



Washington Monthly

Within the Gloom of the *Washington Monthly's* editorial chambers, Hilaritas alights, and to delightful effect. Editor Peters, you card, you:

After worrying about the issue for years and going back and forth on it more times than I would like to admit, I have finally come to agree with Clarence Thomas that affirmative action—to the extent it leads to the advancement of the unqualified—is wrong. There is not better proof than Justice Thomas himself.

[NOVEMBER 1995]

San Francisco Examiner

In her last column of Injun Summer, the fair Hillary again reveals herself an insufferable spoilsport:

When I began this column more than three months ago, I hoped to respond occasionally to the many people who write. So far, I have received more heartwarming and thought-provoking letters than I can count, and a few angry letters inappropriate in a family newspaper.

[OCTOBER 30, 1995]

New York Times

A shiny-faced child of the TV age makes bold to declare his proud philistinism—quoith Frank Rich:

To me, a fledgling news junkie growing up in Washington in the 50's and 60's, they were unmistakably giants. David Brinkley, who happened to live around the corner, turned TV news into a compulsory nightly ritual by bringing wit and skepticism to a trade in which most of the competitors sounded like ham actors auditioning for the role of Moses. Ben Bradlee, rising from the ashes of Camelot, refurbished a newspaper worth reading mainly for its comics with peppery new urban voices who finally woke up Washington's sleepy provincial culture. And Watergate was still to come.

[OCTOBER 28, 1995]

Morning Call

(Allentown, Pennsylvania)

A great American newspaper goes out of its way to prove that a leading American feminist actually wears underwear and gets no credit, alas:

As a long-time reader and subscriber as well as local citizen, I want to register my concern and indignation over the Nov. 2 photo of Hillary Clinton's unfortunate and accidental display of her undergarments.

The decision to print that photo offers nothing to the reading public except the obvious: The *Morning Call* has now bought into this sleazy undercurrent which is tearing down our institutions, ruining the social fabric of our country and rendering as worthless the respect for civility needed to hold our nation together. Journalists with a sense of responsibility don't do that. Slime does that.

—T. SCOTT CURT
Bethlehem

[OCTOBER 6, 1995]

New York Times Magazine

Sen. Robert Dole's crafty campaign against hospitals is brilliantly revealed for the hypocrisy it is:

The Dole camp's decision to block any health plan was no minor triumph of politics over principle. Dole, after all, spent 39 months in a hospital recovering from his war wounds. As Burke puts it: "Here is a guy who really knows firsthand, up front, what health care can do for you. And also knows what it was like not to be able to pay for it."

[NOVEMBER 12, 1995]

Washington Post

What passes for a historic first in the Clinton administration, as noted by Shalala, a local rock group:

Shalala bragged that this is the first administration in which a policy can percolate from the bottom of a bureaucracy to the Oval Office "without ever touching a man's hands."

[OCTOBER 30, 1995]

Vevay Reveille-Enterprise (Vevay, Indiana)

Ms. Ida of Switzer Square, back by popular demand:

I am one proud and happy woman! Today I received a picture of President Clinton, 8 by 10 and in full color. I have written several letters to the President in support of him, and to think he authorized his staff to send me his photograph pleases me to no end. My feet aren't touching the floor! Can any of you Democrats blame me for feeling the way I do? President Clinton is one sweet man, and he is for the common man. May he win the 1996 election!

—IDA M. PETERS
Switzer Square, Vevay

[NOVEMBER 2, 1995]

Washington Post

After quoting another sagacious passage from the work of the esteemed George Gilder published in one of the great literary forums of Christendom, columnist William Raspberry says what has to be said to pass the censorship board at that unhappy asylum otherwise known as the *Washington Post*:

What's wrong with welfare? Here's an answer you haven't heard:

"The key problem of the welfare culture is not unemployed women with illegitimate children. It is the women's skewed and traumatic relationships with men and boys. In a reversal of the usual pattern in civilized societies, the women have the income and the ties to government authority and support. The men are economically and socially subordinate. . . . This balance of power virtually prohibits marriage, which is everywhere based on the provider role of men counterbalancing the sexual and domestic superiority of women."

I almost don't want to mention the source of this arresting notion—conservative George Gilder writing in the conservative *American Spectator* (June 1995)—for fear that the name and affiliation might lead some readers to suspend thought.

[NOVEMBER 10, 1995]

Yale Daily News

A crisis in higher education at Yale, remonstrated against by the alert Jame Donath, an Eli senior and beloved *Daily News* columnist:

Yes, books are indeed integral to life at Yale, a fact that usually hits home sometime around the beginning of Freshperson year. Upon goggling at their first syllabus, students realize that their reading load in their first college course alone will eclipse their reading for all of high school.

Indeed, it has become fairly disturbing to consider the breadth of the reading loads demanded by an ever-growing number of courses at Yale. It used to be the case some years back that English 129 was known as the "Book of the Week Club." Clearly somewhere along the line various faculty members became jealous of this moniker and proceeded to endow their own courses with the same stature.

What has resulted is the impossibility of finding courses in some departments which require fewer than ten books for the semester. And these are not mere pamphlets, mind you: more often than not, these tomes resemble *Ulysses* more than *The Cat in the Hat*.

[OCTOBER 20, 1995]

New York Times

Whilst reviewing "Chicago Hope" and "E.R.," the resident couch potato of the Old Gray Lady takes a stoic turn:

Can prime time support two successful hospital shows? Absolutely. As Newt Gingrich and company stir up national anxieties about the future of medical care, viewers are very much in the mood for watching tales of crisis and stabilization.

[NOVEMBER 6, 1995]

San Francisco Examiner

Another pearl from pundit Hillary, about travels to South Asia last spring with her daughter, and forget about animal rights:

We had an unforgettable time everywhere we went. We wore shalwar kameez, the native dress of Pakistan, to an exotic dinner in an ancient fort illuminated by candles, where we were entertained by dancing camels.

[NOVEMBER 27, 1995]

The Nation

An inscrutable communiqué discovered in the "Letters" page of the venerated *Nation*:

A great lesson of the Simpson trial is that even a rich and popular black man cannot buy himself a fair trial.

[OCTOBER 30, 1995]

Gorbachev Foundation "State of the World Forum"

Mikhail Gorbachev reveals himself as a long-time reader of the editorial page of the *New York Times* and, let's face it, somewhat of a nincompoop:

Q: Mr. Gorbachev, you made it quite clear in your book *Perestroika* that your solution for the problems of the USSR was not to abandon the Marxist-Leninist course but rather to adapt it to modern times, and interpret it more accurately. Do you still generally believe that the way for the world to perfect human nature is by eliminating the corrupting influence of the capitalist economic environment or do you now disagree with what you wrote in *Perestroika*?

Mr. Gorbachev: My general beliefs have not changed. Yet, in the past, the way in which those beliefs have been interpreted, applied to diverse cultures and forced along by man, instead of History, has been awful. Additionally, I do believe that there is a spiritual vacuum that we must find a way to fill and I do believe that all systems have something to offer the world as we become more and more globally interdependent and have systemic convergence with one another. The problem with most organized religions is that their intolerance towards others leads to ignorance of the real world around them, and this leads eventually to war. I also believe it is a great mistake to say that the West won the "cold war." Capitalism is responsible for as much evil as communism ever was and we must now put that behind us and concentrate on our similarities, on how we can all move forward together without any dogmatism on any side. In a nuclear world, this is our only chance of survival. To tap into nature and unleash the human potential that we have inside of all of ourselves, and to see our intimate connection with our environment which has been eroding since the Industrial Revolution.

[SEPTEMBER 27-OCTOBER 1, 1995]

Lansing State Journal

A patriotic recommendation on behalf of the whole planet Earth by T.G. Smith of Lansing, Michigan:

The recent news about finding a planet orbiting a sun in the constellation Pegasus has encouraged astronomers about the possibility of finding intelligent life elsewhere in this universe. Radio astronomers may now pinpoint their monitoring of "broadcasts" from such areas. Conversely, any life out there may also be monitoring our radio and TV emissions into outer space.

Given the quality of our radio and TV broadcasts, is it reasonable to assume that beings on another world would consider us an "intelligent species"? Support PBS.

[OCTOBER 30, 1995]

Santa Barbara News-Press

Proof that a lunatic can still compose exquisite prose:

For those of us who love nature, and her creation, trails are and can be a source of travel and a hope when lost. I've come to the conclusion that this also applies to our furred brothers and sisters who try to live 24 hours a day in what was once their natural habitat. The bad news for them is, man has by his lack of understanding and/or concern blocked their rights of passage. In the past few days, I've noticed several dead animals, at the side of and on the freeway.

It occurred to me that this high frequency may be the result, in large measure, of the center concrete divider. These barriers make it impossible for animals to traverse the highway, which for them is a means of egress. I'm saddened by the sight of death under any circumstances for all creatures. However, what really disturbs me is the fact that many of us don't seem to care. I base this conclusion upon four factors:

1. Excess speeds on all our highways and roads.
2. Man-made systems which do not take into account our four-legged friends.
3. The notion, among some, that it doesn't matter.
4. A general ignorance of our symbiotic relationship vis-à-vis all creation.

One of my personal heroes is Gandhi . . .

— RICHARD S. GRALEWSKI
Santa Barbara

[OCTOBER 22, 1995]



Funky President

IT SEEMS LIKE AGES AGO, doesn't it, that Bill Clinton said his mission was to get the American people "to get out of their funk." In fact it's only been a few months, but that's the equivalent of a million light years in the Clinton fully adjustable presidency. It was only a matter of *days* before he was saying that he hadn't been saying that we were in the funk he'd said we were in before. The president had misspoken — "funk was a poor choice of words." Well certainly it was from the perspective of public relations and spin control. The press pounced on him with ominous reminders of Jimmy Carter's "malaise" speech. Then Clinton — who'd made the remark coming back from a California trip to raise funds for his re-election campaign — panicked. The American people might think he thought something they didn't want their president thinking. So, in the blink of a news cycle, he un-thought it.

IT NEVER TAKES MUCH to tempt a pedant into showing you what he doesn't know. William Safire used the funk flap as an occasion to treat readers of his "On Language" column to a disquisition on the origins of the word. Rooting about his musty dictionaries, Safire missed one shade of the word's meaning. While he correctly noted that funk can mean "to smoke," it also means "to blow smoke" — an apt enough term for the First Bubba's incessant repositioning. Actually repositioning is a bit mild to describe the phenomenon: In 1984, Orwell described Big Brother's "need for an unwearied, moment-to-moment flexibility in the treatment of the facts." *That's* more like it, but a bit long. For economy and style, let's just say: Bill's the Funky President.

THE MOST PREPOSTEROUS omission in Safire's column was even passing reference to what "funk" means to any sentient American under the age of 40. For TAS's many wonderful readers above the cultural divide, funk is a distinctive style of black music that grew out of the soul music of the 1960's. Pioneered by the likes of James Brown and George Clinton (no relation), funk is characterized by a medium-tempo beat and a groove driven by the bass. Of course, describing music is ultimately a futile endeavor; "if you have to ask," as both Fats Waller and Louis Armstrong are reputed to have said about jazz, "you'll never know." In any case, Safire wouldn't have found out about funk rummaging through Francis Grose's 1698 *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*.

THERE'S NO WAY he could have known, then, that one of the standard reference songs in the funk discography is James Brown's "Funky President." The song was released at Christmastime 1974, in the aftermath of Nixon's resignation, but Brown was actually referring to Jerry Ford — "*Taxes keep goin' up / Changed from a glass / Now I drink from a paper cup / . . . We got a brand new funky president.*" (This usage carried yet another of funk's varied meanings, one that Safire did get: smelly.) Taking more and more taxes out of people's pockets? Sounds like JB was presaging the rise of Bill Clinton. There's even a little bit at the end in which James starts talking about "changing things." The only way to do it? He sings, "*Ah need ta be the guv'nah / Ah NEED ta be the GUV'NAH.*" It must have been an early source of political inspiration for Bill.

THE OTHER PRIME PROCENITOR of funk music was George Clinton. You may occasionally see him now hawking Apple Computers on television, his hair an explosion of multi-colored braids and his voice as drawn out and gravelly as Claus von Bülow's driveway. It was George who first gave Washington the nickname Chocolate City, and who standardized the measurement of funk in the late 1970's: if something was very funky, it wasn't high or loud or wide or long, it was deep — "*Not just knee deep, she was to-ta-LEE deep,*" as he put it. It was also Clinton who occasioned my only pleasant moment during a brief stint at the Republican National Committee. My last day there was Halloween, on which the RNC holds an annual party during office hours for underprivileged kids. Corridor lights are turned out, candy is distributed, and staffers are encouraged to make nice with the little shavers. Few felt like doing so; the mood at the RNC then was a sour one, with Bill having knocked George Bush out of the White House the winter before. In a little-used drawer I found a rubber mask of Bush, put it on, and went strolling about the building. I came up to a little boy, extended my hand, and his eyes grew as wide as half-dollars: "Wow," he said with great excitement, "you're George Clinton."

I SUSPECT THE KID'S CONFUSION was more wishful thinking than anything. I'd rather have the composer of "Uncle Jam Wants You" in the White House than the other Clinton. At press time he is very stupidly sending our young men off to Christmas in Bosnia. Those soldiers are about to become immersed in an age-old conflict, stepping into something very deep, indeed. And it's not funk. ❁