

THE TEXAS Observer

A JOURNAL OF FREE VOICES

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**Death
Penalty
Politics**

Pg. 6



ALAN POGUE

Democratic Dilemma

Ronnie Dugger Considers the Governor's Race

The LBJ Biography, Part II

Robert Sherrill on Caro's Means of Ascent

Runoff Endorsements

Ann Richards, Nikki Van Hightower, Hector Uribe, Et Al.

*Also: Bill Adler Reviews The
Ambition and the Power*

A JOURNAL OF FREE VOICES

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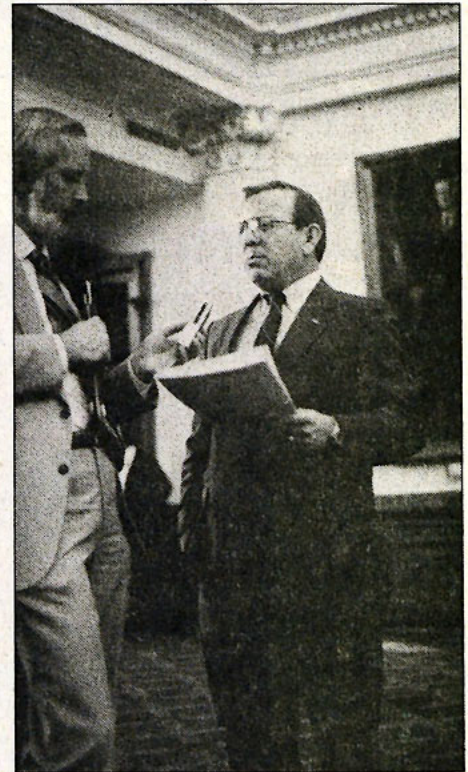
WITHIN MOMENTS of adjournment on the final Thursday of the third special legislative session several members of the House Mexican American Caucus had gathered in a circle around the desk of San Antonio Rep. Greg Luna. They were joined by Houston Rep. Larry Evans, chair of the Black Caucus. Education reform, for this session, was dead. But this group was still in denial. "You have to do more than oppose legislation," Austin Rep. Lena Guerrero argued. "What's the plan?" For 10 minutes the ad hoc caucus, meeting at center aisle and midway between the Speaker's desk and the entrance to the chamber, continued. Until they retired to the beer, barbecue, and relative privacy of Port Arthur Rep. Frank Collazo's office, where they would try for several hours to put together a proposal to take to Speaker Gib Lewis.

Later that night, Mexican American Caucus Chair Eddie Cavazos would go to the Speaker with a proposal to resurrect a moribund school-finance bill. And Lewis, according to what Cavazos said in a brief interview on Friday morning, was unwilling to compromise. "I talked to the Speaker last night and he said he was going to send it back to committee," Cavazos said.

The meeting, between the leadership of the Mexican American Caucus and the Speaker — after the collapse of this session's final attempt at equity reform — is something of a metaphor for the whole process. The process that was evidently frustrating for Cavazos, who told *Houston Post* reporter Mary Lenz that although minority groups had brought the lawsuit which led to the school finance system being declared unconstitutional, they had been shut out of the debate. "We're out of the negotiations," Cavazos told the *Post*.

The lawsuit had indeed been brought by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF). And MALDEF attorney Al Kauffman had served as the lead counsel when the case was heard by the Texas Supreme Court, which ruled 9-0 in favor of the plaintiffs. Yet by the time the legislative package designed to address the wrongs the Court ordered corrected made it to the House floor, the essential element of the plaintiffs' plan had been eliminated. For months before the special session started Kauffman had been making the case for funding caps.

The logic behind spending caps is that they prohibit property-rich school districts from cranking up their tax rates in response to infusions of state monies into property-poor districts. In the past, when the Legislature has tried to equalize spending among the state's



LOUIS DUBOSE

Senator Carlos Truan

school districts, wealthy districts have resorted to local revenue to stay ahead of poorer districts in per-pupil expenditures. This has had the effect of creating "super-schools," which use superior resources to attract the best teachers away from schools with fewer resources, according to Kauffman and Dr. Jose Cardenas, a former Edgewood I.S.D. superintendent who now directs an education think-tank in San Antonio.

Capping enrichment spending at a specified (per-hundred-dollar) tax rate is the only way, according to the Edgewood plaintiffs, to achieve equity. It also would create among all the state's school districts a mutual interest in adequate state funding for all the state's children. With caps, districts across the state would all find themselves in the same boat, according to what Kauffman had said before the session began. If wealthy districts wanted increased funding beyond what they could provide with limited local enrichment, they would have to go to the Legislature to ask for increased money for *all* of the states' schools.

SPENDING caps had fallen by the wayside in the Senate, two weeks before the final House floor debate. Yet Sena-

tors had voted 23-9 (Lieutenant Governor Hobby voting) in favor of a bill that would provide in excess of \$1.2 billion in new education funding. (All but two Senate Democrats, Bill Sims of San Angelo and Chet Edwards of Duncanville, had voted for the \$1.2 billion bill. As did Cyndi Taylor Krier, the San Antonio Republican who was the only member of her party in the Senate to vote for the bill.) Actually, debate in the Senate proceeded at a normal pace, even on the day that Corpus Christi Senator Carlos Truan prevailed with an amendment that added \$400 million to Senate Bill 31, which already carried an \$800 million price tag.

Senate debate proceeded at a normal pace, even when Senator Carlos Truan added \$400 million to the bill.

It was this Senate bill which was sent to the House education committee, which promptly substituted its own version (Committee Substitute Senate Bill 31) by a vote of 6-1. The only education committee member present who opposed the substitute, which cut spending from \$1.2 billion to \$450 million, was Universal City Republican Alan Schoolcraft, the House's education-funding minimalist who will steadfastly argue, in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that when it comes to school finance, less is more.

But the kicker on the House floor was that the substitute bill included the funding principles drafted by Houston Rep. Paul Colbert and patterned, in part, after recommendations made by the Equity Center, a collective of schools of low-to-moderate property wealth. The Center, directed by Craig Foster, had also participated in the *Edgewood* suit, representing the interests of a group of plaintiff intervenors.

So it seemed that if the House version could only be passed and advanced into a conference committee, then a funding mechanism that would have provided equity for up to 95 percent of the state's school districts could have been wedded to the higher numbers in the Senate bill, or at least \$800 million of the \$1.2 billion proposed across the round. And even if it didn't, the funding principles would have, within five years, provided more equity than many involved in the 30-year-old funding battle ever envisioned. The low first-year tab was designed to bring on legislators who feared that they

would be labeled as tax-and-spend moderates.

But it was not to be. The final day's debate included some 100 amendments aimed at the House substitute bill. By the time niggardly House appropriations chair Jim Rudd, a Brownfield Democrat, voted for a Greg Luna amendment that would have increased funding from \$450 million to \$950 million, the conservatives' grand strategy was already obvious. Their intent was to so burden the bill with amendments that it would include something to alienate everyone. By late afternoon, on a day when floor debate would continue until 9 p.m., many House members admitted the bill was beyond salvaging.

At one point the members overwhelmingly voted to eliminate the teacher career ladder, though they left the funding for the program in place. Returning to the floor after a brief absence, Dallas Rep. Garfield Thompson looked at the vote board and asked "What happened?" "We just voted down the career ladder," another member answered. "Oh," Thompson shrugged as he wandered back toward his desk. By a vote of 116-17, with less than five minutes of debate, the House had voted to dismantle a reform that had taken months to construct in 1984. And so it went. After House Education Committee Chair Glossbrenner spent the day at the front of the House, beating back hostile amendments, her bill went down by a 101-45 vote.

Yet most members of the House Mexican American Caucus voted with House conservatives to defeat the bill which they had resolved to oppose when they met on the previous night. "Politics does make strange bedfellows," Cavazos said as he argued against passage of the bill.

Some have criticized Kauffman for holding out for both more money and stronger funding principles. The argument is that he is playing a dangerous game, pushing the whole system toward a court-imposed solution rather than settling for "some equity." And the Mexican American Caucus, arguably the most effective force for progress in the House, stayed with Kauffman. (The Black caucus was more favorably disposed to the Glossbrenner bill.)

But as Kauffman said before the session began, the plaintiffs have won what might be described as a "personal-injury suit." "Now, we're going to the Legislature to collect," Kauffman said. With a 9-0 Supreme Court mandate behind him, now, and not five years from now when the makeup of the Supreme Court might be considerably different, is the time to collect.

Despite the court mandate, the legislative debate had been framed and dominated by the rural conservative Democrats and the Republicans, who are offering to trade "some equity" for an omnibus education-reform package. Most of the issues were framed by the Governor's task force, which was meeting months before the session began. The task force served as a forum in which oppo-

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nents of equity could spend months redefining the Edgewood decision — before legislators arrived in Austin.

We'll go back to the ditches and start working the issue all over again," House Speaker Gib Lewis said at the end of the day's debate. So with Bill Clements promising to veto any package that requires spending more than \$300 million, factions in the House might be said to be entrenched.

That the Black and Mexican American caucuses were meeting together on the last day that the House actually met is a good sign. If there was any consensus that evolved from the House's final day of debate it could be seen in the 85-61 vote against the Schoolcraft plan, which embodied many of the regressive issues developed by the Governor's task force. It is around that vote that some coalition-building might begin.

The fourth special session begins on April 2 and the *Edgewood* plaintiffs will again attempt to collect. **L.D.**

The New McCarthyism

C ALL IT narco-McCarthyism. It is not an unfair comparison. Substitute the phrase "ever used illegal drugs" for "ever been a member of one of the following organizations" and the unfair rush to judgment is compelled by the same logic of fear. In the early '50s, when a subject of a House Un-American Activities Committee inquiry would refuse to answer a question about organizations to which he had belonged, it was concluded that he was a "Fifth-Amendment Communist." Fear of the "narcotraficante" as was first observed in the editorial pages of *The Nation*, now replaces the fear of communism that informed and motivated North American politics since the 1940s. So now, by the terms of the inquisition begun by Jim Mattox, we can identify Fifth-Amendment substance abusers.

For two years now Democrats have feared and Republicans have anticipated that in the Democratic gubernatorial campaign public-policy issues would fade in the white heat of ad hominem attacks. Yet few anticipated how much damage this political campaign could do to the commonweal. After a grisly fight with former Governor Mark White over the bragging rights to the corpses of 33 criminals executed during the past decade, the Attorney General now poses a threat to the years of progress made by drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs across the state.

When Mattox, as a guest on a San Antonio radio talk show, was asked if he believed that Ann Richards had used drugs, he replied "Oh, I think there's not any doubt about that, I think you can ... infer that clearly from the statements that she's made concerning the use of mind-altering chemicals and the fact that she has refused to answer the questions."

Mattox even suggested that evidence to support his accusations will surface. He also said that "the most important thing that would answer all the questions concerning her, uh, these issues, would be a release of her medical tapes and her medical records from the chemical-dependency center that she went into. That gives the real answers."

Substance abusers enter programs with the assurance their medical histories will remain private. Confidentiality is fundamental to treatment and it is for this reason that Mattox's attack on Ann Richards has sufficiently angered physicians and drug-abuse counselors that a number of them have not only come to Richards's defense, but have also engaged in public-relations campaigns to repair the damage done by the Mattox campaign.

Mattox's demand that Richards "answer the questions concerning her own drug usage and talk about ... for instance, who supplied her, what she did, how often she did it, what kinds were used," might even be considered

unfair if asked by a candidate running against Marion Barry. Here, they only serve to illustrate further the extremes to which Mattox will go to win the nomination.

IN THE PAST six months Jim Mattox has made statements that contradict many of the enlightened positions he has fought for during the course of a distinguished career in public office. The most irresponsible position he has taken is his promise to veto any income-tax bill. What he offers as a source of revenue for a state that cannot even meet the basic needs of educating its children and caring for its indigent infirm and aged is a lottery — essentially a voluntary tax on the poor that has been shown to redistribute wealth from the center city to the suburbs. The Mattox-White death-penalty fight, though it will hardly affect as many as will

By the terms of the inquisition begun by Jim Mattox, we can identify Fifth-Amendment drug users.

the anti-tax campaign, erodes the very due-process protections that the Attorney General is sworn to preserve. And there is even an element of irony in Mattox's anti-drug demagoguery. At a time when Texas prosecutors were jailing the state's youth for possession of small amounts of marijuana, and when many of us were working to free Lee Otis Johnson, Dallas State Rep. Jim Mattox was carrying an enlightened but unpopular bill that would have decriminalized marijuana use.

Mattox's claim that because Richards has refused to answer the drug-history question she will be a "sitting duck for Clayton Williams," would be more convincing if made by a candidate about whom serious ethical questions had not been raised. It has been widely reported that on the eve of his inauguration as attorney general, \$200,000 was conveyed to Mattox or his siblings by Dallas land developer Danny Faulkner, who later became the central figure in a savings-and-loan investigation and trial. And, as reported

by *Observer* publisher Ronnie Dugger in these pages, allegations were made under oath two years ago that \$125,000 was set aside to be conveyed to General Mattox to secure his assistance in a civil lawsuit. Though it was never established that the money was conveyed to Mattox, he has refused to answer reporters' questions about these matters.

For years I have admired Jim Mattox. I admired him for the resolve, for the toughness and even for the pathos in his character. He appealed to something in my own working-class background. He was, after all, the working-class stiff who made it to the party to which he never was invited and once he got there claimed it as his patrimony. And all the while he continued to fight for the little guy, going to court to take on the bullies and the bastards. But, sadly, I have come to believe that there is too much Huey Long in Jim Mattox. Not only Long's indigenous populist ideology, but also the idea that an elected official, because he is fighting the good fight, is above reproach.

On occasions I have listened to Mattox speak, have heard him speak when he really spoke from the heart — not just about from whence he came, about his mother waiting tables and his daddy working sheet metal, which to me is important — but about where he was headed and the people's agenda in which I remain intractably convinced that Jim Mattox believes.

And I have thought: This is a man whose principles and commitment I can understand. Here is a man who is and will remain one of us. Here is a man I can follow.

No more. No ends justify these means. How reckless would Jim Mattox be if elevated to the position of governor? I'd rather not find out. **L.D.**

Runoff Endorsements

NIKKI VAN HIGHTOWER is our choice for treasurer in the Democratic runoff election. There was some disagreement in this office as to whether Van Hightower should have been our pick the first time around and the senior editor — arguing that the Van Hightower campaign was using questionable tactics — prevailed. There is no question that **Van Hightower** is the superior candidate. Her record of activism and public service goes back to the Fred Hofheinz administration in Houston, in which Van Hightower held the position of Women's Advocate. She has since worked on behalf of

the Harris County women's shelter, taught at the University of Houston, and now serves as Harris County treasurer. Van Hightower is intelligent, articulate, and has proven herself by serving as treasurer of the county that includes the nation's fourth-largest city.

The candidate we originally endorsed is out of the race, leaving Van Hightower to face Tom Bowden, the San Saba County Judge who only recently entertained the idea of running against former Killeen Rep. Stan Schlueter (before Schlueter resigned in the wake of an ethics scandal). And even before Bowden considered then reconsidered on the House race, he suggested that he might run against Ag Commissioner Jim Hightower.

Bowden is a rural conservative and probably does a good job in San Saba County — where we hope he remains. And his attack on Van Hightower for her membership in the Gay and Lesbian Caucus, with an underlying suggestion that Van Hightower is a lesbian, suggests that Bowden has problems that might preclude him from holding any public office.

But it's not necessary to compare Van Hightower to a lesser candidate to make the argument that she is the better candidate in this race. She is decidedly superior and represents the Democrats' best hope of defeating Republican fat-cat Kay Bailey Hutchison.

HECTOR URIBE is fighting to hold on to his Senate seat in the face of a serious challenge from Brownsville Rep. Eddie Lucio. There is no question about who is the better candidate in this race. Uribe is intelligent, capable, has an exemplary voting record, has represented his district well, and special interests in the state would like to see him retired. Eddie Lucio, according to his financial records, is the Farm Bureau's candidate. He is also backed by the same PACs that bankrolled tort reform and the recent successful assault on the workers' compensation system.

A fellow Mexican-American Caucus member described Lucio as the consummate politician: "He goes back to the district, drinks coffee with everybody, slaps them all on the back, then comes back to Austin and screws them every time he votes."

And while looking at Lucio's personal finance filings in the Secretary of State's office, the *Observer* discovered that Lucio is being investigated by the Travis County Attorney's office. Investigator S. C. Anderson confirmed that on March 5 he "requested copies of Lucio's financial records." But Anderson would say no more about the nature of the investigation. And as the *Observer* went to press, Lucio had not returned calls concerning the investigation.

For Place 2 on the Supreme Court we support Bob Gammage. Gammage, a former Houston Congressman and currently an appellate court judge, has the endorsement of the Mexican American Democrats and a number of other progressive organizations. In the primary, we supported East Texas trial



VIC HINTERLANG

Nikki Van Hightower

lawyer Scrappy Holmes, because we found Holmes's particular brand of East Texas populism most appealing. In the runoff, Houston Judge Ross Sears is generally perceived to be more conservative than Gammage. And ethical questions concerning Sears — which according to a story that appeared in *The Texas Lawyer* include improper influence and legal judgments against him — will be a heavy burden to carry into the general election. Measured against his opponent **Bob Gammage** is decidedly the better candidate.

Place 1 on the Court of Criminal Appeals presents voters in the Democratic runoff with the most difficult choice. Potter County District Judge Morris Overstreet is, by all accounts, a competent judge and as an African American he has somehow managed to win in Amarillo, where less than 6 percent of the population is black. And, it is obvious that Texas is long overdue to elect an African American to statewide office. Yet **Frank Maloney**, an Austin attorney and law school professor is, according to progressive law-

yers, one of the most qualified jurists in the state — particularly concerning procedure in criminal cases. And procedure is what the Court of Criminal Appeals is all about. We will again endorse Maloney and hope that the loser in this race is named by the Democratic Party to be the candidate to run for the seat that was held by the late Justice Rusty Duncan, who died last month in an automobile accident. There will be no primary election to fill the seat that had been held by Duncan, since his death occurred after primary ballots were printed. Judge Duncan was recognized as one of the leading voices for defendants' rights on the court. The yet-unscheduled election to replace him is crucial to the balance on a court that is the state's court of last resort for criminal-justice appeals.

In House runoffs we endorse: **Tim Curtiss** of Lockhart for District 31, **Elliott Naishtat** of Austin for District 49, **Henry Allee** of Houston for District 128, and **Mario V. Gallegos, Jr.** of Houston for District 143.

L.D. A.F.

Death and Taxes

How Jim Mattox Beat the Odds And Won the Campaign Image War

BY ALLAN FREEDMAN

ON MARCH 13, at exactly 10 p.m., Jim Mattox was smiling. Former Governor Mark White had already conceded. Mattox had once again defied the pundits and the politicians who had counted him out. He now faced a runoff election with Ann Richards. The macho man of Democratic politics glowed with boyish excitement.

"Is it too early to declare victory?" Mattox asked his cheering supporters at a primary night Austin victory party.

"No," the crowd answered in a loud refrain.

His voice rose as he spoke about taking on the insurance companies, the banks, and the utilities. As the crowd grew silent, and Mattox's voice more resolute, he talked of his message on behalf of the people who have been "beat up and beat on." Then, his voice soaked with emotion, he closed on a personal note. "Probably the greatest regret I have in my life is that my momma can't be here with me. My momma passed away in 1970. She was 51 years of age. I'm 46. I may not have a long time. But I've got a lot to do."

For a few minutes, Mattox exposed his softer and more thoughtful side. He was compassionate and inspirational. Only briefly did he mention his support for a lottery and his opposition to an income tax. And not once did he mention the death penalty. The twin themes of his campaign — death and taxes — were overshadowed by the heartfelt populist rhetoric of a crusading reformer.

But only for a moment. Indeed, during the primary, Mattox was the man with the pro-death/no-new-taxes message and the money to sell it. Consider these numbers. According to a *Dallas Morning News* poll published September 17, Mattox had just 8 percent of the vote, White had 23 percent, and Richards had 36 percent. In the primary, Richards received 39 percent of the vote, Mattox captured 37 percent, and White finished a distant third with 19 percent. Back in September, *Dallas Morning News* poll director Richard Murray said: "Mattox just has no base of support anywhere."

Clearly, Murray was proven wrong.

IT IS A testament to the power of money in politics that Mattox used the death-penalty and no-income-tax issues so effectively. "Lottery Yes, Income Tax No" was a ubiquitous refrain. He boasted early

and often in the campaign of the number of convicted murderers who were executed while he served as attorney general.

In the death penalty, Mattox was able to further his hard-nosed image and was successful in attracting the attention and votes of a conservative Democratic constituency. The attorney general ran strongly in more conservative rural districts while Richards counted her base in more liberal urban areas. On the issue of capital punishment, he was even able to outflank White, his chief rival for the party's bubba vote.

White entered the race with high negatives. This was a governor who had raised

**"Democrats have
been frightened
away from
the image of
liberalism."**

taxes. He was defeated by Clements in 1986, and White needed an emotional issue that could help him transcend a record that was sure to hurt his candidacy. White thought he had discovered deliverance in the death penalty. His 30-second death penalty advertisements were grim and to the point. "These hardened criminals will never again murder, rape, or deal drugs," White says as he stands next to drawings of the murderers in question. "As governor, I made sure they received the ultimate punishment death — and Texas is a safer place for it."

Will Saletan, editor of *The Hotline*, a national daily political news service, says White's strategy was similar to that of current Florida Republican Governor Bob Martinez. Like White, Martinez has high negatives and is using the death penalty in his current re-election bid to persuade voters to forget his misdeeds. Does the text of this Martinez commercial featuring footage of serial killer Ted Bundy seem familiar? (Bundy was executed in Florida.) "One of the most serious things that I have to address everyday is the whole issue of the death

penalty," Martinez says. "I now have signed some 90 death warrants in the state of Florida. Each one of those committed a heinous crime that I don't even choose to describe to you."

Says Saletan: "In the case of Mark White, the emotional appeal of the death penalty serves to drive out of the voters' consciousness why they got rid of Mark White in the first place, issues of taxes, economics."

Douglas Schoen, a New York-based pollster who advised White, concedes the obvious. Impact in political advertising is defined in large part by repetition. Schoen said the White death-penalty ad was shown too few times to advance the former governor into the runoff. "We weren't able to make the case that he was a sufficiently good governor, that he deserved re-election," he says. "Jim Mattox had stolen the issue."

White's support in the polls did increase after he began to run the execution ad. But he appeared to drop in the final week of the campaign because of Richards-campaign attacks that claimed he used his public position for private gain. That charge surfaced repeatedly in Richards's ads in the final seven days of the campaign.

"The Mark White pro-tax thing, that he raised taxes, was something that hurt him badly," Schoen says. "The Mark White lining his pockets [advertisement] hurt him badly."

Mattox used the death penalty for different reasons; he cemented his reputation as a crime fighter. The Mattox death-penalty commercials were also considered less offensive than White's among minority voters. Many black and Hispanic voters felt the White commercials in particular were aimed at a conservative, white constituency since minorities are represented in disproportionate numbers on death row. Mattox diluted his pro-death message. The lottery/no-taxes stance was more high-profile, for instance, and some believe the more potent message of the Mattox campaign. Unlike White, Mattox had other issues in his arsenal and avoided being identified exclusively with the death penalty.

"The White commercial was much more direct, and it got through to black voters," says Bob Squier, a Richards media consultant.

Mattox was also able to use the death penalty issue against Richards, or so

SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE



"Now it's all well and good to kill a man, but a real governor knows how to make him suffer before he goes ... Did you know there are over 36 miles of nerves in the human body. That's a vast resource of pain we've barely tapped into... Why we're just two years away from being able to remove a man's hips with a ceiling fan."

PHOTOS BY VIC HINTERLANG

Richards's advisers say. In California, gubernatorial candidate Dianne Feinstein has joined the growing ranks of Democratic candidates who are using the death penalty to their advantage. Women are widely perceived as less committed to criminal-justice matters than their male opponents. By using the issue, Feinstein was able to dispel that soft-on-crime perception. One recent poll showed Feinstein's lead increasing to almost 20 percentage points over her rival male opponent, State Attorney General John Van de Kamp. (Van de Kamp, who does not favor the death penalty, has aired tough-on-crime ads to counter the Feinstein surge. The ad was produced with the help of media consultant Robert Schrum, who is advising Mattox.)

Richards created a soft image for herself to begin with. She featured her family in early television ads and sold herself as a grandmother. That identity presented an obvious opening for Mattox to suggest, in subtle terms at least, that Richards couldn't play the tough guy when it came to cracking down on crime.

"I think Mattox doing the death penalty is different than other people doing the death penalty," says Squier, the Richards media consultant "I think he's trying to play the boys against the girls. I think his implication

is that she says she's for it, and she wouldn't do it."

Kelly Fero, a Mattox spokesman, denies the Mattox camp was attempting to play gender politics with the issue. "That is certainly not the intent on this side of the aisle." He says the issue didn't play as well in liberal or urban areas, or among minorities. Says Fero, "I think it worked well in the areas that it was intended to work well."

ALTHOUGH WHITE proved the limitations of the ultimate punishment, it is clear that his unsuccessful campaign will not dissuade other Democrats from using it. Asked if the death penalty proved a short-sighted issue for White, Saletan said: "Gosh. I really don't believe so. I would like to see what else he should have done. Should he have gotten up there and talked about all the things he's done that convinced voters to vote against him four years ago?"

Says Schoen: "I guess my attitude on the general question of the death penalty is it was and is an important issue."

Mattox did prove that the issue works, and it was clear from the numbers on primary day that he was the only candidate who was able to expand his constituency. Richards achieved

a spot in the runoff by holding on to her hard-core supporters, and had neither the message nor the money to expand that base.

Across the nation Democrats are flocking to pro-death positions with the zeal of executioners. This issue has the potential, if it hasn't already, to alter dramatically the character of the Democratic Party. And Texas plays such a prominent role in national politics that the gubernatorial campaign is actively reshaping the character of the party. A recent skit on *Saturday Night Live* featured a gubernatorial candidate who looked like a Texan ghoulishly boasting of his support for the death penalty. That image could soon be how the Democrats are identified on criminal-justice matters.

"The Democrats have been so frightened away from the image of liberalism, they've become more conservative in image than Republicans," Saletan said. "It's the Democrat's anxiety about appearing liberal that's driving this whole thing."

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Democratic Dilemma

Wellfleet, Massachusetts

IT MAY BE that nothing constructive can be salvaged from the debased race for governor of Texas this year, and in any case progressives should be seeking to reduce acrimony and heal wounds. But the Democratic runoff is the nadir in a crisis of the ethical seriousness and the integrity of the Texas progressive movement, and for this and other reasons each of us who is voting in the Democratic primary has a personal responsibility to make his or her most honest and conscientious judgment call between Ann Richards and Jim Mattox. This is mine.

First, I should like to discuss the situation before the beginning of the current campaign. As of that point, Jim was the proven progressive in the race. Generally and specifically, he had stood fast and fought hard for the little people, against the big boys. Among Texas progressives, it has been known that "Jim is one of us" — he has been a member, in very good standing, of the progressive community of Texas, which has its roots deep in the populist values that first arose here in the third quarter of the 19th century and flowered again in the progressive movement that was centered in Wisconsin.

Ann has been a figure in the Texas movement for a third of a century. The fact is objectively, not sexistly relevant that her former husband, David Richards, is one of the most creative and outspoken progressives of principle practicing law in Texas. In the late '50s, when I wanted to challenge those I regarded as the most original thinkers in the Texas movement to write guest columns for the *Observer*, I turned to, among others, Dave. Most of what I assumed about Ann's politics during those years, I deduced from her partnership with Dave, who, in the sexist ways then prevalent among us, took the political lead. The Richardses were just as solidly members of the Texas progressive community as Jim was.

In recent years Ann appears to have moved toward the middle. How far, and whether she has arrived there, one cannot say because she does not say and has gone to a great deal of trouble to avoid saying. On the issues alone, before last year, I would not have decided to vote for Ann on grounds that she might be as progressive a person as I had conjectured she was earlier in her life, because Jim had earned, and had kept on earning, our trust in his progressive commitment, and for me that was the controlling consideration. Ann might, in

fact, be as progressive as earlier she seemed to be, but most of us, anyway, had no basis for knowing it, and there were contrary indications — including her alliances with Senator Lloyd Bentsen and Lieutenant Governor Bill Hobby.

I had one strong personal reservation about Ann — the cruelty of her humor. For many years, first at Austin parties, then as a public speaker, she has been much in demand for her acerbic wit. To get a laugh she was too hurtful — quite often I thought to myself on the spot, as she was saying something about someone, "Well, that was funny, but it was far too cruel." I did not understand this characteristic of hers, and still do not. And I did not, and do not, like it.

I strongly dislike one personal characteristic of Jim's, too — his threateningness. I am not referring to his lack of polish — that's of no moment — nor to his roughhouse ways, except when they make what I am referring to worse. I mean his menacingness, the impression one gets, which he unmistakably conveys, that he will use his power to extract personal support or contributions and to punish non-support, support for another, or opposition. In Texas, where we have had quite enough of that from Lyndon Johnson and the other practitioners of loyalty-to-me-or-else politics, we do not submit to the intimidation, but that still leaves the attempt to intimidate in the air.

IN DALLAS last year, while I was researching other matters, a yet more serious question concerning Jim came to my attention, which, after extensive investigation, I reported under the heading, "Two Inquiries" (*TO*, 9/16/89). Two sets of circumstances raised questions which the Attorney General should have answered, but he refused to grant me an interview about them. Despite my subsequent written standing request to him for such an interview and my offer that wherever I happened to be I would appear for an interview on two or three days' notice, he has continued so to refuse to this day.

The first set of questions concerns the \$200,000 that was paid over to Jim or his brother or sister from Dallas land developer Danny Faulkner in December 1982, the month after Jim was elected and the month before he was sworn in as attorney general. This matter had been reported initially by Allen Pusey in the *Dallas Morning News*. Faulkner, who was later to become the central figure in the

I-30 savings-and-loan scandal, said under oath that Jim had done nothing to earn the money.

The second inquiry concerned unproven sworn allegations that \$125,000 was set aside in a bankruptcy matter for the purpose of being conveyed to Jim to influence his official behavior toward litigation. There was no allegation the money had in fact been so conveyed, as I of course also reported. A reporter from the *Dallas News* had been investigating this subject, but had not been able to get his editors to run his story on it. Before my inquiries ran in the *Observer*, the allegations were published in a Dallas business journal.

To other reporters, Jim has called the charges concerning him about the \$125,000 false. It is unsettling that litigation continues concerning the \$125,000 and other issues in this case that have not been resolved. The case in which they arose has not gone to trial and is expected to be settled, thereby preventing the evaluation of the charges in court. I have questions about the case I would like to ask Jim and his people, but of course he should be assumed innocent in the matter on the presumption of innocence to which he is entitled.

Concerning the \$200,000, there is no doubt that the money was paid over, and there is no contention known to me that the money was a campaign contribution. The month after the payment Jim was to assume the general responsibility for enforcing the laws and regulations of the state, including those concerning the savings-and-loan business. As things have turned out, he has done nothing, at least nothing of which I am aware, to enforce the savings-and-loans laws and regulations. What was the \$200,000 for? Was it personal income for Mattox and/or his siblings, and if so, for what? If it was for doing nothing, was it an innocent gift, or not? Should Jim, just before becoming the state's chief law-enforcement officer, have accepted this money from Danny Faulkner?

These questions are so serious, ideally one would reserve judgment on them indefinitely, but the necessity of choosing a candidate for governor, combined with Jim's continued refusal to give his answers to them, has deprived us of that option for the limited purpose of deciding how to vote. On election day each of us who votes and is informed of these facts is required, willy-nilly, to come to our separate best opinions on what we know of the facts. My best opinion is that Jim's ac-

ceptance of this money, when he accepted it, was seriously wrong; that his failure to use his official powers to investigate and curb the saving-and-loan abuses is not justified by the contention that he did not do so because the federal authorities have been doing such a good job. In any event that explanation does not obviate his answering the question whether he stood back from the I-30 savings-and-loan scandal because of his relationship with and gift from Faulkner; and that until by his explanations (to which every reporter and every citizen should be continuously open) he convinces us to the contrary, there is a standing doubt, in this matter, about Mattox's separation of his public duties from his personal financial gain.

WELL — still considering the period before the present campaign began — who to vote for, for governor? Early on I knew that if Mark White ran I would not be likely to vote for him. Having different personal doubts, as I have explained, about Ann and Jim, in an ordinary situation I would have downed my resentment at the necessity of refusing Jim's threateningness and would have voted, as hundreds of thousands have just done, for Jim, the proven progressive. Doing that, though, I would have had two serious misgivings. First, Ann's election as governor of Texas, the world-famous redoubt of macho chauvinism, would be a rousing victory for women's rights around the world. No Governor Ma, obediently doing what Pa told her to, Ann would be the first woman elected in her own right to govern this state. What a slam to sexism! That would be an important historical event, the ramifications of which in Texas, as a Texan, I would especially enjoy. My second doubt (saturated by the first one) would have been that maybe Ann has just been playing the get-ahead game and once in office would be a courageously progressive governor. But for me, because of the \$200,000 Danny Faulkner paid to Jim or the Mattoxes and Jim's refusal to discuss the matter with me, this primary was not an ordinary situation; that single matter tipped my thinking to Ann, turning the doubts I would have had about voting for him into my reasons for voting for her.

THEN CAME THE CAMPAIGN

First, Ann, while expressing again and again her inexplicable zeal for apple pie, has refused to talk about what she believes and would stand for and do as governor. An insult to every serious voter, this dominant characteristic of Ann's campaign is embarrassingly obvious. I wonder if a fundamental personal cynicism underlies it. I prefer to suspect, on Ann's behalf, that she has been unwisely following the advice of George Shipley, the paid election-consultant who has taken a throat-hold on her campaign, to keep her mouth shut on everything.

Jim and Mark disgraced the state and themselves in their contemptible competi-

tion in their TV ads over which of them is the more enthusiastic killer of convicted murderers. Now it appears that one meaning of Jim's remarkable dead-of-night forays to Huntsville, there to supervise personally 30s killings, was and is his will to present himself politically as the Executioner Himself. Oh no you don't! Mark said in TV retort — "As governor, I made sure they received the ultimate punishment, death. . . . Only a governor can make executions happen. I did, and I will." Ann endorsed capital punishment, but to her credit she did not whip up the ardor to kill.

Allegedly at the instance of Jim's campaigners, members of the press asked the three candidates if they had used illegal drugs, and Ann refused to answer, except to indicate she has not within the past 10 years. Here, too, ideally one would reserve judgment on the question indefinitely, but on election day people had to come to their separate best opinions on what Ann's refusal to deny meant. Willy-nilly, for the same conditional and limited purpose of voting, I credited Ann for refusing to lie, and I deduced, as most voters probably did, that she used an illegal drug or drugs on one or more occasions more than 10 years ago.

Ann's question of Jim about the \$200,000 from Faulkner was, in my opinion, entirely justified and called for — she should have asked about it from the first — yet Jim did not reply; indeed, he refused to make public his income tax returns, which would have shown, as Ann indicated, whether he had reported the \$200,000 or some part of it as personal income, or how else he had handled it.

However, Ann also said through an announcer in a TV ad (for whose words she is of course wholly responsible) that Mark White "took our tax money to line his own pockets," an allegation that is untrue on the known facts of Mark's presumable part in the sorry scandal, raised late in the campaign by the *Dallas News*, that during his governorship his former law firm, which he rejoined in private life, was enriched as it became the state's bond attorney. Ann's false charge on TV could only be justified by certain assumptions concerning or a twisting interpretation of the fact that Mark made more than half a million dollars from the firm his first year back in private life; his indignation about the ad and related questions Ann raised about his \$1.3 million home, was justified.

In the final days, having criticized Ann for "gutter-style politics," Jim ran a TV ad criticizing her for having been endorsed by editors of a newspaper that is produced by Death Row inmates in Huntsville ("Jim Mattox — there are no endorsements for him on Death Row," the ad said). Ann used a last-weekend flier in black churches in which she asked, among other things, "If Mark White is for all Texans, why is he bragging that he killed 19 men on Death Row — many of them minorities?" and Mark, responding, said, according to the *Dallas News*, "I think that mind-altering drugs may have longer-term (effects) as

far as her campaign is concerned. Ten years may not be long enough."

In my opinion that what happened in the Texas Democratic primary for governor was a logical excrement from the corruption of American politics by big money and the resulting prevalence of 30-second attack ads on TV and the paid campaign manipulators who call themselves "consultants." If you prefer you can write off all that happened in the Texas primary, including the pandering on capital punishment, as just politics. But there is one subject which cannot be so dismissed: the candidates' statements and promises on how to pay for the state's provision of services and the schools' provision of education.

JIM PROMISED to veto a state income tax, and he said he would fund the state's needs with a state lottery. Obviously this two-part promise was a campaign strategy in the intimidated politicians' environment of "no new taxes," but it was also a fundamental rupture in Jim's career as a progressive. It seems to me to be very much worse, for the values that are at the heart of the progressive movement, for Jim to promise to veto a state income tax and to institute a state lottery (which is in effect a regressive tax system that falls most heavily on the poor and working people), than it is for Ann to evade the issue, to duck and weave, and to improvise. To the extent that if elected Jim would veto a state income tax and start up gambling at the state's casino, he has bought into Reaganism-in-fact. And because of the objective political situation in Texas now, I do not believe Jim's stance on this matter can be justified by the need to compromise to get elected.

On November 19, 1989, a Texas Poll reported that 69 percent of Texans surveyed said state taxes rather than local property taxes should be increased if additional money is needed for the state's public schools. The state is expecting a deficit of \$3.5 billion to \$5 billion in 1990-1991. As Fred Schmidt has been pointing out in some of his invaluable columns in the *San Antonio Express-News*, Lieutenant Governor Hobby's proposal for a 4 percent state income tax to replace school property taxes and to lower state sales taxes "would be a money-saver for most Texans — the best thing since sliced bread." Last February 1, Anne Marie Kilday, reporting in the *Dallas News*, quoted Hobby: "I used to think that (a state income tax) would happen in three to five years. But . . . I would not be at all surprised if it didn't happen before this year is out."

Even more startling, conservative House Speaker Gib Lewis told Kilday, concerning a state income tax: "I think we need to start talking about it, you know, examining it. Five years ago, no one would even mention the words 'personal income tax.' And a personal income tax is not a popular issue with the man and woman on the street, I'll assure you of that. But at the same time. . . I think we

need to continue to examine a personal income tax. There are situations (as documented by [a special legislative] committee [on the state's tax structure] where a majority of the people of the state of Texas would be paying, in reality, less taxes under a revised tax structure." (I have provided the italics.) Even Gib Lewis is beginning to try to educate the voters to the fact that they can save money with a state income tax.

It is true Hobby is not running for statewide office again, and at present I would not expect Jim, Ann, or any candidate for governor to advocate a state income tax. But Jim has based his political future on his promise to veto one, and that is a grievous abandonment of progressive values on the central issue of state government. If, despite this appalling Democratic primary, we had the good fortune of getting a progressive governor, far from vetoing such a tax, what he or she ought to do is take Hobby's flat-rate proposal and try to graduate it on the basis of the principle of the ability to pay, making it even more beneficial for the great majority of the people. Nothing Ann has said so far in the campaign would prevent her from doing this as governor.

WHILE THE MEDIA'S heat was focused on Ann because of her refusal to answer the question about illegal drugs, Jim repeatedly argued that because of that refusal she could not beat Clayton Williams in November. Williams, Jim said, would kill her. Citizens who try to be principled about politics do not usually feel obligated to support candidates who have no chance at all, but are usually willing to disregard the polls and the media pundits who say they are way behind. Certainly that is the attitude among those of us associated with the *Observer*. For example, but for the \$200,000 question I would have voted for Jim even though he was running third in the polls. Nevertheless, Jim's arguing that Ann cannot win because of the drug question requires a response.

The drug question hurts Ann some with voters, and it might hurt her some more, but there was plenty of time for it to hurt her before the primary, and she still finished first. I believe a public conclusion that she personally took an illegal drug or drugs more than 10 years ago would have less grievous effects on her candidacy than the \$200,000 question would have on Jim's. The Cowboy attacking Ann on the drug matter would reach a point of inverse returns. But the Cowboy attacking Jim on the \$200,000 question, might do so. Perversely, it would be harder for Clayton Williams, playing the macho to his teeth as he is, to berate a woman than it would for him to berate a man.

[One more thing on this, generally speaking.] If people take illegal drugs, I do not condemn them for that, although I hope when I can to be able to help them avoid damaging themselves. If public officials take money in circumstances that affect or appear to affect their performance of their official duties, I do condemn them for that.

I do not buy the defeatism endemic among Texas Democrats about November. It is obvious for objective reasons, after this primary, that Williams and Phil Gramm should be regarded the favorites, but that does not mean they will win, and they are not without their weaknesses. The undeclared scandal of the governor's race this year is Williams's expenditure of \$6,160,000 of his own money to buy a four-year lease on the Governor's Mansion — and that's just so far. The voters let Bill Clements get away with buying the governorship with his own money (that is, strictly speaking, by risking it in loans to his own campaign, sure to be paid back provided he got elected), and they may let Williams do it, too. But they may not.

Certainly the Cowboy's competitors in the Republican primary didn't test his vulnerability here. The closest they came to raising the question, perhaps, was a witty but resigned remark by Lisa LeMaster, Tom Luce's communications director, that "Clayton started out by saying he was going to have an

unlimited budget and he apparently is going to go over that." When billionaire Ross Perot has given your own campaign \$50,000 you can't get too indignant.

But in the general election Texans will be asked, not only to let Williams buy the governorship with his own money, but also to let Gramm buy his new six-year lease on a Texas seat in the U.S. Senate with the most obscene special-interest campaign treasury in Texas history — what, by then, \$20,000,000? A Democratic nominee for governor and state Senator Hugh Parmer running for U.S. Senator, both crusading against big money and both campaigning for progressive ideas, together could create a situation in which both Williams and Gramm go down in flames.

But to join such an effort as the Democratic nominee for governor, Ann would have to construct and run on a substantive program of humane ideas. She is running, she says, as a good manager. Who last ran as a good manager? Mike Dukakis. If Ann is nominated and continues to play fatally into the people's perception that the Democrats don't stand for working people or anything else any more, Williams will beat her. All I can do is hope, if she is the nominee, that her vulnerability on the drug question and Williams, too, is to command new enthusiasm and loyalty because of what she stands for. People will look past the drug question, but on balance they will not forgive Democrats for standing for nothing.

WHETHER or not the governorship can be won for progressive values this year, I am voting for Ann again, in the runoff. After weighing all these factors as I have said, I am less uneasy seeking to advance the prospect by voting for Ann. Those voting for Jim — OK, maybe you're right. I hope, though, that all Texas progressives will keep in mind a few facts. We didn't move Ann toward the center or run her issueless primary campaign for governor, she did that. We didn't take \$200,000 from Danny Faulkner in December 1982, Jim or his brother or his sister did that. We didn't promise to veto a state income tax and to burden the poor with gambling; Jim did that.

And we should not blame Ann or Jim for the money-corrupted campaign environment of 30-second TV attack ads in which they have found themselves; they didn't make that environment, the failure of the contemporary reform movement made it — our failure made it. In the service of progressive values in Texas, to which this journal, as everyone after 35 years should know, is committed, we should not blame each other for voting one way or another here when the underlying disorders of this contest are the underlying reasons for the divisions among us now about Ann and Jim. To recover our democratic system, first we have to recover as a progressive movement.

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Jack Brooks's Next Battle

BY DAN CARNEY

WHEN JACK BROOKS was diagnosed with pancreatitis, many thought his tenure in Congress, if not his time on Earth, was coming to an end. Four opponents lined up to challenge the previously unassailable 37-year House veteran. Republican activist Ed Rollins even suggested that with a little high-level agitation against Brooks, Rollins could "make him quit."

But on December 1, the 67-year-old Beaumont Democrat walked out of the hospital and back to his job as chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, declaring himself fit, scrappy, and as opinionated as ever. He defeated his two Democratic opponents in the March 13 primary, winning almost three quarters of the vote. And it might not be too long before Brooks, as chair of the House Judiciary Committee, again will have an opportunity to flex his muscles.

A long-standing dispute between the \$350 billion insurance industry and the people who buy insurance will soon heat up. Within the next month, Brooks is expected to open debate on his bill in the Economic and Commercial Law Subcommittee. The Brooks bill would prohibit insurance companies from price-fixing, monopolizing, dividing up territory to maximize profits, and requiring customers to buy one kind of insurance (such as health insurance) to qualify for another (such as liability insurance). All of these measures allowed under current law provide the insurance industry the leverage to dictate rates and increase profits.

That insurance companies can fix prices now — as incredible as it sounds — is the result of the 1945 McCarran-Ferguson Act, which exempted insurance companies from most anti-trust regulations. By law, insurance companies, professional baseball franchises, and farm cooperatives can conspire to set rates and otherwise monopolize their businesses. Such rate-setting practices discourage competition and in many cases increase premiums. They also allow insurance companies to band together to deny insurance to customers perceived as high-risk, such as some local governments, doctors, and nurses. Insurance companies are able to make huge

sums of money while enjoying exemptions from anti-trust laws with which other industries must comply.

"The leaders of the property and casualty insurance industry meet constantly to discuss their profits, their losses, and their objectives for the future," Texas Attorney General Jim Mattox told a U.S. House subcommittee. "They sit around the table in the boardrooms of the ISO in New York and they do what no other industry is allowed to do."

The ISO (Insurance Services Organization) gathers information about losses and based on that information recommends prices for liability insurers.

The insurance bill is not the only major legislation on Brooks's agenda. His committee has to deal with legislation pertaining to immigration, assault weapons, civil rights, and the disabled, among other things. But these issues don't pit such powerful opponents against each other. The Reagan Justice Department, the American Bankers Association, the AARP, the American Bar Association, the National Association of Attorneys General, Citicorp, Consumers Union, the AFL-CIO, doctors' groups, nurses' groups, small-business organizations, environmental groups, and a host of other professional organizations have lined up against the insurance industry on price-fixing and monopolization. As one partisan in the debate puts it, "It's likely to be the sleeper issue of the year." (The Bush Justice Department has yet to take a stand on the Brooks legislation.)

CONGRESS HAS been trying for years to repeal the McCarran-Ferguson Act, but has always been rebuffed by the political influence wielded by the insurance industry. The first sign of hope came in the closing days of 1988, when Brooks crafted a bill that would not repeal the current legislation outright but would explicitly prohibit insurance companies from the most egregious anti-trust violations that the current law allows.

The compromise bill changed the nature of the debate, says Linda Lipsen, legislative counsel for Consumers Union. The industry could no longer say that McCarran-Ferguson is good legislation. "It forced the insurance industry to come in and say 'we want to monopolize, we want to price-fix.'"

In 1988, Brooks's compromise was passed in the subcommittee but time ran out on the year and the 100th Congress. In 1989, it was

reintroduced but was pushed back as the result of two lengthy impeachment trials that the Judiciary Committee prosecuted, Brooks's protracted illness, and a vigorous re-election campaign.

For it to go anywhere now, it will have to move fast. Like 1988, this is both an election year and the second year of the Congress. Observers say the bill has about a three-month window left. If it's not on the House floor by July 4, it will probably die. For that reason Brooks plans to move fast.

"I expect to hold a second hearing and final day of hearings on this issue early in spring and I hope to move this legislation through the committee and the House shortly thereafter," Brooks said through an aide.

Interest in containing insurance companies was prompted in large part by a 1988 lawsuit filed by 18 state attorneys general. The suit charged the industry with colluding to create a liability crisis in 1984. That crisis led to an increase in rates and the inability of numerous organizations to obtain insurance at any price.

"We've tried lawsuits, public pressure; people have been griping about the level of collusion for years," said Cathy Koeppen, spokeswoman with the American Association of Nurses. "We're at our wits' end."

A similar story is told in congressional testimony by Lila Coughran, former executive director of the Texas Easter Seal Society.

"Our liability insurance was turned down by 35 companies before we finally received coverage," she said. "You feel like you're selling your soul, like you're being punished for something you didn't do. It's shameful."

The near-uniform denial of the society's insurance needs came despite the fact that it has never had a claim filed against it and has never been taken to court for anything, and that it provides a service few other institutions do.

"We transport infants who have seizures on a bus to the center," Coughran said. "They could not get treatment otherwise. We have a recreation program, and we take disabled children canoeing. We have classrooms for children with disabilities, and we perform physical therapy on children."

Insurance companies respond that preventing them from price-fixing won't solve the problem. And they insist that most of the organizations lined up against them are either out for revenge, or want to get into the business themselves, as some banks do.

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Currently, the insurance industry is regulated at the state level. There is no federal agency to oversee or coordinate regulation. The industry is hoping that federal lawmakers will resist legislation that will take many of the oversight responsibilities from the states and give them to the federal government. The Brooks bill would give states two options: they could either continue to regulate the industry, but only if they do so intensively, or they could hand regulatory control over to the federal government, which would rely heavily on competition to keep the in-

dustry honest.

"From a fundamental point of view, they [congressmen] are not likely to adopt something that doesn't solve the problem," said Marc Rosenberg, vice president of the Insurance Information Institute. "Is there any reason to believe the federal government would be any more effective a regulator of anti-trust problems than the states are?"

So far, the Brooks bill has gotten almost no attention. None of the major Washington publications included it in January round-up articles about future legislation. Part of this

is due to the full plate Congress has before it this year. But part of it is because Brooks has taken a low-profile approach, not wanting to alert the insurance industry to gear up for a massive lobbying effort, according to sources working with Brooks's office.

That might be hard to avoid though, given the increasingly large numbers of lobbyists who show up when legislation threatens business interests. Said Lipsen, there soon could be an insurance lobbyist "on every street corner." □

POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE

✓ **SENATE DEMOCRATS** were almost unanimous in their support of a school-finance bill, supporting the legislation even after Corpus Christi Senator Carlos Truan added by amendment \$400 million to first-year costs, increasing the tab from the originally proposed \$800 million to \$1.2 billion. The Senate bill recognized that the state is so far behind in education funding that a large infusion of money is now necessary. Though there was little hope the bill would pass the House, some in the Senate privately admitted billion-dollar-plus Senate Bill 31 would both send a message to the House and serve as a point of departure for negotiations in conference committee.

The only Democrats voting against the bill were San Angelo Senator Bill Sims and Duncanville Senator Chet Edwards. Sims, a rural conservative, often votes with Senate Republicans. And Edwards, who is usually more partisan and progressive, is running for the U.S. House seat to be vacated by Marvin Leath, who will retire at the end of this term. A vote that will result in increased taxes might be more than Edwards is willing to risk as he faces a Republican opponent in his November congressional race.

Fort Worth Senator Hugh Parmer voted in favor of the school-finance bill, though he is trying to unseat Republican U.S. Senator Phil Gramm, an incumbent who has built a reputation and career by demagoguing tax issues. And Cyndi Taylor Krier, a Republican state Senator from San Antonio, was the only member of her party to break ranks in the Senate. Krier voted with the Democratic majority, which included Lieutenant Governor Bill Hobby, who cast his vote even though it was not required to break a tie.

✓ **IN THE HOUSE**, several Democrats went the other way, crossing over to vote for a Republican-backed plan offered by Universal City Rep. Alan Schoolcraft. Schoolcraft, who has been the House's most persistent and ideological opponent to increased funding for public education, offered a bottom-dollar bill based on the recommendations of the Governor's education

task force. The Schoolcraft bill, which would have cost \$263 million next year and according to its backers would have required no additional state revenue, was defeated, 85-61. The vote might indicate the low threshold that even most conservative rural Democrats won't cross. Nonetheless, several Democrats lined up with Republicans supporting the Schoolcraft bill. Democrats voting for the proposal, which has to be considered woefully inadequate to address the state's educational needs and the Texas Supreme Court's equity mandate, were: John Gavin of Wichita Falls; Dudley Harrison of Sander-son (Harrison won't be back next session as he was defeated in the primary by Alpine attorney Pete Gallego); Bill Hollowell of Grand Saline; Jim Rudd of Brownfield, chair of the House Appropriations Committee; and Robert Saunders of La Grange. There are 90 Democrats and 60 Republicans in the House.

✓ **WITH ALL DUE** respect to the Official English movement we here quote from a *corrido* that farmworkers are singing in the Rio Grande Valley. The topic of the song is the December 6 workers's-comp votes of Rep. Eddie Lucio, Renato Cuellar, and Alex Moreno (to the tune of "Los Laureles"):

El día 6 de Diciembre
del año que ha pasado
Lucio, Cuellar y Moreno
contra la gente han votado
Lucio, Moreno y Cuellar
contra la gente han votado . . .

Lucio, Cuellar y Moreno
negaron eso a la union
votaron con las empresas
olvidando sus promesas
votaron con las empresas
olvidando sus promesas

Lucio, Cuellar y Moreno
de otros han de aprender
que Uribe, Warner, Hinojosa
nos supieron defender
que Uribe, Warner, Hinojosa
nos supieron defender

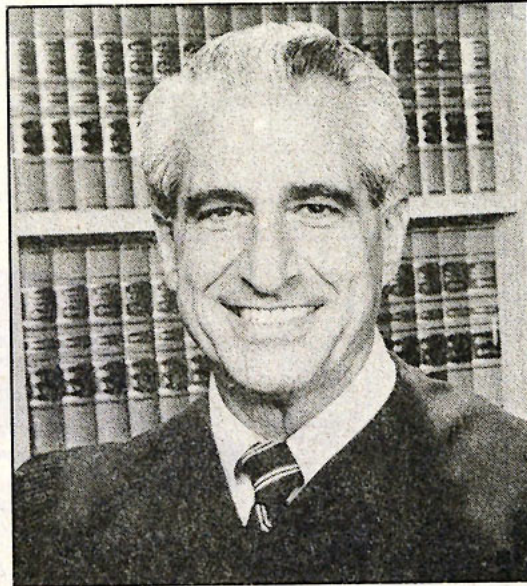
The ballad takes to task the only three members of the Valley delegation who voted in favor of the pro-big-business workers' compensation reform package that passed in December. Rep. Eddie Lucio is now in a runoff against Senator Hector Uribe and will be replaced in the House by a former representative, Rene Oliveria. Rep. Renato Cuellar has no opponent though United Farmworkers promise to find him one. And Rep. Alex Moreno failed to make the runoff that now includes Uribe and Lucio. The *corrido*, "The Treason of Lucio, Cuellar, and Moreno," praises Uribe, Rep. Larry Warner, and Rep. Juan Hinojosa for their defense of workers' rights. Warner lost a primary race against an incumbent appeals-court judge and will not return to the House next year. Hinojosa is retiring from the House.

✓ **THE WACO** *Tribune-Herald* has sunk to a new low in campaign reporting. The *Tribune-Herald* rightly reported March 9 that Nikki Van Hightower received the endorsement of McLennan County Treasurer Odessa Wells. But in the same story, the Waco paper seemed to take its lead from Van Hightower opponent Tom Bowden, a San Saba County judge. Bowden, in a clear play for conservative votes, has pointed out that Van Hightower is a member of the Gay and Lesbian Caucus, "a homosexual rights group."

Perhaps it was inevitable that someone would raise the sexual-preference question. And the Waco paper dutifully reported questions raised at the endorsement press conference: "When asked if she was gay, Van Hightower said, 'I don't think my husband thinks I am.'" Husband/campaign manager Joe Gorton said Bowden was "pandering to the extreme right wing" and that Bowden has an "advanced case of bigotry."

✓ **JUST IN CASE** you haven't noticed, the *New York Times* recently referred to Texas Senator Lloyd Bentsen as the "titular" head of the Democratic Party.

**“Justice is best served when the law serves
all the people.”**



Judge Bob Gammage

For The Texas Supreme Court

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And Many, Many More . . .

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Coke Classic

*If Coke Stevenson Was This Good,
Lyndon Johnson Was That Bad*

BY ROBERT SHERRILL

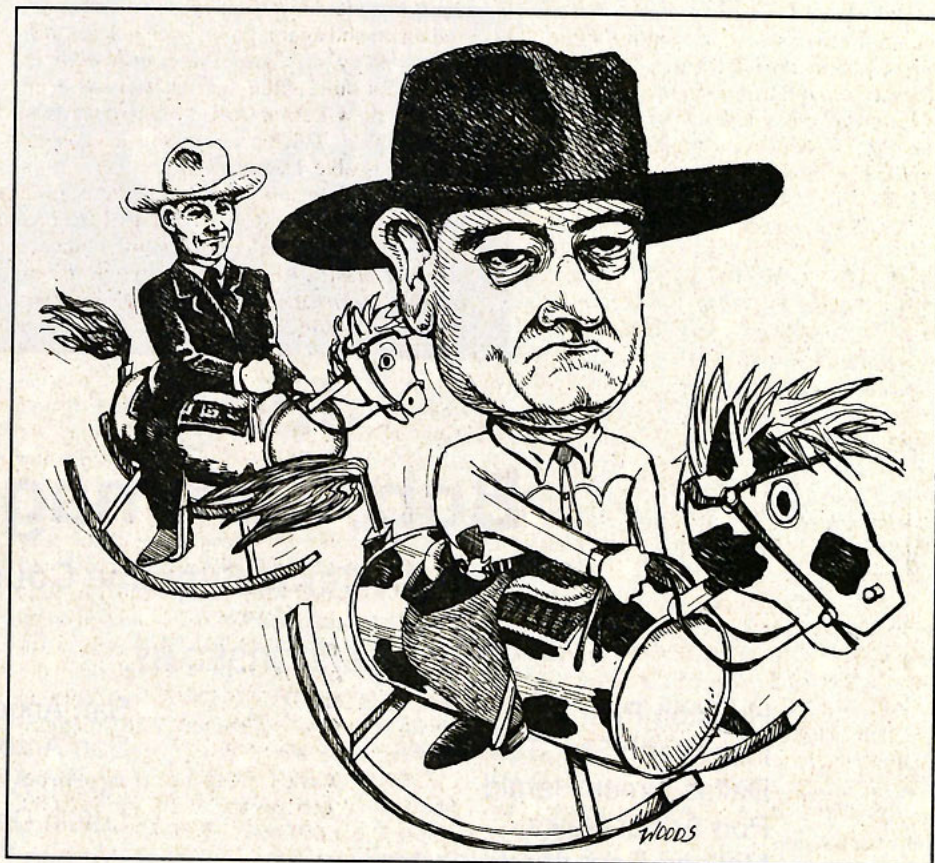
MEANS OF ASCENT
The Years of Lyndon Johnson
By Robert A. Caro
New York: Knopf, 1990.
506 pp., \$24.95

ROBERT CARO is catching lots of flak from reviewers because the second volume of his biography of Lyndon Johnson is filled with even more hatred than the first. I happen to like that. No politician ever deserved our hatred more than Johnson because, simply, no politician ever did more than he to destroy the country. As Caro points out in the introduction to this volume, we have Johnson to thank for not only the 58,000 Americans who died in Vietnam and the 288,000 who were wounded there, but also for the "many American lives [that] were wrecked in other ways, scarred inside with scars that would never heal" because of that war, and for the destruction of "the moral position" of the United States among world powers. I think Caro is also correct when he says that "the shredding of the delicate yet crucial fabric of credence and faith between the people of the United States and the man they had placed in the White House occurred during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson."

You can't say too many harsh things about a guy like that, so I don't fault Caro for his hatred. I fault him for: 1) coming to us in the guise of a divinely-appointed biographer carrying The Torch of Truth and pretending that the major points of the Lyndon Johnson story haven't been told before by expert and eloquent biographers; and for 2) stupidly picking such a cockeyed "hero," Coke Stevenson, to use as a contrast to Johnson. More later on that error, which undermines the credibility of the whole book.

First a word about Fault No. 1: The Eastern press and the book industry feed on their own hype in shameless ways, and in ways that would be funny if they didn't do such serious damage to history and to common sense. Their promotions of new books, and the news stories proclaiming the birth of new books, often haven't any ties to reality.

Robert Sherrill, a former Observer associate editor, lives in Tallahassee, Florida.



GAIL WOODS

A splendid example of their surrealism can be seen in the flackery that accompanies the publication of Caro's second volume. The most embarrassing suck-up article about the book was Nicholas Von Hoffman's in *Vanity Fair*, where he says "If the book seems loaded against Johnson, it is because much of the unflattering material . . . is so new. It is new, Caro points out, not because it was so deeply hidden but because journalists didn't look for it. . . ." Next to that elephant doo-doo, perhaps the most offensive crap was in a February 11 story in the *New York Times* by Martin Tolchin (accompanied by a four-column headline, "Book Says Johnson Stole Senate Race"), opens with this misleading puffery: "A study of Lyndon B. Johnson provides

new evidence that the 36th President stole his first election to the United States Senate in 1948."

Tolchin — whose knowledge of presidential and Texas history is as meager as that of most *Times* reporters, by which I mean that if it relates to something that happened south or west of the Hudson River, he's probably never heard of it before — continues: "The author goes into great detail to tell how Johnson overcame a 20,000-vote deficit to achieve his famous 87-vote victory in the 1948 Democratic runoff primary against a former governor, Coke Stevenson. A South Texas political boss, George Parr, had manufactured thousands of votes, Mr. Caro found."

Let's pause for a moment to peruse that tomfoolery. What "new evidence" did Caro

find? Precious little, if any, that I can detect. Sure, he got an interview with Luis Salas, an election judge who presided over the infamous Box 13 in Jim Wells County where the 87 victory votes came from, and Salas admitted the thievery. But the evidence of that thievery had been so thick and so deep, and had been on the record for so many years — at least 40 — that if Salas had made his confession in triplicate and signed it in neon, it wouldn't have added one iota of "newness" to the evidence.

And if one wants to waste time with legalistic quibbles, one should acknowledge that Salas's testimony, coming as late as it does, would be laughed out of history's courtroom as totally biased and impeachable. What Caro does not tell his readers, among the many things he does not tell them, is that Salas had come to hate Johnson — perhaps not as much as Caro obviously hates Johnson, but pretty heartily nonetheless — because after he had played his flunky's role in stealing the election he had asked Johnson for help on a couple of occasions and been turned down.

THAT DOESN'T mean what Salas told Caro was untrue. But surely a historian of Caro's prominence should let his readers know all pertinent details of the character and motivation of the people he relies on. However, if you want to know about Salas's joining the hate-Johnson (and hate-Democrats; he turned Republican) crowd, you'll have to go to Ronnie Dugger's first volume of his biography of Johnson, *The Politician*, published eight years ago, which covers LBJ's career to 1952.

It was Dugger's great misfortune that his book came out at the same time as Caro's first volume. The incredible amount of press coverage and industry puffery that accompanied Caro's book just swept Dugger's away, as hurricane Hugo did Charleston. A careful analysis of the two books would have shown that Dugger's was much the solidier of the two. But hype allowed no such analysis. And the way the two books were structured also put Dugger at a hopeless disadvantage. Caro displayed all his research in the body of the book; Dugger, for some strange and suicidal reason, stuck much of his best research in the footnotes at the back of the book. It is in a footnote, for example, that you will find the dope about Salas's turning Republican.

Anyone who wants to carry enough sandbags to keep from being swept into the stratosphere by Caro's often gaseous romanticism should keep Dugger's book at hand.

Caro's second volume covers only seven years, 1941 through 1948, "seven years of despair" during which Johnson showed absolutely zilch interest in his job in the House of Representatives. Caro says Johnson rarely offered a bill and almost never opened his mouth on the floor.

But outside Congress Johnson conducted himself in ways that give Caro grounds for portraying him as a bully, a chronic liar, a hypocrite, a cheating husband who insulted

Lady Bird publicly and privately made her shine his shoes, a hustler, a coward, and such a tyrant to his staff members that he sometimes left them in tears.

That's for starters.

Since Johnson was of no importance as a Congressman in those years, Caro is left with only three episodes to hang his book on: Johnson's concoction of a fraudulently "heroic" war record; his somewhat questionable way of acquiring KTBC's license; and his razzle-dazzle campaign to win a U.S. Senate seat in 1948.

As everyone knows who has made even a half-hearted effort over the years to keep up with biographical stuff about Johnson, those three episodes have been written about again and again and again, going back at least to J. Evetts Haley's *A Texan Looks at Lyndon* in 1964, and quite often the material has been handled by writers of skill. Although the *New York Times'* Tolchin accepts it as gospel, knowledgeable readers will hoot at Caro's claim that Johnson's finagling the KTBC license out of the FCC is a "a subject that had been endlessly discussed but little understood, at least partly because of the dearth of detailed information," and it is quite amazing that Caro would have the gall to argue that "the Johnson fortune has been shrouded in secrecy and surrounded by carefully cultivated myths. . . . In this volume, the birth and early growth of the Johnson fortune are examined — and, under examination, the myths collapse."

The biggest myth is Caro's claim that whatever myth ever existed about the way KTBC was obtained and how it prospered wasn't exploded years ago. Indeed, this yarn has been a part of Johnsonana, touched on by newspaper, magazine, and book writers for two decades; it was told in considerable detail in Dugger's book in the section "Turning the Golden Key," subheaded "The Congressman and the Radio Station."

Johnson wanted independent wealth because, on his congressional salary of \$10,000, it was pretty obvious that to afford the solid gold cufflinks, the custom-made shoes, and the \$195 suits he was wearing, he must have his hand pretty deep in the pocket of special interests. His way to riches was to exploit his political power, and the financial power of his pals, to squeeze out the owners of KTBC, then manipulate the FCC to give him a better wavelength, and then use strong-arm tactics on CBS and on advertisers. Nicely told by Caro, but old stuff.

CARO DOES a good job, though not an exceptional one, in retelling Johnson's war record. When the United States entered World War II, Johnson promised to leave Congress and go fight "in the front lines, in the mud." Instead, he joined the Navy as a lieutenant commander, spent the first six months having a good time in West Coast night spots, and then, feeling it was "politically essential" to show up at the front lines, had himself sent off as an "ob-

server" to the South Pacific. There he made one flight on a bomber that had mechanical trouble and never reached its objective.

After that single mission, Johnson hurriedly caught the next plane out, resigned from the Navy, and went back to Congress, where he spent the rest of the war — as he also would spend the rest of his life — concocting bigger and bigger fantasies about his wartime experience.

Although he had been in actual combat a total of only 13 minutes, he told reporters he had been under fire for many months.

The squadron in which he was riding shot down one Japanese plane on that mission; Johnson told reporters, "I saw fourteen of 'em go down right in front of me." (Fourteen was as high as Caro got Johnson's make-believe number, but David Halberstam, in *The Best and the Brightest*, says Johnson finally got the figure up to 20, and claimed that he had personally taken a hand in shooting them down.)

Although nobody else on the plane got a medal, General MacArthur, strictly for political purposes, awarded a Silver Star to Johnson — "the least deserved and most publicized medal of the war," Halberstam calls it. MacArthur didn't have a medal on hand at the moment, but Johnson later bought one at an Army-Navy store, says Caro, and had it presented to him "for the first time" at numerous ceremonies in Texas.

About this farcical episode and its aftermath, Caro misses several points that can be found in Dugger's book. Dugger reports that when Johnson was in Australia sucking up to MacArthur, he ran into Robert Sherrod, a *Time* magazine reporter, who, wishing to avoid military censorship, asked Johnson to take a long memo back to Sherrod's colleagues in the states. The memo was critical of MacArthur. On the way home, Johnson opened the memo, read it, didn't like its criticisms of the man who had just given him a medal, and flushed it down the toilet.

CARO ALSO fails to point out the heavy political fallout from Johnson's ducking military service. Dugger points out that in 1944 Johnson's campaign opponent, Buck Taylor, often ridiculed "his failure to keep his promises to serve his country in the trenches beside the good soldiers he helped to send to those trenches." But the most cutting remarks, says Dugger, came in the 1946 race, from Hardy Hollers, who accused Johnson of going to war "with a camera in one hand and leading his publicity man with the other" and of quitting the service as soon as possible "to return to an air-cooled fox-hole in Washington."

In 1948, our newly rich, bemedaled hero finally got another chance to cheat his way into the United States Senate. This contest consumes more than half of *Means of Ascent*. As usual, Caro pours forth an ocean of details, and I advise readers to come equipped with an inflatable raft.

Because Johnson treated rube Texans to what was then considered a fabulous new gimmick — campaigning by helicopter — Caro takes us up and down so many times, landing in smalltown parking lots and in pastures and often flying in awful weather, some readers are likely to get airsick. And when Johnson was subjected to horrific pain from a kidney stone — an ailment that threatened to end his campaign — Caro demands that we follow him through 13 sweating pages of groans and grunts until the stone is discharged. Whew!

Finally, Caro gets down to the dirty work that all Johnson biographers love to linger over: the stealing of the election.

In his 1941 race for the United States Senate, Johnson had bought the Mexican-American vote in South Texas, but in his over-confidence he had allowed the count to be released too early — thus giving his opponent time to out-steal him in other parts of Texas.

In 1948, he bought the South Texas vote again, but this time he didn't make the mistake of releasing the count too early. In fact, the South Texas political bosses were still "counting" ballots a week after the polls closed — rustling up a few more dead people, in some cases.

Just when it seemed that Johnson's opponent, Coke Stevenson, was going to edge past him on the sixth day of the late counting, aha! Johnson's forces made their infamous "discovery" in Box 13 in Jim Wells County — 201 ballots that hadn't been counted before. All but one were for Lyndon Johnson, making him the winner by 87 votes out of nearly a million votes cast.

It is impossible to make too much over the drama of that thievery. You could say, by compressing history, that Johnson became president by 87 votes — that we got the Great Society by 87 votes, that we got bogged down in the Vietnam War by 87 votes — because if Johnson had lost the 1948 Senate race, he would have been dead and buried politically. And he knew it. And his fabulously wealthy backers, particularly the gents at Brown & Root, who had been mopping up all those multi-million dollar federal contracts with Johnson's help, knew that if he died politically, their federal largesse would be dead, too.

So they pumped so much money into Johnson's campaign that it became almost comical. On one occasion, Caro tells us, Charles Herring and John Connally, acting as money runners, dropped by the Longhorn Cafe for a late-night snack and left behind the brown paper sack they were carrying, loaded with \$50,000 in hundred-dollar bills. (When they returned for it, it was still there.)

Caro follows the route trod by all LBJ biographers: after the bogus vote count, it's on to the brouhaha at the state Democratic executive committee, and then into and out of the courts. Only in one respect does Caro beat

Dugger, and that's in making clear Abe Fortas's most brilliant move: to *deliberately* lose at the appellate level — to pick the one judge at the appellate level who would automatically and swiftly reject their appeal — so that they could move immediately into the comforting arms of United States Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, Johnson's pal.

Although he is much too repetitious, Caro does a great job putting this rococo jigsaw puzzle together. Except for one thing. And that one thing comes close to spoiling his entire story.

He gets much, much, much too melodramatic — foolishly, gushingly — in his support of the loser, Coke Stevenson.

Detesting, loathing Johnson as he clearly does, Caro apparently wasn't satisfied to show that his handlers had bought not merely a few hundred votes but perhaps as many as 25,000 votes in South Texas, including 10,000 in San Antonio alone. But, after all, except perhaps for the generosity of the purchase, that was not unusual. Everyone knew that the Latin votes were for sale, and what prudent politician, if he needed them, would leave them there for the opposition to buy instead? Anyway, as Caro admits, Stevenson's own campaign workers included many who had proved their skills at rigging ballot boxes.

So, since portraying Johnson as a vote buyer didn't make him villainous enough, Caro set out to convince us that Johnson's sin was unforgivably compounded by the fact that he had brought down a white-hatted "Mr. Texas" (Caro likes to call Stevenson that), a knight of Old West proportions who belonged right up there on the silver screen of life alongside Tom Mix and John Wayne.

Aside from the many pages where Stevenson figures in action throughout the book, Caro gives us 40 pages of pure Stevenson biography, including an incongruous seven pages about his second marriage. I don't think it is cynical or unfeeling to wonder who in the world outside the Stevenson family and their close friends would give a damn to learn that "the love between Coke and Teeney was striking, too, as was the contentment they brought to each other. They were to have twenty-five years together, and they seemed to fall only more and more in love." Caro really goes overboard, wallowing around like a writer for *True Romance* magazine. Or more often, like a worshipful scriptwriter for Monogram Pictures.

Much of this stuff is hard to believe. It is very difficult to believe, for example, that Stevenson, a busy lawyer-politician-rancher, would himself, with his own hands, fence his ranch of 10 square miles, as Caro tells us he did. Would he waste his time like that when Mexican and Anglo drifters would have done the job for pennies a day?

Caro tells us that Stevenson built a 20-foot-high, baronial stone fireplace in the front room of his ranch after lugging "every stone home in a tow sack" from "a ridge some miles from the house." Aw, come on. Would Stevenson actually carry them for miles, in a

sack over his shoulder, when he could have used horses and a wagon, or even a pickup? It's one thing to be a rugged individualist and another to be daffy. (Caro got a lot of this stuff from Stevenson's adoring nephew).

CARO really lays it on thick about Stevenson's love of book larnin, and presents it to us as a kind of latter-day Abe Lincoln-reading-by-firelight. "Friends who stayed at the ranch remember sometimes getting up at four or five in the morning to go to the bathroom, and seeing a lamp burning in the living room and, in its circle of light, Coke Stevenson reading, his huge, gnarled, powerful hands tenderly holding the book." What did they expect him to be doing — crushing the book?

We are also told that Stevenson "would never accept a client, no matter how large the offered fee, in whose innocence he did not believe." Yeah, well we all know how easy it is for lawyers to convince themselves of the innocence of clients with money, and Stevenson obviously was no exception, for Caro adds with full-blown naivety, "Yet the docket for a single court term at Junction (the county seat near his ranch) lists 'C.R. Stevenson' as a defense attorney in twenty-seven out of thirty-two cases." The situation seems all too obvious: Stevenson, like a lot of rich, rural barons throughout the South and Southwest, had great influence over the local courthouse — and was only too happy to sell that influence. Twenty-seven out of 32 cases! Wow!

Stevenson had been speaker of the Texas House for two terms. Naturally, Caro describes him as "one of the greatest speakers and presiding officers in the history of all Texas houses"; symbolic of that greatness, to Caro, was the manner in which he ruled the House. With a straight face, Caro tells us that he used his pipe "instead of a gavel, tapping gently for order with its stem." I don't think any reporter who ever covered the Legislature or any member who ever served in it would believe that pipestem-tapping could be relied on to bring order to that unruly body. Our worshipful author has led us into the Land of Oz.

Caro reaches the high-point of his scriptwriting when he describes how Stevenson, accompanied by the famous ex-Texas Ranger, Frank Hamer, went to the town of Alice to investigate the ballot-rigging in 1948. There, while Mexican pistoleros hired by the local political bosses watched sullenly, Stevenson and Hamer "walked side by side, two tall, broad-shouldered, erect, silent men: two living legends of Texas, in fact — two men out of another, vanishing age, another vanishing code, marching down a street in a dusty Texas town to find out for themselves, and prove to the world, how Lyndon Johnson had obtained his two hundred crucial votes."

One needs only Tex Ritter singing in the background to complete that High Noon scene. Unfortunately, the denouement is

disappointing. A mere bank cashier called their bluff and wouldn't turn over the disputed voting list they had come for.

That's typical. On close inspection, much of Caro's buildup of the "living legend" disappears in a puff. Stevenson was neither the hero nor the martyr Caro makes him out to be.

It is quite true, as Caro claims, that in the 1948 campaign some reporters were nothing but whores for Johnson. Their publishers were for him, so they were for him. They lied for him, they wrote speeches on the side for him, they harassed Stevenson for him (although I must say that this wasn't hard to do, since Stevenson was an absolute nitwit when it came to dealing with the press). But what Caro fails to tell his readers is that many other reporters were serving in exactly the same way for Stevenson, particularly those working for Houston and Dallas papers (*vide* Dugger). Caro seems to rely for much of his information on the *Dallas Morning News*, which undoubtedly was one of the most irresponsible newspapers in the United States.

CARO WRITES breathlessly of Johnson's "savage personal attacks . . . against perhaps the most respected public official in the history of Texas." Actually, as Dugger makes clear in his biography, both candidates' basic attack — that the other guy was soft on communism and labor unions — was the same, and equally absurd; if Johnson's was more "savage," it was because he had more money to spread his savagery. But as to Caro's judgment of how highly Stevenson was respected, that is only half correct. Many Texans did respect him; many others, however, considered him to be a pig-headed, out-dated, niggardly old reactionary who was taking money under the table from the oil industry. Their suspicions were strengthened when big oil backed Stevenson in the '48 campaign — something Dugger mentions but Caro doesn't.

One of the most grotesque distortions of history occurs when Caro describes Stevenson's role during Governor Allred's administration. As everyone knows, Allred was one of the state's few progressive governors. He came into office in 1935, midway through the Great Depression. Stevenson was finishing his first term as speaker and was thinking of stepping down, but he decided to accept another term because Allred "was proposing to push through a whole wave of New Deal reforms in Texas. Stevenson had supported the New Deal during its first years; he thoroughly approved of the measures by which it had alleviated the Depression." Do I need to point out that the early New Deal was aimed at rescuing the banks and industry? This was the portion that Stevenson approved of. Then came the New Deal programs aimed at rescuing the people, who were, in 1936, still very broke and very hungry. Stevenson opposed this help.

Caro continues: "But now he felt the emergency was over. It was time for government

to resume its former, smaller, role. Instead, it seemed to be steadily growing bigger. He wanted to fight the trend."

Putting it less eloquently, he wanted to gut Allred and all he stood for. That was Stevenson's sole purpose in accepting a second term as speaker.

Up to that point, Caro is absolutely on target. Accurate in every way. But he obviously realized that it wouldn't do to let his hero be seen as a defender of Hoovervilles, so on the very next page — presto! — with a wave of his magical cape, Caro presents us with a Stevenson whom history would never recognize: a populist, a progressive *who was responsible for passing Allred's program.*

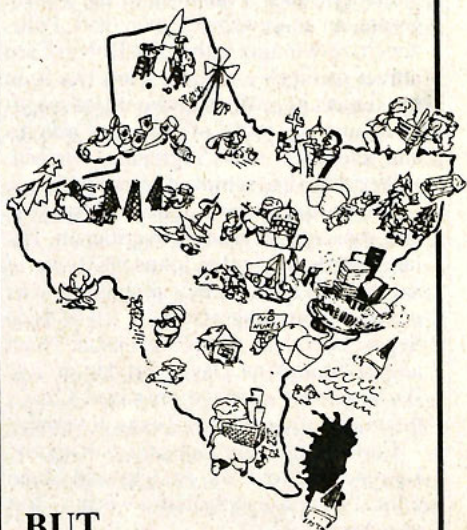
That's what the man says, believe it or not.

THERE'S MORE of this stuff. Caro writes that when Stevenson became governor in 1941, the state was \$34 million in debt and when he left the governorship the state had \$35 million in the bank. The implication is that Stevenson was a wise manager of the state's affairs. What Caro fails to point out, although it is obvious, is that those were World War II years and the defense industry was pouring billions of dollars into the state; a moron could have saved money under those conditions. What's more, only a moron would have kept the money in a safe. Texas desperately needed to spend it to upgrade its schools, rated among the most ill-equipped in the nation; and its state mental hospitals, which were snake pits; and its penitentiaries, which were so cruelly operated that inmates often mutilated themselves to get into a hospital and thereby escape their overseers. Caro doesn't tell you about the Texas that Stevenson betrayed with his stinginess.

Probably many of the 494,104 Texans who voted for Johnson in that election really disliked him, perhaps as intensely as Caro does. After all, Johnson was, as Dean Acheson once told him to his face, "not a likable man." But they disliked Stevenson even more, for things Caro mentions only in passing — for having tried to destroy most of the progressive federal and state programs that would have helped non-rich Texans, for supporting the persecution of University of Texas president Homer Rainey in an ordeal that almost ruined the school, and for being completely divorced from the ideals of the national Democratic Party. In the 1948 election and thereafter, Stevenson would in fact vote for the Republican presidential candidate.

Though he had all the terrible faults Caro details so well, Johnson could at least claim to be the only real Democrat in the race. Which leaves the reader to ponder, among the many fascinating questions raised by this book, whether Johnson's obtaining bogus votes was more unethical than Stevenson's bogus claim of party loyalty — the kind of devious claim that liberal Democrats in Texas have seen overwhelm and destroy them so many times in the past.

This is Texas today. A state full of Sunbelt boosters, strident anti-unionists, oil and gas companies, nuclear weapons and power plants, political hucksters, underpaid workers, and toxic wastes, to mention a few.



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Robert Caro on *Ascent*

A PROFESSOR of mine once remarked that the serious scholar is insulted not when his work is criticized but when it is ignored. Clearly, Robert A. Caro should be in a good mood these days.

Seldom does a member of the Fourth Estate, an ex-newspaper man, and Pulitzer-Prize-winning author like Robert Caro attract so much attention. Caro has been the subject of profiles in two major magazines and the focus of countless articles and television news segments. Indeed, Robert Caro has achieved celebrity status.

But Caro remains sincere, soft-spoken, and, most of all, sensitive to criticism. His latest work on Lyndon Johnson, *Means of Ascent*, has been widely assaulted for its positive portrayal of LBJ's 1948 U.S. Senate opponent, Coke Stevenson. Such august figures as David Broder of *The Washington Post* have criticized Caro's treatment of the former Texas governor.

Caro does not take such criticism lightly. He reads the reviews. And he said of the critical response to his latest work, "I sort of expected it."

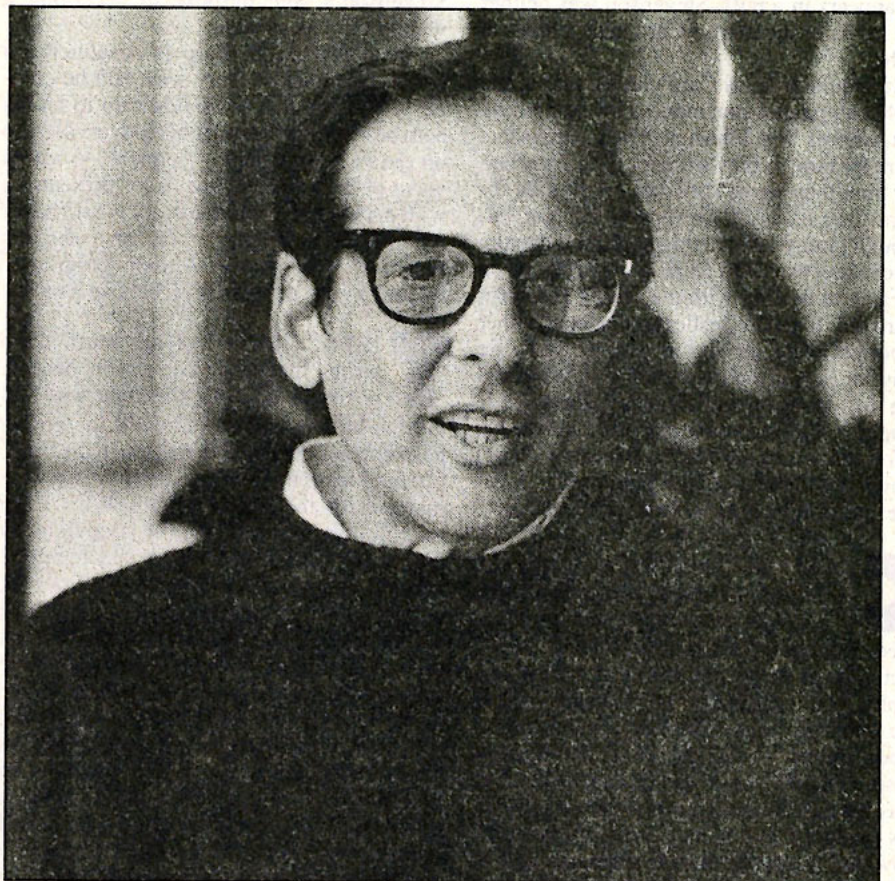
"He's a figure that's lost to history," Caro said of Stevenson in a recent interview at a downtown Austin hotel. "That does not mean he was not a major figure in history."

Broder and others have chastised Caro for elevating Stevenson as a "saintly figure of surpassing virtue and innocence." In *Means of Ascent*, Stevenson's tenure as governor is dealt with in summary fashion. Caro, for example, omits seemingly important details of Stevenson's botched handling of University of Texas President Homer Rainey's academic-freedom case and Rainey's subsequent dismissal in the mid-1940s.

Caro acknowledges that he does not consider the Stevenson governorship in great detail. He insists that his portrait should be seen within the framework of the 1948 election. Caro is not passing judgment on the Stevenson governorship, he said. Rather, he is pointing out that Stevenson was a broadly popular governor, a fact that is crucial in understanding a campaign that would make or break LBJ's career.

"I'm certainly not trying to portray Coke Stevenson as a good governor," Caro said. "His governorship showed all the weaknesses as well as all the strengths of pure frontier conservatism. I said particularly that he was confounded by the narrowness of viewpoint."

"I read all the newspapers," Caro said. "The feeling really was he was beloved. I had to paint this to show the obstacle that



ALAN POGUE

Robert Caro

Lyndon Johnson had to overcome. Throughout his career in government [Stevenson] never deviated from his principles, and won. That does not mean I think his principles are right, which in many instances I certainly do not."

What many of the reviews fail to mention, and what I found so striking in reading *Means of Ascent*, is how silly Stevenson actually appears. Johnson, in charge after charge, effectively distorts Stevenson's record. But Stevenson does not fight back. Johnson is practicing the politics of the modern age — the politics of day-after-day polling and negative advertisements — while Stevenson seems naively confined by the old ways. In terms of campaign methodology, Johnson is the innovator, Stevenson a man of the dark ages.

"It seems unbearably stupid to me," Caro said of Stevenson's campaign methods. "To say the least, this is a very quixotic way to campaign. Except that he was the most successful campaigner in the history of Texas."

Perhaps, as Caro suggests, much of the reaction to this book has been shaped by

our inability to believe the true character of our political system. Liberal journalists, for instance, refuse to embrace or accept a man as conservative as Stevenson. "The liberal journalists at the time mocked him," Caro said. "They mock him now ... He was a liberal. He was as liberal as Texas. He was what Texas wanted."

And at the same time, many reviewers are unable to accept that so prominent a figure as LBJ could be so despicable, that power in America could be used so ruthlessly. Broder writes that Caro is unable to understand "that all politicians are a mixture of noble and ignoble traits, not classifiable as skunks or saints."

Said Caro: "That [1948] campaign illustrates the full destructiveness of the new media politics on the concept of free choice by an informed electorate. One reason for the initial controversy over the book was in each case the same, that the information was so shocking. That we don't want to believe. We don't want to believe this is our political process."

—ALLAN FREEDMAN

Wright Revisited

Repetitive and Redundant on the Wright Stuff

BY BILL ADLER

THE AMBITION AND THE POWER: The Fall of Jim Wright, A True Story of Washington

By John M. Barry
New York: Viking, 1989.
768 pages, \$22.95

LATE IN THE afternoon of Thursday, March 24, 1988, I received a frantic telephone call from the editor of a banking magazine in New York. He had just hung up with Mr. Democrat, aka Bob Strauss, who, he told me, had threatened to sue the publication for libel on behalf of his client, Jim Wright. Strauss was trying to prevent the second part of an article I'd written on Wright and a Texas savings and loan executive from appearing in the magazine's upcoming issue; part one already had been published and the entire story, which first appeared in a Washington magazine, had also been reprinted in the *Observer*.

Four days later the bombastic Strauss and Wright's dour chief of staff, Marshall Lynam, swaggered into the magazine's offices armed with a seven-page "fact sheet" which Strauss claimed refuted, point by point, the "inaccurate information" in the article.

To bolster his case, Strauss also brought a letter John M. Barry had written to him on March 24; Barry wrote the letter at Strauss's request. The letter rebutted my article's depiction of a crucial meeting Wright had held with thrift industry regulators a year earlier. Barry was working on *The Ambition and the Power* and Wright had granted him unparalleled access to many of his private meetings. I thought it odd at the time that an independent journalist would write what amounted to a friendly brief for Wright, that he would allow himself to be used in such a fashion.

Once I waded through his ungainly book, I thought it even stranger that Barry would make public his notes of Wright's meeting with the S&L regulators. (Wright's office subsequently distributed Barry's letter to news organizations who inquired about the

Speaker's efforts to censor a small trade magazine). I thought this because at the book's conclusion, Barry discloses the ground rules he and Wright had established for using Wright's quotes, one of which was: "nothing at all would be revealed prior to 1989, either in print or in conversation." (emphasis added) Either Barry broke his promise or it could be inferred that he meant that nothing *derogatory* would be revealed. Either way, it signaled that Barry had difficulty drawing the line between journalist and apologist.

The book itself does little to dispel this notion. This is unfortunate because Barry stumbled into, as he put it, "an opportunity the like of which few writers have ever had." Two weeks before Wright was sworn in as speaker — before a single storm cloud had gathered on the capital's horizon — Barry told Wright he wanted to write a book "exploring how power is exercised — how Washington really works." He told Wright he wanted to write from the Speaker's point of view and that to do so, to "truly reflect an insider's view of power," required admittance to all of Wright's meetings (at least the ones staff were allowed to attend). Wright consented.

The result should have been a fascinating look into the belly of the beast; instead it is bloated, affected, sloppy, repetitious, sexist, and racist. One problem is that the material is virtually undigested. This makes less for an appetizing read than it does for a political anatomy lesson. The lesson — how Congress works and how legislation gets passed — is all but hidden under the book's excesses. If Barry had taken the time to master his wealth of material rather than simply regurgitate his notebook, this could have been an extremely valuable work. As it is, to find the occasional telling anecdote or illuminating insight requires hacking through a dense underbrush of prose that is often stupefyingly redundant.

Although Barry began his work almost three years before it was published, he must have finished it furiously to capitalize on Wright's recent notoriety. The rise and fall of Jim Wright is a splendid story of how power is obtained, maintained, and lost. Unfortunately, Barry's writing is not up to the task of telling it. His rush job is too evident.

In his review in the *New York Times*, Ronnie Dugger said the book is "too long by a fourth"; I would say fully a third could have been lopped off with no pain to the reader.

Familiar characters are regularly reintroduced as if for the first time, quotes and descriptions are repeated, the same adjectives are hauled out time and again to prop up windy and fatuous passages. Either the book was not edited, or the editor was paid by the word.

On page 77, Barry compares Democratic whip Tony Coelho's in-your-face intensity to that of LBJ's: "Like Lyndon Johnson, he played the game at close range, challenging by physical proximity, pushing, invading, using the physical discomfort of proximity as a weapon." On page 182, writing again of Coelho, we learn anew that "Like Lyndon Johnson, he played the game at close range, challenging by physical proximity, pushing, invading, using the physical discomfort of proximity as a weapon." (Warning: This 768-pager has no index or source notes, so finding such examples — and I have unearthed here only a few — requires digging through the muck all over again.)

On page 212 we are not surprised to learn that the belly of Newt Gingrich is "soft in the way of those who have never done athletic things." We are not surprised because this description of the contentious member from Georgia is no less apt or unflattering than it was 50 pages back, when we were told that Gingrich possesses "the somewhat overweight, soft body of an academic." Speaking of Gingrich, it isn't clear why Barry finds it necessary to quote him twice in the span of 90 pages on how he massages reporters' egos (pages 162 and 252).

Why does Barry insist on telling us what he has just told us, or what his source has just told us? Here he quotes a *Washington Post* reporter on how he broke stories on Ed Meese: "It was all public information. Nobody believed that. Even my own editors thought it was leaked to me." Clear enough, right? Nope. Writes Barry: "Even his own editors believed someone had handed him the information." Must be an echo in here.

Perhaps the author suspects, rightly, that we need an alarm clock to awaken us from the lethargy of the previous sentence. This is fine except when that sentence is identical to its succeeding one, another of Barry's literary devices. After Barry repeats for the *n*th time Wright's woeful maxim, "If they think they do not like me, it is because they do not know me," he writes: "He still believed that. He still believed that." Sometimes the needle even gets stuck on the same sentence: "His voice bitter with a deep bitterness, he said . . ."

Bill Adler is a freelance axe-grinder who lives in Austin. His story on Jim Wright, which he cheerfully acknowledges was disparaged from time to time in Barry's book, appeared in the *Observer* on December 4, 1987.

Nowhere does the needle stick more often than on the word "cold." This little adjective is to Barry's prose what Siamese twins are to one another: inseparable. He writes of cold anger, cold formality, cold ruthlessness, cold voices, cold business (a fave), cold eyes, the coldness of power, cold history, the cold of December. Once poor David Bonior, a Michigan Democrat, "froze, then (presumably defrosting) asked coldly . . ."

We also have a good many folks "snorting," as in responding indignantly. Richard Phelan, the Democrat whom the Ethics Committee hired to investigate Wright, is a snorter, as is an unnamed Democrat. But snorting in John Barry's Washington is nonpartisan: Republican leader Bob Michel snorts, *Post* reporter Juan Williams snorts, and Wright himself is a champion snorter, as he is lip-presser. Whether he snorts and presses his lips together at once is unclear. But when Bob Michel snorts from across the aisle, you can be sure Wright is pressing his lips together.

The book's grating sexist and racist undertones occasionally are evident. In describing Coelho's extraordinary efforts to ingratiate himself with other members, Barry writes as if there were no women in the House: "[Coelho] learned what member's wife liked to go where for a vacation, and then would find out what company or association was meeting there, and arranged to have the member — and wife, of course — invited."

Barry habitually informs us of any non-white member's race, whether or not race is relevant: "Mickey Leland, a black from Houston"; "Charles Rangel, the black Ways and Means member." Then there is the former Kissinger Commission member "Richard Pena, the Texas Hispanic with jet-black hair . . . who is extremely fluent in Spanish." (No doubt the best kind of fluent.)

Barry characterizes the Ethics Committee chairman, Julian Dixon, a California Democrat, as "black but no radical." Hey why not call, say, New York Rep. Ted Weiss "Jewish but no tightwad."

Such writing isn't fair to the rich complexity of the story and its cast of characters: from the oily Wright, a man who invites cynicism, to the tenacious Gingrich, the ultraconservative who, in Barry's simplistic portrayal, doomed the Speaker by tossing the raw meat of press clippings, some decades old, to bloodthirsty reporters. This analysis, that Wright was forced from office for small indiscretions, some perpetrated long ago, manages to demean both Wright — who is made to look silly for resigning — and the daily journalists who uncovered Wright's financial chicanery. If, as Barry says (snorts?), Wright did nothing more than "put his shoulder against the edge of the law and the rules and pushed until he bent back a place for it," if Wright truly committed no ethical violations, or at the very least minor ones, then why did he quit? Barry's logic defies reason.

It's as if in assembling the puzzle of Jim Wright's career, Barry found that the final pieces didn't fit. Instead of asking why, or searching for others, he just jammed them in.

This sort of analytical shortcoming is, in the end, beside the point. The point is why Barry gave such short shrift to one of the more colorful, albeit bit, players, a man named George Mair, whom Wright hired late in 1987 to stem the tide of negative press.

After a *Newsweek* hit left Wright reeling, Mair counter-punched with a letter to the editor: "I know . . . you're having to hype your sagging publication with stories on bra museums [no pun intended, I think], angels of death, and semi-nude female stars. . . . The piece is awash with unsupported innuendo. . . . Why is [Wright's] smile labeled 'unctuous' rather than 'friendly'?"

This is one of the few examples of intentional humor in the book. But how on earth could Barry omit the disclosure that George Mair's background included not only stints as a newspaper and public relations executive but as the author of more than a dozen books, including "The Sex Book Digest: a peek behind the covers of 113 of the most erotic, exotic, edifying sex books." This unforgivable omission could hardly have been for lack of space. If it was, though, maybe Barry could have made do with a reference or two fewer to the remarkable similarities between Tony Coelho and Lyndon Johnson. Or have I already mentioned that?



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SOCIAL CAUSE CALENDAR

A CELEBRATION IN DALLAS

A four-day exposition is planned in Dallas to commemorate Earth Day, **April 22**. About 75,000 visitors are expected to attend Earth Fair Texas from **April 19 to 22**. The fair is the largest and most comprehensive Earth Day celebration in Texas. The exhibits in the fair, which will be held at Dallas Fair Park, are open and free to the public. Exhibit hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. For information, call (214) 522-9650

SAINT DISMAS DAY

Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE) are holding the 1990 St. Dismas Day gathering at the Capitol on **April 5**. This year's observance will include a news conference at 12 p.m. in the Speaker's Committee room. An exhibit of photos by Alan Pogue will be featured in the east hallway of the Capitol. Pogue, an Austin photographer, is a long-time contributor of the *Observer*. Rep. Wilhelmina Delco, chair of the House Committee on Higher Education, and Rep. Libby Linebarger, a member of the House Committee on Human Services, are expected to attend the noon news conference. For information, call Dorothy Hightower at (817) 863-5715 or Wally Ellinger at (512) 472-0915.

JOHN HENRY HONORED IN DALLAS

John Henry Faulk, who will be honored at the Second Annual *Observer* benefit scheduled for **May 5** in Austin, will receive another honor. The Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas will name its state conference in honor of Faulk, who has been a long-time champion of freedom of information. The conference will be held **June 1 to 2** in Dallas. The noted

OBSERVANCES

April 11, 1941 • United Auto Workers gains first contract with Ford Motor Company.

April 13, 1864 • Confederate soldiers massacre black prisoners of war at Fort Pillow, Tennessee.

April 13, 1919 • Eugene Debs imprisoned for opposing U.S. entry into World War I.

April 15, 1967 • 200,000 march against Vietnam war in New York City.

April 17, 1959 • Twenty-two arrested in Times Square for refusing to take part in civil defense drill.

April 20, 1919 • Thirteen children and seven adults are killed in the Ludlow Massacre when the Colorado National Guard burns the camp of striking miners.

April 22, 1526 • First slave revolt in an American settlement.

humorist, folklorist, and staunch advocate of the First Amendment received the James Madison Award, given by the foundation, in 1988. The award honors individuals who have made outstanding contributions to open government. For more information, call Nancy E. Monson at (214) 977-6658.

SAN SABA IN HOUSTON

The Destruction of the Mission of San Saba is currently on display at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The 18th-

century Texas painting was confiscated by U.S. Customs officials in Austin, Texas on November 17, 1989. The Houston museum has gained temporary custody of the painting, reputedly the oldest Texas historical painting in existence. The painting, officially entitled *The Destruction of the Mission San Saba in the Provinces of Texas and the Martyrdom of the Fathers Alonso Giraldo de Terreros, Joseph Santesteban*, depicts the 1758 massacre of the mission's 400 residents by Comanches and allied tribes. The museum is located at 1001 Bissonnet and is open Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thursday evenings, 5 to 9 p.m., and Sundays 12:15 to 6 p.m. Admission for adults is \$2, and for students and senior citizens \$1. Children 18 and under are admitted free. For more information, call (713) 526-1361.

HOUSE REPAIRS IN AUSTIN

Churches, businesses, and community groups will provide much-needed repairs on substandard homes in an East Austin neighborhood on **April 28**, the Hands on Housing workday. The day is sponsored by Austin Metropolitan Ministries (AMM). The Prospect Hill neighborhood will be the target of the effort. AMM hopes to recruit 100 volunteer work crews to complete 100 projects from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. during the day. For more information, call George Stone at 472-9988 or Patrick Flood at 472-7672.

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Autobiography at the Bijou

BY STEVEN KELLMAN

CINEMA PARADISO
Directed by Giuseppe Tornatore
NUNS ON THE RUN
Directed by Jonathan Lynn

CINEMA PARADISO is the name of the only movie house in Giancaldo, a small town in southern Sicily. It might as well be called Inferno, as it is consumed by flames, or Purgatorio, as it is a theater of unfulfilled desire. Giuseppe Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso* has the structure of nostalgia, an extended flashback to an irretrievable past that, even when present, was as elusive as the shadows flickering on the local movie screen.

When middle-aged Salvatore di Vitto (Jacques Perrin) steps out of his Mercedes and into his posh apartment in Rome, the young beauty occupying his bed relays a message from home that Alfredo has died. Salvatore spends most of the night, and the film, recalling his childhood in Sicily and, more essentially, in the movies. No, he was no Shirley Temple, but Cinema Paradiso was his secular temple and the academy for his sentimental education. From his earliest years, young Salvatore (played with wide-eyed wonder by young Salvatore Cascio) haunts the theater's projection booth and charms its kindly, lonely steward, Projectionist Alfredo becomes a mentor to the fatherless Salvatore, and, though his advice is often lifted verbatim from the soundtracks his job has made him memorize, Salvatore — nicknamed "Toto" — feels almost as close to Alfredo as he does to John Wayne, Jean Gabin, or any of the other celluloid personalities who are more real to him than the father who never returns from World War II.

One exuberant evening when Alfredo turns his projector onto the town square so that everyone can see the drama, the reel catches on fire. Cinema Paradiso burns to the ground, but Toto manages to save Alfredo, though the master projectionist loses his sight. When Nuovo Cinema Paradiso rises out of the ashes of the old one, Toto, though still in grade school, is appointed to project its films. Blind and proud, Alfredo sits in the booth beside his best and only pupil.

The passage of years into the 1950s is

registered by the newsreels and changing casts and styles of the movies Salvatore shows. Now an adolescent (played by Marco Leonardi), Salvatore first encounters first love at the end of a lens. It is through the lens of a movie camera that he is learning to shoot that Salvatore captures newcomer Elena (Agnese Nano), daughter of the bank manager, arriving in Giancaldo. Following an extravagant courtship borrowed from a movie script, Salvatore and Elena become inseparable... until they are separated by her father and Elena moves to another part of Italy.

Thirty years later, Salvatore goes home like Kirk Douglas in the movie *Ulysses*, which he had shown one lustrous summer night. (Note how his mother, like Penelope, undoes her knitting as she meets him at the door.) He returns to the scene of his frustrated infatuation with cinema, Elena, and Alfredo. Alfredo is being buried, Nuovo Cinema Paradiso has been out of business for six years, and Elena can be found nowhere but on the frames of film Salvatore made so long ago. Time has taken all, the world that lived so richly in Toto.

"Don't give in to nostalgia," warned Alfredo the last time Salvatore saw him alive. "Forget us." And he does, for 30 years. Intent on a more auspicious destiny for the young man, Alfredo makes Salvatore promise to leave their little town forever. Aside from the fact that he is now some sort of "big shot" in the movie industry and that he has never married, we never learn much about Salvatore's life today in Rome. What sort of films has Cinema Paradiso prepared him to make, and what sort of relationships has the memory of Elena spoiled for him? To the extent that Tornatore has admitted an autobiographical basis for *Cinema Paradiso*, the movie is a surrender to nostalgia, but it is one that most viewers can condone. Not every movie-maddened moppet grows up to be François Truffaut, Steven Spielberg, or Giuseppe Tornatore. But anyone who walks into the dark to see a film has not yet grown up and out of a benign madness. Much of the appeal that *Cinema Paradiso* offers to any moviegoer is its celebration of moviegoing. As evoked by Tornatore, going to the village Bijou in the age before TV was a raucous, joyous communal experience, more akin to live theater than anything available in today's multiplexes. Tornatore turns his camera on the audience — lovers necking, mothers nursing, an old man snoring, young men

masturbating, and Salvatore always gazing, gazing.

"Life isn't like in the movies," warns the blind seer Alfredo, in a movie. "Life is harder." *Cinema Paradiso* does not, and cannot, even by imitating *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, step off the screen into "life." But the movie world it depicts is hardly soft; it is not only a lost world but a world of loss. The local priest diligently inspects each movie sent to Giancaldo and ensures that every cinematic kiss is sliced away. The legacy that Alfredo wills to Salvatore, and that is the lovely climax to *Cinema Paradiso*, is a can of old snippets, a huge montage of excised kisses. What saves this film from being a sentimental advertisement for itself is its plangent reminder that moviegoing is always incomplete, like life.

IN A DISSOLUTE age, where irreverence is the final piety, nuns, like New Jersey or hemorrhoids, become automatic jokes. It is all right to knock a nun as long as you do not get into the habit. What is most offensive about *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All*, *Nonsense*, and other exercises in sororicide is that they are so sanctimonious in their travesty. One longs for the clean, courageous heresy of Martin Scorsese or Salman Rushdie.

Created by a few Monty Python alumni, *Nuns on the Run*, whose title is not a reference to clerical colic, is as subtle and witty a challenge to the Church as smearing Saint Peter's portals with 95 feces. If the sight of a bibulous nun or a lecherous priest is not enough for mirth, writer-director Jonathan Lynn resorts to another venerable comic shtick: transvestism. Imagine two gruff gangsters masquerading as nuns, and you can probably imagine most of the other gags that Lynn manufactures for his farce.

Brian Hope (Eric Idle) and Charlie McManus (Robbie Coltrane), employees of an obnoxious young crime lord named Casey, bemoan the current state of felony; there is no more honor among thieves, or even a pension. They plot to get out of the business before suspicious Casey can retire them permanently. Assigned to rob a clique of Chinese drug dealers called the Triads, they take the money for themselves and run, into a nearby convent, where they hope to elude two gangs and the police by disguising themselves as nuns — Sister Euphemia of the Five Wounds and Sister Inviolata of the Immacu-

Steven Kellman is a professor of comparative literature at the University of Texas in San Antonio.

late Conception. To maintain the charade, they must pretend to be unmoved by the sight of shapely novitiates in the shower and to be expert in Catholic theology. During Mass, larcenous Charlie instinctively and predictably pockets the contents of the collection plate. "It makes no sense to anybody," says Charlie to Brian, to prepare him for a class in which he is expected to explain the Trinity. "That's why you have to believe it." Lynn, who pilfers from *Some Like It Hot*, *Victor!*, *Victoria* and *Tootsie*, has stolen another line: *Credo quia absurdum est*. But, while Tertulian proclaimed that he believed precisely

because it is absurd, viewers of *Nuns on the Run* are not likely to be as generous.

It would not do to search for too much sense in *Nuns on the Run*. The criminal prelude is a pretext to get Brian and Charlie into a convent, falsettos, falsies. The effect is lost on Brian's myopic girlfriend Faith (Camille Coduri), as she has lost her eyeglasses and spends most of the film bumping into things. An encounter with a lamp post sends her to the hospital, where Brian and Charlie of course dress up as nurses. Blind Faith and Brian Hope are the dispensers of inadvertent charity, when, fleeing England

for Rio, they leave half the loot behind, enabling the convent to cover communal funds pilfered by Sister Mary of the Annunciation to gamble on horses. "It's a miracle!" exclaims Sister Superior Liz (Janet Suzman), and we must pretend that we have not been anticipating that line for at least an hour.

When we first glimpse Casey, he is watching *The Long Good Friday*, the Bob Hoskins drama of life and death in the British underworld. Like Tornatore's, Lynn's soul is bathed in the history of cinema. Though its sins are venial, *Nuns on the Run* makes no distinguished addition to that history. □

AFTERWORD

Los Supers

BY BARBARA BELEJACK

SO, they have McDonald's in Mexico City. Hamburgers, Cheeseburgers, Big Macs. Big deal. Here in Mexico we have something better. We have Super Gringo, where the signs are in English, the piped-in music is American pop, and for a mere \$5.74 (actually 15,000-plus pesos) you, too, can purchase a box of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles cereal. Or for \$3, a Betty Crocker cake mix. Or for \$6, a 24-ounce bottle of Aunt Jemima syrup, "maple con waf-fly" — maple syrup with waffles, as the saying goes. And because at Super Gringo the customer always knows best, not only can she or he feast on every pre-packaged item that can be popped open, microwaved (microwaves currently go for about \$350 in one Mexico City department store), or eaten out of the can, our happy consumer can also purchase the latest Nintendo toys as well. I have been assured that there is only one Super Gringo in Mexico City, but the store is only part of a trend. Within walking distance in the pricey Polanco neighborhood, for example, are Super U.S.A., Super Americano, and Super Mr. Price. And you thought they hated us in Latin America.

All these supers are merely capitalizing on Mexico's economic *apertura*, the trade opening that began with Mexico's entry into GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) during the second half of the de la Madrid presidency. For generations Mexico has operated on the import-substitution model of economic development. A combination of high tariffs, import licenses, as well as the usual bureaucratic nonsense, kept all these imported goodies off the shelves of department stores and on the shelves of the not-so-clandestine markets of Tepito, the Mexico

Barbara Belejack is a Mexico City writer.

City neighborhood known as the capital of *fayuca* (contraband). There was also whatever private contraband the rich and not-so-rich could bring back from trips to Houston and runs to the border.

The theory behind the import-substitution model of development, as we all now know from following the news from Eastern Europe, is that state-supported industries will provide employment and a buffer from the evils of Western consumerism. Reality, however, turned out to be a mix of government and business cronyism that produces some god-awful garbage. The Soviet Union recently sponsored an exhibit of embarrassing and inefficient goods and Mexico could probably do the same.

The reality of *apertura*, unfortunately, is not necessarily much better. I suppose it's cheaper than a trip to Houston. But except for that \$2.50 German wine, and the ubiquitous Milky Ways — standard inventory for tens of thousands of Mexican street vendors — *apertura* hasn't brought too many bargains.

Imported consumer goods first started to make a dent here in 1988. Now there is Heineken, Lone Star, and even lowly Budweiser in the land of Corona and Tecate. Mexico's over-priced and unimpressive wine industry must now cope with \$2.50 German labels. And if anyone has \$250 to spare, he can spend it on the priciest of French wines. There is bottled water from Houston and France alongside the time-honored mineral water of Tehuacan. And in the land where chocolate was not only invented, but was the exclusive drink of Aztec nobility, the Milky Way is now king.

Though it has taken a while for the changes mandated by GATT to set in, it has come far more quickly than all that "lifting off the shoulders of the Mexican people" that President is always talking about when he talks

about the foreign debt. (Something that no one here talks about anymore, by the way. That crisis has been solved.) Within the past year California and Illinois have opened trade offices here. New York is next. Texas, you will be happy to know, has been on the cutting edge of the consumer-import boom, operating a trade office here for 17 years. Former manufacturers of electronic junk have now become importers and distributors of junk food. So for the middle-class and upper-class consumer, *apertura* has been "a kind of Santa Claus," says Guadalupe Loaeza, a Mexico City journalist best known for satirizing the way the nation's upper classes coped with the years of economic collapse that were here euphemistically dubbed "*la crisis*."

According to the Ministry of Commerce, everything is going well. Consumer imports represent less than 15 percent of total imports. Mexico is exporting more than ever, diversifying its exports, importing technology, revving up joint ventures and maquiladoras. "The flashy Milky Way phenomenon has been overstated," said Dr. Jaime Zabudowsky, of the foreign trade section.

Well, maybe. For my money, if someone would figure out how to get packages of Hershey's Semi-Sweet Chocolate Bits and Mint Milano Cookies onto the shelves of Superama (an established Mexican chain that takes American Express), I will be quite happy. But I'm not sure this is what Mexico's entry into GATT was designed to achieve and a few nagging doubts remain. The only imported goods most Mexicans will see come in form of imported basic goods like the corn, beans, and sugar that this country's disastrous system of agriculture can no longer produce. Meanwhile, a box of Oreo cookies sells for \$5.55. That's more than a minimum-wage worker here will earn in a day. □

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ORGANIZATIONS

LESBIAN/GAY DEMOCRATS of Texas — Our Voice in the Party. Membership \$15, P.O. Box 190933, Dallas, 75219.

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BECOME A CARD-CARRYING MEMBER of the ACLU. Membership \$20. Texas Civil Liberties Union, 1611 E. 1st, Austin, 78702.

CATHOLICS for a Free Choice — DFW Metroplex. Information: 3527 Oak Lawn Ave., Ste. 156, Dallas, TX 75219.

CASA MARIANELLA, A SHORT-TERM SHELTER IN AUSTIN for refugees from oppression in Central America, needs volunteers for clerical tasks, tutoring, stocking and storing food and clothing, and legal and medical help. Financial contributions and donations of food,

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INSIDE INFORMATION. Subscribe to Texas Weekly, largest Texas political newsletter. Sam Kinch, Jr., editor. Straight, salty. \$120 annually. P.O. Box 5306, Austin, TX 78763. (512) 322-9332.

EMPLOYMENT

PRO-CHOICE ORGANIZATION seeks a bilingual field manager to organize activities in Southwest Texas. Electoral and political work helpful. Organizational skills a must. Based in Austin, some travel. For more information call TARAL (512) 462-1661 or send resume to TARAL, 905-D West Oltorf Street, Austin, 78704.

100% VOTE, a national voting rights project (formerly the Human SERVE Campaign) is looking for a seasoned organizer to oversee the development of a regional campaign establishing voter registration outreach programs in city and county public service agencies, health centers and public schools. The job requires some organizing experience, extensive travel across South Texas and El Paso, and one who is fluent in Spanish; Salary 20-22,000 w/benefits; Send resume to 100% VOTE Southwest Regional Office, P.O. Box 3916, Austin, Tx. 78764.

WANTED EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR for national/child health, nonprofit organization. Requirements include: grant writing experience, proven organizational, communication, fundraising and management skills; preferably bilingual. Application deadline April 20, 1990. Send resume to ATM - Search Committee, Suite 1A-202, 603 West 13th Street, Austin, Texas 78701.