

Letters

Generation gap

I agree generally with Phil Longman's remarks on the need to help parents raise the next generation ("Raising Hell," March). As he writes, "Elected officials love to talk about 'family values' but shy away from proposing anything big or new that would actually help parents juggle the tasks of earning a living and raising a family. The only explanation seems to be that most voters—probably even most parents—don't think that those who nurture the next generation are unfairly burdened."

However, I am concerned that his proposed solution would lead to an increase in population. In my judgment we already have more people in this country than our resources can accommodate. Therefore, we need to address those concerns about too many seniors and too few young in ways other than by increasing the nation's birth rate.

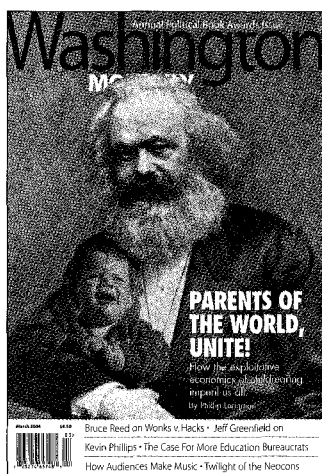
Lyle E. Nelson

Starkville, Mass.

Phil Longman responds: For many people, a world with fewer human beings seems like a better world. Others find the prospect of zero population growth pleasing. But it is important to remember that birthrates at or below replacement levels won't return us to the less crowded world of yesteryear, or preserve today's population structure. Instead, they will produce a world without precedent in which there is explosive growth in the number of dependent elders even as there are fewer and fewer younger people available to support them.

Failing reform

"Hire Ed" (by Marc S. Tucker and Thomas Toch, March) is not only informational, insightful, unbiased, and brilliant, but it's also the first story I've seen in the mass media that directly touches upon the topic of the need for, and the shortage of, good psychometricians.



March 2004

Given the general media bias against testing, I believe that the negative public image is in part responsible for the lack of applicants in my field (along with the high stress and low pay that accompany most DOE jobs).

Kimberly Swygert

via email

"Hire Ed" is one of the few intelligent analyses of NCLB, and you are to be congratulated for putting it together. The first recommendation in the article, however, is way off base. At this point in time, states should be rewarded for keeping low standards. Keeping the number of failing schools small will allow states to improve them and help students. States with huge numbers of failing schools will be unable to bring real reform.

High standards will always be popular, but states cannot label schools as failing unless the states are prepared to help those schools. As you describe in your article, the states are not close to being prepared to help out hundreds of schools.

David Reinstein

Buffalo Grove, Ill.

Honk if you love wonks

Bruce Reed's brilliant piece ("Bush's War Against Wonks," March) on the lack of a policy apparatus in the Bush White

"States cannot label schools as failing unless the states are prepared to help those schools. As you describe in your article, the states are not close to being prepared to help out hundreds of schools."

—David Reinstein

House manages to be hilarious and terrifying all at once. I've long considered Reed to be the ultimate barometer on White House policy function and integrity, which makes his piece even scarier. Our republic being run entirely by people who can't tell the difference between a political agenda and actual governing? Breathtaking.

Jill Kuraitis

Boise, Id.

Islam and modernity

I have read Grenville Byford's article ("Meanwhile in Ankara," March) with interest since I am a Turkish citizen residing in the United States. It is not often that I come across a knowledgeable scholar such as him when it comes to a balanced comparative view of the big three faiths of the world.

Byford is very much on the mark in his rendering of the evolution of Christianity and Judaism vis-a-vis "modernity." His analysis of Islam and its evolution that did not quite happen is, however, deficient as compared to that of the Judeo-Christian faith system. I would agree with him that Mutezile was the progressive movement with the greatest potential but was cut off from the mainstream. His suggestion that the Wahabi movement was innovative (and seemingly progressive) is, on the other hand, far-fetched at best. One has to try very hard

to find a shred of a progressive element in this sect. Fortunately, he mentions the part about the killing, i.e. the perverted charter of killing the non-believers. This by itself is lunacy and I just can't imagine that any intellectual good come out of it. It is, in fact, the basis of the so-called "Muslim terrorism" today.

What's interesting is, though, how this curious little sect and its primitive mindset came to rule a big swath of the Arabian peninsula and its vast oil resources!

Remember the British hero Lawrence of Arabia? What was glorified as the independence war of the Arab nation in the famous movie was nothing more than the installation of the most backward minds into the command of one of the most unfortunate peoples of the world, not to mention the oil that they really were after. Thus was born Saudi Arabia. Give a century to this medieval-minded kingdom and it ends up being the home of the most vilified criminal of the 21st century: bin Laden. Britain is then the midwife of the sea of religious backwardness now called the Middle East and the inevitable violence that emanates from it. The United States has

unfortunately followed in the footsteps of Britain in this part of the world and made the matters much worse in the second half of the century by introducing the Green Belt doctrine during the Cold War, which ignored Saudi missionary activity and created guerrilla hotbeds such as Afghanistan, albeit against the Soviets.

Mustafa Altintas

San Jose, Calif.

Imperial fallacy

On a planet where any country can acquire dirty bombs and WMDs, the operative words in diplomatic circles must be consensus and mutual empowerment ("Twilight of the Neocons"

by Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, March). This is not as paradoxical as it sounds. A secure nation, much like a secure individual, has no need to resort to force if it senses respect for, and an accommodation to, its needs and integrity emanating from its more powerful neighbors.

The American empire—and there can be few doubts that at this moment in history it merits this characterization—and its allies can surely demonstrate to the nations of the world a willingness to understand and accommodate those needs and not impose imperial will by force of arms. A complete disregard for consensus-building breeds marginalized players such as Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda and more like them waiting in the wings, not to mention suicidal insurgents in Iraq and any corner of the globe where American troops are garrisoned and corporate-persons plant their flags.

The regressive "thinking" served up by the so-called Straussian Neocons belongs in the "ash heap of history."

Carlos Acuna

El Centro, Calif.

Halper and Clarke should have devoted a little more space to criticism of how the neocons' doings, admittedly with the stamp of approval by Congress, belittles the harm done to the principles and stature of the United States. A cabal of quasi-fanatics have to a dangerous degree determined the parameters of how the rest of the world will now interact with America.

The stature of the United States and the respect that it merited and merits among other nations is far more important than whether we approve or disapprove of the character of a foreign head of state.

Armand De Laurell

via e-mail

Washington MONTHLY

Paul Glastris
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Markos Kounalakis
PUBLISHER AND PRESIDENT

Charles Peters
FOUNDING EDITOR

Editors: Nicholas Confessore, Benjamin Wallace-Wells

Managing Editor: Christina Larson

Books Editor: Kukula Kapoor Glastris

Contributing Writers: Joshua Micah Marshall, Kevin Drum

Vice President, Development: Amy L. Keltz

Associate Publisher: Carl Isell

Contributing Editors: Jonathan Alter, Thomas N. Bethell, Tom Bethell, Katherine Boo, Taylor Branch, Matthew Cooper, Michelle Cottle, Gregg Easterbrook, John Eisendrath, James Fallows, Joshua Green, Mickey Kaus, Phil Keisling, Michael Kinsley, Nicholas Lemann, Suzannah Lessard, Arthur Levine, Jon Meacham, Stephanie Mencimer, Matthew Miller, Timothy Noah, Joseph Nocera, Leonard Reed, John Rothchild, Stephen Pomper, Jonathan Rowe, David Segal, Walter Shapiro, Joshua Wolf Shenk, Nicholas Thompson, Steven Waldman, Robert Worth

Editorial Advisory Board: Nicholas Lemann, *Chair*, Clara Bingham, Debra Dickerson, James Fallows

Founders' Board: Charles W. Bailey, Russell Baker, James David Barber, Edgar Cahn, David Halberstam, Richard Reeves, Hugh Sidey

Design Consultant: Jandos Rothstein

Editorial Assistant: Soyoung Ho

Business Manager: Claire Isell

Assistant to the Business Manager: Kari Keever

Office Manager/Administrative Assistant:

Interns: Roger McShane, Jason Stevenson, Kathryn Williams

Fact-checker: Timothy Dickinson

Proofreaders: Joe Dempsey, Brent Kendall

Subscription Rates: U.S. and possessions: one year, \$44.95; two years, \$79.95; three years, \$109.95. For Canadian and foreign subscriptions, add \$10 for surface delivery; air mail delivery add \$32. Back issues, \$5. The Washington Monthly is indexed in the Book Review Index, Political Science Abstracts, Public Affairs Information Service, the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, and Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory and may be obtained on microfilm from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Published monthly except combined Jan./Feb. and July/Aug. issues by The Washington Monthly, LLC, wholly owned by W.M. Corporation, a District of Columbia nonprofit corporation.

Reprint Rights: Please call Soyoung Ho at 202-393-5155, or send an email to editors@washingtonmonthly.com.

Subscription Service: Please call our customer service department at (815) 734-5817, or send an email to service@washingtonmonthly.com.

Advertising Sales: Please call Ronn Burr or Joe Whistler, advertising sales managers, at (703) 893-3632, or send an email to rburr@burrmediagroup.com.

Services for the Visually Handicapped: Please contact Kathy Bouening of Volunteer Services for the Visually Handicapped, at 414-286-3039, to request a recording of this magazine for \$2.25 per cassette.

© 2004 The Washington Monthly LLC. All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission is prohibited. ISSN 0043-0633. Postmaster: Send change of address to The Washington Monthly, 733 15th Street, NW, Suite 520, Washington, DC 20005. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C. and at additional mailing offices. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope unless emailed.

The Washington Monthly

733 15th Street, NW, Suite 520, Washington, DC 20005

tel: 202-393-5155 / fax: 202-393-2444

www.washingtonmonthly.com

Tilting at Windmills

by Charles Peters, founding editor



Who buys Viagra

I have been puzzled by the immense sales figures racked up by Viagra and by newer but similar drugs. I had thought these drugs had been developed for seniors who wanted to put a little fun back in life and for a relatively modest number of younger men who were troubled by sexual dysfunction. But obviously millions of young men are buying these drugs. If they really need them, how did women get pregnant before? A clue comes from Warren St. John of *The New York Times*. It's that men in their prime are taking Viagra not because they usually have a problem but because they don't want to have a problem tonight. I do recall, from my youth, that as the moment approaches in a relationship when it becomes clear or at least possible that this will be the night, males experience performance anxiety. In other words, Viagra and its relatives appear not so much to be an answer to a medical condition as an antidote to stage fright.

The meaning of "safer"

When Condoleezza Rice appeared on "60 Minutes" talking about 9/11, she said that now "the world is a lot safer." When the questioner observed that there have been more terrorist attacks in the 30 months since 9/11 than in the 30 months before, she replied, "That's not the way to look at it."

Blame game

It seems to me that the reporting of the Richard Clarke-Condoleezza Rice controversy put too much emphasis on whether the Bush administration was to blame for 9/11, and not enough on

whether the administration's pre-occupation with Iraq detracted from its war against those responsible for 9/11. On the first question, the evidence is so muddled that in a poll released just as we were going to press, Rice won. On the second, however, the evidence is strong. The Taliban and al Qaeda survive today because the Bush administration was so determined to attack Iraq that it diverted resources away from finishing the job in Afghanistan. "What was unique about George Bush's reaction," writes Richard Clarke, "was his choice to invade, not a country that had engaged in anti-U.S. terrorism, but one that hadn't."

Shop until they drop

"If 'sexy high heeled shoes' are four of your favorite words...If girls can never have too many handbags, dresses, t-shirts, or lacy underthings... If you know that shopping is one of life's most fabulous pleasures, then..." according to the envelope copy from a recent direct mail solicitation, you should subscribe to "*Lucky*, The Magazine About Shopping."

This reminds me that I want to embrace a proposal by the New America Foundation's Maya MacGuineas to replace the payroll tax with a tax on consumption. The worker's share of the payroll tax is an unfair burden on low- and middle-income workers. The employer's share is a disincentive to hiring new workers.

The value-added tax in Europe and state sales taxes in this country prove that consumption taxes can be accepted. And MacGuineas's proposal avoids the regressive problem of sales taxes by making the rate increase as the amount of

consumption rises, and by providing low-income exclusions. As for the effect of a consumption tax on business, it's hard to believe that it would discourage the subscribers to *Lucky*.

My enemy's enemy

I admit there's not much chance that Ralph Nader can be persuaded to end his run for the presidency, but a ray of hope may have been presented by Wayne Slater's revelation in *The Dallas Morning News* that Republicans are contributing to the Nader campaign. When Slater asked these contributors if they would vote for Nader, they all replied they were for Bush. "So why," asks *The New Republic*, commenting on Slater's report, "are they giving Nader money?" If Ralph considers that question, he just might be shamed into doing what he should do, and that is get out now.

Gravy jet

Remember Bob Graham, the man who I said had collected \$301,000 for running the senior service program for Wyoming County, W.Va. (pop. 25,000)? Well, I have to apologize. I got it wrong. He actually received a total of \$463,000. It breaks down this way: \$185,000 base salary, \$44,000 overtime pay, \$190,000 unused sick leave and personal days, and a Christmas bonus of \$34,000.

To those who protest, Graham argues that the government can't regulate non-profits. It certainly hasn't been doing so. Cullen Murphy recently reminded us in *The Atlantic* of other examples of abuse by non-profits. "Item: in Massachusetts, a trustee of a family foundation reportedly increased his