
EDITORIALS



THE PRESIDENT'S AMBITIONS

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

For a President who is now well into his second term Ronald Reagan has piled upon his desk a prodigious mound of work—and still some call him lazy. Certainly the Eisenhower of the second administration did not have such vast ambitions. At this very hour the President and his assistant presidents are working on the Strategic Defense Initiative, plans to balance the elephantine budget, to modify the federal income tax code, and to revise affirmative action rules for federal contracts. All are policies of the utmost importance, signifying as they do momentous changes in policy. Yet there is one decision being fevered over that ought not to be on the President's schedule: affirmative action for federal contracts.

Affirmative action is one of those odious panaceas dreamed up by 1970s reformers who viewed all adult Americans as juveniles and all juveniles as animals. According to this view, we

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were all at one with B.F. Skinner's rats. We were to be rewarded when we behaved appropriately and scorned when we were remiss. The reformers had developed a plan for America, and through government coercion each American would hunker down and play his appointed role.

Now here is a profoundly dreary view of humanity. Seen in the reformers' light human beings are hardly human and ought never to be free. We are physical presences to be arranged from above according to race, color, creed, sex, and so forth. A certain percentage of every work force was to be black and female and leavened with other so-called minorities. The exhilarating air of the free society wherein one sets out to achieve whatever one wishes was replaced by categories to be filled and policed by bureaucrats. The sense of personal responsibility, personal achievement, and personal worth was replaced by the knowledge that something other than talent and hard work would decide

one's condition—namely, government decree.

Affirmative action was one of the most repugnant notions ever dreamed up by reformers in a free society. Moreover, it was idiotic. It presumed that the history of the freest country in the world was a history of oppression. Then it promised to compensate the oppressed by immediate advancement in education and in jobs, but without prejudicing the advancement of the theretofore non-oppressed. The promise was of course absurd, and there are today millions of Americans who have been held back because of their sex and race. Others have been advanced, of course. By the late 1970s two-thirds of the American people, accounting for three-quarters of the national wealth, qualified for minority status.

Affirmative action is but another piece of reform that reveals the reformers' deep contempt for democracy and for the ordinary people of the land. It has always been thumpingly unpopular and the reformers have never exposed it to the will of the people. Even its reputed beneficiaries abhor it, for it denies them their personal achievement, revives bigotries, and is so foreign to American ideals.

In 1984 64 percent of the Republic's non-whites opposed preferential treatment, according to the Gallup poll. More recently as many as 77 percent of the Republic's blacks did the same.

Ronald Reagan came into office opposing preferential treatment on the basis of race or sex in hiring and in other matters. In his 1980 campaign statement he said, "We must not allow this noble concept of equal opportunity to be distorted into federal guidelines." Since his first inauguration he has opposed government programs requiring preferential treatment on the grounds of race and sex. As recently as June 15, in a radio talk, he warned against "some today who in the name of equality would have us practice discrimination. . . . These people tell us that the government should enforce discrimination in favor of some group through hiring quotas. . . ." Now he and his assistant presidents worry about how to change an executive order dating back to 1965 that is used as the basis for affirmative action.

Actually, the President does not have to change the order. All he has to do is to rescind it. It is no longer necessary, and he has confectioned for himself a busy enough schedule. □



THE BIG CHILL

And so a jolly, 6'2", 308-pound rookie football player of modest accomplishments is to be the national wow, at least for a little while. William (The Refrigerator) Perry is now ravenously sought after by every organ of the media, not to mention corporate promoters. The same fate has befallen others: absurd misfits, victims of ghastly disease and medical breakthroughs, popular entertainers, and occasionally, individuals of singular, possibly creditable achievement. The hubbub attendant with being William Perry will of course be brief. That is in the nature of being a national wow. Recall, if you will, the fleeting popularity of such

diverse phenomena as Michael Jackson, Margaux Hemingway, or Barbara Honegger. The nation's attention span is dwindling faster than the ozone layer or the Atlantic coastline.

I remember the national hysteria over Michael Jackson. He shouted no songs that will endure and did little else that was admirable to an intelligent mind. Nonetheless, from the ecstatic attention he was accorded by the media and the dopes who follow popular music, one would think that he was a figure of historic significance. The presence of cameras and microphones can create such hallucinations, but only for a while. Then they are moved on to

some other subject of fascination. After Mr. Jackson there was Madonna. Soon even a Madonna undraped and featured in the pages of our leading porn magazines attracted little attention. Who will stir up the credulous clients of rock 'n' roll?

Regarding the behemoth Mr. Perry, we are told that the public is just wild about him. Well, I cannot say that I have encountered a soul who has displayed even modest interest. Before undertaking this column I requested the views of several learned observers of the American scene—what did they think of “The Refrigerator”? Not one manifested any interest whatsoever, and for the first time ever I actually saw the face of my friend William F. Buckley, Jr., go absolutely blank.

Mr. Perry is a defensive lineman who has started in only a handful of games for his team, the Chicago Bears. He has participated in a few offensive plays, caught a pass, and scored a few touchdowns. Well, felicitations. In fact, mazeltov! I hope this is the beginning of a stupendous athletic career, but his induction into the Football Hall of Fame is still a long way off.

In purely objective terms there is no reason for Americans, even the dopes among us, to be fascinated by Mr. Perry. And, as for most of the other national wows, there are often compelling reasons for finding them repugnant—for instance, their lack of talent, their unenviable predicaments, their prosaicness. At any rate, the fascination is always vastly out of proportion to what is warranted.

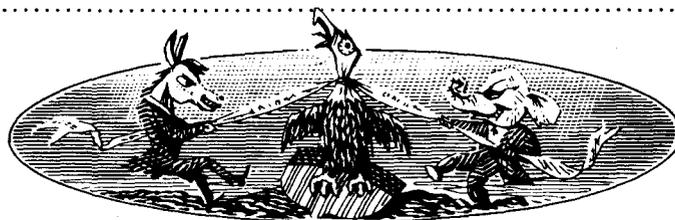
What created these absurd hysterias is the existence of a huge communications network pervading the nation and waiting somewhat desperately for stories to be echoed and re-echoed through it. Every day—in fact every minute—television networks, radio networks, newspapers, magazines, and still more communications systems await the arrival of some great event or personage—anything to utilize their facilities, to intrigue an audience. Broadcast studios and printing presses cost money. Always someone or something must be found to rave about and to make these facilities profitable.

In all history, this is an unparalleled condition. These expensive communications systems simply have to be put to use. Thus we witness the celebration of such fellows as “The

Refrigerator.” Beyond his celebrity there is actually not very much to say about the man. Read the stories about him, listen to the broadcasts.

Ah, but there is! There are those product endorsements, the requests for public appearances, the interviews. To the fascinating story of a fat fellow catching a pass and making a touchdown, the media now add the story of his growing popularity, a popularity that the media created and nurtured. Now is this a genuine news story or is it a contrivance? On a more important point, how many other, more consequential news stories are similarly contrived? It is one thing when great personages create history. It is quite another thing when history is created by the mountebanks who have brought us “The Refrigerator.” □

CAPITOL IDEAS



NO TURNING BACK

by Tom Bethell

At boarding school many years ago I dimly recall hearing that there would soon be a meeting between Premier Khrushchev (as he was called) and President Eisenhower. (Now we are more deferential. “Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader,” seems to be the obligatory media protocol.) My reaction to the earlier Geneva summit was something like this: Wow, if they get together and talk, maybe they will discover that they are members of the same human race, etc. I think now that my reaction was subconsciously formed by fairy tales of rival kingdoms ruled by autonomous, all-powerful Good Kings and Bad Kings. Something unexpected might happen to a Bad King and he would become a Good King. So would his Kingdom. The idea that conflicting ideologies produce forms of government whose coexistence ensures world tension was something that I would not have thought of at that time, nor would anyone have suggested it.

What I cannot understand is that a sizable percentage of the adult population, especially the university-educated segment, retains my teenage outlook thirty years and many summits later. It

should have become clear by now that “differences” between a free market democracy and a totalitarian slave state cannot possibly be “resolved” by a meeting between their heads of state. Indeed, summits tend to be dangerous because they inevitably reinforce the (well-founded) Soviet suspicions that senior American officials are a weak and gullible lot, endlessly willing to re-

spond to threats with *mea culpas* and further propitiatory offerings.

As someone who works in the White House told me, Americans are oddly reassured by the prospect that, post-Geneva, Gorbachev and Reagan will at least have had a chance to get acquainted. That is what is so disconcerting! Gorbachev really is likely to have concluded that all that stuff about the

bellicose Reagan was indeed propaganda and nothing else. Similarly disdainful assessments of the American leadership seem to have been formulated in the Kremlin after almost every summit, to judge by subsequent events (Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Berlin Wall, Afghanistan, and so on). Reagan might have more wisely remained in Soviet eyes the mysterious solitary figure on horseback, riding about his ranch with a blade of grass between his teeth, a missile in his holster, a black hat on his head, and an unfathomable look in his eye.

U.S.-Soviet relations have of course changed since 1955, and in ways that make the persistent faith in “dialogue” particularly hard to understand. First, it should be clear to all by now that the Soviet economic system (socialism) does not work, cannot work, will never work, and if persisted in will reduce to starvation all countries saddled with it. By contrast, from about the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties there was a widespread belief, shared by most economists in the world, and by the CIA, that Communist central planning would before too long leave market economies in the dust.

Paradoxically, however, the number of educated people in the West who are



Tom Bethell is The American Spectator's Washington correspondent.