

Bully Pulpit

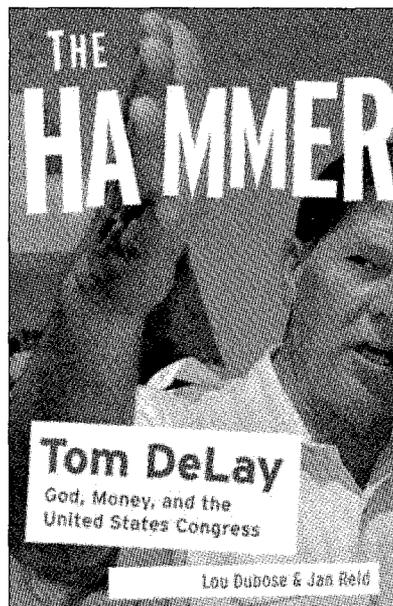
How Tom DeLay changed Washington.

By Jamie Malanowski

It seems more and more possible that the name of Chris Bell will join that of Charles Julius Guiteau on the list of disgruntled office-seekers who helped derail a powerful politician's career. Guiteau, however, merely shot James Garfield, one of our many below-average Buckeye presidents. Chris Bell may end up slaying a dragon.

For those not in the know, Chris Bell is a one-term Texas Democratic congressman who lost his bid for reelection when the Texas legislature gratuitously gerrymandered him into a district where he had to face another (apparently more popular) Democratic incumbent. With his career nipped in the bud, Bell, perhaps humming the "Me and Bobby McGee" lyric about freedom being another word for nothing left to lose, filed a 187-page ethics complaint against Tom DeLay, the powerful House Majority Leader and engineer of the hyper-aggressive redistricting scheme that claimed Bell's seat.

Bell's long-overdue complaint accused DeLay of "bribery, extortion, fraud, money laundering and the abuse of power." In response, the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct has so far rebuked DeLay twice. The first time was for being insufficiently discreet in his



The Hammer:
Tom DeLay: God, Money, and the United States Congress

By Lou Dubose & Jan Reid

Public Affairs, \$26.00

influence-peddling ("Geez, Tom, take the time to maintain a veil of hypocrisy, will ya?") The second time was for using the Federal Aviation Administration to track down furtive Democratic Texas legislators after they had escaped to Oklahoma in an effort to deny the Republican majority a quorum for the redistricting session in which the state Democratic Party would be sliced and diced to death. (The panel had shown a lot

of backbone to this point, but in a prime example of state-of-the-art buck passing, deferred action on another of Bell's complaints, this one alleging illegal corporate fundraising. They are going to wait and see what happens to three DeLay cronies who have been charged with felonies in that matter.)

Regardless of what else happens—and there hangs in the air the kind of ominous silence that precedes the dropping of the other shoe—Bell's complaint has already inspired House Speaker Dennis Hastert to deliver what will surely prove to be one of the Ten Most Unintentionally Hilarious Comments of the Year. "The worry I have," Hastert told *The New York Times*, "is that you again politicize the process, and it denigrates what ethics is all about."

And surely the name of Tom DeLay should never be associated with any denigration of ethics.

Tom DeLay is the most odious character in American politics today. He does not lack for competition, of course, but what sets him apart is that all of his perversions have been accomplished under the radar screen. Apart from his colorful name "the Hammer," DeLay has no public identity, and even that nickname will more likely inspire people outside the Beltway to think of old jocks like Fred Williamson or Dave Schultz than the beady-eyed former exterminator who terrifies Capitol Hill. It's easy to dislike Dick Cheney; he gets lampooned on "Saturday Night Live." But Darrell Hammond could perform a dead-on impersonation of Tom DeLay, and almost nobody would get the reference. Tom DeLay is a cancer cell, silently metastasizing.

Perhaps *The Hammer: Tom DeLay: God, Money, and United States Congress* will shine a bright spotlight on the nefarious activities of the Majority Leader. Lou Dubose and Jan Reid have calmly, clearly, and pointedly laid out the story of DeLay's rise from an undistinguished Texas legislature backbencher to his current position of



Nightmare on K Street

power. They show how DeLay has morphed from a tough whip, admired in the hardball world of Washington politics for his take-no-prisoners approach to party discipline, to a thoroughgoing bully who uses money and capricious, *Scarface*-like gestures to amass more and more and more power.

The most fun to be had from this book will be the arguments it causes about which of DeLay's antics is most scurrilous. Is it his turning over his office to industry lobbyists to write legislation? Is it his innovation of jamming conference committees with loyalists who will pack bills with choice pieces of pork and industry-pleasing amendments? Will it be the way DeLay crazy-cut the district map of Texas to eliminate the possibility of contested elections? Is it his gluttonous fundraising and his naked commerce in political favors? Maybe it's the way he tried to bribe Rep. Nick Smith (R-Mich.) to vote a certain way in exchange for a \$100,000 payment to Smith's son's campaign committee.

It's hard to say that any one of

these is more shocking than the next, although DeLay's colluding with clothing manufacturers in the Marianas Islands, a U.S. protectorate, to set up unregulated sweatshops is particularly ugly and shameless. DeLay and his benefactors created an industry that enjoyed American trade protection but that operated without American regulations, leaving the workers in virtual servitude.

So swaggering has DeLay become that he even spits on the hands that feed him—the lobbyists. DeLay not only does business with lobbyists, but he has also subsumed them. In one early, tone-setting power play, he discovered that the electronics industry was about to appoint as its chief lobbyist a former Democratic congressman, Dave McCurdy. DeLay told the industry that he didn't approve of its choice. When the association refused to change its selection, DeLay simply yanked off the House calendar an important piece of legislation that the administration, congressional committees, and the industry had been working on for months. The

industry group cobbled together a face-saving arrangement, and DeLay put the bill back on the schedule, but a billboard on K Street couldn't have sent the message more clearly. So thoroughly has DeLay taken over the lobbies that now lobbyists actually work for him. You may be, for example, an automotive lobbyist, but when DeLay wants a tobacco bill passed, he gets you to talk to the congressmen from car country.

Politics, as it's been famously said, ain't beanbag, and the list of powerful people, Democrat and Republican, who have advanced personal and special interests over the public interest is long indeed. But it's just not true to say that DeLay is simply engaging in the kind of corruption Democratic leaders succumbed to during their long period in control of Congress. DeLay is a corruptor to a revolutionary degree. As *The Boston Globe* recently reported, conference committees stuffed 3407 bits of pork barrel legislation into this year's federal budget; in 1994, the last year Democrats controlled the House, 47 projects were added. In 1977-78, 85

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percent of non-Appropriations legislation was sent to the floor under open rules that permitted amendment; in the DeLay-controlled Congress, only 15 percent had open rules. As *The Hammer* spells out in detail, DeLay subverts the public's business, undermines the rules, perverts ideas of fairness in order to gain even more control of the House, the legislative process, the Republican Party, and national policy. DeLay has not merely maximized the powers of his office; he's not merely the model of the modern martinet; he has eliminated all the customary checks on his power. There are no longer powerful committee chairmen or a group of independent moderates to act as a check; indeed, given the embarrassing redistricting he masterminded in Texas, voters are hardly a check anymore.

As Dubose and Reid explain, DeLay has accumulated all this power not for personal aggrandizement—he lives rather modestly—but to promote his causes, big business, and fundamentalist Christianity. This places DeLay right at the center of two of the most dangerous trends in America today: the rise of corporate society and the fundamentalization of politics. The balance between business and government, between private economic good and the public realm, which produced a standard of living that was the envy of the world, has been radically tilted in favor of business. And, as we have seen, political leaders who are confident in their own righteousness are apt to embark on all kinds of unsound policies. DeLay is not just a tough guy or a cunning guy; DeLay is a power-grabbing radical who wants to undermine the democratic nature of our political institutions and our two-party system. I doubt very much that DeLay will like this book, but as a man who knows something about pest control, I hope events turn out in such a way that he eventually comes to recognize its insecticidal strength.

Jamie Malanowski is a New York writer.

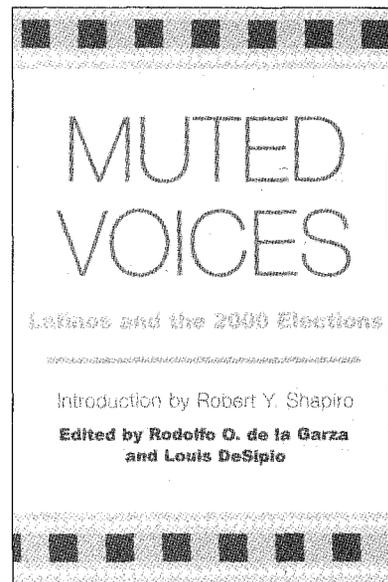
Bloc Patrol

Maybe there's no such thing as the "Latino vote."

By Steve Cieslewicz

It has become an article of faith in this presidential election campaign that the Latino vote is an elusive prize that could catapult to victory the candidate or party that manages to capture it. If you watched either of the political conventions on television this summer, you heard as much Spanish spoken as on a typical hour of "Sesame Street" (though the content of the appeals wasn't much more substantial than "A is for Agua.") At 39 million and growing, Latinos now account for 13 percent of the U.S. population and have all the makings of a formidable electoral constituency. While it leans heavily Democratic, the Latino vote is still in-play, unlike its more established cousin, the Black vote—which consistently gives 90 percent to Democrats. In a close election, many political observers and strategists are convinced that the votes of Latinos alone could determine the outcome.

They just might be right. To listen to Rodolfo O. de la Garza and Louis DeSipio, however, this potential bonanza of votes remains untapped. Since 1988, the two political scientists have tracked the role of Latinos in U.S. politics, and they have released their latest findings, *Muted Voices: Latinos and the 2000 Elections*, just in time for the 2004 election. As the title indicates, the authors—and their 17 collaborators in this collection of essays—argue that Latino interests and concerns are largely neglected by political parties and candidates even as the media focus on them continues to increase.



Muted Voices:
Latinos and the 2000 Elections
By Rodolfo O. de la Garza & Louis DeSipio

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, \$29.95

Muted Voices looks broadly at recent campaign efforts to target Latinos and, in classic academic fashion, uses a series of case studies from high Latino population states such as Arizona, Texas, California, and New York to make predictions about the influence of Latino voters in future elections.

Two dominant arguments are maintained through the essays of *Muted Voices*. The first posits that Latinos cast ballots as a bloc and therefore constitute a singular, identifiable Latino vote. And the second maintains that in order to successfully court this bloc, a political party must both project a "welcoming image" and promote a package of issues