



# Houston Democrats

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

One of the conveniences that Republicans have in choosing their candidates is the presence in American politics of the Avuncular Democrat. It is this public-spirited and stupendously disinterested moral arbiter who has time and again saved the GOP from the extremism that apparently forever lurks in the heart of the party of Coolidge, Hoover, Eisenhower! Yes, the Republicans have come up with many mild fellows, but there are those dangerous extremists just behind the potted plants, and conscientious Democrats are always at the ready to admonish the Republicans against this extremism that could kill them at the polls.

Right now the Democrats are selflessly warning Republicans of the danger posed to them by the Christian Right! These dangerous Christians have taken over the Republican Party of Texas. In Virginia their Anglo-Saxon popes from hill and dale have made Oliver North a candidate for the Senate. Through him they could contaminate the entire U.S. Senate—even Ted Kennedy and Bob Packwood! Did I say Anglo-Saxon popes? Yes I did, for history seems to have again come full circle. The Democratic sophisticates who warn us of the conspiracies of the Christian Right speak in terms very reminiscent of the rustic 100-percent Americans of

yore who warned the Republic of conspiracies being perpetrated by the Pope and his urban hordes of hyphenates in the 1920s to take over the Democratic Party and turn America into the Holy Roman Empire.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but the prissy shrieks of the Democrats against what they call the Christian Right reveal them for precisely what they are, reactionaries. Notwithstanding all their poetry about Change, their actions reveal that the only change they want is a return to 1976 and government distribution of wealth and red tape. True to their reactionary politics, the Democrats want to exclude from politics

those who disagree with them. Thus they have come up with this frightening fantasy about the Christian Right being the most current edition of GOP extremism.

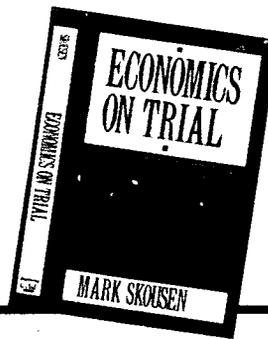
Well, it is the Democratic Party whose leading minority activists welcome the presence of the Jew-baiting, Catholic-baiting Rev. Farrakhan. Such a party is not a very trustworthy monitor of extremism. Truth be known, the Democrats have been hospitable to a far wider array of fanatics than have the Republicans whom they insist we keep an eye on. The Republicans may be the party most likely to turn up anti-abortion candidates, but the Democratic Party is actually tyrannized by the pro-abortion activists. So thoroughly are the Democrats dominated by the pro-abortion movement that in their last national convention they barred the anti-abortion Democratic governor of Pennsylvania from even delivering a speech. Doubtless they would give a Baptist minister the same short shrift. I suppose one should not be surprised that the party that attempts to embrace militant homosexuals, militant feminists, animal rights loonies, and other exotics would identify fundamentalist Christians as beyond the pale.

Not only is extremism less of a threat in the Republican Party but the Republicans also contain more diversity. This June, as the Republicans of Virginia nominated that Bible-pounding, moralistic opponent of abortion Ollie North,



*Adapted from RET's weekly Washington Times column syndicated by Creators Syndicate.*

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the Republicans of California nominated Congressman Michael Huffington to oppose Senator Barbara Feinstein. Huffington is pro-choice. He has adopted moderate positions on homosexuals in the military. He favors arts subsidies—though not extravagant, and not beyond the scrutiny of representative government.

Like North, Huffington is for limited government and lower taxes. Thus the Avuncular Democrats are against him. They do not say they oppose him on these issues. Instead they resort to their old weapons: fear and class discrimination. They raise the frightening specter of his considerable wealth. They say he is

willing to buy the election with his millions. They do not confront his claim that a man of Huffington's wealth and probity is less likely to be bought than Senator Feinstein, who, though immensely wealthy herself, is sufficiently miserly to accept vast contributions from the special-interest lobbies Huffington has spurned. Perhaps it is about time that the electorate recognize that the Democrats' admonitions against Republican extremism have been inane for decades. Moreover, in recent years it has been those crying wolf over "extremism" who have usually been jarringly extreme. □

tans who exploit the various decadent movements once deemed progressive, Miss Nelson is disciplined by neither logic, nor the meanings of words, nor orderly argumentation. She has no point other than some vague disapproval of athletics, traditional American society, and men, particularly self-sufficient men. As Simpson's court appearances accumulate, she will be joined in her pontifications by all the other charlatans. The black militants will have their say and the white militants just behind the arras. We shall hear from the critics of capitalism and of advertising. Doubtless even the militant homosexual will find an angle radiating ominous wisdom. And there has to be an environmentalist twist to the O.J. Simpson saga.

Of course, all the charlatans can hang their pontifications on some nub of truth. There is too much violence in our society. As manners and the code of the gentleman retreat—often under the assault of the so-called progressives—society has become intolerably coarse. Sports stars are indeed exalted to idiotic heights. As the detumescent Simpson is revealing daily, sports stars, especially sports stars who have demonstrated no special attachment to virtue—are not all that special. They can run and jump, but so can horses and dogs. High intellect, artistic creativity, character displayed in adversity, are all more admirable than the feats of animals. That is why, through the ages, art has been more admired than sport.

Simpson should have been jailed after his first conviction for battery. Then he should have lost all endorsements. By that point he had proved himself exemplary of nothing worthwhile. He was by then, however, exemplary of the recklessness of certain modern American men and women. They take family and divorce lightly. They take their pleasures absurdly seriously. They frivol with the deepest human passions and then are astounded when things turn out badly. They are what Richard Weaver called moral idiots. I shall not be surprised in the course of Simpson's trial to hear that both he and the men and women of his set indulged in extensive drug use and promiscuity. That violence and murder followed should surprise no one. Dostoevsky wrote vividly of it, as did Conrad and other great chroniclers of human tragedy, and not one of those writers could outrun his dog. □

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## Turning on the Juice

O.J. Simpson's week of infamy careened into the phony jurisdictions of the noisiest charlatans in the country. It is only a matter of time, then, before his abominations will have elicited more absurd pronouncements than the Cold War.

Already the preposterous Anna Quindlen in the *New York Times* has yawped that Simpson's "is the story of a man who, like many, many other men, beat up his wife and didn't think there was anything the least bit wrong with it." Well, the latest statistics available from the Bureau of the Census record that in 1991 there were 123 million males in the country, so "many, many" is a lot of wife beaters who "didn't think there was anything the least bit wrong with it." Actually, as Laurence Jarvik of the Center for the Study of Popular Culture pointed out in the *Times* a couple of months back, Department of Justice National Crime Survey statistics demonstrate that "wife-beating is relatively uncommon compared with other forms of violence against women." And would Miss Quindlen like to join with us law-and-order types and "get tough" with violent criminals? More prisons, more cops, quicker sentencing, longer sentencing, capital punishment? Somewhere a few words back I think we lost Miss Quindlen.

Someone by the name of Mariah Burton Nelson in the same issue of the *Times* has let out a shout about how com-

monplace it is for athletes to beat their wives. She is the author of *The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football*, doubtless a sociological classic. Perhaps it is owing to this original scholarship that she makes even more expansive statements than Quindlen. Miss Nelson seems to oppose sports in general, as well as boys, and perhaps girls. She says, "society's concept of violence is inextricably interwoven with its concept of expected, condoned male behavior. Boys are given boxing gloves as toys, girls and women who try to join wrestling or football teams are often ridiculed, sexually harassed or simply barred from taking part."

Incidentally, if you are looking for a thread of logic here or even a salient point, forget it. As with the other charla-



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## Property and Tyranny

by Tom Bethell

In the 1980's, Peggy Reigle was vice president of finance for the *New York Daily News*. But she grew tired of battling printers' and drivers' unions and so she retired with her husband to a farm in Cambridge, Maryland. One day her neighbors, an elderly couple from West Virginia, came to her for help. They had invested their life-savings in a 44-acre parcel and planned to sell one half in order to build a house on the other half. A few months earlier, the federal bureaucracy had issued new "wetland" regulations, covering two-thirds of Dorchester County, including the couple's entire property. If they built anything at all they would probably go to prison. "Stroke of a pen," Peggy Reigle said. She couldn't believe it at first. "Not in America," she thought. That was in the summer of 1990.

When she heard about dozens of similar cases across the country, she came out of retirement and went to war on behalf of the expropriated. She started the Fairness to Land Owners Committee, which publishes a newsletter and now has 15,000 members in all fifty states. About 90 percent of the members have been subjected to "wetlands abuse," she estimates. The Endangered Species Act has also given rise to serious invasions of property rights, but it "pales by comparison with wetlands." Reigle estimates that she works with between 250 and 275 other property-rights groups across the country, and many of them put out newsletters and "action alerts."

This is the property-rights movement. It has come in waves, starting with the organizing efforts of Chuck Cushman, who founded the National Inholders Association (an inholder is an owner of private property within or surrounded by federal property). Then came Ron Arnold's Wise Use movement, based in Western states, which pro-

motes the continued use of resources on federal lands (mining, logging, ranching). The most recent impetus has come from the Endangered Species Act, and from George Bush's wetlands folly. Myron Ebell, the Washington representative of the American Land Rights Association, told me that "we have about 800 groups on our fax list." Overall, he believes that there may be as many as 1,200 groups. All this gives us an idea of the severity of the federal assault on property rights in recent years.

Environmentalists have periodically sought to denigrate the property rights movement as a child of big business, perhaps some kind of an Exxon spin-off, but the truth is that it is the environmentalists who are funded by big business (also big foundations, of course). Modern corporate philanthropy would hardly dare touch anything so bold as the defense of property rights. Leafing through a 1993 issue of *Nature Conservancy* magazine one day, Myron Ebell came across a clue as to why this should be so. An article headlined "Corporate America Turns on to the Environment" included the quote: "Like Dow, DuPont believes its efforts yield indirect economic benefits. 'Since we are good neighbors, we are allowed to continue making products,' says DuPont's Megan Burns." DuPont, allowed to stay in business! This suggests what many suspect—that the law is so ill-defined and environmentalists so influential that prudent corporations make contributions to them in order to avoid lawsuits.

Private property decentralizes power, and so it is fitting that the property-rights movement has no central direction or figurehead leader. "It is pretty much a grass roots movement, which is a problem, because it means there's no silver bullet," said the W. Alton Jones Foundation's Debra Callahan in a speech to the Environmental Grantmakers Association.

If the property-rights movement has leaders, Peggy Reigle is certainly one of them. Her most recent newsletter has been making waves on Capitol Hill because it urged congressmen to support a particular bill reauthorizing the Clean Water Act. The bill would actually define wetlands, which is something that Congress has not yet bothered to do.

The increasing extremism of environmental regulation has caused the de facto seizure of a great deal of property all over the country, forestalling billions of dollars worth of economic activity. The regulations have also led to the unjust imprisonment of several people. Here is just one example, reported in Reigle's newsletter:

On May 15, 1989, Ocie Mills and his son Carey entered a federal prison to serve a 21-month sentence as environmental criminals. In building a home for his son, Ocie placed nineteen loads of clean builder's sand in a dry ditch on a small lot in Florida. The federal government said it was a wetland. Carey's crime was that his name was on the title deed. They were in prison for nineteen months. Ocie defended himself, but the trial exhausted the family's savings and they were forced to rent out their home and move into a trailer. Ocie's wife depended on neighbors for food and assistance during his incarceration. Making Freedom of Information requests from behind bars, Ocie found the probable cause of his treatment: an Army Corps of Engineers colonel was annoyed at his "highly publicized" and "documented furnishing of advice to others with intent to subvert the Corps Regulatory Program," and so recommended that he "be prosecuted criminally." He was. Later a federal district court judge concluded that the lot "probably was never a wetland."

The wetlands police, mostly employed by the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, have all along operated without a license

Tom Bethell is The American Spectator's Washington correspondent.