



Georgia (Ave.) on My Mind

by Tom Bethell

A week before the election I had dinner with a group of British journalists. All had recently arrived in the country, all had bought copies of the "Gennifer Flowers" issue of *Penthouse* at the airport, and all were amazed at the media blackout of the story. The Clinton campaign's least-convincing denial of his involvement with Flowers was the response to reports that the governor's car and driver had been spotted in her apartment driveway a number of times. Some of his aides lived in the same building, said campaign manager Betsy Wright, so he was there on official business. Gennifer's most trenchant comment—"A man who will cheat on his wife will lie to the American public"—is not a refrain likely to be picked up by the U.S. news media. Flowers says that Clinton has "two big moles on his back." Next summer, will a vacationing President Clinton appear in public without a shirt on?

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Two weeks after the election the Clintons came to Washington and went to dinner with Vernon Jordan, a civil rights leader who has done well by doing good; and with Pamela Harriman, a remarkably successful social climber from England. The Clintons also attended a reception given by the radical-chic Children's Defense Fund. On hand was the actress Glenn Close, who personally felt "a huge sense of hope and relief" that Hillary would soon be in the White House. Miss Close has a four-and-a-half-year-old daughter and until now has "despaired over her future and the future of other children in this country." She expects that Hillary will be a "huge force" at the White House.

It is good to know, incidentally, that

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the founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund, the sainted Marian Wright Edelman, sent her own children to Sidwell Friends, one of the more expensive and exclusive private schools in Washington. For her own children, at least, Marian put safety and education ahead of merely ideological considerations. Al and Tipper Gore have also sent their children to private school in Washington. Let us hope that they continue to do so, and that Bill and Hillary likewise send Chelsea to a private school.

On the same visit, the President-elect took a much publicized stroll along the 5200 block of Georgia Ave. NW, which is five miles from the Capitol Building. According to a friendly page-one article in the *Washington Post*, Clinton "strolled Georgia Avenue yesterday like a regular guy, handing out high fives, sampling Chinese food and greeting a fellow Georgetown University alumnus with a hearty 'Yo, my man!'" The same story described the area as "one of the city's prime black business districts." A few days later, after the metal detectors and interlocking street barricades had been removed, I decided to go and see Georgia Ave. for myself.

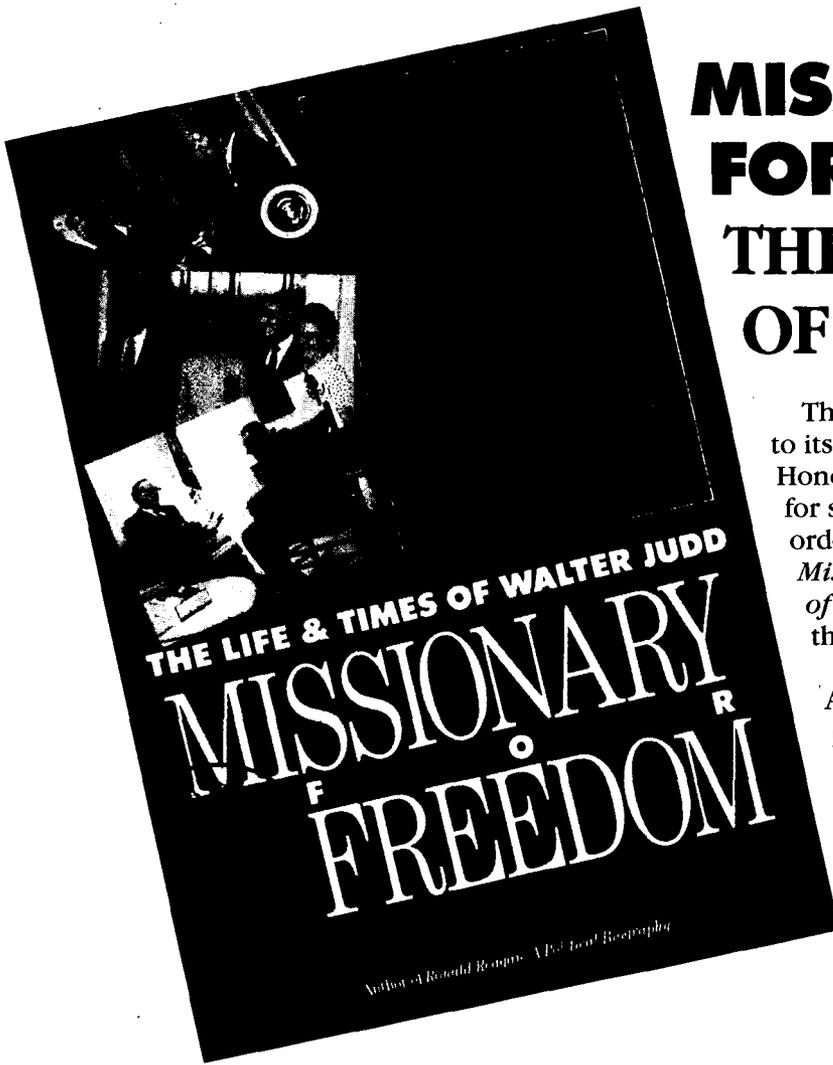
I traveled on the No. 70 bus, past Howard University, where the students are mostly black. For those who knew Washington in decades past but have not returned, the city has been in steady decline for years. It's especially noticeable as you leave Union Station and head west along Massachusetts Avenue for a few blocks. Then turn north, and you're on the road to Georgia Ave.

You pass through a dreary landscape of deserted city blocks, with nothing but weeds and rubble on display; boarded up buildings, their entrances sometimes cemented off with cinder blocks; torn, forlorn posters ("Student Shut 'em Down Day, May '92," "African Liberation Day

'92," "Fight Genocide: Vote Against the Death Penalty, Nov. 3"); potholed streets; abandoned liquor stores; rusted signs; smashed glass; broken casements. Everything is ground down with dirt, depression, abandonment, futility, and neglect.

The population of the District of Columbia has declined from over 800,000 in 1950 to just under 600,000 today, a 25 percent drop, and the decline is continuing. White flight has been succeeded by black flight, as Charlotte Allen pointed out in a detailed article in the *Washington City Paper* recently. These things are not acknowledged by officialdom or reported in the mainstream press. "At the District of Columbia Office of Planning," Allen wrote, "where the government demographers work, an atmosphere of denial straight out of an Elisabeth Kubler-Ross handbook prevails."

Along with New York City, Washington, D.C. has since World War II been one of the main laboratories of the American liberal experiment. We are only beginning to see the magnitude of the disaster. And we cannot expect the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* to tell us what happened, since they have played a key role in promoting the experiment. For the last twelve years, of course, it has been easier and much more preferable to blame everything on the Republicans—Ronald Reagan in particular. One of the more delightful aspects of Bill Clinton's election is that Democrats are finally going to have to take responsibility for Democratic policies—which have unfortunately been pursued all along. (All right, Reagan made an effort in his first two years in office to stem the tide.) I suppose for another year or two the liberals will continue blaming urban chaos on the legacy of Reagan, or whatever, but the day is coming when they are going to have to



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face up to the catastrophic effects of transferring wealth from the productive to designated victims whose unproductiveness is their meal ticket.

The bus pulled up at Hamilton Street. The area was dingy, unimpressive. Not much more than a row of storefronts along two or three blocks: a Popeye's across the street, a gas station on the corner. Here were Used Tires, Special Hennessy, Emmanuel Apostolic Church, Unisex Relaxed Look, Permanent Wave, Sing Long Chinese-American Carryout, People's Involvement Corporation Ga. Ave. Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization, People's Drug. How could this bleak stretch be "one of the city's prime black business districts"? Clinton's visit had evidently been a coup of sorts for 4th Ward city councilwoman Charlene Drew Jarvis, a national co-chairman of the Clinton-Gore campaign. "This is going to be a source of hope and pride for years to come," she said later.

Did someone say black? Most of the people working in the few stores that were open (at the lunch hour, I might add) seemed to be recent immigrants—I would guess half the people behind the counters in those two blocks. There were venturesome Kims at Kim's Cleaners, Jing Qiang Chen at Sing Long, Tesfaye Kumbi at Hamilton Grocery, Yong Chong at Hamilton Beverage, and let me see here, Haile Alemseged also at Hamilton Grocery. He arrived from Ethiopia ten years ago and speaks good English. I went into one store and started scribbling into a notebook. Two storekeepers, possibly Cambodian, were stooped over canned goods, changing the prices. They looked up at me nervously, perhaps assuming I was a city official noting down code violations. I tried to speak to them but they understood nothing—or pretended not to. (No need to make things easy for the revenue agents.) They just stood there, silent and poker-faced, until I left.

In one convenience store a head peered out through a minimal aperture in a solid wall of Plexiglas. Kim looked over at me inquisitively. Secret Service returning for another check, perhaps? Business not good, he said. One robbery lately. He gestured with his thumb up the street—"drug dealers." Anything else I wanted? I walked up the street from Ingraham to Jefferson, one block from where Clinton walked, and

almost all the stores were boarded up. Those that were not were heavily fortified with wrought iron gates and fences. Buzz you in, if they like your looks. There have been eight murders within a mile in the past year. "We card all customers," said a liquor store notice. "No ID, No Sale."

I started to walk north of Hamilton, until I spotted, dead ahead, a bad-ass cluster of five youths in regulation gear: gleaming white sneakers, backward-facing peaked caps, black pants and loose tops three sizes too big, and that ever-so-nonchalant look. There was no one else in sight on that block and so I decided against interviewing them for the story. Did someone say black-on-black crime? I think they would have been willing to make an exception in my case. I turned tail and walked back down to Hamilton Street. A laundromat at the corner proclaimed itself a "drug free zone," but even there it didn't feel entirely safe.

"Man, they must be getting ready for some kind of serious, big-time drug bust," the *Washington Post* reported one man as saying on the day before Clinton's arrival. He had spotted the Secret Service agents with their walkie-talkies.

"No man, the president's coming up here to walk around in our 'hood," said his friend. "For real, man? Man I got to give it to him if he is bold enough to come out and walk around here, because some of the people who live here every day don't like walking up and down these streets." No fooling.

"It's scary," Haile Alemseged told me, inside the Hamilton Grocery. "There's a lot of tension." And he did five years in one of Mengistu's jails in Ethiopia, later escaping the country via the Sudan. Alemseged was standing by the big District of Columbia lottery machine installed on the counter. Every few minutes a black working man would come into the store and buy a lottery ticket or two. In other stores it was the same—lottery tickets seem to be the main item of (legal) commerce on the street. The stores get a percentage if they sell a winning ticket, but otherwise there's no percentage for them. A year earlier Hamilton Grocery did sell a winner. Alemseged told me that he is a partner in the business.

I asked him why most of the workers in these stores along Georgia Ave. seemed to be recent immigrants.

"Good question," he said, and paused.

Like everyone in the neighborhood, he automatically checks out those coming in from the street, but now he seemed to worry about being overheard. "You go to welfare and you have less respect from society," he said eventually. "Ethiopians work hard to be independent—we have the least welfare acceptance of all the ethnic groups . . ."

Whereas . . . the locals?

Now we were beginning to get into "politics," he told me. He was reluctant to elaborate. I didn't blame him. I bought a lottery ticket for a dollar, and went across the street to Popeye's.

I'm not sure that Alemseged had this quite right, however. He attributed the difference to the higher morale and stronger family ties of new arrivals. Maybe. But many recent immigrants are also not eligible for welfare, and, when they are, those who supervise the handouts have bureaucratic ways of obstructing the applications of foreigners. That may be the key.

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Some of us worry that President Clinton will adopt the supply-side policies that he disparaged ("trickle down"). If he cuts the capital gains tax rate in particular, we may be looking at a two-term President Clinton. So far, he is talking investment tax credit, which is innocuous enough. It gives tax breaks to established companies that "invest" in new equipment, irrespective of the ultimate value of such expenditures. Clinton also has in mind a "short term stimulus" package of accelerated public-works spending. Pretty pathetic stuff—little more than Mossback Republican fare, as Alan Reynolds of the Hudson Institute pointed out. The high and unindexed capital gains tax, however, is specifically aimed at economic success. Its reduction really will encourage new businesses and employment. Boom times will be here again, Clinton will be a hero, and Jack Kemp will be issueless. So, Michael Kinsley, *Washington Post* and *New York Times* editorial writers, Hobart Rowen, John Chancellor, Richard Cohen, listen up! Keep up the barrage of criticism against tax cuts. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer, remember, and we do have that budget deficit to worry about. Let it not be said that you changed your tune just because a Democrat reached the White House. Above all, don't throw us into that supply-side briar patch. □

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The Bush Crack-Up

Was the President done in by the economy, or by the politics of the economy?

by Brit Hume

The post-election air over Washington is filled with the cries of disappointed Republicans that George Bush's convincing, yet not overwhelming, defeat could have been averted if only the President and his team had run a better campaign. Even Vice President Quayle, saluting the

focused, largely blunder-free race run by Bill Clinton, suggested that a poor campaign was responsible for the Republican ticket's demise. In fact, the seeds of Bush's defeat were sown long before the campaign began, and it is far from clear that even the most brilliant race by Bush could have changed the outcome.

Besides, the Bush campaign was by no means as poorly executed as the conventional wisdom suggests. The advance work, for example, was superb, especially in the critical closing weeks. Bush played to large and enthusiastic crowds at colorful and well-organized rallies. His three train trips were especially picturesque and had the additional benefit of giving the candidate himself a noticeable lift: he got an obvious charge from the knots of people who gathered at each crossing to wave to him. Standing on the train's back platform, microphone in hand, the President called out by loudspeaker to onlookers, marveling at the friendliness even of those who held Clinton-Gore signs. One older man in North Carolina shouted sourly to

the President, "I don't think so." "Well," said the President, laughing, "I do think so, old fella." He meant it, too. His aides, keenly aware of the odds against him, privately expressed wonder at his refusal to believe he would lose.

Brit Hume is the ABC News White House correspondent.

