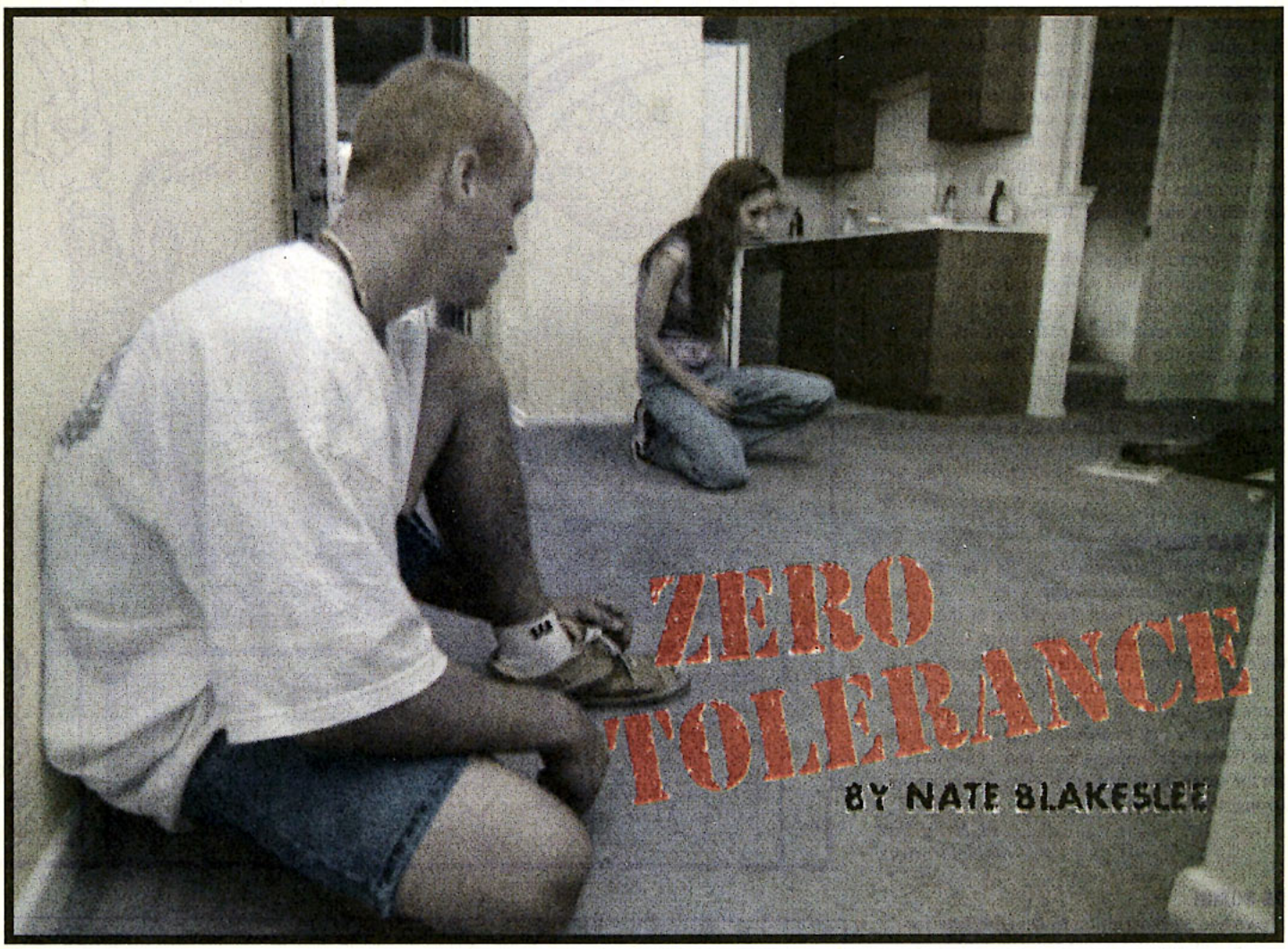
The Bush Bio • The *Son* from Cuba • The Okie from Texas

THE TEXAS
Observer

A JOURNAL OF FREE VOICES

OCTOBER 29, 1999 • $2.25



ZERO TOLERANCE

BY NATE BLAKESLEE

THE COPS CALLED HIM A **STREET-LEVEL DEALER.**

HIS FRIENDS SAY HE WAS SET UP.

IN THE HAYS COUNTY **DRUG WAR,**

YOU'RE EITHER ON ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER.

OR YOU'RE **DEAD.**

0 74470 89397 4 44

THE GUNS ARE ALRIGHT

Re: "Wave of Evil" (Editorial, October 1)

Gun owners and sellers, in general, are not bad folks. We should not want to turn people into criminals for carrying a weapon. Some folks believe they cannot deal with the criminal element without an equalizer. Some people do not want to live in fear because they are weaker physically. Some people just want to be able to carry a weapon to the farm and plunk around. Or whatever.

People hurt and kill others with things other than guns. Try to attack the real problems. Why do people hurt others? How can we create a sense of peace among people rather than animosity and violence? How can we create a society that will advocate peaceful resolution of problems? When we allow politicians to posture on issues that don't solve the root problem, we actually are abetting the evil, violence against others.

Let's try for things such as required gun handling training and safety awareness. Trigger locks. Maybe we should require insurance like we do for the more lethal road warriors, car drivers. Tax the things and use the money for positive public indoctrination. In short, use your logic on the real issues of violence rather than attacking one of the many tools. That would be a real contribution for the paper.

Robert W. Touchet
Austin

THE WAR GOES ON

Re: Alan Pogue's photoessay: "Salt on the Wound" (www.texasobserver.org)

What is there to say? That these crimes, war crimes and crimes against humanity, are allowed to continue, day after day after day.

Thank you for documenting them. Perhaps some day your work will prove of use, in the event that we can establish a *real* international War Crimes Tribunal, whose task is not to punish the weak, but rather to try the crimes of the strong, the "victors."

M. Henri Day
Molde, Norway

DA BOMB!

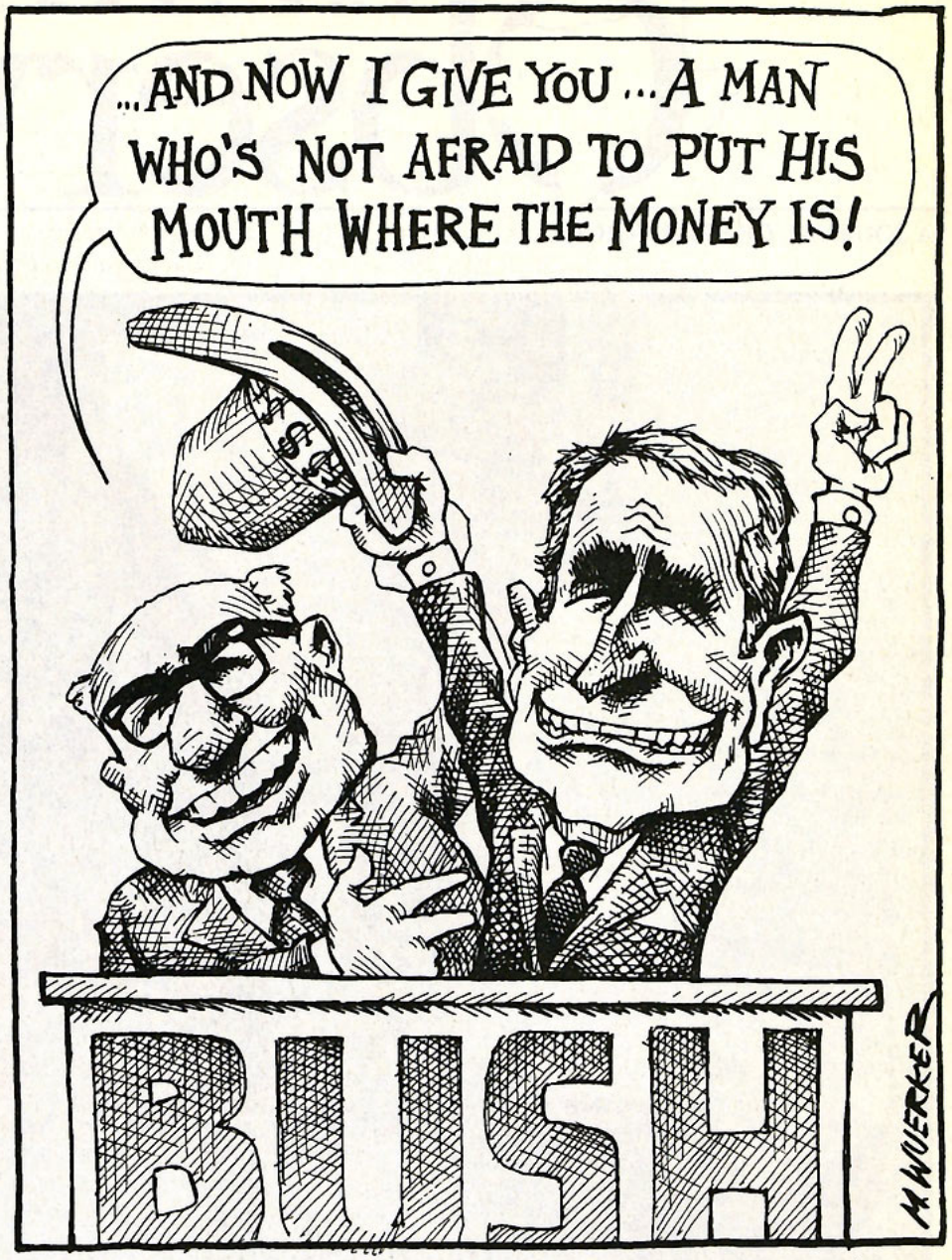
I have had a subscription to *Da Observer* for several months and I wait for it and talk about it with my friends. Keep on Keepin On!!!!!!

Mary E. Stewart
San Francisco

MANSION READING?

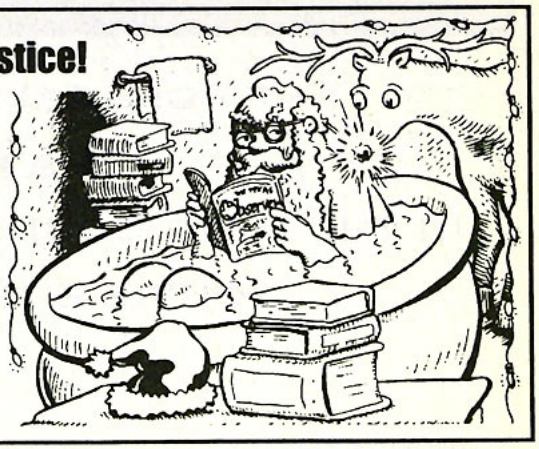
As I read in a recent issue various items about George W. Bush, I was reminded of a note I wrote in 1991, as I read an item in *The Nation* by Alexander Cockburn, as follows: "Brendan Gill was once at Bush's place in Kennebunkport. An insomniac, he tried to find something to read, discovering after investigation of the entire mansion only *The Fart Book*."

Inez Crawford
Lubbock



Brighten someone's solstice!

Give the best of Texas writing and reporting to the people you love, the politicians you despise, and the kids you want to inspire. Gift subscriptions are only $27 or four for $100. We'll even send a card. Mail your order today, or visit our down-home page at http://www.texasobserver.org.



THIS ISSUE

DEPARTMENTS

Dialogue 2

Editorial 3
An Air of Power
by Michael King

Left Field 5
Renegade Town, Bush Beat & Touchdown Jesus?

James Galbraith 13
A Deluded Europe

Molly Ivins 14
Ooops! of Our Times

FEATURE

Zero Tolerance *by Nate Blakeslee* 8
The Drug War has it all: feds as funders, felons as narcs, cops as commandos, midnight fire fights. And real casualties.

Jim Hightower 15
Bush Babies, Dollar Ballots & Fair Pay

Political Intelligence 16

Las Américas 18
Guantanamera by John Ross

Maury Maverick 20
Why are the Children Dying?

BOOKS AND THE CULTURE

A Kind of Hardening 23
Poetry by Frances Schenkkan

Bush Family Dynasty 24
Book Review by Michael King

Real Pictures 27
Art Review by Saundra Goldman

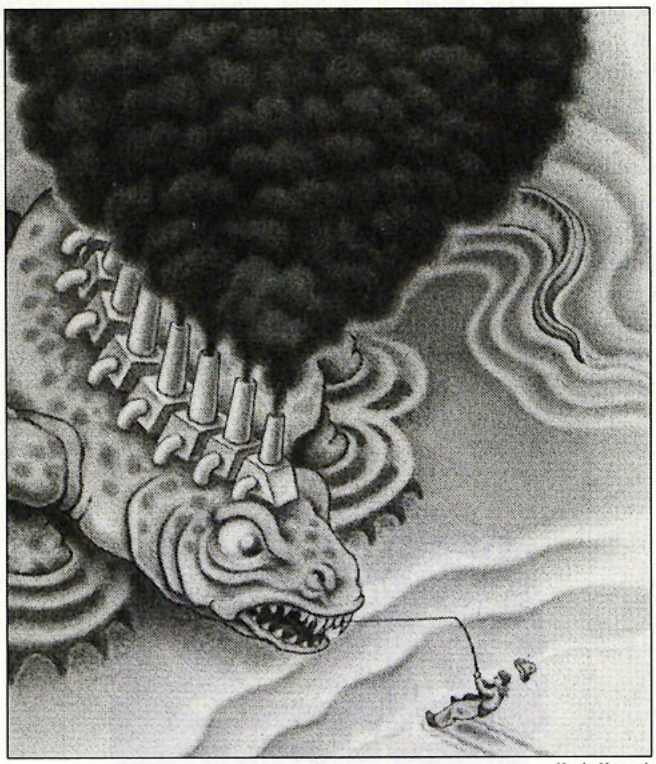
Afterword 30
Haggard Music by Dick Holland

The Back Page 32
Dead Day's Dance by Olga M. Garza Cardona

Cover photo by Jana Birchum

EDITORIAL

Bush's Hot Air



Kevin Kreneck

Texas produces more poisonous pollution than any other state. According to the toxic inventories self-reported by industry and collated by the Environmental Protection Agency, Texas is number one in air pollution and chemical carcinogens, including a whole host of particularly poisonous substances like benzene and vinyl chloride, generally emanating from the chemical complexes on the Gulf Coast. In early October, residents of Houston learned that the city is about to surpass Los Angeles as the nation's smoggiest metropolis, largely because Los Angeles has shown steady improvement due to state regulation while Houston has just as steadily gotten worse. Houston and Dallas–Fort Worth have long officially violated federal clean-air standards, and several other metropolitan areas are soon likely to be added to the list. The state's pollution does not stop at its borders, of course; dioxins produced by TXI's notorious cement-kiln waste incinerators have been found in the Great Lakes.

That's why it's difficult to take Governor and presidential candidate George W. Bush seriously when he tells a campaign audience — as he did recently in New Hampshire — "I'm for clean air and clean water, and have a record in Texas to prove it," or when he claims, as he did to a Houston reporter last spring, "You've got to ask the question, 'Is the air cleaner since I became governor?' and the answer is yes." (To his credit, the *Chronicle's* R.G. Ratcliffe didn't swallow that whopper.)

Bush is certainly not solely to blame for the continuing deterioration of the state's environment. His predecessors in either party have been little better, and the Legislature is deservedly infamous for its slavish devotion to the perennial prizewinners in the pollution sweepstakes: the oil and gas, petrochemical, and utility industries. But as Governor, Bush has gone out of his way to defend the state's major polluters against effective regulation, even when his own agencies favored it. Specifically in the case of air pollution, this year the Bush administration ramrodded an industry-written, "voluntary" anti-pollution program, which allows long-grandfathered facilities (the sources of more than half of the state's massive industrial air pollution, and more than that produced by all the motor vehicles in the state) to persist in unsafe methods that were outlawed for new facilities nearly thirty years ago — thereby rewarding polluters with a competitive advantage. In a word, the state of Texas doesn't just tolerate corporate air pollution: it subsidizes it.

Bush is now taking credit for this year's legislation that may finally require some major utilities to clean up their act, but if he'd had his way, the law wouldn't have crossed his desk — it was forced upon him in return for utility deregulation, another billion-dollar plum for the industry.

In a campaign season, you might think that such an environmental record would be receiving close examination from the media, but at least in the early going, the press has been more than kind to the front-runner. Publications have devoted volumes of speculation to Bush's possible youthful drug use, and his devotion to wife, family, and baseball, but have been considerably less interested in his record as Governor. On environmental matters, the Texas press has done some good work, particularly during last spring's legislative session. The reporting had virtually no effect on the dailies' inert editorial perspectives, but the Houston and Dallas papers followed the air pollution bills in some detail — although without the crucial acknowledgement that the Governor's voluntary program, opposed by every responsible environmentalist in the state, was a done deal from the pre-session moment Bush announced it.

Now that Bush has seized the national spotlight, there are a few signs of more attention to the environmental issue from the national press. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, in an October 10 examination of Bush's record by Mark Sherman, acknowledged that Texas pollution has grown worse throughout the nineties, and pointed out that the Governor had to be forced to do something about it. And on October 3, *The Boston Globe's* John Aloysius Farrell was the first national newsman to take a close look at the genesis of Bush's voluntary anti-pollution program, reporting that industry representatives essentially drafted the legislation. Farrell tied the program indirectly to the cozy campaign-finance relationship Bush enjoys with polluting industries. "Bush's campaign finance records show the grandfathered companies have since donated an additional $300,000 or more," wrote Farrell, "giving Bush more than $1.1 million in donations from these firms since 1993." But Bush's policies are not simply a *quid pro quo* — he shares the corporate conviction that environmental regulation of industry is simply an expensive nuisance, inferior to "market-based" voluntary controls (which have left more than 65 percent of Texans breathing unhealthy air).

One might hope that other reporters will follow Farrell's lead. More often the national reporting has been conventional political handicapping, wondering whether Bush can be hurt on this issue by Al Gore, who is at least perceived as an environmentalist, and who has recently been making reference to Bush's "carrying dirty water" for polluting industries. Indeed, one amusing counterpoint in the early coverage takes the opposite tack: Gore's reputation as a "tree-hugger" can only hurt him, because Bush is a sensible moderate who understands the needs of the private sector. That's the argument of Jonathan Rauch of *The National Journal*, who a month ago excoriated Gore for his "hysterical" book about ecology, *Earth in the Balance*. Rauch described the book as much more of a political liability than having snorted cocaine. And earlier this summer in the same publication, Margaret Kriz congratulated Bush at length for having handed his presidential environmental planning over to private-sector, industry-funded policy wonks firmly devoted to the belief that market-based solutions — e.g., selling public water to the highest bidder — will solve all environmental ills.

Houstonians might take that as a warning for the Bush White House. They should start saving money against the day they find themselves required to purchase clean air from the likes of some of Bush's biggest backers: Texas Utilities, Exxon, Dupont, and Dow. — **M.K.**

For the extraordinary paper trail documenting the Bush administration's industry-driven undermining of state air pollution control policy, consult the web site maintained by Texas PEER (Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility), www.txpeer.org. For more on Bush's record, see www.TomPaine.com.

VOLUME 91, NO. 20

A JOURNAL OF FREE VOICES SINCE 1954

Editors: Louis Dubose, Michael King
Assistant Editor: Mimi Bardagjy
Associate Editor: Nate Blakeslee
Managing Publisher: Charlotte McCann
Office Manager: Ayelet Hines
Production: Harrison Saunders
Poetry Editor: Naomi Shihab Nye
Development Director: Susan Morris
Special Projects: Jere Locke, Nancy Williams
Intern: Chloë Puett
Contributing Writers: Barbara Belejack, Robert Bryce, James K. Galbraith, Dagoberto Gilb, Julie Hollar, Paul Jennings, Steven G. Kellman, Lucius Lomax, Char Miller, Debbie Nathan, John Ross.
Staff Photographer: Alan Pogue
Contributing Photographers: Jana Birchum, Vic Hinterlang, Patricia Moore, Jack Rehm.
Contributing Artists: Jeff Danziger, Beth Epstein, Valerie Fowler, Sam Hurt, Kevin Kreneck, Michael Krone, Ben Sargent, Gail Woods.

THE TEXAS Observer

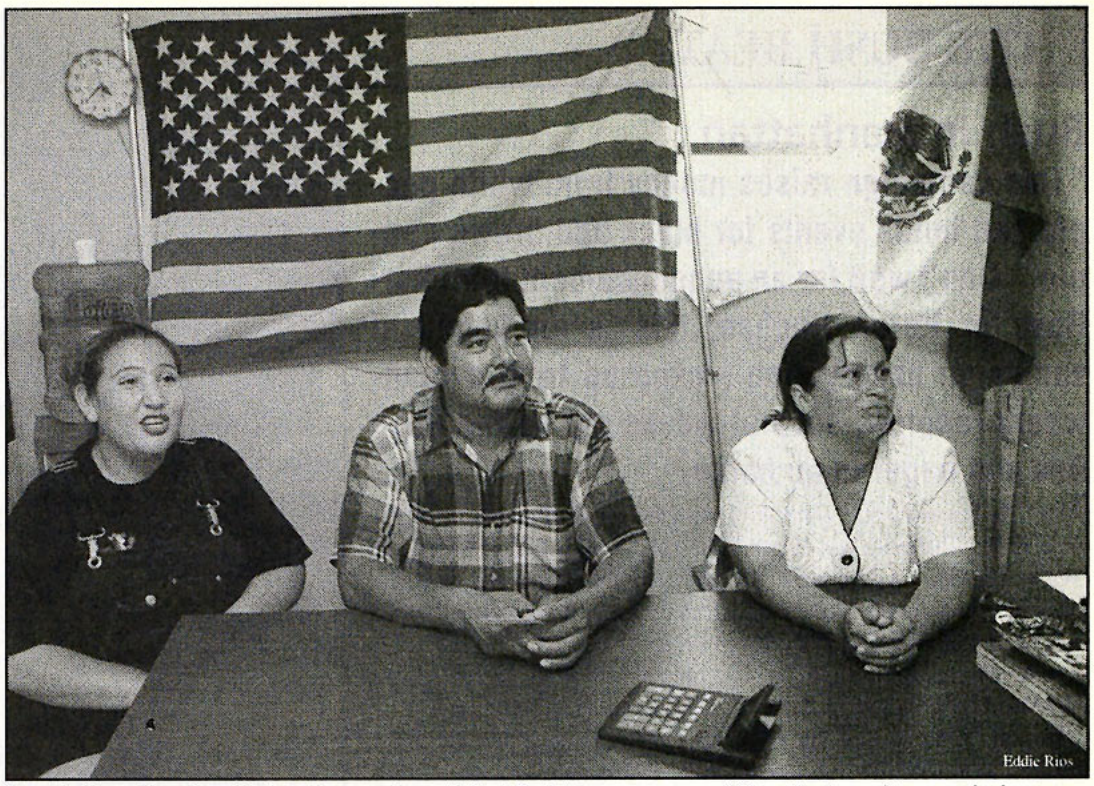
Editorial Advisory Board: David Anderson, Chandler Davidson, Dave Denison, Bob Eckhardt, Sissy Farenthold, John K. Galbraith, Lawrence Goodwyn, Jim Hightower, Maury Maverick Jr., Kaye Northcott, Susan Reid.

In Memoriam: Cliff Olofson, 1931-1995

Texas Democracy Foundation Board: Ronnie Dugger, Liz Faulk, D'Ann Johnson (President), Molly Ivins, Bernard Rapoport, Geoffrey Rips, Gilberto Ocañas.

The Texas Observer (ISSN 0040-4519/USPS 541300), entire contents copyrighted, © 1999, is published biweekly except every three weeks during January and July (24 issues per year) by the Texas Democracy Foundation, a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation, 307 West 7th Street, Austin, Texas 78701.
Telephone: (512) 477-0746.
E-mail: observer@texasobserver.org
World Wide Web DownHome page: www.texasobserver.org.
Periodicals Postage Paid at Austin, Texas.
Subscriptions: One year $32, two years $59, three years $84. Full-time students $18 per year; add $13/year for foreign subs. Back issues $3 prepaid. Airmail, foreign, group, and bulk rates on request. Microfilm available from University Microfilms Intl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.
Indexes: *The Texas Observer* is indexed in *Access*: The Supplementary Index to Periodicals; *Texas Index* and, for the years 1954 through 1981, *The Texas Observer Index*.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Texas Observer*, 307 West 7th Street, Austin, Texas 78701.

Buscando América



From left are Elsa Degollado, city secretary, Rafael Rodriguez, mayor and Flora Barton, city commissioner.

"Will El Cenizo's present be America's manana?" That should be *mañana*, but the headline editor for the *Financial Times of London* let one slip by. The paper actually sent a correspondent to Webb County, Texas, to write a story about a town that "consigned English to second-class status."

"Town" is an overstatement. El Cenizo is a border colonia of 1,700, situated some ten miles south of Laredo. Since August, when the three-person city council voted to conduct meetings in Spanish, the world has come to El Cenizo, to examine what a *Washington Times* reporter described as "a renegade town." The *Boston Globe* sent a reporter to look at "A War of Words in a Texas Town." The Spanish newspaper *El Mundo's* southwest correspondent filed a feature-length story that ran under a bilingual headline *"El Pueblo del* only *Español."* Papers that didn't send reporters wrote editorials. *The Chicago Tribune* editorialized (against), as did Georgia's *Augusta Journal* (also against). Complementing the editorials were op-ed pieces, such as a *Boston Herald* piece by a writer whose maternal grandfather had immigrated from Eastern Europe, and of course had learned to speak English.

"We've had a lot of reporters," said City Secretary Elsa Degollado. "But more than reporters, we have had a lot of hateful phone calls." According to Degollado, the council voted to conduct official meetings and government business in Spanish so they could be understood by the residents of the town. "Everyone speaks Spanish here," she told Left Field (speaking in Spanish). Degollado said she was stunned by the international attention and the public response. "We're just a little town with a volunteer city council and mayor and one employee."

El Cenizo's official decision to refuse to cooperate with the Border Patrol attracted far less attention than its Spanish language policy. (On the day Left Field visited El Cenizo, the Border Patrol seemed to be working, despite El Cenizo's lack of cooperation. On the highway, several miles east of town, five officers and three vehicles had stopped all traffic in a routine search for undocumented immigrants.)

With all of the attention from the press, it was inevitable that the El Cenizo story would find its way to American hate radio. In late August, city commissioner Flora Barton got a call from Don Geronimo and Mike O'Meara, who broadcast the nationally syndicated "Don & Mike Show" from WJFK in Baltimore.

The show was set up with an introduction, as Don dialed.

Don: Here's a story about a city in Texas, El Sneeze-O. Somebody threw pepper in my face, I have to sneeze-O. A little community, fifteen miles from Laredo ... where they made Spanish their official language. I cannot be more pissed off.

The program progressed, through the following excerpts:

Don: Hola.

Barton: Hello.

Don: Hola, señorita. Hola.

Barton: Yes.

Don: Hello, this is the Don and Mike Radio Show.

Barton: Uh-huh.

Don: And you'll notice the language I am speaking to you with.....

Barton: English.

Don: All right. Let me give you a Spanish lesson right now. Porque, listen to this. I got some Spanish here. Let's see if you know it. What I am saying here. Spanish Lesson. Spanish. Spanish commands. I'm going to give you some commands now, okay. [prerecorded sounds are heard]

Barton: That's not you talking.

Don: Eat me.

Barton: That's not you talking.

Don: This is our language tapes. Listen. Eat me. Cómeme. Cómeme. How do you like that? Cómeme.

Barton: Go call the sheriff so he can listen to this, please, they're out there.

Don: Go get the sheriff. When you get the sheriff, will you speak to him in English or in Spanish?

Barton: You're going to be in bad trouble.

Don: Eat shit and die. How am I gonna be in big trouble? Cómeme (bleep) y muérete.

Don and Mike are not in big trouble yet. But by September, Hispanic protesters in Albuquerque managed to get the show pulled off the air there. The program, which is syndicated by Westwood One in New York and is produced at WJFK-AM in Fairfax, Virginia, is still carried by sixty stations. After the plug was pulled in Albuquerque, Don & Mike's unofficial website cried foul. "Does the first amendment not exist in some states?" Of course it does. As Don told his listeners, after Barton hung up on him: *This is a great country. This is the United States of America.*

For additional information, contact New Mexicans for Responsible Broadcasting, 11919 Central Ave SE, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87123, (505) 299-8308)

THE BUSH BEAT

Bush In Manhattan

"This campaign raises money from white people and holds events for black and brown people." Don't wait for an announcement from Karl Rove or Karen Hughes; this is an unofficial campaign observation picked up from a road-weary reporter, several weeks out on the Bush Bus and eager to go home.



On the campaign trail in San Antonio

"This," the reporter said, "is the minority event." That much was evident, even to someone not accustomed to following presidential candidates from one staged event to another. We were standing in the basement gym of the Sisulu Charter School in Harlem, waiting for George W. Bush and Governor Pataki to arrive. The school was new, the Bush Campaign was white, and the students and staff were black.

Bush was in Harlem to make the case for charter schools, a concept so new to New York that one of the children he used as a campaign prop told reporters that "the Sisulu School is the first charter school in the world." That might have gotten by Dan Quayle, but Bush caught it and smiled. Bush has gotten used to kids in this campaign. He spends so much time reading aloud in elementary school reading circles that one begins to wonder if he's making an attempt to catch up. Six weeks earlier, a schoolchild had asked the Governor for the title of a book he had read when he was a child. Put on the spot, he mentioned a sports biography, said his mother "used to make him read," and finally admitted that he couldn't recall a specific title.

But there was no reading of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* today. Nor was there an opportunity for children to ask questions. Readers of *The New Republic* might recall, as reported by John Judis, that a child at a Baltimore summer program for inner-city children asked Bush if he would support an increase in the minimum wage. Bush was caught by surprise and gave the child a dumbed-down lesson in Chicago School Economics, saying he feared a minimum wage would "price workers out of jobs."

In Harlem, Bush praised charter schools. Pataki did the same. Reverend Floyd Flake, a New Yorker by way of Houston, praised charter schools and thanked "his homeboy" for coming from Austin to Harlem to lend his support. Charters are different from Alliance schools and voucher programs. Voucher programs (which take tax money and give it to students to use as tuition in private schools) are rare. Cleveland and Milwaukee host the two biggest experimental voucher programs in the nation. Alliance schools are labor-intensive attempts to improve existing public schools by providing additional funding for teacher training, enrichment programs before and after school, and extensive community involvement. Not surprisingly, they are the most successful educational innovation in Texas — and the most demanding on parents and teachers.

Bush tends to favor charter schools, mainly because of their strong appeal to the religious right. Charters are non-profit corporations that apply for state funding. In Texas they are remarkably easy to set up, which perhaps explains why $350,000 of taxpayer money was lost at one Waco charter, while another took the state money it applied for and never got around to opening its doors. This is the first year for charter schools in New York. Reverend Flake said that, as a black man, he had crossed a line and supported Governor Pataki because he had vowed to implement a charter program.

The principal spoke. The first grade teacher did a teaching demonstration. Those in the back of the room, meanwhile, were treated to the sound of fresh spin at the moment of creation. Bush media man Mark McKinnon laid it on with particular finesse for someone who could appreciate it: former Clinton spin-doctor-cum news analyst George Stephanopoulos. The diminutive Stephanopoulos must have seen something of himself in the equally short and smooth McKinnon, and he appeared to like what he saw. Left Field began to understand why the road-weary reporter wanted to go home.

"This is a white event," the same reporter said after a hundred-block descent into mid-town Manhattan, where Bush was delivering an education policy speech to the Manhattan Institute — the right-wing think tank that has provided part of the intellectual ammunition for "compassionate conservatism." The crowd in the Sheraton ballroom was very white, and just badly enough dressed to be easily identified as part-time public policy intellectuals. The food and service were stunning, with waiters scrambling about with roast pork and potatoes on silver serving platters. It did seem cheesy to make the guests from the Sisulu School sit at the back of the room and eat at hastily set-up tables, near the reporters who ate box lunches (chicken Dijon sandwiches on croissants).

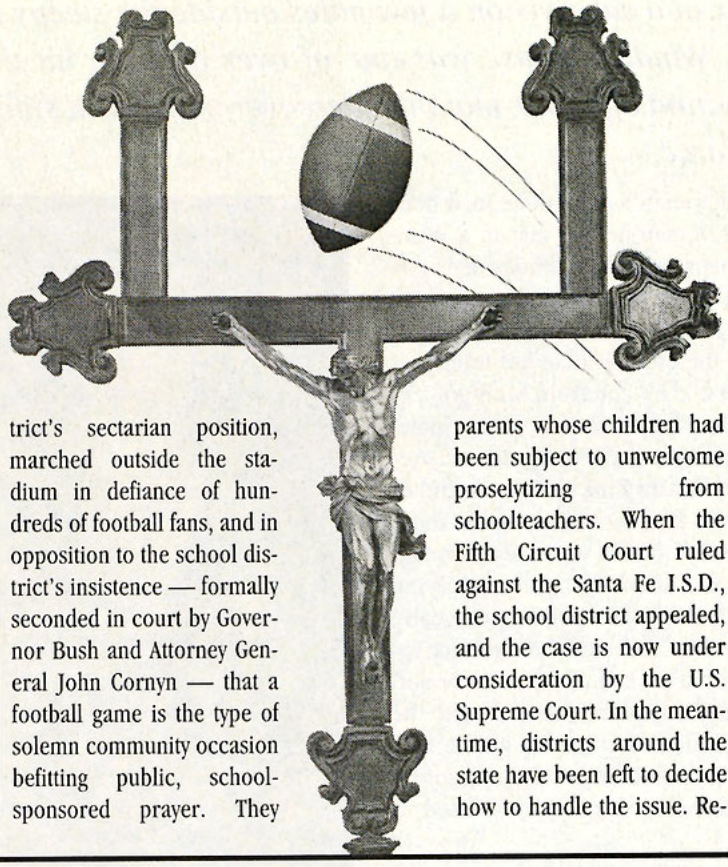
Bush's speech was a bit flat, by his standards. But it was new and it was about policy — not his strong suit. He borrowed a page from his 1994

See "Bush," page 7

No Touchdown Jesus

When Santa Fe Superintendent of Schools Richard Ownby was notified by a group of citizens that they planned to protest his decision to continue with school-sponsored prayer at Santa Fe High School Indian football games, he was not amused. According to Will Ellsworth, a Houstonian who helped organize the October 8 protest at Santa Fe's homecoming game against Texas City, Ownby told him that Ellsworth's request for a permit to march on Warpath sidewalks would probably be approved, but that Ownby would first check with local Baptist ministers, and then talk to the mayor and police chief, to "get a feel" for how the community might react. Ownby told Ellsworth, "I cannot guarantee that they won't take your signs and burn them." (They didn't.) In addition to that helpful lesson in tolerance and civics, Ownby insisted on reciting to Ellsworth in full a series of school facility rules, including provisions against obscenity, libel, rude language, and "material that depicts or describes sexual acts, masturbation, bestiality, excretory functions, or lewd exhibition of the genitals in a manner that is patently offensive to prevailing standards of the community." Ellsworth assured the superintendent that wouldn't be a problem.

In the end, more than fifty people of various beliefs, including some Christians alarmed by the school district's sectarian position, marched outside the stadium in defiance of hundreds of football fans, and in opposition to the school district's insistence — formally seconded in court by Governor Bush and Attorney General John Cornyn — that a football game is the type of solemn community occasion befitting public, school-sponsored prayer. They were met by counter-protestors, including one who waived a well-received "Honk for God" sign. The original lawsuit, prepared by the American Civil Liberties Union, was brought by Catholic and Mormon parents whose children had been subject to unwelcome proselytizing from schoolteachers. When the Fifth Circuit Court ruled against the Santa Fe I.S.D., the school district appealed, and the case is now under consideration by the U.S. Supreme Court. In the meantime, districts around the state have been left to decide how to handle the issue. Responses range from the stubborn, as in Celina, where the school board voted to continue praying whatever the consequences, to the creative, in Iowa Park, where a radio station agreed to broadcast a prayer just prior to kickoff, so that devout fans could bring their radios to the game and pray along from the stands.



Back in Santa Fe, Federal Judge Sim Lake has granted the school a temporary injunction to allow prayer to continue through the end of the season. Senior Marian Ward, daughter of a local Baptist minister, began the game with a prayer to her Lord, beginning, "Dear Heavenly Father, I pray that your presence is in the stadium tonight."

Designated Prayer Ward was theoretically selected by a vote of school seniors, although it turns out she was the second choice (after the winner withdrew) in an election in which fewer than a fifth of the 250 seniors participated. The turnout suggests that the school's new reputation for sanctimony (at least among students) may be overrated. And judging from the final score, the visitors from Texas City may have been praying harder: Texas City, 50 — Santa Fe, 0. ✦

"Bush," from p. 7

campaign, when he swore to shut down the Texas Education Agency. (It's still open.) In this case, his target was the educrats at the federal Department of Education. He laid out something that sounded like a voucher program, in which federal Title I funds would be taken from schools with a failing record and given to parents to pay for their children to attend private schools. And he took a page from Ronald Reagan, with an anecdote about big government. "The Department of Education recently streamlined the grant application process for states. The old procedure involved 487 different steps, taking an average of twenty-six weeks. So, a few years ago, the best minds of the administration got together and 'reinvented' the grant process. Now it takes a mere 216 steps, and the wait is twenty weeks."

He even recognized Mayor Giuliani for bringing "order and civility back to the streets — cutting the crime rate by 50 percent." He didn't mention the pratfalls along the road to civility, such as Giuliani's police officers shooting an innocent African street vendor nineteen times, thereby knocking the mayor off the short list for the vice presidency.

Bush did take a few swipes at his own party, for its focus on "the national economy, to the exclusion of all else," and for "speaking a sterile language of rates and numbers, of C.B.O. this and G.N.P. that." And he said that too often on social issues, his party has painted an image of America "slouching toward Gomorrah." After the speech, reporters pressed McKinnon for the source and meaning of the line, "slouching toward Gomorrah." McKinnon wasn't sure where it came from, but suggested that the reporter take it at "its face value." Again, I understood why the road-weary reporter wanted to go home.

The "big white event" was a fundraiser scheduled for the same Sheraton ballroom later that evening. More than two thousand people drank good wine, ate at a buffet line, and waited for Bush to speak — after a short biographical video backed by a triumphalist sound track with lots of brass and a home-movie feel. Backed by Governor Pataki, Rudy Giuliani, and a spectral looking Alfonse D'Amato, Bush delivered his standard stump speech — his real forte.

It was familiar material, the lines about "prosperity with a purpose," compassionate conservatism that "leaves no *willing* heart behind," and a military plagued by "low morale and aging weapons systems." He also promised "to re-arm America."

His delivery was great and the crowd — most of whom had contributed $1,000 to the campaign — loved him. "I think we did $2.7 million in three days here," Pataki's chief aide said. He wanted to know how Pataki came across in his speech. I began to understand why the road-weary reporter went home. — L.D.✦

Zero Tolerance

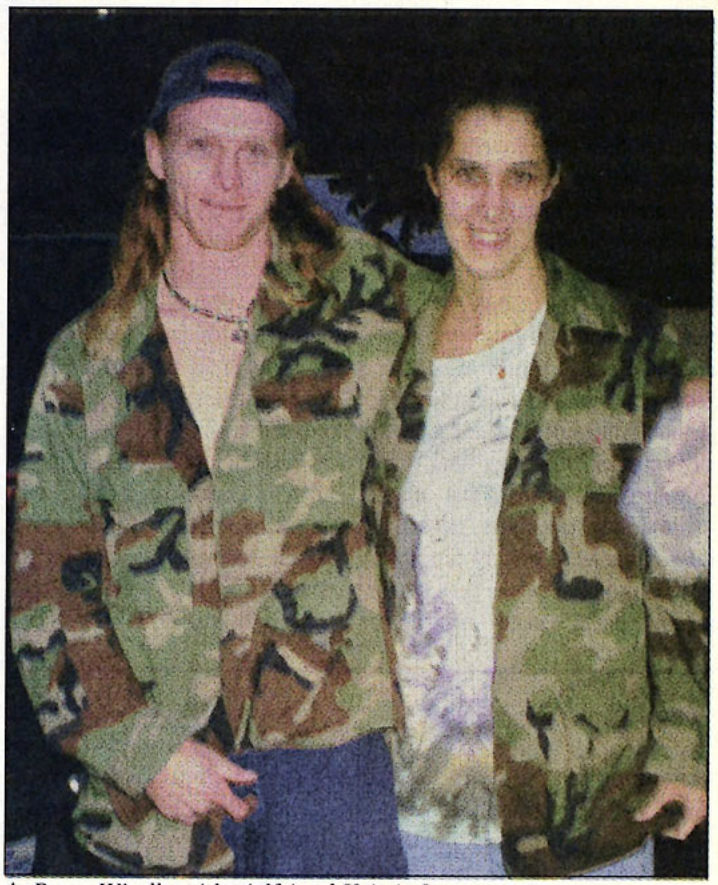
BY NATE BLAKESLEE

Alexander "Rusty" Windle was not a drug dealer, but he died like one. Before dawn on May 24, nine law enforcement officers from three different agencies surrounded Windle's home, a modest duplex in a subdivision a few miles outside the sleepy Hill Country community of Wimberley. Windle's house was one of over a dozen hit that night in and around Wimberley, in the culmination of a four-month undercover marijuana sting conducted by the Hays County Narcotics Task Force.

Windle, a twenty-five-year-old electrician's apprentice, had been set up by a confidential informant, a man he had met in a Wimberley bar frequented by electricians and other tradesmen. According to arrest warrants obtained by the task force, during a two-week period in March, Windle twice delivered half-ounce bags of marijuana — just enough to make the crime a state jail felony — to the informant, a forty-seven-year-old ex-con from Montgomery County. The task force had supplied the informant with a motel room, cash for drug buys, and a miniature recording device. According to a desk clerk at the motel, Kasia Zinz (a close friend of Rusty's, who was also arrested in the May 24 roundup), the room became a party hangout for Wimberley youth, with the informant providing the beer and barbecue, and his new friends supplying the marijuana. "He asked everybody to get him pot, he practically begged you for it," Zinz recalled. It didn't seem to matter to the informant whether the people he set up were actually dealers or not. It took Windle six days to make his first delivery, according to the warrant. On another occasion, he failed to come up with a half ounce at all, returning instead with a small bag weighing only a few grams. The warrant states that he apologetically refused to take any cash for it.

On May 17, the informant disappeared. A week later, armed with three warrants, officers arrived at Windle's house just before five a.m. Two agents, dressed in the black pants, t-shirts, and ski masks of the task force, approached the front of the house. A sheriff's deputy covered their backs. Three more agents dressed in black entered the back yard, and two additional sheriff's deputies staked out the sides of the house. The ninth officer, a federal agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, watched from the shadows of the driveway. Only the four officers in front of the house saw what happened next.

They gave their accounts in separate sworn statements to the Texas Ranger who investigated the incident. Officers Chase Stapp and David Burns approached the front door, and Stapp rang the doorbell and knocked. The officers' accounts differ on whether or not they identified themselves as police. Burns reported hearing at that point what he believed to be the slide-action of a rifle bolt. He immediately dove off the porch and took cover behind a brick wall. The door opened as Stapp began to retreat, knocking over a potted plant on the porch. All four officers reported seeing Windle, dressed only in blue jeans, point an assault rifle at Stapp. Ducking and stumbling backward, Stapp drew his .40-caliber Glock semiautomatic and fired four rounds. Windle was hit once in the leg and once in the chest, falling back into the house. The four officers rushed in and began C.P.R., but Windle died before the ambulance arrived.



▲ *Rusty Windle with girlfriend Kristie Izzo*

That is the officers' story. Local news crews, already tipped about the sweep by the police, rushed to the scene of the shooting. The morning news carried footage of Windle's front yard filled with officers, and a shot of his AR–15 assault rifle lying in the yard where the police had placed it. There were intimations that Rusty was not just a heavily armed dope pusher, but also an arms dealer, wanted by the A.T.F. for weapons charges. Officer Stapp (who has since been cleared of wrongdoing by a grand jury) was praised by his superiors, who also congratulated themselves in a press release

later that afternoon for making a dent in the "unchecked" flow of marijuana trafficking and use in the Wimberley area.

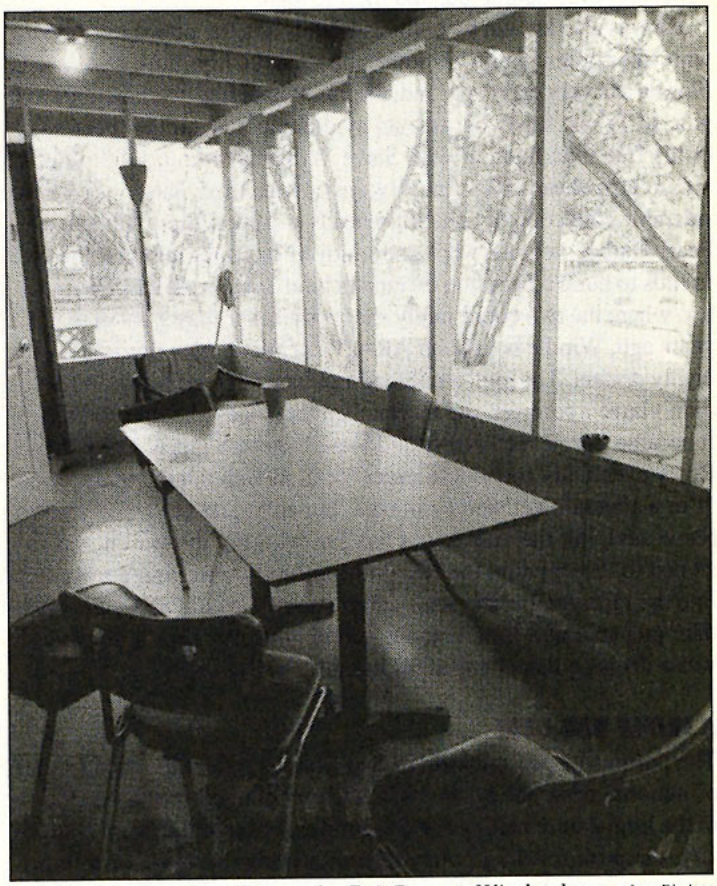
But there are several problems with the official story. Astute viewers would have noticed the absence of a clip in the gun lying in the yard. Although both Burns and Stapp reported hearing the rifle's bolt action before the door opened, Windle never fired a shot, and according to the Ranger's report, the gun was later found to be completely unloaded, with the safety engaged. None of Rusty's friends doubt that he came to the door with a gun — anyone would have, they maintain. "You can't tell me that any cop that was there at his house that night wouldn't have come to the door with his revolver," if he heard a pre-dawn disturbance outside his house, said Kasia Zinz. "What good is the right to bear arms, if you can't bring a gun to your own door?" That Rusty knowingly would have pointed his gun at a cop they find much harder to believe. "He wasn't some kind of extremist, or a wacko," said his boss, Ernest Olsen. "I chew out enough asses in my business, and you get 'em heated up from time to time, and Rusty, it just wasn't in his nature. He'd just say, 'I'm sorry, you're right.'"

Accounts from other suspects arrested on the same night also cast doubt on the officers' version of events. Kasia Zinz was arrested at her boyfriend's house by a second team of officers, at about the same time Rusty's house was hit. According to Kenneth Schlanker, her boyfriend's roommate, the cops failed to identify themselves at all. When he opened the door, they were crouched before him, their guns already drawn. A second suspect (who asked that his name not be used for fear of losing his job) said he got the same treatment: no identification, and guns unholstered. According to San Marcos defense attorney Billy McNabb, the requirement to "knock and announce" is a well-established common-law doctrine for police visits, unless the officers have a reasonable suspicion it would endanger their lives. "That's why we have that policy, to avoid tragedies like this one," he said. San Marcos police policy likewise requires a reasonable expectation of endangerment before the threat of deadly force (that is, drawing a gun) is used. Serving an arrest warrant for a non-violent, low-level drug offense does not generally fit that category. "I think they saw a rifle, had their guns already drawn, and panicked," said Zinz.

When the police searched the house, they found just two baggies of pot, totaling less than an ounce. Rusty's friends and family say he was no different than most of the other suspects netted in the work of that evening: a working person duped into getting a bag for someone he thought was a friend. The task force called them "street level dealers."

DRUG WARRIORS

The thirteen-member Hays County Narcotics Task Force was formed in June of last year, by combining personnel from the narcotics divisions of the San Marcos Police Department and the Hays County Sheriff's Office. The squad is also assisted by a special liaison in the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, two A.T.F. officers (who serve other counties as well), and a retired C.I.A. agent who serves as a special crime analyst. Multi-agency drug task forces became common across Texas in the late eighties, following changes in federal drug laws, which, among other things, allowed such task forces to take advantage of "asset forfeiture" as a potent new means of funding their operations. By working in conjunction with a U.S. Attorney, task forces can "federalize" their investigations, allowing them to keep a much greater portion of returns — from seized cash, weapons, vehicles, and even houses associated with drug-related crimes — than they could under state laws. Despite Hays County's seemingly propitious location along I-35, a major drug corridor, the county task force's numbers in its first year were unimpressive: forty-three pounds of marijuana seized, 1.4 pounds of powdered cocaine, and less than ten grams of heroin. Not that Hays County narcs haven't been active. As of August 1997, almost one in three persons on probation in Hays County had been convicted of drug crimes. But the returns have been limited. The force spent considerable manpower and resources on the four-month



▲ *The informant's cabin at the 7-A Resort, Wimberley* Jana Birchum

Wimberley investigation. Yet approximately thirty of the thirty-five charges eventually filed were for fourth-degree felonies, meaning they involved delivery of small amounts of drugs. The majority of charges were for marijuana.

Rusty Windle came to the Hill Country to get a new start. He was born and raised in West Palm Beach, Florida, in a violent, crack-infested neighborhood in decline, a place his mother refers to as the "armpit of Florida." "He told me stories about that place, of people getting shot right in front of him," his girlfriend Kristie Izzo recalls. "I never wanted to see it." Rusty and his younger brother rarely saw their father, who left the family when Rusty was two. He took after his mother, a tough single parent who worked as an electrician. He dropped out of high school, married at eighteen, and

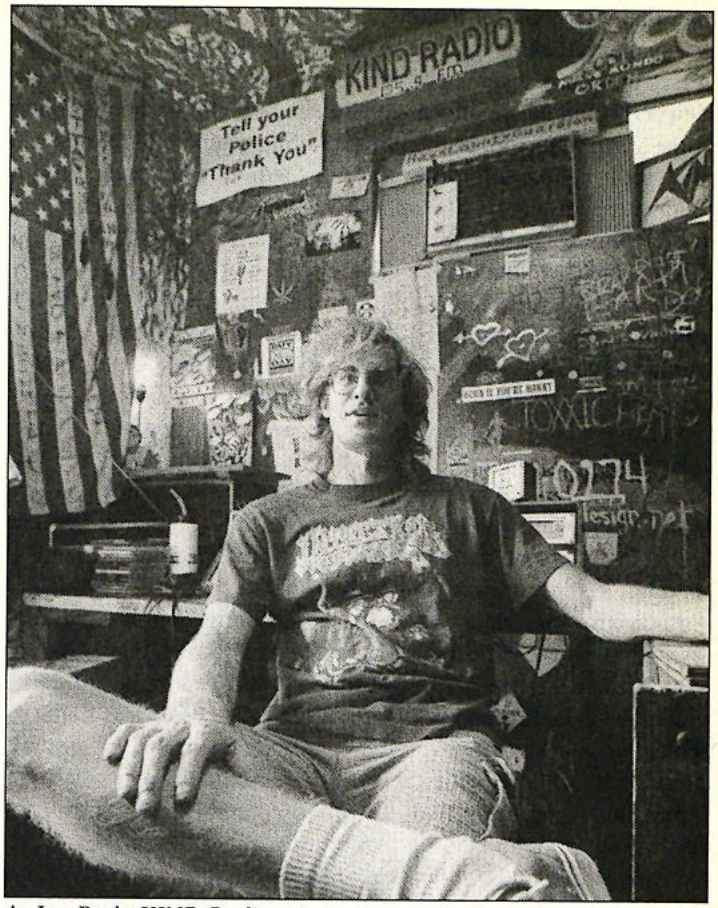
had a son, Christopher. The marriage fell apart, but Rusty never forgot his son, diligently sending $200 per month in child support from Texas, according to Kristie, even though the mother would never let Rusty visit the boy. "At some point in time he wanted to have a real relationship with him," said Kasia Zinz. "That was one of the things he lived for." Zinz and her longtime companion Steve Williams were two of the first people Rusty met when he came to San Marcos; he was eighteen, with no high school diploma, no job, no friends, and a serious drinking problem. The middle-aged couple became surrogate parents to Rusty. He sobered up, got a job as a short-order cook, and then drove a Pepsi truck for several years before becoming an electrician's apprentice at Olsen's Electric in Wimberley. He developed a reputation as a quiet, extremely dependable, even-tempered, and likable man.

He was also known by both his friends and the police as someone who liked guns. Rusty's mother had taught him how to shoot in Florida at a very early age, and his grandfather had given him his first gun. In Texas, Rusty became an avid outdoorsman. He spent much of his free time hunting with Steve Williams, who also introduced him to arrowhead collecting. By the time he died, Rusty had a considerable collection of both arrowheads and guns. Steve's landlord, a Pearl Harbor veteran who also enjoyed hunting, allowed the two friends to build a backstop on land behind Steve's trailer in Wimberley, where the two could safely shoot whenever they wanted to. Five years ago, Windle bought an AR–15 at a Wimberley flea market for eighty dollars. The gun, a military assault rifle resembling an M–16, didn't have a receiver, the mechanism that loads and fires the bullet. It became a project for Rusty and Steve to get the gun working again. Rusty eventually found a receiver for it, though not the correct one. "I'm a Vietnam vet, and I can take 'em apart and put em together," Steve said, but they never got the gun working the way it was designed to. Eventually, the two got it to fire by inserting a metal pin into the receiver, but the semi-automatic rifle would never fire more than one shot at a time without jamming. Rusty kept it anyway. It was a decision that changed his life.

A TRIPLE BAD DEAL

The politics of pot smoking in San Marcos reflect the vicissitudes of national drug policy. In 1974, the city council sent a resolution to the Legislature calling for decriminalization of the drug. Nationally, the push for drug policy reform had also peaked, encouraged by a surprisingly receptive Nixon administration. By the mid-nineties, the pendulum had swung to the opposite extreme: more people have been incarcerated for marijuana-related crimes during Bill Clinton's tenure than during any previous administration.

In Hays County, prohibitionist sentiment has reached a fever pitch, particularly in the battle for the hearts and minds of young people. The prohibitionists are led by Sue Cohen, director of the Hays Caldwell Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse. Cautious, middle-aged, and with a background in business rather than social work, Cohen agreed to an interview in her office only after repeated assurances that the subject would not be marijuana legalization. "We don't want to be accidentally interviewed by one of those pro-marijuana papers," she explained. Like enforcement, drug education has also been federalized, with about 70 percent of the funding coming from federal grants. Curriculum and results are



▲ *Joe Ptak, KIND Radio* Jana Birchum

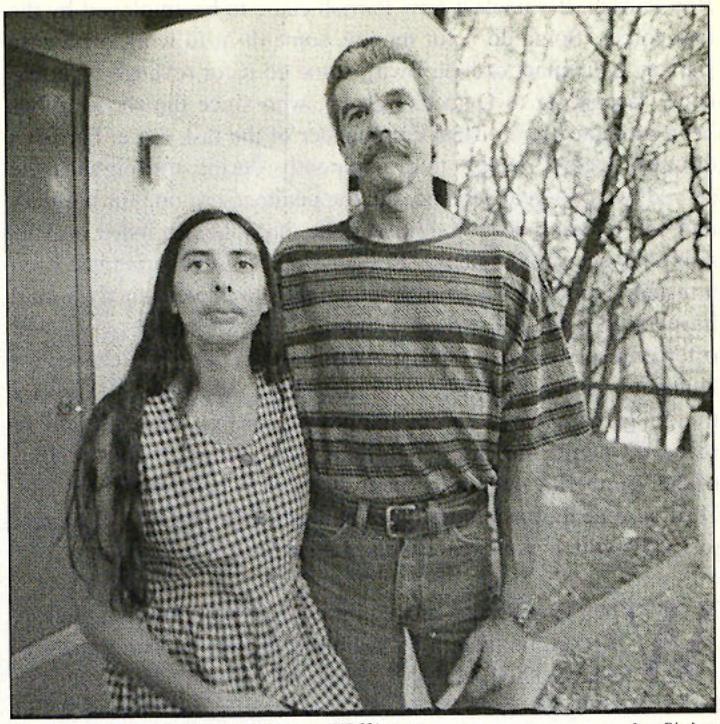
closely monitored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In the early nineties, San Marcos received millions from the Partnership for a Drug Free America campaign, with the goal of making San Marcos a "model zero-tolerance town." But Hays County had no more success with D.A.R.E. and other school-based educational programs than any other Texas community. Rates of usage for all age groups in Hays County remain considerably higher than state averages. "Marijuana activists will say, 'You're losing the drug war,' but my answer to that is, what if we didn't have these programs, then what would our numbers be?" Cohen asked. It's hard to imagine that they could be any higher. Surveys of self-reported drug use taken annually from 1991 to 1996 showed that — after five years of pep-rallies, t-shirts, and red ribbons — rates of marijuana use among Hays County high school students had more than doubled, with use among eighth graders increasing over 500 percent. The school district's response was to stop doing the high school surveys.

Cohen lays much of the blame on her major adversary, the "pro-legalization lobby" in San Marcos. A couple of miles down the interstate from Cohen's office, in a cramped one-car garage attached to an inconspicuous two-bedroom frame house, sits the nerve center of the legalization camp, KIND radio. In 1997, local marijuana activist Joe Ptak founded KIND ("kind" is a reference to top-quality pot), an unlicensed "pirate" station operating from a low-power transmitter, to support a local medical marijuana initiative. Spearheaded by Southwest Texas State University psychology professor

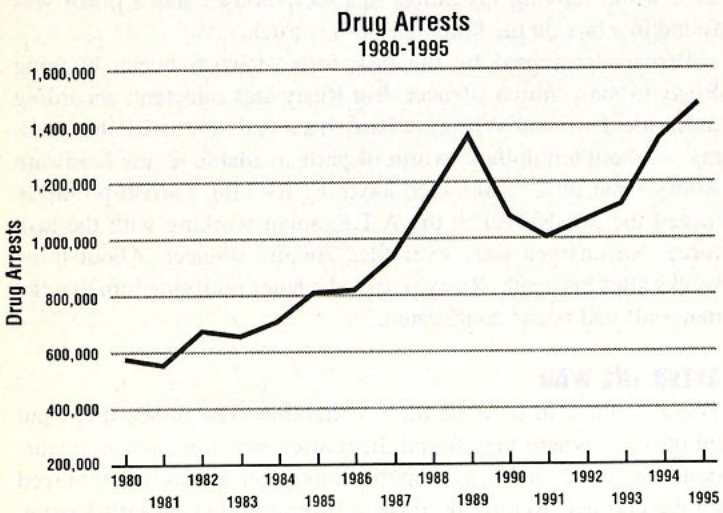
Harvey Ginsberg, the initiative made it to the ballot following a citywide petition campaign. Coming in the wake of the successful statewide medical marijuana campaign in California, the initiative made national news, but also prompted a considerable local backlash. The Hays Caldwell Council went into high gear (Sue Cohen was then assistant director) producing a fact sheet on "the dangerous hoax" of medical marijuana, and giving presentations at schools, libraries, and local businesses. Medical marijuana, business owners were told, would be bad for economic development. The D.E.A. sent in personnel, also for "educational purposes," blitzing the town with cautionary flyers. Neither the D.E.A. nor the Hays Caldwell Council is legally permitted to use federal or state funds for politicking or lobbying. "We walked a fine line," Sue Cohen admitted. "Actually, [the initiative] was the best thing they ever did for us, because people came out of the woodwork to get involved."

But in fact, Professor Ginsberg recalled, voter turnout for the initiative was only slightly higher than typical for any San Marcos election. Out of 20,000 registered voters, about 2,100 came to the polls: roughly 700 voted for the initiative, and 1,400 against. Ginsberg, relying chiefly on the 45-watt radio station to spread the word, was considerably outspent. Despite the result, the low turnout seemed to show more than anything that most people didn't care one way or the other. The spectre of sick people smoking pot — even if it might have been, as Cohen insists, a smokescreen for legalization — failed to move Hays County residents to the polls in large numbers. The controversy definitely got the state's attention, however. In the next legislative session, Hays County State Senator Ken Armbrister, a former police officer, sponsored a bill to ban consideration of any local initiative that would contravene a federal drug law. It passed easily.

Ginsberg says he has no intention of trying again, despite subsequent successful initiatives in Washington, D.C., Oregon, Arizona, Maine, and the recent defection of New Mexico's Republican Governor to the legalization camp. Meanwhile, the federal education money keeps coming, and the battle continues; Red Ribbon week, the Hays Caldwell Council's biggest campaign of the year, descended on every school in the county in mid-October. KIND radio, meanwhile, has begun broadcasting the names of suspected drug informants. (A few days after the bust, KIND was the first to break the true identity of the Wimberley confidential informant, based on a tip from a law enforcement source.) "They've been very irresponsible," remarked Cohen, who says all of her employees have attended the citizen police academy, and gone on police ride-alongs in many cases. "We have a very professional organization here," she said of the task force. When asked if the raid on Windle's house might have been overkill, Cohen shakes her head. "Marijuana is illegal," she said simply. "Whether it was twenty ounces or twenty pounds, they are still obligated to enforce the law." Rusty's death was a waste, she conceded. But "if a law officer had been killed or injured, that would have been a triple bad deal."



▲ *Kasia Zinz (left) and Steve Williams* Jana Birchum



Note: These skyrocketing arrests would seem to reflect a national increase in drug use. But in fact, standard drug surveys indicate that between 1979 and 1990, the percent of the population which reported "using drugs in the past month" dropped from 14.1 to 6.7 percent — falling to 6.1 percent by 1995. Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Preliminary Results from the 1996 Household Survey on Drug Abuse, July 1997.

Chart Source: FBI data provided to Mark Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate*, The Sentencing Project, New Press, 1999.

MAKING THE CASES

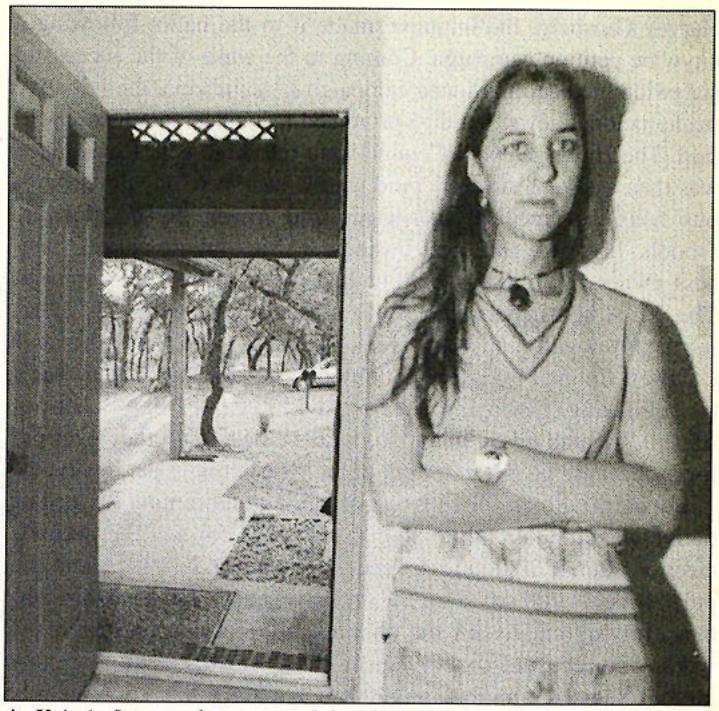
The gun that got Rusty killed may also have been responsible for drawing him into the task force's net in the first place. Rusty and several other electricians spent last winter at Rio Bonito, a Blanco River resort where they rented cabins at off-season rates. One of Rusty's neighbors, a middle-aged electrician named David Stringfellow, had befriended a man known to him as Roger Dalton, who was living at the nearby 7-A Resort in Wimberley. Although the district attorney's office has yet to reveal that Dalton was the informant, or release the terms under which he was retained, a comparison of warrants and court records obtained by the *Observer* confirm Dalton's role in the arrests, as well as his true identity: one

Roy Parrish. It's unclear how Parrish came to be employed by the task force. "Some do it for money, some do it to work off a case [i.e., an indictment of their own], some do it for revenge-type reasons," according to Detective Stapp, who since the shooting has been promoted to assistant commander of the task force. Parrish's criminal record reveals that, apparently during the eighties, he served two two-year sentences in the penitentiary, one for burglary and one for drug dealing. (Among the many aliases listed on Parrish's rap sheet is the name "Rodger Dolson.") If Parrish had been arrested recently for a third felony charge, he presumably would have faced a lengthy prison sentence. "Hays County police will offer almost anyone the chance to flip on someone," in exchange for leniency, said San Marcos attorney Billy McNabb. "Typically they're given a quota: go out and get anyone you can until you've made 'X' number of cases." Declining to comment on the specifics of the Wimberley operation, Stapp said that in general it's up to the D.A.'s office to make those types of deals. But, he said, "We don't just work with anyone; we have some guidelines."

When Roy Parrish moved into Cabin Number 14 at the 7-A Resort, he hung a Vietnam-era flag on his porch that declared, "Kill 'em all, let God sort 'em out." He claimed to be an electrician from Houston who had been injured on the job and had come to Wimberley to recuperate and wait for his settlement. He had an ugly wound on his arm that seemed to support his story, and a briefcase full of prescription drugs that never left his side. Zinz recalls that he quickly befriended a young couple living two cabins down. "He had a fridge full of beer, and he barbecued on the porch almost every night," she said. Parrish encouraged his new friends to bring anyone they knew to the cabin, and Zinz says she soon started to get complaints from neighbors about the constant music and partying. She says she personally witnessed minors drinking at Roy's cabin. "I rarely saw the guy when he wasn't looped." Zinz says he began asking her to get him pot, almost every time she saw him.

Kristie Izzo recalls Parrish coming to Rio Bonito frequently to visit David Stringfellow. Eventually, he started coming to Rusty's cabin as well, on one occasion bringing a joint to smoke, then asking Rusty to get him some more. Parrish came on strong. He was loud and boisterous, with a beer gut, tattoos, scraggly brown hair, and a prominent scar that extended from the right corner of his mouth all the way up to his cheekbone. "He was too friendly," according to Izzo. Then he asked Rusty to get him cocaine. "We'd only known him a week," she said.

Somehow, Parrish knew that Rusty was a gun collector, and that he knew how to make a silencer. Steve Williams says he and Rusty used silencers for poaching: hunting deer on other people's land, usually at night. Sticking anything on the end of a gun to muzzle the sound is illegal, but it is a frequent practice in the Hill Country, especially among working-class hunters who can't afford deer leases. The most common method is to put a plastic soda bottle around the end of the muzzle. Rusty was a little more ingenious. He fashioned silencers out of toilet paper rolls, old butane bottles, anything that would fit on the end of a gun. "He was like a little Boy Scout, always making stuff," according to his Rio Bonito neighbor and friend Andy Wood. In one of Rusty's two previous busts, in February of 1998, S.M.P.D. narcotics officers raided a friend's house where Rusty was staying. The cops didn't find



▲ *Kristie Izzo at the scene of the shooting* Jana Birchum

Rusty's friend or his alleged stash, but Rusty and Kristie were in their room, smoking pot. Both got probation for the quarter-ounce bags they had on them, and Rusty's AR–15, which had a homemade silencer on it, was confiscated. The gun was returned and no charges were filed, but Steve Williams now believes that the A.T.F. took an interest in Rusty at that time. (Rusty's only other conviction — the "weapons charges" alluded to on the local news — was a $200 ticket for illegally transporting a firearm. Rusty was pulled over while moving his things to a new house, and a pistol was found in a box on the floorboard of his truck.)

Perhaps prompted by the task force, Parrish began bugging Rusty to make him a silencer. But Rusty was reluctant, according to Kristie. Eventually, he gave Parrish a metal tube and some washers — about ten dollars' worth of parts available at any hardware store — but never assembled anything for him. Parrish promptly turned the goods over to the A.T.F. agent working with the task force. No charges were ever filed for the silencer. About three weeks after his death, Rusty received a letter notifying him that the materials had been "confiscated."

AFTER THE WAR

There is much to be done after a shooting. The police don't put things back where they found them after executing a search warrant, nor do they help clean up the blood after the body is removed by the coroner. Returning to the now empty duplex with Kristie, Kasia, and Rusty's brother Nick, Steve Williams showed me where pools of Rusty's blood had soaked the carpet in the dining room. The grim task of cleaning up (the landlord let it be known that he would not be responsible) fell to Rusty's roommate, Burt Chumley, and his girlfriend, Melissa Abernathy, who had been asleep in

See "Zero Tolerance," page 22

JAMES GALBRAITH

Europe's American Delusions

I showed up on an ABC television special entitled "Is America Number One?" a few weeks ago. It was not a big appearance. Of two hours of videotape, only a few seconds aired. And those were misleading. Following a narrator's tirade on the virtues of inequality, which I never heard, I am shown stating my agreement that, yes, Europe might learn something from us.

In fact, I do think that Europeans can learn something from us. Europe has 18 million unemployed. We have full employment — or closer to it than we've been in thirty years. The question is: how did we get there?

Europeans believe their problem to be rigid labor markets. All the talk in Europe is of "flexibility": a supposedly American virtue. European "Third Way" politicians continue down the path of deregulation, privatization, dismantling social protections, and making layoffs easier and workers less secure.

But a sole reliance on flexible markets is *not* the American way. We did *not* reach full employment by increasing inequalities in our rates of pay. To the contrary: in the United States, pay inequality went up in the seventies and eighties, when unemployment averaged 7 percent and often jumped much higher. In the nineties, as unemployment fell, so did pay inequality. Pay inequality in the U.S. remains high by our own standards — we are still more unequal than we were in the late sixties. But unemployment then was less than four percent, even lower than it is today.

We in the U.S. used to think of ourselves as a "middle class" society. Guess what? Compared to Europe *as a whole, we still are.* America's pay scale is more unequal than in any single European nation. But taking European countries alone ignores the huge differences between the countries of Europe. Average incomes in Spain (say) are only 60 percent of average pay in Germany; average incomes in Texas are 85 percent of those in New York.

When you factor in the differences between countries — a nice achievement of Pedro Conçeiçao and Pedro Ferreira, two of my student associates in the University of Texas Inequality Project — manufacturing pay inequality in Europe as a whole is larger than in the U.S. by about half.

And, national unemployment rates in Europe are systematically higher wherever average incomes are low. Unemployment rates in Spain, still above fifteen percent, are about double what they are in, say, Norway or Sweden.

European unemployment is not due to wage inflexibility. Any German employer seeking low-wage workers can find them easily — in Spain, Portugal, or Greece. If the problem were that unskilled Germans are paid too much, then Germany would be in a much deeper depression than it is. And Spain with its cheap workers would have full employment, instead of the worst unemployment record since the thirties.

The truth is, European rigidities are of a very different kind.

First, Europe's poor do not and cannot migrate in large numbers to the rich countries where jobs might be created for them. There are barriers of language and culture, shortages of suitable housing, and the vicious politics of skinheads to keep the numbers down. Making matters worse, those workers from poor areas that do migrate do not readily become voters in the places to which they move. They remain not only beneath the political fabric, but also outside it.

Second, Europe as a whole does not transfer income to the people of its poor countries. There is, it is true, a Common Agricultural Policy and some regional development funding. But where is the equivalent of the U.S. Social Security System — or even the portable semi-private pension scheme shared in common by all the elderly of Europe? Where is the Earned Income Tax Credit, paid to all the low-income working families of the continent? Where is the continental minimum wage? These American institutions exist only within European countries.

Third, European banks remain unintegrated. Swedish banks do not make mortgage loans to Sicilians. Could they even qualify, by Swedish lending standards? Consequently, bank reserves accumulated by rich European nations are recycled badly, if at all. The result is a blockage in Europe's financial flows.

Barriers to migration and failures to transfer income and to recycle reserves, if not corrected, will mean that Europe will soon bleed its poor countries dry. No amount of "wage flexibility" can fix this.

A brilliant economist, Paul Davidson of the University of Tennessee, has compared the European Union today to the U.S. in the nineteenth century. We had a single currency then, a rigidly unintegrated banking system, and no Social Security. The result: ghost towns. When a region lost competitiveness people simply had to leave. We solved that problem, in this century, through the New Deal.

And what Europe needs is to emulate, nowadays, is the American New Deal. We have an incredibly efficient Social Security System that recycles income from the working people of New York and California to the elderly of Florida and Texas — every day. We have an Earned Income Tax Credit, at a uniform national standard — and growing rapidly in recent years. We have a federal minimum wage. And we have a reasonably national banking system — far from perfect, as inner city dwellers know, but national nevertheless. Taken together, this is a pragmatic and sensible system developed since the Great Depression for holding the country together — for solving the continental problem that Europe is confronting for the first time.

Europeans are in an odd position. Long proud of their welfare states, they have, by changing the relevant boundaries, defined them away. Now, instead of tearing down the worker protections that they still have, they need to start building again, on a much bigger scale. They could learn about this from us. And we can learn, by looking at Europe, just what it is about our own system — Social Security, the minimum wage, the E.I.T.C., and Community Reinvestment rules for banking — that we should fight hardest to preserve and defend. □

James Galbraith just returned from Europe, where versions of this argument are appearing in the English, German, and Italian press. The work of the University of Texas Inequality Project can be viewed at http://utip.gov.utexas.edu.

Expurts

Having a secret fondness for the giant "Oooops!" story, I was naturally delighted by the case of the Mars Orbiter. This debacle, in which we lost a $125 million climate satellite, occurred because the contractor, Lockheed Martin Astronautics, used feet and inches in its engineering specifications, whereas NASA uses meters and millimeters — and no one noticed the discrepancy. Consequently, when the thing was actually sent out into space, it came apart. Bye-bye, Orbiter. Bye-bye, $125 million.

Not since the cheery news of the Y2K problem ("Ooops!") have we seen such a lovely FUBAR. A FUBAR, you will recall, is an advanced SNAFU: Situation Normal, All Fouled Up as compared to Fouled Up Beyond All Recognition. The more pedestrian finders of morals-to-the-tale have deduced that the loss of the Orbiter proves we should all go to the metric system. I'm sure we should.

It makes such perfect sense. It's a better way to count and actually easier, as well. But I've always put the need for conversion to the metric system somewhere around 724th on my list of Things We Really Need to Do in this country. After losing $125 million down the tubes, I suppose we should move it up a few notches.

The trouble with converting to the metric system as a political proposition — aside from the fact it's the kind of thing Michael Dukakis used to champion — is that it's bound to set off our Know-Nothings. All the people who believe in black helicopters and that there's really a plan for a New World Order that will put our military under the command of the United Nations will go absolutely bat-doo if we try to introduce something as "foreign" as the metric system. They will go even more ape than normal.

Can't you hear them now? "Feet and inches were good enough for my pappy and my grandpappy...." I yield to no one except Walt Whitman in my fondness for the *volk Americana*, but you have to admit, getting us to learn something new is like climbing Mount Everest (said she, who still can't program her V.C.R.). If we were to hire the finest minds of Madison Avenue and get them to make thirty-second commercials teaching us about the metric system — sort of like Sesame Street for grown-ups — we would probably catch on in a year or two.

But I think that there's a larger moral to this tale. The Mars Orbiter, Y2K, the time that the Pentagon lost track of $15 billion and other great "Oooops!" of our time serve to remind us that experts are not necessarily a reliable source.

One of the more obvious impending cases of "Ooops!" is radioactive waste, some of which remains deadly for thousands and even tens of thousands of years. Our "experts" cheerily tell us, *"Noooo* problem." They're going to figure out some way to deep-six this stuff in a structure that will have to last longer than any human civilization ever has, and indeed longer than all of human civilization *in toto* — possibly even longer than the last major shift in tectonic plates. We're not talking centuries or millennia here, but eons. The least the experts could do is quit sounding so damn sure of themselves.

The recent nuclear accident in Japan is yet another wake-up call, and it's high time we stopped pushing the snooze button after every Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, Bhopal and all the other accidents that were never supposed to happen. I have suggested before that the First Rule of Holes needs to be applied: When You Are in One, Stop Digging. In other words, don't make any more of this poisonous crap until we figure out how to deal with what we already have.

An even better idea comes from a retired engineer with Bell Helicopter in Fort Worth I happened to run into in Indianapolis. This gentleman — such an engineer he still carries several pens in his shirt pocket years after his retirement — told me he had always believed that when a new model helicopter is tested, the engineers who designed it should ride along with the test pilot. As Sam Johnson suggested, it would have the same happy effect as the prospect of being hanged in the morning.

Why not apply that rule to other dangerous enterprises? Bet you anything the engineers at Lockheed and NASA would have noticed that "Ooops!" if they had had to get on the Orbiter themselves. If the people who think radioactive waste and toxic waste are so safe had to live next to it themselves, bet we'd get some amazing safety measures — or at least the obvious admission that there's no known way to make this stuff safe.

I realize this is a variant on now-common protests against environmental racism. "If this stuff is so safe, why don't they put it in the rich people's neighborhoods?" There is something cheering about the prospect of burying toxic waste under the River Oaks Country Club golf course or putting a nuclear waste dump next to the U.S. Capitol instead of in Sierra Blanca. Aside from the populist charm of it, we'd be assured wonderfully high safety standards.

Even so, the human propensity for the FUBAR will be with us as long as Murphy's Law is still in effect. The trick is not to make mistakes that are irreversible — like radioactive waste and putting a hole in the ozone layer. We can afford a $125 million mistake (gulp). We can't afford to poison the planet. □

Molly Ivins is a former Observer *editor and a columnist for the* Fort Worth Star-Telegram. *Her forthcoming book, with* Observer *editor Louis Dubose, is* Shrub: The Short and Happy Political Life of George W. Bush. *You may write to her via e-mail at mollyivins@star-telegram.com.*

Bush Babies

Those who still cling to the Alice-in-Wonderland fantasy that there's nothing really wrong with America's big-money system for financing our elections need to meet Alexandra and Hannah Wallin. These twin sisters from Utah each gave $1,000 to George W. Bush's presidential campaign last March.

So what's wrong with that, you ask — why make a fuss about $2,000 from two ladies from Utah? Because, at the time these ladies made their contributions, they were three years old. Alexandra and Hannah are granddaughters of Utah multimillionaire John Price. He's a big-time Bush fat cat, who has given and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for Bush.

On March 24, Price wrote a $1,000 check to George W. So did his wife. So did two of his children. So did his children's spouses. So did five of his grandchildren. All on the same day — a "spontaneous" outburst of familial support for George W! Well, Alexandra and Hannah didn't exactly write their checks, since they were only three. Of course, Price was orchestrating all of this, using his own grandchildren as conduits to get around the legal limits of how much a person can give. On the federal filing, where contributors have to list their occupation, Alexandra and Hannah are listed as "students." So far, George W. Bush has received $164,000 from "students."

Bush's campaign claims that it returned the $5,000 contributed in the name of Price's five grandchildren after a "routine" review of these student donors. But Price tells a different story — he says that when reporters started calling him about these kiddie kontributors, he called the Bush lawyers, and only then did they suddenly get scruples and send back the checks.

It's part of the slime of today's politics that politicians literally take money from children.

.02 PERCENTERS

Have you voted for president yet? I know, the election technically is not until next year, but the votes already are pouring in — 103 million ballots have been cast as of mid-year this year. These are the "dollar ballots" that have been cast in America's money primary — the election that lets corporate executives, lobbyists, and wealthy individuals decide who the real contenders are next year by bankrolling them this year to the tune of millions of dollars. The result is that our choices for president in 2000 will have been narrowed down by these moneyed interests to a handful of candidates who have already pledged to support the economic policies of — guess who? — the moneyed interests!

Yet, the Powers That Be are trying to perpetuate the myth that this money equals democracy — that putting up money is the way we Americans have of exercising our free speech rights. But if we swallow that dose of B.S., then we have to admit we don't have a democracy, but a plutocracy — for the great majority of people don't have $1,000 to put into a candidate. In fact, the U.S. Public Interest Research Group analyzed all the contributions to presidential candidates in the first half of this year and found that only .02 percent (two one-hundredths of one percent) of Americans gave a thousand bucks to any candidate.

The U.S. PIRG report, titled "Running For The Money," also finds that the leading contenders have gotten most of their war chests from this tiny minority of $1,000 donors — two-thirds of Gore's money comes from them, Bush got three-fourths of his money from them, and Bradley got 82 percent of his money from them.

Now, who are Bush, Gore, or Bradley going to represent — the 99.98 percent of us who don't have $1,000 to give to them, or the elite few who are financing their campaigns?

To get a copy of PIRG's report, go to their web site: www.pirg.org.

PILLAGE REWARDS

You've heard the reports of how corporate executives are getting fatter than butcher's dogs — for example, IBM's top dog grabbed $336 million last year, and the boss of The Gap hauled off $495 million in personal pay, which is almost $10 million a week!

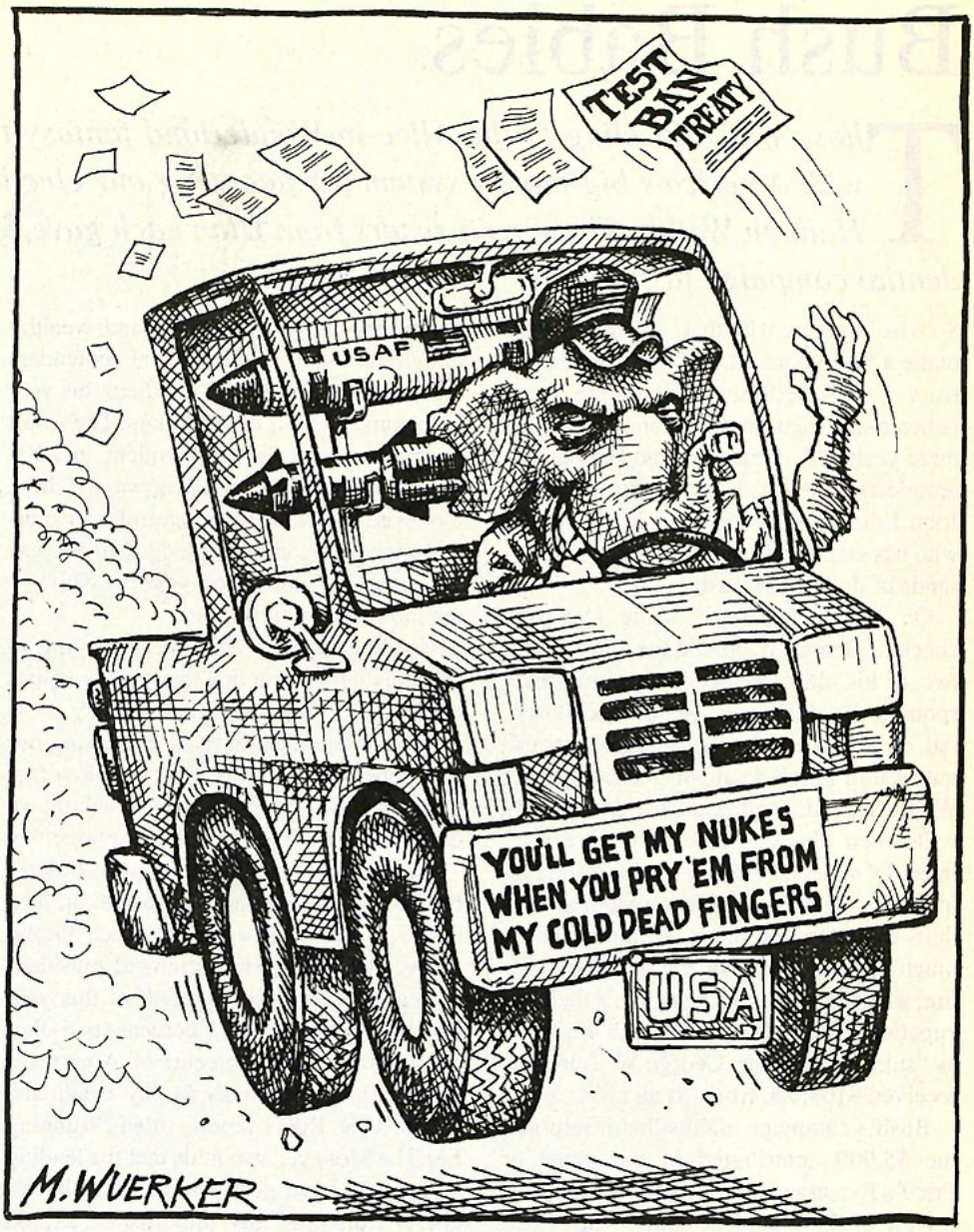
The issue here is not that a few people are making tons of money. Indeed, I'm in favor of people making money. Rather, the issue is disparity and plain old fairness. Our economy is humming — worker productivity is up, output is greater than ever, corporate profits have set records, stock prices are through the roof, and more wealth is being generated than ever before. This enormous economic gain was not created by a handful of C.E.O.s. Our entire society pitched in to create it — workers, family farmers, teachers and, yes, governments. But only the top strata of society have pocketed the gain. The average American worker is putting in longer hours, producing more, and enduring greater stress, yet the average weekly wage was 12 percent less last year than it was twenty-five years ago!

In the convoluted financial system of the corporate structure, the boss has a powerful incentive to fire masses of workers periodically. In the trendy way C.E.O.s now get their salaries "enhanced," they are given stock in the company each year, which they can cash in as the price of that stock rises. The fastest way to goose-up stock prices is to fire a few thousand workers in one whack. Wall Street brokers and speculators love to see a C.E.O. cut corporate costs like this — which means the C.E.O. can cash in for a killing.

This system destroys employee morale and actually undermines the strength of the corporation for a decade — but the C.E.O.s don't care, for they'll have descended onto a golf course with a golden parachute by then. □

Jim Hightower's radio talk show broadcasts nationwide daily from Austin. Find him at www.jimhightower.com, or e-mail: info@jimhightower.com.

A STAR IS BORN? Word in the pews in San Antonio is that conservative Christian activist Anne Newman is planning a run for the state Senate seat vacated by Gregory Luna, whose deteriorating health has forced him to retire. Over the years, the indefatigable Newman has made education her bailiwick. Her one-woman organization, The Texas Family Research Council, provides ammunition for the conservative bloc on the State Board of Education, particularly her fellow Antonian Bob Offut, about such topics as "school to work," "Goals 2000," and other nefarious emanations from the Clinton administration. During the textbook review process, she's been known to single-handedly review dozens of books for evidence of multiculturalism and social engineering (See Nate Blakeslee's "McGraw-Hill Sees the Light," April 30). Newman, a Republican, hasn't a prayer in the central city district, one of the most Democratic in the state. Democrats who have announced include San Antonio State Representatives Leticia Van de Putte and Leo Alvarado, Jr. Newman's ace in the hole might be conservative San Antonio magnate James Leininger, one of the state's biggest supporters of right-wing causes and candidates. Best known for his decisive last-minute loans to statewide Republican candidates Rick Perry and Carole Keeton Rylander in 1998, Leininger's radar tracks lower-level races as well, including the State Board of Education, where his money has helped build and maintain the strong minority of conservative Christians. Newman, considered a leading light among grassroots activists, could be the next passenger on the Leininger train.



UNREFINED. Texans worried that Governor Bush's campaign claims of environmental progress might threaten the states' leadership in most categories of pollution can rest easy: Texas refineries are still pouring out more toxic pollution than any others in the country. That was the conclusion of a study by the Environmental Defense Fund, which compared states with four or more refineries, and reviewed toxic chemical release and transfer data from the U.S. E.P.A. 1997 Toxics Release inventory and related state/facility data.

Defenders of Texas industry like to suggest that the sheer size of the state and its petrochemical industry accounts for its leadership in pollution, but the E.D.F study found instead that the twenty-three refineries in Texas emit the greatest quantities of toxic pollution *per barrel of crude oil processed* — that is, they're not just big, they're dirty.

Of the twenty-eight worst refineries in the U.S. for overall pollution, seven are in Texas. They include Shell Odessa Refining Company; Lyondell Citgo Refining Company (Houston); Phillips 66 Company (Borger); Specified Fuels & Chemicals L.L.C. (Channelview); Coastal Refining & Marketing Incorporated (Corpus Christi); Mobil Oil Corporation (Beaumont); and Shell Deer Park Refining Company.

The facilities and states were ranked according to a weighted average of their emission of various pollutants per barrel of production per day. For example in New Jersey, which has strict reporting requirements on pollution, refineries accounted for 1.65 pounds of toxic release inventory pollutants per barrel per day, while Texas refineries were emitting 6.17 pounds per barrel per day. Among the 144 rankable refineries in the U.S., those in Texas, Oklahoma, Montana, and Wyoming performed worst overall.

"This analysis shows that Texans suffer a disproportionate share of refinery pollu-

tion due to the sheer number and generally poor performance of refineries in the state," said Ramón Alvarez, staff scientist for E.D.F. in Austin. "Cleaning up these refineries would afford significant benefits to the health of Texans." The methodology and overall results of the study, along with detailed material about refinery processing, suggestions for community organizing, and related matters can be reviewed on the new E.D.F. Community Guides website: www.edf.org/communityguides.

LONE STAR HUNGER. While Texas is Number One in pollution, we're only Number Three in hunger. According to a report released October 13 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 1998, 12.9 percent of Texas households were "food insecure" — that is, the families did not have access to enough food to meet their basic needs at all times. Food insecure households are further classified as "hungry" when at least one family member is forced to skip or cut meals due to inadequate resources for food. The percentages translate into daunting numbers of Texans: approximately 2.5 million people lived in food insecure households in 1998, including 987,000 suffering from outright hunger. Nationally, the U.S.D.A. estimates that in 1998, 10.2 percent of all households in the country were food insecure, and 6.1 million adults and 3.3 million children suffered from outright hunger. The research also shows that after a significant nationwide decline from 1995 to 1997, there was a sharp increase in hunger and food insecurity in 1998, with 3 million more adults and 2 million more children considered hungry or food insecure. The relative change in Texas numbers over the same period was unavailable.

The numbers were collected in an update of the U.S.D.A.'s Food Security Measurement Project, first produced in 1995. Texas had the third-highest level of food insecurity in the nation in 1998, below only New Mexico and Mississippi.

"The stories these numbers tell us about Texas," said Celia Hagert of Austin's Center for Public Policy Priorities, "is that in spite of our booming economy, millions of Texans still struggle to meet the most basic of needs — sufficient food to lead a healthy life or raise a healthy family."

In related news, according to estimates released by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the percentage of Texans living in poverty — based on an annual income of $13,650 for a family of three — decreased slightly between 1997 and 1998. But at the same time, the number of people receiving assistance from state and federal programs has plummeted, far in excess of the drop in the poverty rate. According to Census estimates, the state poverty rate was 15 percent (3 million Texans), down from the 16.7 percent (3.2 million) in poverty in 1997. Yet Texans receiving food stamps have dropped 41.1 percent, from a high of 2.8 million people in 1994 to a current low of 1.5 million (the largest drop in the nation). Participation in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (the new name for the welfare check) is down 39.6 percent, and Medicaid usage is also down. Since these programs are administered through the same state welfare offices, it is likely that clients being discouraged from T.A.N.F. and directed toward job hunts are also not being informed that they are eligible for food stamps or Medicaid.

Of course, there's more than one way to look at those numbers. If the current trends continue, in a year or two Texas should be able to add yet another category to its claims of Number One. Look out, Mississippi and New Mexico!

PEER PRESSURE. The Bush story that wouldn't die — that is, the one *not* about cocaine — got more life pumped into it recently, with the launching of a new website chronicling the seamy underside of the Governor's voluntary pollution reduction program for grandfathered plants in Texas. Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), a relatively new group that encourages public employees to blow the whistle on environmental crimes — especially those involving their own agencies — has chosen the grandfather issue as the first of many Texas environmental scandals to profile on their new site (www.txpeer.org).

The site documents the story (see "How a Bill Becomes a Law," by Nate Blakeslee, June 11) of how the Governor secretly enlisted the state's top polluters to craft a plan to their liking. The grandfathered history has already found its way onto another new website, www.TomPaine.com, which ballyhooed its October launching in an advertisement on the op-ed page of *The New York Times*.

Over on the Sierra Club's Lone Star Chapter website, meanwhile, Neil Carman and company have compiled a comprehensive list, titled "Texas Air Policy Issues," which briefly documents (in semi-chronological order) eighty different policy decisions made by Bush and/or his T.N.R.C.C. commissioners, and their consequences for public health in Texas. Political Intelligence dubs it the *Encyclopedia Carmana*.

Apparently feeling the pressure, the Bush campaign released a three-page missive defending the Governor's "reasonable and balanced approach" toward environmental regulation. □

You are Invited

To join the Texas Affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union in honoring Former Congressman Bob Eckhardt,

Winner of the 1999 John Henry Faulk Civil Libertarian of the Year Award

David Rabban of the U.T. Law School will be the principal speaker

• Saturday, November 20th at 6:00pm (cocktails-cash bar), and dinner at 7:00pm ($45)
• Hilton Hotel, Middle Fiskville Road, Austin
• For information and reservations, call: 441-0077.

He Wrote the Song

BY JOHN ROSS

Havana/Mexico City (October 6)

The suave old codger pseudonymously dubbed "Compay Segundo" glides onto the stage in his traditional Panama hat and, waving his fat cigar like a baton, signals his muchachos to strike up what many consider to be the signature song of Cuba, "Guajira Guantanamera." *Suddenly, the Mexico City audience is up and singing, along with their 92-year-old pot-bellied idol, just like audiences in the U.S. and Europe have been prone to do, ever since Compay and a clique of largely-forgotten veteran Cuban musicians sat down to record* The Buena Vista Social Club *three years ago.*

Assembled by Ry Cooder, the eclectic Los Angeles guitarist, the *Buenavistas* — most notably Compay, the elegant, pianist Rubén González (seventy-six), and vocalist Ibrahim Ferrer (seventy) — sold millions of CDs to U.S. fans who did not have the vaguest idea what the old men were singing about. They even won a Grammy for their efforts.



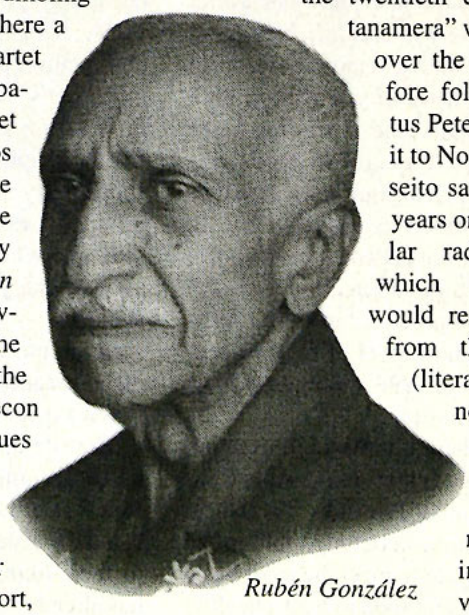
Ibrahim Ferrer

Now *The Buena Vista Social Club* has become a must-see Wim Wenders music documentary on screens throughout the world, and Compay and company are so hot that their projected February 2000 return to New York's Carnegie Hall is already sold out.

The runaway success of the Buenavistas is a sort of post-modern justice. Sliding into decrepitude — González' piano had literally been collapsed by termites when he was rediscovered by Cooder — on a Cuban music scene where the infernal racket of rock and rap shouted down the graceful *sons*, *guajiras*, and *boleros* of another era, the old men's turn has come again. Their new-found popularity has revived a genre that brings some blessed lyricism to the incessant cacophony of urban industrial styles that dominate the pop music world.

Unlike so many of their contemporaries, such as salsa queen Celia Cruz, the Buenavistas, who are old enough to remember the bad old days of pre-revolutionary Cuba, kept their faith with traditional Cuban *son* and did not or could not abandon the rebel island. One reward for sticking it out: last year, Compay Segundo was roughed up by a mob of Cuban exiles (*gusanos*) during a stopover in Miami.

In 1999, the new old Cuban music revival has become a star attraction of the Havana tourist scene. Even as the music goes global, it is quite alive and kicking in crumbling old Havana, where a polished quartet of aging troubadours croon dulcet boleros like "Dos Gardenias" upstairs at the well-worn Bodeguita de Media, and the son of Beny Moré (the legend of Cuban *son* who drank himself into oblivion in the sixties) takes the microphone in the Plaza of the Cathedral. Out on the Malecon seawalk, the salsa and meringues sizzle during August *carnavál* time. To devotees of Cuban music, *Havana Vieja* has the feel of another rollicking Caribbean port, New Orleans.



Rubén González

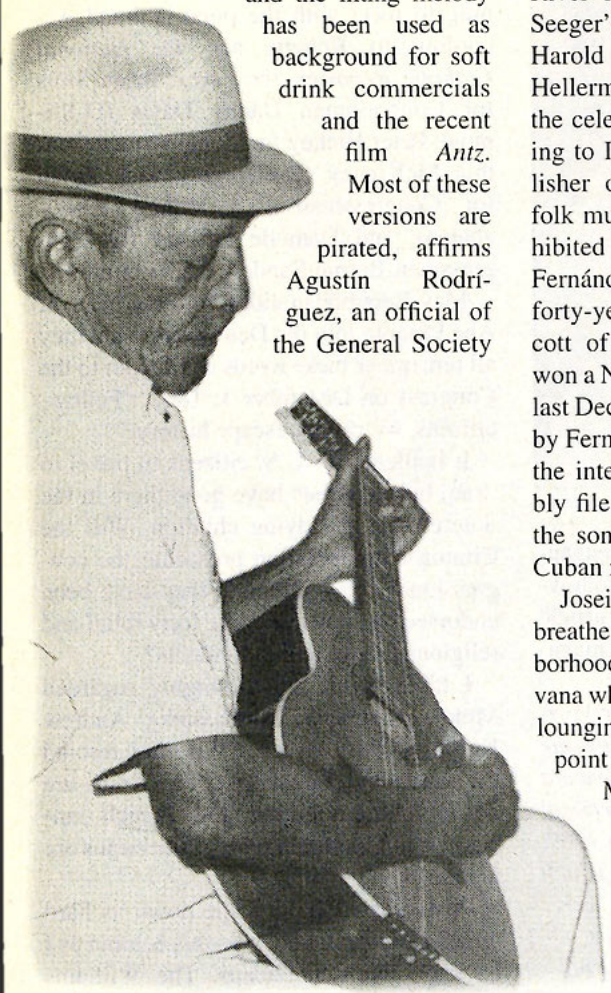
The boom has even brought Celia Cruz back to the island — at least on film. A new feature documenting fifty years of *son*, and featuring Moré and Cruz, has just opened in Havana and the lines are around the block.

Missing out on the sudden fame and (potential) fortune of the revival is Joseito Fernández, the man who gave the world "Guantanamera," or more properly, "Guajira Guantanamera," farm song from Guantanamo (on the extreme eastern end of the island, where the U.S. continues to maintain its unpopular military base).

With or without lyrics by José Martí, the patriot poet who led the struggle for liberation against the Spanish at the beginning of the twentieth century, "Guantanamera" was a favorite all over the island long before folk singer emeritus Pete Seeger brought it to North America. Joseito sang it for twenty years on a wildly popular radio show, on which a newscaster would read a *nota roja* from the newspapers (literally, a "red note" — usually a crime of passion) and the glib Fernández would improvise a verse to his famous song. Joseito recorded "Guajira Guantanamera" for RCA Victor's Latin

division in the forties.

Now 200 versions of Fernández' song have been cut by everyone from Seeger to the Sandpipers to jazzist Paquito de Rivera, and the lilting melody has been used as background for soft drink commercials and the recent film *Antz*. Most of these versions are pirated, affirms Agustín Rodríguez, an official of the General Society of Songwriters and Editors in Havana, which is demanding millions of Yanqui dollars in royalties for the family of Joseito Fernández, who died in strained circumstances in 1976.



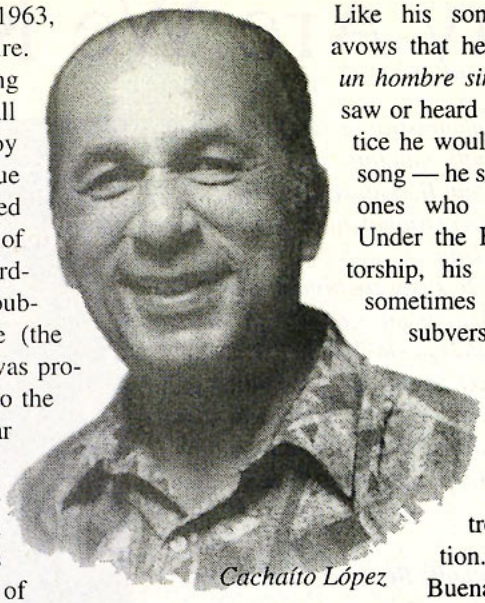
Compay Segundo

As the story goes, Pete Seeger first heard "Guantanamera" sung at a left-wing summer camp for children in upstate New York. Apparently, the campers had been taught the tune by Hector Angulo, a Cuban-born instructor at a then-politically correct Manhattan music school who claimed to have inserted the Martí lyrics (Angulo certainly translated them). Seeger fell in love with the celebrated lyric *("Yo soy un hombre sincero que viene de donde crece la palma"* — "I am a sincere man who comes from where the palm tree grows"), first performed "Guantanamera" at a Carnegie Hall concert in 1963, and soon added it to his repertoire.

Publishing rights to the song were quickly picked up by Fall River Music, which is run by Seeger's long-time colleague Harold Levanthal and Fred Hellerman, a charter member of the celebrated Weavers. According to Irwin Silber, one-time publisher of *Sing Out!* magazine (the folk music bible), Fall River was prohibited from paying royalties to the Fernández family by the near forty-year U.S. economic boycott of Cuba. The publishers won a New York court decision last December against demands by Fernández' heirs for a share of the international royalties. "We'll probably file in Spain next," says Rodríguez of the songwriters' society, which holds the Cuban rights to "Guantanamera."

Joseito Fernández' memory continues to breathe in the *barrio valiente* (angry neighborhood) of Los Sitios, a corner of old Havana where few tourists tread. Ask the locals lounging on any street corner and they will point to the alley where his daughter Migdalia maintains a tiny private museum in her father's honor. Set behind burglar gates in a dilapidated tenement, Migdalia displays the old troubadour's guitar, now in place on top of the television set. Joseito's *guayabera* is neatly hung on the back of his chair, and his straw sombrero hangs on a wall covered with photos of his performances throughout Cuba. There are altars to the Virgin of Charity, Cuba's patron saint, in both rooms.

"My father was a hero in this neighborhood," Migdalia recalls. "He would walk in the middle of the street and the people shouted from the balconies, begging a song. The children followed him everywhere...."



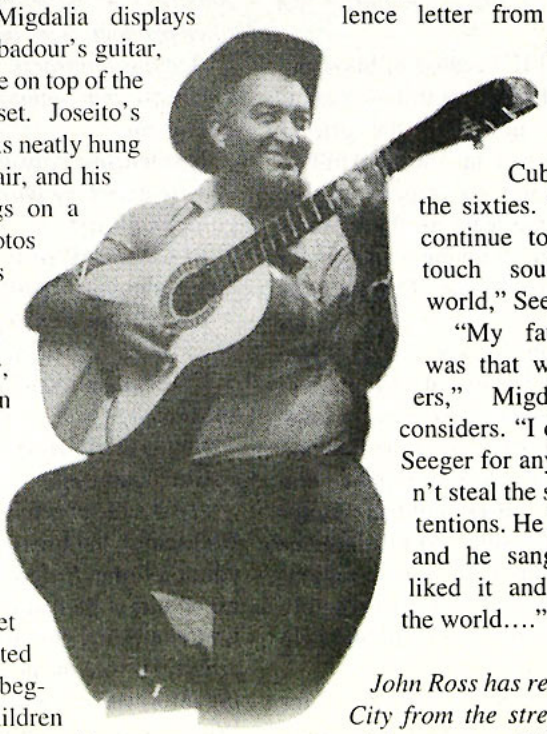
Cachaíto López

Like his song, Migdalia avows that her father was *un hombre sincero*. "If he saw or heard of any injustice he would make up a song — he stood with the ones who had fallen." Under the Batista dictatorship, his verses were sometimes considered subversive — Joseito sided with and remained loyal to Fidel Castro's revolution. Like the Buenavistas, he never left Cuba. "He said the sadness would kill him."

According to the songwriters' society, Fall River now argues that "Guajira Guantanamera" is really an old Cuban folk song, and that Joseito Fernández only popularized it — a view shared by exiled Cuban novelist and critic Guillermo Cabrera Infante, but one that causes Migdalia great pain.

"Everyone in Cuba knows my father wrote 'Guantanamera' — even Pete Seeger acknowledges it...." She displays a condolence letter from the U.S. folk singer, who met and embraced Joseito on his first trip to Cuba at the end of the sixties. "Your song will continue to reach out and touch souls around the world," Seeger wrote.

"My father's prophecy was that we are all brothers," Migdalia Fernández considers. "I don't blame Pete Seeger for any of this. He didn't steal the song with bad intentions. He liked the melody and he sang it and people liked it and it exploded in the world...." □



Eliades Ochoa

John Ross has returned to Mexico City from the streets of New York and the avenues of Havana.

Why Are We Killing Children?

The Clinton administration has been trying hard, apparently with little success, to persuade Pope Paul II, and, separately, a delegation of congressional aides, to abandon plans to visit Iraq.

A recent U.N. study confirmed what critics of the sanctions have argued for years ... that thousands of children under the age of five die each month as a result of the sanctions. The report estimated that 500,000 children under the age of five (more than 4,000 per month) have died since 1991.

—Tom Roberts
National Catholic Reporter, September 3



Alan Pogue

What do you think about the estimated 500,000 Iraqi children who have died, mostly under the administration of President Clinton and the Democratic Party, the heirs, my God, of Franklin Roosevelt? Are these deaths less important than our credit cards? Millions upon millions of working-class Arabs living in the Middle East know the above figures. Will they pay us back some day? Have you protested the deaths of these children? (Cheers for Tom Roberts of the *National Catholic Reporter* for telling the truth.)

Pope John Paul II, because of his opposition to artificial birth control — a stand opposed by a majority of the priests, brothers, and nuns of his church (folks I like and care about) — is generally no hero of mine. But at least for the moment he is my hero, in showing concern for those dying children of Iraq. On that issue he gets my salute.

It's un-American, you know, to visit Iraq and help dying and innocent children, because Saddam Hussein is so evil. In large degree he got that way during the Reagan-Bush years, when Uncle Sam supplied him with millions of dollars, military intelligence, bombs, and bullets to kill Iranians who had the audacity to attempt to nationalize their own oil — as Mexico did before World War II with the good will and help of Franklin Roosevelt.

What's more, U.S. businessmen, for money, supplied Saddam with something especially murderous during the Reagan-Bush years. Run your eyes over the following gut-wrenching information in an article by William Blum in the *Progressive* magazine, April, 1998:

According to a 1994 Senate report, private American suppliers, licensed by the U.S. Department of Commerce, exported a witch's brew of biological and chemical materials to Iraq from 1985 through 1989. Among the biological materials, which often produce slow, agonizing death, were:

Bacillus anthracis, cause of anthrax.

Clostridium botulinum, a source of botulin toxin.

Histoplasma capsulatam, cause of a disease attacking lungs, brain, spinal cord, and heart.

Brucella melitensis, a bacteria that can damage major organs.

Clostridium perfringens, a highly toxic bacteria causing systemic illness.

Clostridium tetani, a highly toxigenic substance.

Hey, Hitler! Hey, Stalin! How do you like them apples?

(To double check, I telephoned Matthew Rothschild, the high-minded, bright young editor of the *Progressive* magazine, and asked him if he had received any information contesting the accuracy of the above article. He told me he had not. What shocking information about our beloved country. What say you, Eleanor Roosevelt?)

Who are the congressional aides planning to meet with the pope in Iraq? According to Roberts and the *National Catholic Reporter,* they are, "Brian Sims for Congressman Danny Davis (D-Illinois); Peter Hickey for Congressman Cynthia McKinney (D-Georgia); Jack Zylan for Congressman Earl Hillard (D-Alabama); and Danielle LeClair for Congressman Bernie Sanders (Ind-Vermont)."

May Republican aides with the heart of Abe Lincoln join the Democrats. May they all remember these words of Lincoln to the Congress on December 1, 1862, "Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history."

It is illegal for U.S. citizens to travel to Iraq, but hundreds have gone there in the interests of the dying children. Will the Clinton administration prosecute the congressional aides, although they have been endorsed by something like forty relief and religious groups and individuals?

I talked with retired, highly regarded Middle East U.S. Ambassador Andrew Killgore, who told me, "We must rescind the sanctions against Iraq. The Arabs are not bombing German and French embassies, but increasingly we Americans are in danger."

Postscript: I have come down as hard on the Democratic Party in this column as I have on the Republicans. The Williams Jennings Bryan story I have told before seems especially appropriate today.

At an Iowa State Fair, before a group of farmers, Bryan was asked, "What's the difference between a liberal and a conservative?"

"A liberal," Bryan replied, "is like an old mule pulling ahead. A conservative is like a plowshare holding back. Between the two they break the soil."

That sounds a little too goody-goody, but we have to come together and stop our American cruelty of the Iraqi children. Saddam was our son-of-a-bitch, anthrax and all. Why must innocent children suffer? □

Longtime freedom fighter Maury Maverick is a columnist for the San Antonio Express-News, *where a version of this article first appeared.*

American Income Life Insurance Company
EXECUTIVE OFFICES: P.O. BOX 2608 WACO, TEXAS 76797 (817) 772-3050

BERNARD RAPOPORT
Chairman of the Board and
Chief Executive Officer

HARD POWER, SOFT POWER

By Joseph S. Nye

Now that the bombs have stopped falling on Serbia, many analysts are celebrating the success of America's military power. They are correct, but military prowess is only part of the story. It would be a serious mistake if Americans came to believe that the lesson of Kosovo is that we can simply bomb the world into becoming a better place.

While it is important not to ignore the continuing necessity of military force for some purposes, it is equally important for Americans not to be misled by the temptations of having the world's mightiest armed forces into thinking that U.S. power is greater than it is in other, nonmilitary, dimensions. The United States is a preponderant but not dominant power — that is, America is bigger than all the other players overall, but it does not possess overwhelming superiority in all key areas.

Instead, power today is distributed in what amounts to a three-dimensional chess game. The top military board is unpopular, with the United States, Europe, and Japan accounting for two-thirds of world product. The bottom board of transactional relations that cross borders outside the control of governments has a more dispersed structure. This complexity makes policy making more difficult. It means playing on several boards at once.

Another important distinction is the one between "hard power" — a country's economic and military power to coerce — and "soft power," the ability to attract through cultural and ideological appeal. It is important that a half-million students want to study in the United States each year; that Europeans and Asians want to watch American films and TV; and that American liberties are attractive in many parts of the world. Our values are significant sources of soft power. Both hard and soft power are vital, but in today's "information age," soft power is becoming even more so than in the past.

Massive flows of cheap information have expanded the channels of contact across national borders. Global markets and nongovernmental actors play a larger role. Nations are more easily penetrated and less like billiard balls bouncing off one another. As a result, political leaders find it more difficult to maintain a coherent set of foreign policy priorities and more difficult to articulate a single over-arching national interest. Yet the United States, with its democratic society, is well placed to benefit from the rapidly developing information age. Although the coherence of government policies may diminish because of these many penetrations, our institutions will be attractive, and the openness of our society will enhance our credibility, which is a crucial resource in an information age. Thus we will be better placed to make use of soft power. At the same time, the soft power that comes from being a "city on a hill" whose example shines forth does not provide the coercive capability that hard power does. Alone it does not support a very venturesome foreign policy.

Soft power works by persuading others to follow or getting them to agree with us on values and institutions that produce behavior we want. Soft power can rest on the appeal of our ideas and culture or our ability to set the agenda through standards and institutions that shape the preferences of others. It depends largely on the persuasiveness of the free information we transmit.

If America can make its power legitimate in the eyes of other countries and maintain international institutions that encourage others to define their interests in ways compatible with ours, we may not need to expend as much on costly traditional economic or military sources of power.

Hard and soft power are related, but they are not the same. Material success makes a culture and ideology attractive, and economic and military failure lead to self-doubt and crises of identity.

However, soft power does not rest solely on a foundation of hard power. The soft power of the Vatican did not wane because the size of the Papal States diminished. Canada, Sweden, and the Netherlands have more influence than some other states with equivalent economic or military capabilities. The Soviet Union had considerable soft power in Europe after World War II but squandered it by invading Hungary and Czechoslovakia even when Soviet economic and military power continued to grow.

Soft power varies over time and in different areas. America's popular culture, with its libertarian and egalitarian currents, dominates film, television, and electronic communications. Not all aspects of that culture are attractive to everyone — for example, conservative Muslims. Nonetheless, the spread of information and American popular culture has generally increased global awareness of and openness to American ideas and values.

To some extent this reflects deliberate policies, but more often soft power is an inadvertent byproduct. In part, it depends on how well we live up to our ideals at home. One of the less obvious lessons of Kosovo is that in an information age, Americans should pay attention to maintaining our soft power.

Joseph S. Nye is dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He was assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs in 1994 and 1995. This article first appeared in The Boston Globe.

"Zero Tolerance," from page 12

the back of the house at the time of the shooting. They moved out the same day. The couch where Burt's brother Blake had been sleeping — directly in the line of fire — was the only furniture remaining in the duplex. Steve showed me where the forensics team had pulled a stray bullet out of the wall just above the couch. (Blake was hustled out the back door by officers so fast, he didn't even know Rusty had been shot.) Andy Wood was the first to call Rusty's family in Florida, breaking the news to his grandfather and brother. Andy, Kristie, Kasia, and Steve packed up Rusty's things so that his mother wouldn't have to see the mess.

Rusty's mother and brother arrived the next day, and a wake was held a few days later. Rusty's family would have seen him soon; he was planning a temporary move to Florida at the end of the week to be near his ailing grandfather and to look after his brother, with whom he was very close. Rusty also wanted to be near his son, who turned seven on the day he was shot. His mother took his ashes back to Florida, where Christopher helped spread them. "She told us that he seemed to understand who it was and what it meant," Kristie told me.

Rusty's wasn't the only life disrupted by the events of May 24. His ex-wife and son will lose their child support. Steve Williams was evicted from his trailer. Burt and Alyssa have gone to live with Burt's parents. Several arrested that night lost their jobs. David Stringfellow, arrested for allegedly selling half a bottle of Vicodin to Roy Parrish for thirty dollars, is still in jail five months later, on a parole violation. David had been living with his mother, a seventy-year-old woman who told me Parrish tried to solicit her for pills as well. The drug war breaks up families, a reality that Sue Cohen said the police seemed to sincerely appreciate. She recalled an instance in which the task force arrested and jailed the parents of a family with seven children. It was Officer Chase Stapp, she told me, who called her office asking for some "Drug-Free" t-shirts for the kids.

Quiet, rail-thin, with a deeply creased face and short, wiry gray hair, Steve Williams doesn't become animated until he starts talking about the shooting. At the duplex, he can't resist walking through the incident one more time, demonstrating how the cops' version just doesn't make sense. Rusty fell a good ten feet from the door, around a corner. He thinks the task force came to the house looking for trouble. He thinks they may have shot Rusty before he reached the door. He demonstrates how they could see Rusty through the windows, but Rusty couldn't see them. He doesn't know what to believe. "It's just like the thing in Waco: 'The Davidians were all a bunch of idiots and they shot at us and then they set themselves on fire,'" he said. "Now come to find out it was all a bunch of lies." Back at his place, he shows me a Glock like Chase Stapp's, coated in nylon, lightweight, fast, deadly. See how the clip can hold fourteen bullets, how the safety automatically disengages when you pull the trigger. "This is what it's beginning to be like here in the U.S.," he said. Zero tolerance. □

Photo Manipulation in Photoshop

Make your photos more spectacular through digital enhancement, photo montage, colorizing, creative new compositions or simply digital cleaning. I can also digitize your favorite photos for safer, long-lasting archiving.

Call (512) 462-0796 or email: worldwis@gte.net



Will he reach his high aspirations? Or will he just blow it?

Read about it in the *Observer*.

I want to subscribe to *The Texas Observer*.

___Student ($18) ___2 years ($59)

___1 year ($32) ___3 years ($84)

___Check enclosed ___Bill me

Name

Address

City/State/Zip

Where did you find this issue of the *Observer*?

The Texas Observer • 307 W. 7th St. • Austin, TX 78701 • (512) 477-0746

Foresight

Had Uncle Hubert known
when he strolled away from the asylum
that the hundred miles
back home to the farm
would be his last long freedom,
he might have stopped for pie in Pleasant Hill
or hitchhiked part of the way.
Motorcars were exciting then
in rural Louisiana.

Maybe he did dally;
I know nothing of Hubert as a traveler.
Or as an uncle.
He was just a kid —
nineteen, I heard, or younger.
After he got home, things were okay
until again there were threats,
murderous threats I'm told,
and the family took Hubert back to Pineville
where he stayed put fifty years
except for walks on the grounds.

As a child, I imagined a rescue —
dogs, barbed wire, Hubert hurried
to the back seat of our old Chrysler.
At dawn, my father would swing up the drive
and my mysterious uncle would soon be settled
into the middle bedroom.
In fact,
my father, seven children to support,
close himself to breaking,
fought like mad when the state threatened
to release his only brother.

I was ashamed of him, and scared:
if I were Hubert, would he rescue me?
But had I known
that sacrifice, like freedom,
has its limits,
and what we do for our children
we may not do for others,
I might have thought before now
of loss, and a man's grief,
as he Sunday-drove a hundred miles south
to walk with his brother.

Wasps

Outside my son's bedroom, in a fist-sized nest,
yellow and black wasps doze on papery cells.
I thwack the window pane,
appalled that danger has come so close
though my son is gone now, to college.
Quarter-inch wings flare into fierce Vs;
two wasps stare in, flicking antennae and legs.
I, who admire fertility in any form
but especially in late summer,
curse the insects' misfortune to have nested here.

On our honeymoon, my husband surprised
a hive of bees as we trudged home from a Greek beach.
They stung his face, his nose, inside his ears.
In panic, he knocked off his glasses
so had to go back into the swarm while I,
bikinied, begged the bees, "Oh! Stop! Stop!"
Later, in our whitewashed room by the sea,
we fell asleep to household pots and shouts,
the drone of family life,

which wasps know all too briefly
and for that I do apologize.
No one thing will bring us to safety
or my son back home, I know that.
I will kill them anyway.

—FRANCES SCHENKKAN

A resident of Austin, Frances Schenkkan has been a reporter for the *Houston Post* and was chair of the Austin Planning Commission in the early eighties. She has published a short story in the *Austin Chronicle,* and was awarded the Adele Steiner Burleson prize in poetry at U.T. She and her husband Pete have three sons.

Schenkkan writes: "The poem about my uncle began last spring when I happened on his name, written out in full in my father's handwriting in a genealogy. It moved me because I grew up thinking my father wanted Hubert forgotten. 'Foresight' and 'Wasps' attempt to describe a kind of hardening that prevents children at times from seeing adult grief and results in our doing things like killing wasps unnecessarily. Both poems were written while I pursue a graduate degree in creative writing/English at U.T.–Austin."

—Naomi Shihab Nye

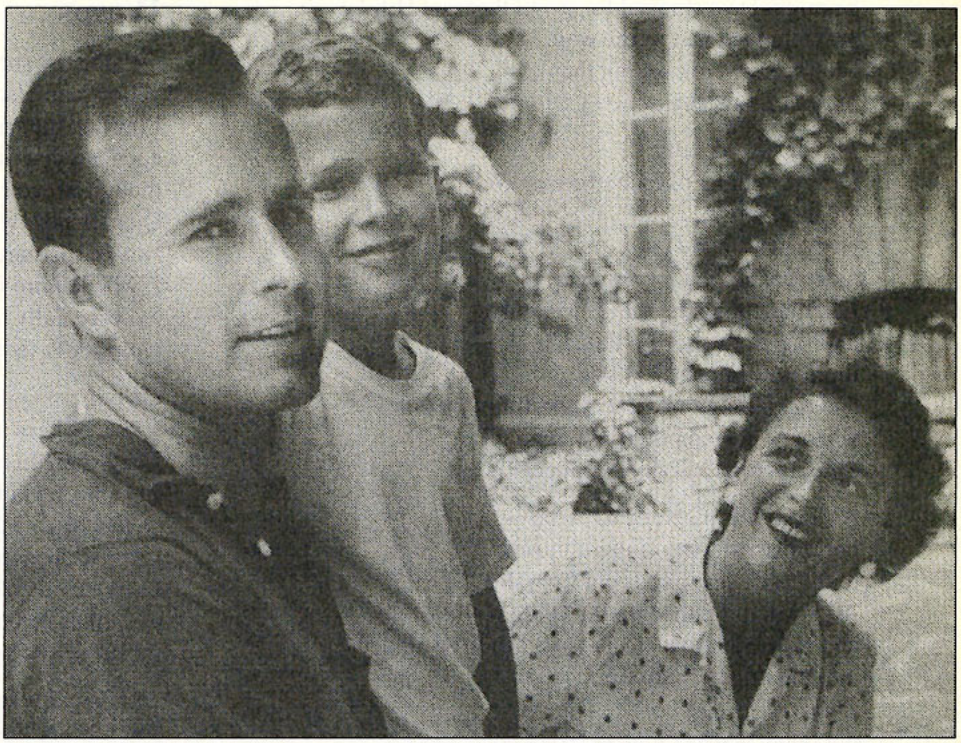
The Observer*'s poetry page is partially funded through a grant from the Austin Writers' League, in cooperation with the Texas Commission on the Arts.*

Here We Go Again

Tracing the George Family Bush

BY MICHAEL KING

FIRST SON:
George W. Bush
and the Bush Family Dynasty.
By Bill Minutaglio.
Times Books.
384 pages. $25.00.



▲ *George W. Bush and his parents, 1955*

George Bush Presidential Library

This is a book much more interesting than its subject. Indeed, even Governor Bush might agree, since he made a point of telling the author that it was too soon for a biography. "Come back in twenty years," Bush told Bill Minutaglio. Of course, Bush may have meant that quite literally since, more than a year later, on the day Minutaglio submitted the completed manuscript to his publisher, Bush's press office told him one more time that the Governor was "still deciding" whether to grant the writer a real interview. The next time they hear the Bush team trumpeting their candidate's "decisiveness," voters might recall that exchange.

Indeed, the entire subject of "books" is taking on a comic air in relation to the burgeoning George W. Bush mythology. Minutaglio's substantive and detailed biography has won the race to publication, but will be followed in short order by others already in development, including (to blow our own horn) a political examination by Molly Ivins and my colleague Louis Dubose (due this winter). And Bush has his "own" book in the works, initially to be ghosted by longtime Houston sportswriter Mickey Herskowitz. But when Herskowitz (hardly an investigative reporter) proved insufficiently deferential — he actually wanted access to more policy material than the Governor's canned speeches — he was unceremoniously dismissed and replaced by head flack Karen Hughes, who knows better than to deviate from the message of the day.

And what of the Candidate's own pen? Well, *First Son* provides a couple of tasty samples of the Bushean prose, at merciful brevity: "Dear Susan & Michael [Dell]: Laura, the girls and I had a fine time Saturday at your party. We especially appreciated the tour of your home. It is great. I look forward to future visits. Sincerely, GW." "Dear Myron [Magnet], Thanks for your time and sharing your thoughts with me and my staff. We were all fired up after you charged our intellectual batteries." There may be no need for a second Bush Library, after all.

Minutaglio writes that the campaign bristles at the increasingly widespread realization that the Candidate is not exactly (to put it politely) an egghead. Bush staffers insist that they have seen their boss actually reading books, and Hughes herself once "angrily lectured [an Austin reporter] on how many books Bush was reading, how he read 'even more books than Karl Rove, and Rove reads a lot of books.'" Since strategist Rove's favorite political scribe is the execrable Myron Magnet, apostle to the overstuffed, he may not be the best role model for the neo-bibliophile Dubya. Bush might better stick to his New Testament, which he at least says he reads, and the occasional Phillips Andover Academy alumni newsletter.

For as *First Son* suggests, it was at Andover (and Houston's Kinkaid Academy before it) that the young Bush learned the essential tools of his political ascendance: affability, gregariousness, and what his schoolmasters called *style*. In his chapter under that title, Minutaglio reprints the founding-day speech of Kinkaid Headmaster John Cooper, who promised "an education which develops the best in the student, which seeks to give him a sense of style...." At Bush's 1964 graduation from Andover, Headmaster John Kemper struck much the same note: "You are a proud group in a proud school. This pride will be sustained if you take with you a sense of style." By all accounts — including his own — an otherwise indifferent student, Bush learned these lessons well. As a young man he was a legendary shlub, but (as head cheerleader, stickball commis-

sioner, landman, managing partner, candidate) he was always full of jokes, shook everybody's hand, and *remembered everybody's name.* They said that about LBJ too, and indeed about Bill Clinton — if you plan to spend your entire life working the room, it is the one indispensable skill.

As the full title implies, *First Son* is as much a family story as a personal history. There are few surprises, at least to anybody who's been following the Bush career, and no scandalmongering to speak of: no stunning revelations about drugs, and the chapter on the Air National Guard is even a little behind the curve of Ben Barnes' recent incremental confessions of string-pulling on Bush's behalf. But there is throughout the book an impressive accumulation of detail, of how this particular American life, born to insulated privilege and the instinctive expectation of its permanence, sorted itself out on the way to high office: grudging acceptance and then embrace of the dynastic education (Kinkaid/Andover/Yale/Harvard); ritualized apprenticeship in Houston and Midland, underwritten by family connections; the young squire's impatience to assume his inheritance (i.e., run for office, any sufficiently high office); a calling in of generations of favors; and then finally, the formal assumption of the expectations of the prince's class. They are champing at the bit in Greenwich, River Oaks, North Dallas, Tanglewood, Grosse Pointe.... The Arkansas *arriviste* and his followers must be driven from the throne,

LITTLE LEAGUE MILLIONAIRE

Editor's note: As Bill Minutaglio prepared for the publicity tour for his new book, First Son, *he spoke to the* Observer *about the approach of the book, and his research on the Bush family. The following is an excerpt from that conversation. — M.K.*

What's your sense of George W. after having written the book?
It's interesting how the parallels appear to me, between Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. I hope they are apparent in my book....

For example, he's not exactly an arching intellectual, not a guy that spends a lot of time behaving like a "policy wonk" — the kind of guy who's going to stay up until three or four in the morning debating, studying, analyzing, or relishing the art form of public policy, the intricacies of welfare reform, or the tax structure. People who like him or dislike him kind of agree on that.

Of course, you can spin that so it looks to his credit — that he seems more of the vigorous or spontaneous delegator, and knows how to surround himself with good people, and makes the decisions when he needs to, and he's good at understanding the bigger and broader picture of things. The flip side of that argument is that maybe he doesn't understand the real nuances and the specifics of each issue, so it's not really to his credit.

You did have a couple of brief conversations with Bush?
I met with Bush twice. Basically, he said to me (I'm paraphrasing), "Come back and see me in twenty years, when I've really accomplished something in life."...

Since the Governor's office in Texas is not really a very powerful position, I decided to concentrate more on his upbringing. I think that's pretty evident and people will probably criticize me for this, for delving more deeply into his development and his family instead of his actual tenure as Governor. But I decided, I was more interested in where he came from, his dad, more on how he grew up within that family.

Bush did provide you with some contacts?
He did give me a few names, some of whom I suppose he thought would be innocuous or flattering. His Little League coach was one of those, and he turned out to be symbolically perfect. This elderly gentleman, out in Midland, was saying things that were really indicative of Bush as an adult. He said, "He wasn't the best Little League player in the world, he was almost afraid of the ball, but he was in on every play. He was just always there." He couldn't hit to save his life, apparently, but he was the catcher — you always need a catcher, the catcher is in on every play. I don't know if you want to read it that way, but I took that it to be almost symbolic: Bush is always there, he's always in on every play, he's omnipresent, maybe not the most important player, but he's surrounded himself by a team, and he gets to play.

And then the coach said to me, he realized that he was probably coaching the richest Little League catcher in the world. His dad was obviously a millionaire. That's something I'd never thought about. There are all these stories that come out of the Bush camp about the family emerging in this West Texas moonscape and carving their way up, almost this Horatio Alger kind of story. In fact, I know now, and I hope people will know better after reading the book, those stories aren't really accurate.

Bush's more than comfortable family circumstances are a recurrent motif.
Well, when Karl Rove and these campaign people say that "Bush understands Bubba because he *is* Bubba," that's not entirely true. I've been around the state enough to think I know "Bubba" just a little bit, and Bubba doesn't go out after an enormous family tragedy and play a round of golf. (That's not really an indictment, it's just an observation. I hope I wrote the book in mostly a neutral fashion.)

Bubba doesn't date Oleg Cassini's daughter, Bubba doesn't date Tricia Nixon (when Tricia Nixon was the daughter of the current President), and Bubba doesn't count among his friends people who are sitting at the higher echelons of industry and commerce and society and education. Bubba isn't born in New Haven, and Bubba doesn't live in the house that's right next door to the Yale president.

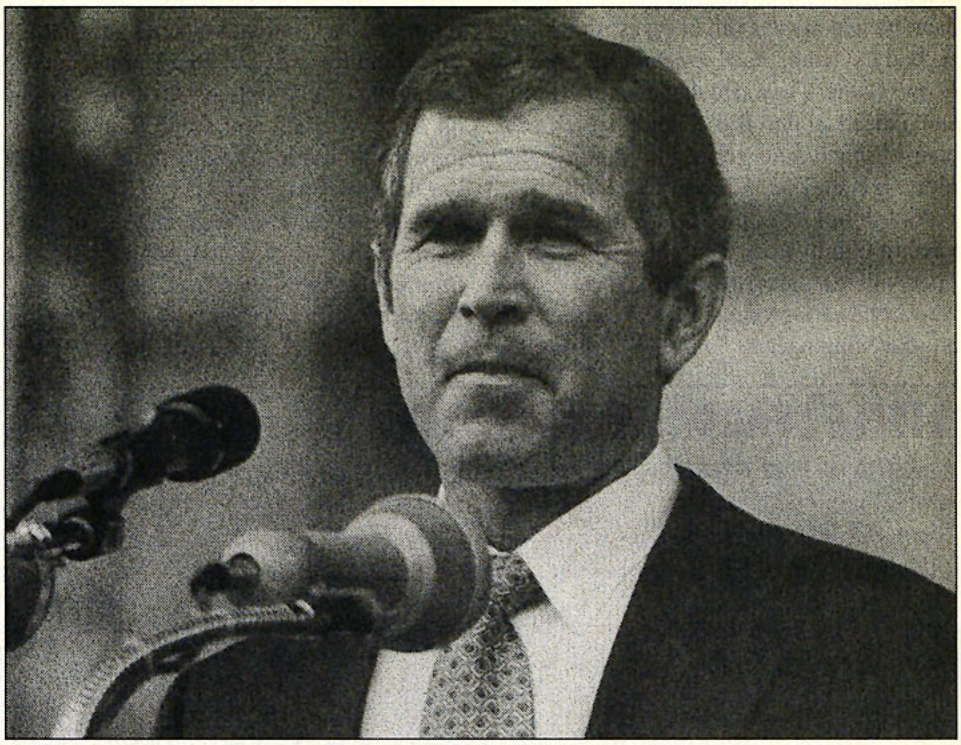
I gather that the Bush people were not exactly enthusiastic about the book, and gave you only minimal access.
I found out from one of his close advisors, that the Bush inner circle had begun referring to me as "Mononucleosis." I assumed it to be a corruption of my last name, since a lot of people have trouble pronouncing my last name. I also figured, well, it's something contagious that doesn't go away real easily. I've never had a chance to confirm that one way or another. □

that the true royal lineage be re-established.

A lot of this is pure-dee horseshit, of course, from the oafish scions of new American money, and especially in the early chapters of *First Son* one often feels sorry for author Minutaglio, because his official subject keeps skittering off the page. There's just not much to say about the young Georgie, after you've pointed out his passion for and incompetence at baseball, his safely wild streak, how little his friends remember of him. This all tells the reader a great deal, but it's mostly between the lines. The family as a whole is indeed more interesting, and in curious ways: the obsession with competition and ranking; the formal negotiations between relatives over family business; the oft-proclaimed resistance to inwardness and reflection. Games and sports seem virtually compulsive: when her young daughter Robin dies of leukemia, Barbara Bush's response is an exhausting round of golf. Smitten by loss, some people throw themselves into work, but in this world, jobs are a hobby or a distraction. Games are real.

There is also little of George W.'s own beliefs, except as they advance the narrative. When he finally decides to run for governor of Texas, his chosen issues (tort reform, welfare reform, law and order, local control of schools) seem less precisely the convictions of the candidate than of surveyed Republican focus groups and suburban swing voters, which is of course why they work. Minutaglio notes this platform, Bush's broadcast of it, and moves on, to campaign style and pace. He has grasped that particular ideas don't really mean much to Bush himself, except as strategy, and if the need arose he could just as easily exchange them for something else. Those looking to discover George W. Bush's convictions should look elsewhere; what he *stands for* — that is, the people and interests he represents — are everywhere present in this book. Overwhelmingly, they ain't you and me.

Yet despite the lackluster central figure, a handful of secondary characters draw attention. There is the mysterious Doug Wead, a still-persistent Bush advisor on the Christian Right who, it turns out, was the catalyst for the legendary dismissal of John Sununu from the first Bush White House, and apparently still has the Governor's ear.



▲ *The newly sworn-in Texas Governor, 1995* Alan Pogue

There is the lamentably wasting-away, Lear-like Bob Bullock, who rails against fellow Democrat Ann Richards and her Hollywood friends, and somehow comes to a deathbed alliance with the alien Bush family, perhaps (Minutaglio suggests) because of an unexpected emotional connection with Bush the father. There is Barbara Bush, the apparently sedate matron whom her sons make clear is the real enforcer in the family. And there is even the minor tragic figure of Poppy Bush himself, the real government wonk, permanent yes-man from Congress to U.N. to C.I.A. to presidency, now rapidly being abandoned both by events and his son's campaign, which looks more and more for its symbolism to Reagan the Winner rather than to Bush the Loser. One after another of the Republican hangers-on longingly describe George W. as "really a Reaganite," and what they mean is, he's not like his dad.

Or at least they hope so. Columnist George Will demanded and received first shot at *First Son*, and instead of renewing his mewling complaint that the Candidate lacks *gravitas*, Will acknowledged that the book confirms George W. is no "intellectual" — but then neither, insisted Will, was FDR or Reagan. To that one can only say: there are apples, and there are oranges, and there are also kumquats.

The demagogic defenders of "Western Civilization" and "high intellectual standards" are now reduced to proposing ignorance in a president as really not that bad, that bozos too have their virtues. So it is that Edmund Morris' meretricious new biography is finally comforted by what he memorably calls Ronald Reagan's "encyclopedic ignorance," insisting that the Emperor — founder of a mighty new age for the Imperial Republic — was clothed with virtue under all that nakedness. The Emperor's devoted disciples dearly want to believe they have found a new champion in Texas, nekkid as a babe. They may well be right. □

ACLU
CENTRAL TEXAS CHAPTER
invites you to our noon Forum
the last Friday of every month.
Furr's Cafeteria Banquet Room
in Northcross Mall, Austin.
Call (512) 459-5829
For information.

Curtain Rising

Nic Nicosia and the Artifice of Real Life

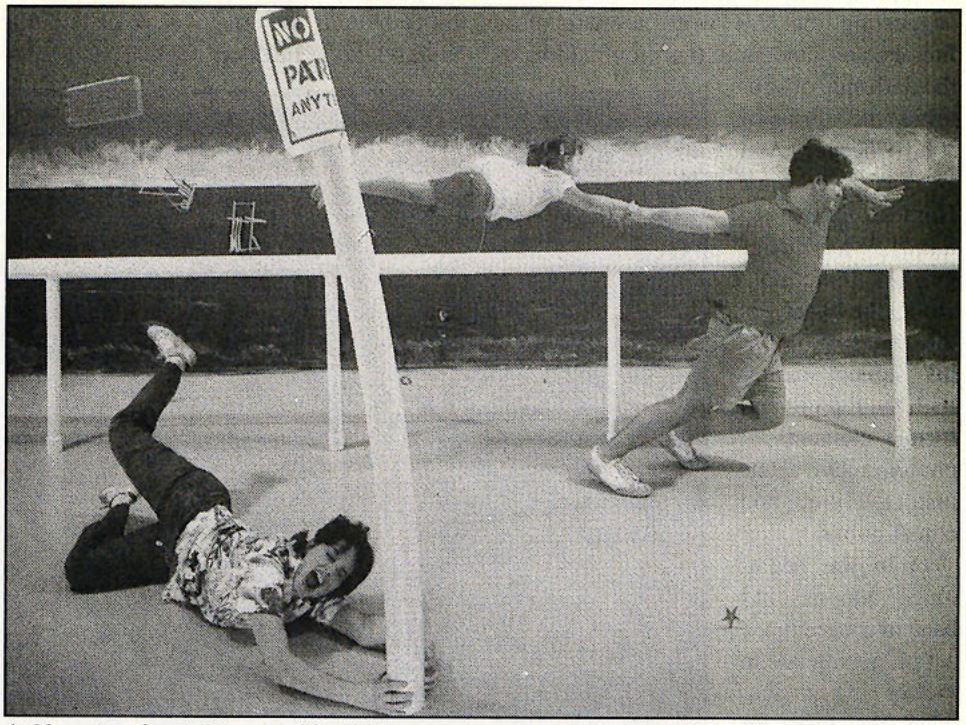
BY SAUNDRA GOLDMAN

NIC NICOSIA:
Real Pictures, 1979-1999.
Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston.
Through November 28.

It is morning in Middletown, a mythical place that is also a pun on Middleton, the Dallas neighborhood which is home to the artist Nic Nicosia. It is middle America, white suburbia, the setting for *Middletown Morning,* Nicosia's film rendition of a typical morning in the life of an artist. Not any artist, but a suburban artist who also happens to be a husband and a father, thereby subverting the myth of the starving, promiscuous, drunken bohemian. For that matter, Nicosia's portrait also completely undermines the more contemporary stereotype, of the urban studio loft dweller, who wears a lot of black clothing and shops at Soho's Dean & DeLuca.

Nicosia has filmed this piece in his home city of Dallas — where, as in many Western cities, residential neighborhoods can look just like the 'burbs. The film features daily rituals: fetching the papers and then crawling back into bed with your spouse, only to be interrupted by the telephone ringing, the baby crying. It is Anytown on any morning with any baby (the film's baby is called only "Baby"). But it is also a specific tale of an artist living in the heartland, and trying to have a viable career in a profession centered in New York.

Middletown Morning begins as the neighborhood boys deliver the local paper in their red wagon (walking anachronisms even in Middletown). The artist pokes his head over the fence and lets them know that *The New York Times* arrived ten minutes ago: a real paper from a real city, *the* real city, one hour ahead of Texas time and light years ahead in artistic sophistication. The artist negotiates a relationship between his domestic life in this provincial location and the professional domain of the New York art world — which comes roaring into his home through a review of his work in the paper and through the telephone, in an agonizing conversation with his dealer. "I'm living out here in Middletown," says the artist (played by Nicosia himself, who more often uses friends as actors). "This isn't annoyance. It's insecurity."



▲ *Near (modern) Disaster #8, 1983*

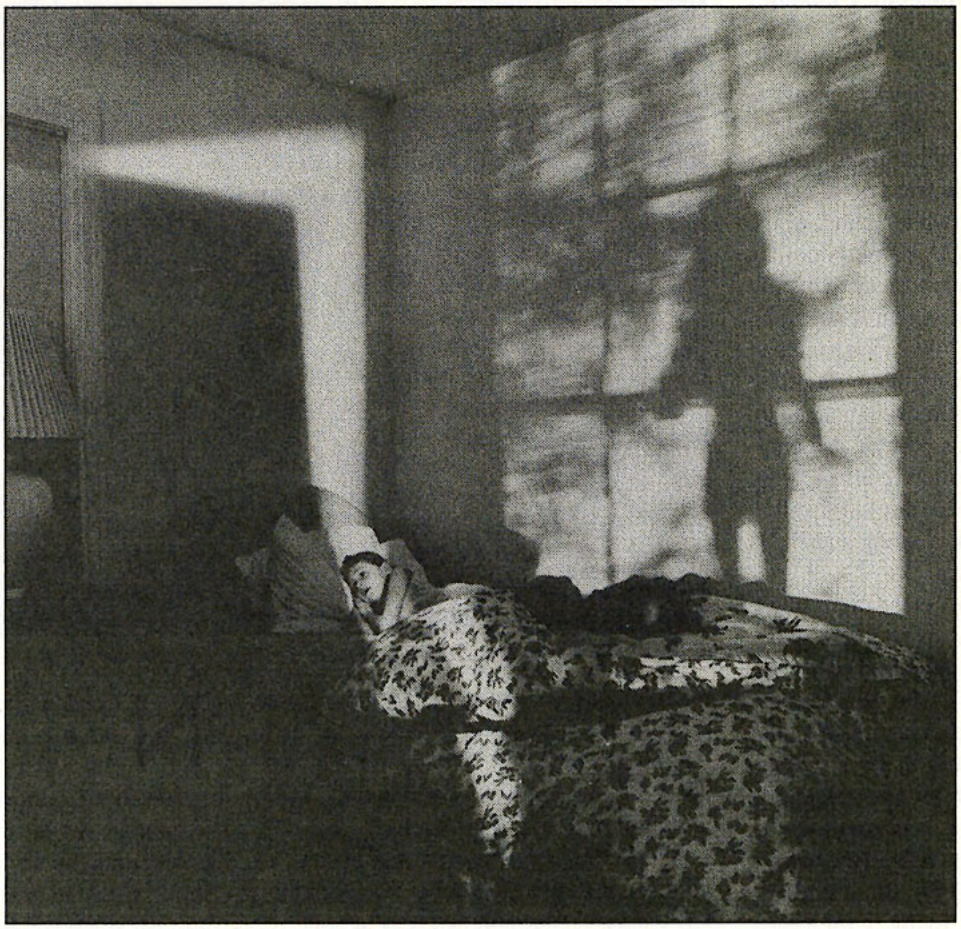
Nicosia's suburban-artist paranoia is of course not limited to the heartland, but exists in arts communities throughout the United States, especially those in close proximity to New York — Boston and Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. — all who endure in the shadow of Manhattan. Far removed from even the shadow of the shadow, Nicosia uses his location to his artistic advantage. While he may be paranoid about his chosen home, he is unwavering in his commitment to record and comment on it. Having lived most of his life within a few miles of this spot (born in Dallas, Nicosia attended Denton's University of North Texas and the University of Houston), the artist focuses on what he knows best, what immediately surrounds him. Doing so, he renders a poignant, humorous portrait of American suburban life.

Nicosia's films are being screened as part of a mid-career survey exhibition, "Nic Nicosia: Real Pictures, 1979-1999," currently at Houston's Contemporary Art Museum. There is an appropriate time in an artist's life for a such show: when he or she has gone beyond the promise of clever youth, when the work begins to seem of a piece, when it begins to evolve into a mature vision — and yet maintains the energy and vitality of the early work. This is now true of the photography and film *oeuvre* of Nic Nicosia. As his work has developed, it has become deeper and more complex.

The exhibition is neatly organized into series or cohesive bodies of work, re-enacting Nicosia's development. Each new series comes quickly on the heels of the last, yet demonstrates that Nicosia has carefully and deliberately moved from one set of problems and issues to the next. He has tried on one element of photographic practice at a time, beginning with the exploration of illusion and implied space, and

moving to situations, character, and themes — from staged sets, to people acting on the sets, to characters and psychological drama.

By happy coincidence, Nicosia's show occurs as *American Beauty,* the Sam Mendes/Alan Ball film, is on view at multiplex theaters in malls nationwide, suggesting that his work is part of a literary and cinematic tradition exploring the dark side of suburbia (the stories of John Cheever, Ann Beattie, and A.M. Homes come to mind). What distinguishes Nicosia's work, however, is the integration of his subject matter with the themes and formal elements of photography, art history, film, and comic books.



▲ *Untitled #7, 1991*

From the beginning, Nicosia has been interested in the act of looking and in viewer expectation: what we take for granted as we observe the world in quick glances. The earliest piece in the show ("Untitled," 1979) is a photograph onto which the artist has drawn a lawnmower, an air conditioning unit, a tree, and a shadow of that tree falling across the front of the house. Because the image has been rephotographed, creating one smooth surface, one does not immediately notice that these items have been superimposed. You have to look carefully; and when you realize the photograph has been altered, you understand the artist is playing a game, asking you to question your own habits of looking, and to examine your assumptions about the accoutrements of domestic life.

Nicosia continued to manipulate viewer expectation through trickery and illusion, in works that purposefully align him with early modernist painters, specifically Matisse and Picasso. In "Wall Paper" (1981), Nicosia mimics Matisse's "Red Studio," playing with spatial depth through the use of the complementary colors red and green. Where Matisse used the push/pull of opposites to flatten out space on the canvas, Nicosia creates an impressive illusion of deep space in the literally flat photograph by combining the effects of color with the representation of doors opening onto a series of rooms. Nicosia also applied actual paper to the photographed wall (hence the title). Because we expect to see paint on the walls, we assume that is what is there — until we look carefully and notice the masking tape holding it all together.

In later work, informed by his undergraduate study in film, Nicosia refers to the deceptive devices of the movie set. In "Near (modern) Disaster #8" (1983), he has suspended a girl by a cable as if she were flying, without attempting to hide the cable, thereby exposing the fictions of film. The fakery is exacerbated by the obviously painted seascape in the background and the flying umbrellas (actually the paper parasols one finds floating in mixed drinks). In the *Near (modern) Disaster* series, Nicosia also began working with actors, choreographing their movements on staged sets. The antics and facial expressions are deliberately campy and artificial, and the work evokes a zany body motion, capturing the players at just the right moment as they stumble and glide across the sets.

As Nicosia's work progressed, his focus shifted from habits of looking to outright voyeurism. He roams the suburban landscape, his camera catching a moment in a neighbor's yard — and we stop to take another look. In the *Love and Lust* series (1990-1991), Nicosia explores the dramas inside the boxy houses lining suburban streets: the sexual dramas, viewed through an opening in the bushes or an unobtrusively open door. In the nighttime scene of "Love and Lust #1," a young woman poses in a two-piece bathing suit — hand on hip, head thrown back, bra straps pulled down over her shoulders — as an older man sits back in his chair, holding a coffee cup, smiling, with his legs slightly spread. The woman is illuminated only by a porch light that serves as a spotlight, creating a stage on which she performs — not only for her admirer, but for us, the peeping-Tom viewers, peering in through an opening in the trees.

In Nicosia's *Untitled* series of 1991-1992, all of the pictures are set at night, allowing dramatic lighting effects and suggesting the strange demons of suburbia after dark. In one photograph, a small girl curls up in the corner of her bed in the corner of her room, swallowed up by the large

space, lit only by a crack of light coming through the door. Through her window, a large silhouette looms over her bed: Barbie, the spectre of female perfection foreshadowing the girl's future. During the period covered by this exhibition, Nicosia raised two daughters, and in his early work, he referred occasionally to the two-dimensional world of coloring books. As he watched his children grow, he addressed childhood sexuality in the nuclear household, and the many dangers facing children in this seemingly banal environment. A young girl in a bathing suit comes face to face with an older man; teenage boys have nothing better to do than pick a fight; at a watering hole, a group of children discover a corpse floating among the rocks.

In his films, Nicosia takes images and ideas from his still photographs and sets them in motion. In *Middletown* (1997, not to be confused with *Middletown Morning*), the artist drives around his neighborhood, circling the same block again and again, catching the same people out of the corner of the camera's lens on each pass. Often the car comes just close enough to allow a guess at what we see, but not close enough to stop and stare and get details; then he turns the corner and moves on. Nicosia recreates the experience of wandering suburban streets, barely noticing the daily occurrences of people working in their gardens and children playing in the street, or the occasional out-of-place businessman walking down the road.

In *Moving Pictures* (1998), Nicosia goes a step further and takes his camera inside a colonial style house, zooming in from the bright, sunny day to the artificially lit darkness. Figures, going about their daily business, move in and out of rooms. A woman in heels sways back and forth as she stirs a pot on the stove, a young boy shoots and maims dolls with a toy gun, and the body of a busty teen-age girl travels from pool table to stairwell.

In 1989, Nicosia began taking portrait commissions, triggering his interest in the way people present themselves for the camera. In his series *Act 1-9* (1994), black-and-white photographs are stripped down to one or two people inside a spotlight. For "Act 9," the artist himself dressed up in stage makeup, transforming himself, in appearance and spirit, into a much older man.



▲ *Real Pictures #11, 1988*

In "Act 2," there is only a chair behind a scrim and two empty spotlights in front of it, waiting to be filled. For Nicosia, every moment, every scene, is a stage waiting for something to happen, waiting for a real-life actor to present himself. Step right up, he seems to say, into the glaring spotlight of American life. □

Austin writer and art historian Saundra Goldman is at work on a book about the artist Hannah Wilke.

"Nic Nicosia: Real Pictures, 1979-1999" will travel to the Dallas Museum of Art, where it will be on view from May 25 through August 27, 2000.

The Okie from Texas

BY DICK HOLLAND

Sometimes my friend Bobby comes over and we listen to country music. Bob was a football player in White Oak, and I served some time in Longview, so we come by this impulse naturally. We both like the old style music, and I expect that we get a little arcane at times, comparing the nuances of Willie Nelson's version of "Hello Walls" with that of Faron Young, or arguing the fine points of which backing band was superior, Buck Owens' (The Buckaroos) or George Jones' (The Jones Boys). My wife leaves the music area (the kitchen) at some point, saying something like, "There's nothing more dangerous than a couple of smart rednecks." Usually I feel flattered.



Valerie Fowler

Often, perhaps under the inspiration of an adult beverage or two, either Bob or I will say something really adolescent, like, "Don't you think Hank Williams probably really was from Texas?" This mode of cultural appropriation comes so easily to us and issues forth with such generosity of intent, it's easy to forget that this way of thinking, taken a step further, is what gives Texas patriots a bad reputation with our neighbors in Colorado or Mexico (Old and New). I have met any number of Texas ladies who think that Santa Fe is cute and might enthusiastically back an invasion staged from someplace like Hereford or Muleshoe.

This cultural imperative to claim the good things for ourselves looms large in Texas myth building. For instance, let's say you have a favorite black Texas musician from the thirties or forties, who hightailed it to California or Kansas City or New York in order to make any kind of living at all, and in all honesty, to get the hell out of his home state. Charles Brown and Teddy Wilson come to mind. Card-carrying Texas culture boosters consider these legendary figures *pioneers of Texas music* — regardless of how happy the musicians must have been to go north, west, or east.

If you're nimble it works both ways. Coming the other direction, we have been quick to welcome novelist Cormac McCarthy, an import from both New England and the South. We hasten to point out that it was only after the great man landed in El Paso that he found his true subject matter in the horse pens and wasted landscapes of West Texas and Mexico. *All the Pretty Horses* feels like Texas through and through. Oh, and didn't Sam Shepard write something one time in a motel in San Marcos? Isn't a birthplace just kind of a technicality anyway?

This benign imperialism is particularly tempting in country music — it hardly seems right that *any* country artist who connects with us is from someplace else. After all, Bob Wills and Ernest Tubb and Lefty Frizzell and Willie Nelson really *are* from here, and Jimmie Rodgers got to Kerrville as fast as he could, away from the tubercular climes of Meridian, Mississippi. Even that icon of all icons, Hank Williams, played his last paid gig at Austin's Skyline Club. So I am confident of operating on good Texas precedent when I propose that we extend this territorial imperative just one step further: Let's adopt Merle Haggard.

A few weeks back, Merle's two big tour buses were parked outside Stubbs', an Austin club known for its barbeque (out of Lubbock) and good outdoor stage. Before the show, our group ate across the street at Jaime's Spanish Village, a venerable Tex-Mex joint where the Number Four dinner remains precisely the same combination it has been since 1966. We speculated what Merle's first song would be; the leading contenders were "Mama Tried," "Sing Me Back Home," or one of his drinkin' songs, like the splendid "Tonight the Bottle Let Me Down." When Merle and his band — a crack outfit still called The Strangers — opened with "Silver Wings," no one was disappointed.

Merle seemed a little surprised by the size and ardor of the crowd, and after a tentative start, played and sang with a lot of conviction. He was very much part of the band, and you forget that in live performance the vocalist, even if he is Merle Haggard, sometimes becomes almost subsidiary to the instrumental arrangements. (Think of Frank Sinatra being buffeted about by Count Basie.) Haggard wisely holds on to his star veterans and there was a feeling of continuity seeing the great pedal steel/dobro player Norman Hamlet, and, providing the female vocals, the fascinating Bonnie Owens. A few years older than Merle, Bonnie, before she was married to Haggard, was married to Buck Owens. The fact that Merle and Bonnie had a famously "open marriage" before they divorced in 1982 was almost as shocking to traditional country fans as is the fact that she now is integral to his show. This rich life together and apart provided a little extra-musical subtext, as when they tuned up on the Bob Wills classic, "Faded Love." Bonnie's look of longing when the song ended may have been pure country showbiz, but it worked for me.

Indeed, it was this section of the show that set me thinking about Texas adoption papers. When Merle picked up the fiddle it was time for Bob Wills and Jimmie Rodgers, the two Texas patron saints, and this group paid them the compliment of playing it straight and swinging all the way. "Take Me Back to Tulsa" featured the slightly corrected, post-sixties lyric — "poor man picks the cotton, rich man gets the money" instead of "darkie picks the cotton, white man gets the money." But in Birkenstocks or manly footwear, toes were tapping. Jimmie Rodgers' "T.B. Blues" is a great song and perfect for Merle, just recently out of the hospital with pneumonia.

When it was time for his signature numbers, Merle did not disappoint. The plain beauty of his medley of "Tulare Dust" and "Mama Tried" brought to mind the Farm Security Administration Depression-era photographs of California. (Truth to tell, Merle was indeed born in Bakersfield in 1937.) Although most classic country artists' biographies are filled with lachrymose hyperbole, Merle's entire bearing and voice reflect a life of early hardship and poverty. Unlike more publicized country "outlaws," Merle served hard time in San Quentin, and songs like "Branded Man" are filled with palpable shame and resentment.

Accordingly, the subject matter of Haggard's best songs have mostly dealt with bitter memories of growing up and the economic realities of tough times. These tunes rarely stray into sentimentality, and the powerful lyrics of "Hungry Eyes" and "If We Make It Through December" are blunt reminders of his roots. There are those who think it is a short step into the questionable realm of Merle's political statements. I suppose that his anti-anti-war anthem of the Vietnam era, "The Fightin' Side of Me" is pugnacious, but it now sounds just dated, and he seldom performs it. On the other hand, he delivered a strong version of another exercise in nostalgia, "Are the Good Times Really Over?," with its fond look back at an America "before Nixon lied to us on TV."

About this time in the evening a little breeze blew through Stubbs' canopied back yard, hinting that our summer of '99 mini-dust-bowl weather might soon be passing. In the sky was a fingernail new moon. Merle's final tip of the hat to Texas music was a stirring rendition of Lefty Frizzell's swing classic, "Always Late With Your Kisses." If Merle's fluid and spare vocal style is based on anyone, it is Lefty, a native of Corsicana and a true innovator, labeled by Scottish novelist and country music writer Duncan McLean (in his book *Lone Star Swing*) as "the thinking man's Hank."

Haggard's last number was, of course, the obligatory "Okie From Muskogee," greeted by the world-wide Howl of Affirmation. Maybe they don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee, but I've heard they just might on Merle's bus. As we walked toward home down Red River, the pungent smell was wafting gently in the breeze. □

Dick Holland is editor of Larry L. King: A Life in Letters, *just published by TCU Press. In April, 1997, he read his paper, "It All Began the Day My Conscience Died: the Cheatin' Song From Prototype to Post-Modern," to an American Studies seminar at the University of Hong Kong. Three months later the British Crown Colony handed itself over to the People's Republic of China.*

ANDERSON & COMPANY
COFFEE
TEA SPICES
TWO JEFFERSON SQUARE
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78731
512-453-1533

Send me your list.

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ Zip _____

PROTECT YOUR RIGHTS.
Join the
Texas Civil Rights Project
$25 a year. Volunteers needed.
2212 E. MLK, Austin, TX 78702.
Call (512) 474-5073
for more information.



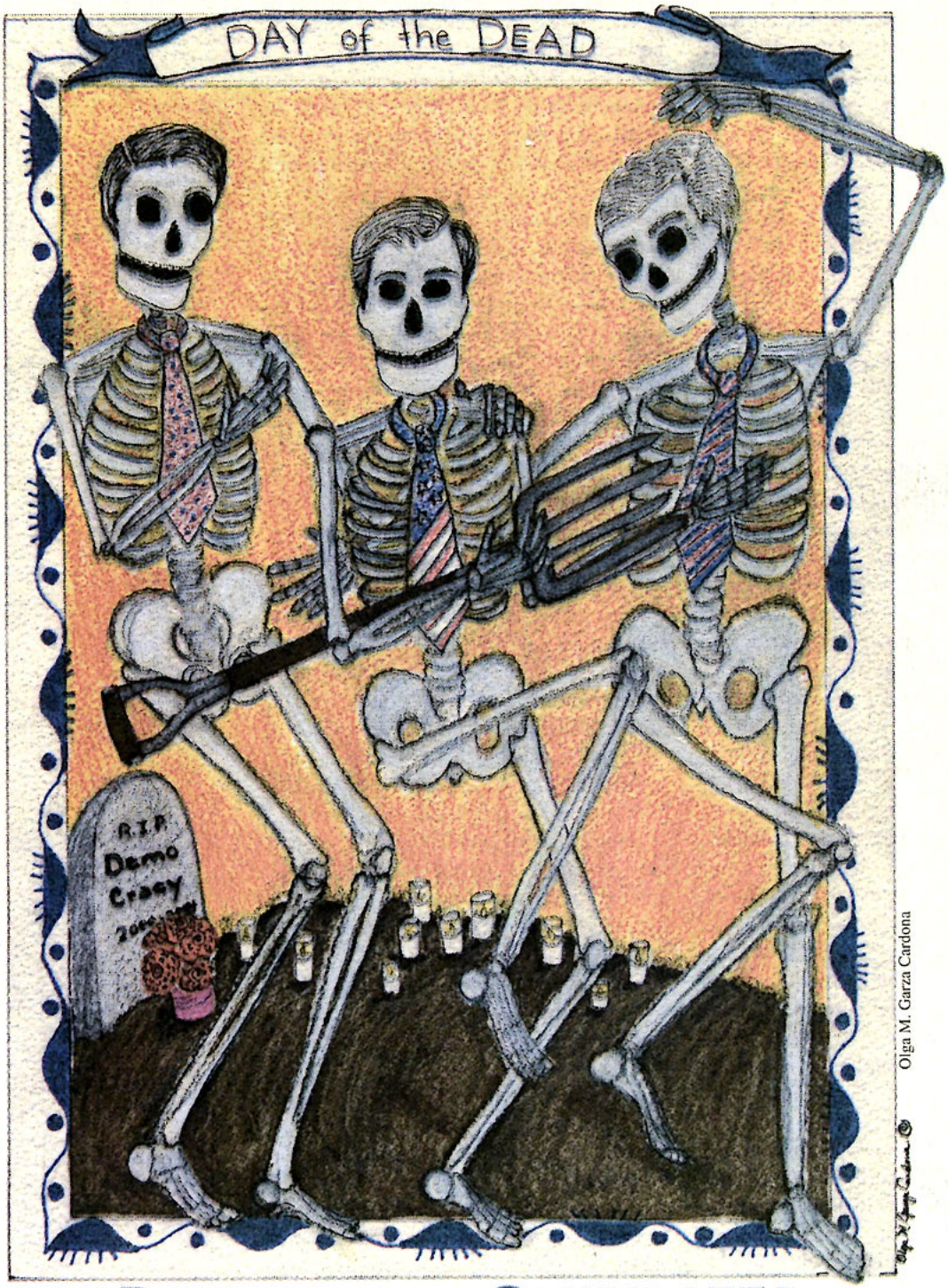
BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND.

It took a public outcry and an act of Congress to save the gray wolf from literally vanishing. But we did it. Today, a lot of other creatures face similar extinction. So please, contact us to find out how you can help protect other endangered species.

SIERRA CLUB
FOUNDED 1892

85 Second Street,
San Francisco, CA 94105
(415) 977-5653
www.sierraclub.org

©Lee Kline



Olga M. Garza Cardona ©

DANCE OF THE CANDIDATES