



Tilting at Windmills

BY CHARLES PETERS

*Hillary's Pink Blouse • Alan's Threat To Albert • Greed on PBS
The Boomer Space Race • Wrong Man in Wrong Place II*

HILLARY CLINTON'S "CAMPAIGN wardrobe is getting a little... repetitive" charged the March 6 issue of *Time*. It illustrates this grave accusation with pictures taken on seven different occasions, each showing the First Lady wearing a pink blouse and a brown jacket. Why should anyone care? The only people I can think of who would be interested are the same ones who criticized her for changing her hairstyle too often. And for them, one would think her fidelity to pink and brown would be reassuring.

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MY WIFE AND I HAVE A SMALL house. We have lived in it for 38 years and have grown too fond of it to leave even if we could afford to. But it is small and by now is crammed to the eaves with books and papers and the assortment of memorabilia and just plain junk that families accumulate over the years. So we understand the need for more space. But baby boomers have taken it to a new dimension. Consider one couple who are friends of ours. When they moved from the small apartment where they lived when we first knew them to a nice house twice the size of ours, we thought they had found a permanent home. But just a few years later, the husband told me they were moving. "Why?" I asked. "You have such a nice place now." His answer: "We need more space." The new house is 2 1/2 times the size of the house that was twice the size of ours.

It turns out that my friends aren't unusual. They're typical. "Like the American waistline, the new American home is getting larger," write *The Wall Street Journal's* Carlos Tejeda and Patrick Barta. "Empty nesters, baby boomers at the tops of their careers and the young and

options-rich all are buying homes with more bedrooms, more bathrooms, and more flourishes than ever before. 'People want incredible amounts of space,' says Leslie Barry Davidson, a Houston architect. 'They come in and say, I want space for all my stuff, my clothes, my skis.'

The flourishes usually include spacious, well-appointed kitchens. "Not that anyone cooks," one buyer told the *Journal*. "But it looks impressive."

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"OH MY GOD. MY GOD. I HAVE no idea what you're talking about. I can't believe this." Thus spake Joseph Westphal, an assistant secretary of the Army, after *The Washington Post's* Michael Grunwald informed him that the Corps of Engineers, which Westphal supposedly oversees, had been waging a behind-the-scenes campaign to increase the Corps' \$4 billion civil works budget to \$6.2 billion. This illustrates a couple of truths about the culture of bureaucracy that this magazine has long labored to bring to the public's attention. One is that the boss is often the last to know, which is why any boss should take great pains to find out what's going on below. The other is that anyone charged with overseeing a bureaucracy should know that its natural tendency is to increase its budget. A larger budget not only heightens the bureaucrat's sense of importance, it also decreases the likelihood of job loss and increases the possibility of promotion, not to mention more funding for travel, conferences, and other goodies dear to the bureaucratic heart.

When a misguided staff economist suggested that a proposed

Corps project really was not needed, his supervisors immediately circulated a memo saying it was time to "get creative" with studies in order to "grow" and "not to take no for an answer."

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On vouchers, it seems to me that both sides are wrong.

SO MANY CORPS PROJECTS have done more environmental harm than good and so many have proved to be costly boondoggles that it seems an unlikely candidate for a budget

increase. But that does not mean that all agencies have enough funding. Some truly need more. An example is the National Transportation Safety Board, an agency with an impressive record of efficient and courageous fact-finding. A recent Rand study found that the NTSB staff is overworked. Average workload for the staff involved in the TWA 800 and ValuJet investigations was 62 hours a week. And the situation is likely to get worse. The number of transport aircraft is projected to double by 2017.

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BY THE WAY, IF YOU'RE IN the market for a new home, large or small, be warned that there's a new racket being practiced by the homebuilders. They will advertise the home as being built by a prominent company but the actual sales contract will be executed by an underfunded subsidiary. So if the house is a lemon and you sue, the underfunded subsidiary may not be able to compensate you.

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DID YOU KNOW THAT THE SAME FBI agent was the on-the-scene commander at both Ruby Ridge and Waco? His name, according to Terry Ganey and William Freivogel of *The*

St. Louis Post Dispatch, is Richard Rogers. This has to be one of history's more spectacular examples of putting the wrong man in the wrong place, and, then after he has been proved to be the wrong man, putting him in the wrong place again.

Even more incredibly, Ganey and Freivogel report that Deputy Assistant FBI Director Danny Coulson wrote a memo warning about Rogers before the disaster at Waco. Opposing a request for permission to use gas to force the Branch Davidians out, Coulson argued that the plan was driven by the fatigue of the FBI team in Waco. "They are not only tired physically but tired of the situation and frustrated by the perceived lack of success," Coulson said that Rogers was "a significant part of the problem."

Then Coulson said, "We had similar problems in Idaho with him, and he argued and convinced [his superiors] that Randy Weaver would not come out. That proved to be wrong." But only after Rogers' misjudgment led to the killing of Weaver's wife and son.

EARLY IN THE CAMPAIGN IT WAS revealed that John McCain had written a letter to the FCC on behalf of a contributor. The media—even the many reporters who liked McCain—treated this as "embarrassing disclosure" assuming it showed McCain had done something wrong. But it can be perfectly legitimate to write such a letter. It would be wrong if he did it because of the contributions. But it's possible that his contributor has a legitimate case that the legislator should help him make to the agency. It is also possible that the legislator is writing the letter just to get the contributor off his back and that the letter is so understood by the agency that gets it. This happens far more often than most people realize, but the press should be sophisticated enough to understand what's really going on. Unfortunately, it's a rare reporter who looks behind an apparent con-

flict of interest to see if it's real. After all, if it turned out not to be real, the story would be ruined, and who wants to ruin a good story?

HAVING COMPLAINED ABOUT flowers that have lost their scent and tomatoes that have lost their taste, I'm happy to report that something is being done about at least one of these problems. Natalia Dudareva, an assistant professor in the Department of Horticulture at Purdue University, has launched a research project to determine why the scent of flowers has been lost and what needs to be done to restore it. Now will someone please volunteer to do the same for tomatoes.

THERE IS A REBELLION GOING ON in California against the state's three-strikes law, reports *The Washington Post's* Rene Sanchez. I hope it succeeds. The California law fails to adequately distinguish between violent and non-violent crime. Third-time felons must get 25 years to life even if their crimes are non-violent. Nearly 50,000 inmates are in California's prisons because of the statute.

Third-strike laws make sense for violent criminals. To protect society, you need to put those guys away for a long time. But for the non-violent, they just don't make sense. In Los Angeles, reports Sanchez, a homeless man who broke into a church in search of food received a third-strike sentence even though his last offense took place 10 years earlier.

MAURINE NEUBERGER DECIDED not to run for reelection to the U.S. Senate in 1966 because of the amount of money she would have to raise. What was the amount she found too daunting? \$250,000. That wouldn't finance a campaign for some state legislatures today. By 1984, a U.S. Senate candidate could spend \$12 million. And imagine what Rudy Giuliani and Hillary Clinton are going to have to shell out in New York this year. That's why campaign finance reform is important and

that's why I am sorry about the demise of John McCain's presidential effort. By publicizing campaign finance reform, he gave millions of people hope that the system could be changed and was attracting them to the voting booths in record numbers, reversing the decline in voter turnout that had been such a pronounced trend in the 1990s.

A *New York Times* profile by Nicholas Kristoff explains another reason I hated to see McCain lose. He was a proven leader. Kristoff says of the men who served under McCain in the Navy: "Loyalty to the Skipper was widespread. As one tracks down and talks to the men he once commanded, it is striking how often their voices light up as they describe something magical about the Skipper... he would hurtle into the maintenance shops and start kidding the officers, peppering them with rapid-fire questions and jokes, urging them, scolding them and leaving them fired up... Inertia had set in. But then McCain came in and changed them overnight."

So I regret his loss. Not that I don't share the conventional wisdom that he spent too much of the campaign's final days in overheated, overly-personal attacks, instead of focusing on the inspiring elements of his message. But I also feel that his mistakes were compounded by the media. Instead of seeing McCain whole, and consistently reporting his virtues and his faults, the media helped inflate his victory in New Hampshire by their too-enchanted reporting. Then, having become disenchanted, the media expressed that disenchantment disproportionately during the last week, and contributed to his defeat on Super Tuesday.

MEDICAL ERRORS AND THE deaths they cause have been in the news recently. Behind the problem is the medical profession's longstanding lack of enthusiasm for self-criticism. The situation among lawyers is no different. For example, during 1998-9, the Wisconsin Board of Attorneys

Professional Responsibility received 1256 complaints of which 1068 were dismissed without investigation. Only 34 of the complaints led to public reprimand or license suspension or revocation.

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A CANADIAN IS THE DEPUTY COMMANDER of the U.S. Army's Third Corps based at Fort Hood, Texas. This, having come about because of NATO, makes sense to me. In fact another form of the idea is one of the *Monthly's* old causes. Since we haven't brought it up for a while, it may be time to tell our newer readers about it. The State Department has embassies and consulates all over the world. So do countries like Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand with whom we have a language and many other things in common. Why have duplicate embassies and consulates in the places where we have common interests with at least one of those nations? Why not let one of them represent us in some places while we represent them elsewhere. Of course we can't do this everywhere. Sometimes our interests diverge. But where they don't, we could save a pretty penny.

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"VOTERS IN THIS YEAR'S Republican presidential primaries rank education dead last in importance," writes Dave Boyer of *The Washington Times*, citing exit polls and other surveys of GOP voters. The same may be true of the political reporters for our great papers. Although I thought George W. Bush's best moment in the California debate was when he talked about his accountability education program, and the worst moment for McCain and Keyes came when they disagreed on the basis that any federal role in education is automatically bad. In their stories the next day

neither *The Washington Post* nor *The New York Times* tried to explain Bush's position or the significance of his opponents' disagreement.

Even though we find Bush's ideas on education promising, his chances of enacting them with a Republican Congress in power seem less than promising in light of what the surveys—and indeed past performance in Congress—show to be his party's indifference to improving public schools.

It is a rare reporter who looks behind a conflict of interest to see if it's real.

One reason for the GOP's indifference to the public schools is that Republicans tend to be older and richer. Many of their children are grown or they can afford to send them to private school or they live in affluent suburbs

where the public schools are not a problem.

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IF WACO SHOULD HAVE COME AS NO surprise after Ruby Ridge with the same man in charge, then Fox's "Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?" should have been entirely anticipated by anyone who knew the history of Richard Darnell, the show's creator. Not only had he been responsible for Fox's quiz show "Greed," he also had produced "Alien Autopsy: Fact or Fiction," "When Stunts Go Bad," and "World's Scariest Police Chases." One of his shows featured the surgical removal of a 303-pound tumor from a woman. He did decide against running a show called "The World's Most Embarrassing Throw-Up Moments." It was not that he found the concept distasteful. According to Alex Kuczynski and Bill Carter of *The New York Times*, "he decided against it because the vomiting segments were re-creations, not actual footage."

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THE EPA HAS PUBLISHED A NEW brochure entitled "Environmental Security—Strengthening National Security Through Environmental

Protection." It revives one of the great Cold War bureaucratic tactics: Find some way to identify your program with national security! This ploy was enshrined long ago by the success of the "Defense Highway Act" in attracting generous appropriations.

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WILL ALAN GREENSPAN'S INTEREST rate hikes, by slowing the economy down too much, hurt Al Gore this fall? That is the question asked by David Ignatius in a recent column in *The Washington Post*. Ignatius says that Greenspan's latest increases "will really bite into the economy in September and October." If they do cause an economic slowdown, Gore will repeat the unhappy experience of another vice-president running for president. I seem to recall that Richard Nixon blamed his defeat in 1960 on the Fed's anti-growth policies that year and is said to have told Arthur Burns, the Fed chairman in 1972, to make damn sure he didn't repeat the 1960 mistake, advice that Burns heeded. On election day there was so little economic discontent among voters that Nixon won by a landslide.

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CREDIT CARD USE AMONG college students is getting out of hand, Joshua Wolf Shenk warned in an article in *U.S. News & World Report* a few years ago. Was he right? Consider this recent news from James Schembari's "Personal Business" column in *The New York Times*. Nellie Mae, a provider of student loans, finds that 35 percent of recent graduates who are repaying its student loans have other debts of more than \$1,000—not per year, but per month!

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SOME GOOD NEWS. FLORIDA PUT \$200 million from its tobacco suit settlement into an anti-smoking campaign that features tough television ads—one calls tobacco "the greatest killer of young people." The campaign resulted in a 20 percent drop in tobacco use among high

school students and a whopping 54 percent drop among middle school students.

The bad news is two-fold. First, most other states are using less of the settlement money for anti-smoking efforts—the average is only seven percent. Second, in Florida, Governor Jeb Bush has slashed one-third of the funding for the program.

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WHAT ECONOMISTS USED TO worry about as inflationary were wage increases without comparable productivity increases. American productivity grew five percent in the second half of 1999. Wages grew at less than half that rate. Why doesn't Alan Greenspan attend to these statistics, instead of insisting that growth has to mean inflation?

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL reports that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has not only (1) sued to overturn an Exxon policy, made after the Exxon Valdez accident, that bars anyone with alcohol or drug abuse from safety jobs but (2) also sued to prevent a railroad from relieving a train-dispatcher of his duties because he has a heart condition that can cause him to lose consciousness. The Commission is arguing that consciousness is "not itself a job function" and the employee's condition is not a "direct threat" to others.

This warped reasoning reminds me of the District of Columbia's Department of Motor Vehicles Director Sheryl Hobbs Newman, who defends her department's policy that counts safety violations against the truck company but not against the truck driver. Thus a driver can have an unlimited number of tickets and still keep his driver's license. Willis Curry still had a license—even though he had twice the number of violation points needed to revoke it—when his runaway rig ran a red light, flipped over, and killed a 17-year-old student. According to Ronald J. Hansen of *The Washington Times*, the four DMV

employees responsible for Curry's license have been rewarded by Director Hobbs Newman with routine raises and one has even been promoted.

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IF FOX HAS TAKEN THE LEAD in encouraging money mania, the other networks are not far behind. As we have pointed out, even PBS has been featuring a show called "The Courage to be Rich." And as we were going to press with this issue the local public television station WETA was advertising: "Live from the WETA Studios: 'SMART WOMEN FINISH RICH.'"

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IF CONSERVATIVES, OTHER THAN George W. Bush, talk about education reform at all, it is usually to advocate vouchers. Liberals on the other hand tend to be automatically against vouchers. It seems to me that both sides are wrong. The reason is that vouchers can't be that big a factor. There simply aren't enough vacancies in the parochial schools, which are usually the only affordable institutions where the vouchers can be used. Catholic schools had more vacancies in the 1970s and '80s but the middle class has awakened to their value and has been snapping up the remaining slots so that there aren't a lot left for the poor. But where the vacancies still exist liberals—including Al Gore—are wrong to oppose vouchers that can permit the poor to escape from public schools when those schools are too abysmal to have any hope of giving the students a fair chance in life.

Early research on vouchers in the District of Columbia and in Milwaukee testify to their value. In the District, elementary school students who transferred to private schools were happier and did better in English and math than their former fellow students who remained in public schools. The Milwaukee study shows that vouchers encourage racial diversity rather than discouraging it as many liberals had feared. The percentage of minority students in pri-

vate schools has grown from 22 to 35 percent.

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A CAUTION FROM THE DISTRICT study. Although the private school experience helped elementary students, those in grades 6-8 were more negative about their new schools and, while doing a little better in math, did worse in reading than those remaining in public school. Is it maybe that middle school is too late to make the change? You've got to get them at an early age, which by the way is also the message of Michael Eskenazi's article in this issue.

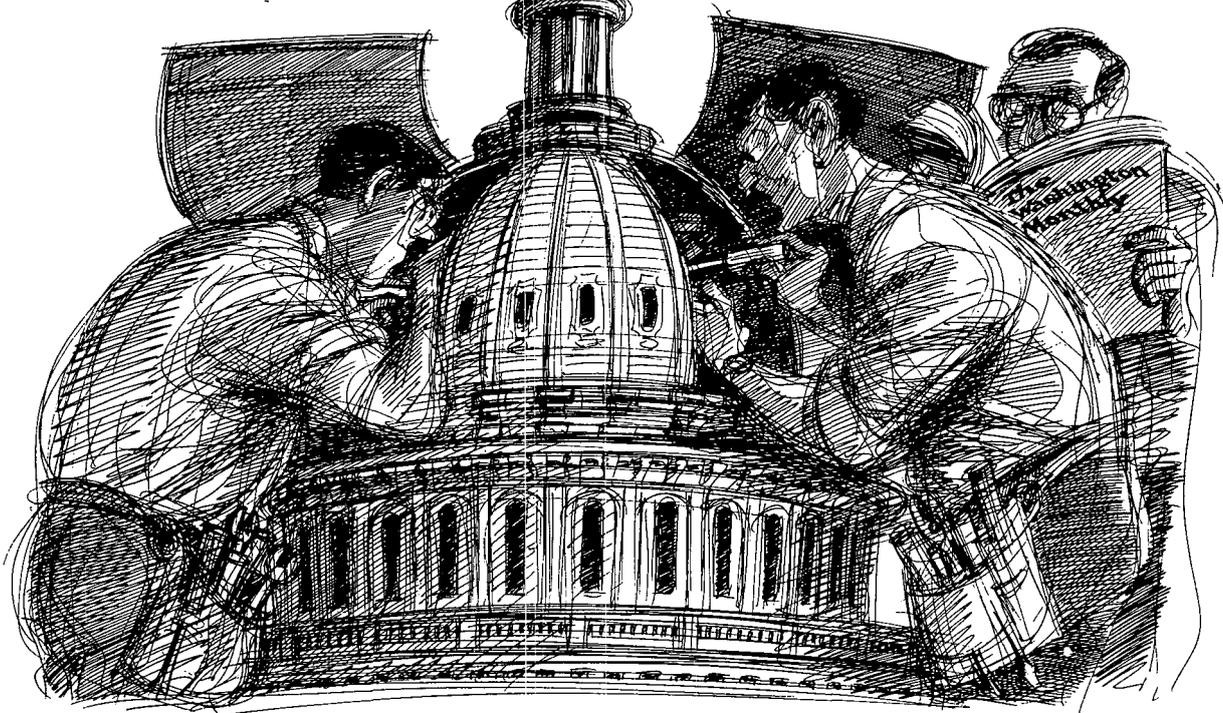
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JAY MATTHEWS OF THE *Washington Post* did the reporting I relied on for the District study. Jay is an unusual man. He is extremely well-connected, having worked on the *Harvard Crimson* during the same era as such luminaries as James Fallows, Michael Kinsley, David Ignatius, Frank Rich, Don Graham, and Robert Samuelson. Early in his career he was hired by one of the best papers, *The Washington Post*, and put on the fast track to conventional journalistic success. He, however, chose to get off the track and devote his career to covering education. I don't always agree with him, but he deserves the kind of special recognition we give to those who could succeed practically anywhere but choose to devote their lives to teaching in the public schools. In my religion, they are doing God's work.

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ANOTHER SUCH PERSON IS Barbara Busch, who recently retired after 35 years working in the federal government. Barbara began her career working for me at the Peace Corps. I was fortunate to have hired her. She was what we want every civil servant to be: intelligent, efficient, dedicated, and just plain nice. Barbara was attracted by the New Frontier-Early Great Society idealism that reigned in the Peace Corps back then. How many government agencies project this kind of appeal today?

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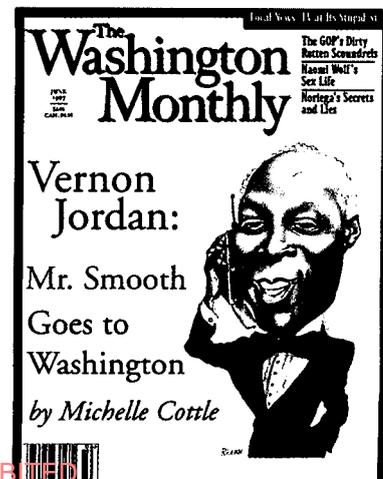
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Fighting Chance

*Why we need enriching childcare to
give our kids a fair start*

BY MICHAEL ESKENAZI

IF YOU HAVE EVER WONDERED HOW important decent childcare is to poor families in the United States, consider the following two stories—one sad, one hopeful—from the beginning of the present school year:

Jewel Foster was a single mother in Chicago's South Side. She'd been scraping by without working for several years, but when her sixth child arrived and her boyfriend left her high and dry, she knew she'd need to make some extra money. She lined up a promising job—working as a cashier at Chicago's high-end Marshall Fields department store—and what's more managed to find a precious daycare spot for her baby at a soon-to-open center run by a local non-profit. She also enrolled in a course to get her high school equivalency diploma. But when Foster learned that the Center had to delay opening indefinitely, things quickly fell apart. She tried to line up another daycare center but had no luck—in part because there are only 900 subsidized daycare slots in all of Chicago. A social worker offered state-funded vouchers to pay for “informal” care—meaning too many loosely supervised kids crammed into a too small neighborhood apartment. “I didn't want that for my child,” says Foster. She quit her job to care for her baby during the day and took a dead-end job packaging boxes at a shipping company at night, when a neighbor could look in on the kids. She also dropped her course.

In New York a happier story was unfolding. At the end of the first day of a federally funded “Head Start” pre-school program in Manhattan's P.S. 5, the teachers discussed a 3-year-old named Brenda Uruga. She was so outgoing, thoughtful, inquisitive—so

promising—they couldn't help but pick her out of the crowd. Candida Uruga, Brenda's mother, smiled as she recalled that only a year ago Brenda had started out at a federally-funded “Early Head Start” program as a sheepish, disinterested toddler who didn't speak to anyone. Mrs. Uruga said that since then Early Head Start had “transformed” her relationship with Brenda and her other children. Following a year of working with the program's family workers, she has a more active role in the children's education, and says: “Now when my daughter wants to read a book, I take the time to read with her. I used to believe it made no difference.”

And that, in a nutshell, is the tragedy of the American educational system: Despite all of our resources and all of the know-how we have about giving kids a leg up in life, we wind up helping only a handful of the children who need it. Perhaps we confuse ourselves with the bewildering range of labels that we use when we talk about the services that we provide or should be providing for the young: Head Start, Early Head Start, childcare, daycare, early childhood education, and so on. So let's be clear: What we need to emphasize, and what all of these programs need to focus on, is educational enrichment—an experience that blends seamlessly with the American educational process and will set the child up for a productive career in the public schools.

With 75 percent of American families now using daycare for their preschool-aged kids, there's certainly a critical mass of consumers for this sort of “quality” care. Yet studies have shown that only 25 percent of American daycare centers offer quality services—and those are the 25 percent most expensive. For the well-to-do, America offers state-of-the-art pre-school “campuses” like Denver's Creme de la Creme, which boasts 32-foot vaulted ceilings, a line of faux Victorian shopfronts, a mini-television station,

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