

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

The Worst Books of the Year



Every year the J. Gordon Coogler Committee refrains from awarding its Worst Book of the Year Award until the Pulitzer Advisory Board has conferred its accolades. Why should

our board of literary experts pore over the claptrap when the Pulitzer Prize nominations may have whittled the field down to the year's five most imbecilic books? Usually this strategy works. Several Pulitzer finalists have copped a Coogler, thus freeing our committee members to spend even more time playing golf and otherwise pursuing the intellectual refreshments of the age.

Nineteen ninety-eight was different. The Pulitzer nominations were not bad. Some rose to the level of decent mediocrity. Nonetheless, our work was relatively easy, for Harvard law professor Alan M. Dershowitz had a bestseller. His *Sexual McCarthyism* easily won the 1999 J. Gordon Coogler Award for the Worst Book of the Year in non-fiction. The Coogler Laureate for fiction is Erik Tarloff for *Face-Time*. Of the two, Professor Dershowitz's book is worse. Tarloff is not a bad writer. He has copped his Coogler mainly because of the book's plot, wherein a White House staffer has an affair with the president. Surely the novelist can be more imaginative, and that Tarloff's wife was a staffer in the Clinton White House casts still more doubt on his imagination.

Dershowitz's *Sexual McCarthyism* is much more interesting. Stupidity is always more amusing than dullness. His goal, Dershowitz tells us, is to defend "our del-

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icate system of checks and balances" that has, he argues, been grievously endangered by the Clinton impeachment proceedings. What he has actually achieved is the re-creation of one of the staples of American comedy, the dizzy professor. Professor Dershowitz's distracted persona turns up everywhere nowadays: on the op-ed page, on talk radio, on TV. I personally experienced it a few weeks back when I expressed my reluctance to appear with him on a TV talk show. Even on television I prefer at least fleeting moments of lucidity from interlocutors. The show's producer responded that it was Professor Dershowitz who was reluctant to appear with me. According to Dershowitz, every time we had appeared together in the past I made cruel sallies against him. The fact is that I never had appeared on television with him before. My only sallies against him were in print. Again, we see evidence of the dizzy professor.

Somehow we agreed to the show. Dershowitz put in his usual performance, long-winded, contradictory, superficial, and reliant on several variations of what logicians diagnose as logical fallacies. His attempt to defend the presidency in this dreadful book is more of the same, though the book employs a wider range of logical fallacies. For instance, *Sexual McCarthyism* repeatedly lapses into "glittering generalities," the ad hominem fallacy (the term "Republican" in his usage is a hate term), argument from assertion (his), argument from authority (again, his; he does not appear to have many other authorities).

Even the book's title commits a logical fallacy, in this case "illicit presumption." The prof's presumption is that there is such a thing as sexual McCarthyism. What would that be? Sex by association or a sex under every bed? "Sexual McCarthyism" is a nonsense term. What Dershowitz is actually doing is misappropriating the incendiary term McCarthyism and apply-

ing it to one of President Clinton's opponents, Independent Counsel Ken Starr for polemical effect.

True McCarthyism is defined as a personal attack on elements deemed subversive through indiscriminate charges that are usually unsubstantiated. But the charges made against Clinton have been fully substantiated, starting with Clinton's own admission: "I did have an improper relationship with Communism." No, no, professor, that is a little joke. Clinton actually admitted to an improper relationship with Monica Lewinsky. Actually, in this rambling repetitive book, Dershowitz never bothers to define sexual McCarthyism other than to say that a "compelling analogy" can be drawn between Starr's investigation of Clinton's sex life and the 1950's investigation of "private sexual behavior" by Senator Joseph McCarthy, Roy Cohn, and Edgar Hoover.

This is what is called a false analogy. Neither McCarthy nor Cohn showed much interest in "private sexual behavior," and Hoover was not a McCarthyite. Again, the professor commits a logical fallacy. Throughout the book he is guilty of

25 YEARS AGO IN The American Spectator

The Seventeenth Amendment, adopted in 1913, decreeing that senators should be chosen by popular vote, changed the picture radically. Today a senator, instead of being the sublime elder statesman envisaged by the Founding Fathers—beyond the reach of popular clamor and free to judge controversial issues on their merits—is as likely to be a demagogue as his junior in the House.

—Frederic Nelson
"Some Thoughts on Impeachment"
MAY 1972

other blunders. At one point he says abuse of power and perjury “would be impeachable.” Later he says they are not: “Even if every word of the Starr Report... were true, Starr’s accusations would not rise to the level of an impeachable offense.” At one point he favors some form of Independent Counsel. Later he is against it. Judges should not pick an independent counsel.

No, wait, they should. On page after page the dizzy professor is at work.

As is well known, Professor Der-showitz is an energetic self-promoter. Now he is also a Coogler Laureate. I would not be surprised if he lists his Coogler on his resumé. Possibly he will have forgotten that it is for the worst book of the year. ❄

be playing the role of Wartime President. But there is an even more colossal irony at work. Clinton and the progressive Democrats urging us all to stand tall against Serbian *Lebensraum* are generally the same anti-war activists who criticized our effort in Vietnam. Actually, their criticisms of that effort are infinitely more applicable to this military effort. How does history manage such drama?

Did we bungle into Vietnam? In a brilliant essay in the *Washington Post*, the former secretary of defense and director of central intelligence, James Schlesinger, shows how this Administration of 1960’s idealists bungled into the Balkans. Did we practice an idiotic strategy called “graduated escalation” against the North Vietnamese? That is precisely what Clinton is *doing now*, and he even uttered the caveat that will come back to haunt him; he informed the world that we shall not introduce ground troops. Did we reserve for ourselves only limited options for a successful conclusion of our engagement in Vietnam? All the world knows that we have bungled into the present hostilities with no clear strategy, or as the phrase has it, “end game.” Milosevic better buckle as Ho Chi Minh did not or Richard Milhous Clinton better find himself a Kissinger.

Watching the pitiable column of refugees straggling out of today’s war zone, and noting our shelling around Kosovar and Serbian cities, I thought of another parallel from the Vietnam War. Do you remember how Bill Clinton and the other anti-war demonstrators used to jeer at the statement supposedly made by an American military officer explaining that “we had to destroy the village to save it”? Well, what is Clinton doing to Serbia and Kosovo now? How can the Clinton administration, with all its progressive idealists from the 1960’s, get out of the fix it has gotten the country into? Another line from the 1960’s suggests itself. It is a line Our Wartime President will doubtless cotton to enthusiastically. Let us “Make Love, Not War.” ❄

Make Love, Not War

And so, as British journalist Peter Hitchens has observed, NATO has become the military wing of CNN. Here is war waged in the post-Cold War era, by the same people who in their youth trivialized the Cold War and snickered at its honorable claims. Not surprisingly, their present military excursion is rich with ironies extending out to the far shores of absurdity. Was Hitchens’s jest callous? In fact, CNN sent out a press release boasting that “CNN/US’s coverage of air strikes against Yugoslavia propelled the network to its highest-rated week of the year.” How callous is that? “War, it’s good for one’s ratings.”

Doubtless over at the White House Our Wartime President is getting somewhat anxious about the obduracies of war. One cannot cleverly talk one’s way through a war, not when it is being waged against a tough thug like Slobodan Milosevic, whom Mr. Clinton compares to Adolf Hitler. Why Hitler? It tells you something about the political pranks being played in American culture that, to diabolize an enemy, the Clinton administration compares that enemy to Hitler rather than, say, Stalin or Lenin. Or that other aggressive brute down in the Caribbe who in our lifetime has used his secret police and military much as Milosevic is using his, Castro.

Rather than comparing Milosevic to Hitler, it would be historically more appropriate to compare him to one of these despotic Communists. After all, Milosevic has actually been a Communist. In what passes through his dank brain for philosophy and economics, he

probably still is. His mother was an orthodox Communist from a Communist family. His wife comes from a prominent Communist family. As late as the mid-1990’s she was a professor of Marxist theory and chief ideologist of a hard-line Marxist party in Serbia. Milosevic rose through the Communist ranks to his present dictatorial power. Yet Our Wartime President and his aides insist on this fantasy, Milosevic is Hitler. Doubtless Mr. Clinton, as he passes his Marine guards at the White House, sees himself as Churchill, or in the delusory world that is his reality, FDR.

As he rallied the nation against a Serbian blitzkrieg from his desk at the Oval Office, Mr. Clinton surely had on his mind FDR, the last American Wartime President acceptable to progressive Democrats. True, Mr. Clinton did not utter any sonorities comparable to “a date that will live in infamy.” In fact, the only memorable lines he uttered were memorable solely for their incoherence. Yet he was obviously living out his latest fantasy: Bill Clinton, Wartime Leader. Was that a gas mask on his desk? I half expected him to call for war rationing and a blackout of our cities to protect them from the Serbian blitz. And why not a crackdown on Serbian fifth column-elements operating out of goulash kitchens in Brooklyn? Perhaps Mr. Clinton’s FBI could coordinate with the Chinese spies now operating in our country to protect our nuclear facilities from Balkan espionage.

Yes, it is a colossal irony that the only draft dodger ever to be president would

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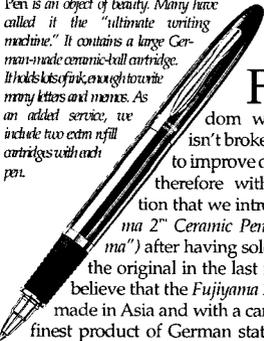


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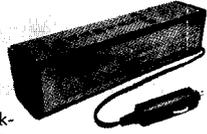


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“Lyla Rose Belkin was a lively, alert five-week-old baby when I last held her in my arms,” said her father, Michael Belkin, a financial analyst in New York City. “Little did I imagine as she gazed into my eyes that she would die that night. At her final feeding she was agitated and feisty—then fell asleep and didn’t wake up. The autopsy ruled out choking. A swollen brain was the only abnormal finding. Most doctors I spoke to said it must have been Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, a catch-all diagnosis for unexplained death.” This happened last September. For weeks, Belkin and his wife agonized over what they might have done differently. What he couldn’t get out of his mind was that a few hours before Lyla’s death, she had been inoculated with the Hepatitis B vaccine. Most doctors he spoke to scoffed at the idea. The vaccine is safe, they said. But he began his own investigation, and he became disturbed by what he found.

He spoke to Bonnie Dunbar, a molecular biologist at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. Five years earlier, her brother had experienced multiple sclerosis-like symptoms following vaccination. “His problems have been attributed to the Hepatitis B vaccine by over a dozen different specialists of unquestionable medical expertise,” she testified before the Texas Public Health Board. “He has now been rated permanently and totally impaired. His health care has cost the state of Texas around half a million dollars to

TOM BETHELL is TAS’s Washington correspondent. His latest book, *The Noblest Triumph*, was recently published by St. Martin’s Press.

date.” Then disaster struck again. A student in her lab, who was required to take the vaccine, “went partially blind following her first booster injection, a medical condition that was exacerbated by her second booster which resulted in long-term hospitalization.”

Only a few years ago, Dr. Dunbar was honored by the National Institutes of Health for her vaccine work. Nonetheless, she began her testimony with this eye-opener: “I am not here today as an official representative of Baylor College of Medicine but as a concerned citizen of Texas and the United States. In fact, I am sure that some of my colleagues would not approve of my appearance. Especially those that are benefiting handsomely from pharmaceutical company income as consultants and expert witnesses while carrying out vaccine clinical trials.”

Merck & Co. derives \$900 million per annum from vaccine sales. Its Hepatitis B vaccine is the first in the country to use recombinant DNA technology. Since 1991, Hepatitis B inoculations have been given routinely to infants in the U.S., and 36 states now require that a series of three shots be given to infants as a condition of attending school. Although many are now getting the vaccine, hardly anyone in the general population is at risk for the disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta says that in 1996 a total of 10,637 cases of the disease were reported in the U.S., of whom 279 were below age 14. In 90 percent of cases, antibodies are naturally produced and after a flu-like illness the patient recovers and is immune for life. To drum up a Hepatitis B scare, and justify the massive vaccination program, the

CDC has arbitrarily multiplied the number of reported cases by 20, using the argument that most go undiagnosed.

The general population is not at risk for Hepatitis B. The profile of those who are is similar to those at risk for AIDS. The CDC identifies the hepatitis risk groups as: drug addicts, homosexuals and heterosexuals with multiple partners, children of immigrants from certain areas, health-care workers, and infants born to infected mothers. So how come everyone is urged to get the vaccination, including newborns, and why are state health departments playing along, agreeing that children can’t go to school if they don’t get their shots?

The CDC explains that it has “generally not been feasible” to identify people “engaged in high-risk behaviors.” Instead, the agency recommended “making Hepatitis B vaccine a part of routine vaccination schedules for infants.” In other words, the risk of adverse events must be borne by innocent infants, who can be singled out on the maternity wards, because the sex and drug addicts can’t be expected to identify themselves. Jane Oriant, executive director of the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons, and a practicing physician, commented: “It’s outrageous to be forcing this upon children, the great majority of whom are not at risk. But all *are* at risk of adverse reactions to the vaccine.” She doesn’t recommend the shots for those not in risk groups.

“I am horrified by what I am seeing on this issue,” said Baylor’s Dr. Dunbar. “I can’t believe this is happening in this country.” Public health is being used to undermine individual responsibility and to legitimize intrusion on family autonomy. Sidney Wolfe of Ralph Nader’s Health Research Group, a foe of drug company profiteering, was not familiar with this controversy. He cited a 1997 study claiming