

# THE TEXAS Observer

A JOURNAL OF FREE VOICES

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**BEHIND  
THE  
PRISON  
WALLS**

Pg. 20, Pg. 22

## The Return of Joe Bob Briggs

BY MICHAEL KING

**T**HIS IS A STORY about the sorry state of American journalism, and the historic place of Joe Bob Briggs, as one small sordid chapter in its continuing decline. Briggs was and is the alter ego of John Bloom, an unassuming but solid movie writer and city columnist for the *Dallas Times Herald*. Joe Bob, the "Drive-In Movie Critic from Rockwall, Texas," was Bloom's comic mask for writing satirical reviews of the horror/kung fu/teens'n'tits movies that are otherwise primly ignored by the journalistic guardians of "good taste" (or the "high sheriffs," as Joe Bob calls them, in one of his offhand prole epithets that hits directly home). Joe Bob's manic and unflinching capsule reviews, including body and breast counts, and the hilarious exploits of his imaginary bowling alley and drive-in cronies, found a large audience. (The



*Herald* sold T-shirts reading "Joe Bob is a close personal friend of mine.") As his audience grew, so did his notoriety — each Friday's column seemed to push the bounds of irresponsible journalism just a little bit further.

Joe Bob went into syndication, winning acclaim and outrage from North Carolina to San Francisco ("the wimp capital of the world," said J.B.), and Joe Bob managed to insult some contemporary sacred cow virtually every week ("Bab-tists," "Mad Mothers against Drunks," and most impudently of all, "The National Organization for Bimbos"). But his editors tolerated him because, first and obviously, he sold a lot of newspapers, and secondly, one hopes (without much conviction), that they realized that adult readers should be considered intelligent enough to recognize irony when they see it.

PATRICK STARK

As things fell out, the latter proved to be a dubious assumption, the general state of self-righteousness in these United States being what it is. In the spring of 1985, after three years of anarchic and risk-taking satire, Joe Bob finally gored the

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*In Which Joe Bob Returns With His Collected Works  
And Our Reviewer Steps Forth to Perform Delicate Chopsocky  
On the High Sheriffs of the Newspaper World*



# THE TEXAS Observer

A JOURNAL OF FREE VOICES

*We will serve no group or party but will hew hard to the truth as we find it and the right as we see it. We are dedicated to the whole truth, to human values above all interests, to the rights of humankind as the foundation of democracy; we will take orders from none but our own conscience, and never will we overlook or misrepresent the truth to serve the interests of the powerful or cater to the ignoble in the human spirit.*

*Writers are responsible for their own work, but not for anything they have not themselves written, and in publishing them we do not necessarily imply that we agree with them because this is a journal of free voices.*

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**Subscription Manager:** Stefan Wanstrom

**Publishing Consultant:** Frances Barton

**Development Consultant:** Hanno T. Beck

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## DIALOGUE

### The Speaker Responds

The long cover article of your December 4 issue, "Jim Wright and Vernon S&L's High-Flying Honcho Don R. Dixon," is a very irresponsible piece of journalism.

Anyone in public office must expect to be the subject of unfavorable editorial treatment from time to time. That is fair game. I've had my share of editorial criticism, expect to have more, and to take it on the chin. This is another matter.

Often an inaccuracy will occur in a news story which is innocent of intent, and while potentially damaging to the reputation of a public official, is suffered without reply simply because the official is too busy to take the time to respond in detail to each incorrect imputation. The above-mentioned article is so inaccurate and so harshly prejudicial in total scope and intent that it must not be allowed to stand.

The entire thrust of your seven-page article is to make a connection and to insinuate a relationship between myself and Don Dixon which simply *does not exist*.

The truth is that to the very best of my recollection I have never met Don Dixon, do not know Don Dixon, have never had any business relationship with him of any type whatever, and in my entire life have had only one long distance telephone conversation with him.

On that one occasion, in November of last year, Mr. Dixon requested my help as a member of Congress in asking the Federal Home Loan Bank Board to consider his request for a one-week delay in the threatened foreclosure of his business, which he said was about to occur on that very day that he called me for help. He said he had located a source of independent financing which could save him and his borrowers and stockholders from financial collapse if he could be given just a few days.

As I have done over the years for literally thousands of other private citizens who call asking my intercession on their behalf with federal agencies, I telephoned the agency involved and asked that the responsible officials look into this citizen's claim. I knew absolutely nothing about this man's business or the factual validity of his assertions and said so at the time.

This is the only direct contact of any kind that I have ever had with Mr. Don Dixon or on his behalf. It is the kind of thing most Congressmen do almost every day for some private citizen or another.

Surely that does not warrant a long article implying some sinister connection between myself and Don Dixon and casting aspersions upon my professional and personal reputation. Nor does it provide

justification for such glib descriptions of me as "unencumbered by philosophy or ideology."

Aside from this very central misinterpretation upon which your entire article rests, there are a great many inaccuracies which could have been avoided by giving someone in my office the courtesy of an opportunity to provide the facts. This was not done.

Contrary to your claim that Wright "declined to be interviewed for this article," neither of your two authors ever spoke to me about this article or asked me even if I knew Don Dixon. My office has no record of any request from either of them for data or factual information.

As a result, the article attributes to me deeds I have never done, thoughts I have never thought, and words I have never said. And its underlying theme implies a close association with a person I do not know.

This really is not responsible journalism. It isn't even common courtesy. Public office holders should endeavor to be thick-skinned, I know. But even a public official is entitled to better treatment than you have given me in this case.

*Jim Wright  
Washington, D.C.*

### The Author Replies

I am pleased that the Speaker does not rebut a single fact concerning his actions. However, his blustering assertion that I never gave his office an opportunity to "provide the facts" is, to put it charitably, outrageously false. Starting on July 1 — more than four months before the story was published — my Washington associate, Mike Binstein, and I made *no less* than a dozen calls to Wright's offices in Washington and Fort Worth to request an interview. We had five telephone conversations with Charmayne Marsh, Wright's press secretary, during which her tone could only be described as contemptuous. At least seven messages for her went unanswered. We also spoke twice with Jimmie Bodiford in the Speaker's Fort Worth office about meeting with Wright during his trip home over the 4th of July weekend. Twice she told us she'd get back to us.

We're still waiting.

*Bill Adler  
Austin*

### Feminists For Life?

Robert G. B. Powell's letter (*TO*, 11/6/87) is typical of the obfuscation promoted by the misnamed "right to lifers."

No woman is "forced to submit to

**Continued on Page 19**

# Boom Times

**WE ARE NOW** embarking on one of the biggest booms in prison construction this state has ever seen. Within the next two years, state officials want to add about 10,000 new prison beds to the Texas Department of Corrections, which now houses more than 38,000 convicted felons.

Construction will begin this year on a 2,250-bed maximum-security prison in Gatesville as well as four new 1,000-bed minimum-security prisons around the state. State leaders also want a 2,250-bed maximum-security prison in Amarillo, but they'll have to scramble for funding now that Attorney General Jim Mattox has ruled that the legislature didn't intend to add quite this

## *More on Texas Prisons* *Pages 4, 16, 20, 22*

much prison space. But even without the Amarillo penitentiary, we are heading for the biggest prison explosion of the last three decades. When you add the additional 2,000 beds provided by four new private prisons expected to be completed by the end of this year, we will be seeing an increase of more than 8,000 beds in the TDC system.

At this rate, we may soon be back in the running with California, which holds about 60,000 prisoners, for the title of the nation's largest prison system. But there's a difference: California has 26 million people to our 16 million. So our rate of incarceration is already higher.

The problem that faced state leaders in 1987 was that even with an early release program in place, the prisons were bumping up against the court-ordered population ceiling. Desperately afraid of taking the rap for letting too many criminals back on the streets, the only thing prison administrators and politicians could come up with was to build, build, build. Lieutenant Governor Bill Hobby made prison construction part of his "Build Texas" public works program. Whether the state really needed more prisons was no longer the point — here was something that would be good for the economy.

So the voters dutifully went off to the polls last November and approved a \$500

million bond issue to help finance the new prisons. The debt ultimately will be retired by the state's taxpayers, but you can bet that many of the people who unthinkingly vote for more prison expenditures will be the same ones who complain the loudest about new taxes. And they are likely to be disappointed if they think that the new prisons will mean the problems that have been plaguing TDC for so long will go away.

William Bennett Turner, the lawyer who represents the inmates in their 15-year *Ruiz* suit against the state, predicts the new prison construction will end up prolonging TDC's legal troubles. Turner says there had been a chance the case could finally come to an end in 1989, when the last of the court orders are to be met. "What screws that up is the state's attempt to deal with overcrowding by building new prisons," he told us recently. Turner says the state is having enough trouble meeting existing court orders for improvements. "To think that they can handle a third bigger system is crazy. . . . They can't manage it. They can't afford it."

Charlie Sullivan, who with his wife Pauline now runs a prison reform group — CURE — as a national effort from Washington, sent out the same message last November, when he returned to Texas to appeal to voters to reject the bond issue for prison expenditures. "I think we've got enough prisons," he says. "We've just got to get the right ones [prisoners] in and the right ones out." Sullivan says there are too many people serving time for "technical violations" of parole and probation. Thus, the state ends up paying \$20,000 a year to house a prisoner "for drinking a beer at the wrong time."

Sullivan suggests a serious state effort to devise — and fund — alternative forms of punishment and to reform the state's sentencing guidelines. One place for such a discussion is in the House select committee on sentencing and recidivism, led by Rep. Al Granoff, D-Dallas. Granoff said in December that the state is in danger if it doesn't look beyond new prisons as a way to deal with crime. "You don't really speak to anyone in the field and have them honestly say, 'Yes, the cure is building more and more prisons.' But it's politically easy," he said.

Harry Whittington, who in his time on

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the Board of Corrections became a rare breed of dissenting Republican, says in his excellent foreword to the new book *Texas Prisons* (see review page 16), that with the extra money now appropriated for new prisons, and with the debt financing plan and the plan to build private prisons, "there will soon be more prisons, more prisoners, more guards, and more profits to monitor, resulting in an increasingly complex prison system and even greater opportunity for corruption, mismanagement and mistreatment of inmates."

Yet there is not a single major state leader, not Gov. Clements, not Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby, not Attorney General Jim Mattox, who has stood up and spoken about the long-range problems of the prison system with any true vision. We'll build more prisons and we'll fill them up and the problem will only get bigger. **D.D.**

# The Drug War Fills the Prisons

BY RICHARD RYAN

Washington, D.C.

**F**EDERAL SENTENCING guidelines passed by Congress as part of its perennial law-and-order binge are now in effect. The new guidelines eliminate paroles and plea bargains in federal cases, and since they promise a cataclysm in the U.S. prison system, it is now worth reconsidering these monsters (which I discussed here two issues back) if only so we'll know what the end will look like when it arrives.

What follows is a statistical breakdown based on Bureau of Prisons numbers of the federal inmate population in Texas. The first figure is the number of prisoners in the institution; the second represents the number the facility was designed to hold; the third, a measure of overcrowding, is the percentage by which the prison's population exceeds its capacity:

- Bastrop — 726; 472; 54 percent
- Big Spring — 676; 482; 40 percent
- Fort Worth — 845; 660; 28 percent
- La Tuna — 1,005; 465; 116 percent
- La Tuna Satellite Camp — 304; 168; 88 percent
- Seagoville — 775; 359; 116 percent
- Texarkana — 886; 402; 120 percent
- Texarkana Satellite Camp — 250; 144; 74 percent

From where the sun now stands, we have roughly 50,000 Americans in federal prisons. In 1992, according to estimates of the Federal Sentencing Commission, that figure could grow as high as 80,000, when you take into consideration the combined effects of the new drug laws passed by Congress in 1986, the longer sentences imposed on repeat offenders, and the new mandatory sentencing guidelines federal judges are obliged to follow. No one will deny the drama of a 60 percent prison increase, but the true explosion is expected at the turn of the century. Assuming the number of offenders sentenced to federal prisons, which has soared under Reagan, continues to grow at its current rate, we can expect the population in U.S.

Richard Ryan is the Observer's Washington correspondent.

government institutions to clock in at 150,000 in the year 2002. Without the new narcotics laws, the repeat offender statutes, and the mandatory sentencing guidelines, the commission estimates the prison population could be as low as 95,000 — still a considerable increase above the current levels, but nothing like the 200 percent increase that the kick-ass regulations are going to bring down upon us. Most of that increase will be attributable to the drug laws — as the moralists of Washington, reeking of gin and tobacco, continue to insist that Americans have no right to control their own nervous systems.

Indeed, at the center of our penal philosophy is a certain drug-induced paranoia. Somewhere in the past it was determined that the state held an absolute right to monitor every individual's biochemistry. This physiological fascism has survived to the present day, in the face of the scandalous suffering inflicted by our pharmaceutical taboos and in the face of the absurd and ineffectual nature of our laws. Never mind that by outlawing cocaine we have sluiced a river of money into the hands of some of the worst people in the world; ignore the Justice Department's *de facto* support of Latin American death squads and dictatorships. Far better to make assassins rich than admit our superstitions are empty.

Which explains why the authoritarians in Congress pursue the "War on Drugs" (an ideal name for it, really) with the same to-hell-with-reality enthusiasm that they once brought to the conflict in Indochina. A January press release from Senator Lloyd Bentsen's office nicely captures the narco-warriors' cost/benefit mentality: "Arrests by DEA [the Drug Enforcement Administration] are up by 39 percent in Texas. . . . Cocaine seizures have more than doubled . . . during April to September 1987. . . . Seizures of marijuana along the southwest border increased 341 percent. . . . Heroin seizures were up 66 percent." The release ends in classic militarist newspeak: "These numbers by no means indicate we have won the war against drugs in Texas, but they do demonstrate that we have succeeded in committing the federal government to the battle. We must keep the heat on."

Perhaps General Westmoreland can be

summoned out of retirement for one last all-or-nothing extravaganza. While we look for the general's number, drug-traffickers should have plenty of time to restructure supply routes and up their profit margins, if they haven't done so already. As in any war, those who suffer most are the poor and the outcast, the citizens born into alienation, who accepted crime and drug use as a normal response to a society which offered no spiritual or civic models, which held out nothing more encouraging than the hope of a two-room flat in a slum or barrio.

The federal prison system has become the darkest manifestation of our war on drugs, and while the mandatory sentencing guidelines don't significantly increase the total numbers of Americans entering the system, by eliminating paroles and plea bargains they will serve to keep prisoners incarcerated for much longer stretches of time. Through the magic of exponential geometry, the increase in prison populations will grow more rapidly as the years pass, as petty offenders and victimless criminals who might have been released quickly stack up in our jails. It is worth noting that none of the Texas federal facilities is a maximum security prison; the individuals who will have to find room in the state's overcrowded penal ghettos are not the depraved or violent — those will be sent to more secure prisons — but outcasts that the new laws will drive farther into the wilderness.

**O**N JANUARY 5TH, *The Wall Street Journal* ran an excellent front-page story in which a number of prominent physicists denounced the superconducting supercollider [SCC]. The supercollider, the *ne plus ultra* of particle physics, is a 53-mile-long proton accelerator which has lobbyists slaving and taxpayers howling. The concrete industry, one of the project's strongest advocates, has taken to calling the SCC "the big pour." Those decrying the idea in the pages of the *Journal* include Nobel laureate Philip Anderson and James Krumhansl, the President-elect of the American Physical Society.

It has now emerged that in order to get research funding for SCC, its backers in the science community deliberately squelched the construction of a smaller collider on Long Island. Scientists outside

the esoteric world of particle physics fear that other important research needs will be swallowed up by the awesome political gravity of the SCC, which has become the technological equivalent of a black hole.

These denunciations haven't cooled the enthusiasm of the Texas delegation for the

project: the Department of Energy has released a revised list of eight candidate sites, which includes Texas. If, God forbid, Congress should actually vote to fund this fiasco, and Texas gets the nod, it would mean \$5.3 billion worth of pork for the district of Joe Barton, the Republican

nonentity from Waxahachie. (Waxahachie was nominated by a state-funded research committee, which squandered over \$100,000 of our money courting the DOE.) Not a single Texas Congressman has, as of yet, pitched a stone at this citadel of glass. □

## ESSAY

# Our Invaded Capital

BY LOUIS DUBOSE

**S**O ONE TRIES to make some sense of all of this. The collective euphoria: the Governor, the Secretary of State, the Speaker of the House, the Mayor of Austin, the President and Chancellor of the University of Texas, all seated at the front of the Senate chamber, the Eyth portrait of good and celibate Stephen F. Austin hanging at their backs between the flags of France and the Republic of Texas, all are listening to Congressman Jake Pickle, who during his tenure in the House has endured five presidencies and who at the moment is doing his best to explain what Sematech will mean to Austin and Texas. Sematech, the research consortium organized by 13 major American semiconductor manufacturers, the research and development consortium that, within five years, is expected to bring the American semiconductor industry abreast of the Japanese, who today lead in research, development, and marketing, has selected Austin as its home. And nothing, we are led to believe, will ever be quite the same. Even Max, the not entirely reformed hippie flower-vendor who represents South Austin on the City Council, sounds a little silly when he offers up a half-hearted criticism of the city's growing dependence on high-technology defense spending. So he equivocates.

A dispassionate look at what has been bestowed upon us, it seems, is nowhere to be found. The usually staid *Austin American-Statesman* throws typographical decorum to the wind and mixes Sematech's red, white, and Columbia blue logo right in there with the paper's standard, inky type in front-page headlines, then goes on to devote three full pages to the company, including graphics explaining the workings of a semiconductor. Television anchors all enthusiastically lead off with Sematech stories. "Jobs, jobs, jobs," soundbites Governor Bill Clements across four local stations. And

Jake Pickle, a Congressman not usually given over to gross hyperbole, says: "I'm as happy as I was the night Lyndon Johnson was elected president." And, "It's like igniting a booster rocket to Mars."

Might we here, in a small voice, suggest that something about the Sematech deal is not right? So far, only *Statesman* humor columnist John Kelso and James Sledd, the idealistic University of Texas English professor of Ronnie Dugger's *Our Invaded Universities*, have dared what must be considered a regional heresy. Kelso weighs in with 24 column inches of his standard, heard-in-the-roadhouse schtick. And, in a brief letter to the *American-Statesman* editors, Sledd decried Sematech's "drivers of welfare Cadillacs. . . . Bribe by millions and millions of the taxpayer's dollars." But mostly, everyone is, well, ebullient.

And, indeed, it is welfare that brings Sematech to Texas. During one of those moments when it abandoned its front-page cheerleading and attended to the exigencies of journalism, the *American-Statesman* staff laid out the incentives package by which Texas taxpayers and consumers seduced Sematech. Almost \$10 million will assure transferred engineers and executives discounted mortgage rates when they purchase homes in Austin. By legislative fiat, children immediately become Texas residents; this will cost the state's universities — read taxpayers — some \$312,000 in tuition. Seventy-five thousand dollars in kiddie-perks, such as summer camp fees, are now available for Sematech children. Country club memberships will be subsidized by \$100,000 in community-based incentives. Forty-thousand dollars will provide tickets to professional sporting events in Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas. And, I suspect, to those cultural events that remain, as the financially overburdened University of Texas curtails its arts funding. Another

\$100,000 will help relocating spouses find employment. Three-quarters of a million dollars will provide for transportation. Fifty thousand dollars is allocated for recruitment assistance, \$100,000 for local family sponsors. "Good grief," blue collar columnist Kelso concluded, "When Hannibal showed up in somebody else's town, at least he rode in on his own elephants."

**P**ORK IS PORK, however. And that is precisely what Sematech is about. Not unlike the big military posts that Lyndon Johnson, Sam Rayburn, and Richard Russell brought home to the South some 30 years ago, Sematech is a pork barrel defense project. Mark Nelson, of the *Dallas Morning News* Washington bureau, writes (in one of the best pieces of reporting to come out of the Sematech story) that the large, powerful and united Texas House delegation, and House Speaker Jim Wright, prevailed in Washington and delivered \$100 million in start-up money for Sematech. The appropriation bill was heard in the House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee, where Lufkin Democrat Charles Wilson serves. In the Senate, Sematech lobbyists found an ally in Lloyd Bentsen, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. And when funding was threatened in a House-Senate conference committee, Pickle, who sits on the Ways and Means Committee, persuaded Wright to apply sufficient pressure to assure the \$100 million funding level. Sematech officials, who will be dependent on the federal government for future funding, see the Texas delegation as one that can deliver; this proved more important than the much more substantial local offers put together by cities like Boston and San Jose.

What the Texas delegation has delivered for Austin then is some 800 new jobs; at least half of the new positions will be filled

by transfers from the 13 companies participating in the consortium. And Sematech's \$250 million annual budget already has Austin Chamber of Commerce types talking about 2,400 additional related jobs in the city. All of this good news in a city that has slipped into a recession and where the vacancy rate for office space at 37 percent is the highest in the nation. So Sematech is not only pork, it is substantial pork, particularly when one considers the difficulty of getting new money approved by Congress.

Yet many see the government's role ending here, once it signs the checks — not exactly the type of *laissez faire* management that would have appealed to Johnson, Russell, Rayburn, and the rest. Writing on the op-ed page of the *Wall Street Journal*, industry analyst Michael Malone suggested that the microchip consortium's very success "comes down to this: Does Congress have the wisdom to fund Sematech and then stay out if its way?" Malone even extracted a promise from Defense Department deputy secretary Robert McCormick. "We don't want to control Sematech," McCormick told the *Journal*, "or to set its agenda — only to make sure that whatever is developed there gets infused into America's industrial base." So there you have it. Tax dollars are used to create a private enterprise. Then control is surrendered to the private sector. What we end up with here is socialism for the rich. In the course of the debate on strategies to bail out the lagging microchip industry, one industry executive, T. J. Rogers of Cypress Semiconductor, even went so far as to suggest that the federal funds be divided into \$10 million parcels and distributed as venture capital. Like the poor who line up for government disbursement of surplus cheese and butter, eager venture capitalists could simply queue up for their share of America's wealth.

This sort of economic development, of course, even in the Twilight of the Age of Reagan, remains such a powerful cultural imperative that it precludes public debate. Only two elected officials openly questioned the Sematech package as it proceeded through the state and local governments whose very responsibility it is to consider such matters. In the legislature, Houston Rep. Ron Wilson killed, on a technicality, a \$50 million bond package that would have provided funding for the Sematech package. Wilson, in one of his better moments during the past session, cited a provision in the state constitution that prohibits the use of public revenue for private purposes. Ironically, it is this same provision by which municipalities — such as Dallas — have justified their refusal to fund shelters for the homeless. And in the Austin City Council, Councilmember Sally Shipman cast a vote against waiving development fees for Sematech, arguing that such concessions were not even made for nonprofit groups working in the city. Shipman said that the amendment was introduced on an agenda late at night as an

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## **This sort of economic development remains such a powerful imperative that it precludes public debate.**

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emergency item. There was no precedent for the vote and, according to Shipman, the council had recently denied a similar fee waiver request from the Austin Child Guidance System for a child guidance center currently being built on state property. Shipman made it clear that she is in favor of Sematech's coming to Austin. "But if we're going to waive fees for business development groups," Shipman said, "how about non-profit social service groups?"

Shipman, of course, lost the vote. And word came down from Sematech's temporary headquarters in San Francisco that her vote had caused serious concern about an anti-Sematech faction in Austin. "I had heard that questions had been asked by someone with Sematech ties," Shipman said, "about one person on the council." Shipman said that she was not too concerned about the comment and that she had been supportive of the Sematech package. "But there was no precedent to waive all development fees," she said. "And when you do something like that, you need to be prepared to pick up the slack somewhere else in the budget."

Wilson's parliamentary defeat of the semiconductor bond package was circumvented by a pledge of University money from the Permanent Fund. Texas House Speaker Gib Lewis, Lieutenant Governor Bill Hobby, and the Governor have all agreed that the University of Texas will be repaid through appropriations during the next legislative session, still more than a year away. A bold promise, considering projections that the next legislature will face a greater fiscal crisis than did the lean and mean 70th legislature. What is evident is that public debate and old fashioned legislative processes are precluded — so long as the goal is economic development. Only in an *ad hominem* response to Austin's selection by Sematech did Councilmember Max Nofziger raise the issue of the growing concentration of high-tech defense industries. And no one carefully considered that, at the production-line level, the microconductor industry is essentially a chemical industry, relying on caustics and arsenic. And it is on the production line, where chemical exposure is a recognized workplace hazard, that most of the 300-400

local jobs will be made available. The standard of rigorous debate and careful consideration that is applied to social spending here is waived; all that is deliberated is how much.

And we have come to expect even less vigorous public debate when economic development is described as a dividend of technological advancement. Long ago, the terms of this debate were defined in corporate boardrooms by a business elite tired of the excessive democracy of the '60s and '70s. One is either for this type of development or one is anti-science and anti-technology. Dissent becomes irrational and unreasonable. Writing in 1980, in *The Hidden Election*, David Davidson and David Noble anticipated precisely the corporate arrogance by which governments are required to pony up then quietly retire. An organized business elite, according to Dickson & Noble, at the end of the Carter presidency was moving against what it perceived as the excessive regulation and stifling government control of the '60s. There was corporate America demanding "a greater degree of moderation in democracy." They beat back government in the name of efficiency, remystified science, and restored the usurped authority of experts. At the same time, they urged diminished expectations in social welfare, fewer "disincentives" (regulations) and "selectively enlarged direct federal support of research and development." And now, by god, they've got it.

And, in the course of their getting it, more turf on the state's largest university has been surrendered to yet another wave of invaders. It is the university that will turn over part of its Cray X-MP/24 super computer to Sematech. The university has already made similar agreements with the Microelectronics and Computer Technology Corp., (MCC) which occupies the university-owned Balcones Research Center. Shortly before Sematech was founded, regents committed an additional \$20 million to expansion of the Balcones electronics research lab, according to system chancellor Hans Mark (who came to the University from NASA). And, the university has been funding MCC since its arrival here in 1983.

But the Sematech arrangement comes after a legislative session in which the university had to scramble for funds, depending on lobbying and rallies organized by supporters like H. Ross Perot and Jess Hay to keep the governor and legislature at bay. The University Research Institute — the main source of financial support for individual research projects — has recently made deep cuts in grants to faculty members and the university has announced that it can no longer support its performing arts program. Yet according to Gehard Fonken, UT executive vice president and provost, the university is well prepared to work with Sematech because of a decision made ten years ago to give a new focus to the engineering department. "Our involvement

today is not by chance," Fonken told the *American Statesman*. Some liberal arts professors, however, suggest that there is another side to the funding equation and many are moving on. "It's a business and engineering school," said a former UT professor (one of half a dozen recognized leaders in his field) who resigned from a tenured liberal arts position to move to a large out-of-state university. "That's where

the money is going. And it's going to cause a lot more unhappiness in liberal arts."

And that is where the money will continue to go. To bring Sematech to Austin, the university has purchased from Data General—one of the members of the consortium—the \$12 million abandoned microconductor facility that will now be renovated at an estimated cost of \$25 million, then rented to Sematech, for

something like one dollar a year. All of this has been achieved with frightening expediency, within a few months, and with an equally frightening absence of deliberation. Lines dividing the public and the private here become conveniently blurred. The Data General building becomes a UT property. Like the institution itself, and most of our elected officials, no longer can it be bought. But it can be rented. □

## PROFILE

# Bobby Ray Inman and the High-Tech Sweepstakes

BY PAUL SWEENEY

**H** E'S THE VERY MODEL of a modern military officer. Four years ago Admiral Bobby Ray Inman, former director of the National Security Agency (NSA), retired Navy officer, and once number two man at the Central Intelligence Agency, arrived in Austin to build a world-class research laboratory for private industry. Backing him were Control Data Corporation; Motorola, Inc.; Advanced Micro Devices, Inc.; Eastman Kodak Company; NCR Corporation; and a host of other high-technology companies that had vowed to pool their research to do battle with the Japanese.

Today the Microelectronics and Computer Technology Corporation (MCC) boasts a \$75 million budget and employs 500 people. But it no longer employs Inman. Instead, he's hard at work building another company from scratch. This time, he says, he will develop a defense electronics holding company, Westmark Systems, Inc., that will eventually buy up a string of companies—most likely in the \$50 million to \$350 million price range—and then market their products to the Pentagon that Inman knows so well. Westmark completed a \$694 million tender offer for Tracor, Inc., Inman's first acquisition, October 9.

Admiral Bobby Inman's career is a primer in how to parlay years of government service into million dollar investment deals. He's an inside entrepreneur—a brand of entrepreneur especially common in the multimillion dollar financial deals that mark the waning years of the '80s. His talents are those of the organization man comfortable with large bureaucracies. His strength

*Paul Sweeney, a long-time Observer contributor, is now a business writer for the Orlando Sentinel. This article originally appeared in the December issue of Venture magazine.*

is the ability to package and sell his message to the media. His edge comes from whom he knows, the military procurement officers in Washington and the money and power brokers of Texas and Wall Street. His product isn't a revolutionary computer or pizza delivery system. His product is economic rationalization, restructuring, and leverage.



BILL LEISSNER

Admiral Inman

And like some others of this breed of entrepreneur, Inman functions best within the embrace of the federal government. MCC exists only because of hidden government subsidies and exemptions from federal antitrust laws. The Pentagon will be Westmark's primary customer. In this sheltered corner of the economy, Westmark won't have to worry about competition from the Japanese. Westmark will make its

millions from repackaging assets for the financial marketplace.

It's hard to figure out how the busy 56-year-old Inman has time to run Westmark. The Admiral, an aloof, bookish-looking man with a high, broad forehead, crooked arching eyebrows, a gap between his front teeth, and a reputation for genius and persuasiveness, serves on the boards of directors of Fluor Corporation, Oracle Systems Corporation, Southwestern Bell Corporation, Texas Eastern Corporation, and, before the tender offer, Tracor Corporation. He is a director of the elite Council on Foreign Relations, a kind of shadow State Department that claims Henry A. Kissinger and Cyrus R. Vance among its members. Inman is also chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas.

Not a bad resumé for a boy from a dusty small town in East Texas. The precocious second of four children born to Mertie and Herman Inman, the owners of a Sinclair station in tiny Rhonesboro, graduated from high school at age 15. He finished his degree at the University of Texas at 19, entered and then dropped out of law school, and finally enlisted in the Navy during the Korean War.

By 1974 Inman was head of Naval Intelligence, and in the wake of the domestic spying scandals, took over as head of the NSA in 1977. Inman ran the super-secret organization until 1981. By that time Inman had learned how to survive in the halls of power. James Bamford, author of *The Puzzle Palace*, a history of the NSA, writes: "Inman was a skilled diplomat when it came to dealing with Congress; he had acquired the talent while suffering through various Congressional investigations as director of Naval Intelligence." Still, by 1982 Inman was bridling under the director of the CIA, William Casey, and though he had become a four-star admiral at age 49, he was looking for civilian opportunities.

Enter William Norris, the visionary founder and chairman emeritus of Control Data Corporation. Norris had grown alarmed in 1981 when he learned that the Japanese government had organized its leading high-technology companies in an effort to produce a fifth-generation computer. Norris believed that it would take a combined effort by U.S. high-technology companies to meet the Japanese challenge, since none — save perhaps IBM — possessed the financial resources to perform such long-term research on its own.

But Norris and his collaborators expected a number of thorny issues, chief among them U.S. anti-trust laws that are designed to deter collusion and foster competition. A laboratory "as significant as the one we are talking about here would get a lot of political attention, probably adverse," Norris told then Harvard Business School researcher William Murphy, who has written an unpublished study of MCC. Norris was also afraid that a person from the private sector would be unable to operate a nonprofit organization, as the laboratory would be. "I don't know how to manage a nonprofit organization, and I don't think many other people do it well" Norris told Murphy, now an assistant professor of management at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

Inman was perfectly positioned to play that role. Says Roy E. Kuntz, director of applied research for NCR Corporation, "We like his energy, his contacts in government, especially Congress. His great enthusiasm turned us on. And, of course, he had been running the NSA organization, which is one of the largest users of electronics in the world. It's also a compartmentalized organization with a need for some shielding." With 10 competitors (now 20) nervously joining forces, MCC required an expert, as Kuntz says, at "shielding proprietary information [between programs]; you can't get proprietary information just by being in the hallways." What better person than a high-tech superspy?

**E**VER SINCE HIS hiring, Inman has faced charges that he is just another influence peddler at work in the military-industrial complex. Kelly Fero, an Austin-based investigative reporter, spoke to officials at the NSA who dismissed Inman as "just another beltway bandit," a member of the consulting community that encircles Washington, living off contracts secured from the very agencies that used to employ them. On the surface, Inman's rebuttal is surprisingly effective. Says Fero "I brought up the issue of beltway banditry. And he [Inman] said there would be none of that. He said two things. One, they [MCC] were not producing a product that they could sell to the government. It was strictly a technological research firm. And two, they were not going after defense contracts. They would have nothing to do with the government."

But those surface details don't matter much when the whole game relies on access to the public trough. Inman seems to have thoroughly understood the rules. He certainly played the game like a master.

The initial dollars come from the city of Austin, the state of Texas, and several wealthy individuals. Soon after he took control at MCC, then little more than a sign on an empty warehouse outside Washington, Inman orchestrated a highly publicized search for a permanent location. The campaign escalated into a free-for-all as 57 cities in 27 states tripped over one another offering tax breaks, free land, and other incentives in order to entice MCC to town.

Austin's April 8, 1983, victory didn't come cheap. MCC was promised, virtually rent free, a 20-acre tract of land at the University of Texas' Balcones Research Center just north of the city. Before MCC finally moved into the enormous ivory building, MCC spent three years in a temporary site, also free of charge. "We pay a dollar a year rent to the University of Texas," says William D. Stotesbery, director of governmental affairs for the firm, adding, "for the next 10 years."

There's more: almost \$20 million in University of Texas-funded laboratory equipment inside the 200,000-square-foot building went with the deal. Businesses in the community provided \$500,000 to defray the relocation expenses of MCC employees. Austin's banks promised more than \$20 million for home mortgages at below-market rates. The university promised to create 32 new faculty positions, each endowed at \$1 million, in the areas of computer sciences and microelectronics. The university also pledged \$5 million in research equipment, \$750,000 for graduate fellowships, and \$1 million in general support.

Austin and Texas got part of their investment back from the public relations campaign Inman waged. Although a unprepossessing figure who seems a cold and even colorless automaton, the Admiral managed to generate articles that examined his personal outlook, his view of MCC, and his vision of the future. Austin soon appeared in the print media as a "megatrend" city. "Austin Discards Its Dungarees," declared the *Economist*, while *Fortune* headlined: "Austin, Texas: On a High-Tech High."

Not many people in Austin will openly criticize Inman, partly because Inman didn't so much overpromise as allow the citizens of Austin to overfantasize. One veteran Austin business journalist observes: "Inman is a great huckster. He brought the hype factor to MCC. He sold it as the beginning of a new age for Austin. He was careful not to make overblown claims. But he was the catalyst for unreal thinking."

Today, the Mellon Bank in Pittsburgh is saddled with poorly performing loans on a spectacular downtown Austin complex. Once-mighty Nash Phillips/Copys, the

country's biggest residential builder a couple of years ago, is in Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Speculators and developers were so busy picking out their Mercedes-Benz sedans, however, that they never took the time to read the Admiral's fine print. "Expectations for the near term exceed what's going to happen," he told a *Texas Monthly* reporter in 1984.

It's tempting to brand all the Inman-generated public relations — and MCC insiders credit Inman as the architect of the effort and the strategist who played cities against one another — as merely ego-gratifying hype. But it served a crucial internal function for MCC. Top people weren't exactly beating down MCC's door. The early plan that MCC's member companies would supply top talent soon proved largely illusory. "He wanted eagles and they kept sending him turkeys," says Robert Pry, former technical director with Gould, Inc., and currently director of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Austin.

Because MCC was so new and untested and had no track record, "There were a lot of nay-sayers, people who said it would never work," says George D. Black, vice-president for human resources at MCC. "You don't have any resources," they said. "You don't have anything else in place." But, adds Black, "Inman was a very powerful recruiting tool. . . . Every person hired here came in large part because it represented an opportunity to work with someone like Bob Inman."

The value to MCC of the Admiral's corporate and military-related connections has never been in doubt. Thanks to the Admiral, such big-name defense contractors as Boeing Company and Rockwell International Corporation joined the consortium.

And although the MCC project was billed from the first as an outfit that would rely solely on civilian funds, its economics depend on Pentagon funds funnelled indirectly through the member companies. Because MCC is approved as an independent research and development (IR&D) site by the Pentagon, defense contractors such as Boeing and Rockwell, in effect, can use Pentagon money to pay for their membership in MCC. The Pentagon provides a certain amount of IR&D money "as a necessary cost of doing business," allowing the recipient to consider it as an overhead expense, according to a Pentagon spokesperson.

A public relations official at one MCC member and defense contractor, who asked not to be named, says of the IR&D money: "It helps defray research costs. It allows you to afford research that you couldn't do otherwise. When you're talking about electronics, you're talking about big bucks."

For Pry, once Gould's representative at MCC, that subsidy makes it impossible to judge MCC's effectiveness. "Using this [IR&D money] indicates MCC's lessened

viability as a commercial organization," Pry says. "You see, that's a relatively cheap way to go. If I take out money for MCC from commercial funds, the stockholders and board of directors will ask harder questions." He adds: "It's not a free lunch. But it gives companies the freedom of not taking money that would show up on their profit and loss statements."

**I**NMAN WILL HAVE to run Westmark with more attention to the bottom line. Basic trends seem to be in his favor. The Electronics Industry Association (EIA) reports that the electronics share of the research, test, and evaluation budget will grow from 49 percent of the military budget in 1987 to 54 percent in 1996. At the same time, the group predicted, the electronics share of all military procurement will grow from 35 percent to 40 percent.

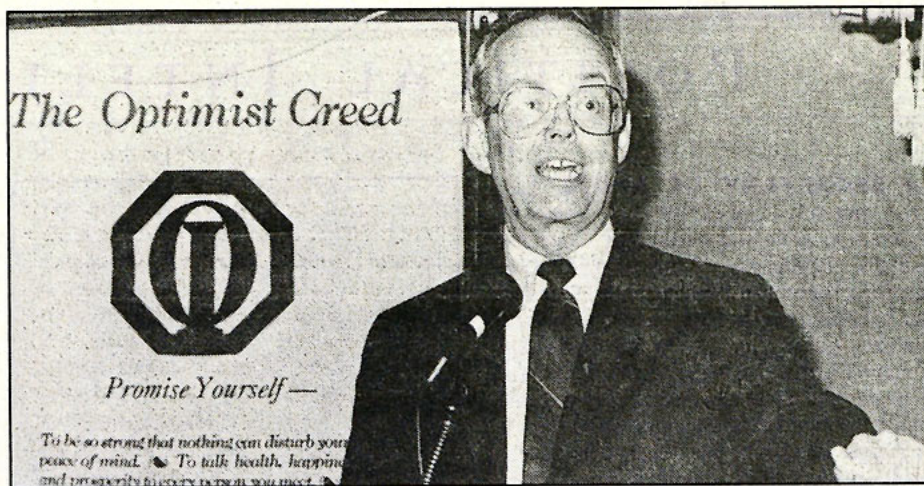
Inman's strategy for exploiting that trend isn't exactly innovative, but it really doesn't have to be. Begin with ample capital, initially \$100 million from Dallas investment bank Mason Best Corporation. Add Inman's clout, or presumed clout, with the Pentagon and the Congressional committees that oversee the military budget. Set up a bluechip board of directors with influence on both Wall Street and Capitol Hill. Among Westmark's directors are Robert S. Strauss, the former chairman of the Democratic National Committee and a powerful Washington lawyer; Drew Lewis, former Secretary of Transportation and CEO of Union Pacific Railroad; and Donald H. Rumsfeld, former Secretary of Defense and now a Chicago businessman.

"He brings a certain stature in the field of high tech and defense," says Strauss in his gravelly drawl. "While he has never had to concern himself with actually running a business, his record as a manager has been splendid in the past." Then Strauss, in a burst of candor, explains his reasoning: "Hell, I don't know a thing about the defense industry. I'm the kind of son of a bitch who bets on people. I've been betting on people all my life. I'm betting on Bobby Inman."

But Inman and Strauss aren't going to win big from the basic business trends in the defense electronics industry. The growth cited by the EIA amounts to an increase in the market of just \$3 billion by 1996 — not peanuts, but hardly the stuff killings are made from. No, Inman and Westmark will make their money the old-fashioned way — by buying public companies, taking them private, and taking them public again.

Westmark will be exploiting a basic market anomaly. Wall Street's preoccupation with possible cuts in military spending has depressed the prices of military electronics issues, analysts note.

But the picture changes radically if the stocks are judged not on their fundamentals but as takeover vehicles. Defense electronics companies have been the target of seven



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### Bobby Ray Inman at an Austin speaking engagement

takeovers in the last year. In the takeovers, multiples have ranged from 2.5 to seven times book value. Applying only an average multiple from these deals to the remaining issues suggests prices at least 50 percent above current market prices.

Of course, Admiral Inman is not the only one to notice this situation. But he does bring some special resources to the game. Wall Street analysts such as Wolfgang Demisch, one of the vice-presidents of First Boston Corporation, don't think Inman will have much, if any, trouble making friendly takeovers in the defense electronics industry. "If he comes in with money and resources," says Demisch, "he'll be treated like a long lost brother."

Takeover targets will also see Admiral Inman as a key to new business. "It's important to be present at the creation," the Wall Street analyst says. "If you wait for the *Federal Register* to notify you that a contract is going to be issued, it will probably be too late. The Pentagon won't take a chance on somebody they don't know from Adam."

Those contacts and that inside knowledge are likely to be even more important in an era of relatively static defense budgets. "You don't just market to the Defense Department," explains Admiral Eugene Carroll of the Center for Defense Information. "You market in Congress, which decides which weapons are built — and which ones are squeezed out. The ability to seek trends and key opportunities and sell that to Congress and the Pentagon is very important." Inman doesn't believe his "insight" into the Pentagon is sufficient to involve Westmark in future Congressional hearings over conflict of interest charges.

Inman's own apparent conflict of interest at Tracor makes it relatively difficult to judge Westmark's first tender. Most Wall Street analysts have called the \$32-a-share offer fully valued. Some speculate that Westmark bid so high to avoid any seeming impropriety resulting from Inman's place on the board. A year ago stock in the Austin

defense electronics firm traded at \$18.50.

It's unclear what, besides Inman's contacts and a star-studded board, Westmark will bring to acquired companies. Westmark is looking only for friendly takeovers, where management will stay on board. Nothing in that strategy — or Inman's track record as a manager at MCC — suggests that Westmark will have much involvement in running acquired companies.

Despite the differences between a holding company and a research laboratory, Admiral Inman's two endeavors raise some of the same questions in the minds of critics. Those from the field of economic development wonder whether the MCC model is a good way to use taxpayer money in order to foster business and enhance the prosperity of communities.

Other questions come from academics studying the effects of the military budget on the American economy and on civilian research and development. These questions take on a special timeliness as the semiconductor industry gears up its own research consortium, Sematech, an effort also likely to receive Defense Department funding.

Lloyd J. Dumas, professor of political economy and economics at the University of Texas-Dallas and author of *The Overburdened Economy*, notes that many electronics companies are shutting down their consumer goods operations to manufacture only military hardware and weapons. Texas Instruments, for example, no longer sells watches and has moved away from personal computers. At bankrupt LTV, the Dallas-based conglomerate and steel maker, Dumas notes wryly that only the defense manufacturing sector of the firm was still making money — "because the military doesn't have to be efficient."

Admiral Bobby Ray Inman, of course, doesn't have to worry about these issues any longer. Westmark can help rationalize the U.S. economy — and earn a pretty profit — even if U.S. companies only sell to the Pentagon and only Japanese investors buy shares. □

# POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE

✓ **SECRETARY OF STATE** Jack Rains publicly kicked off his Voter 88 registration drive and what some suspect is also the beginning of his campaign to become governor in 1990. After a Dixieland jazz band had warmed up a crowd of several hundred guests in the Senate Chamber January 13, Rains told the crowd that Texas receives only \$1.00 in federal services and contracts for each \$1.59 paid in federal taxes. He suggested that higher voter turnout will result in more federal money spent here. "Not since reconstruction has Texas been so disadvantaged by federal policy," Rains said. He added that it was easier to make a case for "sending aid to Yankees" when oil was selling for \$35 a barrel. Rains's message, minus the Yankee-bashing, will be heard around the state on commercial radio stations as public service announcements.

But the usually friendly Rains bristled when a reporter asked about his political future and the political advantage of a high visibility voter registration campaign. "My job as Secretary of State is to run a registration campaign," Rains said. "If you've got suggestions on a better way to do it, I'd welcome them." Rains insisted that the registration campaign is a bipartisan effort to increase voting rolls in Texas. "I even brought Slagle and Strake together and I have a photographer here to prove it," Rains said. Both State Democratic party chairman Bob Slagle and his Republican counterpart George Strake were present for the Voter 88 rally.

Asked why the campaign was not directed at state offices, particularly the Department of Public Safety drivers license offices where new residents and address changes are registered, Rains said that there are not state funds available. "And the DPS," he said, "didn't want it. They testified against the bill."

"That's not true," Rep. Ernestine Glossbrenner, D-Alice, told the *Observer*. Glossbrenner chaired the House Elections Committee and supported a bill to provide voter registration in state offices. "The DPS was opposed to the language in the bill. When we changed it to make it [registration at DPS offices] permissible rather than mandatory," Glossbrenner said, "they dropped their opposition and lowered their fiscal note [the projected cost associated with a piece of legislation] to zero."

According to one public interest lobbyist, the figures Rains projected for printing and postage on House Bill 2418, the voter registration bill promoted by Glossbrenner, were set so high that they discouraged legislative support. The bill reported out of the election committee by a straight 5-4



Jack Rains

LOUIS DUBOSE

partisan vote. "I was disturbed to see the Republican members of the committee looking to the secretary of state's representatives for direction on voting in committee hearings," Glossbrenner said. The current Voter 88 campaign is an extra-governmental program underwritten by corporate donations.

✓ **LOYD DOGGETT SCORED** an early victory in his race for a seat on the state Supreme Court when he persuaded former Vernon Congressman Jack Hightower to move his race to another court seat and avoid a divisive primary fight. Hightower has been campaigning since the spring for the court seat vacated by Justice Ted Z. Robertson, who is running for the chief justice position abandoned by John Hill. Some observers credit Attorney General Jim Mattox for bringing Hightower and Doggett together. With Democratic Party chairman Bob Slagle away in Sherman, the two candidates met to resolve their differences. "They had a face-to-face standoff and Hightower blinked," was how one party activist described it. Though Hightower has a statewide staff and has been in the campaign for months, some observers consider Doggett a stronger candidate. Doggett, the former state senator from Austin, is a plaintiffs' attorney with a pro-consumer record in the Senate. It is assumed that he will draw strong financial support from plaintiffs' attorneys who perceive the Republican interest in the court as a continuation of the tort reform war fought in the last legislative session.

Gov. Bill Clements demonstrated such thinking when he publicly attacked the court for its failure to consider the effects of its

decisions on businesses in Texas. The court has a reputation among some in the business community as being pro-plaintiff/pro-consumer. Hightower will help the Democrats by providing what is perceived as a business conservative for the court. He faces no primary opponent but will run against Barbara Culver, a Republican district judge appointed by Clements this month to replace Justice Robert Campbell, whose unexpected resignation touched off the musical chairs between Democrats. One writer who follows the judiciary suggested that Culver is a less conservative candidate than Hightower and might appeal to some liberal Democratic voters. In the Democratic primary Doggett will face Judge Martha Anthony, described by *Austin American Statesman* political writer Dave McNeely as "a Houston district judge elected as a Republican . . . ranked lowest among Houston district judges in bar association polls."

✓ **DOGGETT'S** entering the court race will probably renew speculation on who will line up to replace Attorney General Jim Mattox if Mattox indeed runs for governor. Liberals fear a fratricidal race between Dallas Congressman John Bryant and Houston State Senator Craig Washington. Neither have run in statewide races and both have expressed their interest in the job.

✓ **SYNDICATED COLUMNISTS** Rowland Evans and Robert Novak are betting on the People's Lawyer to win the governor's race. In a recent column they described Mattox as "combative and populist," representing "the new left-leaning face of Texas Democrats . . . far ahead in the early going for the 1990 nomination for governor." The two columnists have Mattox leaning toward Sen. Paul Simon: "He hints that he and his fellow populist, Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower might endorse together — maybe for Simon." Evans and Novak had Mattox insisting that Al Gore's Texas backers won't be able to do it for the Tennessee Senator here. The AG sees Gore as unelectable but he showed up at a Gore endorsement gathering in the Lieutenant Governor's conference room at the Capitol. Mattox spoke with Gore, who had just received the public endorsement of former Governor Dolph Briscoe and Dallas financier Jess Hay. The book on Mattox is that he rarely misses a political gathering of more than half a dozen and seems to thrive on press-the-flesh and look'em-in-the-eye campaigning. The Attorney General usually stakes out the door to catch them coming and going. Like Elvis, the man is everywhere.

✓ **ON THE GORE** candidacy, *Dallas Times Herald* columnist Molly Ivins finds herself in an unusual position. That is, in agreement with the Attorney General. Ivins describes the recent outbreak of Gore endorsements (Gore Outs) as an opportunity for Southern pols to avoid choosing one of the real contenders and risking offending a winner. Ivins questions the wisdom of backing Gore: "Since the whole purpose of this misbegotten Southern primary is to increase the influence of the South in national politics, it is not the brightest thing we've ever done to go backing a guy who has no shot just because he is a Southerner. I guarantee you Gore has nothing else going for him. Nothing."

✓ **ANNOUNCED IN AUSTIN** by Jess Hay, former Gov. Dolph Briscoe, and 60 other conservative Democrats, Gore did nothing to prove Ivins wrong. In the course of a 45-minute press conference, the Tennessee Senator said nothing of substance. At times, he deferred to Hay who, when asked by reporters what issues led him to endorse Gore, responded that issues weren't that important. "Tone," Hay said, "is what wins elections. Not issues." Hay went on to discuss how he liked Gore's tone.

✓ **IN THE BOWELS** of the Capitol, to political observers seated around formica cafeteria tables, labor lobbyist Dee Simpson is describing the packaging of Al Gore as "a fraud." "Al Gore is the most liberal of the whole bunch," Simpson said. "Check his COPE ratings, look at his voting record; to call him conservative is outrageous, a fraud." A quick glance at your *Almanac of American Politics* will prove Simpson right. Labor still seems to be leaning toward Gov. Michael Dukakis, whose Texas campaign appears to be recovering from the infighting that began when Tom Cosgrove, a Northeasterner, clashed with the local staff soon after his arrival here.

✓ **THE REPUBLICAN** opera boffo continues. According to one angry parent in Houston, her son, out of high school for the Christmas break, was hired by Southern Political Consulting and put to work signing voters' names to a Pete du Pont petition. He was also provided beer while he worked. And *Houston Chronicle* reporter Anne Marie Kilday told one Austin TV reporter that she was surprised to find her father's name on a du Pont petition. "I looked at the petition and I knew that Daddy wouldn't have signed a petition for Pete du Pont," Kilday said. "Then I remembered that Daddy has been dead for four years."

✓ **POLITICAL CARTOONISTS** and columnists are already jumping on the Beau Boulter for Senate campaign, and it hasn't even begun. Boulter, a Republican Congressman from Amarillo, recently had let it be known that many of his votes in Congress were inspired by communication with God. If that's where Boulter got the



Al Gore

LOUIS DUBOSE

word to run against Bentsen, he must not have been listening carefully. Democrats are elated, hoping that Boulter will encourage Bentsen to spend some money campaigning. Austin CPA Mary Nell Mathis, who two years ago ran against Cong. Larry Combest, another Panhandle Republican, said that the absence of Boulter — and God — is going to affect the performance of Combest. "Poor Larry," Mathis said, "without Boulter, how is he going to know how to vote?"

✓ **GOD IN AMARILLO** is coming into focus as an early theme in the Republican Senatorial primary. Milton Fox, the 61-year-old former state representative who is challenging Boulter for the right to run against Bentsen, is also raising the religious issue. In an interview with Joe Cutbirth of the *Wichita Falls Times* he attacked the Amarillo Congressman for his ties to the "so-called religious right," and cited a Boulter fundraiser where the unctuous Illinois Congressman Henry Hyde was the featured speaker. Fox said that in 14 years in the legislature, every vote he cast on related issues was probably "in the vein of what they wanted." But he never considered himself part of the right-to-life movement. "I'm not willing to take their blood oath," Fox said.

"I'm a Presbyterian, the kind who goes into the closet [to pray]," Fox said. "It may be a problem for Beau when he indicates that he gets the burning bush voice of God," he said of Boulter. "If that's his indication, it could be a problem for his candidacy." Boulter fired back that he was not quite that holy. "I have never heard a voice from

God or anything like that," Boulter said. But he did want to let it be known that he remains holier than his opponent. "If a person makes fun of a person who prays, that indicates they don't pray," Boulter said. Amen.

✓ **STATE SENATOR** Bill Sarpalius, one of three Panhandle Democrats running for the seat Boulter will vacate, was attacked in an Amarillo nightclub where he was celebrating his 40th birthday. On the dance floor of the Caravan Club, an assailant approached Sarpalius from behind, tapped him on the shoulder, then hit him in the mouth, knocking the Senator to the floor. He then kicked Sarpalius in the face. Sarpalius underwent surgery and an aide announced that the Senator has no intention to withdraw from the race, though his jaw has been wired shut. When he arrived at Northwest Texas Hospital in Amarillo, Sarpalius demanded that he be given a test of alcohol content in his blood. According to the *Dallas Morning News* a hospital employee confirmed that there was absolutely zero alcohol content in the Senator's blood. The Northwest Texas Hospital in Amarillo does not administer IQ tests.

✓ **A CONSERVATIVE** Democrat with designs on the Attorney General's office is state Rep. Dan Morales of San Antonio. Morales, a 32-year-old attorney, caught the attention of the public when he presided over the tax and appropriations debate in the House during the final hours of the last legislative session. Morales stepped in when it became evident that Rep. Stan Schlueter, who had the run of the show on fiscal matters for the duration of the session, didn't have the nerve to push the tax package.

Morales filed a financial statement with the secretary of state showing that between July 1 and Dec. 31, he had received \$75,000 in contributions, mostly from big givers in San Antonio and several political action committees. He has no opponent in his House race and will use his money to travel in the state and try to reach a final decision on the attorney general race.

### Clarification

An item in Political Intelligence entitled "Mattox Speaks" (*TO*, 12/18/87) quoted Jesse Trevino, who was identified as a "political player in the Valley." Mr. Trevino is a Harlingen insurance agency owner and a long-time Democratic party activist. Some readers have confused our source with another Jesse Trevino, an Austin-based newspaper columnist who writes on politics and issues of concern to Mexican Americans. Mr. Trevino, the columnist, wishes our readers to know that he does not necessarily share the opinions expressed in the *Observer* by Jesse Trevino, the activist.

✓ **WHEN SENATOR** Paul Simon breezed into Austin December 27, he intended to impress a select audience of Austin liberals with his dovish stance on the arms race. But the Austin newspaper the next day had him threatening Western Europe with nuclear weapons.

Simon had been presented with a difficult question from the audience after his speech: "Can you conceive of any situation in which you would justify the use of nuclear arms?"

The candidate paused, then began, "It is very hard. . . . And I don't think . . . I think the only way that it would be used, whether it's Paul Simon or anyone else sitting in the White House, is if there were a direct assault by conventional forces of the Soviet Union in Western Europe. I think that at that point there would be the danger of using nuclear warheads."

Simon was quick to add that such an assault was, in his view, extremely unlikely, and that the nuclear threat is only one more reason to emphasize "the tools of diplomacy" to a greater extent than the Reagan administration has.

In contrast to his invoking the spectre of using nuclear weapons in Western Europe, Simon's speech (to about 100 members of the Austin Council on Foreign Affairs) was a plea for peace and de-escalation of the arms race.

Simon began his speech by talking about "this nuclear cloud that hangs over all of us." "We have the ability in a matter of hours to create a world where never again will the laugh of a child be heard, never again will a blade of grass grow," he said. Drawing his only interruption for applause, Simon said the first thing he would do upon moving into the White House would be to tell the Soviet Union, "If you will stop all nuclear warhead testing, we will stop all nuclear warhead testing."

Simon complained that "defense policy leads foreign policy today rather than the other way around." He said the Reagan administration has been "extremely short-sighted" in Central America and he criticized the Administration's mining of Nicaraguan harbors. "What if one of those mines had sunk a Soviet ship? . . . And before

long, that . . . that thing that none of us can even comprehend might have happened."

"We are preoccupied with Nicaragua, with three million people," said Simon. "Right next to us is Mexico, with 83 to 85 million people." While not intending to suggest that Nicaragua is unimportant, the candidate said, "We are spending at least 10 to 20 times as much attention on Nicaragua as we are on Mexico."

Simon repeatedly described his ideal foreign policy as one that is based on "caring much more." He invoked, as he often does, Hubert Humphrey as an example of a Democrat who cared about Latin America. Simon spoke of redirecting money from the more than \$300 billion currently spent on the military. "If we could spend ten percent of that or five percent of that on lifting the lot of people in the most depressed nations in the world, what a vastly finer world we'd be living in," he said.

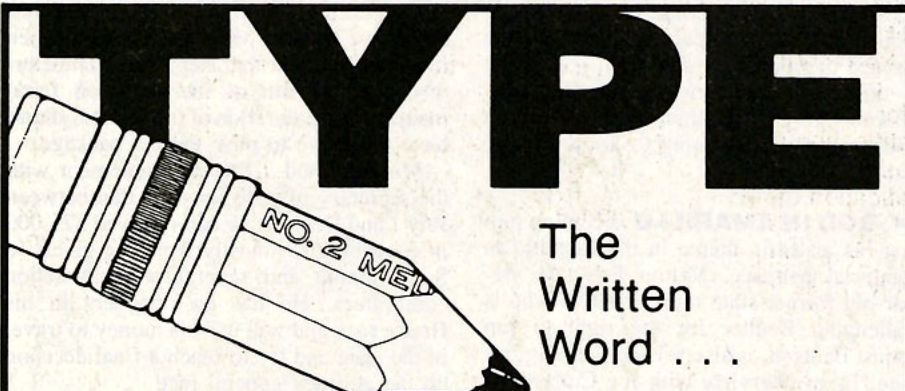
✓ **JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT**

it was safe to say *chile con queso*, they're back. Lou Zaske and those glib English Firsters are after the Governor and others who oppose making English the official language. "They are out of step and they have been duped," Zaske said at a Capitol press conference. An Official English newsletter assured those concerned about the movement that their intent was not to influence the choice of language in private conversations or in the privacy of the home. Official English spokesperson Roy Ontiveros predicted that 85 percent of the Republicans voting in the Texas primary will endorse the official language proposition on the Republican ballot. He described it as an important issue in the 1988 election. □

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# HOW TO CELEBRATE THE CONSTITUTION

Ira Glasser

American Civil Liberties Union  
Executive Director's Speech  
ACLU Biennial Conference  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Thursday, June 18, 1987

Two-hundred years ago, the founders of this country brought forth a remarkable, if flawed, document. The Constitution, with the Bill of Rights added to it, established an unprecedented legal and political framework for the protection of liberty and democracy. From Montesquieu, it took the structural idea of separation of powers, establishing a legislature to make the laws, an executive branch to implement them and an independent judiciary to check them both and to settle disputes involving interpretations of the law.

From the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment, it took the substantive principles of individual liberty and codified those principles in the Bill of Rights. Understanding that even a majoritarian democracy required strict legal limits on governmental power, the founders established such limits by adding the first ten amendments to the fledgling Constitution.

It is worth remembering, of course, that even this bright beginning required political struggle. The Bill of Rights was not part of the Constitution as it was drafted on September 17, 1787. Nor was it part of the Constitution submitted to the 13 states for ratification. Rather, it was extracted as the price of ratification after intense political struggle and because the anti-Federalists had enough votes to block ratification of the unamended Constitution.

So to begin with, when we celebrate the Constitution as we know it today, we celebrate not only those who labored and debated during the summer of 1787, but also those who found their product wanting, and during the months following the summer of 1787, fought to improve it. At its birth, therefore, the Constitution was not only the product of learned debate among delegates to the Constitutional Convention, but also of those whose vision of liberty was more insistent, and who were prepared to fight for that vision, even if it meant rejecting the Convention's work.

But even with the Bill of Rights added to it, the Constitution was a deeply flawed document. It legitimized slavery and racial discrimination; indeed, that legitimization was the price of the new federal system. Slavery was this country's original sin: it infected the Constitution at its conception. And for the first 78 years of the Bicentennial we celebrate today, the Constitution protected racial slavery and legalized racial discrimination. Certainly, it is not *that* Constitution we celebrate today.

The Constitution we celebrate today — a document that guarantees equality before the law — required years of struggle and a bloody civil war before additional

amendments were passed, intended to bring blacks within the Constitution and to apply the Bill of Rights to state and local government.

But even after the Civil War amendments were passed, liberty and equality did not follow automatically or easily from the text. Within a short period of time, the hopes and aspirations of black people were snuffed out, white hegemony was restored, and the promise of the 14th and 15th Amendments were almost completely frustrated.

It would take another century before the struggles of black people began even minimally to redeem the promise of the Civil War amendments. During that time, racial discrimination became deeply imbedded in our laws, our political institutions and our culture. Racial violence was common, and black people, especially and tragically young black people, learned to limit their aspirations. Most whites accepted this, and nearly all whites benefitted from it. And until 1954, the United States Supreme Court legitimized it.

For 165 years of the Bicentennial we celebrate today, the Constitution permitted racial discrimination and legitimized the suffocation of black hopes for equal opportunity. Certainly, it is not *that* Constitution we celebrate today.

What we celebrate today is not only the paper on which our rights were written, but also the struggles of those who fought, and died, to make those rights a reality, to bring those paper rights to life.

We celebrate Frederick Douglass, who told a white audience on July 5, 1852:

The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers is shared by you, not me. The sunlight that brought light and healing to you has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth of July is *yours*, not *mine*. You may rejoice, I must mourn.

We celebrate Jackie Robinson, who stood alone in 1947 and broke the racial barrier to what had cynically been called "the national pastime." And we celebrate Branch Rickey, a white man in a position of authority, who helped him.

We celebrate Oliver Brown, who a few years later bravely walked his daughter Linda to their neighborhood school, which was by law limited to white children.

We celebrate Rosa Parks, who sat down on a Montgomery bus, and Martin Luther King, Jr., who stood up to finish what she began.

We celebrate the children at Central High School in Little Rock, and Medgar Evers, and Viola Liuzzo and the three young men whose bodies ended up in a Mississippi dam in the summer of '64.

(to be continued)

# The Return of Joe Bob Briggs

**JOE BOB GOES TO THE DRIVE-IN**

By Joe Bob Briggs

New York: Delacorte Press  
1987, 326 pages, \$8.95 (paper)

**Continued from Cover**

wrong ox. In a stinging parody of both the "We Are the World" rock-star charity campaign and united Negro College Fund, he used the phrase "stupid Negroes" in the lyric of a scurrilous pseudo-song, "We Are the Weird." (He also remarked a couple of times on the "stupid white people" running amok in that week's movie, but nobody complained about that. So it goes.) On the vomit meter, it was one of Joe Bob's more effective performances though hardly out of the ordinary. But a black DJ and a black politician got together, organized a crowd to march on the *Herald*, and demanded the end of Joe Bob. The editors unceremoniously capitulated, immediately, and the column was killed — without so much as a phone call to John Bloom, who was out of town at the time, but who now had, in effect, been publicly branded as a racist by his own newspaper and its editors.

If Bloom was "guilty" of anything, it was of dropping his own guard — despite the long leash the paper had given him, his instincts should have told him that the offending column was skating on very thin public ice. Backed into a corner by his editors' "dismissal" of Joe Bob, Bloom resigned. Not content to make an apology for any misunderstanding, the paper further reacted to Bloom's resignation by attempting to make him a nonperson. They refused to print his farewell column (written under his own byline), and letters to the editor, instead of being published, received smarmy personal replies in return. (I know, because I got one; an editor wrote to tell me that although *he and I* were intelligent enough to understand Joe Bob's satire, the great unwashed out there were of course too stupid, etc. This was exactly the sort of arrogant and fundamentally class-bound bias

that Joe Bob's columns were so effective at pillorying.) Having killed Joe Bob in Dallas, the paper attempted to pressure other papers in syndication to kill the column; and when this book collection was under consideration, the *Times Herald* attempted to stop its publication unless (get this) Bloom agreed not to ridicule the paper, and *they* got to pick the columns. Charming bunch of guys.

**F**OR THEIR PART, Texas liberals, such as they are, sat on their hands. Writers and editors sniffed about the limits of satire (i.e., don't offend *me*); and this journal, for example ("the tyrant's foe, the people's friend"), watched Bloom get drummed out of polite society with nary a whimper of empathy. *Texas Monthly*, in its review of this book, allowed as how "we" should have seen disaster coming and headed Bloom off before he hurt himself. Well, folks, they come for Joe Bob on one day, Larry Flynt the next; now Allen Ginsberg can't be heard on the radio. But hell, don't worry — those guys just went *too far*. We know our place; we're *responsible* journalists.

And what was all the fuss about? Joe Bob's collected reviews turn out to be much as they seemed upon first reading: fresh and funny satirical pieces, in the voice of a character so tellingly pig-headed that he makes Archie Bunker seem like Andy Rooney, and blows Molly Ivins's comforting Texan good ol' boys off the map. Joe Bob faces head-on what most newspaper "humor" columnists politely ignore: there's a whole social and cultural world out there, beyond and below upper-middle-class suburbia, and it does not look like anything that is ordinarily allowed in the pages of the "family" newspapers. By inventing Joe Bob and giving him an utterly convincing voice, John Bloom was liberating a few column-inches of a daily newspaper for a view of the world that newspapers — through their editorials and op-ed pages, through their food columns and fashion sections, through their "lifestyle" and gossip pages, through their relentlessly exclusionary coverage of the "prominent" and their mouthpieces — are *designed* to

make invisible, and inaudible. It may not have seemed like much at the time, but the importance of Bloom's success can be gauged by the final frenzy of the effort to suppress it.

First, there were the films themselves. Movies like *The Grim Reaper*, *Basket Case*, and *Screwballs* are utterly forgettable, and yet they keep getting churned out by filmmakers for two reasons: 1) they're cheap to make and 2) they have a ready audience. I'd venture to guess that not one in ten of the people who read Joe Bob's reviews had seen the "films" in question. But Joe Bob was the ultimate connoisseur of great "bad" movies, and the sweetest pleasure of these films is mulling over just how atrocious they are. Joe Bob allowed his readers this vicarious entertainment, *without even having to endure the movies themselves*. Seemed like a good deal to me: while I have no taste for films like *The Evil Dead* or *Freddy the 13th* or whatever (when it comes to dark corridors and graveyards, even on celluloid, I'm basically a pure-dee coward), I know people who get a big kick out of them, who actually *like* being scared out of their wits, and guess what: **THESE PEOPLE ARE NOT AX MURDERERS**. They even enjoy talking about movies and getting a good laugh out of them. And Joe Bob knows this territory cold.

But a whole lot of people who never sully themselves with such things (the same people who wouldn't be caught dead at McDonald's) believe that the people who go to such movies are *not like you and me*. Janet Maslin made this argument in *The New York Times* and then refused to appear with Joe Bob to discuss the matter if she couldn't have prior warning of anything he might say. "Sophisticated" viewers, who should know better, seem to think that the people who go to these movies confuse them with "real life," and are thereby corrupted by them. The truth is, as a film writer I have seen enough of these films to know that their audiences are probably more aware of the "illusions" of cinema than the average PBS groupie schmoozing over the latest dreary peasant epic from Paris. That's why they go to the movies, and for the same reason they ride roller coasters; because it's fun.

*Michael King writes regularly on books and films for the Observer. He lives in Houston.*

But the film reviews, funny as they were, soon became simply the occasion for recounting the continuing exploits of Joe Bob and friends, and they're all here: Rhett Beavers, Wanda Bodine, Cherry Dilday, Chubb Fricke, and the inimitable Chloris ("Ugly on a Stick"). Rhett runs afoul of Arkansas Polio Weed and the law, Joe Bob and Wanda drive the Toronado to the Cannes Film Festival, Joe Bob gets religion in New Orleans, Joe Bob attempts to save the standards of the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders for posterity . . . and still manages to perform delicate chopsocky on the likes of Bo Derek, Arnold Schwarzenegger, even John Cassavetes. Bloom managed to do what most writers would give their eye teeth for: he created a *voice*, and a world for that voice to live in.

It's no wonder he didn't want to give up Joe Bob without a fight. Bloom may also have been devoured by his own character; his own reputation as a writer pales by comparison, and he now makes personal appearances as Joe Bob, although he's much too old and too sober-looking for the job. I caught him on The Movie Channel a couple of months ago, introducing some lifeless gangster picture and complaining that the Channel's producers wouldn't let him show *The Evil Dead*, "the best spam-in-a-cabin movie ever made": "We know these movies are SICK AND DISGUSTING. WE LIKE 'EM!" In his Glen Campbell pseudo-country get-up, Bloom looked lost. He's even been embalmed by Calvin Trillin in *The New Yorker*. On the other hand, the loyal fans are still out there: his newsletter, *We Are Still the Weird*, just passed its Fifth ("Dacron") anniversary edition, and *The Dallas Observer* and a couple of dozen other brave newspapers out there still run the column. More power to 'em. They still operate by Joe Bob's first law of American journalism: "In Communist Russia the government uses the newspapers to print lies. In America, we get to make up our own lies."

Houston, where I live, is cursed with two of the most boring newspapers in America, which is saying a good deal. Either rag would be greatly improved by ripping out its editorial and op-ed pages and replacing them with the musings of Joe Bob, beside regular snaps of Sybil Danning. Instead, we get the lunatic ravings of fanatics like Pat Buchanan, George Will, William Buckley, James Kilpatrick . . . you know, *responsible* journalists. *Serious* men. One day, with a little bit of luck and the grace of some god with a sense of humor, HEADS WILL ROLL!

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# Shrake on Foreign Affairs

BY RICHARD RYAN

## NIGHT NEVER FALLS

By Bud Shrake

New York: Random House, 1987  
263 pages, \$17.95

**W**HEN I PLUCKED Austinite Bud Shrake's new novel, *Night Never Falls*, from the *Observer's* stack of books received, the first things that caught my eye were the blurbs on the dust jacket. "A swash-buckling adventure yarn," burps Larry L. King. "The best thing to come out of Texas since chili," hoots Dennis Hopper. "Enough in it to fill three operas and six rodeos," croons Willie Nelson. "Shrake can write a story for me any time," harumphs Roy Blount. A spiffy band of admirers, to be sure, but this smelled suspiciously of a late night tequila fest, with Shrake's amigos drawing woosily into some PR-man's tape recorder.

As it turns out, for all their slobbery, back-slapping excess, the blurbs fit well with the campy nonchalance of the novel itself. Shrake, a former sportswriter and foreign correspondent for the *Dallas Morning News* and author of several novels and screenplays, has used his journalistic agility to slap out a funky little bloop single of a novel — if it doesn't drive in any runs at least it should keep 'em happy in the bleachers.

Shrake's tale relates the adventures of one Harry Sparrow, a columnist for the *Paris Dispatch*, an apocryphal English-language newspaper circulated in post-War Europe. The novel opens in 1954, as Sparrow, hungry for a little Pulitzer action, departs merry old England for a jaunty bit of war reportage in Vietnam, still under French domination. "Our man Sparrow" — the novel is a cocktail of film noir and beau geste clichés — gets himself smuggled into Dien Bien Phu, the valley in northern Vietnam where the French colonials are staging a valiant (if ill-advised) last stand against the communist hordes. While bodies pile up around him, Harry falls in love with a French nurse, who, in turn, has a long-standing attachment to a foreign legionnaire, a mercenary who has signed on to fight to the death at this last outpost of French colonialism. The legionnaire, for his part,

*Richard Ryan, the Observer's Washington correspondent, occasionally swipes books from the Observer mailroom.*

is in reality a former SS officer, a Nietzsche-inspired assassin pardoned by the French at the end of World War II in return for his entrance into their foreign forces. Sparrow, the reporter, despises Selchauhansen, the Nazi, but rescues him from a burning aircraft for the sake of Claudette, the nurse. Selchauhansen then makes Sparrow an honorary legionnaire, and plays allegorical chess games with him, while shells explode overhead and the German expounds on his transcendental fascism. Dien Bien Phu eventually falls, Selchauhansen conveniently disappears in the final conflagration, and Sparrow and Claudette escape to Thailand with the help of Ho Chi Minh, a big fan of Harry's newspaper column. Beginning to get a feel for it?

Anyway, Sparrow and Claudette marry and move to England, but Claudette hates Harry's fixation on golf, and runs off to Paris. Selchauhansen, who as it turns out is not dead, (but you've already guessed that) reappears in Algeria, which has begun to revolt against — that's right — French colonialism. Claudette goes to Algeria to meet her German hunk, and is kidnapped. Harry goes to Algeria to win back his French squeeze and gets caught up in more of the death throes of imperial capitalism. Now I know you're getting the feel of it.

Happily, *Night Never Falls* has no pretensions to literary greatness. It does, however, carry itself with a certain neo-pulp charm, coming on like a good-natured vulgarization of the Graham Greene novels — *The Quiet American* and *The Honorary Consul* — that obviously inspired it. In the Greene tradition, Shrake cuts the unwashed masses plenty of slack — the brutality of the Vietnamese communists and the Algerian nationalists is treated as a predictable response to the humiliations of European domination. But where Greene, at least in his better novels, penetrates the veneer of exoticism into the psychic reality of oppression, Shrake merely uses his foreign backdrops and Third World rebels to provide a little color for Caucasian romance. ("Do you actually know Chairman Ho?" a French officer asks Harry when the Viet Minh come to spirit the popular reporter out of the killing zone. "I knew him a little in Paris," responds Harry. "He used to wait on my table at the Brasserie Lipp. I was a hell of a tipper.")

Besides his rather patronizing attitude

towards swarthy revolutionaries, Sparrow also maintains an annoying refusal to take sides in any of the conflicts into which he's thrown. Greene's novels gather critical momentum at that point in their trajectory when the reader understands that Greene's heroes, in the face of reservations and doubt, conclude that communism is the only logical political position left to embrace. Harry Sparrow never makes such a blind leap of faith. Indeed the only character with any well-defined political ideas is Selchauhanen, who injects into his ferocious anti-communism a good deal more passion than Harry spares for his liberal agnosticism. Shrake's world view, if it merits such a high-flown name, balances the degrading crimes of colonialism against the intellectual savagery of communism and rejects them both out of hand. Shrake compromises his novel by refusing to deal with the big political questions he creates. Instead, we get a paragon of libertarian individualism, Harry Sparrow, a shiny pinball to bounce off ambiguous bumpers, a straight-up Joe stepping gingerly over the mud puddles of contemporary history.

Ah well. Perhaps it's best to read *Night Never Falls* as a send-up of the international adventure genre: in any case, it's not so much a novel as a novelization in search of a movie. The action scenes, which Shrake handles well, keep things moving along at a Technicolor clip. The best thing you can say about the book is that it would probably have made a fairly decent '50s vintage Hitchcock flick, with Alan Ladd as Sparrow, Cyd Charise as Claudette, and Max Von Sydow as the Nazi.

Shrake's work does, however, hold darker implications for the post-McMurtry Texas novel. (Naturally, a McMurtry blurb appears on the dust-jacket of *Night Never Falls*.) The tongue-in-cheek adventure story got a rather thorough overhaul in the '70s with gonzo musclemen like Jim Harrison and Tom McGuane giving the traditional formulas a funky paisley languor, and old timers like John McDonald coming along for the ride. You'd have thought after all those sun-stoned Travis McGee novels the whole idea of genre fiction would have burnt itself out. Then along comes Larry McMurtry with *Lonesome Dove*, a neo-genre masterpiece, a big, scaly epic of a novel that stalked the literary landscape like a prehistoric monster, crushing Toyotas under foot. I'd say McMurtry earned his Pulitzer the hard way, but I hope Texas writers harbor no illusions about the future of old-fashioned linear novels. Unless, that is, they want to follow Shrake's lead, and crank out an existential comic book in between film scripts. □

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# The Prison Wars

BY DAVE DENISON

**TEXAS PRISONS:  
The Walls Came Tumbling Down**  
By Steve J. Martin  
and Sheldon Ekland-Olson  
Austin: Texas Monthly Press  
1987, 289 pages, \$21.95

**F**OR TWO LONG DECADES, Texas officials fought on the losing side of a war over the state's prison system. An unbroken line of governors, attorneys general, and prison administrators stubbornly resisted all attempts by a small group of prisoners and their attorneys, and then by a federal judge, to make the Texas Department of Corrections something other than a repressive institution immune to outside scrutiny. When the complete history of the state's resistance is laid out in one telling, as it is in *Texas Prisons*, it makes for an astounding tale of bad government. To think of the years spent, and the money, and the innumerable hours in court. For what purpose? To maintain an ill-conceived campaign to stave off the kind of changes that any state leader with open eyes and foresight could have seen were inevitable. This is a case of governmental malpractice we've got here.

Anyone who reads a newspaper is probably aware of the landmark *Ruiz v. Estelle* prison suit, and of Judge William Wayne Justice's ruling for the prisoners, and of the effect it had on the Department of Corrections. The case is as immediate as recent newspaper stories about the constant opening and closing of the TDC doors, as the system tries to stay within court-mandated population levels. *Texas Prisons* goes back to the very beginning to tell the story of how our prisons got to the point they're at today. From the first 225-cell prison opened in Huntsville in 1849, through the swelling of the system from 4,000 prisoners in 1909 to 15,000 in 1972 and through the "most massive prisoners' rights suit in the history of American jurisprudence," we see the evolution of Texas prisons. And we see how slowly things change in what former prison board member Harry Whittington says in his foreword is "probably the least understood public institution in Texas."

The early history is the most readable part of the book. There is enough that the modern reader can recognize: the overcrowding problem and the temporary halts in admissions, the experiment with private enterprise

prisons, the stories of inmate and guard brutality. The first inmates were locked up in Huntsville just 15 years before slavery was abolished by the Thirteenth Amendment. But as the authors note well, prisoners were not included in the amendment's protections. A court case in 1871 declared that because a criminal had forfeited the right to liberty he became "for the time being a slave of the State." The prisoner was, in the court's phrase, "civiliter mortuus," or as we might say today, a dead man.

Texas prisons were set up from the start to be financially self-sufficient, thus the large agricultural function of the early prisons. In time, the range of prison industries was expanded so that by the 1960s inmates were at work in factories making garments, soaps and detergents, brushes and mattresses, and in repair and retreading plants. The prison system went through periods of neglect and reform, but it emerged from the 1950s with a reputation under the leadership of O.B. Ellis as one of the most efficient and productive prison systems in the country.

When Ellis died in 1961, George Beto became the new head of the TDC. "Because of the rapid progress the department had made since 1948," the authors write, "and the resulting credibility of Ellis and Beto, legislative and executive oversight diminished to a point where Beto ruled with little interference from outside forces." For a brief time Beto enjoyed a period of autonomy. But the winds were shifting in the 1960s. Across the nation the civil rights movement was stirring activists to challenge established power and institutions. The idea that prisoners had Constitutional rights began to take hold. And a few key rulings by the United States Supreme Court affirmed that indeed the due process protections and the proscriptions against cruel and unusual punishment were operative clauses of the Constitution.

The authors cast Frances Jalet as the central character in the drama about to unfold. Jalet (described perhaps a few too many times in the book as a "57-year-old volunteer female attorney") in 1967 moved to Texas to practice "poverty law." That year she took up a correspondence with an inmate named Fred Cruz. Cruz was a "writ writer" — one of those troublesome inmates who spent a good deal of his waking moments drawing up legal documents

alleging one wrong or another committed by the prison administration against the inmates. This was not an occupation that prison officials took lightly, but when Jalet decided to lend her legal expertise to Cruz's complaints they became seriously concerned. Jalet ran up against George Beto, who decided to make life difficult for her.

Beto tried to get Jalet in trouble with her superiors, according to testimony that emerged in Jalet's suit against Beto, and complained to her supervisor that she had "become a thorn" in his side. Then by 1971 he had had enough. He ruled that she would no longer be allowed to correspond with or visit any prisoner in any TDC unit. Her banishment did not last long but it was an unmistakable sign that Beto did not intend to watch passively as outsiders began to meddle in his prison system.

It was then that Beto made a serious tactical error. He decided to put all prisoners who had dealings with Jalet on the same hard labor squad. Those who would agree to sever ties to Jalet would find themselves with a much easier prison life. But most stayed on. What the director did not seem to realize at the time was that he had created "a writ-writers' consortium," as the authors put it. The segregated prisoners "spent countless hours during the eleven months of confinement improving their legal skills, strategizing and coordinating their efforts, and assisting one another in the drafting of petitions." It was this "consortium" that "thereafter produced virtually all the major reform litigation in the TDC." One of the writ-writing prisoners happened to be David Ruiz.

**R**UIZ FILED HIS petition in 1972, the same year W. J. Estelle replaced Beto as prison director. The pattern of "aggressive resistance" that Beto established was to become the pattern that governed the state's response throughout the long history of *Ruiz v. Estelle*.

In April of 1974 Judge William Wayne Justice of the United States District Court, Eastern District of Texas, consolidated the *Ruiz* suit with six other class-action lawsuits, placing almost every operational aspect of the prison system under litigation. With this consolidation, Justice had taken the first major step toward organizing the case "that would keep TDC under the superintendence of his court through at least two decades, five directors, four attorneys general, and four governors."

Meanwhile, Justice wasn't the only "outsider" taking an interest in what went on behind the prison walls. 1973 brought the formation of a new citizens' group led by Charlie and Pauline Sullivan that began to work with relatives of prisoners and began to push for legislative action on prison issues. Responding to evidence that serious problems within the Department of Corrections were caused by the existence of a "building tender" system, in which prison managers enlisted brutes from inside the



ALAN POGUE

### W. J. Estelle

prison to help keep order, the legislature prohibited further use of inmates to supervise other inmates. This might have been the most significant prison reform of the decade but for the fact that TDC, according to compelling evidence assembled in *Texas Prisons* and elsewhere, chose not to abide by the law.

Instead, prison officials and state leaders lashed out at the interfering lawyers and activists. Director Estelle blamed rising prison tensions on inmates with "revolutionary aims and goals," and complained of "writ writers and agitators." State Senator Walter "Mad Dog" Mengden was quoted in a Houston newspaper as referring to a citizens' committee led by Charlie Sullivan as the "most grotesque collection of radical activists ever put together under one roof."

And the state set about blasting away at Judge Justice. When Justice first consolidated the prisoners' petitions and ordered the United States Justice Department to investigate the prisoners' allegations, the reaction of Attorney General John Hill was to charge that the Judge was trying to conduct "a wide ranging investigation into the Texas prison system for which he could fashion precise remedies. Judge Justice seeks to abandon his role as a jurist hearing complaints of parties who appear before him, and becomes an active pursuer of the petitioner using the Justice Department as his sword and shield."

Hill's point man was Ed Idar, a seasoned attorney who became the Attorney General's lead counsel. It was under Idar's leadership (he first worked under Hill and then under Attorney General Mark White) that the state embarked upon the long series of delaying tactics and legal maneuverings. One of the first attempts was to challenge Justice's decision to involve the Justice Department in the case. The state's petition filed in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals objected to

allowing "the U.S. to rampage through the Texas prison system in the hope of finding unconstitutional activities." The petition said of Justice's actions, "a grosser misuse of judicial power cannot be imagined."

Idar's apparent view of Judge Justice as an adversary led to what the authors term "a stormy history" between them. We have as an example Idar's attempt to introduce a piece of uncontested evidence during the trial in 1979. When Justice expressed his displeasure, Idar responded, "I have gathered the impression from the beginning of the trial, quite frankly, Your Honor, that we have been adjudged guilty —." Which led to the following exchange:

*Justice:* Counsel, I'm going to hold you in contempt of court if you keep up in this vein, and I advise you to apologize to the court immediately.

*Idar:* Well sir, I did not intend to be in contempt of court. I simply am expressing my opinions as an attorney, and I feel that we have our First Amendment rights to respectfully address the court in this line.

*Justice:* I would suggest that you apologize to the court at this point.

*Idar:* I will state again, Your Honor, I did not intend to be in contempt of court.

*Justice:* I said I seek an apology.

*Idar:* In that event, sir, I do apologize then. The court has misconstrued my remarks.

It had been six years from the time Ruiz filed his petition until the case finally went to trial. The unfortunate thing for the state was that while its lawyers were delaying, conditions in the prison were getting worse. By the start of the trial there were nearly 25,000 prisoners locked up, 1,000 of whom were confined three to a cell. "The overcrowding issue, which had arisen while the six-year procedural battle was waged by the state, would become the preeminent issue in the suit, and more than any other issue provided the basis for broadscale

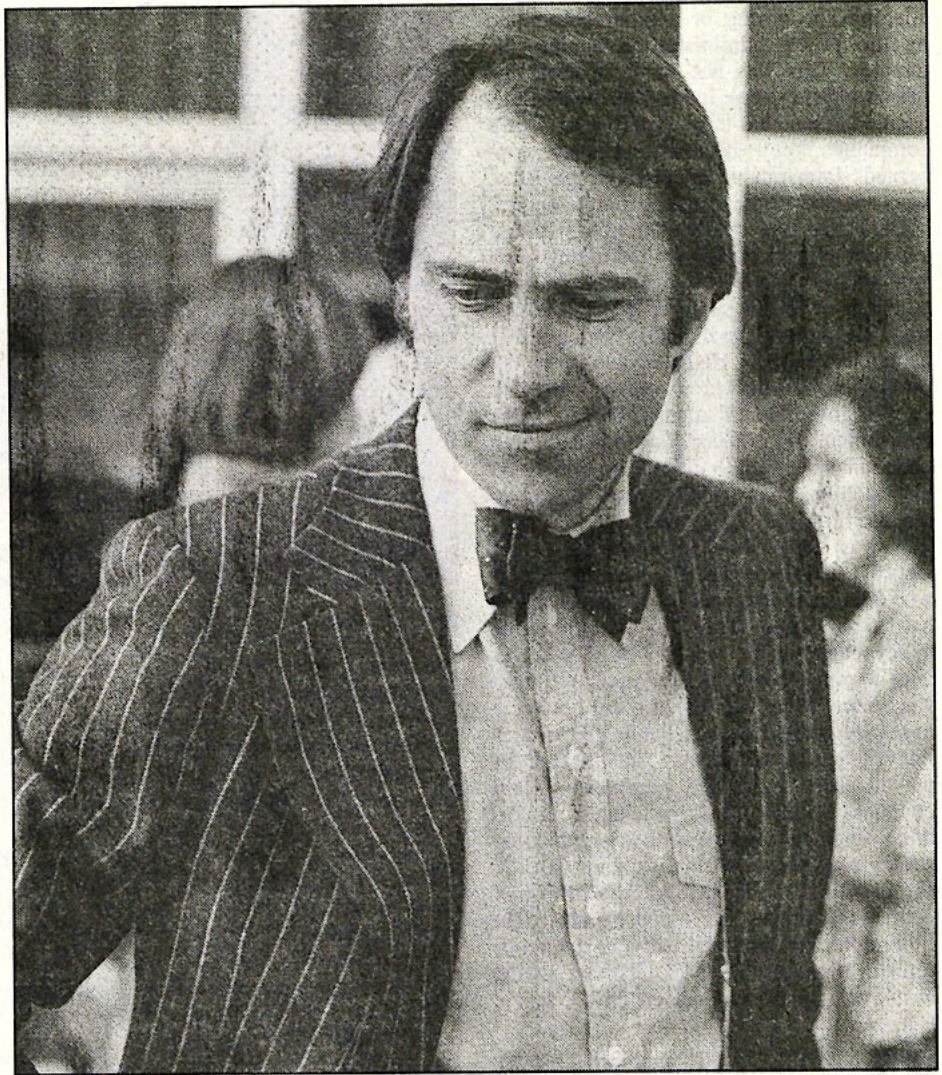
systemic relief to the TDC prisoners," according to the authors.

The trial came to a close in September of 1979, after 161 trial days and 349 witnesses. More than a year later, Justice issued his famous opinion, finding the prison system to be unconstitutional. He ordered an end to overcrowding and to the "unlawfully maintained building tender system," and mandated an increase in civilian guards and better health care and access to the courts.

For more than a year afterward, the authors say, Justice's order was met with "outright defiance" and "utter contempt" by prison officials. W. J. Estelle said the opinion "read like a cheap dime-store novel." And Attorney General Mark White's office immediately filed with the Fifth Circuit to have Justice's orders stayed. Next, White and the state prison board decided to hire outside lawyers to prepare the state's appeal. For a while, Pike Powers, White's close political buddy and the head of Fulbright and Jaworski's Austin office, led the appeal effort. Over a three-year period the state racked up \$2 million in fees to lawyers in this foredoomed effort.

This went on while White was the attorney general, while White and Bill Clements faced each other in the 1982 governor's race (arguing about who would be tougher on crime), and into White's term as governor. Estelle finally resigned in 1983, after 12 years as TDC director, and more and more information continued to seep out that damaged the state's argument that the prisons did not need sweeping changes. *Texas Prisons* takes us up to the present, but what one remembers at the closing is Mark White still sniping at Judge Justice and complaining about "country club prisons," not realizing apparently, even at the end, that he and the state of Texas had always been on the wrong side of history when it came to reforming a deeply troubled prison system.

**T**HERE ARE SOME peculiar things about this book. One cannot blame book publishers for packaging and marketing a book in an attractive way, but a strictly honest title would have been something like "Texas Prison Litigation: A Detailed Chronology." For it never really takes us inside *Texas prisons*, it takes us inside the courtroom and into the legal documents. This is certainly a reflection of Martin's hand in the project. (Martin is the lawyer, Ekland-Olson the sociologist.) At times the legalese becomes almost unbearable. You've got your consent orders and your protective orders, your claims and counterclaims, your *per curiam* decisions and your writs of *cert*. Try this passage for the flavor: "... the Supreme Court granted Jalet's petition for writ of certiorari. Judgement in the case was vacated, and the case remanded to the circuit for further consideration in light of *Haines v. Kerner*. On October 18, 1972, the circuit vacated the district court's judgement and remanded



ALAN POGUE

#### William Bennett Turner represents TDC inmates

the case for an evidentiary hearing. . . ." It's not all this bad, but it is sometimes enough that even the most dedicated of civil libertarians might question why the Constitution gave lawyers the right to write books.

Some attention has been paid in the press to Martin's unusual role in the book. As is stated clearly in the introduction, Martin worked as a prison guard in Texas in 1972 and then returned to work as a lawyer for TDC in 1981. In his four years helping to defend the prison system, Martin of course had access to privileged information. His resolution of the attorney-client privilege problem was to rely "wherever possible" on publicly available information. "In those instances where information was deemed critical, but was privileged," he writes, "we secured the information from sources other than myself."

That may be acceptable, but Martin's role as a participant in the story makes for some odd twists in the writing. Toward the end of the telling, the book lapses into writing about the co-author in the third person. "Martin was a thirty-two-year-old recent law school graduate . . ." we are told. And "Martin had seen firsthand the prominent

role [building tenders] played in daily prison operations . . ." Of course the problem with a writer writing about himself in the third person is that it affects an objectivity that does not exist. A historian who played no role in the events surrounding TDC might have cast Martin in a different light, or he might not have put Martin in the story at all.

The authors have not claimed *Texas Prisons* is a work of literature. It is indeed a definitive work on the procedural history of prison litigation in Texas. It is an accomplishment of thoroughness. But what a book there is yet to be written on Texas prisons! By bringing the people to life, on the inside and the outside, by giving the reader an idea of what being locked away in a Texas prison cell really *feels* like, by facing head-on the sheer human complexity of a system accommodating in a decent and dignified way people who have been inhumane and destructive, and by capturing the drama of the remarkable lawsuit that changed the face of the nation's second largest prison system, then we would have a story that could be called "Texas Prisons." It needs to be written. □

# SOCIAL CAUSE CALENDAR

## ARTIST/WRITER COLLABORATIONS

The Glassell School of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston will present *One+One: Collaborations by Artists and Writers from January 22 through February 25*. The exhibition includes specially created work by 26 well-known artists and writers living in or near Houston who were paired and invited to work together for the project. Contributors to the exhibit are Donald Barthelme and Jim Love, Rosellen Brown and George Krause, Olive Hershey and Gael Stack, Edward Hirsch and Derek Boshier, Richard Howard and Robin Utterback, Phillip Lopate and Sally Gall, Beverly Lowry and Melissa Miller, Cynthia Macdonald and James Surls, Susan Prosperi and Lucas Johnson, Pattiann Rogers and Jack Boynton, Ntozake Shange and Chuck Dugan, Lorenzo Thomas and Benito Huerta, and Susan Wood and Peter Brown. For more information, please call Janet Landay at (713) 526-7659.

## MUSIC FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

Sabíá!, a musical group from Los Angeles whose repertoire includes music drawn from the New Song Movement of Latin America as well as original compositions emphasizing songs written by, for, and about women, will perform on **January 29** at 8 p.m. in Batts Hall on the University of Texas campus, Austin. Tickets are \$8 in advance and \$9.50 at the door — proceeds will go to the Central America Peace Initiative and the Peace and Justice Education Fund. Call (512) 474-5877 for more information.

## TRAINING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS

The Texas Committee on Natural Resources (TCNR) is holding a series of free training workshops to help environmental activists participate in the Texas caucus process of both the Democratic and Republican parties. The bipartisan training programs/workshops will cover: becoming

## OBSERVANCES

**January 29, 1889** • 6,000 railway workers strike for end to 18-hour work day.

**January 30, 1948** • Gandhi assassinated in New Delhi.

**January 31, 1950** • President Truman gives order to produce H-bomb.

**February 1, 1960** • Four students sit in at Woolworth's lunch counter of Greensboro, North Carolina, beginning the civil rights sit-ins of the 1960s.

**February 2, 1848** • U.S. and Mexico sign the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ending the Mexican-American War. Known as "La Mutacion," Mexico ceded nearly half its national territory to the U.S.

**February 4, 1869** • IWW founder "Big Bill" Haywood born.

**February 8, 1978** • "Longest Walk" begins. Native Americans march from San Francisco to Washington, D.C., to protect treaty rights.

**February 10, 1964** • House of Representatives passes Civil Rights Act.

**February 12, 1817** • Frederick Douglass, writer and abolitionist, born.

**February 12, 1909** • NAACP founded.

a state delegate for each party; organizing at the grassroots level; and getting environmental issues on the parties' platforms. In addition, there will be presentations by Democratic and Republican party activists.

The training program/workshop schedule is: Fort Worth, **January 30**, Main library downtown; San Antonio, **February 6**, Institute of Texan Cultures; Dallas, **February 13**, Wadley Research Center; Houston, **February 19-20**, site not yet confirmed.

For more information, contact G. K. Sprinkle, TCNR, 5405 Chevy Circle, Austin, Texas 78723, (512) 926-7748.

## WYETH IN HOUSTON

*Andrew Wyeth: The Helga Pictures* exhibit will be on display at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts from **January 31 until April 10**. The collection includes 140 watercolors, temperas, drybrushes, and drawings of the artist's model and neighbor, Helga Testorf, done between 1971 and 1985. Also opening at the museum on **February 6** is an exhibition of approximately 150 illustrated manuscripts from the ninth to the 16th centuries, many of which have never been on display before. *The Glory of the Page: Medieval and Renaissance Illuminated Manuscripts from Glasgow University Library* will run through **April 24**.

## MEAD FESTIVAL IN AUSTIN

In honor of the 10th anniversary of the American Museum of Natural History's Margaret Mead Film Festival, *Art and Artisans*, a collection of past festivals' finest films, will come to Austin in February. The 11 films are divided into four themes and the four-part series will be held each Thursday in February at 7:30 p.m. in Burdine Hall on the University of Texas campus. Program I, **February 4**, Music and Dance in Society; Program II, **February 11**, Reviving Ancient Traditions; Program III, **February 18**, Portraits of the Individual Artist; Program IV, **February 25**, Women and Cultural Continuity. Admission is free. For more information, contact Scout Carr at (512) 478-7742.

## INF TREATY LECTURE IN AUSTIN

Physicians for Social Responsibility will sponsor a lecture on the INF Treaty by Richard Kramer at the Seton Medical Center, Dining Room 4 at 7:30 p.m. on **February 10**. Mr. Kramer is a University of Texas Professor Emeritus of Government and retired Air Force Lieutenant Colonel. For more information, call (512) 441-5472.

# DIALOGUE

## Continued from Page 2

abortion," contrary to Powell's absurd claim. All the pro-choice people say is that a woman should have a choice in the matter.

Abortion is a woman's decision ultimately. It is her responsibility either way. The reason that abortion reform came about was because women were tired of having men and the state dictate what they could do with their bodies.

The "right to lifers" deliberately obfuscate the difference between a human

being and human life. A spermatozoa, a zygote, a fetus, is not a human being — they are merely earlier stages of human life. The life of a fully independent, fully grown human being takes precedence over any potential life.

I do not know if Powell personally was involved in the anti-war movement, but I do know that the overwhelming majority of the anti-choice movement is pro-war, pro-capital punishment, anti-welfare, anti-gun control and generally ideological clones of

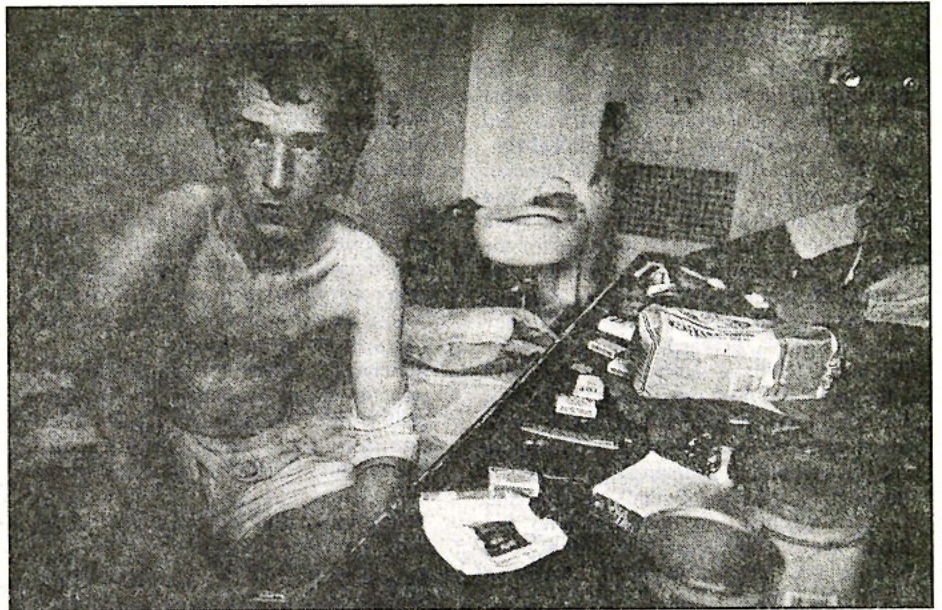
Jesse Helms. It's real cute to quote alleged "pro-life feminists" (whatever that dubious designation means) but, as Powell well knows, it is very unrepresentative of the anti-choice movement.

I want to say in closing that the *Texas Observer* does a great job and I wish we had something of similar quality in the intellectual desert of California culture.

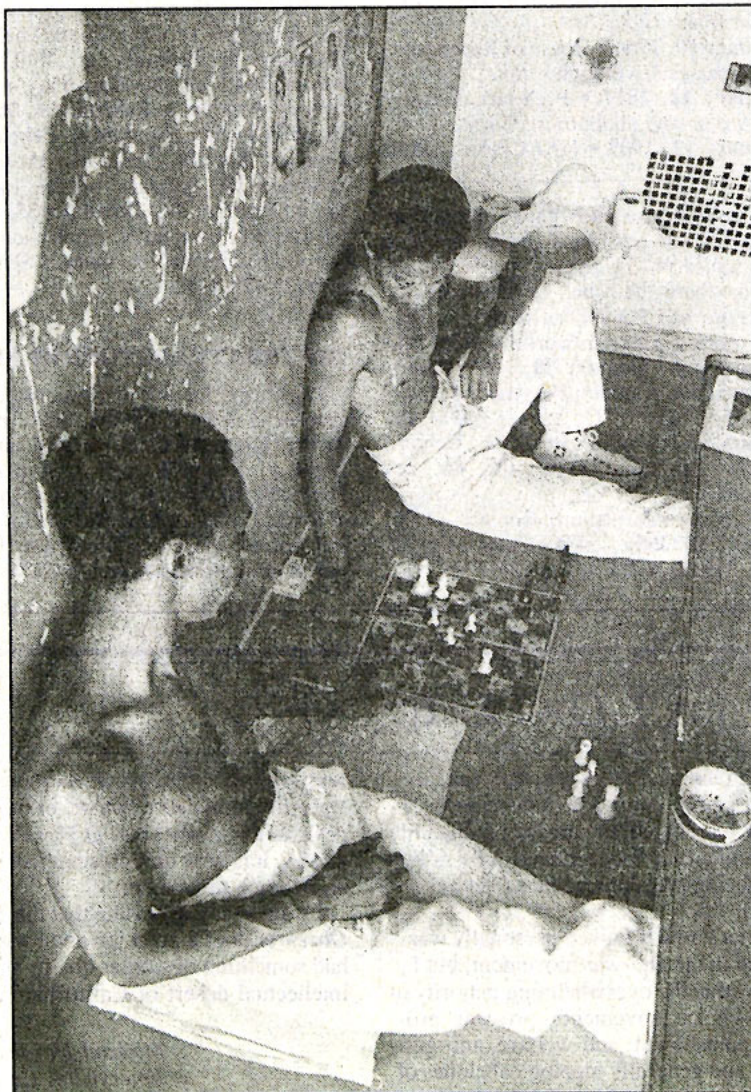
Michael Hardesty  
Emeryville, California

# BEHIND THE WALLS

We present photos from a recent exhibit by Alan Pogue, whose work appears in *Texas Prisons* by Steve J. Martin and Sheldon Ekland-Olson. This series was taken in 1984.



▶ A man and his cell at the Darrington Unit

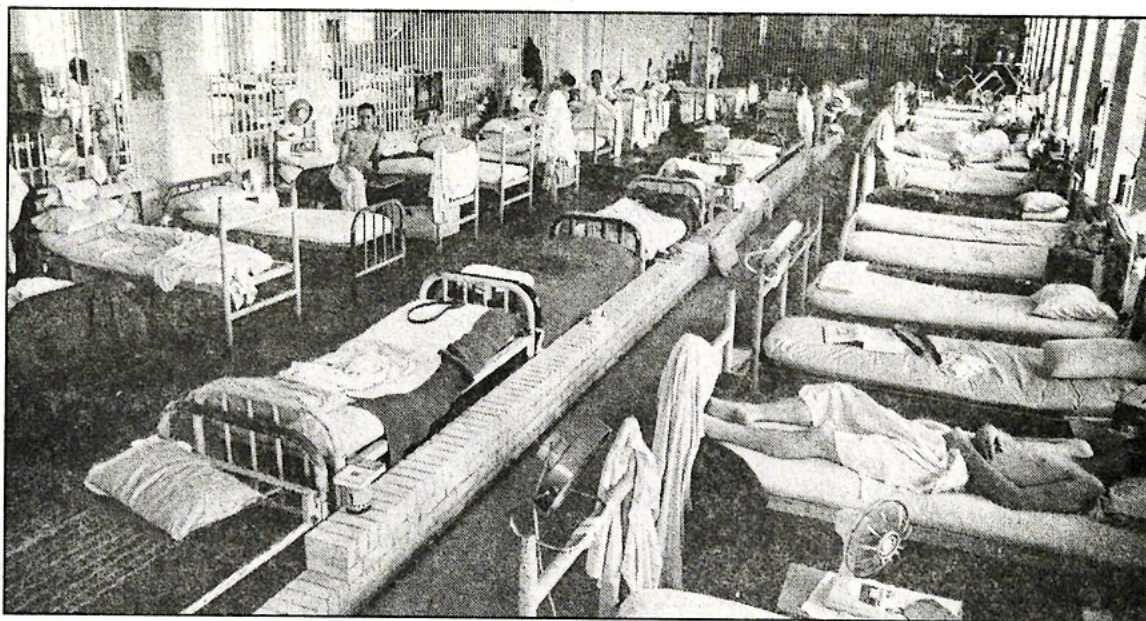


◀ A two-man cell on a 90-degree day, Coffield Unit



▲ Roaches and trash in a narrow space between rows of cells, Ramsey I Unit

# Photos by ALAN POGUE



▲ Overcrowded dormitory, Clemons Unit



▲ Inmate and poster collection, Darrington Unit

# Life and Death in TDC

BY PHILIP BRASFIELD

I WOKE UP just outside Sugarland when the TDC chain bus nearly sideswiped a slow-moving pickup truck. I heard curses and catcalls from the other prisoners crowded into the hard metal seats around me. As we neared the settlement of Rosharon, Texas, I could see what appeared to be a meatpacking plant spoiling the horizon of the coastal plain. The bus slowed into a right turn, I rolled the last of my tobacco into a cigarette, and then we were at the Darrington Unit. I was the only peckerwood who got off the bus that day. Few of the prisoners who remained on board envied me: Darrington had a reputation then, not so much as a meatpacking plant but as a killing ground. It was a reputation well deserved.

My experience in prison stretches back a decade. A few years on death row had seasoned me with a vengeance; I believed myself equipped with a leather soul. But even if I couldn't remotely be considered as a "new boot" as I was transferred to Darrington, I wasn't prepared for the seriousness of what I had for years considered little more than a game other people played.

Prison gangs such as the "Aryan Brotherhood," "Texas Mafia," "Texas Syndicate," "Mexican Mafia," and "Mandingo Warriors" seemed ridiculous and unreal, no matter how seriously their members took themselves. On Coffield, where I was first offered membership to the Aryan Brotherhood, I was told that one must "kill to get in, die to get out." When I declined to join, explaining my lack of belief that any particular race is inherently superior to another, I soon heard what a "nigger lover" I was. By the standards of the Aryan Brotherhood and the Texas Mafia, not only did I lack a "Viking's spirit" and "enough heart" to stand up for myself, I was perceived as probably being a queer . . . but that's another story. Had I gone along with their doctrine of white supremacy, I would have been accepted conditionally into their tribe, allowed to "wear a patch"

*Philip Brasfield, who is serving a life sentence in the Texas Department of Corrections, is the author of Deathman Pass Me By (Borgo Press, 1983). He is currently seeking a publisher for his second prison book.*



GAIL WOODS

(tattoo), and if the occasion presented itself ordered to murder anyone the gang leaders might think an enemy. No greater honor, according to these young men, could befall a brother than to spill black blood to insure that America's security was maintained through racial purity. My transfer from Coffield came after my jaw was fractured in three places.

The Mandingo Warriors is a black organization which, in my view, formed as a consequence of racism from the black perspective. Their reaction to the rising evidence of white supremacists establishing a power base in the TDC was deeply embedded in the same deranged fear, distrust, and hatred that motivated white prisoners. It seemed as if a number of good ol' boys and rednecks employed as bossmen tacitly approved of the terrorism fomented in the prison system. For them, it must have been a hell of a show. For the rest of the players in this Greek tragedy within concertina wire, it might have simply seemed better to be associated with *some* gang, *some* body of true believers, than to be alone. But in prison, everyone is alone; everyone is isolated and vulnerable, like too many strangers in a terribly strange land. Hardly anyone I remember realized that all power games in prison end in defeat.

Martin Luther King, Jr., defined racism as a philosophy based on a contempt for life . . . an arrogant assertion that one race is the center of value and the object of devotion before which other races kneel in submission. Throughout our history, which is founded on the genocide of one race and then the enslavement of yet another, blacks have found themselves forced into this kneeling submission. Yet the prison experience in Texas often turns this tradition upside down. Because more blacks are imprisoned than whites or Hispanics, they have become the majority. The mutual hatred, fear, and contempt of some blacks toward some whites was in reality an insidious method of repression and control. That tool was then, as now, the most restrictive factor in anyone's liberty, for it comes from inside one's mind, heart, and soul. In prison, where an individual's power is immediately sapped by an almost total reliance on the system itself, those who are most insecure derive the most satisfaction from the practice of and allegiance to racist thoughts and actions.

**W**HEN COMPARED TO EITHER the black or white gangs, the Texas Syndicate and Texas Mafia are anomalies. Both organizations

share older histories and purposes going back several generations and spanning the Rio Grande. Both have traditions and origins associated with the organized crime families in Mexico and the Southwest, which act as pipelines for illicit drugs. Within the context of prison, the strength and cultural cohesiveness of the Hispanic gangs has generally defied infiltration by outsiders. But as the membership of white and black gangs grew in proportion to their violence against one another, so did the gangs' need to subsidize their continued existence and survival through one of the few means possible in prison to make money.

The problem of keeping drugs out of prison is a security problem that has never been adequately addressed because correctional officers have always been some of the lowest paid people around. It was the competition for drug sales, the violation of turf, which turned the usually complacent and safe grounds of TDC into a slaughterhouse. At the height of the gang-related killings in 1984, which claimed 25 lives, former Governor Mark White squinted into the camera lens and intoned, "We are at war." He then seemed to make a career out of dodging the issue. Perhaps he was too busy signing death warrants of those "legally executed" by the state.

It was a war that was lost the minute it was declared, a war the prisoners declared against themselves in which, like in every other war, innocent lives were lost. Empty challenges and meaningless deeds were carried out with no one realizing that getting even is forever impossible and that in this life, in or out of prisons, just getting by is the best we can hope for.

What would happen when another body would hit the floor was that the lock-'em-up mentality would go into automatic overdrive. A half-hearted search for weapons would be conducted; personal property would be destroyed or confiscated and lost forever; showers and hot meals and all movements outside of the squalid cells would be indefinitely suspended and the majority would be punished for the actions of a minority. A few blacks, a few whites, and a few more Mexicans would be moved to an ever-growing area of Darrington called Administrative Segregation where, more times than not, deals would be immediately made between the keepers and the kept: in exchange for information against other prisoners, one's limited liberty could be restored. The level of distrust grew according to the number of prisoners locked up "under investigation." The enemy of my enemy is not necessarily my friend. Doing time on Darrington then was like a game of chance where the rules changed with each shift, every day, and the odds favored no one.

That game ended on the night of September 8, 1985. In a flurry of mindless paranoia and flashing steel during that sultry Labor Day weekend, two members of the

Texas Syndicate stabbed three members of the Mexican Mafia in a 45-second attack that left three bodies draining on the dirty dayroom floor. Prisoners around them had been watching TV or slapping dominoes on the tables, talking loudly to impress one another with a new twist on some old lies. Before anyone snapped to what was coming down, the body count jumped from 22 to 25 for that year. Before dawn the next day, another murder occurred on Ramsey II, just up the road. (By the end of the year the total was up to 27.) The keepers feared a large-scale riot, they said . . . and maybe they did. Thirteen units were locked down. During the subsequent shakedown of personal property, hundreds more crude weapons were found, surprising no one in prison but shocking legislators and their constituents and the media. Each in turn demanded harsher sentences for assault, for possession of weapons, and through that came harsher conditions which we live with today.

I suppose we shall never rid ourselves of racism in America. It seems that we have become as addicted to it as we have to the standard response to violence and crime. Perhaps as a nation we are junkies, one and all, hopelessly addicted to the very things we say we fear and hate the most. And like any addict, we go to great lengths to preserve our supply of ready-made fixes.

We preserve and encourage racism economically, just as we preserve and sustain violence in America through the harsh retribution found in life sentences given for car theft and death sentences meted out when we know that an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is just so much vengeful bullshit. Perhaps most of all, we are addicted to the process of being Americans . . . and therefore somehow we are exempted from responsibility for our actions, and worst of all, exempted from learning from our terrible mistakes of the past.

The past gives witness to prisons being brutal, horrible places where the condemned of society are crammed together in an atmosphere of virulent negation. The past gives witness to racist legacies and atrocities which represent the greatest threat I know to democracy and real freedom — the freedom to be who you are and what you are without shame, without fear, without guilt or compunction . . . the freedom to live your life without someone *not* like you, by nature of their race or the balance in a bank account, making you feel that you're unworthy, that you're no damned good. Until then, we're a mob of junkies, at war from within, addicted to the illusion of yesterday and helpless to find a lasting, valid peace in "this" world, or in the world we prisoners sometimes think of as being free. □

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