

Letters

Much Too Something

I very much appreciated Steven Waldman's "Search for the Three Little Pigs" (November). It's curious that Mr. Waldman posits the Disney version as moral compass. After all, in the end, everybody, improvident and evil alike, survives to sing and dance a jig or terrorize the weak on another day. Yes, Disney lets the big bad wolf get away. What is a child to glean from this message?

If Mr. Waldman thinks modern adapters ruin the classic fairy tales he remembers, wait until he sees the reading texts that will be foisted on his hapless child. With every special interest group in the country—from feminists to evangelical Christians to pigeon fanciers—exerting pressure to make sure textbooks don't step on their values, many stories children love are just too fraught with risk for most textbook editorial committees to countenance. To complicate matters, states like California have specific requirements for the tales students residing in their borders can read. Stories must depict senior citizens as vigorous, attractive, and agreeable; women in active, nontraditional roles; handicapped in favorable roles. There must be a balanced mix of racial and ethnic groups; no junk food allowed in a story. And so on.

In *Oranges*, when John McPhee describes his unsuccessful search for a Florida restaurant serving fresh orange juice, a waitress explains that people prefer frozen concentrate because it's predictable. "Fresh is either too sour or too watery or too something." More and more these days, people are worried that the stories children read might be "too something."

SUSAN OHANIAN
Charlotte, VT

G.I. Jerks

I am very much in sympathy with Amy Waldman's piece "G.I.s: Not Your Average Joes" (November) until I get

to what may be the emotional heart of the matter: "People don't, in fact, see the connection between the presence of a strong military and their right to disparage it."

People don't see the connection because there is none. The pretense that our "strong military" has somehow preserved our freedoms might have some credibility if we were Luxembourg; but we are in fact the United States of America, and have been thoroughly insulated from the threat of subjugation by our geography and the historical accident that none of our neighbors has risen to superpower status.

Whatever it was doing in Vietnam, Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, and Iraq, the military was not protecting our freedoms. The unkind would say that they were functioning as hired thugs. A kinder, more educated interpretation would be that they were instruments of national policy—diplomacy by other means. But the pretense that they were protecting America and preserving liberty is a far more egregious lie than any perpetrated by the much-maligned liberals.

The energy behind this apotheosis of the military surely comes from World War II. It was a great war, and the Americans were wonderful in it. But it's long gone now. The military has its uses and merits, but let's cut the crap about the military preserving whatever it is that makes America great.

PETER D. JOHNSON JR.
Auburn, AL

During and after reading Amy Waldman's article, I was of two minds. "Gee," I thought, "someone's finally taken a good look at the military; this is really good." But also on my mind was the thought that Ms. Waldman still hadn't quite gotten it. By relying on Charles Moskos, she missed the forest for one of the trees.

Moskos has had a love affair with the Army for years, perhaps since he was a conscript back in the '50s. But his feelings for the Army make him see all the other services through green-colored glasses. The Army is most certainly *not* the Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard, or even Marine Corps. Unfortunately, Mr. Moskos has been so fixated on the Army for

so long, he fails to see that each service has its own culture, its own problems, and its own ways of working out these problems.

The recent disclosures about sexual harassment and abuse in the Army are evidence that all is not as well as Mr. Moskos might have us believe. Then again, he seems to have been against full integration of women in the Army for at least a decade.

While race relations in the military are definitely better than they are in society at large, the situation *vis-à-vis* women is not so rosy. Only in the Coast Guard have women been *completely* integrated (ashore and aboard ships and boats)—and since 1978 at that.

ANDREW WEBB
San Diego, CA

Fare Thee Welfare

In "Reforming Welfare Reform" (November), Michelle Cottle asks, "Is this bill intended to help balance the budget or to develop a more effective welfare program?" Perhaps a brief review of history might help her answer her own question and also challenge her assumption that "entitlement programs act as a trap."

• Aid to single or widowed mothers was established because jobs were and always would be unavailable. Such mothers were expected to stay home and raise their children, sometimes considered a noble task by advocates of "family" values. Women were denied aid if they went to work, the original definition of "welfare cheating." The aid was never intended to be only for people "in-between jobs."

• The U.S. has had, for many years now, a bipartisan policy to maintain high unemployment in order to control inflation by discouraging workers from asking for higher pay. Policymakers know full well that jobs will not be available for all.

• The only interest shown by governors is to get people off the welfare rolls. They are not about to spend enough for caseworkers, support and regulation of child care facilities, and training programs. If they can get people into any job, they can erase them from the rolls and give-up tracking

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them. Once these people are lost from view, there will no longer be a "problem" to solve.

FREDERICK C. THAYER
Pittsburgh, PA

The article "Reforming Welfare Reform" omitted consideration of a major obstacle to success: medical insurance. Medical care for one's children is understandably too important for the welfare recipient to abandon for a private-sector job without benefits. Some state proposals include full family medical benefits for two years after leaving welfare, but what happens when those benefits expire? Most businesses with jobs for people with limited skills are not providing full medical benefits at no cost to the employee.

Further, as an employer of unskilled workers, I find that there are many men and women not on welfare who are looking for full-time employment. Why should I give preference to someone coming off welfare?

JOHN R. MOOT
Cambridge, MA

Dixie's Dark Side

The review of *Dixie Rising* (November) was very interesting and I certainly will read the book. But I do not agree that manners are morals. As a person born in Virginia, I know that is wishful thinking. Southerners, more than any other group I know, can be very polite to your face and be anything but kind behind your back. While that demeanor may make things more pleasant on the surface, it does nothing to correct basic race and class problems. As far as I'm concerned, the South has a long way to go toward correcting its deep racial bias. So I'm not happy when I hear that the rest of the country is becoming more like the South!

NORMA L. BALLING
Rochester, MN

Iruined

Charles Peters's piece on the shameful history of the CIA ("Tilting at Windmills," November) appeared to suggest, perhaps inadvertently, that the

consequences of the CIA coup in Iran were not as bad as those in Guatemala because in the latter a democratically elected government was overthrown. The 1953 CIA-sponsored coup did not simply install the Shah (who always wanted to be much more than a constitutional monarch), however, but also overthrew the popular liberal nationalist government of Dr. Mohammed Mossedeq. Mossedeq's government was replaced by a brutal military government headed by General Zahedi, a one-time collaborator with Nazi efforts in Iran. In 1955, the Shah dismissed Zahedi and, with CIA and Mossad assistance, created a modern security force that, in the absence of nationalist legitimacy, was absolutely essential to his survival as one of the United States' anti-communist allies in the Middle East. During the Shah's reign, thousands of Iranians were jailed, tortured, or executed for anti-regime activities. In fact, Iran, particularly in the 1970s, had one of the worst human rights records worldwide.

FARHAD HOMAYOUN
via e-mail

Floodplain Freeloaders?

John Solomon's article on the habit of wealthy residents in disaster-prone areas to rely on the government to protect them against property loss ("Flirting With Disaster," October) was informative and interesting. However, it was not very discriminating, painting the truly unfortunate with the same broad brush strokes as the greedy. Anyone who went to the Midwest during the floods of 1993, as I did, could have told Mr. Solomon that, for the most part, wealthy property owners along the Mississippi are on elevations well above the floodplain, with spectacular views of the river. Land at the lower elevations is generally cheap and uninsurable at any price. The poor live there because it's all they can afford. When it floods, they go back and rebuild because there's no place else to go. Grouping these people with the elite of Malibu and Miami is grossly misleading.

WILLIAM FENTON
Alexandria, VA



Tilting at Windmills

BY CHARLES PETERS

Barry Brings Home the Duck • Come Back, Dolly

• Primal Gere • Hooray for Cheap Chic

IF YOU WANT TO MURDER SOMEONE, Los Angeles is the place to do the deed. The *Los Angeles Times* has studied how the local criminal justice system dealt with 9442 homicides reported from 1990 through 1994. Only 47 percent of the cases resulted in arrests and indictments for murder or manslaughter. Just 16 percent resulted in murder convictions.

If you've heard Los Angeles prosecutor Gil Garcetti's boast that his office has a 93 percent conviction rate, you may wonder how the 16 percent could be accurate. The 93 percent is true, but only of the cases that actually go to trial. The reason the 16 percent is also true is that, in the other 84 percent of the cases, the killer is not found, the case is dismissed before trial for lack of evidence, or the charge is plea bargained to manslaughter or less.

The failure of witnesses to testify is a major cause of the low conviction rate. This is most common in gang slayings, which account for 40 percent of the county's homicides. "A district attorney's manual," reports the *Times*, "tells novice prosecutors to expect at least one witness to recant in every gang case."

Police ineptitude is another important factor. One case was dismissed because the cops had misplaced the key document. Three others were lost because it was discovered that the key witness the police had identified in each case was one woman who happened to be a prostitute, a crack cocaine addict, and a paid police informant. Her credibility was not enhanced when she revealed that an LAPD detective had told her he would help her if she

would falsely testify that she had witnessed one of the slayings.

Conservatives who concentrate on bashing government instead of trying to improve it might ponder this bad police work. Don't they really want law enforcement that works?

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LAST MONTH I COMPLAINED ABOUT the increase in smoking and drinking by role models in the movies. A recent example is *Primal Fear*, in which the heroine, Laura Linney, smokes, and the hero, Richard Gere, drinks. Gere even drinks his whiskey straight, a throwback to the 1930s, when drinking straight whiskey was a sign of manhood. It also gets you drunk very fast, meaning you are more likely to do stupid things like cause auto accidents in which innocent people are hurt. And it does terrible things to the lining of your throat, esophagus, and stomach.

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SHORTLY AFTER THE NOVEMBER election, I had a chance to discuss the results with a Democratic senator. He said that back in mid-October, he was confident his party would win a majority in the Senate. "What went wrong?" I asked. He said three things: John Huang, the Christian Coalition, and money, of which he quoted Trent Lott as saying the GOP had been able to pour "\$30 million into close Senate races in the final two weeks of the campaign."

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THE OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT publishes a guide to health plans available to federal employees and retirees. Those living in Florida are in for an interesting experience when they call the information number provided for that state. It is answered by a woman who, according to Mike Causey of *The Washington Post*, says: "Hi sexy. Thanks for calling the Pleasure Club Hot Line. Please

have pen and paper ready to write down information on how you can connect to women and girls right now?"

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IF YOU WANT A DOWN-to-earth illustration of the plight of the working poor in this country, consider that there are 42,277 families in Nassau County, N.Y., making less than \$20,000 a year. Yet Bruce Lambert of *The New York Times* reports

that "a check of apartment listings in Nassau County shows that there are almost none for under \$900 a month and very few under \$1000 a month." Often, Lambert adds, landlords require initial payments of "\$5,000 or more to cover the first month's rent, security deposit, and broker's fees."

Put yourself in the shoes of these families. Think of how you would manage your monthly budget paying that kind of rent.

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PLACES LIKE HONOLULU, SAN JUAN, and San Francisco have—as this magazine frequently notes—increasingly become the venues of choice for the meetings and continuing education seminars of our legal,