competitive pressure, the newspaper refused to follow the lead of major national news organizations and rely on anonymous sources to name suspects in the sensational Yosemite triple murder case. This small *Western Communications* daily newspaper, despite daily competition in their local market, held fast to a company code of ethics that prohibits publication of the names of suspects identified only by anonymous sources.

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Table for One, Please

America's disintegrating democracy

By Curtis Gans

IN THIS ERA OF AMERICAN SELF-congratulation—for winning the Cold War, establishing American pre-eminence as the world's foremost military and economic power, the “longest peacetime economic expansion” in American history, record levels of employment unaccompanied by high inflation, budget surpluses, reduced crime rates, decreased air and water pollution, the ability of an ever-increasing percentage of Americans to spend an ever-increasing percentage of their savings on an endless variety of non-essential consumer goods, and their pursuit of the bitch-goddess of wealth with abandon and without shame or apology—there is an underlying dirty little secret:

The underpinnings of American democracy that helped produce all this are coming apart.

For nearly the past 25 years, I have been looking at one aspect of this problem—the growing disinclination of Americans to vote and otherwise participate in the political life of their nation. Every biennium American politics seems to produce new modern records for citizen political disengagement. And every year, the nation seems further and further from the political comity, cohesion, and consensus that makes possible the constructive address of citizen needs. In the 1998 election, only 11 percent of the 18-19 year olds eligible to vote for the first time bothered to go to the polls. The United States now stands 139th out of 163 democracies in the rate of voter participation. And the nation that prides itself on being the best example of government of, for, and by the people is rapidly becoming a nation whose participation is limited to the interested or zealous few.

Five years ago, in an article entitled “Bowling Alone” in an obscure publication, Robert D. Putnam expanded this discussion beyond the boundaries of political engagement by arguing that the entire spectrum of social connectedness in interpersonal, civic, and social life in America was eroding. His title was

drawn from his finding that while bowling as an activity had not diminished in popularity, what had diminished substantially was league bowling, as emblematic of many more important activities that Americans were doing in isolation rather than in conjunction with others.

Prior to that article, Putnam was a respected, if not widely known, Harvard professor who had published a minimally read but highly honored book on Italian social connectedness. “Bowling Alone” took certain elites by storm. Putnam was

invited to discuss his findings with foundation executives, institutional leaders, and the President of the United States. He was showered with grants to expand his article into a book and to conduct a series of seminars to elaborate on his initial findings with a high-level group of peers. Putnam also spawned a small industry of detractors, led by the late Everett Carl Ladd, who suggested that if one looked in other directions—toward continued high levels of church attendance, the proliferation of new political and social organizations, increased charitable giving, and a recent increase in volunteerism—the social state of America was not as bad as Putnam made it out to be.

Five years later, after exhaustive research including into the data that Ladd had used to debunk Putnam's theory, *Bowling Alone* is now a formidable book, which, through the overwhelming weight of evidence he has amassed, demolishes this set of criticisms.

He does not deny any of his critics' assertions—that church attendance is still at a high level, the number of political and social organizations has mushroomed, many more dollars are being donated to charitable organizations, volunteerism is on the rise among the old and the young, and there are many communities which still retain a high degree of community engagement.

But against this small catalogue of Pollyannaish propositions, Putnam has arrayed an imposing set of contrary and depressing evidence:

- Not only has there been a 25 percent decline in voting, but also a 50 percent decline in political involvement as measured by campaign activities

BOWLING ALONE:

The Collapse and Revival of American Community

by Robert D. Putnam

Simon & Schuster, \$26.00

CURTIS GANS is director of the non-partisan Committee for the Study of the American Electorate.