THE TEXAS Observer

A JOURNAL OF FREE VOICES

APRIL 7, 1989 • $1.50

**IN PRAISE OF JOHN TOWER**
*Pg. 8*

# The 70th Day

THE SUN CROSSED the equator Monday morning, March 20, at 9:28 Austin time — at least according to those who follow these things and pretend to understand how it is that the sun crosses the equator. At the point of the vernal equinox the day is said to be exactly as long as the night all over the world. Twelve hours of daylight match twelve hours of darkness. Thereon, for those of us in the Northern Hemisphere, the sun continues to move nearer from the equator, so that our days become longer and longer.

March 20 also happened to be the point of equinox for the Texas Legislature: it was the midpoint of the 140-day session. By the close of the day's proceedings there would be 70 days gone, with 70 remaining. And, as if in sync with the change in the season, the days at the legislature would begin to get longer, too. It was springtime at the Capitol now; sluggishness was giving way to a windy and tempestuous season.

The world of the Capitol has a way of becoming — if you spend an entire day there, and certainly if you spend 70 — a self-contained world. To stretch your spatial awareness is to wonder about your car that is parked a few blocks away in a two-hour zone. Are the tires chalked yet? Should I dash out and check? Toward the end of the day, the world expands as far south, maybe, as the Colorado River. Twelve blocks down San Jacinto Street in the hotel bar at the Four Seasons, you can get a drink and mingle with certain lobbyists and certain legislators and look out over the water.

During the day, you can maintain the illusion of being "in touch" with the outside world. If you work for a legislator, your office computer will give you up-to-date information on that evening's receptions, to be held at varying times and locations all over the city. The Retail Grocers' Association might have a lavish spread — or would the Texas Credit Union League be a better bet? You can imagine piles of jumbo shrimp on ice, and banquet tables with stainless steel pans full of fajitas, kept warm by a small flame underneath. The food is free, and the drinks are too, and you go hoping for a dessert bar as satisfactory as the one you remember from the — what was it? Association of Realtors? Homebuilders? Mortgage bankers?

And yet such auxiliary events, even if they are in the "awareness" genre (promoting Cancer Awareness or Heart Disease Awareness, etc.) do little to expand your awareness. Because whether you are at the Four Seasons or out on the jumbo shrimp circuit, you are still a part of the Capitol world and under its spell, the rest of the world does not really exist.

You would not, for example, stop to take note at 9:28 in the morning — in the middle of your Capitol business

**Continued on page 3**

*One Day in the Life of the Texas Legislature*

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.*

SINCE 1954

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: One year $27, two years $48, three years $69. Full-time students $15 per year. Back issues $3 prepaid. Airmail, foreign, group, and bulk rates on request. Microfilm editions available from University Microfilms Intl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Any current subscriber who finds the price a burden should say so at renewal time; no one need forgo reading the *Observer* simply because of the cost.

THE TEXAS OBSERVER (ISSN 0040-4519/UPS 541300), ©1989, is published biweekly except for a three-week interval between issues in January and July (25 issues per year) by the Texas Observer Publishing Co., 307 West 7th Street, Austin, Texas 78701. Telephone: (512) 477-0746. Second class postage paid at Austin, Texas.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE TEXAS OBSERVER, P.O. Box 49019, Austin, Texas 78765

# DIALOGUE

## Bowie County Illumination

I wish to compliment you on your series of articles on the Bowie County Courthouse situation (*TO*, 12/9/88, and 12/23/88). You have provided coverage of a topic that otherwise would have gone largely unreported. You had the insight to see that this regional story is a single but sterling example of one that is often repeated through time and across the state. The illumination that you cast on the destruction of the Bowie County Courthouse may have come too late to help Bowie County, but the 253 other counties should benefit from the knowledge of Bowie County's loss.

I have suggested to two Bowie County newspapers that they reprint your articles.

I would like to read the *Observer* on a more regular basis. Please add me to your subscriber list.

*William McKemie*
*Dale*

## Hayakawa's Paranoia

Bravo to Tom McClellan for "Dear Dr. Hayakawa" (*TO*, 2/24/89), an eloquent answer to the stupid English Only questionnaire. Sam (as he's known to many) Hayakawa was born in Winnipeg in a country he foolishly says has been "torn apart" because it's bilingual. By the same logic, the Swiss would have fallen into chaos centuries ago.

Sam has been a little loony ever since he got tough with the students at San Francisco SU back in the '60s, and was commended by then-Gov. Ronald Reagan. To paraphrase the other nitwit who recently decamped the White House, "just say no to English Only," Sam's pet paranoia.

*Waldo F. McNeir*
*Houston*

## Gems to Ponder On

Gracias Mil, Tex-Obs and Tom McClellan, for a moving and passionate — and very much marvelous usage of English, a most inventive and beauteous tongue, but, as you state so cogently, not the only linguistic vehicle of beauty and depth — commentary (*TO*, 2/24/89). You have given Dr. Insulated Semanticoma Hayakawa some verbal gems to ponder on, that is if he can find his way back to *Language in Thought and Action*. Maybe he needs to recant some of his priorlife verbiage from the pages of *ETC*.

Yes, English faces no threat, other than the one posed by unintelligible misusers of the language. All languages are beautiful, and each one gives a wealth of images and nuances which help realize the universality of sentientness. I believe deeply that my mind is capable of learning many languages, that my humanity empowers me to comprehend and appreciate the polyfaceted wonder of humankind as we continually reinvent ourselves and cultures.

I thank you for the wisdom distilled within the writing, for the enjoyable sojourn through myriads verbs and nouns, through the magic of language, and ultimately for the pensive defense of our most wonderful of human creations: Language in all its costumes and nuances. A poem sings within, celebrating you, and its tonalities dance a cross-cultural choreography, backgrounded by sounds and accents which speak of the resonance of human diversity. Thank you again.

*Ricardo Sánchez*
*El Paso*

## A Note Of Criticism

Surely I'm not alone with the following opinion, but regardless, and I say this with reasonable good will, Tom McClellan is an ass.

*Hardy Sanders*
*Colleyville*

## Dim Son

I wish the record to show that in the manuscript version of my review of Robert Kennedy's oral memoirs (*TO*, 1/6/89), I called the Senator's eldest son, Rep. Joseph Kennedy, D-Mass., "terribly nice, terribly dumb." In editing, this phrase was altered to "awfully nice, if not too bright." When I protested the change I was informed that "dumb" was "a Presidential adjective," reserved as a matter of *Observer* style for the highest office in the land.

I now discover that in the February issue of *Spy* magazine, Joe Kennedy is described as one of America's "10 Dumbest Congressmen." The Kennedy Dan Quayle is really like finds himself in the company of such Washington dim-inaries as Alphonse D'Amato and the *entire* Virginia Senate delegation, past, present, and future.

I regret that the *Observer* was scooped on this important story by a publication which runs full-page perfume ads.

*Richard Ryan*
*Washington, D.C.*

Write Dialogue.
We welcome comments from our readers. Please keep letters short and snappy — 100 to 250 words is ideal.

# EDITORIAL

# The 70th Day

**Continued from Cover**

— of the vernal equinox. You would not attempt to visualize the sun crossing the equator. The laws of nature hardly seem real — or relevant. We are concerned here with the laws of men. Perennially changeable, these laws are subject to all the forces that swirl around under the pink granite dome. The forces themselves are the essence of politics; watching them, and trying to understand them, is the preoccupation of those who get pulled into the Capitol's magnetic field.

I WOULD LIKE to tell you about the 71st session of the legislature by telling about the events of the 70th day. A portrait of the legislature at midsession is something like half-processed film; you can only begin to see what is developing. There is a randomness about it, as well. On the 70th day, the concerns that happened to have caught my attention were AIDS, agriculture, and accidents. On any other day, it might just as well have been banking, budget deficits and bottle deposits, or campaign finance, college funding and child care. Most often, the agenda is set by the powerful — by the insiders. But every once in a while a group of people from the outside world will attempt to make the reality of their lives intrude on the Capitol consciousness. And this is how the 70th day began.

It was shortly after sun-up and the morning papers were still in the driveway behind the Governor's Mansion (he takes the *Austin American-Statesman* and the *Dallas Morning News*), which sits just two blocks southwest of the Capitol. On the sidewalk outside the front gate to the mansion, Skip Fuller was setting up a breakfast table with doughnuts and empanadas and two placards — one that said BILL and one that said RITA. A few other activists were helping with the set-up, and a few members of the media had arrived. A morning TV crew wanted to go live at 7:25, Fuller was told. Fuller and the others were part of the Austin ACT UP group (the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power). Two of them took their seats at the table and began to read the morning papers. One wore a Bill Clements mask on the side of his head.

At 7:20, a parade of 33 noisy activists rounded the corner of 11th and Colorado and marched to the front gate, where "Bill" and "Rita" were waiting. They carried signs (WAKE UP, BILL), blew on noisemakers and whistles, banged pots and pans, and raised their voices. Some of them wore pajamas or bathrobes. A trumpeter played reveille. Someone was banging a gong. After the din subsided, the group's spokeswoman read a statement. Her complaint was that Governor Clements has yet to address the AIDS epidemic in his three years in office. "While Bill Clements counts sheep, we're counting deaths," she said. She urged the governor to wake up to the AIDS crisis.

The trumpeter, wearing blue flannel pajamas and a nightcap, then stood on the steps in front of the gate and played "Taps." The sound echoed off the downtown buildings a block away. Then the activists ate the doughnuts, drank coffee, and dispersed.

The governor's office was pleased to inform reporters later that Clements had not, in fact, been asleep in the mansion on that particular morning; he had spent the night in Dallas. Nevertheless, the symbolism was what counted, and on the next day several state newspapers carried a photo of the demonstration.

In the course of the 70th day, I would run into Glenn Maxey here and there at the Capitol. Maxey undoubtedly has one of the hardest jobs at the legislature: he leads the Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby and is at the forefront of efforts to secure increased state funding to fight AIDS. There are several reasons why it is beginning to look as if those efforts will be successful — none of them having to do with the leadership of the Republican governor.

For one thing, neither Lieutenant Governor Bill Hobby nor House Speaker Gib Lewis are asleep on the AIDS issue. Last year they appointed a task force to make recommendations to the legislature, and they appear to be taking the recommendations seriously. The task force was led by the Rev. Chris Steele of Houston, whose tireless crusading for an immediate state response to AIDS has galvanized many who might otherwise have been inclined to ignore the issue. At the same time, Maxey's patient and low-key approach at the legislature — and the fact that he knows the Capitol so well from his years as an aide to former state Senator Oscar Mauzy — is an important factor in the improving picture at the legislature.

Consequently, legislation that calls for dramatically increased funding over the $3.4 million that the legislature directed toward the AIDS fight two years ago is moving through the House and Senate. The Senate finance committee is now working with a plan that calls for $34 million in funding over the next two years. In the House, Speaker Lewis has released a proposed spending plan that calls for even more: $46 million. Something along these lines can be expected to emerge from the legislature as a whole. And then it will be up to Governor Bill Clements to sign it into law.

WALKING THE HALLS of the Capitol shortly after 9 a.m., I crossed paths with Annette LoVoi, who lobbies for the Texas Consumer Association. She had come from a meeting with Rep. Curtis Seidlits, a second-term Democrat from Sherman, who has astounded her by introducing a bill that she believes imperils consumers' rights to recover damages in lawsuits over unsafe products. She said she looked him straight in the eye and told him he has a terrible bill. He told her not to be alarmed — his bill was 70 percent "recodification." Just adding a few

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**FEATURES**



**DEPARTMENTS**

clarifications to the law, is all.

LoVoi seemed to feel more than slightly betrayed. She had helped Seidlits in his campaign last fall, traveling in his district and upholding him as a consumers' champion. And now *this*. His bill would be up for a hearing later in the day in the House State Affairs committee and she was preparing to blast away at it.

Even without LoVoi's tip-off, it would have been a good bet there was going to be some public interest vs. insurance lobbyist action, judging from the sight of the "tort- mobile" parked conspicuously near the Capitol's north entrance at the corner of 14th and Colorado. The tort-mobile is a traveling exhibit on a trailer attached to the sea-foam-green '57 Chevrolet wagon belonging to Tom Smith of Public Citizen. The exhibit consists of a dissected Ford pickup, showing the placement of the gasoline tank directly behind the driver's seat. The point is clear enough: some products are designed by idiots. And accidents happen. And people are maimed. The tort-mobile made several appearances last session, when the insurance industry made its big push for "tort reform." There were a few threads left untied from last session, and the industry had apparently decided Curtis Seidlits was the man to tie them.

But before Seidlits's Son of Tort Reform was introduced in committee, there would first come a reckoning with March 20 as National Agriculture Day. I don't know how the rest of the nation observed it, but Ag Day in Texas had the sound of a clanging bell, marking the opening round of what is shaping up to be a titanic political bout between the populist element and the reactionary element of the state's agricultural sector. In one corner is the commissioner of the Texas Department of Agriculture, Jim Hightower. In the other is the Texas Farm Bureau, egged on by other agribusiness interests. On this the 70th day, the bill to extend the life of the Ag Department — as presently structured — was due to be heard in the Senate. Also, the Farm Bureau was scheduled to convene in Waco to call for Hightower's head.

The shape this clash was taking would not have been predictable as little as four months ago. Before the beginning of the legislative session, political observers assumed Hightower's reign at the Ag Department was about to end, as he was expected to run for higher office. Hightower had been at odds with the state's beef producers during the winter, chiefly because he didn't parrot the conventional industry line when questions were raised by European importers about the wholesomeness of hormone-injected American beef. Hightower's offense was to suggest that if Europeans wanted natural beef that had been raised without artificial growth hormones, there were Texas cattle raisers who would be happy to provide it. But other cattle raisers would have preferred that the state's chief agriculture official had told the Europeans to go to hell.

Nevertheless, the issue might have blown over if Hightower's detractors could have rested assured that he would be gone before long, off to fight a quixotic battle against Republican Senator Phil Gramm. It was not to be. In January, a week before the opening of the session, Hightower announced that he would seek another term as ag commissioner in 1990. To leaders of the Farm Bureau and the state's agribusiness and chemical industries the thought of another four years with Hightower at the helm was too much. They turned up the heat politically by trumping up the beef hormone issue. Farm Bureau leader S.M. True called on Hightower to resign his office.

**"Could it be that the Farm Bureau is trying to protect their investment?"**

Most likely, it was the chemical lobby that was first to realize the extraordinary possibilities this session held out to Hightower's enemies. For this happened to be the year the Ag Department was up for the once-every-twelve-years Sunset Review process, and the Texas Chemical Council had already been planning to make the legislature a staging ground for a war over Hightower's regulation of agricultural pesticides. But — they might have said to their allies at the Farm Bureau — why stop there? Why not use this rare opportunity — when the very continuation of the agency was in the hands of the legislature and a Republican governor would sit in final judgement — to inflict more serious damage? Such conditions might not be in place again for another generation.

Suddenly the Farm Bureau's leadership, as if by divine inspiration, realized that Texas farmers would be better served by an agriculture commissioner who is appointed by the governor rather than elected by the people. This revelation came at a somewhat inconvenient time, given that a statewide conference of Farm Bureau delegates had met in Corpus Christi in December and resolved that they were in favor of an elected ag commissioner. But no matter. The Farm Bureau would meet in Waco at a specially called meeting on March 20 with a select group of members and they would reconsider the issue.

MEANWHILE AT THE Capitol, Hightower's supporters had organized a counter-event. At 9:30 a.m., five farm and ranch leaders held a press conference to declare their support for an elected commissioner of agriculture. Joe Rankin, president of the Texas Farmers' Union, told a small group of reporters that conservative farm groups are trying to get rid of Hightower simply because they disagree with him. "We can't 'sunset' this right to vote," he said.

Harold Bob Bennett, a board member of the Texas Corn Growers Association, derided the Farm Bureau's attempts to present itself as the voice of agriculture. (He wore a button that said "Sunset the Farm Bureau.") "The Farm Bureau is definitely an insurance company, first and foremost," he said. Bennett said that the largest concentrations of Farm Bureau membership are in urban areas, and he distributed a list showing 1985 figures for the top 30 counties in Farm Bureau membership. Leading the list was Harris County (Houston) with 7,281 members and Collin County (suburban Dallas) with 5,574. Bennett also said that company documents for 1988 show the Farm Bureau holds $1.2 million worth of stock in Syntex Co., a Panamanian firm that produces the artificial growth hormone used in most Texas feedlots. By raising the beef hormone issue, "maybe could it be that the Farm Bureau is trying to protect their investment?" he asked.

Mike Levi, a rancher from Spicewood, also spoke up for Hightower, praising the ag commissioner's efforts to help market Texas goods. "I like to see an aggressive marketer in that position," he said. "Historically that hasn't been the case." He attributed the move to get rid of Hightower as an opportunistic move by "vested interests." Recalling the representative of the poultry industry who ran against Hightower in 1986, Levi said, "If they'd been successful in getting their poultry lobbyist in there, do you think they'd be trying to do away with this position? Hell no, they wouldn't."

After statements by a leader with the American Agriculture Movement and a member of the Texas Nurseryman's Association, the pro-Hightower entourage took their show on the road — or rather to the air, flying to Waco, Corpus Christi, and McAllen to hold more press conferences.

On my way over to the Senate chamber, I ran into Dee Simpson, labor lobbyist, advocate of farmworker causes, Capitol philosophizer, master of the cryptic half-sentence. At this hour of the morning he was not loquacious. But he reached into his valise and pulled out a bumper sticker that said: *THE TEXAS FARM BUREAU IS IN BED WITH THE CHEMICAL COUNCIL. (But it's you and me they're screwing.)* "That's a long message for one bumper sticker," I noted. "There you ahhhrre," he said, drifting away.

SHORTLY AFTER 11:00, the Senate was called to order by Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby. The invocation was given. The clerk called the roll. In accepting the excused absence of Senator Frank Tejeda of San Antonio, Hobby casually announced that the Senator was in Nicaragua, having been chosen as part of the American team to observe the recent election there. The election, of course, was being held in El Salvador, but nobody stirred, nor corrected Hobby, nor seemed to object to Tejeda's announced presence in Nicaragua.

The looming item on the intent calendar was Senate Bill 489, carried by Senator Tati Santiesteban, Democrat of El Paso. This was the bill that gives the Texas Department of Agriculture a new twelve-year lease on life and retains an elected agriculture commissioner.

The bill was not expected to encounter trouble in the Senate, which has a 23-8 Democratic majority. Hightower had launched his defense of the agency in a Senate committee on March 8, bringing in Democratic powerhouse John White, who served as Texas Commissioner of Agriculture for 27 years, to speak in favor of an elected position. Hightower began by telling the committee, "I promise all of my detractors, all who want to get at me, I will not hang on for 27 years." Committee chair Santiesteban commented that politics seldom offers such permanent employment. "Indeed," said Hightower. "Some days you think you're a peacock, the next day you're a featherduster, Mr. Chairman. I understand the politics of that."

But after that brief philosophical moment, Hightower delivered a no-nonsense defense. "Rather than me droning on about the details of the bill," he told the committee, "I really want to go to the nub of what I think is at work around SB 489. If this were simply a matter of good government or another agency undergoing normal Sunset Review, we could all speak a little bureaucratese, rest easy and adjourn over to Scholz Garden. But that's not really what's afoot, here in this bill. This is a political attack." The attack, Hightower said, was led and orchestrated by the chemical lobby, and was coming on two fronts: one, to get rid of the ag commissioner as an elected official and, two, to transfer authority for regulating pesticides to an independent appointed commission.

Hightower noted that the Sunset Advisory Commission (which is made up of four Senators, four Representatives, and two members of the public) considered — and rejected — both those proposals in their review process. It became apparent soon enough that Santiesteban's Senate committee had no interest in messing with the Ag Department, either. Though the committee has three Republicans and Bill Sims (who serves as the voice of the Farm Bureau in the Senate), Senate Bill 489 was reported favorably by a vote of 9-0.

Its passage through the full Senate was just as smooth. The bill was brought up for consideration on a 24-5 vote (this is essentially the vote on the bill; it passed later on a voice vote). Voting against it were four Republicans (Bivins of Amarillo, Krier of San Antonio, Leedom of Dallas, and Ratliff of Mt. Pleasant) and the Democrat Sims of San Angelo. Sims and Ratliff also teamed up to try to restrict the Ag Department's authority to levy fines in cases of pesticide violations. "We in agriculture do not feel it's fair to have this kind of administrative penalty," Sims argued. "We don't quite understand why it needs to be done." But his amendment was rejected 16-13. There was no discussion of making the agriculture commissioner an appointed official. That discussion would come later, when the bill reached the House.

**"Some days you think you're a peacock; the next day you're a featherduster."**

I HAD EXPECTED to spend the afternoon in the House State Affairs Committee, to see if the consumer lobbyists would give Rep. Curtis Seidlits a drubbing. But the committee was aswarm with lawyers and the topic was How To Gig the State Bar This Week and you can read about that in the *Texas Lawyer*; I got out fast.

It seemed that it would be an interesting exercise, while it was still National Agriculture Day, to put the question of the fate of the Texas Department of Agriculture to a few Republicans. Would they try to put a high-minded gloss on a political movement that looks suspiciously like a low and calculated attempt to rough up one politically unorthodox (and, yes, ambitious) Democrat? Indeed they would.

As the Republicans would have it, they are thinking seriously of ways to bring better representation to farmers. Here is how Rep. Terral Smith, the well-regarded, sometimes moderate Austin Republican, explained it: "I'm staying open on the issue," he began. "The argument, and I think it is a legitimate argument made by the farmers, is that the Agriculture Commission was created to be an advocate for farmers, that was its purpose. And over the years, and as the urban people outnumbered the farming people, it has turned into a consumer advocate office." He added, "And that's O.K. There's nothing wrong with a consumer advocate office. But that's not what the purpose of the Agriculture Commission was to be in the first place. The farmers are arguing that the only way in today's state that they can actually have an advocate is for him to be appointed. Because if he's elected, he's gonna be elected by urban people."

Smith said the issue has been discussed in some meetings with House Republicans and the governor's office, but that it is not clear to him what the governor is going to do. I asked if he was afraid the Republicans would run the risk of looking as if they want to abolish an elected office just because they didn't like the officeholder. "I think it could end up making a hero out of Jim Hightower, a martyr. And I think you have to be very careful with that," he said. "He is a very popular, charismatic type guy. And he's very good at articulating his position, and I'm sure he could turn this thing around to his advantage tremendously. And that's a shame in a way. And it cuts both ways. I mean, you're right. We probably wouldn't be talking about it if it wasn't for Jim Hightower. And it probably wouldn't be as great a political risk if it wasn't Jim Hightower. So his personality makes it both."

Rep. Dick Waterfield is a straight-shooting Republican from Canadian. He represents the top half of the Panhandle and is himself involved in running a feedlot in his district. In an interview in his office that was overseen by the head of a mounted ten-point buck, Waterfield said he favored creating an appointed agriculture commission that hires a commissioner. Although he said he and Hightower get along fine, he was disappointed with Hightower's role in the beef hormone trade flap. "We didn't get strong support," he said. In his view, Hightower should have stood up and said "There's nothing wrong with the hormones."

Waterfield said he is not part of a "Get Hightower" move, though he admits that such a move is underway. "That's not what I'm talking about," he said. His worry is that people who are not "ag-oriented" are voting for agriculture commissioner. "I've got some problems with a person in Houston not really knowing what's good for agriculture," he said. "Let's get farmers represented. Right now we don't have them represented."

But he admitted, also, that the issue would not be so explosive without the Hightower factor. "If Hightower were not so controversial, probably you would not see this — I'm not naive," he said. "Had he continued to run for Senate and if [deputy commissioner] Mike Moeller were running for Ag Commissioner, this probably wouldn't be going on."

"You've got to understand, Hightower really hasn't endeared himself to many people around here," he continued. "Jim's a populist. That's what he calls himself. And I don't know how many populists you have out there in the House."

Waterfield noted a small irony of his position. "I'm usually for an elected deal," he said. Last session, in the debate over whether to have an elected or appointed state Board of Education, he favored giving the people the vote. How is it, I wondered, that he now thought an appointment process would bring better results than an election? I asked him to consider the case of the Texas Department of Health. Here you have a health commissioner who is hired by an 18-member board that is appointed by the governor — much the same structure he is recommending for the Agriculture Department. And yet the health commissioner and his agency are widely perceived in the legislature as being sluggish, unprogressive, and biennially unworthy of adequate funding. He didn't dispute the point. "I'm not saying appointed is utopia," Waterfield responded. He just doesn't want city people voting for ag commissioner if they're going to vote for someone like Hightower.

By the end of the afternoon, word had filtered down to the Capitol that the Farm Bureau had decided they would prefer to do away with the 82-year-old custom of letting Texas voters pick a commissioner of agriculture. Hightower released a statement that dismissed "this small gathering of Farm Bureau members, who were rounded up by the organization's Waco-based hierarchy." Said his news release: "This decision, though intended as a slap at me, is really a slap at the people of Texas and at their right to choose who will direct a major state agency." It was clear that the battle over the Department of Agriculture could end up taking up a lot of the legislature's time in the final 70 days. "It's going to be a big, big issue," Dick Waterfield said. He conceded that there were plenty of other issues — workers' compensation reform, funding of education, repairing the state's budget — that ought to take a higher place on the legislative agenda than a fight over the ag department.

BUT THIS IS HOW it goes at the legislature. The agenda is most often set by the state's powerful economic interests. If they decide they want to get rid of a politician through a legislative power-play, their efforts must be taken seriously. They know that in taking on Hightower they are guaranteeing a high-publicity fight with the political rhetoric turned up full blast, but they also know they have a Republican governor in power who just might be crotchety enough to be pushed into the fray.

In smaller scale, the agenda-setting power of the interests can be observed at any given point of the legislative day. Our 70th day had now stretched to the hour when most sensible people would be at home eating dinner or watching "Wheel of Fortune." And yet the House State Affairs Committee had finally finished with the State Bar and was ready to discuss products liability. The tort-mobile was still parked out on 14th Street, meaning that Public Citizen's Tom Smith was still on duty. As was Annette LoVoi of the Consumer Association.

It was about 6:00 by the time Seidlits got up in front of the committee to present his bill relating to dangerous products, unfortunate accidents, and consumers' lawsuits. At Seidlits's left elbow were three powerful lobbyists: Rusty Kelley, Jack Gullahorn, and Nub Donaldson. Kelley and Gullahorn work for just about anyone who is willing to give them tremendous sums of money; Donaldson is a former legislator who lobbies for the Texas Civil Justice League, the industry group that promotes "tort reform."

Seidlits presented his bill as a way to make Texas more attractive to industry by making it less likely for business to get sued for every little thing that goes wrong with their products. He assured the committee that his bill "does not compromise our state's strong stand on products safety," and that it "does not take away [injured] people's right to recover."

Austin Democrat Lena Guerrero wanted to know who would benefit from the bill. Seidlits danced around the question. Then he turned and called his first witness — a representative of Cooper Industries of Houston who testified to the ways his company "has been a victim of products liability law in Texas." Cooper has had to pay out $42 million in products liability claims over recent years, he said. Nub Donaldson made a pitch for the bill, saying it would restore "predictability and fairness" to the civil justice system.

Eventually the public interest lobbyists had their say: Annette LoVoi, Tom Smith, and Reggie James of Consumers Union. I cannot say I stuck it out long enough to hear them, but I see by their prepared statements that they claim that the bill adds new procedural barriers to keep injured consumers from recovering damages and that they especially objected to a provision to protect pharmaceutical companies from lawsuits as long as their products have been approved by the FDA. In the consumer lobbyists' view, the threat of lawsuits is an important incentive for manufacturers to make sure their products are not dangerous or defective. Smith said later that he left at 10:30 p.m. and the meeting was still going on. In the end, Seidlits's bill was referred to subcommittee for fine-tuning.

So . . . just another day at the legislature. The products liability issue turned out to be a fine example of the agenda-setting power of the business lobby. Most often it works this way: A business group will come up with an idea — an idea, maybe, that could save their industry a bundle of money. Then they find some sap in the legislature to agree to carry a bill for them. And then they hire a team of influential lobbyists to push-that-thang-through. The sap knows that with power and money and influence on his side his bill has a good chance of getting passed. A successful bill adds to his stature — suddenly he becomes someone who can "get things done" in the legislature. (He begins to daydream about making the Ten Best list in *Texas Monthly* and he starts to look out of the corner of his eye to see if the *Monthly* photographer is coming around.)

Public interest lobbyists serve as firefighters, popping up here and there to fight one little blaze or another that the moneyed interests set. It is a defensive game that casts them in the role of spoilsports against those who use the legislature as an arena to settle political scores and to promote their private gain.

The Consumers Union, citing Seidlits's products liability bill and another bill attempting to weaken the Deceptive Trade Practices act, released a statement saying it was beginning to look like "Consumer Destruction Week" at the legislature.

And that was just how it looked on Monday. Tomorrow would be another day.

**—D.D.**

# True Stories

*Waco*

"LET'S MAKE IT CLEAR what the issue is not. It is not a Farm Bureau-Jim Hightower feud. It is not a squabble about pesticides. It is not about $100 million worth of beef. It is not about hormones, or farm labor, or liberal versus conservative, or misappropriation of state funds, or growing pistachios in West Texas, or establishing Israeli-type agriculture, or setting up roadside vegetable stands or organic farming."

So began the single-issue convention of the Texas Farm Bureau: with remarks from the organization's Executive Director, Warren Newberry, explaining what the meeting wasn't all about. Which, in fact, was what the meeting was all about.

For two hours, in the Brazos Room of Waco's civic convention center, Farm Bureau delegates, nudged along by their president, S.M. True, debated the language of a motion to rescind a policy position adopted in December in Corpus Christi, where they came out in favor of an elected state commissioner of agriculture. And since a vote against Hightower was inevitable, much of the Waco debate was focused on the agriculture commission that would rid the state of the incumbent commissioner.

"You can put earrings on a hog but you can't hide the ugliness," Hightower has said of Reagan farm policy and a dozen other issues. The same might be said of the Farm Bureau debate in Waco. Because no matter how carefully the argument was framed, it was fundamentally ugly; it required embracing the principle, while renouncing the practice of participatory electoral democracy:

"I, too, value the privilege of electing," Becky Lamar of Erath County told the delegation. "But I believe in an informed vote. Farmers and ranchers are not in a majority anymore. So, are the people in the cities truly informed about who will represent agriculture? If we have an elected commission, we can not state qualifications for the people who file for those offices. If it's an elected commission, whoever wants to can file and run for those offices."

S.M. True was not so circumspect about

LOUIS DUBOSE

**S.M. True**

removing the voter from the equation of ag commissioner selection. "I think that at this point the Farm Bureau's preference — we heard a lot of discussion pro and con today — but I think the discussion came down on the side of an appointed commission today," True said. His personal preference, he told a reporter, also is an appointed agriculture commission.

THERE IS a certain element of farce in what occurred at the Waco convention — an element of farce that derives from the fact that the Farm Bureau claims a membership of 327,000 in a state where fewer than 90,000 derive more than half of their income from agriculture. The Farm Bureau is not the collective voice of the Texas farmer. It is, rather, an insurance company. And a discount tire company. And an agricultural implement company. At least one Farm Bureau holding, Texas Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance, is identified in Sibbald's *Guide to the Texas top two-fifty 1988* as one of the state's 250 largest privately-held companies. When Farm Bureau directors conclude a board meeting, Mikkel Jordahl wrote in the *Observer* four years ago (T0-4/19/ 85), "they go around the table, so to speak, and call the meeting of the insurance company to order." (Jordahl was quoting a TFB staff member.)

And Farm Bureau representatives, it seems, are something less than honest when questioned about the holdings of those insurance companies — particularly holdings that might appear to compromise the Bureau as an interest group representing agriculture. Is there any truth, a reporter from somewhere outside the regular press corps asked at the Waco meeting, to claims made by the Texas Farmers Union that a TFB company owned stock in Syntex — a Panamanian agricultural pharmaceutical manufacturer? The question was framed in a way to allow Farm Bureau representatives to publicly inoculate the pro-Hightower Farmers Union claim of a conflict of interest.

"Roddy," True said, "I presume you're talking about the American Farm Bureau." True was interrupted by Warren Newberry: "I happen to be the administrative officer and we have absolutely no [Syntex] stock whatsoever. And as far as I know, never have had. So that is not true."

Asked by the *Observer* if any of the Farm Bureau's ancillary companies owned stock that might represent a conflict of interest, Newberry fired back with a two-word response: "Absolutely none!"

So ended the press conference and the two-hour Waco convention. But not the conflict of interest story. Because according to records filed with the state board of insurance, Southern Farm Bureau Casualty held, at the beginning of 1988, 25,000 shares of Syntex stock worth $800,000. Syntex is a Panamanian ag-pharm company that produces Synovex, a growth-promoting product which in 1988 was a top seller in American feedlots. Unless the stock was sold off during the past year, it compromises the bureau's position in its fight with Hightower over chemical-free beef. And serves to remind the public that the Farm Bureau is a for-profit corporation and not a public interest group.

And so the Waco gathering *was* about a Farm Bureau-Jim Hightower feud. It was a squabble about pesticides (Also listed on the Southern Casualty statement was $466,000 in Union Carbide stock and S.M. True's name as a company Trustee). And it was about $100 million worth of beef, and hormones and farm labor and liberal versus conservative . . .

We can't beat Hightower "in the polls," True said to *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* political writer Kaye Northcott. Nor can they beat him in the legislature. But here in Waco, in an auditorium overlooking the Brazos river, they sense they can beat him in Bill Clements's executive office. Maybe they know something that we don't. —**L.D.**

# The Case For John Tower

**BY JAMES McCARTY YEAGER**

THE FBI STUFF about John Tower was so much fun it was hard not to revel in the delicious irony of it all. The notion of the FBI invading the privacy of right wingers, instead of making their usual forays against members of the other political camp, was good enough for starters. Having protested for years that the Bill of Rights did not apply in national security cases, conservatives were all the more angry for being hoist on their own petard.

Procedural ironies aside, the personal tone of the Tower discussion was appropriately low-down. For 18 years John Tower was the lowest of the low; a canting, carping, right-wing-minority Senator so self-righteous he made Alaska Senator Ted Stevens look like an unstuffed shirt, so mean he made Strom Thurmond of South Carolina look like a reasonable man, and so politically insignificant he made Jim McClure of Idaho look like a legislative giant.

Then Reagan came in; Tower got made a Committee Chairman and suddenly became respectable. Meanwhile people started forgetting that not only was he a flagrant drunk but a notoriously nasty public one. And they conveniently ignored his penchant for being seen with diminutive Asian women over whom he can seem to loom. As for being bought after he left office: he had never had to be bought while he was in power, so in a way they were wasting their money.

Everybody around Washington knew about his failings even prior to his divorce; the media were forced by the court mudslinging to give mild and discreet notice to what their reporters and editor had heard and seen for years. John Tower's level of self-indulgence verged, and presumably still verges, on the self-destructive.

While his arrogance had always made him a tempting target, his former obscurity protected him. And once John Tower emerged as a principal Reagan spearcarrier, the natural mutual protectiveness of the powerful, aided by the supine docility of the media, replaced his earlier obscurity as a cover for his behavior.

But by the time of his ultimately unsuccessful Senate confirmation fight for Secretary of Defense the rules had changed and John Tower stood revealed. Initially this change occurred under the Gary Hart Memorial Repeal of the Old Pals Act, and partially it occurred because of public disgust with Defense Department self-gratification. In the larger scheme of things, it occurred mainly because the only thing the Bush Administration has going for it is that it isn't Ronald Reagan's.

Thus the first time Bush tried a Reagan trick like putting a known pig in office, he started to lose what little luster he possessed. However, Bush is going to be around for four long years, so rather than attack Bush's "misguided loyalty" (Reaganistic euphemism for callous indifference to public appearances), the attacks centered on Tower. It's just what happened with Meese, Watt, Deaver, Burford, North, and many who succeeded in escaping indictment under Reagan. The sins of the sons-of-bitches were not visited upon the father-figure, though in any well-run republic they would be.

Personally I prayed for Tower to be confirmed. First of all, it made perfect Republican sense to have an emotionally unstable little bully in charge of the nuclear codes. It even has a fine Republican precedent. That was the essence of Nixon's "Scare the Commies with my unreliability, Henry" theory, and if it was valid then it should be valid now. Of course, one of the main problems with that theory is that the Russians are already used to the notion of chemically crazed dodderers at the helm; after all, they lived through Brezhnev.

As long as the Republicans have won the Presidency, they ought to be forced to govern in consonance with what passes for their principles. This means jingoism, bellicosity, interventionism, and a vast public welfare spending program in which all the beneficiaries either wear uniforms or are engineers for defense contractors. Tower is blatantly in favor of all this kind of thing, and was innocent, or deranged enough to think that if the government pursued such ends straightforwardly and publicly the people would follow. Now in Dick Cheney we're going to get a bland votary of the mysteries of defense doublespeak, who may succeed, where Tower could not have, in protecting the Defense Department from rational (meaning deep) spending cuts.

On a more personal level, we've just survived eight years of a Commander in Chief whose direction of the nuclear niceties was, at best, gaga. Reagan, the Republicans' principal saint, had a button finger so thoroughly divorced from reality that any pale simulacrum of dissociation Tower achieved by chemical means could not have approached Reagan's perfect vacuity.

The additional factor that Tower would have brought to his job was similar to that imported by Al Haig into the first Reagan Cabinet: a bundle of fixed ideas so wildly at variance with shifting international facts that "In God We Trust" perforce became more than a mild hope in navigating the ship of state. Fortunately, the Rev. Falwell did not seem to claim all of God's attention; despite the Reagan crew's best efforts, He kept us out of serious trouble. Certainly nobody in the Administration tried to do so.

Thus Tower was quite capable of being a Republican Secretary of Defense, no matter what was discovered that ratified what Washington had long known against him. On past form he would have been wholly deferential to the military mind, which was the best that could ever be said of Cap Weinberger's strategic vision. While public trust of the military is properly limited, the brass do seem to have learned, either from Vietnam or from unsuccessful weapons tests, not to risk their hardware in unsympathetic environments like sand, scrub, salt, or jungle. This reluctance acts somewhat as a brake on effectuating the gunship diplomacy plans concocted by the wilder minds in the State Department; and it was the reason the NSC under North felt they had to tear up the Constitution to help invade Nicaragua.

Tower, especially if he was as debilitated as his nocturnal adventures must normally have left him, could have been expected to hew quietly to the line set out for him by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Historical reasons being momentarily in force, that line is likely to be quite conciliatory. Like old-style librarians who would rather shelve than circulate books, at this juncture the Pentagon would rather acquire than use weaponry. Tower was admirably fitted to provide the bellicose language behind which the industrial levers can be pulled. Meanwhile he would have taken his own fervid rhetoric sufficiently seriously to convince the right wing that he could scare the enemy.

But mainly I wanted Tower confirmed so

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I could sit back and wait for one of the network stakeout teams to broadcast some good videotape of Tower juiced up in a restaurant sometime during his term. The woman he would have been seen fondling, or shouting at, but in any case publicly humiliating, might even have turned out to be Vietnamese. John has been personally trying for years to understand the Vietnam War by reliving Saigon staff good times, all friendly brawls and friendlier bar girls. This didn't disqualify him for Secretary of Defense any more than did his craven deference to gold braid.

The sins for which Tower was condemned (with a little too much emphasis on the *flagrante delicto* and not quite enough on taking defense contractor money) in fact made him representative of his putative subordinates in certain matters of morale and morals. Since the aim of Republican government is to have all agencies save the Labor Department and Health and Human Services be captive to those they supposedly regulate, Tower was not only fit to be a Republican Secretary of Defense, he would have been perfect. □

# Howard University's Atwater Uprising

**BY RICHARD RYAN**

*Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.*

Psalm 27

*Washington, D.C.*

THE 27TH AND 23RD Psalms . . . Passages from the Gospels and the Koran . . . Frightened readers tried to make the sacred texts heard above the sound of breaking glass, as a contingent of D.C. riot police in full battle gear smashed out the barricaded main doors of the administration building at Howard University. It was noon on Tuesday, March 7, and the four-day old student uprising was skidding toward a violent conclusion.

When hundreds of students seized the administration building the previous Friday, the *coup d'ecole* was not, as some unsympathetic observers tried to portray it, a spontaneous act of youthful rambunctiousness. Howard University, the country's most distinguished African American college, is not a happy place these days, and according to campus leaders a major demonstration had been pending since the beginning of the spring term. Howard activists pointed to the soaring campus crime rate, the inefficient processing of student loans, and the continual attempt by reactionary commentators to link the principles of an Afro-centric curriculum to declining black scholastic performance — insults which the students of Howard suffered with a waning patience. But whatever protests these accumulated injuries might have provoked could never have compared to what happened at Howard in the first weeks of March. For who could have imagined that Howard president James Cheek would ask Republican media terrorist Lee Atwater to join the Howard board of trustees, or that the Howard board would show commensurate bad judgment in unanimously approving the appointment?

Lee Atwater: the progenitor of the Bush campaign's racist focus on the furlough granted by Michael Dukakis to felon Willie Horton. In Atwater, progressive observers found the embodiment of Bush's "Angst Macht Frei" campaign style. Atwater was a bad-news piece of Southern white trash who knew only-too-well what fears Horton's sub-equatorial face would send surging through suburban television sets. Not since the days of the Scottsboro boys has the specter of interracial rape been exploited so shamelessly. Following last year's election, the victorious hillbilly — and newly named chairman of the Republican party — sought to deflect the animosity of African Americans by professing his great affection for the blues.

Was Atwater truly surprised that his playing guitar with B. B. King meant less to Howard's protestors than his opposition to new sanctions on South Africa, or his support for Supreme Court-nominee Robert Bork? Let him think again. In Northeast Washington the Howard rebels live with the underclass violence Atwater turned into a right-wing ad campaign. But they don't consider slum-bred crime a refutation of black culture or commitment. These students brought a personal resolve to their quarrel with Atwater. They knew what they were after, and who was going to have to give it to them: in retrospect, the school officials with their court orders and the police with their teargas canisters were no match for one of the most coherent and well-organized campus uprisings in the history of American disobedience.

But at Tuesday's noontime eclipse no one in the Mordecai Wyatt Johnson Administration Building heard freedom's chimes ringing. Scores of women protestors sat or lay on the hard lobby floor while just outside the police waited for the final mandate to evict them. Small squads of men, many of them the sentries who had kept order throughout the occupation, gathered in entrance ways ready to confront the onslaught. It never came. After two hours of negotiations, D.C. Mayor Marion Barry, relieved to do something other than answer questions about his scandal-ridden administration, emerged from the student encampment and called off his officers.

The protestors were fortunate to live in a city whose mayor had run the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee during the glory days of the civil rights movement. But none of their demands had yet been met, midterms were approaching, and a court order and threat of expulsion still hung over their heads. Given that kind of pressure you had to wonder how long they could hold out and which points on their agenda they might compromise.

On Tuesday evening I stood before the administration building watching an unceasing convoy of cars roll up to the front steps with shipments of food and blankets and additional protestors. As I watched I fell into a conversation with a small group of demonstrators standing at the building's main entrance and asked whether or not Atwater could remain if their other demands were met. The students made disparaging noises and shook their heads.

"It's nonnegotiable, then?"

"Absolutely. No way he stays."

"Man, imagine what you'd think if Louis Farrakhan were made head of, you know, of —"

"A synagogue?" I suggested, and we all laughed.

A rumor went out among the assembled reporters that the odious Reverend Al Sharpton was on his way from New York. But when student leader Bill Simms, who

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*Richard Ryan writes about politics from Washington, D.C.*

had come out to brief the press on new developments, was asked about Sharpton, he responded with a thin smile, "We don't want him here. This is no concern of his."

His response was typical of the protestors, who consistently refused to be exploited or deterred. There was no grandstanding: reporters were kept out of the building. Demonstrators brought their lawyers to all meetings with school officials and made sure that the crowds of students who flocked to and from the protest were orderly and calm. In the body-clogged hallways the sentries cleared fire lanes and no one could enter the central stairwell rising to the student command center except visiting officials and the leaders themselves.

By late Tuesday evening Atwater submitted his resignation to the board and the following day Cheek capitulated to the student demands.

Besides reminding progressives how effective "direct action" (as the anarchists call it) remains, it seems that the Howard uprising holds two particular lessons for African Americans. First, it underscores the concerted strength of black activists when they pursue well-defined goals. This is the genius of black consciousness, out from under the burden of charismatic leadership that has too-often turned Afro-American politics into a cult of personality. A second and equally important lesson is that when their leaders betray them, African Americans have both the duty and leverage to set matters right. David Nicholson, a black editor with the *Washington Post*, noted that Howard President James Cheek has in recent years become increasingly alienated from his own students, and increasingly subservient to the white Congress members and administration officials who provide most of Howard's funding. With the appointment of Atwater, Cheek took his toadyism to intolerable extremes and the Howard students acted admirably in reining him in.

This is not to suggest that D.C. Mayor Marion Barry is an exemplar black leader — despite his role in the Howard University affair. Barry is as corrupt and embarrassing a public officials as exists in this country. He has spent the last eight years in bed (sometimes literally) with drug dealers and real estate developers. He is once again under grand jury investigation, this time for his connection to a crack peddler from the Virgin Islands, where Barry's administration has a consulting contract which appears to be little more than an elaborate kick-back scheme.

Despite his ineffectual leadership and his currying favor with developers, while impoverished neighbors explode in an all-out drug war that may soon bring federal troops into Washington, Barry remains surprisingly popular with most African American residents of this city. The Barry machine continually exploits fears of a white takeover in order to keep the poor wards, where the majority of D.C. voters live, in the mayor's camp.

Like Cheek, Barry is an erstwhile civil rights activist. Like Cheek, Barry came to office as a reformer, committed to a populist platform. Like Cheek, Barry has devoted considerable energy courting white financial interests that are willing to support accommodating African American officials. What the Howard uprising underscores is that such officials, no matter what the color of their political opponents, must be held accountable by their constituents. It's time for Washingtonians to show Marion Barry the same rough justice Howard students showed James Cheek.

THE DORK DEBUTS: It is truly phenomenal how quickly George Bush has dissipated the momentum of his Presidential campaign. Ronald Reagan had the supreme good fortune to come to power with the Congressional equivalent of a mob of skinheads at his back. The New Right brat pack in the Senate — plus massive defections by conservative southern Democrats in the House — allowed Reagan in 1981 to ram through Congress the most significant social agenda since Johnson's New Society. He never again had a comparable legislative victory and his last term was little more than a running series of scandals and political defeats. But he remained popular and politically formidable because his entrance was so strong.

Bush, who was on the scene for Reagan's remarkable performance, seems to have learned nothing from it. Beyond the obvious embarrassment of the Tower defeat there is the rather more ominous vibe of bumbling indecision that now radiates from the White House. The wolves of the press corps can smell the weakness and have begun salivating. Though Bush, according to opinion polls, remains popular outside the beltway, on the banks of the Potomac he's beginning to look like his own vice president.

Jimmy Carter was often criticized for thinking aloud. Bush seems to "not-think" aloud. After a madman with an imported copy of an AK-47 opened fire on school children in California, Bush said he was against banning "semi-automatic hunting rifles." When asked what he thought should be done about the murder rate in D.C. (America's highest) he said, "We need the help of the press to do something about it." His cheerful willingness to appear aimless is dazzling — at least Reagan tried to shield his ignorance behind a screen of one-liners. In late January he gave an interview to *Newsweek*, whose reporters asked the President what he wanted the story of the first hundred days to say. Bush said: "I don't know. I would like to have it written that we made major strides towards getting a grip with Congress on the budget deficit. Whether that will be done in a hundred days, I don't know. I like to think that you might see by then some major foreign policy initiatives. I don't know where or how." When asked about the proposed Congressional pay raise that had by then sent taxpayers into a frenzy, he said, "I've got to figure out what I'm going to say." When asked if he might endorse a pay raise smaller than the one originally proposed, he said, "You know what the answer to that is? I don't know, that's my answer."

Yet Americans seem ready for the tough choices that the President can't bring himself to make. A few weeks after Bush's shockingly vapid *Newsweek* interview, Dallas Congressman Martin Frost released responses to his annual legislative questionnaire. Frost received 11,400 replies, his largest response ever. The figures, and the political resolve they depict, are impressive. By a margin of 69 percent to 31 percent, respondents preferred raising taxes to allowing the deficit to rise. By 85 percent to 15 percent, Frost's constituents favored a mandatory seven-day waiting period for anyone wanting to purchase a handgun. Like a pack of raving liberals, 65 percent supported raising the federal minimum wage from $3.35 to $4.55. By a margin of 73 percent to 27 percent they favor federal legislation guaranteeing up to ten weeks unpaid parental leave. And as for George Bush's one major economic initiative since coming to office, the Dallas dwellers oppose using federal taxes for a savings and loans bailout, 80 percent to 20 percent. Now that's a mandate.

I'm rather beginning to enjoy the Bush era. □

## Observer Bequests

Austin Attorney Vivian Mahlab has agreed to consult with those interested in including the *Observer* in their estate planning. For further information, contact Vivian Mahlab, attorney-at-law, P.C., at 1301 Nueces, Austin, Texas 78701, or call 512/477-9400.

# Democracy's Decline

## *What This Country Needs Is A Good Voter Registration Drive*

**BY LAFE LARSON**

IN LAST November's Presidential election, the number of eligible Texans who didn't bother to vote exceeded the number of those who did. About 5.4 million went to the polls, but about 5.6 million stayed away. And of those who didn't vote, about 3.1 million (or 60 percent) were people with incomes below the national median.

The figures confirm a common perception that poor people don't vote in high numbers. But, of course, statistics don't tell us the reasons why they don't.

Mainstream political analysts tell us that low voter participation is due to some sort of political "malaise" that has set in, that Americans lack motivation when it comes to voting. Political pundits on the right assert that voter apathy is a healthy sign, reflecting a contentment with the system. The fact that many just don't get up the gumption to vote doesn't necessarily mean anything is wrong with the process and shouldn't be a cause for alarm. However, this theory fails to explain why the poor, who have the most to gain from voting, stay home in greater numbers. Further, why is there so much resistance from the right to opening up the enfranchisement process?

Those on the left regard low participation as a more deliberate act — an unorganized, mass boycott of electoral politics. Those who vote in lowest numbers, the poor, stay away because neither political party addresses their needs. Analysts on the left claim that turnout would increase significantly if our system were more closely modeled after Western Europe's class-based political system. The poor would be motivated to vote if there were better candidates or campaigns were more issue-oriented. The fallacy of this proposition is that turnout doesn't increase appreciably when an attractive progressive candidate is on the ballot. Voter turnout differences between conservative and bland Mark White and populist Jim Hightower were insignificant in both 1982 and 1986. If candidate "politics" are the driving force, turnout patterns should reflect that; but they don't.

There is a third explanation for America's low voter turnout: many people don't vote because discriminatory registration practices put into place in the late 19th century continue to keep poor and minority voters locked out of the electoral process. To understand our electoral behavior, according to this line of thought, we must examine the deeply entrenched institutional barriers that prevent large blocs of citizens from participating. The mainstream analysts' classic "blame the victim" scenario, in this view, ignores a long-standing pattern of deliberate attempts to keep poor and minority voters from the polls. Today's system, although less extreme than in the early part of the century, continues to deny millions of poor people easy access to the polls.

The "procedural barriers" argument is put forth by authors and activists Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward in their recent book, *Why Americans Don't Vote*. Piven and Cloward, who also founded Human SERVE, a national electoral reform project, reject the mainstream political analysts' apathy argument, viewing apathy, instead, as a "consequence, not a cause" for America's low election turnout. Before restrictions were established in the late 1800s, both rich and poor voted in record numbers, they point out. Today, once registered, voters turn out in high percentages regardless of the level of formal education. Similarly, Western European countries experience no appreciable difference in turnout among different classes of voters. Barriers such as difficult registration procedures rather than voter apathy are the leading cause for low voter turnout in America.

What would be the result if these barriers were removed? For starters, Mark White would probably be Governor of Texas, and Michael Dukakis would probably be President. More important, if a system of inclusion had been maintained, America would most likely resemble the social democracies of Western Europe. No longer would the U.S. be the only democracy in the world without a national health care program, nor would the infant mortality rates in many U.S. cities be higher than in some Third World countries. Nor would we be generating a growing underclass where one-half of all black and one-third of all Hispanic children live in poverty.

Why? Because the majority of the nonvoters are poor. Nearly two-thirds of the 70 million nonregistered citizens nationwide have incomes below the national median. And statistics suggest that once registered, people vote. In the last three Presidential elections, over 80 percent of *registered* Texans cast ballots.

INITIALLY, ONLY land-owning males were allowed a voting voice. Enfranchisement expansion began with the removal of the property requirement, and, as barriers were lifted, participation rose dramatically. After the Civil War, black males were granted voting rights and participation reached record levels, ranging from 70 to 80 percent.

The pattern of widespread participation began to change by the late 1800s as measures to restrict the franchise were adopted. The farm/labor coalition of 1876 and later the Farmers Alliance forged electoral movements challenging the established political and corporate power structure. Success from populist uprisings threatened the corporate barons, who moved quickly to adopt restrictions to the ballot through poll taxes, literacy tests, and lengthy residency requirements. So successful were the various disenfranchising techniques that blacks and the poor literally disappeared from the registration rolls. In Texas, black participation dropped from 100,000 to 5,000 between the 1890s and 1906. Black voting dropped from 80 to 18 percent in Mississippi and fell 50 percent in Arkansas between 1884 and 1904. Northern states joined the exclusionary trend by establishing residency requirements, some requiring 14 years as a prerequisite to voting. The upshot of the widespread disenfranchisement campaign was a dramatic drop in voter participation nationwide from 79 to 49 percent.

In reaction, members of silenced constituencies battled to remove barriers and organized to extend the right to vote. The women's suffrage movement was a highly successful militant effort that, after a series of strong challenges, culminated in the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Austin activist Jane Y. McCallum organized a drive in 1918 that registered 389,000 women in 17 days, after having won the franchise. The more recent challenge came from the mass protests and litigation during the civil rights movement. A direct result of the movement was the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, perhaps the most sweeping reform of our

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electoral process, breaking down the last of the legal barriers preventing large blocs of citizens from exercising their right to vote.

Although long-standing legal barriers have been eliminated, no remedy has been adopted to rectify 100 years of discriminatory practices. Unlike the civil rights reforms where an affirmative obligation required redress of discriminatory practices, voting rights reforms were limited to striking down bad law, but did not obligate affirmative changes. The courts have held that there exists a constitutional right to vote, but no constitutional right to register. Consequently, government does not protect the right to vote in the same way that it protects citizens' civil rights.

The lack of an affirmative obligation to rectify discriminatory practices has allowed a system of institutional barriers to remain intact. Today's patchwork of 49 different state registration systems effectively disenfranchises millions through practices reminiscent of those established 100 years ago. Twenty-four states require voters to appear in person to register — usually at the courthouse during working hours. For example, Louisiana voters must appear before the parish registrar. Until struck down by the courts last year, Mississippi maintained a dual registration system — one for municipal and another for county, state, and federal elections. And it's not just Southern states that have registration barriers. The state of Massachusetts maintains a barrier-ridden system requiring a personal appearance by the voter.

Once registered, staying on the registration rolls is another matter. Forty states strike voters from the rolls simply for not voting. Six states, including New Mexico, cancel registration for failing to vote in one general election (every two years). Although Texas does not purge for nonvoting, there is no provision for notifying voters who are being removed from the rolls.

In New Mexico, voter applications have been rejected because they were filled out in the wrong-colored ink. In Boston, organizers of a Latino Fair were denied their request for a deputy registrar. In New York, voting records are frequently misplaced because clerks fail to alphabetize correctly.

It should come as no surprise that the poor are seriously underrepresented in our electorate. The deliberate attempts to keep the poor from voting create a heavily class-skewed American electorate. Only 54 percent of the poor (those with incomes under $10,000) are registered, compared with 79 percent of those with incomes above $25,000 (1980 figures). The class gap widens further when considering voting strength. Although the poor make up one-quarter of the population, they comprise only 17 percent of the total vote. By contrast, the most affluent one-quarter of the population accounts for 35 percent of the voting strength. Voting strength of the rich is twice that of the poor.

NOW IS THE TIME to finish the civil rights revolution that began 25 years ago. A national movement is being organized to demand full voting rights for all Americans. The 100% VOTE campaign will push legislation establishing an affirmative obligation on the part of government to enroll citizens to vote, as is done in every other major world democracy. Federal, state, and local governments will be charged with creating voter rolls through outreach efforts in health clinics, day-care centers, public schools, welfare offices, public housing sites, drivers license offices, and other service-provider facilities. Every government office will become an enfranchisement center. Two U.S. House bills, one by John Conyers, D-Michigan, and the other by Al Swift, D-Washington, and a Senate measure by Edward Kennedy, D-Massachusetts, and Alan Cranston, D-California, create a universal voter roll through government outreach programs.

Texas could be one of the first to establish full enfranchisement statewide if a bill introduced by Rep. Ernestine Glossbrenner, D-Alice, passes. The initiative directs state agencies to register their clients on a routine basis as part of their service obligation. It is estimated that one state agency, the Department of Human Services, could enroll approximately 500,000 new voters based on their annual client population. Drivers license offices could enroll voters, as well.

Local governments will be expected to join the registration revolution. A two-year campaign, led by Human SERVE, working in conjunction with Southwest Voter Registration, has begun in South Texas. The project targets cities and counties from San Antonio to the border in an effort to register clients in the vast array of local service provider centers. Organizers estimate that 600,000 new voters could be enfranchised by election day 1990.

What if they held an election and all the poor, disabled, minorities, and women came? One result might be a more progressive government. An electoral movement is needed to complete the work began by our brothers and sisters 25 years ago — for no real social change can take place when one-third of the people are shut out of the political process. Full enfranchisement is the means by which we can create a more fair and equitable political system. □

# Defense Dependence, Industrial Competitiveness, and the Economic Prospects of Texas and the Nation

*These remarks by Lloyd J. Dumas, Professor of Economics and Political Economy at the University of Texas at Dallas, are based on a draft discussion paper presented at the "Dallas 2000 and Beyond: Critical Issues for the Next Generation" conference held in Dallas on March 3, 1989.*

—Bernard Rapoport

## INTRODUCTION

There is little question that heavy concentrations of military-serving activity around Texas (e.g., military bases surrounding San Antonio, military industry in Dallas/Fort Worth, nuclear weapons production in Amarillo) have provided a short-term cushion for those areas in recent years. While tumbling oil prices and serious farm problems have created deep recession in much of the state, the enormous military buildup produced a strong, continuing flow of military dollars into the state's pockets of military economy. Yet there are compelling reasons why the military dependence that appears to have been a short-term asset for these areas in the recent past has been a long-term liability, and one which is likely to soon become a short-term liability as well.

## THE CHANGED CONTEXT

Between fiscal year 1980 and fiscal year 1989, spending on "national defense" more than doubled, from $134 billion to roughly $294 billion. At the same time, the national debt of the United States more than tripled from $914 billion to $2.8 trillion, as the nation cut taxes and borrowed heavily, largely to finance that military buildup. (It is interesting to note that the savings which would have resulted from a flat Department of Defense budget over that period would have wiped out more than 70 percent of the increase in the national debt.) The soaring national debt in turn led to a near tripling of the net interest on that debt, from $53 billion to $152 billion. Without this explosive increase in the national debt, the interest savings alone would have taken us two-thirds of the way to balancing the federal budget.

This federal spending binge, coupled with a refusal to pay for it with tax revenues, has also crowded out a great deal of productive private business investment. And it has put a considerable squeeze on the ability of state and local governments to raise the funds they needed. It is therefore not difficult to understand why there are now powerful political pressures to balance the federal budget.

In FY 1987, spending on the military and interest on the national debt alone accounted for almost 90 percent of all the federal income tax revenues collected from all individuals *and* corporations in the United States combined. Without draconian tax increases or slashes in federal social programs much greater than the public was willing to accept from the previous Administration, significant cuts in the military budget are highly likely. In their absence, there is virtually no prospect of balancing the federal budget in the foreseeable future. This is not a question of ideology or political preference. It is simply a matter of fiscal reality.

## THE LONG-TERM LIABILITY

There are also long-term structural economic forces pushing the nation toward reduced military expenditures. Much as been written about the pressing problem of the failing competitiveness of American industry. In the mid-1980s, President Reagan appointed a special Commission on Industrial Competitiveness to look into this issue (more than two-thirds of its members were major industrialists and bankers, including Mark Shepherd, Chair and CEO of Texas Instruments, and Edwin Harper, Executive VP of Dallas Corporation). In January 1985, the Commission issued its strongly worded report, saying

> During the past year, 30 leaders from American business, labor, government, and academia have come to remarkable consensus. . . . Are we meeting the competitive challenge? Not well enough. Our ability to compete in world markets is eroding. . . . This report contains compelling evidence of a relative decline in our competitive performance.

For more than three-quarters of a century, from 1894 to 1970, every single year the U.S. exported more than it imported. This remarkable performance reflected the ability of American industry to produce so efficiently that it could pay the world's highest wages and still make products people wanted at a price they could afford to pay. In the 1970s, these continuing trade surpluses turned into deficits, despite a decline in American industrial wages relative to the rest of the world. (U.S. industrial labor costs per hour, including fringe benefits, had fallen to about ninth in the world as of the middle 1980s.) By 1983, the U.S. merchandise trade deficit had reached an all-time high of roughly $67 billion. By 1987, this record had been shattered — the deficit had more than doubled, despite a fall in the value of the dollar and weak oil import prices. American industry had become relatively inefficient, and so had lost its long-term competitive edge.

Why has this happened to the nation which used to be a model of industrial efficiency for the rest of the world through much of its modern history? Though many things affect the efficiency of industry, there are two factors which are critical — the availability of sufficient engineering and scientific talent to generate a continued flow of improvements in technology that allow producers to make better products at lower cost, and the availability of sufficient investment capital to deploy those improvements. Over the past four decades, the large, well-funded military has diverted large amounts of both those key resources from the civilian, commercial economy.

Roughly 30 percent of the nation's pool of engineers and scientists and a comparable fraction of its capital have been taken by the military sector. The long-term drain of these key resources has undermined the ability of U.S. industry to maintain its competitive position, especially relative to those nations (e.g., Japan and Germany) whose commercial industries are only lightly burdened by that drain.

*(to be continued)*

## INTRODUCING: PPIF'S LEGISLATIVE PROFILES

PPIF's Legislative Member Profiles are intended to equip ordinary folks with some of the same background information on Members that Capitol insiders have at their fingertips. Compilation of the profiles is underway, with first priority given to Committee Chairs in the House. Copies are being distributed to libraries and to organizations participating in PPIF's training program for public interest lobbyists. If you are interested in receiving more information on these profiles, complete the form shown below.

*Bruce Gibson, continued*

**CAMPAIGN FINANCES**

(Note: A=Austin; D=Dallas; FW=Fort Worth; H=Houston

1986: Raised $78,750. Got contributions from 123 PACs. Contributors of $2,500: Allied Bancshares Leadership Funds Tx. Acct. (H); Bankers Legislative League of Tx. (A); Contributors of $2,000: Tx. Dental Association (A); Coalition for Transportation and Water Development (D); Tx. Medical Assoc. PAC (A); Contributors of $1,500: Tx. Real Estate PAC (A); Savings and Loan PAC (A); Contributors of $1,250: General Tele State PAC (San Angelo); Contributors of $1,000: Good Government Fund (FW); Transporta-

*Ashley Smith, continued*

**PERSONAL FINANCES—1987**

Smith owns fewer than 100 shares of stock in Exxon, Inc. (sold at net gain of less than $1,000), Kaneb, Inc. (sold at ne loss of between $1,000 and $5,000), and Colgate Palmolive Corp. Owns between 100 and 500 shares in Western Banc (sold at net loss of over $5,000) and Wyndham Capital Corp. Owns more than 500 shares in Pryor Tungsten Co., Inc., Windsor S&L, Liberty S&L, Houston Savings, Smith-Parker Products, Inc. (with spouse), and Smith-McCain, Inc. (sold

*Terral Smith, continued*

**Legislative Activity**

**1985 (69th)**— In a Feb. 20, 1985 interview with Bonnie Skaar George of the *Westlake Picayune*, Smith outlined agenda as putting priority on the protection of Lake Travis, passing a tougher DWI law, and addressing the pr crime and overcrowded prisons. Smith carried a bill on wiretapping that outlawed the use of pen registers. Sp to prohibit beverage containers w/ detachable openers. Carried bills relating to DWI.

*Jack Vowell, continued*

**VOTES ON KEY ISSUES**

For a complete explanation of the following issues, see the "Issues Summary" included s

**1981—67th SESSION**

**1:** Worker Compensation for Farm Workers (HB 698)— Voted aye.
**2:** Increase AFDC Payments— Voted nay.
**3:** Bilingual Education Funding— Voted aye on the motion to table.
**4:** Raising Interest Rates (HB1228)— **A)** Lower the ceiling from 30% to 24%: Voted nay.
**B)** Final passage: Voted aye. [Vowell received $3,350 in contributions from lending groups in interest rates. (*Ft. Worth Star-Telegram*, 3/29/81.)]

*Stan Schlueter, continued*

**DEMOGRAPHICS OF DISTRICT 54** (1980 census)

**HOUSEHOLDS**

Total households: 34,860

by Household Income:

- $ 7,499: 28.7%
$ 7,500 - $14,999: 31.6%
$15,

by Composition

One male: 9.1
One female: 10.4

*cy Information Fund Member Profile*

**, D—FORT WORTH (District 89)**

2, 1936. Attended Sam Houston State U.; finished at TCU in '59. C

e 1970. Speaker of the House since '83. Member of the House Dem
ell; executive asst: Daryl Dorcy; special assts: Dale Craymer, Larry
ss relations: Tim Conger; district asst: Joy Arthur. Capitol offc: r
Fort Worth / (817)737-3783.

ncludes part of Tarrant County (See demographic profile.)

**OCCUPATION**

Lewis Label Products, Inc.; Director of Lake Worth Nat'l Bank; owne
ctor of Ft. Worth Business Forms, Inc.; president and director of L.
partner of 287/Blue Mound Joint Venture Partners (all of these in
ner / partner of S 03 Ranch (Milford) and S 03 Ranch (Bertram). Sa

***For Information – Complete & Return To:***

***Sarah Searcy***
***Editor, c/o PPIF***
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***Austin, TX 78701***

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*Address* _____

*City, State, Zip* _____

*Tel No. (___)* _____

**A public service report from the Public Policy Information Fund, 1205 Nueces, Austin, TX 78701 (512) 469-0158**

# THE TEXAS SENATORS: BILLS INTRODUCED 1989

*Note: In our March 10 report we listed new legislation introduced by Texas House Members. Here we report on public bills introduced by our two U.S. Senators since the beginning of the 101st Congress through the Easter recess. Each bill bears a number which appears in parentheses after its brief description. If you want more information on a Senator's bill, write to him c/o United States Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510. For free copies of a bill or information on the status of these bills or any other pending legislation, you may contact Senate Document Room, Hart Office Bldg., Room B-04, Washington, D.C. 20510 or call them at (202) 224-7860.*

**LLOYD BENTSEN**

*Medicare:* To amend the Social Security Act to make certain modifications in the Medicare program with respect to payments made under such program to hospitals located in rural areas, to improve the delivery of health services to individuals residing in such areas, and for other purposes. (S.306)

*Central American Refugees:* To amend title V of the Refugee Education Assistance Act of 1980 to provide certain resettlement assistance for certain Central Americans. (S.372)

*American Canal:* To direct the Secretary of State to construct, operate, and maintain an extension of the American Canal at El Paso, Texas. (S.426)

*Lake Meredith:* To authorize the Secretary of the Interior to construct and test the Lake Meredith salinity control project in New Mexico and Texas, and for other purposes. (S.486)

*Cancer:* Designating the week of April 14, 1989, through April 22, 1989, as "National Minority Cancer Awareness Week". (S.J.Res. 34)

*Hospice:* To designate the month of November, 1989 and 1990 as "National Hospice Month". (S.J.Res. 78)

**PHIL GRAMM**

*FCC:* To permit the Federal Communications Commission to utilize value based assignments in awarding licenses for the use of the electromagnetic spectrum. (S.170)

*Balanced Budget:* Proposing an amendment to the Constitution relating to Federal budget procedures. (S.J.Res.30)

*Trade:* To authorize negotiation of a North American Free Trade Area, to promote free trade, and for other purposes. (S.356)

*Immigration:* To amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to deny the adjudication of certain political asylum claims made in the United States. (S. 474)

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***BUSTAMANTE TAKES ON OREGON FARM BUREAU***

*Note: From time to time we will reprint portions of speeches or debate from the Congressional Record which illuminate an issue, or the political context in which our legislators work. Reprinted here are remarks of U.S. Representative Albert Bustamante of San Antonio made on the floor of Congress on February 9, 1989.*

Mr. BUSTAMANTE. Mr. Speaker, yesterday a disturbing story appeared on the national news wire. While testifying before the Oregon State Senate, an Oregon Farm Bureau official said that the bureau was opposed to an increase in the minimum wage because it would attract more migrant workers to his State.

The official told the State Senate that this could create what he called a "mini-San Antonio between Salem and Portland."

As a Representative of San Antonio, as an Hispanic Member of this body, and as a former migrant worker who spent many a summer picking crops in Oregon, I take great offense at this statement and the reasoning that the State farm bureau used to arrive at its position. Their argument is blatantly anti-Hispanic and is insulting to an honorable group of men, women, and children who provide an essential service to the State of Oregon, and to our Nation's agricultural economy.

When my family traveled to Oregon each summer to pick beans and strawberries, we were not some plague that had to be controlled. We were hard working American citizens, and we expected to be treated with the same respect that is owed to all people.

The vast majority of migrant workers are Hispanic. They provide a service to the agricultural community that few others are willing to. These hard working people deserve the right to perform their job without discrimination.

I rise to affirm our uncompromising opposition to the kind of reasoning used by the Oregon Farm Bureau—for when we discriminate against any group of Americans, our entire Nation suffers.

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***COMING.....***

In April PPIF and the Southwest Voter Research Institute will release a national report on how the 100th Congress dealt with issues of interest to Hispanics. Each Senator and Representative will be rated on the extent to which his or her votes are in harmony with opinions on national legislation expressed during a survey of Hispanic leaders. We hope to reprint portions of that report, particularly those pertaining to the Texas Congressional Delegation.

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***WHAT IS THE PUBLIC POLICY INFORMATION FUND ?***

The Public Policy Information Fund, Inc. is a non-profit, non-partisan research and education organization incorporated in the District of Columbia in 1985.

Financial support for the work of PPIF comes in part from grants made by the following: The Field Foundation, The Rockefeller Family Fund, The Youth Project, the Forum Institute, the Apple Corporation, and Gerard Communications.

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# POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE

**DEMOCRATS WERE HAPPY** last fall to reclaim two Congressional seats in Texas, with the election of Bill Sarpalius of Canyon to the seat formerly held by Republican Beau Boulter, and Greg Laughlin of West Columbia to Republican Mac Sweeney's seat. But everyone knew there would be times when it would be hard to tell the difference between the two new Democrats and their Republican predecessors. And now here are Sarpalius and Laughlin merrily voting right along with the Republicans. Take, for example, the recent vote on whether to raise the minimum wage. The House approved a raise (from $3.35 to $4.55 in 1991) by a vote of 240-179. All eight Republicans in the Texas delegation voted no. But five Democrats voted no, as well. They were: Sarpalius, Laughlin, Marvin Leath of Waco, Ralph Hall of Rockwall, and Charles Stenholm of Avoca.

The House rejected by a vote of 218-198 an amendment supported by President Bush that called for a smaller increase and the creation of a sub-minimum wage. All Texas Republicans except Joe Barton of Ennis voted in favor of the amendment. Sarpalius, Laughlin, Leath, Hall, and Stenholm voted for the sub-minimum wage, joined also by Mike Andrews of Houston and Jim Chapman of Sulphur Springs.

**IN THE TEXAS HOUSE** of Representatives a new breeze seems to be blowing. Some social spending advocates were surprised by the generous level of spending in the plan announced by Speaker Gib Lewis in March. Money to address the AIDS crisis, for example, was higher in Lewis's proposals than in Lt. Gov. Hobby's plan now being discussed in the Senate — which is an unusual switch. Lewis also suggests an additional $600 million to help resolve inequity in funding of the state's public schools. Advocates of higher education spending, however, were somewhat disappointed by Lewis's numbers. Overall, the Speaker is calling for $1.9 billion more to be spent over the next two years than the Legislative Budget Board proposed in January.

Those who are attuned to the politics at work here cannot help but notice that Lewis's ambitious plan was announced as he continued to be plagued by newspaper stories around the state that suggested the Speaker had benefited from favorable treatment by the state Parks & Wildlife department in the stocking of wildlife on his ranch. His progressive spending goals not only knocked the wildlife stories off the front page for a day or two, but it brought him new admirers in the "people's lobby" crowd.

**ONE REFRESHING** thing about Texas conservatives is that they don't pretend to be smarter than the rest of us — or at least they don't pretend very convincingly. Young conservative groups, especially, often issue statements to the Capitol press corps that are riddled with misspellings and grammatical goofs (due to the declining standards of Texas education, no doubt). "Conservatives of Texas Denounce Congressional Hypocracy," was the headline on a recent press release that we received in the week after John Tower was rejected by the U.S. Senate. We read on with delight, hoping to find dire warnings about the state of our "democrisy," and other imaginative wordplay. According to the statement, Steven Munisteri, the chairman of the fledgling Conservatives of Texas organization, authorized the group's board to make the following statement: "The Conservatives of Texas believe that actions by the Democractic [sic] leadership and the Senate in rejecting a highly qualified John Tower for partaking of alcoholic beverages while many of those same Senators are known for womanizing constitutes the height of hypocracy [sic]. As there [sic] own personal conduct indicates that they themselves do not find that such activities should disqualify one from public office, we can only conclude the Senate's actions were a deliberate attempt to undercut the authority of the Presidency. . . ." Etc. Etc.

The statement went on to refer to Georgia Senator Sam Nunn as a "convicted drunkard" and to recycle a *Washington Times* allegation that Senator Ted Kennedy "engaged in sexual activity on the floor of a Washington restaurant in 1987."

Attached to the release was a copy of a fawning letter to Tower, offering to honor him with a "Spirit of the Alamo" banquet in April.

**THOUGH SEVERAL** newspapers around the state have editorialized in favor of preserving an elected commissioner of agriculture — despite the moves in the legislature to get rid of Jim Hightower by getting rid of his job — the one-time populist Panhandle newspaper *The Canadian Record* has come out against Hightower. In an editorial in the March 16 edition, the *Record* said: "Hightower's own objective has always been to use TDA to build a populist movement to further Jim Hightower's own political ambitions. Indications are that Hightower's populism is none too popular with the agriculture constituency he has sought to represent. He may succeed in destroying his own nest." Concluded the *Record*, "It couldn't happen to a more deserving fellow."

**ONE OF THE FIRST** of the state papers to side with Hightower was the *Dallas Times Herald*, which editorialized on March 10 against making the office appointive. "Agriculture remains a highly important part of the Texas economy," wrote the *Times Herald*. "Commissioner Hightower has spent six years helping producers and consumers. He has sponsored diversification plans, promoted new processing capabilities, made pesticide use safer and found new more efficient ways to use our soil and water without doing them violence." The editorial urge the legislature to approve the reauthorization of the Ag Department — and to do it quickly, to give time to override a possible veto by Gov. Clements.

One the other side of the issue, the *Dallas Morning News* editorialized that it was high time Texas made the office of ag commissioner an appointed position. Most other states do it that way, they argued, so why not Texas? (We look forward to the *Morning News*'s approval of a state income tax on the same rationale.) Just to demonstrate that their stand was one of principle — nothing personal against Hightower — they recommended that the change not be made until 1994, giving Hightower one more run for the office in 1990.

Somehow, it's hard to imagine that that's quite what the Farm Bureau has in mind.

**ONE REPUBLICAN** in the House to watch on the Ag Department bill is Rep. Jack Vowell of El Paso. Vowell is chairman of the Sunset Advisory Commission, which recommended legislation to recreate the department in its present structure with an elected commissioner. If Vowell were to buck a governor's veto, he might bring a few other reasonable and moderate Republicans along with him.

**WHILE THE STORM** over the Ag Department was brewing in Austin, Hightower popped up in San Antonio to testify in front of Henry B. Gonzalez's Congressional banking committee, which was conducting hearings March 10 and 11 on the effects of the savings and loan industry's collapse. Attorney General Jim Mattox teamed up with Hightower for an afternoon display of populist fireworks on the financial questions at hand. Hightower said the S&L problems were the result of a "decade of unsupervised financial frolic" and said the brunt of the Bush plan to revive the industry "will fall on the people who cannot get a loan at the very financial institutions they are being asked to bail out." State Treasurer Ann Richards testified on the second day of the hearings. (More on the Gonzalez hearings in an upcoming *Observer*.)

# Politics and the Act of Writing

**BY TOM McCLELLAN**

TO PUT WORDS on paper — or to enmesh them in magnetic fields on a plastic disc, for that matter — is a political act, if for no other reason than this: at the moment of their incarnation those words enter the world of common and international law.

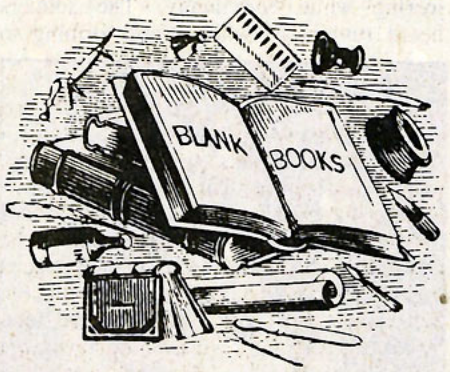
In one of Robert Graves's odder verses, he reflects on having learned that a postcard he'd mailed to a friend during the first Great War had just brought a nice price at an estate auction. The object on which his words were penned, he pointed out, might change ownership, but the immaterial utterance itself, "the written word," remained the property of Mr. Graves — et ux, et heir and assignees — no one could publish it but him or by his leave — and in that poem he reproduced what he'd said. And it was as exhausted and dull as any soldier's note.

So, no one may copy your grocery list and sell or distribute it without your permission.

At the polar extreme from your grocery list, on the axis of political impact, we have the current example of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, perceived by the Ayatollah and those who acknowledge him as their spiritual leader as an attack on their faith virulent enough to merit the death sentence. At the time of this writing the book has been burned in Yorkshire and Greater Manchester by the very Muslim migrants Rushdie hoped would read it and a $5.2 million bounty put on the author's head. Whether the novel is any good scarcely matters, save as matter for sardonics:

> . . . likewise, our mountain-climbing, prophet-motivated solitary is to be the medieval baby-frightener, the Devil's synonym: Mahound.

Would the reader care for 300 to 400 pages of that sort of narrative? The "prophet-motivated" pun is clever enough. "Strikes me as overly florid," writes a local commentator, "but I'd stop short of the death penalty." The novel is no longer a literary work; it has become a best-selling cause, an international incident/media event.




Will Marge Thatcher or Ross Perot put a bounty on the Ayatollah? Film tomorrow.

In a recent "Doonesbury" strip the Islamic Critics' Circle informs the press that they've ordered death by stoning for Leo Buscaglia, Erica Jong, and Donald Trump. "Hey," says a reporter, "what about Andy Rooney?"

Back to Mr. Graves, his soldiering in World War I. Historically, the poet was part of the establishment, or wanted to be. Chaucer carried out diplomatic missions; Shakespeare's troupe became The King's Men at last, John Donne starved from lack of preferment until receiving a Deanship, Sam Johnson's dictionary earned him the royal pension that Ollie Goldsmith twitted him about: said it warped his politics; for by that time, a writer could depend, to some extent, on a literate public. By WW I the poet had been completely cast among the people to make his way as best he could unprotected. "As for literature," says Mr. Nixon to Ezra Pound's creation Hugh Selwin Mauberly, "It gives no man a sinecure."

THE FIRST WORLD WAR the poets could not celebrate, not as Tennyson once celebrated the charge of the Light Brigade at Balclava. Even Kipling's sympathy for the British Tommy called to the frontiers of empire was not enough. "What passing bells for those who die as cattle?" asked Wilfred Owen shortly before he was killed.

Like Graves and Owen, Ford Maddox Ford's character, Christopher Teitjens, serves his country for the duration of "the war to end all war." He even requests to be sent to the front — because his government so misuses his competence and clarity that he feels he cannot otherwise continue to serve both his nation and his own integrity. Modern war politicized the poets.

Fascism radicalized them.

> Democracy is today to that extent a realized and intrinsic fact, that politics is everybody's business. Nobody can deny this; it stares us in the face with an immediacy never known before. Sometimes we hear somebody say "I take no interest in politics." The words strike us as absurd. Not only so, but egotistic and antisocial, a stupid self-deception, a piece of folly. But they are more: they betray an ignorance not only intellectual but ethical.

Thomas Mann was pissed. Exactly why he was pissed he explained after he found a term for what Marx would have called the combined forces of the Oppressor Class:

> Interest is all that which seeks to thwart [the desire of mankind for self-betterment], because it would thereby be cut off from certain advantages and privileges; seeks by every means at its command, not scorning the basest, even the criminal. . . . In Spain, interest rages, rages with a shamelessness such as the world has seldom seen.

Hemingway did ambulance duty for the republic, Wystan Hugh Auden served as a stretcher bearer, George Orwell did a hitch with the Marxist troops, Dorothy Parker reported on the siege of Madrid, Spain's foremost poet Fedirico Garcia Lorca was murdered by the *facistas*, and Chilean Consul Pablo Neruda explained the problem:

> Come and see the blood in the streets,
> come and see
> the blood in the streets,
> come and see the blood
> in the streets!

I think we are into the topic now. More to follow. □

*Tom McClellan, a Dallas writer, contributes a regular column to the* Observer.

# Houston's Hidden History

## *In 1917, Black Soldiers Marched in Rage And Took Their Secrets to the Grave*

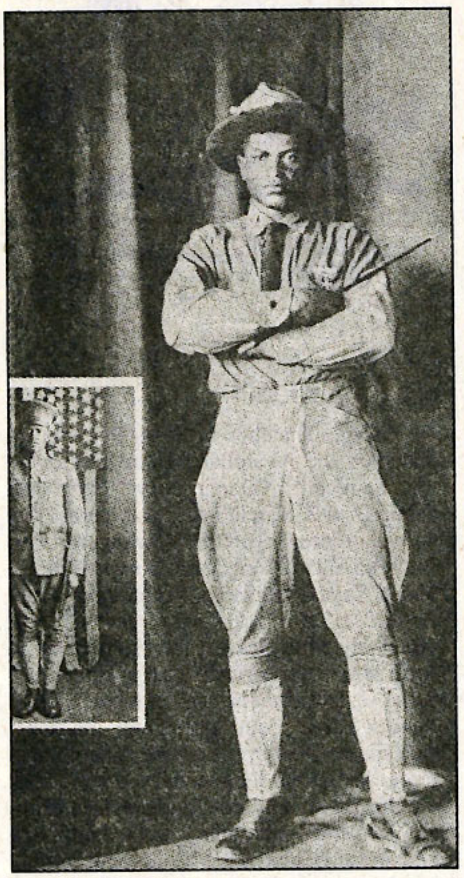
**BY ROSALIND ALEXANDER**

*San Antonio*

THE GALLOWS and original grave site aren't marked anymore. The scaffolding that Fort Sam Houston Museum curator John Manguso describes as "about the size of a two-car garage" was torn down and burned immediately after the hanging — before the press got wind that there was a hanging. But there's a little rise by Salado Creek that is still barren and lonely in the middle of the day. And former state legislator Maury Maverick remembers that "as a kid on a bike" he was afraid to go beyond the well-known line dividing the road from the hanging place. There's also a little indention in the ground marked with a worn and worried circle path that San Antonio private investigator Mike Kaliski identifies as the original burial place. Beneath it, for 40 years, lay the heart of the black military column from Camp Logan — in graves marked only by Army bunk tags numbered one through nineteen.

To find the official graves that the Army finally dug in 1937, walk north, two rows east of the Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery flagpole. There, you can find 17 of the marble stones, each engraved with a standard cross over each "mutineer's" name. Below the crosses are the dates of the hangings. No ranks, no serial numbers, no birth dates. Just typically strong black family names like Williams, Johnson, Collier, Nesbit, and Hawkins. After seven decades, the incomplete markings still serve to segregate the graves. They do not, according to Manguso, represent a further slight by the army. "Regulations change," he shrugs.

IN LATE AUGUST of 1917, a few short years before the "Negro" came into vogue in New York, and a few months after the U.S. declaration of World War I, 100 soldiers of the all-black 24th Infantry stationed near Camp Logan, outside Houston, armed themselves, marched into the city, killed 20 whites and wounded 12 others. For weeks, the troops who had accompanied Pershing in New Mexico and completed tours of duty in the Philippines had been harassed and beaten by Houston police, demeaned on street cars and at drinking water barrels, forced to adhere to Jim Crow laws, and stripped of their military dignity and privilege in the presence of initially reverent black civilians and a jeering white community. The soldiers heard rumors of white mobs forming to attack their bivouac and word flew through camp that one of the unit's exemplary M.P.s had been beaten to death by local police while inquiring about a jailed soldier who had been severely beaten for protecting a black civilian's rights. Upon seeing a few soldiers carrying ammunition from a supply tent, the unit's white officers, who had been all but oblivious to the unrest, tried to round-up the battalion's guns. Earlier, at the suggestion of Houston police, officers had disarmed black soldiers before they went into town. This time the act was disastrously timed. Attempting to take the weapons from men who had reason to fear local lynch mobs was the breaking straw, even for the largely Southern, obedient, and war-seasoned soldiers. So, on August 23, during a sudden summer rainstorm and after one of the hottest days then recorded in Houston, the best of the 24th Infantry's "I" Company and a few soldiers of "L" and "M" Companies loaded their Springfield rifles, formed a loose column under the command of 13-year veteran Sgt. Vida Henry, and marched east toward downtown from what is now known as Memorial Park.



**T.C. Hawkins**

Some fell in with the column because they wanted revenge for the indignities and abuse they'd suffered at the hands of bigoted and brutal policemen like Rufus Daniels and Lee Sparks — and from hostile white Houstonians. Some followed because they were trained to obey orders, and others stood with the column because they feared being killed by the mutineers for not adhering to cries of "To hell with going to France, . . . get to work right here," and "Stick by your own race." Whatever their reasons, 118 black infantrymen of the 24th were subsequently tried in one of the largest courts-martial in U.S. military history. Of the 111 who were convicted, 19 were hanged, 63 were sentenced to life in prison, and 29 received lesser hard-labor sentences.

The circumstantial evidence by which the infantrymen were convicted was gathered largely from a few black witnesses granted immunity in exchange for labeling someone a "ring leader." And from hundreds of helpful whites who claimed they could tell one insignificant black face from another that they may or may not have seen on a dark, stormy Houston night. But because Sgt. Henry had blown his own head off after he lost command of the splintered column, and the court-martialed men maintained an unbroken code of silence — save proclamations of their innocence — many important questions about Camp Logan will never be answered. On December 11, 1917, the first of the 13 sentenced to die were hanged. Several months later, six more "mutineers" were executed in the same place and in the same manner. The truth of their individual guilt or innocence may never be proven.

The strength to be silent comes from innocence. Everyone who was there [at the hanging] can still hear the song the condemned

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*Rosalind Alexander is a freelance writer living in Austin.*

men sang in unison, 'Lord, I'm Coming Home.'

—Jason Holt, nephew of hanged "mutineer" T. C. Hawkins

Although the condemned men took most of their story to the grave, there are signs that some of the soldiers wanted to be heard. In the days immediately following the riot, the Third Battalion of the 24th U.S. Infantry was corralled and shipped to Columbus, New Mexico, where they had been stationed before going to Houston and where they would be held until the courts-martial and hangings in San Antonio. On the way to New Mexico some soldiers threw messages tied to rocks from the windows of the train. One such message, found by a Schulenburg resident, read, "Take Tex. and go to hell, I don't want to go there anymore in my life. Lets go East and be treated as people." It seems that some of the black soldiers foresaw the need to get their story out to anyone who might listen. Problem is, no one wanted to then, and too few people have since. But Sam Houston's Gift Chapel, which by virtue of its size had served as the location of the courts-martial, is still boycotted by the local black community. And the Post library, which was then the guardhouse where the men were imprisoned while they awaited trial and sentencing, has long been avoided by area blacks. Tall, proud, uniformed black "ghosts" still refuse to allow the Uprising to fade completely into oblivion.

And the Camp Logan ghosts do more than occupy buildings. They seem to compel the historians still trying to make sense of the whens, wheres, hows, and most importantly the whys of the Camp Logan Uprising. As Robert Haynes, author of Violence: *The Houston Riot of 1917*, remarked, "I know some were innocent and some were guilty. When justice isn't possible — as it wasn't in 1917 — there comes a time when you become your own judge of justice and do what you can. I'm troubled by the whole damn thing!"

HISTORIANS, military personnel, and others drawn to the mystery and tragedy of the Camp Logan march gathered recently at a photographic exhibit, play, and panel discussion in San Antonio's Carver Cultural Center. They tended to prefer the soldier's story broken down into its major, most dramatic sections: a) the Tension Build-up in Houston, home of one of the most racially intolerant white populations in the South and an infamously brutal police force; b) the Mutinous March that is "the only racially motivated riot in U.S. history to claim more white lives than black"; c) the Courts-Martial at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, a process remembered for its well-heeled team of military prosecutors and a lone, less-qualified defense counsel; d) the secret execution by hanging and burial on a deserted plot of ground that, according to apocrypha, was once owned by Ku Klux Klansmen; and finally e) the Aftermath, with its increased NAACP memberships in Houston's black community and increased distrust of black soldiers by white citizens. In context, however, the Houston uprising at Camp Logan was just one of two dozen in major U.S. cities from 1917 to 1919, at least three of which involved black military men. In fact, two months after the Houston march, a black soldier was abused in South Carolina and his unit's white officers felt compelled to ship the 369th Infantry Regiment to France in order to keep them from marching on the town. The 369th

# The Camp Logan Drama

IT'S APPROPRIATE that a playwright from Houston, the daughter of a black soldier, should dramatize the lives, loves, and fatal decisions made at Camp Logan by the men of the 24th Infantry. Although Playwright Charles Fuller (*A Soldier's Story*) wrote a drama based on the black military insurrection in Brownsville, Texas, that preceded the Houston uprising, and Alex Haley included a small portion of the Camp Logan affair in his "Roots" series, Celeste Walker is the first to tackle the Houston uprising in a live theatrical production. Known for her work with the Writer's Clinic in Los Angeles (most notably *Sister, Sister*, *Smokes Bayou*, and *The Wrecking Ball*), Walker wrote the Camp Logan dramatization and mounted a short, underfunded production run with Houston's Kuumba House Repertory Theatre in 1985. In 1989, with the help of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, *Camp Logan: A Drama in Two Acts* was produced at the Carver Cultural Center in San Antonio and performances were staged February 9, 10, and 11 in conjunction with a photographic exhibit and panel discussion on the actual uprising.

The play loosely relates the mounting tensions of several soldiers in Company "I" stationed outside Camp Logan, an army training facility being built outside of Houston in the hot summer of 1917. But Walker's play was not written as a documentary or even as a purely factual account of the events that transpired before or after the 100 soldiers marched into Houston to recover by force their lost dignity.

"I'd always heard bits and pieces of the Camp Logan story," Walker recalls, "and I had to ask myself, 'What kind of men were these?' What got them to this point?' So my characters in the drama are composites based on the men in my life. My dad was in the military and my grandfather was in World War I. I stuck with the facts — the events — as they happened during the riot. I didn't read about the actual men because I wanted to create my own men. Since then, I've found that several of the actual soldiers [of the 24th who were involved in the uprising] are similar to my characters."

Clearly, the silver screen might better convey the actual violence that could precipitate such a mutinous march. Street car confrontations, beatings, the overwhelming helplessness of a single black man in the face of thousands of Jim Crow whites is after all the stuff of at least a few large-budget blockblusters. But Walker's simple tent set and the indirect revelations by six convincing actors of what life was like for a black soldier in 1917 get the job done in *Camp Logan*. The direction of the Carver Cultural Center production by Madame A. Yujuan Carriere (also of Writer's Clinic fame) captured enough of the flavor of military life, with its counting cadences and "Taps," to transport the audience beyond what happened at the Camp to *how* it can be understood or perhaps even justified.

Dr. Robert Haynes, an expert on the Houston Riot of 1917, maintains that the play truncates the actual events of the August 21, 1917, uprising, and he commends Walker's dramatic license. Because the characters are composites, their names and some actions also differ from Haynes's painstakingly detailed account. The playwright's purpose is well served, regardless. The cast of the play is so committed to "getting the story out there" that they eagerly sacrifice curtain calls — preferring to give such accolades to the veteran soldiers who earned them with their lives. As Walker explains, "The story got hushed. I think that they [the Army] didn't want blacks to know that other blacks rose up and took power. It didn't want them to be martyrs. Maybe we can look back and learn something. Nobody wants violent confrontation. Maybe we can see to it that it won't happen again."

Performance runs of *Camp Logan* are scheduled for Houston in April, and there is discussion of a Los Angeles production of the play. **R.A.**

landed in Bret just 16 days after the first 13 men of "I" Company, 24th Infantry, were awakened by their jailers and hanged.

Conjecture varies as to the marchers' motivations — beyond being explained by the racial nightmare that was Houston in 1917. Robert Haynes, author of the definitive study of the riot, makes an arguable case for a premeditated conspiracy on the part of Sgt. Henry and other so-called ring leaders. Jason Holt, now a New Jersey lawyer and the only descendent of any of the executed soldiers to yet come forward, makes at least an equally good case for a group of men being caught up in events over which they had no control. Holt's uncle, Thomas Coleman Hawkins, who enlisted at 21 and was convicted of each count the Army brought against him when he was 24 years old, provides one of the more human facets of the uprising and its study. He was identified by witnesses who had not known him before the trial and who testified against him in exchange for their own immunity from prosecution. Once informed of his imminent execution, T. C. Hawkins thought to write his mother a letter. The letter, dated December 11, 1917, declares Hawkins's innocence of any wrongdoing and assures his South Carolina family that he will see them in heaven:

Dear Father & Mother,

When this letter reaches you I will be beyond the veil of sorrow I will be in heaven with the angels. . . . Don't regret my seat in heaven by mourning over me. . . . I am sentence to be hanged for the trouble that happened in Houston Texas altho I am not guilty of the crime that I am accused of but Mother it is God's will that I go now and in this way and Mother I am going to look for you and the family if possible. . . .

Hawkins's letter seems even more moving now that we know that his mother had written to the Army to inquire about her son's whereabouts. Though he was on his way to San Antonio to be tried and executed, she received a standard and inaccurate reply from the War Department: "His mail address is Thomas C. Hawkins, Company I, 24th Infantry, Douglas, Arizona."

Some researchers contend that the Army classified details of the riot and trial for 50 years in an effort to cover up its own buckling under to public pressure. It is, however, no secret that the Army wanted to dispose of the matter (and the men) quickly to keep the nation's attention focused on the German attack on democracies in Europe. Fort Sam Houston Museum curator Manguso disputes the cover-up allegations by explaining, "There's an enormous amount of information floating around in the military records that the Army doesn't know how to locate." And, he is quick to note, professional historians haven't considered the Houston incident significant enough to canonize it. Meanwhile, personal information on the mutineers is still protected by the Privacy Act; only a request by then Senator Ralph Yarborough opened the Army's files for scholar Robert Haynes.

If Jason Holt, private investigator Mike Kaliski, playwright Celeste Walker, and the historians in attendance at the week of commemorative dramatizations and discussion of Camp Logan held at the Carver Cultural Center in San Antonio have their way, the black column will be resurrected again and yet again under progressively brighter lights. The exhibit will be at Austin's Black Arts Alliance through April 29 and the play will be staged in Austin's Paramount Theater on April 28-29. Some involved in the San Antonio gathering are determined that the play and exhibition will help to explain the Camp Logan Uprising as a collective act of self-defense against racially motivated indignity and brutality.

Jason Holt, who has spent years studying accounts of the uprising in an effort to fully understand his uncle's dilemma, would "like to see a different kind of review for the first 13" — one that reexamines the circumstantial evidence and the validity of the convictions handed down. Mike Kaliski hopes someday to produce a film of the Uprising and has collected such a wealth of information during six years of study of the men and their circumstances that he is indispensable to any such effort. Celeste Walker hopes to expose theatergoers to a complete version of the story she grew up hearing in bits and pieces as a child in Houston. Dr. Haynes and his colleagues in the academic world agree that they should "try to ascertain as much of the truth as possible" about the Houston Riot of 1917. They also agree that the task is a difficult one.

There are so many unanswered questions about these men of the "I" Company who chose to fight for their dignity at home and then to maintain a code of silence throughout their courts-martial — questions that compel some scholars to keep digging for the reasons why the soldiers defied the odds and began what could be considered a suicidal march. Black and white Houstonians have yet to completely forget the two-hour rampage of the armed but ultimately powerless soldiers — even if individual and collective memories have grown sketchy. Seventy-two years later activists want to discern what happened so that this lesson of history can be taught rather than repeated. Holt, the only known descendant of an executed soldier of the 24th, insists that exoneration of the "I" Company is their only just epitaph.

Holt's suggestion may provide the only just solution for the lingering historical injustice that is Camp Logan. Clearly, someone or something should bear responsibility for the deaths of 15 Houstonians. But who can we honestly and unequivocally call guilty? The Army, for stationing black trained and experienced black fighting troops in a racist hotbed such as World War I Houston? Or perhaps the Army martials who disallowed the soldiers' right to appeals and Presidential or judge-advocate reviews? Should the hostile, bigoted citizens of Houston who disregarded and disrespected the Army uniform only when it covered black skin be found guilty? Or should the bulk of civilian blame rest on the indifferent and incompetent mounted Houston police who considered the unjustified beating of black soldiers and killing of black civilians their perogative?

Can anyone still be sure of the "guilt" of the tried and convicted black soldiers who may have seen their "riot" as simply a defensive stand against centuries-old intolerable treatment escalated out of control during the hot summer of 1917? Who is guilty? No one suggested that the obviously negligent white Army officials be court martialed en masse. And not a single bigoted citizen of Houston took the stand fearing his own neck might be carressed by a hangman's noose. The most notorious of the mounted police, Officer Starks, shot a black civilian to death in front of several black witnesses the Sunday after the uprising occurred. It took a jury of Stark's peers "one minute" to acquit him. The facts point simply to the fact that Camp Logan was an avoidable tragedy whose unchecked aggravating incidents and factors rendered it unavoidable. Undoubtedly the column of men marching out of Camp Logan calls for a closer eye and ear to the needs and silenced cries of proud black soldiers. Now it's easier to see that their storm was neither sudden nor fleeting. □

# From Earth to Air, From Poetry to Art

**BY ROY HAMRIC**

**FROM UNCERTAIN TO BLUE**
**By Keith Carter**
Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1989
160 pages, $29.95

*FROM Uncertain to Blue* is a vaguely mysterious title for Keith Carter's book of photographs, which is unquestionably the most poetic and penetrating look ever at the little Texas towns and people the Big Highways passed by.

Uncertain, Texas, has a population of 189 people; Blue has about 50. One imagines Carter getting out his Texas map and circling the names of the forgotten towns he visited: Welcome, Fate, Diddy Waw Diddy, Poetry, Old Ocean, Blessing, Omen, Need More, Eminence, Eden, Sublime, Art, Ding Dong, Earth, Air, Climax. All in all, he has 80 photographs assembled here.

The simple, one-word, quirky evocation of such place names on the page opposite each photograph creates a visual-verbal interplay and a poetic response that books of photography seldom touch.

That each picture stands up against the solid integrity of such words says a lot about Carter's eye. To say he respects the reader might be an understatement; he may overestimate many readers.

The sparks that flash between town names and photographs can ignite a wild zig-zag of association and reaction. Listing place names and images together might get that verbal and visual energy across, but let's just say this is the most intellectually invigorating and loving photography book in many years.

A number of points on content and style: Lots of photographers have covered this ground before, but none have produced such a sustained performance, with such continuity of personal vision. Part of the key is his unerring sense of what not to show. The space-content is the reflection of the past in the present, but Carter adroitly isolates the scenes and people, so there's almost no reflection of any "cultural" or "institutional" icons or emblems. Carter's space is that which is fundamentally grounded close to the human hand and eye, what unaffected (not to say uneffected) people naturally create around themselves, whether it's a front yard, a room interior, or a personality.

This is the space-content of Epiphanies, of found moments, but regardless of whether it is architectural structure or landscape juxtaposition, or portraiture, each picture is presented in that mysterious way of great art that implies there's no other way to see this. It's as if the place the photographer is standing is — must be — as important as what is photographed.

Mention also should be made of the energetic tension in these pictures. In addition to unerring content, Carter likes lines and edges. In a single image, he'll throw in multiple, helter-skelter schemes of division and dissection.

If this weren't enough, writer Horton Foote provides an elegant introduction and Carter's wife, Pat, has provided an afterword of trip "notes" that alone is worth the price of the book.

This is admirable work. It's not condescending, not cute, not dramatic, not "beautiful," not ugly.

There are echoes here of Paul Strand, Robert Frank, Eugene Meatyard, plus a singularity that's the imprint of a unique Texas photographer who should soon have a major national following. □

*Roy Hamric is a freelance writer and photographer living in Arlington.*

KEITH CARTER

**Maydelle**
**". . . two men break away from the church group and mosey down to inspect us. Lester Bingham and B.B. Williams. B.B., who is 81 years old, leans up against the side of a shiny new Cadillac while we talk. Lester fills us in on the history of the town, but Kip keeps staring at B.B.'s feet . . ."**
**—from Notes by Pat Carter**

# Social Cause Calendar

### WOMEN'S EQUALITY, WOMEN'S LIVES

Women and men from around the nation will gather on Sunday, **April 9** in Washington, D.C., in a show of public support for enactment of the Equal Rights Amendment and preservation of women's right to abortion. An assembly will begin at 10 a.m., on the Mall and will be followed by a march at noon and the rally at the Capitol at 1:30. Participants are encouraged to wear white. For further information contact your local NOW chapter or call (512) 452-6245.

### REGINA VATER EXHIBIT

Vater, a Brazilian native, counterpoints Amazonian myths with images from European culture. The exhibit of her photographs and installations opens Thursday, **April 6**, from 6 to 8 p.m. at Women & Their Work Gallery in Austin. The show continues through May 14.

### SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

Austin Shakespeare will be presenting "Much Ado About Nothing," opening **April 13** at 8 p.m. at the Zilker Hillside Theater in Austin. The Ballet Folklorico Company of Roy Lozano will add a Latin flavor to this romantic story. This free will run Thursday through Sunday at 8 p.m. through **May 7**. For further information call (512) 452-6285.

### FUN RUN

The Coalition of Texans with Disabilities is hosting a "fun run" Saturday, **April 15** from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the University of Texas Memorial Stadium in Austin. Anyone interested in walking, running, or rolling is encouraged to call the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities at (512) 451-2807.

### 64 BEDS DISPLAY

The exhibition of the 64 Beds Project will be on display at 1st Street and San Jacinto in Austin through **April 18**. The project also offers suggestions on ways to help the homeless. For further information on the exhibition or upcoming tour, please call Linda Spielman at (512) 478-7635.

### 6TH ANNUAL PANTEX BICYCLE PILGRIMAGE

The Pantex Plant near Amarillo is the final assembly point for all nuclear weapons in the U.S. Every year since 1984, people have bicycled from many Texas cities to a Peace Camp outside the gates of the plant. The bicycle pilgrimage will be **June 20-29** and the Peace Camp will be **June 30 through July 4**. For further information call Bill at (512) 472-5854.

### OBSERVANCES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### VOICES OF HOPE AND ANGER

Women leaders in struggles against military bases in six nations, including this one, will travel throughout the United States in April to speak out on negative impacts of such installations, including erosion of national sovereignty, drug problems, prostitution, and usurping of land and water resources. The tour, called "Voices of Hope and Anger," is sponsored by the National Disarmament Program of American Friends Service Committee. Three of the women will travel in Texas. Marta Sandoval is the Secretary of Women's Affairs for the Central Nacional de Trabajadores del Campo (National Peasants and Workers Central) in Honduras. Bok-Nim Yu is founder and resident director of My Sister's Place, a spiritual community and counseling center for Korean women married to, living with, or serving American G.I.s in Korea. Aurora Camacho de Schmidt was born in Mexico City and now works as a staff writer for the national office of American Friends Service Committee. The women will talk on direct human impacts of military bases on people in surrounding communities, analyze the political impacts of such bases and forces, describe efforts of people to resist or respond to conditions created by the bases, and explore alternatives to the U.S. military presence for their countries and communities. In Austin, the speeches will be on Thursday, **April 13**, at 7:30 p.m. at St. Martin's Lutheran Church, Fellowship Hall, 606 W. 15th Street. For more information, call the American Friends Service Committee, (512) 474-2399. In Dallas: Sunday, **April 16**, 5:30 p.m. at Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Assembly Room, 3811 Oak Lawn Avenue. For more information, call the Dallas Peace Center hotline, (214) 421-1988.

### PICNIC FOR CHOICE

The Austin Pro-Choice Coalition will have a family picnic at Pease Park on Sunday, **April 9**, from 3 to 5 p.m. There will be speakers, music, and children's activities. Austin families will gather to show their support for a woman's right to choose a safe and legal abortion. The event is being held in conjunction with the March for Equality/Women's Lives in Washington, D.C. Throughout the day, the Coalition will be collecting signatures as part of the national mobilization campaign to preserve abortion rights. The "Millions of Voices, Silent No More" campaign will create a climate in which it is unacceptable to erode or overturn *Roe v. Wade*. The need for response is immediate because of the recent threats to abortion rights in the courts, state legislatures, clinics, and Congress. Please join us in sending the message that we refuse to return to the days of dangerous back-alley abortions. In the event of rain, the picnic will be postponed until Sunday, **April 16**.

### MARIO CUOMO AT UT-AUSTIN

New York Governor Mario Cuomo will speak Monday, **April 17** from 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. in Bass Concert Hall on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin. Cuomo has implemented an array of economic development incentives that have put almost one million New Yorkers to work since 1983. He also has been effective in implementing an intensive homeless housing program and the "Decade of the Child" plan. Admission is $5 for the general public and $1 for UT students. Call (512) 471-1945 for further information.

**A FABLE**

# In Search of Excellence

**BY BILL HELMER**

THERE WAS A SENSE of urgency in town. A newspaper feature on gifted-children programs indicated that every other community in the state had established one, and the idea that local youngsters lacked this opportunity to develop their special talents and creativity was filling their parents with alarm. One neighboring school district had started giving SAT college-entrance exams as early as the fourth grade. Another had brought in a nationally known educator and child-psychologist who had written several books on the subject. Thus, the school board found itself under pressure to establish such a program immediately so that no prospectively famous physicist or medical scientist or pianist would end up pumping gas or waiting tables for want of the proper intellectual fertilizer.

Budget limitations ruled out hiring any prominent advocates of gifted-children training for a full-time job. Even those who traveled from place to place like circuit riders, setting up programs for local administration, wanted consulting fees as impressive as their credentials. So it was considered a stroke of great good fortune when discouraged PTA members left an emergency meeting on the subject to find (tucked under their cars' windshield wipers) leaflets introducing Doctor Horace Naismith of Del Rio, an expert in clinical psychology with child-development experience, who billed himself as the "guru of the Rio Grande" and who happened to be on tour.

That Naismith was educated out of state impressed parents immediately and helped compensate for credentials that at first glance seemed a little skimpy. His degrees were from a private university in the Dominican Republic, and his previous work had been as director of the Good Neighbor Marriage Counseling Clinic and High-Q Day Care Center in Del Rio. But he evidently had authored a book titled *Left Brain, Right Brain, No Brain*, and this plus his training as a gynecologist and gunsmith seemed to make him just the kind of Renaissance Man needed to detect and foster whatever special talents he might discover in the children of the community.

*Bill Helmer is a longtime* Observer *contributer living in Chicago.*

And the price was right. Three hundred dollars a month plus travel and entertainment made him a bargain no taxpayer could pass up.

The excitement over Doctor Naismith was only slightly diminished by the discovery that his residence was a housetrailer at the KOA on the edge of town, and that he drove a pickup. Nor did his stature improve with the information that Doctor was his first name. But to his interview Naismith brought with him a VCR and videotape of *The Right Stuff*, and the few skeptics on the school board fell silent in admiration of a man who so clearly understood the meaning of excellence.

The screening test Naismith introduced in the lower grades impressed parents immediately. Pupils were invited to take a large sheet of paper and draw the classic kitty-kat, with circles for head and body and little triangles for ears. They were then asked to outline the figure by pasting down cute, furry little pussywillow buds picked on a field trip. Basic intelligence was judged by how quickly a child became bored with such a tedious project and began chewing on the pussywillows or throwing them at classmates.

The screening test for older pupils was an exercise that utilized both sides of the brain simultaneously. The children were asked to figure out new applications for conventional objects originally intended for other uses — the idea here being to judge their imagination, creativity, and ability to improvise. For example, a truly gifted child might discover that if you pour a couple of ounces of Lone Star Beer in an ordinary kitchen pot, cover it with plastic-wrap, and punch a hole in the middle, it will attract a thousand cockroaches who become too loaded to find their way back out.

The gifted-children program was still in its infancy when problems arose. Parents whose youngsters did not make the cut suddenly felt like second-class citizens and demanded more testing. This led Naismith to begin curving the grade scores, only to be accused of favoritism toward the somewhat underachieving son of a shapely, mini-skirted divorcee considered to be of dubious moral character — by other single mothers with weight problems. The question of nature versus nurture was debated in letters to the editor of the local paper, and a few extremists began advocating better birth-control measures for some of their neighbors in order to improve the gene pool.

The moral tone of the community declined even further amid accusations that the school was practicing a subtle form of eugenics, and rumors had it that some parents were hiring special tutors, or putting their offspring on caffeine and diet pills, or sending them to school with polished apples concealing tightly rolled 20-dollar bills. That Naismith's pickup was traded in on a BMW only fueled certain suspicions.

In an attempt to please everyone, the gifted-children program was steadily expanded to recognize special aptitudes in more and more areas, from car repair to football to television-watching, until no child was excluded. This reduced parental rivalry initially but created a general interfamily animosity that Naismith could see was heading toward a new plateau of competition. With every child officially "gifted" in one way or another, some parents already were declaring their child *more* gifted than others. The matter of comparative *intelligence* was coming up.

Whether Naismith did it in a noble effort to save the community from itself or merely to illustrate his state-of-the-art knowledge of I.Q. matters, no one is sure. But at the next PTA meeting he described an illuminating experiment conducted at a major university by scientists seeking to determine if intelligence had a biological component. The researchers trained earthworms to perform certain basic (*very* basic) tasks, then mashed them up and fed them to untrained earthworms. To the amazement of everyone except perhaps the experimenters, the untrained earthworms which ate the "smart" earthworms began to display greater intelligence!

The school board closed down the gifted-children curriculum the following week, citing cutbacks in federal funding. Naismith returned to Del Rio, according to the newspaper, where he now operates a roadside serpentarium ("SEE DEADLY REPTILES MILKED FOR THEIR VENOM!"). The article concludes with a quote from schoolboard president Molly DiRago, who says of the now-defunct program, "It seemed like a good idea at the time." □

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# CLASSIFIED

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