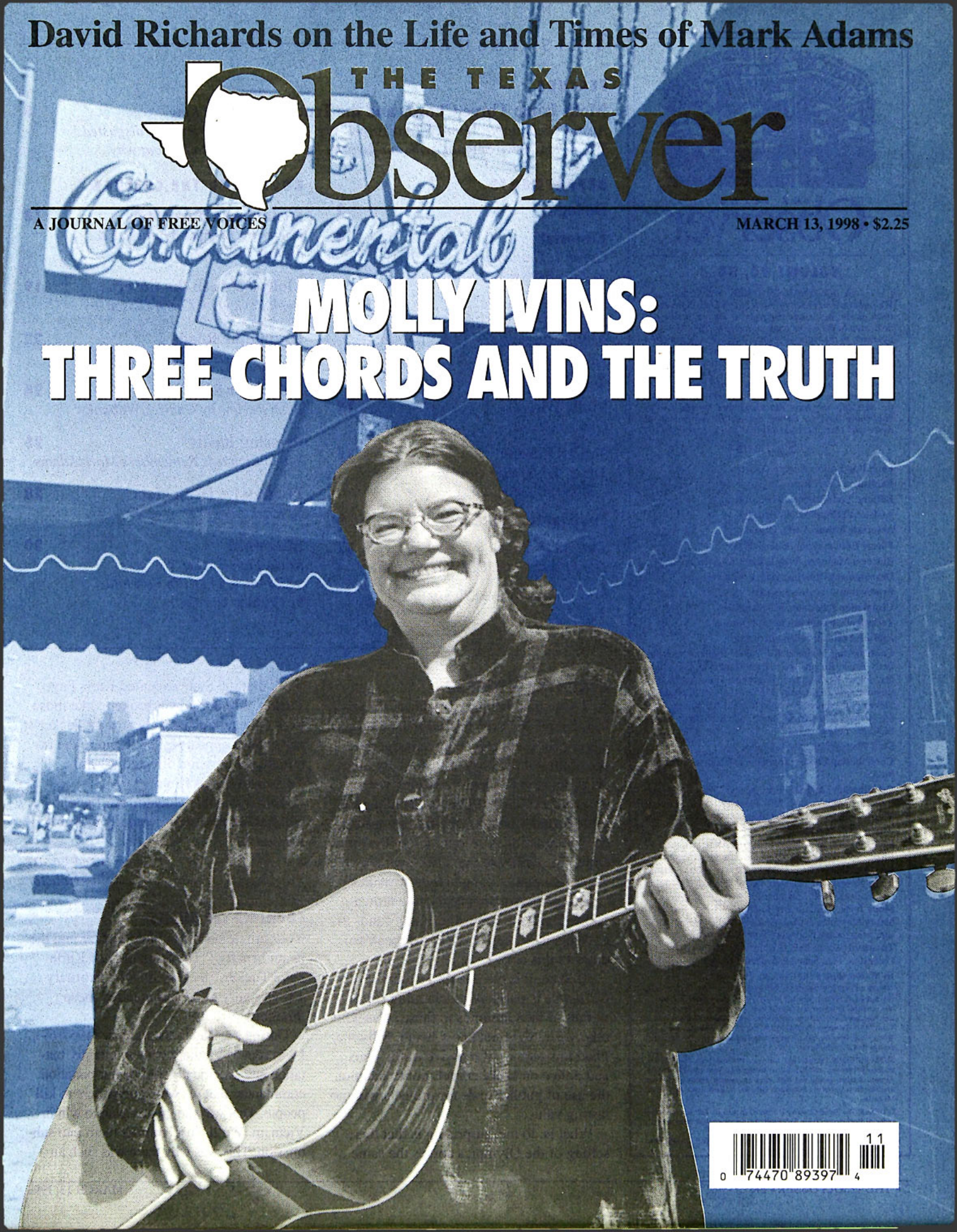
David Richards on the Life and Times of Mark Adams

THE TEXAS Observer

A JOURNAL OF FREE VOICES

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MOLLY IVINS: THREE CHORDS AND THE TRUTH



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THE TEXAS Observer

VOLUME 90, NO. 5

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 human-kind as the foundation of democracy: we will take orders from none but our own conscience, and never will we overlook or misrepresent the truth to serve the interests of the powerful or cater to the ignoble in the human spirit.

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

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Austin's inimitable "Honky-Tonk Angel" says she's "angry, bitter, and disgusted." We go Texas two-steppin' with our favorite "singing arthur" to find out why.

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DIALOGUE

HUNTSVILLE OLYMPICS?

As I settled in this past Sunday (February 8) for some light reading with the *Houston Chronicle*, I was forced to confront the possibility of the 2012 Houston Olympics. As a Houston resident for twelve years, I am well conditioned both to the odd need felt by some (many?) here for national, indeed international, recognition of the city, and to the ability of the downtown crowd to play hardball to obtain their treasures. Ongoing construction of the downtown ballpark and the handover of city funds to developers of the Fourth Ward speak volumes to this ability.

As such, it is not a surprise that the *Chronicle* is publicly proclaiming the virtues of the Olympics to those of us who otherwise might not know better. Silly me, I had this picture of massive traffic jams and police on every corner, not to mention the use of public funds for projects with no lasting value.

What is, to me, surprising is that this selling of the Olympics comes the same week that the State executed Karla Faye Tucker. Are our power brokers, like those idiot college kids who cheered as Tucker's last chance appeals failed, blind to the international derision directed towards Texas and Harris County?

This is one that Houston ain't gonna get. Let's not waste my money pursuing the dream.

Fred Lazare
Houston

COUNTING THE BODIES

Your article on Karla Faye Tucker and the death penalty ("The Humanity of Karla Faye Tucker," by David Dow, February 13) was very good and inspired these thoughts.

During my stay in the military (1967-69), I was sent to Vietnam with an infantry battalion and specifically told by our battalion commander that we were going there to kill people. That was the greater plan to win in Vietnam. We'll "just" murder them into submission. This was why there was such an

obsession with having high "body counts."

So it is with the death penalty.

Now we have another politically exploitable body count which falsely assumes that we, the State of Texas, are taking care of business. On the eve of Karla Faye's murder, Governor Bush said in very weird fanciful terms what I used to read on one of the more idiotic T-shirts, which said "Kill them all and let God sort them out." Is this the kind of world leadership we are to expect from one who wants to be president?

It reminded me of a recent episode of "The Simpsons." In this one there was a big townhall meeting to sort out whether Springfield should allow legalized gambling. The Reverend Lovejoy was asked his opinion and replied, "Once the Government says it is legal it is no longer immoral." So going with the flow is the chicken-shit moral to his story.

Killing isn't cool, it never has been, and never will be. And like war it is just another disaster at the end of a long string of blunders. It is also more economical to be our brothers' and sisters' keeper than their killer.

Thomas Heikkala
Austin

CELLBLOCK BELIEVERS

Professor David Dow is wrong and presumptuous when he states, "No one has reason to doubt the sincerity of Tucker's conversion" in his anti-death penalty article. I take strong exception to such a pompous pronouncement, because I doubt *all* prison conversions. They are automatically suspect to me, coming as they do in the restricted and artificial environment of incarceration. When these criminals seek out their religious experiences "on the outside," in the real world, then I will be able to consider their sincerity.

Annette Stone
El Paso

NO JUSTIFICATION

Shame on folks like Tyrus R. Cox ("Dialogue," February 27) who cite the cost of locking someone up for life as a reason to support capital punishment. We rightly bear the cost of removing dangerous individuals from society because we stand to gain from their absence, and because there is no acceptable alternative.



▲ *Karla Faye Tucker* Alan Pogue

Committing an atrocious, violent act does not remove a person from the category of "human being," despite the rhetoric of Mr. Cox's letter. Really, Tyrus, the only "proof" of one's humanity is one's anatomy. Here's the hard truth: we should not kill killers because they remain people, and it is wrong to kill people. By the way, the jury did not determine that Ms. Tucker was not a human being. The jury determined that she was guilty of her accused crime.

Finally, it's absurd to justify executions on the basis of existing poverty. Protecting civil society from violent individuals is a necessary and legitimate function of the state, just as caring for the most impoverished and vulnerable members of our society is a necessary and legitimate function of the state. It is our responsibility to fund both.

Just had to get that off my chest.

Bill Bailey
Austin

P.S. Thanks for going out and digging up important information throughout the state and presenting it bi-weekly in an accessible form with pertinent, liberal analysis. Y'all do a great job!

NORTH OF NO SOUTH

Chris Garlock reviewed James Ledbetter's book about public broadcasting, *Made Possible By...* in the February 27 issue ("From You to Archer Daniels Midland"). It's a solid piece of work and a book that deserves reading. However, Garlock or your editing muddle things a bit.

My bone to pick is with the use of "America" and "American." As you know, an American is a person who lives in the Americas, that is, North or South America. I had assumed that the *Observer* would edit out these terms when they are misused to describe a person residing in the United States or something from this country. Please do so in the future.

I don't want to preach here, but I cringe when people say something like "Americans believe that...." It is really an unexamined arrogance that we United States citizens carry with us. What does a Chilean or Venezuelan or Canadian think of us as we verbally place ourselves at the center of the universe (or hemisphere)? About the best interpretation I can think of is that our mis-usage of "America" is lazy or sloppy. A middle ground analysis might call it ignorant. On the other extreme some might call it hegemonic or bigoted.

One thing is certain — we in the United States aren't the only Americans. Let's quit talking like we are.

Tony Switzer
Austin

The Editors respond:
By ordinary linguistic convention, citizens of the United States of America *are called "Americans," just as citizens of Venezuela are called "Venezuelans" and citizens of Canada are called "Canadians." More precise distinctions are only necessary when a writer is distinguishing between "North" and "South" Americans (which still doesn't solve the Canadian problem, nor does it help much in distinguishing Mexico). Chris Garlock's article about public broadcasting in the U.S. A. required no such distinctions and used the term "Americans" correctly.*

Correction

In "The Other Dallas ISD" (February 27), "corruption at the school board" should have read, "corruption in the superintendent's office." We regret the error.

Write Dialogue
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We Are What We Are Forced to Eat

On February 26, jurors in Amarillo decided that Oprah Winfrey and Howard Lyman were not liable for damages in the suit brought against them by a group of Texas cattle feeders led by millionaire cattleman Paul Engler. The plaintiffs' prospects had looked pretty dim ever since Judge Mary Lou Robinson ruled, one week earlier, that they had failed to make a case under the Texas False Disparagement of Perishable Food Products law (the "veggie libel law"). Robinson allowed the suit to continue only under standard business disparagement statutes, thus setting the bar much higher for the plaintiffs.

The plaintiffs will likely appeal the court's ruling that the product disparagement law did not apply in this case. Some observers on the other side of the cattleguard had hoped that Carter appointee Robinson would strike down the Texas law, but she didn't (perhaps so as not to deprive herself of the opportunity to preside over an upcoming suit even weirder than Cattlemen v. Oprah: under the false disparagement law, a group of Texas emu farmers is suing Honda over a television ad that portrayed emu farmers as dupes).

Little of the reporting on the trial concerned mad cow disease itself. This is unfortunate because, as Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber point out in their well-researched and very readable 1997 book, *Mad Cow U.S.A.* (Common Courage), the disease is poorly understood, and discussion of it is too often discouraged by industry and government spokesmen.

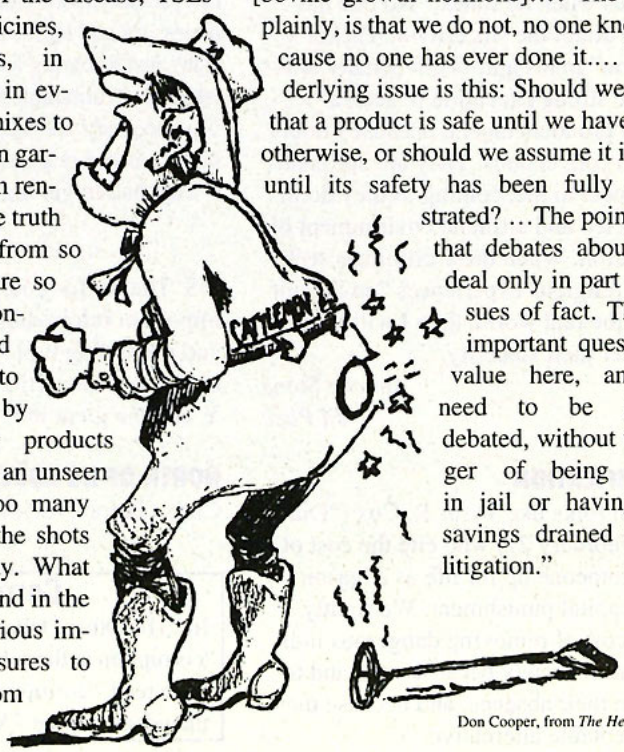
Mad-cow disease, or bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) is one of a class of diseases (transmissible spongiform encephalopathies or TSEs), that includes the human Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease. TSEs can be transmitted from one species to another, and also occur sporadically at a rate of about one in a million. Last year, Stauber and Rampton report, five unrelated patients in Western Kentucky were diagnosed with CJD, and it was found that all of them had eaten squirrel brains (leading a group of verbally graceful researchers to urge "caution … in the ingestion of this arboreal rodent").

No one knows for certain what the risks are of contracting CJD from food or other animal products. The theory about what happened in Britain is that cows were infected by eating meat-and-bone meal which contained the rendered remains of other BSE-infected cows, and people contracted CJD by eating BSE-infected beef; so the U.S. government banned the feeding of cud-chewing-animal-derived products to other cud-chewing animals in 1997. The ban does not apply to pigs or chickens, however, even though BSE has been experimentally transmitted to pigs. Under current regulations, it would even be legal to feed TSE-positive materials to pigs, chickens, or pets.

Does this mean we should swear off eating hot dogs? Not exactly, write Stauber and Rampton, for based on current, limited scientific understanding of the disease, TSEs could "pop up in medicines, in organ transplants, in gelatin (which is used in everything from dessert mixes to medicine gel-caps), or in garden fertilizer made from rendered bone meal.... The truth is that the risks come from so many directions and are so unpredictable that consumers can't and shouldn't be expected to cope with those risks by selectively boycotting products suspected of harboring an unseen infection. There are too many bullets to dodge, and the shots may be blanks anyway. What we need is good data, and in the meantime we need serious implementation of measures to prevent the disease from spreading — *not* just surveillance that will only alert us to tragedy after it has already arrived."

Standing between the public and "good data" — and more generally blocking the publication of information about food safety — are product disparagement laws. Wealthy celebrities like Oprah can fight and win lawsuits, but the threat of a lawsuit silences critics with shallower pockets — a pleasing outcome for the laws' authors, who would prefer that questions of food safety be resolved without any public discussion.

Stauber and Rampton quote farmer and Illinois law professor Eric Freyfogle: "Do we know whether it is fully safe for humans to drink milk for 40 years from a cow given [bovine growth hormone]...? The answer, plainly, is that we do not, no one knows, because no one has ever done it.... The underlying issue is this: Should we assume that a product is safe until we have proven otherwise, or should we assume it is unsafe until its safety has been fully demonstrated? ...The point here is that debates about safety deal only in part with issues of fact. There are important questions of value here, and they need to be publicly debated, without the danger of being thrown in jail or having one's savings drained through litigation." **—K.O.**



Don Cooper, from *The Hereford Brand*

La Migra Goes Shopping

BY NATE BLAKESLEE
Austin

In late January, hitting construction sites, landscaping firms, restaurants, and hotels, plainclothes Immigration and Naturalization Service agents nabbed 234 undocumented workers in Austin. One hundred ninety-nine of the detainees were back in Mexico the morning after their capture, according to a press release from INS regional headquarters in San Antonio.

Not mentioned in the press release was any information about six men who had been wrongly detained, but INS spokesperson Ray Dudley said they were all released within two hours. About a dozen others have requested hearings to challenge their deportation and are being held in a detention facility in Laredo.

The arrest of legal residents may be old news to most Texans, but a new tactic the INS is using at East Austin grocery stores may not be so familiar. On the afternoon of January 19, several armed agents stationed themselves at the exits to the parking lot of the HEB store on the corner of Riverside Drive and Pleasant Valley Road. According to eyewitnesses, the agents proceeded to check systematically the identification of customers leaving the lot. Apparently their timing was right. Witnesses say about thirty persons were arrested and taken away in INS vans. "The raid took place on a Monday, which was no accident," says East Side businessman and activist Marcelo Tafoya, "because that's when a lot of Mexican workers go to buy their groceries. They live sometimes five or six to a household, and they'll buy maybe $200-$300 worth of food at a time." One East Side nightclub owner, who declined to give his name, said two of his employees were arrested in the parking lot and deported that same day. They promptly (and illegally) crossed back into the United States and returned to Austin less than a week later. "They told me there were bags of groceries just left in the lot," he said. "Nobody thought to check if they had kids waiting for them at home, or what."

Dudley says he has no knowledge of any recent operations in Austin other than the January 26-30 raids. The HEB incident, he explained, doesn't fit his agency's *modus operandi*. "We go to job sites, we don't just pull in to some lot and say 'let's check for illegals,'" Dudley said. But María Loya, who works for the Austin immigrant aid group El Buen Samaritano, says she has heard numerous reports in recent months of raids on customers at several East Side grocery stores. Attorney Jim Harrington of the Texas Civil Rights Project has heard the same stories. Harrington, who frequently handles litigation involving the INS, has also heard complaints that agents are entering stores, walking the aisles, and methodically selecting people for questioning. "As a practical matter," says Harrington, "they are employing what's called a 'profile' — how someone is dressed, how they talk, what they are purchasing." Although INS agents are authorized to detain someone without a warrant if they believe there is probable cause, they are prohibited from using profiles, which are considered discriminatory and therefore constitutionally suspect. Although the issue of probable cause has always been a gray area, Harrington says, setting up a checkpoint in the parking lot of an HEB is not. "That would be totally illegal," he said.

ALTHOUGH INS AGENTS ARE AUTHORIZED TO DETAIN SOMEONE WITHOUT A WARRANT IF THEY BELIEVE THERE IS PROBABLE CAUSE, THEY ARE PROHIBITED FROM USING PROFILES, WHICH ARE CONSIDERED DISCRIMINATORY AND THEREFORE CONSTITUTIONALLY SUSPECT.

That in itself might explain why no agency claims responsibility for the parking lot raid. When asked about the uniformed agents working in the HEB parking lot, Dudley suggested that this reporter call the Border Patrol, whose agents, he said, wear the familiar light green uniforms reportedly seen in the HEB parking lot. The Border Patrol is a separate enforcement division of the INS (whose worksite investigators do not wear uniforms). And the Border Patrol's primary task is, of course, "area containment" along the border, although the agency responds to tips about illegal workers, usually in rural areas. Agents at the Border Patrol office closest to Austin, about seventy miles away in Llano, deny participating in any East Austin raid. They pointed out that plainclothes INS agents are often accompanied by uniformed detention agents (in the same light green), who handle the delivery and incarceration of suspected undocumented immigrants. And they suggested a call to the INS. Spokespersons for the McAllen and Laredo sectors of the Border Patrol (who couldn't even agree on which jurisdiction Austin is in), each directed calls to his counterpart in the neighboring sector.

The agents themselves — unlike the official spokespersons — have fewer reservations about their activities. Although he declined to be identified, a Border Patrol agent contacted for this story confirmed that grocery stores are commonly targeted. "HEB is a good place to get 'em," he said, "...because that's where they shop, and where they cash their checks." There was more specific confirmation of the raid on the HEB lot. Nona Evans of HEB's Austin district office confirms that something did happen on the parking lot in front of the Riverside HEB on January 19, but because "HEB was in no way involved," she would not comment further.

This much is clear: immigration agents from some agency have been arresting

people while they shop for groceries in East Austin. And the immigration law passed in 1997, which makes deportation quicker then ever, often results in a quick ride to the border — if a detainee cannot convince agents that he has a right to remain in the United States. Nearly 112,000 persons were deported by the INS last year, a 62-percent increase from the previous year. And 27,000 of those deportations occurred in Texas.

"The fundamental problem with all INS abuses," says Jim Harrington, "is that it is incredibly difficult to get people to sue." Wrongfully deported people are not easy to find, and resident aliens who may have a case for false arrest or imprisonment are too intimidated to speak out against the agency that controls their status — or is at least perceived to have that power. "It doesn't really matter who's doing the raids," Harrington explains. "People are scared." □

Frequent contributor Nate Blakeslee's work has also appeared in The Nation, The Progressive, *and* Earth First! Journal.

Unsafe at Any Speed

BY ROBERT BRYCE

It's time to face the facts: the B-1 bomber is a failure.

The most recent B-1 crash, on February 18 in rural Kentucky, adds to the mountain of evidence that establishes the supersonic, ground-hugging bomber as an unsafe, unreliable, hyper-expensive airplane of negligible military value.

Yet the $280-million-per-unit bomber stays aloft because it is powered by the most potent fuel in Washington: money. And some of that money flows down hill — from Washington to Texas. Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene — the home of the plane that crashed in Kentucky — houses forty B-1s, twenty-nine C-130 cargo planes, and has a $300-million impact on Abilene's economy.

The B-1 has always been tied to Texas. The late Republican Senator John Tower was a booster of the plane from its earliest stages. LTV built the B-1 fuselage at its plant in Dallas. And Hans Mark, the former Secretary of the Air Force who became Chancellor of the University of Texas System, gets some of the credit for bringing the plane back to life after Jimmy Carter killed it in 1977. More recently, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, who serves on the Armed Services Committee, and Congressman Charles Stenholm, who represents Abilene, have been unabashed bi-partisan B-1 boosters. Last July, they secured $20.5 million in new construction funds for military family housing and a new B-1 maintenance facility at Dyess.

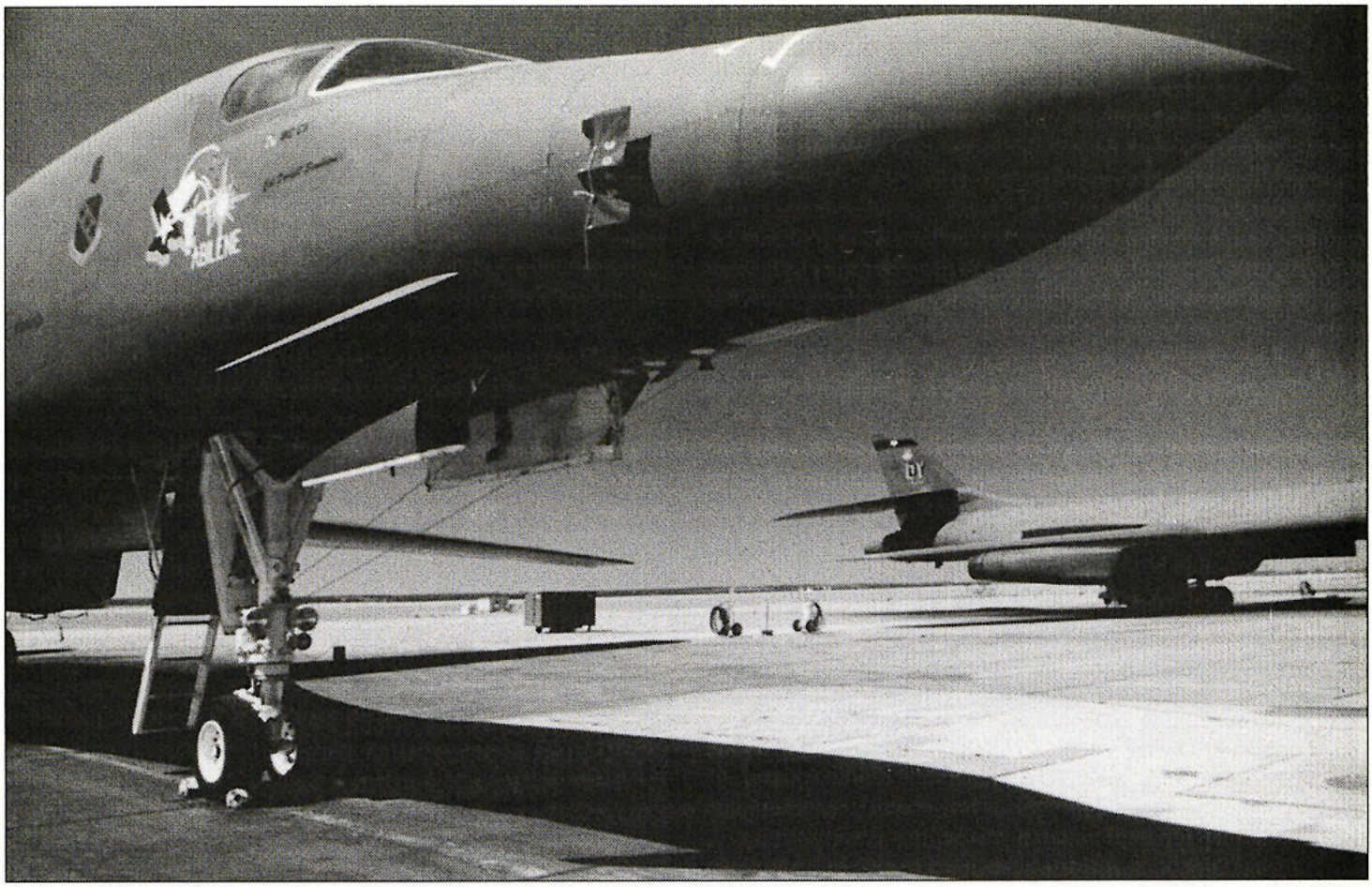
Never used in combat, the entire B-1 program has stayed in the repair shop since the first plane arrived in Abilene in 1985. The bomber's engines have exploded or failed to start, its fuel tanks have leaked, its radar system hasn't worked, its avionics were incompatible, and its skeleton developed premature cracks. Those problems appear to have been fixed. But upgrading the the B-1 fleet with modern weapons and electronics systems will cost another $3 billion. In the meantime, according to the Air Force, the plane costs $10,986 per hour to stay aloft, an amount surpassed only by the equally useless $2-billion-per-copy B-2 bomber, which costs about $14,000 per hour to fly.

ACCORDING TO AIR FORCE STATISTICS, THE B-1 IS THREE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE INVOLVED IN SERIOUS ACCIDENTS OR CRASHES THAN THE REST OF THE AIRPLANES IN THE FLEET.

The General Accounting Office has continually uncovered cost over-runs, and safety and mission-related problems with the B-1. In 1994, a GAO official told a congressional committee, "The jury is still out on the question of just how effective the B-1B aircraft will be as a conventional bomber." Another report that year found the plane could not fly effectively in cold, wet weather because it did not have a de-icing system.

In 1995, Undersecretary of Defense Paul Kaminski suggested that the B-1's critics might be on target when he said the Pentagon was considering "retiring immediately" the entire B-1 fleet. In 1996, the GAO suggested that Kaminski might be on to something, when the agency reported that retiring the B-1 "would save about $5.9 billion in budget authority for fiscal years 1997 to 2001." (Budgetwatchers' note: $5.9 billion is roughly equivalent to the annual budget of the Environmental Protection Agency.) While admitting the move would "increase U.S. forces' dependency on other capabilities and therefore the risk that some targets might not be hit as quickly as desired," the GAO said the Pentagon had "more than ample ground-attack capability." In addition, according to the Pentagon, most targets "would be within the range of other forward-based tactical aviation assets and missiles." Last September, the GAO determined that the Air Force had overpaid a contractor who was performing maintenance on the B-1 by $10 million. So even if the B-1 fails as a delivery system for weapons, it obviously delivers for shareholders, executives, and defense plant workers.

Perhaps that's why the plane continues to fly through a storm of statistics that prove it is hopelessly unsafe. While all four crewmembers involved in the Kentucky accident ejected safely, four other officers were killed in a B-1 that crashed last September in Montana, in an accident the Air Force blamed the pilot. In 1992,



▲ *B-1 bombers at Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene* Robert Bryce

another B-1 crashed near Valentine, Texas, killing all four on board. The three accidents occurred during routine, low-altitude flights. According to Air Force statistics, the B-1 is three times more likely to be involved in serious accidents or crashes than the rest of the airplanes in the fleet. For the B-1, the lifetime rate for "Class A" mishaps — accidents involving loss of life or $1 million in damage — is 4.02. For the Air Force, the current overall rate is 1.37. The destroyed-aircraft rate for the lifetime of the B-1 is 2.13. The current destroyed-aircraft rate (measured per 100,000 flying hours) for the Air Force overall is 0.79.

Recently, the Air Force bragged that the bomber has been deployed in Southwest Asia, where it stands ready to be used against Iraq. But B-1s won't be used in Iraq— unless the U.S. decides to give up its celebrated "smart" weapons. The B-1 was designed to drop nuclear warheads on the Soviet Union, so it is capable of carrying only the unguided 500-pound bombs that have been in the American arsenal for decades. Given the American military's promise to conduct a "surgical strike" on Saddam's weapons factories, the B-1 will remain on the tarmac even if diplomacy gives way to a military assault.

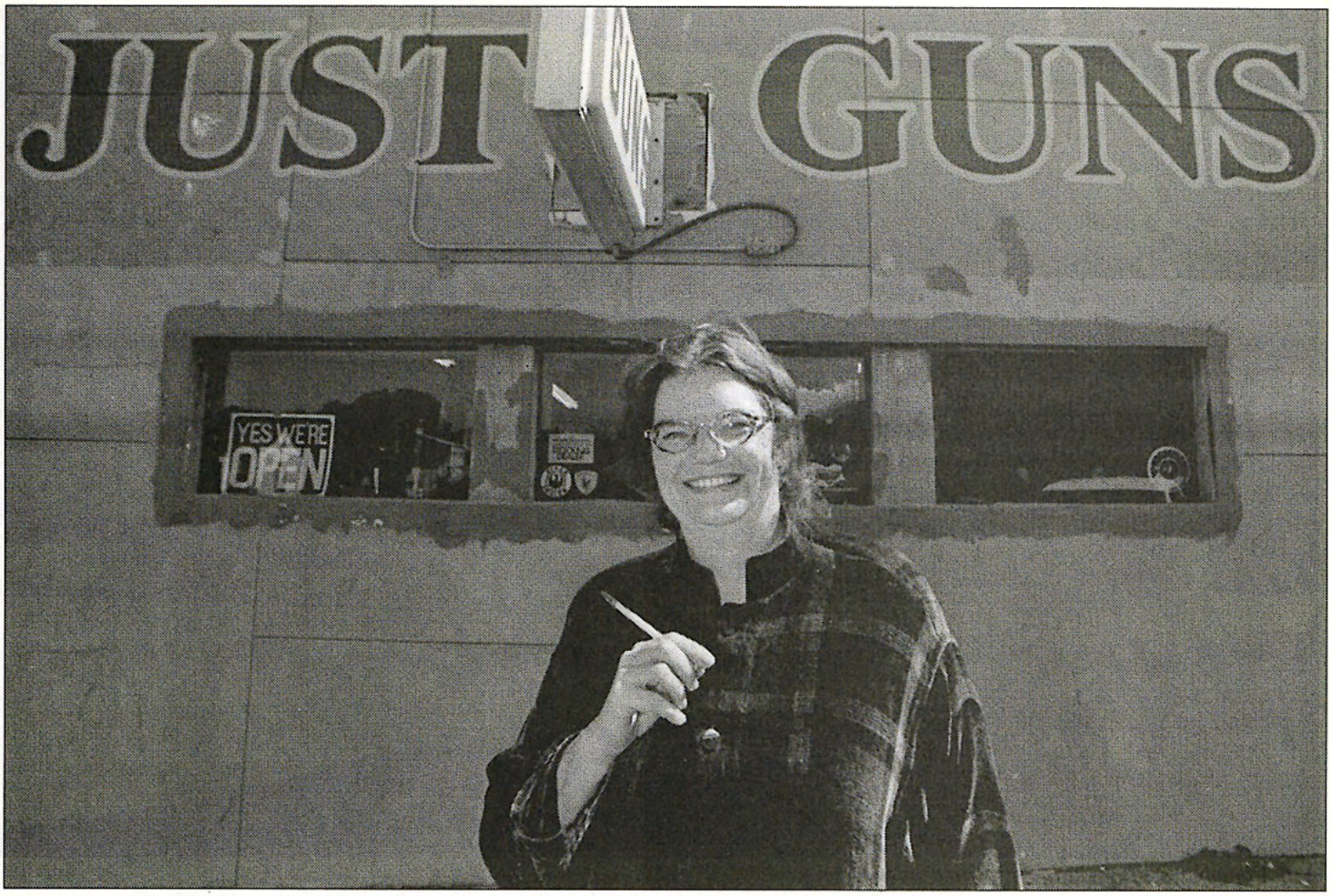
The B-1 is supposed to replace the B-52, which has been in service since 1952. But the old B-52 — with a mishap rate one-third that of the B-1 — is more reliable, more versatile, and a helluva lot safer. In September of 1996, when the U.S. last dropped bombs in Saddam's backyard, the Pentagon relied on sea-launched cruise missiles and cruise missiles launched from a B-52 that flew into the region from an air base in Diego García.

The U.S. military has far more war-making capability than any of our adversaries. A 1996 study by the Center for Defense Information found that the U.S. has 3.5 times more military airplanes than Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, and Syria *combined*.

Yet Texas politicians — Hutchison, Stenholm, and others — are resolved to keep the B-1 flying. In a statement issued two days after the crash, Stenholm said, "In spite of this incident, the B-1 remains the backbone of our bomber fleet." And, he added, the funding for the B-1 upgrade "reinforces the Air Force's commitment to this important air power asset."

It may be time to listen to the people on the ground instead of the politicians. Randy Rushing was a volunteer firefighter who was one of the first on the scene at the Kentucky crash site. Rushing told the Associated Press that he had picked up the B-1's co-pilot after he found him in a field. According to Rushing, "He mainly said that something went haywire." □

Robert Bryce, a frequent contributor to the Observer, *is a contributing editor at the* Austin Chronicle, *where a version of this story first appeared.*



Alan Pogue

Dancin' With Molly Ivins

BY MICHAEL KING

Look out, LeAnn Rimes — here comes Miss Molly.

The superstar country music ingenue had better start looking over her shoulder, because sultry-voiced newcomer Molly Ivins is hot on her trail.

Ivins, heretofore known primarily as an inkstained wretch — er, a syndicated newspaper columnist and former *Observer* editor — is about to make her national singing debut, at this month's South by Southwest music festival in Austin. Fronting a band which includes (at least part of the time) Jerry Jeff Walker and Jimmy La Fave, Molly (the "Honkytonk Sweetheart") Ivins and Friends will be headlining at the Cactus Café on Saturday night, March 21. A world tour is rumored to be in the works — that is, if everybody who reads this will repeat it to a few friends.

Actually, Molly hasn't quite yet abandoned her coruscating and hilarious pen for an electric guitar, and the national tour she is about to begin is in fact on behalf of her new book, *You Got to Dance With Them What Brung You.* That undeniably honky-tonk Texas title nicely catches both the demotic flavor of Molly's prose as well as the foreboding implications of her subtitle, "Politics in the Clinton Years." Molly and I spent a couple of hours recently talking about the book (her third, after *Nothin' But Good Times Ahead* and *Molly Ivins Can't Say That, Can She?*) collected from her syndicated columns of the last five years.

Molly began by translating the bit of folk wisdom that for her has become the constant and debilitating undertone of the national political scene. When she and her editors began reviewing her recent writing, she says, they discovered her most recurrent theme: "the corruption of politics by money." "As applied to politics," she explains, "'You got to dance with them what brung you' means you vote with the people who helped you get to office, who made it *possible* for you to get in office — and that pretty much means your big

contributors." Over the last few years, she had been aware that a new wave of political outrage was rising in the country, but only when she started to write the book's introduction did she recognize her own anger. "When I read it over I was really amazed. I had *no idea* I was so angry."

Here's a taste of Molly Ivins' anger, from *You Got to Dance:*

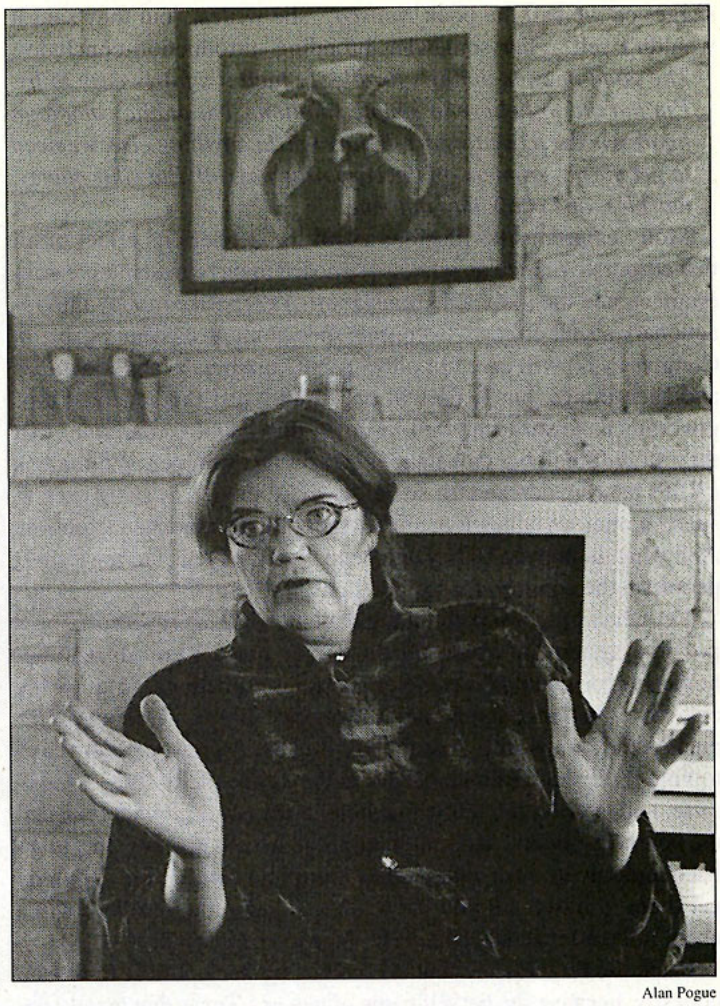
Our politicians have truly made a pact with the Devil. One watches them spend more and more of their time and energy grubbing, coaxing, flattering and whoring for money. Terrified of being cut off from the mother's milk, they stand like morons in the rising sea of contempt that threatens to drown the whole system. Then they wonder why no one likes them anymore.

Molly has been covering politics since 1970, when she returned to her home state of Texas from a stint as a reporter for the *Minneapolis Tribune* to the *Observer*, where she stayed as co-editor for six years (and guardian angel now for nearly thirty). Since 1976, she has worked for *The New York Times,* the *Dallas Times Herald,* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, currently the home of her column, syndicated in two hundred newspapers. Molly has followed Texas and national politics from Sharpstown to Watergate to Whitewater, and she says that in recent years, the political atmosphere — at least in its formal, electoral version — has indeed gotten worse. "I had been observing this phenomenon, this rising tide of cynicism and disgust in politics, commenting on it with some concern, and I didn't realize how much I was part of the same phenomenon. And it really took me by surprise. I've always loved watching politics, and I enjoy writing about politics. I love the vast, Dickensian cast of characters.... I even enjoy the game, the three-dimensional chess and the high-stakes poker, the strategy of it. I have always tried to remember that the chips on the table of this game are peoples' lives, which is something I think a lot of us forget — politicians and the people who watch them. But I have always liked politics, and suddenly I find that I am angry, and bitter, and disgusted.

I HAVE ALWAYS TRIED TO REMEMBER THAT THE CHIPS ON THE TABLE OF THIS GAME ARE PEOPLES' LIVES, WHICH IS SOMETHING I THINK A LOT OF US FORGET — POLITICIANS AND THE PEOPLE WHO WATCH THEM.

"Money has always been part of politics. Certainly as long as the time I've been covering it, there hasn't been any noticeable degree of purity to the process. But we've not seen it like this, to this extent. And it's just — if you look at the money that puts people in public office now, it's *all* special interest money, and of the special interest money ... over 60 percent is corporate special interest money. The consequences are just absolutely disastrous: government of corporate special interests, by corporate special interests, for corporate special interests. And it's not going to change until we change the rules, and get the corporate special interest money out of politics."

Molly is certainly serious about her life-long political commitments, and particularly about her ongoing battles on behalf of campaign finance reform. On the day we talked, in the sunlit study of her home in south Austin, the McCain-Feingold reform bill was hovering in the anterooms of the U.S. Senate (about to be filibustered to death), and she was alert to the minutiae



Alan Pogue

of what might happen to the bill and its amendments. But in listening to the ripple and roar of her conversation — about politics, journalism, scandals, music, just plain old gossip — it's hard to be convinced that Molly Ivins can in fact be "angry, bitter, and disgusted." One of her favorite after-dinner anecdotes ends with the deathbed farewell of a good friend, civil rights lawyer Joe Rauh, who had fought undaunted for liberal causes, win or lose, through the darkness of the McCarthy years: "Molly," he said, "tell 'em how much fun it was. Tell 'em how much fun it was."

Molly seems always to have taken Rauh's advice very much to heart. She is inevitably, irrepressibly lively, brimming with jokes and tall tales, jumping from one topic to another to retrieve a remembered laugh or insult, or suddenly up from her chair to dig out an old clipping or a new list of outrages that will find their way into an upcoming column. In the space of a few moments her voice riffs from a fortissimo hoot to a seductive East Texas drawl to a natural comedienne's clipped whisper — and then there's that great rolling, rising laugh which, when it comes, feels like a warm spring rain. And despite her frankly glum short-term political diagnosis, she remains insistently positive in overall outlook and optimistic in spirit. Is it a rhetorical pose or a real conviction? "It's real optimism, it's real optimism. It's partly that I am a congenital optimist; and also, optimism is one of the ways I deal with the lunacy." In her book, after her frank summation of the Clinton years ("I

suggested we call the book *Nausea*," she writes, "but they said it wouldn't sell"), her somewhat brooding introduction concludes,

> *The good news is that it's fixable. In fact, it's fairly easy to fix. I'm too old to believe in simple solutions, but public campaign finance is the place to start. Before we do anything else, we need to get the government off the corporate payroll. Put your money, marbles, and chalk into that one.*

Molly entertains no illusions about the deleterious effect of all that corporate money on what is supposed to be representative government, and the inevitable translation of corporate money into reactionary social policy. "Corporate special interests want people in Congress who will give not only specific tax breaks and loopholes and such things, but [who will encourage] just the general tilt of government toward the well-to-do in this country. *Imagine,* that they would finally get a balanced budget last summer, and there is *all* this pent-up demand for social services: there's a crying need to spend money on education, and all these things that need attention. And what do they do? They decide to give tax breaks to the richest people in the country, for capital gains."

Yet when I press her about the realistic chances for reforming a political system in which all the major players are already beholden to corporate power, her response is immediate. "I know the answer to that one: democracy still works. The thing about politicians is they're goosey. And they're *especially* goosey if they have to vote *really* bad. Remember when they gave themselves a sneak raise, and every radio talk-show host in the country went nuts and the voters responded and sent in all these letters, and they had to go back and unvote their raise? They were in a *total* panic. You *can* get them to move; all you have to do is get enough folks to care about it." And that, she believes, is the job of journalists.

Later she reminds me that she comes by her political optimism honestly, because she herself came of age in a Texas that legally denied the most basic civil rights to black and brown people, and expected women to stay in their places as well. If that kind of tyranny could be overcome and outlasted, she argues, so can Newt Gingrich, Tom DeLay, and George W. Bush. She looks back on her long years of reportage and they provide her with a wry perspective. "The beauty of Texas," she laughs, "is that it's really hard to argue that things are getting worse. I mean, no matter what they come up with, when you've been around here for twenty-eight years, you can sit around and remember when things were *really* ridiculous.

"I grew up before the civil rights movement in this state, and I came of age in the sixties, and my first political involvement was with the civil rights movement. I think that's enough to make you both a liberal, and permanent optimist. We saw in the civil rights movement, how *much* things can change, how *fast* things can change. How *powerful* people are, how powerful *ideas* are, and mass movements are. *And,* how much good government can do, when government turned around, and the feds were the good guys."

Molly insists that she is not one of those liberals who, "as Ronald Reagan would say, 'think that government is always the answer.'" But in the current media atmosphere of blaming government for everything that goes wrong, Molly has found herself in a curious position for a journalist, of defending government from its noisiest right-wing detractors. ("Cussing government in a democracy is a peculiar thing to do," she writes. "It is, after all, us.") "To sit around and whine about government," she tells me, "as though it could not do anything right, is ridiculous. Government does a lot of things right, but we don't ever hear about them. The cussing of government has really gotten bad.

"The government is just a tool, like a hammer. You can use it to build with, you can use it to destroy things. There's nothing intrinsically good or evil about that hammer. If people sat around cussing hammers as much as they sit around cussing government, by now some Timothy McVeigh would have blown up the hammer factory."

Molly's inveterate cheerfulness generally gets its hardest test when she turns her attention home to Texas, and she listens to her progressive friends bemoan the increasing Republicanization of the state. Recently she used her column to reproach good-naturedly the *Times'* Bob Herbert, who (understandably provoked by the accelerating rate of Texas executions) had described the state as a political wasteland for liberalism. Molly considers such a view of Texas woefully shortsighted. "We have two consolations," she argues. "One is that things are even more hilarious than usual. The entertainment factor is really quite high. And also, the state is dominated by short-term thinking. Here is absolutely everybody saying the state is getting more Republican every day, it's getting more Republican by the day. But Texas is going to be a majority-minority state by the year 2004. It may take a generation to have an effect, but there it is — and the Republicans are doing exactly all the right things for their own long-term destruction in this state. They couldn't do it any better, if we authored the script for 'em." The thought of George W. Bush, Rick Perry, and Tom Pauken preparing the way for a coming generation of progressive minority political activism fills Molly with delight.

WE SAW IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, HOW *MUCH* THINGS CAN CHANGE, HOW *FAST* THINGS CAN CHANGE. HOW *POWERFUL* PEOPLE ARE, HOW POWERFUL *IDEAS* ARE, AND MASS MOVEMENTS ARE. *AND,* HOW MUCH GOOD GOVERNMENT CAN DO.

But what about the short and medium term — during which the Texas powers-that-be will install tort deform, and welfare deform, and school vouchers, and privatization, etc. etc., up to our choking necks? She has a Molly-esque answer for that, too. "In the medium term, we serve the very important function as The National Laboratory for Bad Government: Really Bad Ideas, Tried First Here, and Proven Not to Work." And for writers, a gold mine: we will not lack for material in the New Texas.

When Molly and her co-editor Kaye Northcott (now an editor at the *Star-Telegram*) ran the *Observer,* they were almost unique amidst a Legislature and a press corps that had seen precious few women, and certainly none like these. But young Molly had most recently come off the police beat in Minneapolis, and was already an old hand at ingratiating herself in a male world. "There had been one woman television reporter from Houston.... She was no longer there, but there was still a fair amount of resentment against her, because she had sort of made a habit of interrupting the other reporters, and saying, 'Oh, *Senator,* would you mind just coming over here for a few moments and just

answering some of my little ol' questions?' And it really irked the guys on the press corps.

"That wasn't the way I operate anyway, but I worked real hard at being 'one of the guys.' And I succeeded to such a horrifying extent that one day I was sitting in the press box between the *Dallas Morning News* and the *American-Statesman,* when one of the young lovelies who worked as a Senate page wiggled by, and the *DMN* hit me in the ribs from one side with his elbow, and said, 'Jesus, Ivins, look at the ass on that one,' and the *Statesman* hit me from the other side, and said, 'Christ, look at those tits.' I sat there, and began to think, 'You know, I've taken this too far.'"

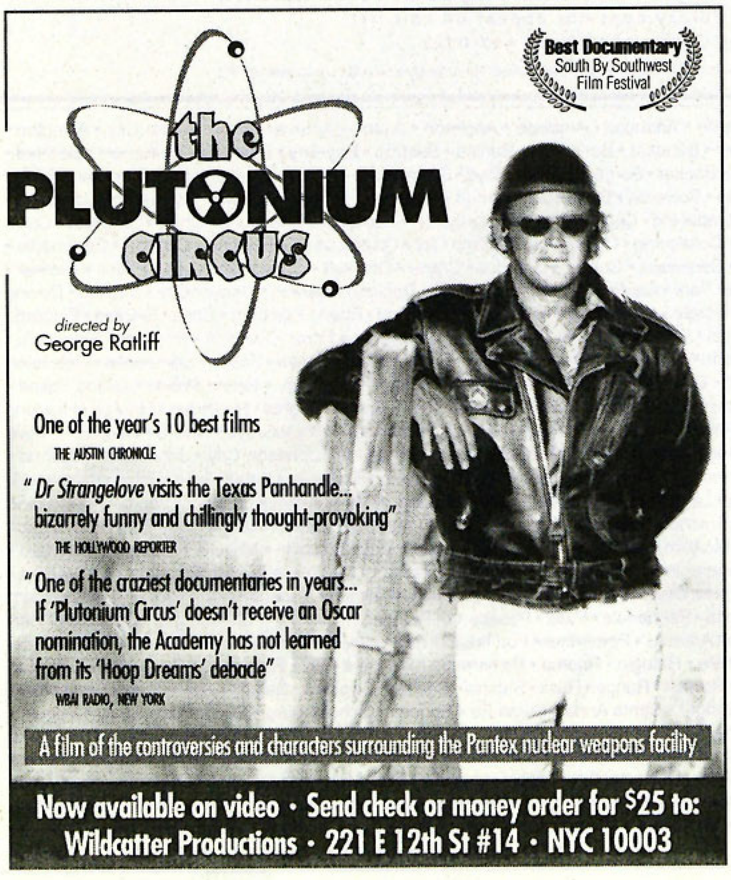
Molly says the ground-level sexism has now pretty much disappeared ("Women reporters can get hired equally, and they can get good assignments") but that when it comes to promotion into upper management, the glass ceiling remains a reality. "It's present in every business, including politics and journalism."

We were talking, of course, in the midst of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, and though Molly had some harsh words for Clinton ("it's completely destroyed his credibility"), she was harsher about her journalistic colleagues, particularly the Washington press corps, which she says has misread and overblown the scandal, in the meantime corrupting the useful word "character" to mean only "sex." "They are as *clueless* as I have ever seen them. There were Clinton's numbers going higher and higher, and that has *nothing* to do with Bill Clinton. That's *anti-media.* And those smug, self-important, pompous, arrogant bastards on television, sitting there justifying what they've done, is just disgusting."

Molly lays much of the blame on the press and its relentless search for personal "scandal," as opposed to reporting the real structure of power and politics, for the growing national cynicism about politics, and for the abandonment, especially by the rich and powerful, of the whole notion of a social contract. And she believes those chickens will come home to roost. "We're all in this together. The public schools are a big item — if they destroy that, all bets are off....

"You cannot *buy* your way out of the consequences of letting the public sphere go to hell. There's not enough money in this life to buy yourself a private security force, like big rich people in South America, and private armies, and private everything. What happens is, the country becomes more and more of a disaster area, and there's *no way* you can run away from that." The environmental movement, she says, is an important sign of the reaction against radical selfishness. "There are real, visible consequences in the environment — there are real consequences in having Fly-By-Night Garbage of New Jersey take care of nuclear waste. This is *not* that hard to notice."

But should the lunacy get just too much to bear, Molly can now turn to her whole new career, as what she laughingly calls "a recording *artiste.*" The music gig actually started as "a band of singin' *arthurs"* led by novelist Stephen King and humor columnist Dave Barry. They call themselves the Rock-Bottom Remainders, and Molly is "very *loosely* associated" with the band, as a "Remainderette" (novelists Amy Tan and Barbara Kingsolver have also sung with the group). San Francisco literary rep Kathi Goldmark de-



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cided that with a little cross-country organization, the Remainders could raise money for literacy. That got Molly and Friends into an Austin studio, recording the Kitty Wells version of "The Wild Side of Life" (i.e., "It wasn't God who made honky-tonk angels"). "Of course I improved the lyrics slightly," says Molly, "because I *am* a writer. As in, 'From the start, most every heart that's ever broken, it's because there always was some *prick* to blame.'" She was surprised when Goldmark also asked her to sing a verse of a rock song ("I can barely sing at all, let alone a *rock* song"), but overcame her initial hesitation "with the help of all my *real* musician friends."

Lo and behold, I am treated to Molly Ivins' spirited, husky contralto, in an *a capella* version of the old Bo Diddley tune, tentatively at first, and then just belted out:

Well, you can't judge the honey, by looking at the bee,
And you can't judge an apple, by looking at the tree,
And you can't judge a daughter, by looking at the mother,
And you can't judge a book, by looking at the cover.

In that star-struck moment, I could swear I hear, in there somewhere, distant echoes of another rebel East Texan, Janis Joplin. Molly, however, does not quite have stars in *her* eyes. "Now I should point out that the name of Kathi Goldmark's label is Don't Quit Your Day Job Productions. The name is *very* well chosen."

But just the thought of herself on a forthcoming recording, singing up a storm in the distinguished tradition of Bo Diddley, sends Molly Ivins into another fit of rolling, wonderful laughter. She's obviously thinking how much fun it is. □

Following her appearance at the Cactus Café (U.T.–Austin) March 21, Molly Ivins will be at Book People in Austin, March 24 (7 p.m.), and at Brazos Books in Houston, March 26 (7 p.m.).

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All the Rumors, Speculation, Hearsay, & Gossip Fit to Print

By Ralph Nader

Washington, January 27

A combination of Bill Clinton's fictions and dissembling about his past extramarital affairs, and the ferocious competition between the commercial press to be first with any snippet, has produced, not a media frenzy, but a full-scale media riot.

Article and column after article and column in the reputable press kept referring to "allegations" about the President having sexual relations with a 21-year-old woman and urging her to lie about it. Allegations from whom?, I asked five Washington reporters. Silence for a moment, and then the counter-question: "Well, what would *you* call them?"

If the press is to avoid pulling a Senator Joseph McCarthy smear tactic, either an accuser needs to be openly available, or a lawsuit filed, or a prosecutor charging in court, or at least some accusatory evidence of minimum credibility.

What did the press have? A partial transcript of telephone conversations, recorded by a critic of Clinton who once worked in the Bush White House, with an apparently distraught young woman talking about her relations with the President. The woman, Monica Lewinsky, has made no accusations to date, and swore under oath in the Paula Jones litigation that she has had no sexual relations with our country's political leader.

The press also had part-time special Prosecutor, Kenneth Starr, who is the all-purpose investigator of Clinton matters, while working actively as a senior partner with the corporate law firm of Kirkland & Ellis on behalf of major companies wanting something from — yes— the Clinton Administration. Starr's office has the Lewinsky tapes and leaks to reporters of unverified tidbits.

So what the newspapers, magazines and television-radio have been conveying to the public are rumors, speculation, hearsay, and gossip based on the excited utterances of Ms. Lewinsky in a private conversation with what she thought was a friend. The media validly could report an investigation under way, but who has made any allegations that would lead to the riotous, almost breathless behavior by the press corps in Washington, D.C.?

For example, how many times have you heard, "If the allegations are true, this is the end of the Clinton Presidency," or "He'll have to resign in days," or "He'll be impeached by Congress." From George Will to Sam Donaldson to Tim Russert to George Stephanopoulos to Cokie Roberts to the McLaughlin crew to E.J. Dionne to James Glossman to the experienced reporters at the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal* and on and on, the rush to judgment has deprived them of judgment, restraint, and professionalism.

It was noteworthy that David Broder of the *Washington Post* paused long enough to graciously refer to the allegations as "still unproved."

Washington Post Ombudsman, Geneva Overholser, who has been fielding irate calls from readers who agree with her that the press is far ahead of the facts, nonetheless said in her Sunday column that "the story was not insubstantial, there was much to go on. There were numerous anonymous sources but they were testable — assertions of fact, not judgment or characterization."

One problem, Ms. Overholser. They were at the time neither tested nor testable, nor corroborated nor identified, nor were they even accusatory assertions. Starr says he is investigating, and the tapes were shaky conversations whose most titillating segments were contradicted under oath by Ms. Lewinsky herself. She also said to her friend on tape that she has lied her entire life.

Now the big story may yet firm up, may yet report evidence that leads to proven prevarication, suborning perjury, and obstruction of justice. But until then, can the media please suspend leading so gravely with such oblique or doubtful personal conversations that do not rise to the level of reportable allegations?

Instead, the feverish media are sprawling from unidentified or non-existent allegations to repeated hypothetical questions, such as "If these allegations are true, it's all over for Clinton," to media polls based on these hypothethicals which are then reported back to the people to further hype the reporting.

From *Newsweek's* Evan Thomas ("explosion with the allegations") to *The New York Times'* Frances Clines ("a veritable universe of allegations") to Tim Russert inviting the on-line, reckless sludge merchant, Matt Drudge, to his *Meet the Press* Table with columnist William Safire, *Newsweek's* Mike Isikoff and legal columnist Stuart Taylor, the bottom fell out of establishment journalism last month.

The collapse of journalistic standards of fairness, accuracy and proportionality has precedents, to be sure. One could easily see it coming in recent years.

But this media meltdown will be partially shielded from depthless shame, only if the facts catch up to the rioters and spare them. Otherwise, lots of prominent but precipitous reporters and editors will have damaged themselves, and that precious asset known as public confidence.

Government for Sale

Thanks to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and all the peacemakers around the globe, including those who ruined the administration's television show in Ohio. If we put just half as much money into working for peace as we do into preparing for war, we wouldn't have to contemplate killing hundreds of thousands of innocent people in order to accomplish jack.

And now that we've spent not-enough-time on the obligatory "whew-and-thanks," let me suggest that we shift our focus to a little matter of the *first* priority. Something more important than war and peace? The economy? Jobs? Poverty? The homeless? Education? Housing? Yup.

Why don't we spend just half as much money on ensuring peace as we do on preparing for war? Because peace groups don't make big campaign contributions, and weapons manufacturers make huge ones. In fact, weapons manufacturers contribute so much money to politicians that politicians often vote to spend the public's money on weapons we don't need and even on weapons that are pretty useless.

More concerned about the economy than campaign finance? Why do you think the bottom 50 percent of the people in this "booming economy" have yet to get back to where they were before the last recession? Why do you think Congress, after years and years of cutting and cutting and cutting social programs, took a great swag of money last summer — before we had a balanced budget — and gave it to the wealthiest people in this country in the form of tax cuts? Because the wealthy give big campaign contributions, and people in need do not.

Go right on down the list, and the answer every time, in every area of governance, is that decisions are not made according to what the people need or what is best for the country — decisions are made according to who gave how much money.

That's why it's especially frustrating to see polls showing that most Americans favor campaign finance reform but *they don't think it's all that important.* Just scouting around the country myself, I have yet to find anyone who doesn't "get it," who doesn't see the connection between campaign contributions and political corruption. But they have no idea how much it costs them personally.

Last week, the Senate once more took up the McCain-Feingold bill, a much-watered-down version of campaign finance reform but one that would have the happy effect of banning soft money (the unlimited swag that goes to parties instead of candidates). Because the Republican Party gets the biggest share of soft money, it opposes reform.

Now, this same Senate has just spent an entire year and $3.5 million investigating the fund-raising abuses of the 1996 presidential campaign. All those lurid tales about fund-raising in Buddhist temples and at White House coffees, all the righteous indignation and calls for Attorney General Janet Reno to appoint a special prosecutor — now is their chance to do something about it, now is their chance to fix it. Watch them verrrry closely.

Want an example of how this affects your life? According to the Center for Responsive Politics, during the first half of 1995, meat and poultry PACs distributed $338,205 — 81 percent of it to Republicans. Of the total amount, $73,987 went to House Agriculture Committee members, with Chairman Pat Roberts of Kansas coming out as the top recipient.

June 28, 1995, Associated Press: "A key House panel voted Tuesday to block the first sweeping proposal to reform meat and poultry inspections since 1906, despite warnings from consumer groups that the action could be deadly.

"The House Appropriations committee voted 26-15 to withhold funds for the Department of Agriculture's planned changes to the inspection system unless the meat industry is allowed to help re-write them. The USDA changes were designed to use modern scientific techniques to cut down on the 4,000 deaths and 5 million illnesses from contaminated meat every year."

From *The New York Times,* July 1995: "In the next few weeks, Congress will consider legislation to alter rules on food safety significantly. The changes, scattered throughout several bills, have been proposed by Republicans to limit the federal government's authority to regulate not only food safety but also health and the environment.

"Taken together, the bills would reduce the burden on business to prove that food is safe and would increase the burden on government agencies to prove that proposed rules would reduce risks to the public and would be worth the cost. The bills would also expand the food industry's chances to appeal the rules in court."

Connect the dots. Follow the bouncing ball. A report just released by Common Cause, "Pocketbook Politics," shows how powerful special interests — helped by generous campaign contributions — have won victories in Washington that are costing the American consumer. Since 1991, the special interests examined in the report doled out more than $61.3 million in political contributions — nearly $24.6 million of that in unregulated soft money contributions. What did it cost you?

- $550 million because of lost access to generic drugs.
- $59 billion annually at the gas pump because for three years Congress has frozen the fuel efficiency standards.
- $2.8 billion annually from the jump in cable TV bills and pay phone rates that followed the 1996 Telecommunications Act.
- $1.6 billion in sugar and peanut subsidies.

And that, to coin a phrase, is like the tip of that thing that hit the Titanic.

And to coin a future phrase, here is today's Campaign Finance Slogan: "It's government by the people — not people buy the government." Our reader response to last summer's slogan drive was incredible. □

Molly Ivins is a former Observer *editor and a columnist for the* Fort Worth Star-Telegram. *You may write to her via e-mail at mollyivins@star-telegram.com.*

Give Us Your Rich...

And you thought the IRS had an attitude problem. Check out the visa officers in some of our foreign consulates who issue travel permits to tourists who want to visit America.

No Statue of Liberty romanticism for these people, no "send me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses." According to *The New York Times,* our visa officers in Brazil are instructed as a matter of official policy to reject tourist applicants on the basis of their appearance. For example, on the application of a 24-year-old technician who wanted to visit Disney World, the officer wrote: "Slimy looking. Wears jacket on shoulders with earring." Likewise, a 23-year-old Brazilian who wanted to come to America for the World Cup soccer championships was rejected by the initials "LP!!!!" scrawled on her document. The initials stand for "Looks poor."

Indeed, the consulate has a five-page manual instructing visa officers to use such abbreviations as "TP — talks poor," and "LR — looks rough" to screen out applicants. The officers seem to get in the spirit of rejecting anyone with a hint of poverty in their profile: "No way," an officer wrote on one woman's application. "Poor, poor, poor."

This despicable practice comes to light thanks to the efforts of Bob Olsen, himself a former visa officer in Brazil. Appalled by the practice he found, Olsen refused to use the agency profiles — and soon found himself rejected by the State Department for "failure to adjudicate visa applications with the requisite speed and good judgment required by the job." He was chastised because "he refuses to compromise with his own convictions."

Good for Bob! The good news is that a judge has now ruled that Mr. Olsen shouldn't be fired, but praised.

IF IT SMELLS LIKE...

Here it comes again: Hightower's "Goober-head Award," given periodically to prominent figures who have their mouths running at full speed, but don't seem to have their brains in gear.

Today's awardee is Maria Eitel, a first-time Goober winner, but given her position, I'll bet it won't be her last. Ms. Eitel has been named to a prestigious new job: Vice President for Corporate and Social Responsibility at the Nike corporation. Gosh, that's a heavy load to shoulder, huh? The giant shoemaker, a notorious sweatshop exploiter, announced that she'll now be responsible for shaping up Nike's labor practices. Company president Thomas Clarke declared that the hiring of Ms. Eitel "signals Nike's commitment from the top to be a leader ... in global corporate citizenship."

Wow, she must be a tiger! Probably has a lot of experience in the fight against worldwide labor exploitation. It'll take a tough cookie to bend the Nike swooshtika toward justice, so let's check her credentials: Let's see, Maria Eitel has been a television reporter, a White House spokeswoman for the Bush Administration, and a corporate affairs manager for Microsoft. What? She's a PR flak, a political spinmeister, a corporate con artist!

We're to believe that she'll hold Nike's golden feet to the fire?

Who do they think they're kidding?

In her Nike debut, Ms. Eitel sounded more like a lapdog than a watchdog, declaring that criticism of the company's labor practices have not been justified because this is "a very complex issue." What a goober. There's nothing complex about the fact that Nike hires teenage girls in Asia to make its pricey shoes, pays them subpoverty wages, and allows them to be abused in the workplace. Nike's new "VP for Corporate Responsibility" is just another public relations cover-up.

They can put French perfume on a skunk, but it still won't hide the stink.

FLIM-FLAM BUDGETING

There's an old country song that goes, "It felt so good when it stopped hurting."

Well, that's my sentiment exactly whenever I hear Republicans and Democrats alike saying they plan to "fix" our Social Security System. Fix it? How about they just stop hurting it?

Latest example is Bill Clinton's highly-touted "zero-deficit budget," announced February 2. Headlines everywhere exclaimed, "First Balanced Budget in 30 Years," noting that Clinton's 1999 federal budget actually will show a $10 billion surplus. Good news, right?

Not if you're counting on getting Social Security when you retire. To make his budget "balance," Clinton quietly reached into the Social Security Trust Fund — a fund that is supposed to be used for nothing but paying out benefits to future retirees. Clinton took $100 billion from the fund, leaving us with an I.O.U. Without this money, his budget wouldn't balance — instead of a $10 billion budget surplus, there would have been a $90 billion deficit.

In other words, his "zero-deficit" is a flim-flam, a con-game. Bush did the same thing — Reagan, too. Presidents and the Congress have routinely been looting our Trust Fund to make their deficits look smaller. Already, they've taken $600 billion from it — money owed us when we reach retirement age. Then, these cynical politicians tell us that to "save social security," dire measures are needed, like increasing our eligibility age to seventy.

Clinton even piously proclaimed that to help shore up the Social Security Trust Fund, he wants to donate that $10 billion surplus in his new budget. But wait — he only has that surplus because he took $100 billion out of the Fund.

It's like someone stealing $100 from you, then wanting a pat on the back for returning $10 to you. Do we have sucker wrappers around our heads? □

Jim Hightower is a former Observer *editor and Agriculture Commissioner who preaches the populist gospel nationwide on his daily Hightower Radio show.*

WORKINGMAN'S FRIENDS. A February 13 Texas Supreme Court decision has made it easier for employers to fire employees injured on the job, and to diminish the benefits of those who seek a lawyer or sue.

The question of whether a company that does not subscribe to the state worker's compensation act would still be affected by the law prohibiting retaliatory firings was brought to the state's high court by Lawrence P. Bouchet. According to an article by Mary Flood in the *Wall Street Journal* (February 25), in 1987 Bouchet was a general foreman with the Texas Mexican Railway Company in Laredo when he fell on a rail car, rupturing two disks. Because he was not satisfied with the company's settlement proposal, Bouchet filed suit; three months later, the company stopped paying his salary in apparent retaliation. Bouchet won in lower courts, but the Supreme Court ruled 8-1 that the law against retaliatory firings and benefit decreases applies only to "employers who act under the Texas Workers Compensation Act." Since the railroad company is a "nonsubscriber" to the Act, the court ruled the company had the right to fire Bouchet.

Workers' advocates believe this decision could have devastating effects for employees injured on the job, and is specifically an additional incentive for businesses to leave the state's optional workers' comp system. John Wall, a Dallas employment attorney who had supported Bouchet's case, said that employers will now be able to opt out of the state's compensation plan and fire workers without repercussions. Texas is the only state that does not require that businesses carry the worker's comp coverage. According to the Texas Research and Oversight Council on Worker's Compensation, almost forty percent of state employers choose not to be covered by the worker's compensation system.

Business groups have generally applauded the Court's decision. According to Steve Bent, executive director of the Texas Association of Responsible Nonsubscribers, the only worry they have is that the decision might provoke a debate on the issue.

STOP RITUAL MURDER. The Texas Conference of Churches, an ecumenical group of numerous Christian denominations representing 9.5 million Texas members, has passed a resolution calling upon Christians for active opposition to the death penalty. On Ash Wednesday (February 25), representatives of various denominations asked Texans to show support for the statement by writing their legislators demanding an end to capital punishment. The state of Texas has conducted thirty-seven executions in the last year, including the widely publicized death of Karla Faye Tucker.



Scott Van Osdol

"The Karla Faye Tucker execution, tragic as it was, was only one in a series of tragedies in Texas," Roman Catholic Bishop Joseph P. Delaney said, in an interview with the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram.* The TCC's resolution states, as one of the reasons for its rejection of capital punishment, the fact that "evidence is overwhelming that racism, classism, and economics are governing factors in administering the death penalty; and that greater numbers of people of color are executed than is reflected in the general population; that mentally incapacitated people and far too many poor and uneducated people have been executed — thus demonstrating the injustice of the current practice of exercising the death penalty."

The resolution also describes capital punishment as unnecessary because "in our modern society we have means of keeping an offender from harming others." United Methodist Bishop Joe A. Wilson, head of the 25-county Central Texas Conference, told the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram,* "When we destroy a human life, either through crime or capital punishment, we have prevented the possibility of redemption or rehabilitation." Other representatives present at the press conference said there is no evidence that capital punishment deters violent crime or comforts the victim's family.

NAMING NAMES? State health officials say the number of reported AIDS cases in Texas has remained stable, leveling off after a peak in 1993, and the number of AIDS-related deaths in the state is down 10 percent. Yet the health department is ready to collect and record the names of Texans testing HIV-positive.

Texas currently uses a tracking system that assigns people with HIV a code, which uses information such as gender, race, and part of the Social Security number, instead of names. The state only gathers names in cases of children with HIV or of adults whose infections have progressed to AIDS. This protects patients' privacy, and keeps them safe from the discrimination HIV

patients still experience. However, Dr. Charles Bell of the Bureau of HIV and STD Prevention at the Texas Department of Health says this system just isn't working. State health officials argue that the new treatments available today allow people with HIV to live longer before the development of AIDS, and specialists recommend earlier treatment for those infected. Without adequate control of the affected population, officials say they cannot plan adequately.

The proposal, however, has met with widespread opposition. Town hall meetings in Arlington and Houston have drawn thirty groups (including the American Civil Liberties Union) who oppose the state's reporting HIV patients by name. Jamie Schield, of the AIDS Resource Center in Dallas, told the *Abilene Reporter-News* that requiring names will prevent people from coming forward to be tested, leaving them without knowledge of their condition, or education and support. The Center will hold the next town hall meeting to discuss the proposal on Wednesday, March 18, 6–8 p.m. (2701 Regnery Street, Dallas). The Health Department expects to make a decision in March or April.

MANAGED NEWS. Thus far the highlight of the media's new Gulf War campaign was CNN's exclusive February 18 broadcast of a so-called "town meeting" at Ohio State University, planned as a White House staged event worthy of the Politburo. Fortunately, a handful of ordinary citizens refused to play along. Instead, they fiercely questioned the assembled dignitaries, loudly declaimed their opposition to what is indeed a "racist war," and embarrassed poor Bernard Shaw and Judy Woodruff in their eagerly assumed roles of palace scribes. The next-day's reaction from the national press? The networks complained that they hadn't been allowed the same broadcast rights as CNN, and the pundits blamed the White House for allowing these protestors to "send the wrong message" to Saddam Hussein.

Less noticed but just as telling was National Public Radio's February 17 special edition of "All Things Considered," which featured eighty-nine minutes of warmongering "experts" discussing the most efficient ways of destroying Iraq, and one minute of a war opponent (Sara Flounders of the International Action Center in New York) describing the popular opposition to the war. Anchor Bob Edwards cut Flounders off before she could finish (which he did to no other speaker), and her brief remarks (e.g. "Seven years ago, against the Gulf War, it took three months of military mobilization before there was large opposition. Now there is already opposition") even disappeared from NPR's official transcript of the broadcast.

May the first medal of the new Iraqi campaign be awarded to those brave Ohio peacemakers; and may Bernard, Judy, Bob and the rest be sentenced to live on a sanction-determined Iraqi diet for a month, before they are allowed to file their next "reports."

DON'T CALL US. What if you held a town meeting and nobody came? If you're the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission, that's called public input.

The TNRCC has inaugurated a six-week series of "town hall" meetings around the state to discuss "strategic planning" — but hasn't bothered to invite the public. Almost nobody turned out for the first meetings in El Paso and San Angelo (because the agency had done zero publicity), and a February 26 meeting at Arlington's North Central Texas Council of Governments building was nearly cancelled when the TNRCC only notified COG officials the day before. Dallas environmentalists who hastily organized to testify said they waited for an hour for somebody even to open the building.

TNRCC watchers also report that Commissioner Barry McBee used a recent Dallas speech to blast the press, particularly the *Dallas Morning News*, for insufficiently favorable coverage of agency initiatives.

According to a press release we coaxed out of the agency, additional meetings for March include Beaumont (March 9), Amarillo (March 12), Harlingen (March 16), Corpus Christi (March 17), San Antonio (March 19). For more information call the TNRCC at (512) 239-5000, or check the web site at www.tnrcc.state.tx.us.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE ABORTED. Maybe you thought campaign finance reform is about getting the obscene amounts of corrupting money out of the political system, so that democracy — one person, one vote — can begin to work again.

Wrong-o, green breath. According to the Texas Right to Life Committee, the Senate tabling of the McCain-Feingold legislation was a historic defeat of ruthless pro-abortionists. Joseph Graham, president of Texas Right to Life, congratulated Senators Phil Gramm and Kay Bailey Hutchison for helping to defeat the legislation, which would have restricted the use of "soft money" to run thinly disguised "issue advertising" actually intended to influence elections. The reform legislation, said Graham, was being promoted by "special interest groups such as the League of Women Voters and Common Cause in an effort to silence the growing, organized voice of common Pro-Life/Pro-Family citizens."

Next time you hear those smiling reformists promising that public campaign financing would mean less special interest influence on government, don't believe them — they're only trying to silence the unborn.

DUNCANVILLE TO D.C. Donovan Campbell Jr. has successfully sued the Duncanville school board on behalf of students' "right to pray" before and after each basketball game. In Del Rio, he countersued for a church that had excommunicated a woman because she left her husband and four children to live with another man. The woman, who had sued the church for slander, claiming the congregation labeled her "an adultress," lost and agreed to apologize to the church and pay its legal expenses. Now Campbell is representing Paula Corbin Jones, and according to a profile in the March 1 addition of *The New York Times*, Campbell's "cleverest move [in the Paula Jones case] may have been his successful effort to amend Ms. Jones's complaint against the state trooper she said took her to Governor Clinton's suite." The lawsuit, which Campbell picked up from the lawyers Jones fired, no longer contends that the trooper's remarks to a magazine damaged her reputation. Her claim of a damaged reputation could have allowed the trooper's lawyers to introduce evidence of her previous sexual behavior. The President's past sexual history, however, is still fair game in the lawsuit. Campbell was recruited by the Rutherford Institute, based in Charlottesville, Virginia. His legal practice, Rader, Campbell, Fisher & Pyke, has been organized to reflect the religious beliefs of the law partners, according to the *Times*. □

To Three Friends

Each in his way, people help out each other.
A resilient small society of friends
Shows caring, more or less, the degree unimportant,
And often not measured to your sense of loss.

Your dog was run over in the street. Your parents
Died. A cyclonic wind split down a branch
Into your car. A great friend swatted a fly
Automatically with the flat of his hand

Within your car, shattering the windshield.
Your favorite sports team lost big in the playoffs.
A burglar stole your stereo and TV
While you were visiting your sister. You

Lost the woman you loved and wanted to marry
Thirty years ago, and now you are pushing sixty.
You get no solace out of buying clothes.
You will soon join the Dead Poets. But society

Saves you from neurosis and paranoia.
Your friends gather round you like a neighborhood
Of chicken soup and, each in his own way,
They give you the help and love you need to live.

—THOMAS WHITBREAD

The Internet Comes to Our Office

They have placed a computer in our office
like a pot turned on its side
spilling clicks and colors
and labyrinths of connection.
It flashes dire and pouty messages
of failed attempts, abortions,
faulty commands. What I need
is never behind its icons.
As in an electronic shell game
I turn each one over, looking
for my nugget. I am always waiting
for an hourglass to reveal my fortunes.
I haven't learned to spell its spells
and I conjure what I don't really want.
Colleagues are drawn, one by one,
to its cauldron of light and webs.
And enchanted — what else? —
are those who drink deeply.

—MARGIE MCCRELESS ROE

Thomas Whitbread teaches in the Department of English at U.T.-Austin, and was Poetry Consultant for *The Texas Observer* for many years. He is a past winner of the Texas Institute of Letters poetry prize.

Margie McCreless Roe was born in Fort Worth and has lived in Georgetown, Dallas, Austin, San Angelo, Corpus Christi, La Grange, Mason, and Brady with her preacher husband and two sons. She now lives in the San Antonio area. Her work has appeared in many places, including *Bird Watcher's Digest* and *The Christian Science Monitor.*

Both poems celebrate linkages which sustain us — in many lives, recently, the internet feels like a fourth friend.

—Naomi Shihab Nye

Romantic Lone-Star Populism

Ivins' New Collection Considers the Clinton Era

BY KAREN OLSSON

YOU GOT TO DANCE WITH THEM WHAT BRUNG YOU: Politics in the Clinton Years.
By Molly Ivins.
Random House.
245 pages. $23.00.



Alan Pogue

In the summer of 1970, a 25-year-old, six-foot-tall, redheaded journalist loaded her two cats and her rubber plant into her Mercury and drove from Minnesota to Texas, to become co-editor of the *Texas Observer*. Though she'd grown up in Houston, Molly Ivins had gone east to college (Smith), then on to journalism school at Columbia, then to Minneapolis where she won a slew of awards as a reporter for the *Minneapolis Tribune*. Nonetheless Texas was home, as she informed readers of the August 21 issue: "I can't help it. I love the state of Texas. It's a harmless perversion."

"I love the gritty, down-on-the-ground quality of Texans," she wrote, "their love of a good yarn and the piss and vinegar of their speech.... and I like the pleasant open vulgarity of Texans." Perhaps she was over-romanticizing the state, Ivins conceded, but so what — it was good to be home.

As for Texas politics, there was little for *Observer* writers and readers to romanticize that summer: incumbent Senator Ralph Yarborough had lost to Lloyd Bentsen in the previous spring's Democratic primary; U.T. Board of Regents Chairman Frank Erwin was doing his best to suppress campus protests and edge out respected scholars; "everyone in the state left of Grover Cleveland," wrote Ivins, "appears to be in normal disarray."

"But I must confess," she continued, "that I rather relish the political situation here, if only because there is no shortage of proper villains in Texas. The battles are so lifeless elsewhere, ever fought **on** tedious shades of gray. Down here the baddies wear black hats and one can loathe them with a cheerful conscience." Thus Molly Ivins announced herself to this magazine, which she would co-edit, along with Kaye Northcott, for almost six years. Even in her opening words, Ivins invoked the sense of humor and the love of politics-as-carnival (Texas politics in particular, a carnival in which the barker has a hangover and the freaks have run amok) that still fill her work.

That introductory *Observer* piece contained a bit of contradiction: in the eyes of its writer, Texas is home but *real* Texans are "them": yarn-spinners who didn't go east to school. And though a reader glancing at Ivins' latest collection of columns, *You Got To Dance With Them What Brung You*, would likely notice the Texanisms — her prose is sprinkled with words like "whomperjawed" and "fantods" and "'em"—it is the arch deployment of high English that stands out in the early *Observer* piece. (Said Virginia to Vita, *I must confess that I rather relish the political situation here....*) The high English is still there in her recent book, along with the Texanisms. Throughout her career as a reporter and columnist for various publications, Ivins has shown herself to be not just a journalist who knows how to drawl but a populist stylist, fashioning a vernacular that blends the high, the low, and the Lone-Staresque, preaching and irony, Shakespeare and sumbitches.

One of the bad things about being a journalist is that some piece you knocked off years and years ago, minutes before deadline, can be dug up and subjected to scrutiny — so it may be un-

sportsmanlike to go rooting through a reporter's decades-old work. It's interesting nevertheless to read Ivins' current book against an unscientific and quite possibly unfair sampling of those seventies *Observers*. There is a column in *You Got To Dance* about the *Observer* (a big favorite in this office when it was published last year); in it Ivins recalls her days here as "a happy, golden time, full of sunshine and laughter and beer," days of traveling the state and meeting the two liberals in each town and stealing pencils from the governor's office. She mentions slight variations in the magazine under different editors, but you get the sense that it has struggled along more or less unchanged from 1954 until the present.

In the seventies, though, the content of the magazine had more of a political-insider flavor to it than it does now; there were more articles about Texas politicians, and greater familiarity with state government was assumed of the reader; it was taken for granted that jostlings for power within the Legislature were important. This is not to say that the *Observer* covered only state electoral politics, but that the kind of interest the presumed reader took in state electoral politics was different then — as if the Legislature were a sporting event, and that reader was eager for the play-by-play.

Ivins therefore wrote a number of long, gossipy, plain-speaking pieces (not entirely humorless, but not whoop-it-up *haute-Texan* either) about, for example, the question of whether Price Daniel, Jr., would replace Gus Mutscher as Speaker of the House in 1973: "Rayford Price pulled off a brilliant stroke: he made a deal with the Republicans and got ten votes right there. The Republicans got a good deal, too. But Daniel wouldn't deal, see? Then the liberals got kinky. Hale would keep Heatly and they all hated Heatly and for heaven's sake how could the old Dirty Thirty vote to keep Heatly, even if only for the interim? Damn fool purists, muttered Daniel's people."

These days, as a columnist for a national audience, Ivins naturally tends instead toward the brief and the broad. ("People have devoted long and solemn thumb-suckers to the new leadership," she wrote of the Republican Congress elected in 1994, "analyzed it, psychoanalyzed it, and worked it by fractions. Ignoring, of course, the real story, which is not the new leadership here but the new followership.... Boy, are these people followers. Lock step, in line, march in unison, chant in unison, don't think, don't learn, follow the leader.") In the transition from Texas reporter of the early 1970s to national columnist, mid 1990s, Ivins went from being an informed source on state politics for the benefit of people who cared about it, to an explainer of politics, and at times of Texas, to an audience teetering on the line between interest and disgust in its elected officials.

The ideas behind her recent columns are straightforward: she singles out campaign finance as the scourge of present-day American politics, and insists that changing the system is the most urgent task before us. Otherwise the book does not attempt to deliver up any profound message beyond those of the individual columns, in which Ivins criticizes fundamentalism and welfare reform and right-wing weirdos, or praises people she's admired, or visits the Mall of America, or waxes rhapsodic about the looniness of right-wing weirdos.

For all the diversity of the book's seventy-some columns, though, there's an approach common to many of them. Time and time again, Ivins holds up some current piece of political rhetoric (usually some gem emanating from Republican circles) in order to deflate it. She punctures various buffoonish assertions by Rush Limbaugh, Newt Gingrich's decline-of-American-civilization version of history, the Republican claim that large numbers of parents were coaching their kids to fake disabilities in order to get SSI benefits, Dole's claim to superior character, Clinton's family values platform, Phil Gramm labelling himself "blue collar"... and so on. Sportscasting has been replaced by spin analysis.

Of course it's natural for a columnist to talk back to a politician, whereas a reporter would talk about what the politician is doing. But Ivins' rhetorical focus also seems to reflect how politics is conducted in the mid-nineties — through television campaigns, through anecdotes that spread like catchy jingles and get turned into bad laws. Gingrich's slogans beg for someone like Ivins to beat them back; at the same time dissent, these days, seems a lot like talking back to the TV. (Which takes us back to Ivins' conviction that publicly-financed elections are the nation's only hope, since the more public participation in government boils down to relatively uninterested TV-watching every other November, the more candidates are forced to display themselves on TV and raise obscene amounts of money to do so.)

Over the past thirty years populism has

FUN IN TEXAS

After much listening and pondering, I have come to this conclusion: What our country needs is more Texas liberals.

Before you accuse me of hopeless parochialism, consider the one great truth that all Texas liberals grasp in their cradles: Things Can Always Get Worse. In fact, they often do. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to rejoice now, because these will probably turn out to be the Good Old Days....

The pride of Texas liberals is that we remain of good cheer in the face of adversity — adversity being, as near as we can tell, the natural order of things. So resolved are we to enjoy things before they get worse that we consider it an imperative to Have Fun.

Texas liberals mostly have fun by gathering a mess of beer, guitars, dogs, and good folks, and plonking ourselves somewhere outdoors in the Great State so we can get sunburned and bitten by mosquitoes, fleas, ticks, chiggers, tarantulas, brown recluse spiders, and all four varieties of poisonous snakes found on the North American continent. Now you understand why people who consider this fun are so desperately needed on the national level. Any situation that doesn't include all these ingredients can only be More Fun.

— Molly Ivins, from "Texas Liberals Ought to Come in Tablet Form,"
You Got To Dance With Them What Brung You

gone right-wing: Republicans discovered George Wallace, hence angry white males, and hence populist campaign talk. In his fine 1995 book *The Populist Persuasion,* historian Michael Kazin — who defines populism not as a strict affiliation like Catholic or Democrat but as a type of language, "a flexible mode of persuasion" — follows the uses of populist language, beginning in the late nineteenth century. While the agrarian Populist farmers of the nineteenth century used both moral argument and pro-working-class language in advancing their causes, in this century, morals-based grassroots movements (the temperance movement, Christian Coalition) and labor movements have kept their distance from one another. Meanwhile, following World War II, conservatives appropriated populist language, opposing social change with appeals to the average family. Particularly in the late 1960s, conservatives proclaimed themselves the defenders of the so-called silent majority of workers and their families.

Considering Ivins' work in historical perspective, it's noteworthy stuff simply because, along with a few others like Jesse Jackson and Jim Hightower, she has articulated her left populist opinions to a large, appreciative audience. Her appeal no doubt derives in part from her humor, her Texas shtick: here comes the good ol' girl to talk some sense to y'all. I suspect her popularity also owes something to the seamless, vivid quality of her writing (so many of her columns just slide on down) and to her romantic optimism. Though Ivins denounces politicians as a matter of course, she just as firmly declares her belief that most people are nice, that this country is a great one to live in — because of, not in spite of, its absurdity — and that liberals ought to enjoy the sunshine, drink some beer, and keep on trying. This is the lesson you learn in Texas, she writes in one column ("Texas Liberals Ought to Come In Tablet Form"): rejoice now, for things can always get worse, but at least villains make for good stories.

There's clear danger in carrying this sort of thinking too far: American politics already seems too often like a bad national rerun, and political commentary that simply says, "No, it's really the great American movie," is faint praise. Ivins does more than that, but at times her "optimism" doesn't ring true; it seems more like a glibness built into her style, an automatic feature of the Ivins-column persona. The Ivins voice, while setting her apart from some of her more plaintive counterparts at lefty publications (thank goodness), sounds wrong at times, as when a friend who committed suicide is described as "a fine and sensitive writer who most recently distinguished himself by tying a plastic bag over his head...." The other limitation Ivins is up against is that she's writing columns. She writes great columns, but there are times, particularly when she's discussing Texas politics, that you wish you were getting more than a few anecdotes, given how much Ivins clearly knows about her subjects.

There are rumors afoot that her next book may satisfy that wish. Until it appears I suppose we Ivins fans will have to make do with columns, though, and beer in the Texas sunshine. □

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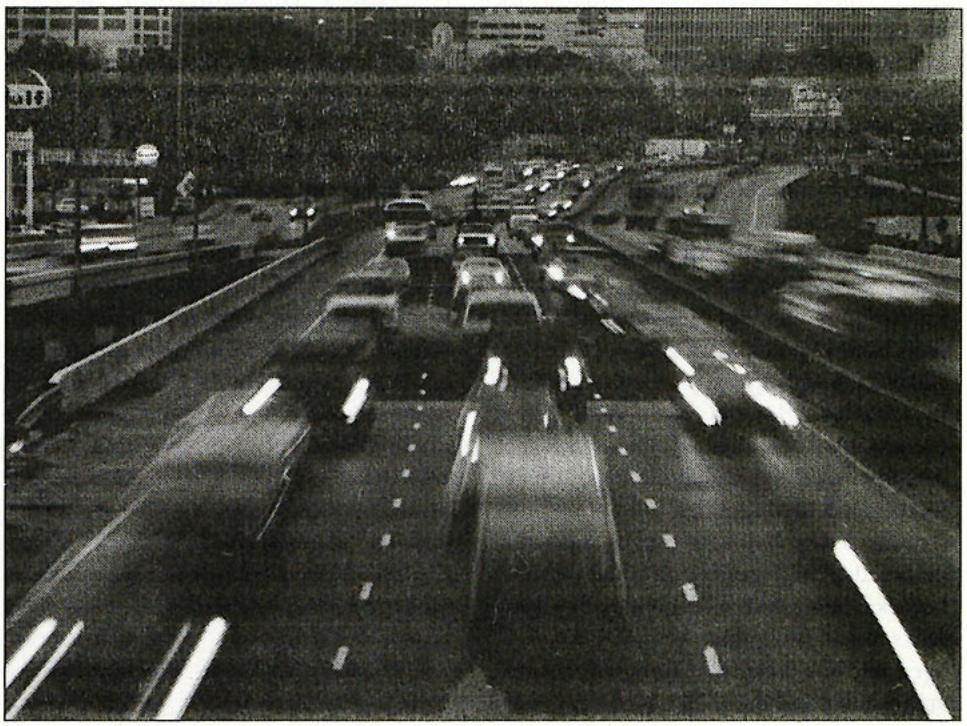
No Exit

Is There a Cure for the Highway Blues?

BY CHAR MILLER

DIVIDED HIGHWAYS:
Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life.
By Tom Lewis.
Viking.
354 pages. $27.95.

THE CITY AFTER THE AUTOMOBILE:
An Architect's Vision.
By Moshe Safdie, with Wendy Kohn.
Basic Books.
187 pages. $24.00.



Alan Pogue

Thomas Jefferson of Monticello was suspicious of cities. In *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1784), his patriotic articulation of the rural virtues of the new republic, he scorned the urban energy that the industrial revolution was then unleashing in London and Paris. Americans, living in an edenic land of agricultural plenty, had no need to replicate the Old World's experience. "For the general operations of manufacture, let our workshops remain in Europe," he asserted. "It is better to carry provisions and materials to workmen there, than bring them to the provisions and materials, and with them their manners and principles." It was the corrosive impact of urban sensibilities on democracy he feared most of all. "The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body."

Jefferson would change his mind, but only because of the threat that the War of 1812 posed to the nation's survival; as historians Morton and Lucia White observed in *The Intellectual Versus the City* (1961), this led him reluctantly to accept "the city as an indispensable element of American life." Without it, and the domestic manufacturing it generated, the sovereignty of the United States would have been fatally compromised, and that was something the former president would not countenance. Those who now would oppose urban economic development, he wrote a friend in 1816, "must be for reducing us either to dependence on ... foreign nation[s], or to be clothed in skins, and live like wild beasts in dens or caverns. I am not one of these."

But neither was he persuaded that a citified future was a healthy prospect for the country he had helped to found. Were we completely to pattern ourselves after Britain or France, we would carry on business "with one half of the world at the expense of eternal war with the other half." As necessary as commercial centers were, the conflicts they engendered must be avoided. That is why he concluded that it was still better for Americans to continue to adapt "our policy and pursuits" to our "agricultural capacities," for that "is more likely to make us a numerous and happy people, than the mimicry of an Amsterdam, a Hamburgh, or a city of London."

It is good thing, I suppose, that Jefferson did not live to see just how thoroughly succeeding generations have imitated, even surpassed, the European society and economy that so troubled him. But he might be comforted to know that his ambivalence about urbanization, and his worries concerning the consequences that would flow from an industrialized society, are integral to late twentieth-century critiques of those emblems of the modern, post-industrial city: the automobile and the freeway.

The title of Tom Lewis' book, *Divided Highways,* updates the Jeffersonian concerns. So too does the text's close focus on the physical impress of our historic westering impulse, epitomized by "paths, roads, turnpikes, and canals in the eighteenth century; railroad track in the nineteenth; and an ever-increasing number of wide roads and streamlined highways in the twentieth." In these "signatures of civilization," he argues, Americans have written down their "notions of progress and above all speed."

Spelled out too are an array of cultural contradictions. Souped-up cars allow us to "conquer the vast spaces of our landscape," and then we litter the scene with smog, concrete, and neon; we can rocket over hill and dale, but cannot easily walk across town due to the obstacles that an automotive infrastructure puts in our way; while our highways seem to "diminish distance and travel time" — especially at 75 miles per hour — that's only true if you can locate an empty stretch of road.

No moment more poignantly captured these paradoxes than the burial service held for President Dwight Eisenhower on the morning of April 2, 1969. He had pushed hard for the development of the Interstate Highway System, a partial consequence of having witnessed the heightened mobility that the autobahns had provided the Nazi war machine. So it was only appropriate that on news of the death of the former Supreme Allied Commander, an army of nearly 100,000 mourners rolled in to Abilene to pay their last respects, driving along the routes he had financed with billions of federal tax dollars. Their grief-stricken numbers would have swelled considerably, however, if a horde of people hoping to attend the services had not been caught in a three-mile traffic jam along Interstate 70.

Movement and congestion: the twin results of the nation's forty-year experiment with constructing a trans-continental highway system designed to conform to the needs of the internal combustion engine and its many drivers. Social dislocation might be added to the mix. Here again, Lewis finds the apposite anecdote, this one about a Texan, Francis Cutler Turner. He had grown up along the railroad tracks in Fort Worth in a house without plumbing, running water, or electricity; a devoted son, he (and his siblings) would later buy their parents a new homestead, with all the modern amenities. As fate would have it, he became a federal highway administrator responsible for platting the new interstates. One of them, I-35, was scheduled to run smack through his parents' cherished home. When he visited them in the early seventies to explain the situation, he saw the stake that marked the highway's center line hammered in front of their living room window. Met at the door by his mother's plaintive request, "Frank, can't you do anything?" the engineer replied: "I can but I won't.... You'll just have to move."

Even as we might applaud Turner's ethical stance — why should he have spared his parents only to uproot other families? — surely we recoil from the technocratic indifference that enabled him and his planning peers to lay down roads that ran roughshod over the social ecology and natural environment. The architecture of the interstates could be as brutal in its physical appearances as in its human consequences.

Some of the engineers' hubris has been blunted over time. Confronted with federal lawsuits brought by an empowered citizenry, they have been forced to bury freeways underground and erect sound barriers to muffle the ear-popping decibel levels that afflict those who live along the most heavily trafficked corridors. Congress, too, has begun to backpedal. Once immovably in support of disbursing Highway Trust funds solely for roadway construction — think of all that pork barrel largesse — in 1991 it passed the Intermodal Surface Transportation Act (ISTEA) mandating the integration of other forms of transport into planning processes. The development of bicycle paths, better pedestrian access, and light rail systems will be paid with Highway Trust monies. With ISTEA's passage, Lewis concludes, "the age of building the largest engineered structure in the world was over."

The new age has not yet arrived, of course, as any commuter will attest. Nor will its birth be anything but awkward. Indeed, renowned architect Moshe Safdie recognizes that "diverse environments and lifestyles require opportunities for choice," and that "no single method of transportation is going to serve as the golden breakthrough to an effortless commute." In *The City After the Automobile,* Safdie suggests that before reconsidering the means by which we wish to move people in and out of metropolitan centers, we must consider how to meld our goal of increasing mobility with the "best system of transport to satisfy each type of mobility we desire." This leads to a provocative suggestion. He does not propose that we can the car, one of the favorite tropes of the anti-auto club, but that we reimagine our relationship to it. Central to what he calls "public private transit" is the creation of the "Utility car" (or "U-car"), a publicly owned automobile that would be part of "a pool of vehicles at our disposal by the hour, day, week, or month." Picked up at storage facilities located at transportation nodes, paid for through credit cards, these electrically powered cars "would enhance the freedom of movement we now enjoy" but add "the convenience of a publicly run and maintained utility." Such an option would also decrease the amount of time and space that contemporary car culture demands, by lessening traffic congestion and reducing the amount of space parking lots and garages consume. If this system were effectively linked to networks of mass transit, we then could transfer from one form of transport to another without skipping a beat. In that sense of ease lies the U-car's most alluring quality, its designer argues: it has the potential to fulfill the "longtime promise of cars: the carefree life."

The trick is to depersonalize the automobile, a tough sell in a society that so intertwines sexuality with horsepower and (through its popular music) reflexively sings the praises of the backseat orgasm — no "Utility car" inspired "Pink Cadillac." Yet Safdie suggests that an inspiration of another kind will seduce us away from our auto fixation. Were we to "join our personalized patterns of car travel with fixed, planned corridors of public transportation," we could weave "open, green, suburbs" with other, more "dense concentrations" of population into a "single organism." In so doing, we would maintain "the civic meeting places vital to an enlightened society and the desire to possess the vastness and freedom of the open road." That deft blend might even inoculate us from the "pestilential" dangers that Jefferson believed were inherent in urban civilizations. □

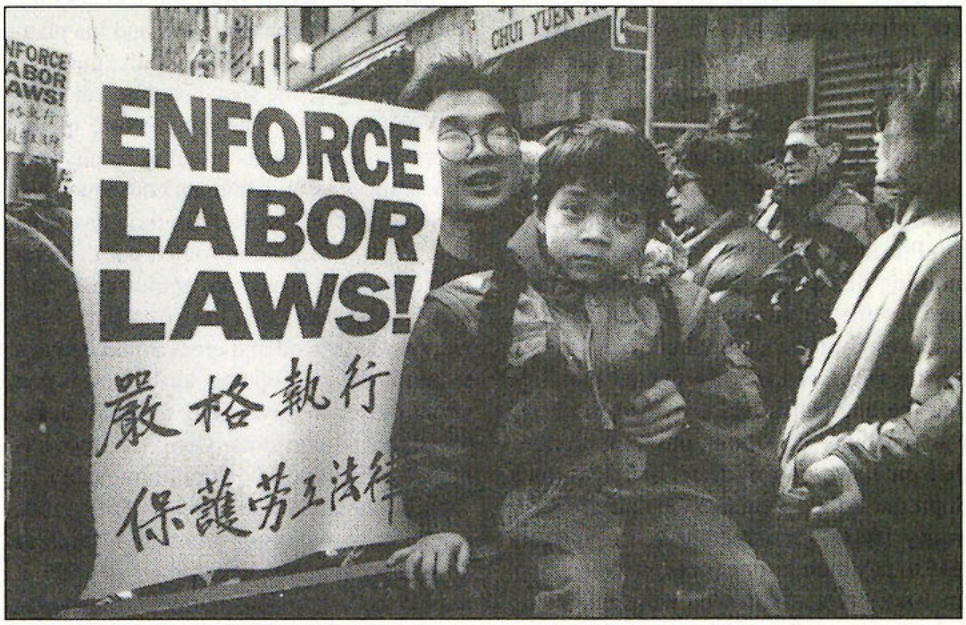
Contributing Writer Char Miller initially rebuffed the editors' request for a review of Divided Highways, *due to his work on a companion documentary aired by PBS last fall. But they pointed out that anyone who sang The Beatles' "Drive My Car" on NPR as a promotional gimmick for the film is a bit unprincipled to begin with; his capitulation proves their point.*

Chinatown Behind Closed Doors

Charting the Trade in Illegal Asian Labor

BY CHARLES WILBANKS

FORBIDDEN WORKERS:
Illegal Chinese Immigrants and American Labor.
By Peter Kwong.
The New Press.
240 pages. $24.00.



▲ *From the cover of* Forbidden Workers

Corky Lee

When President Jimmy Carter met with Deng Xiaoping in 1974, Carter reminded the Chinese leader that U.S. law forbade granting "Most Favored Nation" status to any country that didn't base its economy on free market principles, and didn't allow its citizens to emigrate freely. Deng's response: "How many millions of Chinese does the United States want?"

Quite a few million, apparently, judging by the numbers of Chinese working illegally in the United States. While Deng's statement laid bare the many contradictions of U.S. immigration policy at the time, that policy has become no more rational today. Lawmakers and human rights advocates in the United States loudly deplore working conditions and prison labor in China, at the same time that sweatshops employing Chinese workers in barbaric conditions flourish in the U.S. Meanwhile, the U.S. government forbids the entry of illegal workers, and spends huge sums on their interdiction, but does little to discourage demand for the workers by American businesses. With estimates of more than 25,000 Chinese entering the U.S. illegally every year, and more than a million entering legally only to remain after their visas have expired, it appears the demand is growing.

Peter Kwong's *Forbidden Workers: Illegal Chinese Immigrants and American Labor,* is a dramatic, clearly written exploration of the huge smuggling network that brings Chinese workers to the United States and other industrialized nations. Kwong begins with the chilly June morning in 1993, when the freighter Golden Venture ran aground off a beach in New York. Ten of the 287 would-be immigrants drowned after jumping into the sea, and the rest were arrested, destined to spend years languishing in prison, having just spent months in the Golden Venture's disgusting cargo-hold. Kwong, chairman of the Asian American Studies program at Hunter College in New York, interviewed the Chinese in prison, and visited their families in villages around Fuzhou, currently the source of most illegal Chinese immigrants. What he learned in his travels is tragic and maddening.

LAWMAKERS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES IN THE UNITED STATES LOUDLY DEPLORE WORKING CONDITIONS AND PRISON LABOR IN CHINA, AT THE SAME TIME THAT SWEATSHOPS EMPLOYING CHINESE WORKERS IN BARBARIC CONDITIONS FLOURISH IN THE U.S.

In Fuzhou, Kwong easily found "snakeheads" who smuggle desperate Chinese citizens around the world for as much as $40,000 a person, many of whom come through Central America and Mexico into Texas and various points north. Posing as a Chinese-American businessman, he also had no trouble meeting Chinese government officials who are eager accomplices. Back in New York, he talked to scared Fujianese who work until they drop, sometimes sleeping in the restaurants and garment factories where they work, living under constant threats from the smugglers, to whom they owe possibly insurmountable sums.

Kwong, who has been a regular contributor to *The Nation* and the *Village Voice,* was an early critic of the "Asian Values" argument — that cooperation, discipline, and loyalty to authority resulted in the huge economic gains across so much of Asia. That argument, viewed through the dust of the once vaunted Asian economic "miracle," now appears laughable, but variations on the theme survive in the U.S. The stereotype suggests that Chinese immigrants are tougher than other ethnic groups, and don't mind unremitting toil in bad working conditions for less than the minimum wage. Such a generalization allows

SNAKEHEADS AND SNAKETAILS

The success of human smuggling operations depends on the cooperation of hundreds of individuals, including snaketails in Fuzhou, corrupt officials in China, fishermen-smugglers on China's coast, Taiwanese fishing and freight fleet owners, Malaysian shipping crews, safe house operators dotting the globe, and underworld "facilitators" along the smuggling routes from Bangkok, Central America, Mexico, and Texas to New York.

The smuggling network also involves passport and visa counterfeiters in Hong Kong, gangs who specialize in stealing passports in Asia, money launderers in New York who transfer smuggling funds back into China, and financial operators who handle debt payments in China. In New York, the smuggling network relies on Chinese youth gangs as enforcers who oversee the snake people, on lawyers who defend illegals and appeal for political asylum on their behalf, and on members of the Fukien-American Association on East Broadway, who were observed by law enforcement officials placing threatening calls from their offices to Fuzhounese immigrants in New York, demanding smuggling fees.

Parts of the operation are subcontracted out by the syndicate. The U.S.-Mexico border crossings are usually handled by Hispanic subcontractors. Until her arrest in 1996, Gloria Canales, a citizen of Costa Rica, headed one of the largest immigrant smuggling operations in Central America. Immigration officials have estimated that Canales and her confederates had moved yearly at least 10,000 migrants from India, Pakistan, and China from Central America through Mexico to major U.S. cities.

—*from* Forbidden Workers, *by Peter Kwong*

businesses that profit from sweatshops to trivialize them as a mere cultural issue that outsiders don't understand.

In *Forbidden Workers,* on the other hand, the Chinese workers Kwong interviews are no different than anyone else: they work as they do only out of intimidation and desperation. New York's China-

NEW YORK'S CHINATOWN APPEARS A GRIM PLACE, WHERE POWERFUL BUSINESSMEN AND CRIME SYNDICATES USE THREATS OF KIDNAPPING, TORTURE, AND RAPE TO KEEP UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS IN LINE.

town appears a grim place, where powerful businessmen and crime syndicates use threats of kidnapping, torture, and rape to keep undocumented workers in line. As for ethnic solidarity, it is Chinese people — from corrupt mainland officials (who sell visas to immigrants for many thousands of dollars) to unscrupulous employers and "community leaders" in the United States — who exploit other Chinese. All the while, they push arguments about ethnic solidarity as a way of isolating Chinese workers from whatever help they might find in the United States.

This is an important book, written after much courageous reporting and thoughtful research. No one who reads it will ever walk through a Chinatown, in the U.S. or Canada, in quite the same way again. As for policy prescriptions, even Kwong doesn't seem to have much confidence that change is on the way. He advocates stronger labor unions in the United States; this is slow in coming. And he urges tougher worker-protection laws, coupled with harsher sanctions and international cooperation against the smugglers and those who virtually enslave the workers once they have landed here. Judging by President Clinton's State of the Union address, just the opposite is more likely: Clinton advocated more money for the Immigration and Naturalization Service to "get control of our borders." By then it's already too late; but the government appears uninterested in reducing demand for the workers before they decide to emigrate.

In the meantime, the bloody business of human smuggling is likely to grow. While in China, Kwong says he was unable to convince a single person that Chinese citizens working illegally in the United States face a difficult, dangerous existence. Said one farmer: "After taxes and providing for the family's needs, I make twenty dollars a year. You make that much in one day. No matter how much it costs to get there, or how hard the work is, America is still better than this." □

Charles Wilbanks is a writer who lives in New York City.

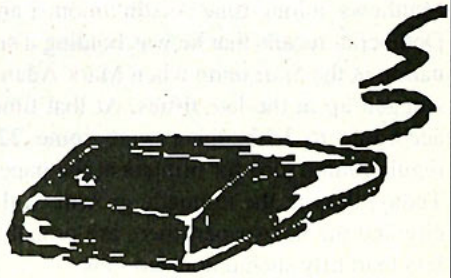
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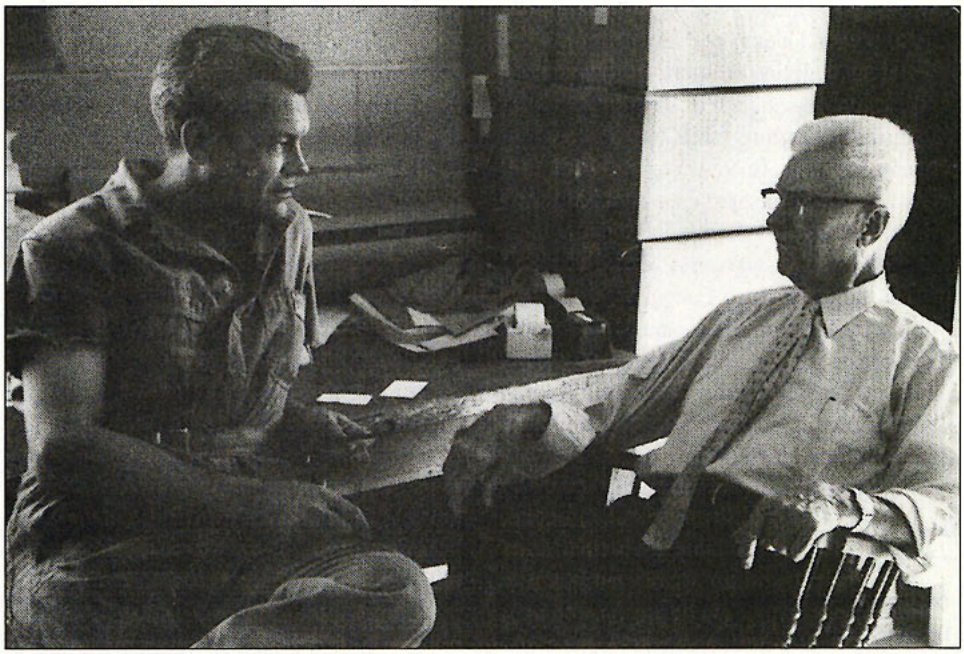


Memoirs of a Progressive Packrat

The Observer*'s First Printer Lived a Life in Movement*

BY DAVID RICHARDS

GLIMPSES OF A CENTURY:
By a Mouse in the Halls of the Mighty.
By Mark Adams.
Packrat Press (Washington).
272 pages. $24.95.



▲ *Mark Adams and his father, Silas, Chaparral Press, ca. 1958* Russell Lee

Mark Adams was first and foremost a printer. When his Austin printing business failed, as it did from time to time, he "slugged up as a linotype operator at the *Austin American-Statesman*." This meant, in the language of the Typographical Union, that he took his union card, went to the newspaper composing room, printed his name on a lead slug, and hung the slug on the "Available" board. By this action, Mark announced to the foreman of the shop that he was available to hold a "situation" (a.k.a., job) in the paper's printing operation. Hiring of printers was done by the foreman who was himself, by custom and rule, a union member. Indeed, in those years, regular situation holders could hire substitutes to cover their regular shift without management approval, so long as the sub was slugged up. This practice, which existed at unionized newspapers across the country, enabled journeymen printers such as Mark Adams to move across the country and from job to job almost at will, creating an iconoclastic crowd of roving freethinkers.

Technology and the elimination of hot lead type in the printing process has decimated the journeyman printing trade. Irish Matthews, a long-time Austin unionist and Democrat, recalls that he was holding a situation at the *Statesman* when Mark Adams slugged up in the late fifties. At that time, according to Irish, there were some 220 regular union jobs for printers at the paper. Today, despite the dramatic growth of the city and the newspaper, there are probably less than fifty such unionized jobs.

Not only have we lost those skilled jobs, but we may also face the loss of the colorful language that characterized the unionized printing trade. I remember well my first representation of the Typographical Union in Dallas in the fifties. It took weeks just to adjust to the peculiarities of the jargon. Some years ago, Chief Judge Brown of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals wrote a wonderful opinion, attempting to describe a dispute between I.T.U. Local 173 and the *Dallas [Morning] News*. Judge Brown's opinion noted that the culmination of the controversy came when the "chapel chairman pied the forms in the hell box." The Judge pointed out that the chapel chairman apparently had no ecclesiastical duties, but rather functioned as the union steward, and the hell box was the disposal for used metal type. We will probably never again see such disputes — nor another Mark Adams.

All of this is simply to say that reading Mark Adams' *Glimpses of an American Century* brings home vividly what we have lost to technology.

Mark's father was a printer and editor of small town weeklies in East Texas, and Mark was a journeyman printer by the age of fifteen. In the midst of the Depression, when the East Texas oil field was at its early peak, Mark was working with his father on a weekly in Gladewater. According to Adams, "Governor Ross Sterling sent the National Guard to shut down the huge oil field until the Texas company could finish its pipeline to the major company refineries on the Gulf Coast. (Governor Sterling had entered politics from his post as CEO of the Humble Oil Company…)." The senior Adams was incensed, and denounced the Governor's invasion of East Texas, commenting in his paper, "The only difference between Ross Sterling and his militia and Al Capone and his mob is that Sterling's gunmen wear uniforms."

Mark's father rightly expected retribution, and shortly there were unsuccessful attempts to indict Mark and his father for criminal libel, and visitations from a Texas Ranger, who later told Mark they had been called by the Governor's office and instructed to do whatever was necessary "to quiet us down." With this background, it is

no surprise that Mark fell in with a cluster of progressives on the University of Texas campus in the thirties.

Mark's accounts of U.T. politics of the era invoke names that are certainly familiar to *Observer* readers, and who were central to my own political maturation — Otto Mullinax of Dallas (with whom I practiced law for many years), Chris Dixie of Houston, Creekmore Fath of Austin, and Bernard Rapoport of Waco. This young group of progressives came under the spell of Dr. Bob Montgomery of the economics faculty, who apparently marked all of them for life. Certainly, they have remained at the forefront of progressive politics in Texas for half a century or so. According to Mark, Dr. Bob was wont to say, "Texas is the richest colony of Wall Street" — an observation which may be less true today, but surely an accurate reflection of the role big oil has always played in this state's politics.

Included in Mark's World War II reminiscences is an incident seemingly right out of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, and it brings home the omnipresence of oil's influence. Mark was on the carrier U.S.S. Lexington:

[During] the hit-and-run attack we made on Hong Kong on our way out of the South China Sea ... as we checked over the operation order, with its slapdash assignment of target priorities, I pointed out the paragraph stating that the oil tank farm at Kowloon was to be protected from attack because the tanks were the property of the Texas Company.

According to Mark, his commanding officer commented, "Aren't these tanks supplying oil to the Japanese?" Upon return from the mission, the officer reported that he had gotten off target and feared his bombs might have landed "'smack-dab on those Texas Company tanks.'

"I nodded. 'You can't always tell where those bombs are going to hit.'

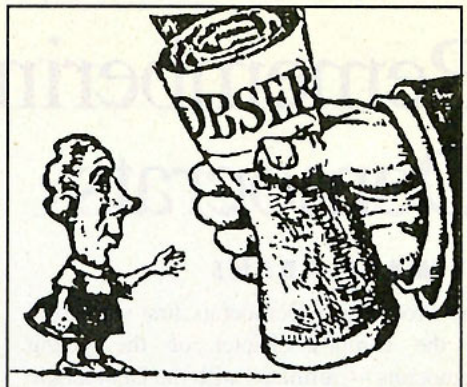
"So I wrote down in the combat report: 'Dropped bombs at shipping in the harbor. Missed.'"

Mark Adams came back to Austin after the war and, for the next thirty years, was a fixture in the progressive political scene as a printer, writer, and political activist. He was a participant in all of the Ralph Yarborough campaigns, and in 1954, he helped launch *The Texas Observer,* as its first printer. This gave him, in his words, an opportunity "to operate a print shop which would print propaganda for liberal causes." In 1958, Adams convinced the Texas AFL-CIO to buy a half-interest in the press, enabling Adams to provide campaign literature to liberal candidates at cost. But in 1960, his dream came crashing down when, without warning, AFL-CIO President Jerry Holleman pulled out the union's money. The end of his shop sent Adams back to the *Austin American,* as a linotype operator. Shortly thereafter, Holleman was appointed Assistant Secretary of Labor, apparently on the recommendation of the new Vice-President, Lyndon Johnson. Adams figured that, since he had been on Johnson's "shit list for a long time," therein lay the explanation for the loss of Holleman's support. Who knows? In that era, Texas liberals suffered from probably excessive paranoia, finding Johnson's hand in all of our misfortunes, sometime with good reason. (On LBJ, Adams himself is nothing if not blunt: "The son of a bitch was a certifiable psychopath.")

Adam's indomitable nature is best shown by his "retirement" years. At age sixty-seven, he took off from Austin with a fellow printer, Ann Price, and a mobile printing press. For the next few years she slugged up at newspapers across the west, while Adams did odd jobs and printing projects on his mobile press. In 1982, at the age of seventy-two, Mark and Ann married and settled in Washington state. There, Adams built and founded the Packrat Press, using hot lead printing equipment that had been destined for the scrap pile. For the next fifteen years, they printed and published what they chose, including Adams' own writings, those of Otto Mullinax, as well as the letters of Franklin Jones of Marshall, one of the most gifted of *Observer* contributors.

Mark Adams died in 1997, with this book still in progress. It was completed by his wife Ann, and printed by Packrat Press. The book is disjointed in parts, and in that, too, it reflects the life of the author. This memoir is dedicated to his children and grandchildren, and is a testament to his restless energy and iconoclastic soul. It gives the reader the full flavor of the time and place. □

David Richards is a longtime Texas political activist and civil rights attorney who currently lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.



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Remembering the Progressive Democrats

BY MARK ADAMS

The Progressive Democrats first organized as the campus chapter of the young Democrats — affiliated with the Democratic Party — intending to fight in causes of the New Deal. But immediately they found themselves restrained by conservatives perfunctorily installed as officials of a paper organization by an equally conservative state Democratic Party administration. The greying bald heads and paunches of these state Young Democrat officials who sought to discipline them seem to have been particularly galling to the campus Young Democrats — not reflecting their own idea of youth.

The campus group was flattered but not persuaded when Jack Garner, the Vice President, wrote them a letter chastising them and demanding that they shut up and behave.

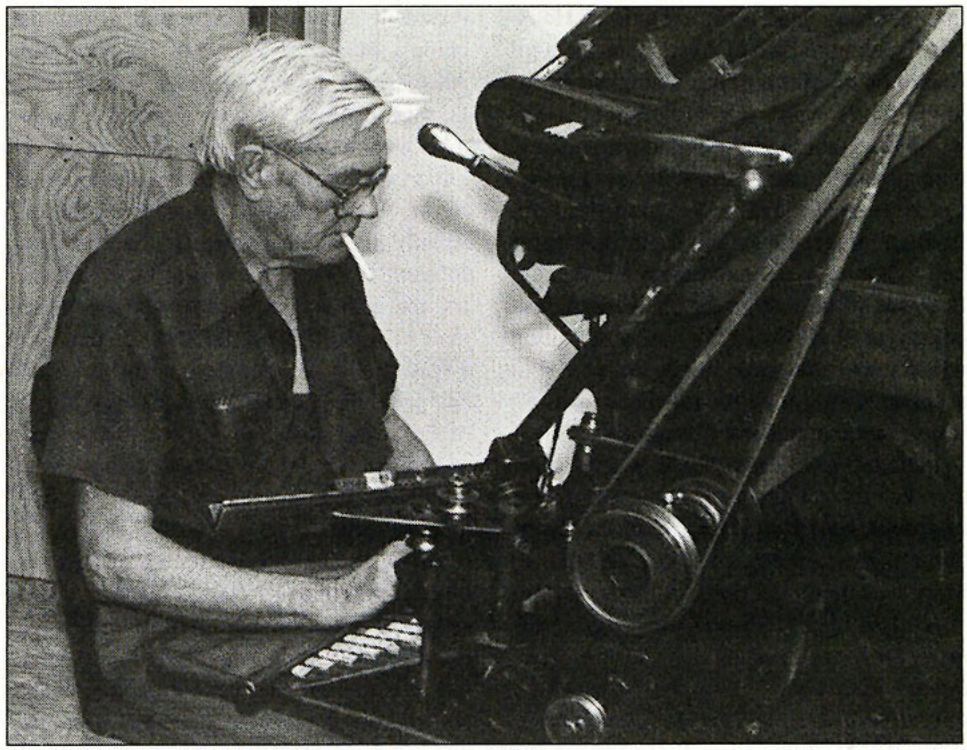
The campus group withdrew from under the authority of the Young Democratic organization and took the name of Progressive Democrats.

About this time two things happened which served to crystallize their own image of themselves for all time to come.

First, since they had crawled out from under the umbrella of announced policies and principles of the Democratic party — which at least partially reflected Roosevelt's embryo New Deal — they decided they should set out a statement of principles and policies of their own. The result was the PD Constitution which, verbatim, concludes these notes.

I find this remarkable. It is a truism that humanity habitually backs into the future — eyes focused on the horror it backs away from but with little thought of where it's going. But these youngsters — the PDs — looked very carefully back over their shoulders with firm intent to plan, to pick a better path.

It is to be noted that there is nothing radical whatever in their Constitution. Basically its principles might more accurately be termed reactionary — it reflects a yearning for return to the local self-reliance, freedom, and independence they identified with their forefathers and the days of an American frontier. Their most radical specific proposals were (1) an increased tax on sulphur, which was the most air-tight and profitable monopoly exploiting Texas resources (Jefferson had urged an unequivocal prohibition of monopolies in the Bill of Rights). And (2) a law regulating public utilities and establishing a commission to enforce it. (They knew such regulation was rooted in the English common law governing millers — dating back approximately to the reign of Richard the Lion-Hearted.)



▲ *Mark Adams, Packrat Press, Washington 1983* Courtesy of Packrat Press

A second crystallizing event occurred about the same time. The PDs were given their baptism of fire.

THE BAPTISM OF FIRE

The lobbyist for Texas Gulf Sulphur, noting with approval the activities of Martin Dies and his Un-American Committee, got a resolution through the legislature to set up a similar committee "to investigate communist activities at the University of Texas."

The resolution, of course, was aimed at driving Dr. Bob Montgomery off the University faculty. The sulphur lobbyist thought Dr. Bob the root of all evil — Bob had written a book about the sulphur monopoly and urged a steep state severance tax on sulphur, and besides he taught the course on public utilities in the Economics Department. So Bob's admiring students on campus — specifically the PDs — were directly in the line of fire.

The rationale of that lobbyist's Dies-McCarthy gambit, of course, is also rooted in the venerable past. I seem to remember that James I — regarding Sir Walter Raleigh as a political threat — accused Sir Walter of conspiring with the Spanish against England. That was an outlandishly improbable idea, but it was established to

the satisfaction of King James on the basis of no evidence as yet known to historians. And thus having found Sir Walter guilty of treason, King James had him drawn and quartered — that is, executed by the most cruel and inhuman method possible.

Happily the assault on Dr. Bob by the lobbyist's legislative lynch mob was abortive. It was a fiasco. (I speak of it at length in the Afterword I wrote for Otto's *Thus Spake Idion*.)

But before Bob got to the stand to answer the committee's questions with simple, direct answers that revealed the committee members to all eyes as the venal boobs they were, and an embarrassed legislature withdrew the committee's authorization, the student PDs had been put on the stand, browbeaten by the committee members in accusatory speeches based on nothing at all, and grilled at length about passages taken out of context from PD correspondence files (which the lobbyist had quite literally hired a thief to steal before the hearings were authorized).

It was a baptism of fire for the PDs, and they emerged from it as a cadre of blooded troops for armies of the democratic cause.

A blooded trooper knows two facts an untried trooper cannot feel positive about. And the knowledge is oddly strengthening. Fact 1: He knows he can be hit and hurt if he ever finds himself in battle. Fact 2: He knows for sure that from somewhere inside himself he can find the courage to face Fact 1, and such knowledge, once gained, is good for a lifetime.

Looking back over the half-century that has elapsed since the PDs graduated and left campus along their separate paths, I cannot think of a single one of the 1934 PDs who has not held true to the principles they drafted for themselves so long, so very long ago. □

Mark Adams was a longtime Texas political activist and one of the founders and the first printer of the Observer. *On the wall of his office was a quotation from Sabatini: "He was born with a gift for laughter, and a sense that the world is mad." His last home was in Oak Harbor, Washington, where he died last year, two months before his eighty-seventh birthday.*

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS, 1934

We hold these truths to be self-evident for a modern democratic society:

1. That the function of our industrial order is to produce the most generous quantities of goods and services feasible, and to distribute them to the largest possible number of people.

2. That the individual's share in these goods and services should be determined by his efforts in producing them, unless he is physically or mentally unable to do productive work, or unless he is specifically exempted from such work by the group.

3. That the greatest political good is liberty — that is, the right of the individual to make a free choice in the fundamentals of life, *e.g.*, in his job, his home, his religion, his politics and in goods and services which he will consume.

4. That private monopoly is against the public interest, and in the production or distribution of any important good or service cannot be tolerated in a democracy.

5. That equality of opportunity in securing the essentials of life, health, education, and economic advancement must be provided for all.

6. That the allocation of functions between various governmental units should recognize two basic propositions: (1) in a democracy, governmental powers should be as close to the citizen as is practicable; (2) governmental functions should be performed by the agency — local, state, or national — which can best perform each function.

7. That the people should perform through governmental agencies those functions that can be performed in that way more satisfactorily than through private business units.

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Chronicle of a Death Foretold

BY CARMEN GARCIA

Lyon, France

When I left the editorial offices at Euronews on the night of February 2, the windshield on the car was covered by a cap of ice so thick that we had to pour water on it to thaw it out. The cold and ice were not that unusual; it is winter, and Lyon is not far from the Alps. But it was the end of a very hard day. In mid afternoon, all the office teletypes jumped to life with reports of an accident in the north of Italy, where the tail of a U.S. jet fighter had sliced through a cable supporting a cable car carrying twenty people. The car plummeted to the ground and all on board died. The jet climbed out of the valley and the pilot landed without complications at the base he flew out of in Bosnia.

Euronews received the images of the tragedy from RAI, the Italian TV network, and our editors raced against the clock to prepare a bulletin for the 6 o'clock news, as all of Europe's TV outlets reworked their evening lineup to make a place for the continent's lead story. If the American fighter pilot had flown at the altitude required by NATO, all of Europe's TV networks would have led with a very different story. They would have been informing viewers that it was still not certain whether Karla Faye Tucker would die that same night. News of the latest development in the story had arrived a day earlier, on Monday, when Victor Rodríguez, speaking for the Texas Board of Paroles and Pardons, announced that the board had refused to commute Karla Faye's death sentence to life in prison.

In our newsroom, which simultaneously transmits TV news in six languages, not a half-hour had passed without a Texas update, which inevitably included the image of this white, fundamentalist Christian woman who was so very photogenic. And for several days it seemed as if all of Europe was looking toward Texas, and the newspaper headlines suggested the same.

In Italy, which has no death penalty in civilian cases, the opposition to Karla Faye Tucker's execution was vocal, organized, and daily, making the case for a total ban on capital punishment.. "I am completely against the death



penalty ... and clemency should be granted in this case and every other case," Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi told reporters late Monday while traveling in Latvia. "All pleas fall on deaf ears," *Il Corriere della Sera* reported. "Texas rejects clemency and everything is prepared for an execution," *La Repubblica* wrote. "For Governor Bush it is easier to confirm [the death sentence] because it is easier for him to obey his strong sense of justice rather than his latent sense of humanity," an editorial writer in *La Stampa* wrote. Pope John Paul had appealed to U.S. authorities, but Vatican spokesman Joaquín Navarro Valls said late on Monday that no answer had yet been received. Valls reiterated the Pope's opposition to the death penalty. In Spain, *El País* devoted much of its front and inside pages to Karla Faye Tucker and in France, *Le Monde* and *Libération* did the same. The story received the same treatment in Germany's newspapers.

Every major network had sent news correspondents to the small East Texas college and prison town whose name was becoming a household word in Europe. France Deux; France Trois; the three channels that make up Italy's RAI; Spain's public network, TVE. All with live feeds from Huntsville during prime-time evening news broadcasts.

It had been years since the death penalty had disappeared from the Old Continent — with the exception of Russia and the Baltic states, where capital punishment statutes remain on the books but have not been enforced for many years. And when these countries want to become part of the European Council, they will be required to sign a European Human Rights Accord. The accord doesn't prohibit state executions, but the countries will face strong pressure to sign a supplementary protocol that clearly prohibits capital punishment. Perhaps the reporting on Karla Faye Tucker will increase that pressure.

On Wednesday at 8 p.m., when the wire services announced that the U.S. Supreme Court had rejected Tucker's appeal, all of Europe's attention turned to Texas Governor George Bush, the only person who could do anything to slow Tucker's march toward the death chamber. When the news arrived that George W. Bush was Karla Faye Tucker's last hope, our editors all agreed: tomorrow's lead story would be Karla Faye Tucker's death by lethal injection. After a week-long deathwatch in the newsroom, editors began writing the copy for a news event that hadn't yet occurred, as everyone pronounced Karla Faye Tucker dead — for the simple reason that no one could conceive of an act of clemency from a Republican candidate when presidential elections are only two years away.

I left the newsroom as our news teams got their instructions: at fifteen minutes before she is scheduled to die, proceed with the report that Karla Faye Tucker has been executed in Texas.

Tomorrow the director of the U.N. High Commission on Refugees will offer her condolences to the victims of the family, then add that she could not accept that "one death justified another." French politicians from across the ideological spectrum will lament the execution. And in Germany, the Social Democrats will decry the execution as "a violation of the most elemental human right: the right to live."

I was home by midnight. □

Carmen García is a journalist from Madrid, Spain and a former Observer *editorial intern, now working for Euronews in Lyon, France.*



War Ink

"The nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them."

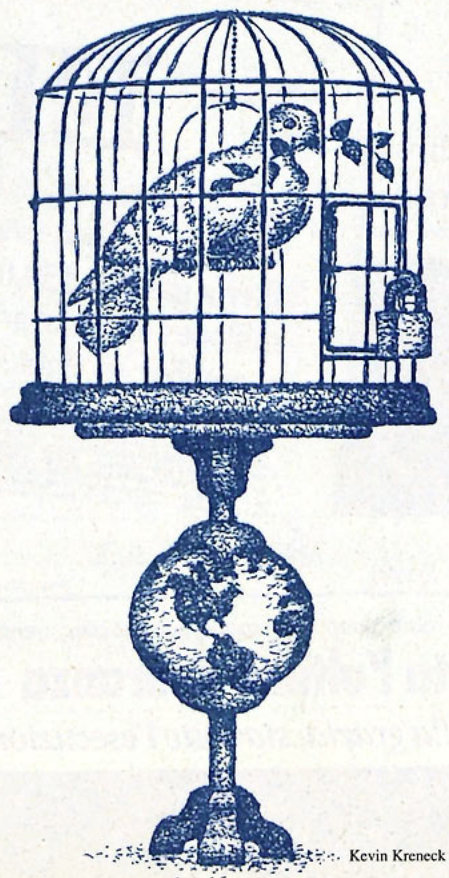
—George Orwell

One of the many grim amusements of watching the U.S. national security state prepare for war is following the role in those preparations assigned to the U.S. press. The Official Bogey-Man of the Hour is Saddam Hussein's Iraq, but when the villain alters, the pattern does not. So it goes with the current solemn ritual: as it became clear that the Clinton administration had decided to move to defy the overwhelming international consensus against a military solution, the U.S. press dutifully began waging the propaganda war that must of necessity precede the shooting.

We have been treated to heartwarming profiles of U.S. soldiers readying for tearful departures (although any danger they will endure will largely originate from their own weapons of mass destruction). We have seen glowering images of Hussein and his brutal massacres of the Kurds (with no mention, of course, that most of these brutalities occurred with U.S. support and assistance, in that prehistoric era a decade ago when Iraq was a U.S. ally). And we have read rigidly constricted versions of the available U.S. options ("Should we just bomb Baghdad, or should we bomb Baghdad and invade?").

And that's only the news reports. The columnists and commentators have also been admirably eager to prove themselves as arm-chair bloodthirsty as the average warlord. Led as usual by *The New York Times'* Abe Rosenthal and William Safire, and the frothers at *The New Republic*, the pundits have eagerly demanded "the elimination of Saddam" (Rosenthal); "to replace dictatorship with a form of democracy" (Safire); "the remaking of the Iraqi state and the unseating of Saddam" (Fouad Ajami in *The New Republic*). In the same issue of *The New Republic* (February 23), Eliot A. Cohen advocated a sustained and overwhelming military campaign, worrying only that Bill Clinton's "character" flaws might make that impossible. There's a thought: that adultery might render a president morally untrustworthy to engage in mass slaughter.

The Texas papers have also done their part to keep up the drumbeat, with their syndicated op-eds leading the charge. Under a particularly cynical cartoon featuring Clinton imprisoned by a peace sign ("What goes around comes around for the old '60s war protestor"), the *Houston Chronicle* (February 20) featured Charles Krauthammer's outrage that Clinton didn't appear sufficiently warlike in his threats against Iraq. Sandy Grady (*Austin American-Statesman*, February 21) complained that the administration had clumsily muffed its job of "selling" the war to the American people. A few days later, the *Dallas Morning News* (February 24) featured Jim Hoagland muttering that the U.N.-brokered deal had tied Clinton's hands, but he could still salvage all, by insisting on an "automatic," unilateral U.S. attack in the event of any further "trouble" from Hussein, forbidding any interference by any other nations. Pin-striped bravery is an awesome spectacle.



Kevin Kreneck

What is *not* reported is also crucial. Virtually unmentioned, for example, have been the catastrophic consequences of the U.N. economic sanctions, kept in place largely because of U.S. belligerence. According to the U.N.'s own reports, since sanctions began, over 1.2 million people, (the majority children) have died as a result of medical shortages; more than 4,500 children under the age of five are dying each month from hunger and disease; there has been a six-fold increase in the mortality rate for children under five; and the majority of the country's population has been on a semi-starvation diet.

The U.N. inspectors looking so diligently for weapons of mass destruction apparently failed to notice their own. □