

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

You've Gotta Have Gephardt



I have suffered an insight! It may dictate a momentous change of heart.

Heretofore when I watched such moral colossi as the Hon. Richard Gephardt

and the Hon. Tom Daschle caught in the throes of emotion as they pled for Civility in politics and an end to Gridlock, I thought: *hogwash*. They blame, thought I, conservatives for wrongs they themselves initiate. After all, the Republicans have been elected by a clear majority, and twice. It is the Democrats who now thwart progress and engender Gridlock. Let the people's vision be realized!

But now I see that I am wrong, and it took a little-noted development in our nation's capital to enlighten me. True, the Republicans have temporarily finagled a majority in Congress, and they are in possession of growing majorities throughout the states. Yet that does not invalidate a fabulous fact that the likes of Gephardt and Daschle know well, to wit, liberals are right and have been right on every enthusiasm they have advocated for decades. Conservatives are wrong and often inhumane.

What evoked this insight in me is a recent series of stories about a very happy event here in the District of Columbia. Sex education is a success! All the conservatives' pessimism about educating our young in the mysteries and discipline of sex has been mistaken and probably inhumane. Children as young as nine years of age have mastered sex, even safe sex. Teenagers have a firmer grasp on the

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advanced stages of sex than their parents, who often find such esoterica as inscrutable—according to highly scientific findings of our sexologists—as molecular physics, if there is such a thing as molecular physics.

According to the aforementioned news stories, Washington's Martha Winston Elementary School has become a veritable showcase of effective sex education. On April 7, nine fourth-graders, ages nine through twelve, left class to practice "sexual relations," though it was neither part of a homework assignment nor for class credit. It was all voluntary. These fourth-graders, five boys and four girls, are to be commended for their excellent use of valuable class time. One of them had been barred from a classroom after he "challenged the authority" of a teacher. But did he linger in a hallway or heave paper airplanes at classmates as might have been done in a prior generation? Not at all, he went directly to a nearby "preparation room." There he coaxed other classmates to join him and, according to the *Washington Times*, all "disrobed and practiced sexual acts on each other."

Now if only the students' math instructors were to become as expert at teaching math as Winston Elementary's sex-education instructors have become in teaching the scortatory science. Why cannot the nation's teachers of foreign languages and the sciences learn to confer on their subjects the same excitement and seriousness that our sex instructors confer on their discipline? Think back to when you were a fourth-grader. In your free time did you ever slip off to a quiet room and practice with your schoolmates your lessons in, say, geography or phonics? And the fourth-graders at Winston practiced together, boys and girls. Obviously there is no gender phobia at old Winston. My only criticism is with the school's name. I hope

it bears no relationship to the Winstons of cigarette fame. That would be a bad example for impressionable students.

The triumph of the Martha Winston sex-education program is not unique. According to D.C. Board of Education President Don Reeves, "If the media wanted to go around and look at other schools, they'd see incidents like that going on all the time." It is at this point, however, that the story of the Martha Winston sex curriculum gets confused. Some of the reactionary politicians of the area cannot, as we say, "deal with it." They want school officials reprimanded, even fired. Apparently the school's progressive principal boasted that the sexual exercises of the fourth graders were "consensual." He was attempting to head off complaints from the reactionaries.

His calm and cool observation has provoked the conservative Republican, Trent Lott, Majority Leader of the Senate, to mockery. "The principal," Lott says, "is saying, 'Well, we can't do anything because it's consensual.' For nine-year-

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As Melville and others have demonstrated, there is something scary about anything or anyone who is out to con you. You know you are not a fool, yet there are those who would like to prove that you are, who will wave flags or burn them if they think that is what you want, or hold a parade, or cry "alienation," or display a pretty girl or mourn a dead one. A clever showman usually knows what it is we care about, but he rarely knows why or how we care. It is that secret alone which keeps us safe from him, who, if we were to lower our defenses, would never give us an even break.

—Roger Rosenblatt,
"Grooving the Symbol"
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olds? I mean, something is not right here.” Once again the conservative is being wrongheaded and inhumane. Perhaps the Hon. Gephardt and the Hon. Daschle could take him aside and explain that, at

old Winston, the sex is always safe. Moreover, it has taken years of expert sex-education classes to bring fourth-graders to this level of sexual sophistication. Deal with it. ❀

amongst the hurly-burly of the Capitol’s crypt, the propagandists from the NPCBW are, of a sudden, angered that the monument does not include Sojourner Truth, a black women’s rights advocate.  1967

Twelve-Stepping Over the Line

Here is the latest from Dick Morris, Our President’s erstwhile political consultant and a recovering foot fetishist. “Like all 12-step programs to cope with the problems facing one,” he intoned to a patient reporter for the *Washington Post*, “it is both agonizing and successful.” Agonizing?

This 12-step program may be agonizing to you, Mr. Morris, but to those with a taste for irony it is immensely amusing. Ever since this tireless gasbag was caught in Washington’s Jefferson Hotel with the lady of delight who duly reported his attraction to feet, the wags of the Republic have been facetiously speculating on the possibility of Morris seeking therapy in one of the Yuppies’ popular multi-step programs, and will his therapist wear shoes or work in his/her stocking feet? In fact it was in my column on September 13—three weeks after the *Star’s* exposé—that I described Morris’s foot fetish as ‘a sickness’ and predicted: “Doubtless he will soon be announcing his admittance into therapy, though it better not be one of those 12-step programs—we journalists will endure only so much malarkey.”

According to the *Washington Post’s* reporter, Morris has been engaged in this program for several months. Is it possible that he has been reading jokes about his “sickness” and available “12-step therapies” and taken them seriously? He does not seem to have a very finely developed sense of humor. But how many of Washington’s giants do?

Admittedly in this glorious era it is difficult to distinguish a joke from an actual event. With the buffoons pre-

dominating in the White House and on Capitol Hill, all burlesque, parody, satire, and farce, in fact every flight of fancy, is sorely pressed to keep up with reality. So the president’s campaign consultant who advised that the 1996 Democratic Convention revolve around a return to family values was exposed as a prostitute’s frequent client, even as the convention was echoing his family values refrain. Mere city blocks from the White House he would regale the lady with the day’s presidential anecdotes while she ministered to his foot fetish. More laughable still, he fell in love with the woman—with her whole person, not just her feet. And one last hoot, at some point while the wags were joking about his fetish he entered a 12-step program. He talks about it publicly!

Now cast your gaze over to the Capitol. After four years of bullying a craven Congress, the mountebanks who compose something called the Suffragist Portrait Monument Committee (SPMC) are about to have their 13-ton marble depiction of three suffragists placed in the Rotunda beneath the Capitol dome. Already these propagandists of grievance have had a statue of Roger Williams, the seventeenth-century dissenting cleric and symbol of our country’s religious tolerance, banished from the Rotunda to make way for this glum rock—you should see the suffragists’ grim visages! Now something called the National Political Congress of Black Women (NPCBW) wants the process stopped. Though the three suffragists have been stonily staring forth from their hunk of marble for decades while displayed

“This is about principle, and the principle is, how many times are African-Americans going to be written out of American history,” complains Rep. Cynthia A. McKinney, presumably an African-American. Actually the only principle at play here is self-promotion. None of the suffragists has replaced Roger Williams in American history. His achievement remains unsullied. But to promote oneself into the leadership of one of America’s constantly proliferating aggrieved lobbies such as the SPMC and the NPCBW one has to stir up a fuss.

Yet, *mirabile dictu*, now the mountebanks are at each other’s throats. None, of course, has any respect for the country’s history or for the tradition of tolerance that they are exploiting. In fact, it is their disregard for American history that allows them to tear down monuments and heave up new ones to their passing enthusiasms.

The achievement of Roger Williams, however, endures. Of him the historian George Bancroft writes: “He was the first person in modern Christianity to assert, in its plenitude, the doctrine of the liberty of conscience, the equality of opinions before the law; and in its defense he was the harbinger of Milton, the precursor and the superior of Jeremy Taylor.” John Quincy Adams writes of Williams’s peculiar mixture of zealotness and kindness, and the historian Richard Armour reminds us that because of his qualities, “Pilgrims branded him. They branded him as a heretic, and drove him from town to town” until he founded the state of Rhode Island. There is not much to laugh about there. So perhaps the wags of the Republic should be grateful that serious fellows like Williams are being replaced by the likes of Dick Morris and the Hon. Cynthia McKinney. ❀

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Politics Comes Cheap

Campaign reform is designed to keep government big.

The most important item on the Beltway agenda this year is the increased regulation of political speech. An early indicator was the four-part series in the *Washington Post* in February ("The Fund Raising Frenzy of Campaign '96"). Seven reporters filled nine pages of the paper. The amounts now being spent on federal elections were "unbridled," "freewheeling," or "unconstrained," they said. But their stories strategically omitted the key information needed to conclude that the amounts of money really are excessive.

By way of background: the Federal Elections Campaign Act of 1974 limited individual campaign contributions to \$1,000, an amount not adjusted for inflation since (the indexed amount would now be \$3,300). Political Action Committees may give up to \$5,000. As mass communication is impossible without large expenditures, the law inevitably restricts political speech. A porn site on the World Wide Web cannot be regulated in any way, but set up your own "Vote for Al Gore" site on the Web, or print your own bumper stickers and spend over \$250 doing so, and you are subject to FEC reporting requirements.

These reforms have forced candidates to devote so much time to fundraising that a real headache has been created. It is a general rule in Washington that interference with markets in the name of reform will create new problems and therefore calls for more reform. The classic case was the energy crisis, created by

price controls. It was found that we had no "national energy policy," so the Department of Energy was created. The current hullabaloo about the cost of elections was a byproduct of reforms enacted after Watergate. (The unanticipated revival of the political parties is another. Because unlimited "soft" money can be channeled to the parties for television ads, as long as they don't urge voting for specific candidates, they have found a new role as the brokers of TV advertising.)

Recognizing that political speech is a First Amendment issue—indeed one of the most important—the Supreme Court ruled in 1976 that the communication of opinions about political issues is protected by the First Amendment and cannot be restricted. The court also acknowledged that rich people can spend as much of their own money as they like. Hence issue advertising, a rising number of millionaires in the Senate, and Steve Forbes on the presidential hustings. Again, unintended consequences.

Strange New Lott

For supporting the Chemical Weapons Treaty, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott won the 1997 Strange New Respect Award. The presentation was made by Arthur Ochs Sulzberger of the *New York Times*. He congratulated Lott for "refusing to second-guess the decisions already made by the State Department and the international community." Senator Lott's request that reporters be barred from the ceremony, held in Katharine Graham's dining room, was respected. —T.B.

Editors of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, the major television networks, and a mostly Democratic collection of politicians, have construed soft money and PAC expenditures as mere circumventions of their good intentions. So they seek a new round of more Draconian reforms. Their whole tendency is to think of politics as something that should be immune from market forces—played out, ideally, in a forum organized by Common Cause, with no candidate enjoying any monetary advantage over another.

The problem is that the *consequence* of politics—increasingly its whole purpose—is the capture of billions of dollars of real money and its redistribution to favored recipients. Liberals don't mind that at all. If they forswore any further redistribution, then no doubt we could enjoy a moderate politics restricted to the functions set forth in the Constitution. Common Cause rules of engagement would then suffice. But the liberals don't want that. They want to be able to take and redistribute money politically without having to deal with a rational response from its present possessors or its potential acquirers. They want to outlaw any organized response to their own organized larceny.

Their good-government smokescreen has been the disparagement of excess. "The basic problem is that the cost of conducting a campaign for federal office has been bid up to a point that is destructive of the very democratic process it is said to represent," the *Washington Post* editorialized in April. "The cost at both the congressional and presidential levels is obscene."

Dominating the culture means never having to provide evidence for your beliefs. Here are some relevant figures. The total amount spent by the Clinton and Dole campaigns from January 1995

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