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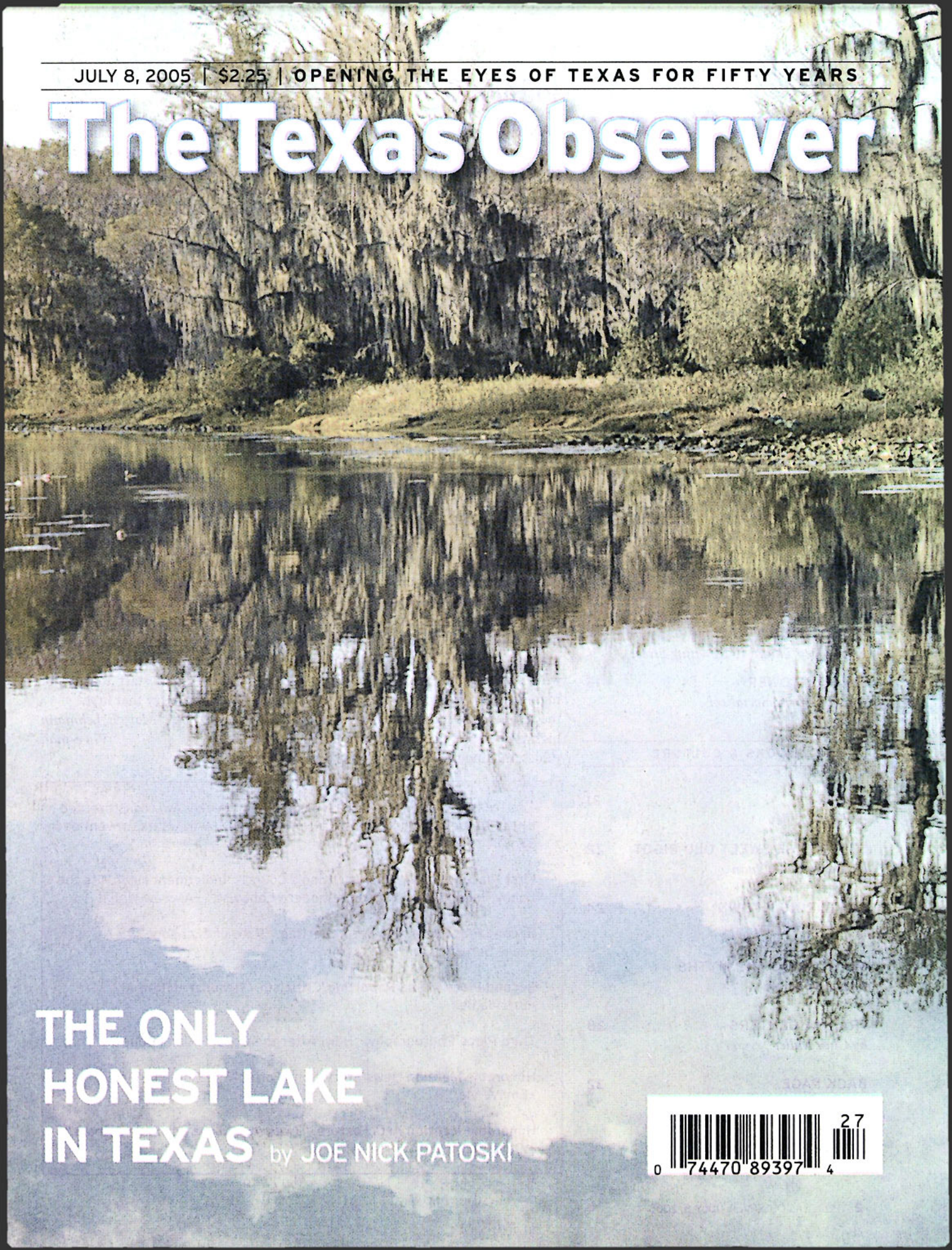
The Texas Observer



THE ONLY HONEST LAKE IN TEXAS

by JOE NICK PATOSKI

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JULY 8, 2005

The Texas Observer

FEATURES

DEPARTMENTS

BOOKS & CULTURE

Cover photo by Ron Munden

Dialogue

TAXING

Sometimes knowledgeable people get things wrong. In the June 24 issue, the *Observer* asks us to look at the numbers of "the brainy folks" at Center for Public Policy Priorities, who have come up with an income tax as the revenue solution that could produce $18 billion a year, fund education, and pay for a 90-percent cut in property taxes ("A Taxing Exercise").

Not too brainy—in fact all wrong. Knowledgeable people go wrong in failing to check out where existing taxes are not working and make every effort to deal with them first. If the car engine is clanking, you don't just pull up to a gas station for a better grade of gas. You look under the hood.

The machinery of this plan sounds peculiar. What sounds wrong is that the legislators, not known for relieving the financial hardship of ordinary people, are rushing to lower the property tax drastically. To make people happy? Hardly. They're doing it to make land dealers happy. Lowering property taxes increases sales profits, which drives the price of property higher, which all too soon pulls up the property tax anyway. Conversely, high property taxes would lower land values, making sales less profitable but property more affordable again.

The tax on improvements usually is too high, but that isn't the part of the property tax that legislators want to keep as low as possible. It's the tax on land, the part that doesn't depreciate, whose location value the community creates but the landowner cashes in on. Some of that free lunch could supply the needed school revenue.

The real estate lobbyists are the brainy folks. They know these facts and hope that the public never catches on to the fact that the ills of too-rapid growth—the skyward price spiral, gentrification, country-gobbling suburbs, and speculation—each stalls in their tracks when a good bit of the profit is taken out of land deals. And the only way to do that is to tax it out.

If you're in favor of a new tax to pay for schools, make it a state tax on land location. Even though our legislators are opposed to any property tax rate increases, remind them that it is the presence of adequate schools that adds so much to land (location) values. A state location tax for improving schools could soon start to pay for itself. We ought to try that first.

Mary L. Lehmann
Via e-mail

The Texas Observer won an impressive six AltWeekly Awards, presented by the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies (AAN) at its convention in San Diego last month:

First Place Political Column, "King's Court," "Indictment Heat Hits the Lobby," and "Texas' First Postmodern Lobbyist," –Andrew Wheat

Second Place Investigative Reporting, "Rate of Exchange"
–Jake Bernstein and Dave Mann

Second Place Media Reporting/Criticism, "Deconstructing Al"
–Brenda Bell

Third Place Photography, "Haiti After the Coup,"–Alan Pogue

Honorable Mention News Story-Long Form, "The Golden Hour,"
–Emily Pyle

Honorable Mention Arts Feature, "Twas Awe Like a Tewibble Dweam,"
– Dave Hickey

What Goes Around, Comes Around

It was easy to appreciate the cyclical nature of Texas politics—and even find some hope—sharing a window ledge seat in the House chamber with Rep. Jim McReynolds (D-Lufkin) on the night of June 28th, a week into the Lege's special session on school finance. The House had entered its 12th hour of debate on an education package. After this go-around, legislators will have attempted to fix school finance three times in little more than a year; twice since September 2004 when District Judge John Dietz ruled that the Lege had failed the children of Texas.

The Republicans who seized power in 2002 are struggling with an obligation put into place only a few years after they last ran Texas, more than a century ago. In 1875, state constitutional convention delegates passed the following: "A general diffusion of knowledge being essential to the preservation of the liberties and rights of the people, it shall be the duty of the Legislature of the State to establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of free public schools."

McReynolds, a former history professor at Stephen F. Austin State University, is well placed to savor the irony. "I'll rein in the corporate greed," he paraphrases Governor Jim Hogg, pointing to the large portrait that hangs to the left of the speaker's podium. "What we are doing tonight is a variation on a theme," notes the rural East Texas Democrat.

In 1836, Texas' Declaration of Independence listed the lack of a public school system as one of the reasons for the revolt against the Mexican government. Subsequent governments took steps toward such a system but squandered the money and land set aside for it to corruption and greedy corporate interests. In 1873, a grassroots farmers' organization called the Grange organized in Texas. Two years later, the Grangers and their allies would comprise half the delegates at the Constitutional Convention. The Grangers believed that every child had a natural right to a good education and that government's job was to defend its citizenry from exploitation by economic elites.

More than a century later the Gilded Age has returned. The people's voice is but a whisper in the Texas Legislature, drowned out by powerful economic interests and a radical ideology that believes public education is from the pit of hell. Republican moderates, well placed to solve the school finance problem, are shut out of the debate. During the regular session, Rep. Bob Griggs (R-North Richland Hills), a former school superintendent, spoke passionately in favor of adequately and equitably funding public education. This time, he isn't even recognized to ask a question of the bill's author. "Griggs just called it like it was and pissed them off," says McReynolds. Now, rumor has it, Griggs won't be running for reelection. (He says he'll decide in September.)

Regardless of what happens this special session, the current leadership has proven itself hostile to fulfilling its constitutional obligation. But then, it might not be necessary. The state Supreme Court begins oral arguments on July 6 in the appeal of Judge Dietz's ruling, and Governor Rick Perry, who is one pick away from having appointed a majority of the court, has said publicly that the Supremes won't uphold it.

Gov. Hogg knew how this story plays out. That's why, after leaving office, he successfully campaigned for a prohibition to keep corporate money out of state politics. Today, a century later, there is overwhelming evidence that the GOP machine and its corporate funders violated that prohibition to obtain power in 2002.

Where is the next Grange? The next Hogg? "We are in a cycle right now," says McReynolds, the historian. "Will it come back around? Sure, it will. The American people have a built-in gyroscope." —**JB**

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White Robes and Pink Slips

FOR PETE'S SAKE In late May, Dallas Congressman Pete Sessions filed HR 2726, the "Preserving Innovation in Telecom Act." The bill might more aptly be called the "Preserving the Sessions Family Bottom Line Act."

To the telecommunications industry's dismay, cities around the nation, such as Austin and Philadelphia, have plans to introduce low-cost broadband access to their citizens. From the perspective of the municipalities that want to provide this service, access to information (whether at a library or, in the Information Age, at a laptop), is a public good, so it is within government's purview to make it as widely available as possible at the lowest possible price. Instead of waiting for telecoms to install the technology for broadband access, the municipality would build the infrastructure itself, as it typically does with other public goods such as roads, and sell access wholesale. But, of course, Sessions comes from Texas, where we think differently.

If passed, HR 2726 would ban municipalities from providing low-cost Internet access to residents in places where telecoms already provide a "substantially similar service." Municipalities that already offer such services would be grandfathered into the act. Before his career in the House, Sessions was an executive at telecom giant SBC Communications, formerly Southwestern Bell. He was with the company for 16 years, starting out at Bell Labs, according to his online biography. His wife, Juanita, is currently vice-president for billing at SBC, the *National Journal* reports.

According to the congressman's financial disclosure statement filed in 2004 for the previous year's assets, Sessions owns stocks in SBC, AT&T, and Verizon, with a combined value of between $2,003 and $31,000. These three companies would reap the benefits if the government were prohibited from providing Internet services such as citywide wireless access. Also disclosed on the form, his wife has between $500,001 and $1,000,000 in SBC stock options. Gina Vaughn, the congressman's spokesperson, says the numbers have changed since the completion of the mandatory disclosure in May 2004. Those options are now worthless, Vaughn maintains, due to fluctuations in the stock price. This assertion could not be independently verified. According to the disclosure, Juanita Sessions has other stock in SBC as well as in Bell South and WorldCom, now called MCI. Those stocks' combined value was listed between $2,003 and $31,000.

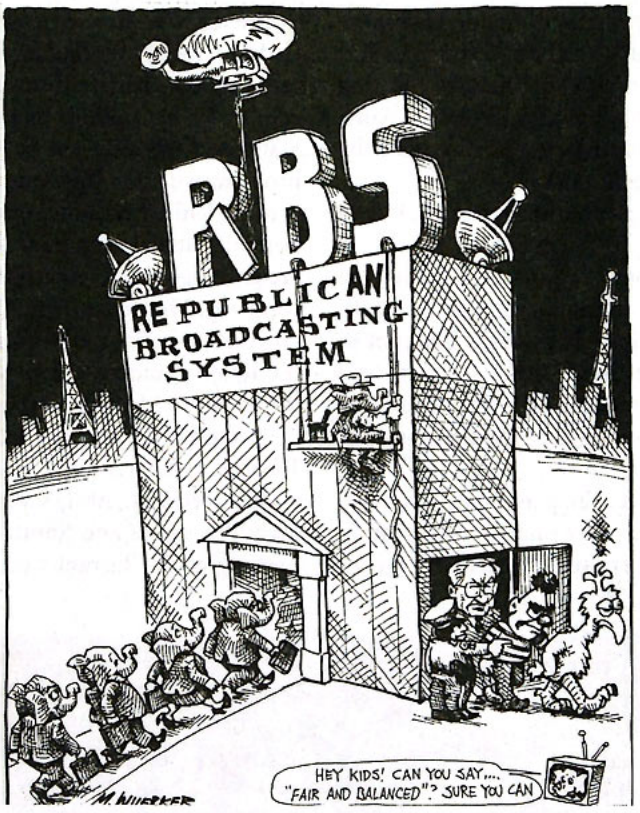
Vaughn denied that Congressman Sessions' holdings should be seen as improper. "I really don't see it as a conflict of interest," she said. When pressed on the fact that these companies would gain from such legislation and, by extension, so would her boss, she said, "I don't think that's a good argument."

She insisted that the legislation was good for the economy because high-tech companies would gain, not just telecoms. Sessions has stock for at least one of his dependent children in Lucent Technologies, a high-tech firm that designs software to power communications networks. Lucent used to be known as Bell Labs, where Sessions began his career. The congressman's dependent children—aged 11 and 15—also own stocks in SBC, Bell South, AT&T, AT&T Wireless, and Qwest. Excluding Juanita's $500,001 to $1,000,000 in SBC stock options, the entire family's telecom and Lucent stocks have a combined value between $8,014 and $126,000.

OFF THE RESERVATION Bibles were still warm from the swearing-in ceremony on the Coushatta Reservation in Elton, Louisiana, when the new tribal council took its first official act—firing Texas lawyer Kent Hance. Hance, Scarborough, Wright, Ginsburg & Brusilow had been retained by the tribal council that was thrown out of office in a May 28 election and replaced by a reform council. Holdover Council Member David Sickey led a two-member reform faction to a complete rout of the five-member tribal council, which he claimed mismanaged the tribe's finances. A big part of the mismanagement was the payment of a staggering $32 million in fees to D.C. lobbyist Jack Abramoff and his partner Mike Scanlon. Abramoff and Scanlon, close associates of House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, are under investigation for billing six casino-rich Indian tribes an estimated $81 million. The Coushattas are the largest victims of the billing scandal. And there was more than the $32 million. Contributions that Abramoff directed the ousted Coushatta council to make, as "the cost of doing business in Washington," are being examined by the new council and will almost certainly exceed $2 million.

Hance's firing was reported by Shawn Martin of *The American Press* in Lake Charles, La. The Hance, Scarborough law firm is accused of no wrongdoing. But the 850-member tribe that owns Louisiana's biggest casino was a big profit center for the small Austin-based law firm. Hance was paid almost $1.3 million from June 25, 2004, through May 2, 2005, according to Sickey. A final total could be higher because the new tribal council looked only at wire transfers larger than $20,000. Hance also represented the ousted council in tribal court, where Sickey was suing to schedule a recall election and reassume control of the tribal police force the previous council handed over to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. ("More lawyers than anyone has ever seen in our little tribal courthouse," Sickey told the *Observer* in November.)

The firing probably didn't surprise Hance. "Kent Hance doesn't represent me ...," Sickey told the *Observer* ("The Pimping of the Presidency," June 10, 2005.) "He represents Lovelin Poncho." Poncho, who was the tribal council chair until the reform council was sworn in on June 8, recently admitted to the *Observer* that he was wrong when he said he hadn't visited the White House in May 2001 in exchange for a $25,000 contribution to Americans for Tax Reform. He had, a source close to him said, "revisited the issue" shortly before the May 28 election. Also fired was Tribal Court Judge T.J. Davis who had handed down several rulings in favor of the ousted council. And the police chief installed by the BIA. And Texas plaintiffs' lawyer Joe Kendall, who was handling the tribe's suit against Abramoff and his Washington law firm. Anyone non-Indian hired by former tribal chair Lovelin Poncho or referred by Kent Hance is officially off the reservation.



WHEN THE KLAN COMES TO TOWN The sign read simply "Event," but the cops in riot gear, the anarchists clad head-to-toe in black, and a small group of people wearing white robes and pointy hats signaled that this was no ordinary happening. At the community center in Tomball, on the northwest edge of Houston, the White Camelia Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Cleveland, Texas, were holding a "lecture and exhibit." Invited were "all those interested in the survival of the White Race," no "muds" or media allowed. Those lucky enough to get past the Klan security at the front door—manned by the likes of Jim Stinson of the hate-punk band Whitewash and John "Cadillac" Thellin, a hard-core Klan leader—were privy to a collection of Klan artifacts and memorabilia. The traveling exhibition featured black-and-white photographs of thousands of Klansmen descending on San Antonio and Dallas in the 1930s; pristine posters of *Birth of a Nation*, D.W. Griffith's 1915 filmic paean to the Klan; Grand Dragon robes; vinyl records of racist music; comic books depicting blacks as subhuman and slave-masters as benevolent caretakers; and all manner of Klan tchotchkes, including a porcelain statue of a robed Klansmen that plays the carol "(Dreaming of a) White Christmas." There were no photos of black men hanging from trees.

Inside the community center, Klansmen and members of the public toured the exhibit beside children and whole families. After about 100 people had viewed the exhibit, Charles Lee, the Grand Dragon of the White Camelia Knights, took to the dais, looking quite Sunday-go-to-meetin' in his suit and tie. Lee, a bald and slight man with an East Texas accent, spoke to the audience on the "true" history of the Klan, which was apparently founded during Reconstruction as a way to ensure the survival of the White race against the tyranny of freed slaves. Contrary to popular belief, Lee contended, the KKK is not a "racist" group but a "racialist" organization along the lines of the NAACP or LULAC designed to ensure that white people have a voice in a nation run amok with multiculturalism and a Jewish-controlled media. The Grand Dragon touched on the woes of immigration ("people coming straight from the jungles"), the war on Iraq (sending Americans to die for Arab ingrates), and even the offshoring of jobs. Lee seized on contemporary working-class worries and spun them into a simple framework of racial hatred.

Outside the civic hall, riot cops stood guard as hundreds of people protested the Klan in a cordoned "free-speech zone." This area seemed reserved for the out-of-town lefties: the International Socialist Organization; the anarchist-oriented Anti-Racist Action (ARA), a group committed to direct action against racism and racists; and the New Black Panther Party. About a block away, a coalition of local churches carried on their own multiracial Klan protest with lots of breaks for prayer and impromptu sermons.

While the church-organized rally was heavy on togetherness and ministry to the Klansmen, the much younger and more militant crowd in the free-speech zone was spoiling for a fight. According to an eyewitness, Steve May of Tomball, four Klansmen approached and threatened a single ARA member. Quickly, other ARAers spotted what was happening and approached the rapidly escalating scene. The Klansmen then fled, chased by a group of about 30 ARA members and supporters, across a field behind the community center and into a restaurant, whose doors were promptly locked. With the KKK members inside the restaurant, a crowd of protestors formed outside, demanding that the

—continued on page 30

FEATURE

The Only Honest Lake in Texas

It looks like a winner has emerged in the struggle for Caddo Lake

BY JOE NICK PATOSKI

A table full of good ol' boys and good ol' girls are having a hoot over lunch at Dawn's, under the bridge where State Highway 43 crosses the western edge of Caddo Lake. One in the crowd claims he's been seeing blue UN flags popping up all over the lake, hearing folks speaking Esperanto and Ebonics, and observing some lake people engaging in secret handshakes—all sure signs the United Nations has taken over Caddo Lake.

"That'll give the general heart palpitations," one big bubba cackles.

The "general" is retired General Vernon Lewis, the lake resident who co-sponsored a resolution along with Ed Smith, the mayor of nearby Marshall, in the 2004 Texas Republican Party platform condemning the Caddo Lake Institute and, through the institute, its president Dwight Shellman and its cofounder and chief financier Don Henley for aligning with the United Nations.

There it is, Article 10 under Environment, Property Ownership, and Natural Resources: "We oppose conservation easements on our natural resources administered by organizations unaccountable to taxpayers and voters. For example, the efforts of the Caddo Lake Institute to act as a surrogate for the UN in gaining control of water rights of Caddo Lake."

The dig was directed at the institute for its role in having Caddo Lake recognized as a wetland of international importance by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (www.ramsar.org) in 1993. Caddo is one of 19 wetland sites in the United States and the only one in Texas to get the designation. The problem with the Republicans' proclamation is that Ramsar is not a United Nations convention, nor does the "important wetland" designation have squat to do with landowners' sovereignty rights. (At least the Caddo Lake Institute was in good company. The Texas Republican party platform also opposed affirmative action, statehood for the District of Columbia, the Kyoto Protocol, the Biodiversity Treaty, and buying land for endangered species, while supporting the "rule of capture" of groundwater and abolishment of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms.)

On March 24, 2004, several months prior to the platform adoption, Lewis and Smith spoke at an emergency townhall meeting of the Tarrant County Republican Assembly in Fort

Caddo Lake

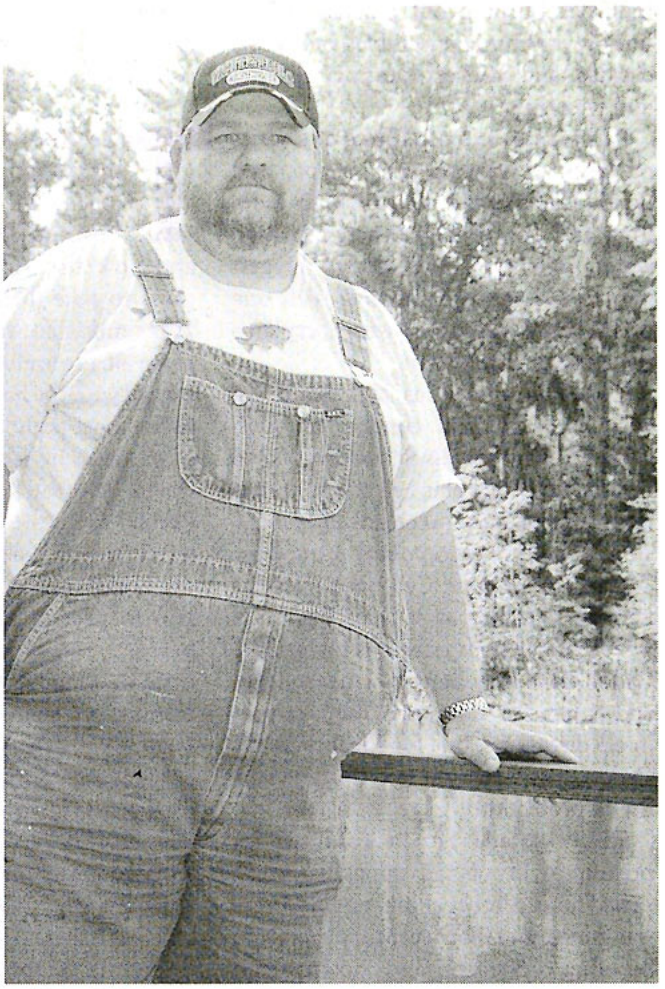
All photos by Ron Munden

Worth on "Seven Flags Over Texas (The UN Is the Seventh Flag)." The announcement for the emergency meeting asks, "Why Is the UN in Texas? Why Do They Want Texas Water? Come Here [sic] about the California-ization of Texas and About the Republicans That Are Helping the Wrong Side."

Robby Speight, a burly character sitting at the lunch table at Dawn's who is president of the Greater Caddo Lake Association, recalls meeting a State Department official at a national lake conference a year ago. The official told him they had a name for people who get their dander up about the United Nations' support of the Ramsar Convention and are forever paranoid about the world body's imminent invasion: "the black helicopter crowd." The State Department official allowed that the case of the retired general and Mayor Smith successfully lobbying to get it written into the Texas Republican Party platform was a little more extreme than usual. Obviously, the State Department official doesn't know Texas.

The lunch crowd at Dawn's is laughing because, for all the ongoing battles between the lake people and the city of Marshall over water rights to Caddo and the fulminations from the black helicopter crowd, the war on Caddo Lake is over. Battles are still being fought and skirmishes are forever, but when all is said and done, the good ol' boys and good ol' girls who live and work on the lake won, and they know it.

Although a last minute state court ruling or political intervention is never out of the question, Caddo Lake as an untapped source for water hustlers is off the table. The water right to 40,000 acre feet that the Army had but never fully utilized when it oversaw an ammunitions plant by the lake, which politicians from the city of Marshall also coveted to sell to an industrial user, is being handed off to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the overseer of the national wildlife refuge being created on the site of the ammo plant, and the Fish & Wildlife Service's interest in water marketing is less than zero.



Robby Speight

Caddo Lake is unlike any other lake in the state. It's the only lake with an honest history because it is the only honest lake in Texas, having formed naturally sometime during the 19th century. It's the only Texas lake with its own body of literature, including *Love Is A Wild Assault* by Elithe Hamilton Kirkland, the twisted, true-to-life romance novel based on the life of Harriet Moore, aka Harriet the Brave and Beautiful and Kishi Woman of Caddo Lake; *Caddo Was ... A Short History of Caddo Lake* by Fred Dahmer, the definitive Caddo Lake book; *Every Sun That Rises*, stories told by Wyatt Moore, another lake sage who was a boatman, fisherman, guide, trapper, raftsman, moonshiner, and roughneck as well as a gifted storyteller; and Jacques D. Bagur's recent *A History of Navigation on Cypress Bayou and the Lakes*, the extensively researched history of boat traffic that has debunked several myths about the lake.

Fine as books may be, full appreciation of Caddo Lake is a two-step program. First, one must reach back in the mind's eye, beyond the printed word, beyond the Great Raft jam on the Red River (most often cited for forming the lake out of the Big Cypress Bayou in the early 1800s), beyond the New Madrid earthquake of 1811, also attributed as the source, and even before to the Caddo Indians and their legend of the chief who had a vision and told his people to move to higher ground in advance of a deadly wall of water that covered their village overnight. Going to Caddo is going all the way back to the beginning of time, when the towering bald cypress—Texas' own redwoods—were common all over the Earth, not just in the few selected nooks and crannies like Caddo Lake where they persist today, bearing witness to the primordial soup that spawned all life.

Next, spray yourself down for mosquitoes, chiggers, and other bugs, walk out on the dock in the back of the cabin you've rented, and take it all in. The foreground is defined by a coating of duckweed floating on the water in a surreal electric lime-green swirl. The background is dominated by a wall of bald cypress soaring skyward. In between, herons and cranes pick their way through the muck to stab and grab a small crappie or some other object of desire while a red-shouldered hawk and a green heron play out a quiet drama as the hawk swoops out of high branches of its tree to hassle the heron for infringing on its space by perching on a branch too close. The give-and-take is accompanied by a noisy soundtrack of

bullfrogs burping out percussive bass lines to rhythmic ensembles of locusts, cicadas, and crickets buzzing, clicking, and whirring.

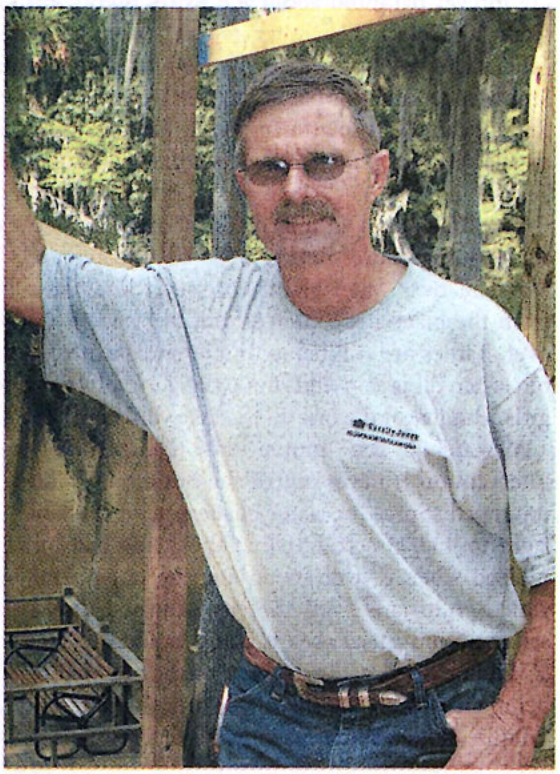
Part swamp and consisting of a series of lakes of varying size, shape, and depth, Caddo Lake is roughly 23 miles long and covers 40,000 acres in high water, making it the second biggest natural lake in the South and easily one of the most inspiring, which explains the Ramsar recognition.

Caddo is almost as significant for what it is not: no condos, no high rises, no chain motels or restaurants, no resorts, no gated, planned communities, no margarita bars, no chains, no pretension, none of the trappings of modern Texas Lake Culture. Cell phone service here is as spotty as it is in Big Bend. The Big Bend comparison is intentional. Caddo Lake may be in northeast Texas and relatively close to urban centers in all directions, but for those who get Caddo, it is a natural jewel just as worthy of protection.

Still, it should not be confused for pristine. A lot of bad things have happened here. Almost all the virgin timber was gone more than a century ago. Dam building upstream and downstream along Cypress Creek all but eliminated floods, which rob the riparian forest of much of the soup of rich nutrients deposited on the topsoil in high water. The lake is downwind of several electricity-generating plants powered by cheap but dirty-burning lignite coal containing mercury. Texas Tech toxicology scientist Thomas Rainwater discovered the highest concentration of mercury ever found in a snake while studying a cottonmouth rattlesnake from Caddo Lake. Consumers are warned to eat no more than 8 ounces of bass or drum from the lake per month due to high levels of contaminants. The presence in the water supply of pharmaceuticals from the chicken processing industry is becoming a concern. The highest level of acid rain west of the Mississippi River has been recorded here. And the City of Marshall still wants to utilize part of its right to draw 16,000 acre feet of water a year just upstream of Caddo to attract an industrial user.

Many of those problems aren't going away soon. It will take time, money, and community consensus to fix them.

This story was originally going to be about Don Henley, Dwight Shellman, and the Caddo Lake Institute they founded together and how the Texas Republican Party came to hate them. Henley is the East Texas musician who spent some of the millions he's earned with the Eagles, one of the most popular bands of all time, to save Henry David Thoreau's Walden Pond. Henley founded the Walden Woods project, which raised $17 million to protect Thoreau's beloved Walden Pond from development, before turning his sights on his own Walden, Caddo Lake, about 25 miles from Linden, the town where he grew up. In 1993, Henley enlisted Shellman, an attorney and his neighbor in Aspen, Colorado, where he keeps a vacation home, to co-found the Caddo Lake Institute (CLI). Shellman moved part-time to Uncertain, pop. 194, the largest community on the lake and, as president and general counsel for the institute, began showing locals how to use science, education, and the courts to protect the lake and their property.



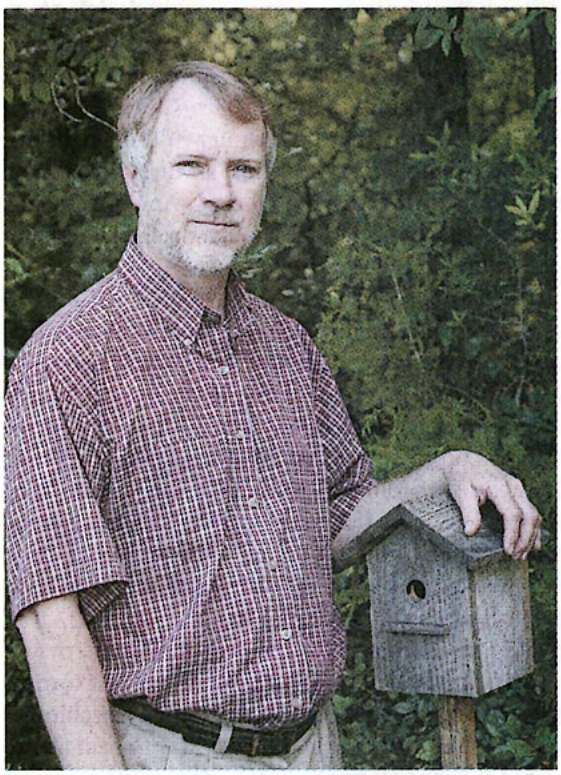
Paul Fortune

This story was also going to be about the vendetta waged by retired General Vernon Lewis, the former head of the Cypress Valley Navigation District, which is responsible for maintaining the lake's boat roads, against Shellman and the CLI. Lewis' field of battle has largely been the op-ed page of the weekly newspaper he co-publishes, the *Lone Star Eagle*. When asked about his dispute with Shellman, General Lewis is blunt. "He's going to go away someday, and when he goes away, this Caddo Lake Institute is going to go away. This is a one-man show and it is all about money and environmental power. They don't give a shit about Caddo lake."

Shellman's sin was to organize various lake interests and challenge the political status quo. The Caddo Lake Institute's initial emphasis was on science, research, and school partnerships to define exactly what the lake is. Much of that accumulated data has been put to use. Shellman raised the question of the consequences for the lake if Marshall utilized its full right to 16,000 acre feet of water taken from just upstream of the lake. Caddo Lake interests protested a proposed power plant for American Electric Power that was eventually sited elsewhere. The institute applied for an in-flow water right for the lake and the Cypress Basin. Several lake residents sued power plants in East Texas for emissions causing mercury contamination. When Marshall tried to switch its water right permit from municipal to industrial use, Shellman litigated the city's ability to do so without a contested hearing all the way to the Texas

Supreme Court. (The case was heard in October 2004. At press time, a decision is still pending.)

But Shellman, who is stepping down at the Caddo Lake Institute at the end of the summer, isn't the story. Neither is the retired general. The longer one lingers on the lake, the clearer it becomes that it's the people in between who will determine the lake's future.



Tom Walker

Shellman is an Aspen lawyer. Paul Fortune grew up on Caddo Lake in a one-room shack on Pine Island Road on Big Cypress Bayou that his family moved into in 1953 following a house fire. "We had no running water; we had no indoor plumbing," he says, but he did learn a lot about fishing and hunting and paddling. "I'm not very educated," he says. "I graduated high school in a class of 12 and I wasn't in the top 10. Caddo Lake has been my bread and butter. There's no other place like it."

A clean-cut, spine-erect go-getter, he followed his father in getting a job at the Lone Star Ammunition Plant, which opened in 1944 and employed as many as 2,400 workers until it ceased operations in 1995. Fortune left the plant in 1980 but never really left the lake, where he builds houses and serves as vice-president of the 700-member Greater Caddo Lake Association. Lately, he's been hanging around the administration building of the ammo plant again, this time to help transform the property from a $44-million Superfund cleanup site to the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge, an 8,500-acre symbol of the lake's future.

"The first time I met Dwight Shellman was six years ago with a group of local people," Fortune remembers as he shows me around the old administration building, where the refuge will be headquartered and the Caddo Lake Institute will lease offices. "We were told this might be a wildlife refuge *if* the community wanted it. Don Henley had the connections, but Dwight said Don didn't want to waste his time and money if the local people don't want it." Fortune and nine others were flown to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge south of Albuquerque, courtesy of Henley, and were sold on the idea.

"We had heard of other uses—a prison, a chicken processing plant, industrial park," he says. "All of that sounded good for the local economy, but they weren't compatible with Caddo Lake right here." Fortune credits Shellman for being "so durn persistent" in making the refuge a reality and recognizes that Shellman's work is almost done.

"For years, Dwight's been retiring. He's like my father—he can't quit. But I think Dwight realizes somebody needs to take the helm, if there is somebody. He wants to find that person to do it. To my knowledge, he hasn't found that person yet."

Shellman could do worse than Fortune. He's one of several lake people I encountered who are passionate about the lake and projects like the refuge, where planning for public access is underway, including wildlife observation areas for hikers, bikers, and equestrians. There's hope the refuge's infrastructure will siphon off some of the $1.2 billion birding and wildlife observation brings into the Texas economy annually, most of it currently being spent along the coast and in the Rio Grande Valley.

Fortune gets almost gaga talking about Harrison Bayou Bottoms, 1,400 acres tucked back in the wildlife refuge that is a rare slice of old-growth hardwood river bottom. The acreage was initially leased from the Army by the Caddo Lake Institute before it was integrated into the national wildlife refuge. "I would like to see a boardwalk into a portion of where it is totally undisturbed, but where people can view this," Fortune says. "Man has altered Caddo Lake something fierce. Places like Harrison Bayou Bottom prove it's still a salvageable lake."

The refuge purchase complements more than 8,000 acres on the north side of the lake, designated a state wildlife management area in 1992 through land buys by the Texas Nature Conservancy, and the 800-acre Caddo Lake State Park on the other side of the town of Karnack, effectively blocking major development along Caddo's shoreline.

Tom Walker, the mild-mannered, fifth-generation local, part-time librarian, pro-life Christian, and vacation Bible school teacher who introduced me to Paul Fortune, is the e-mail version of Paul Revere on Caddo Lake, the communicator who keeps a long mailing list apprised of affairs that affect the lake. He's also a birder, so when I find a wren chick on the front stoop of the cabin where I'm staying, I know to take it to Walker, who conducts bird-banding sessions on his family homestead. A day later, he's sending photo updates via e-mail.

Walker lives at the family homestead near the lake, where I nibble fat blueberries out of his garden and listen to

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Letter from Lavaca Bay

BY DIANA CLAITOR

Lavaca Bay, halfway between Corpus Christi and Galveston, has always produced a wealth of shrimp, blue crabs, oysters, and red and black drum. It's also home to what author and environmental lawyer Jim Blackburn calls the worst environmental disaster on the Texas Gulf Coast—"the taking of the bay" by aluminum giant Alcoa.

Starting in 1966, Alcoa's Point Comfort plant discharged enormous quantities of mercury into the bay. Conservative estimates put the number at more than 67 pounds a day. In the early 1970s, state officials ordered Alcoa to stop discharging mercury-laden water and vapor; subsequently oyster harvesting was banned. In 1988, fishing and crabbing was banned. Shrimp was not thought to retain as much mercury; it was never banned.

In 1994 Lavaca Bay became a federally designated Superfund site, and as a result, Alcoa began paying for the cleanup of mercury as well as other dangerous pollutants. So far, it's spent approximately $40 million. Last December, after years of negotiation, federal and state agencies reached a settlement with Alcoa and Alcoa World Alumina LLC, which have agreed to spend at least another $11.4 million to restore the bay and to reimburse state and federal agencies for their costs. As part of that agreement, Alcoa will donate 729 acres for wildlife habitat and will also build fishing piers and boat ramps to compensate recreational users. Company representatives say the total price tag is likely to exceed $100 million.

But many of those who live and work in the area say the settlement is far from adequate. They point out that it fails to mention losses to commercial fishermen—the fin fishermen, oystermen, shrimpers, and crabbers who bring Gulf Coast seafood to our tables. As people in the insular fishing communities along the coast have begun to mull that over, they have also begun talking about something that for years many have been reluctant to openly discuss—the fact that ban or no ban, many consume seafood from all parts of the bay and many local communities have experienced an explosion of health problems, including autism [see "Mercury" page 11], that they now suspect may be mercury-related. With the assistance of two South Texas law firms, an uneasy coalition of three historically divided fishing groups—Anglo, Hispanic, and Vietnamese—has now decided to take on the largest aluminum corporation in the world.

photo: Diana Claitor

Frankie Neal of Seadrift reads the proposal for the lawsuit.

Like many veteran shrimpers, Dennis Williams also goes by what he calls his "shrimping name"—Deputy Dawg. Like many shrimpers around Lavaca Bay, he regularly did contract work at the Alcoa plant in Point Comfort. Now 67, Williams has been suffering from multiple health problems, including heart disease, partial deafness, and tremors, for many years. His wife, Donna Sue, 61, speculates as to the source of those problems. "For these guys," she says, "between eating the seafood and working in those plants, it's a double whammy."

The Williams' were among the crowd of fishermen, oystermen, shrimpers, crabbers, seafood dealers, divers, and former plant workers who filled the Calhoun County agricultural building one night in Port Lavaca this past May to hear about a lawsuit being planned against Alcoa. Among those who addressed the crowd was Dr. B.J. Presley, a professor emeritus at Texas A&M. For Presley, the subject of mercury and Lavaca Bay was old hat. In the late 1980s he began collecting samples and data on the mercury levels in the bay. In addition to contributing to efforts that led to its designation as a Superfund site, he also participated in a 1994 conference at which more than 100 scientists examined the complex effects of mercury contamination. In Port Lavaca he sounded exasperated to be repeating what he had said so many times before. Summarizing his objections to the Alcoa settlement, Presley argued that the company and the government agencies focus on cleaning up "hot spots," as opposed to dealing with widespread mercury contamination. He also doesn't think sampling the fish will reveal the levels of contamination in humans.

"Study the people, not the fish!" he growled. "The hair doesn't lie. So like I said 20 years ago, why aren't we doing blood or hair sampling to get a direct measure? Instead of trying to establish how much fish they're eating, where the

fish came from, how big they are, what phase of the moon they were caught in...."

Laurel I. Cahill, a spokeswoman for Alcoa, says that the company has indeed assessed the impact of mercury contamination on both the commercial interests and health of area residents. In a lengthy e-mail response to questions from the *Observer*, Cahill wrote that "estimated mercury intake" for commercial fishermen and their families had been compared to EPA guidelines. "It was concluded that for women of childbearing age," she stated, "there is a low potential risk from exposure to mercury in fish from Lavaca Bay and this risk is below a level of concern." She referred to a "door-to-door interview process conducted by TDH in 1996 [that] concluded that the Vietnamese shrimpers—a potential local subsistence population were not at risk because their activities generally occur outside of Lavaca Bay."

Dr. John Villanacci was in charge of public health assessment at TDH at the time and has a different take on the survey. Villanacci says that when members of his staff tried to do interviews in the Vietnamese community, which had the highest consumption of fish, they ran up against a wall of silence.

"Nobody would admit to eating anything from the banned area," he says, adding that he suspects people were afraid to admit consuming fish from the bay because they would also be admitting to breaking the law. From the health department's standpoint, he says, that left nothing to investigate. No exposed population, no tests.

But in tiny fishing communities nothing is ever quite so simple. The state does attempt to warn residents of health hazards by posting large signs, written in English, Spanish and Vietnamese, at various points around the bay. The signs read "Health Warning! DO NOT eat crabs or fish caught in the closure area of the bay," and display a map and further information about the danger of mercury contamination and a $500 fine for those caught with seafood. Many in the fishing communities, however, see those signs as just more unwarranted intrusion from the Austin bureaucrats who have enacted regulations and restrictions that have caused problems for commercial fishing. They say that people may have known that mercury was there, but still didn't think there was anything wrong with eating seafood from the bay. Moreover, it was impossible to take the ban seriously, says Dennis Williams. "So they say the fish are safe on one side and not on the other?" he asks. "Like fish don't move around."

Many locals avoided the topic altogether. "People didn't want to do anything to hurt the fishing," says Donna Sue Williams, who formerly managed fish houses in the town of Seadrift. "So they didn't talk about it. It was always sort of hush-hush."

If that seems shortsighted, it's also indicative of an atmosphere of independence, secrecy, and a general distrust of outsiders in the fishing communities. But times are definitely changing. Nearly 1,000 area residents have signed up to participate in a lawsuit against Alcoa, according to Jim Cole, a

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LINKS IN THE MERCURY FOOD CHAIN

Mercury enters our food supply from contaminated water. Whether companies dump mercury into air or water, it ends up in the water—fresh and salt—where bacteria convert it to methylmercury that accumulates in algae. That algae is eaten by small fish, which in turn are eaten by larger fish. The concentration of methylmercury in fish that are higher in the aquatic food chain, such as red and black drum and spotted sea trout, can be as high as a million times the concentration of the surrounding water.

"The bottom line in all this is that the latest sampling from this year shows some fish and shell fish from the Lavaca Bay area are high enough that if you eat a modest amount of them per week you'll be getting an unsafe dose of mercury," says Texas A&M professor emeritus Dr. B. J. Presley.

Unfortunately you are not safe if you just avoid Lavaca Bay seafood. Our state is allowing coal-burning utilities to produce so much mercury that Texas now leads the nation in methylmercury levels. An estimated one-third of the state's freshwater fish is contaminated by this heavy metal.

Media attention has focused on mercury's toxic effects on infants. But mercury also injures the neurological systems and brains of adults, although the symptoms may not appear for decades. According to National Environmental Defense Fund study (August, 2004) methylmercury poisoning in an adult can cause a range of problems including memory loss, behavioral changes, tremors, headaches, and even hair loss. Now, however, newer studies reveal that people with elevated levels of mercury are more likely to have cardiovascular disease.

Most devastating of all, however are mercury's effects on fetuses and infants. In low doses, the element may affect a child's development—delaying walking and talking, shortening attention spans, lowering intelligence levels and causing learning disabilities. In higher amounts, mercury is being linked to autism, according to a growing number of reports. A common assumption is that the mothers of these children must have been exposed to extraordinarily high amounts of mercury, but even the Environmental Protection Agency, which is often conservative in its predictions, reports that this is not necessarily the case. "Minimally affected mothers have given birth to severely affected infants," warns a 1998 EPA report.

The latest EPA advisory uses data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in its estimation that more than 300,000 infants who "may have increased risk of learning disabilities associated with in utero exposure to methylmercury" are born each year. **—D.C.**

The Graveyard Shift

BY FELIX GILLETTE

On a Monday afternoon in May, Teri Little strolls across her mother-in-law's grave, holding an L-shaped copper probe in each hand. The probes look a bit like sawed-off coat hangers. Little points the wires ahead of her like pistols. She takes a few more steps, and the tips begin to swing inward, slowly crossing into an X. "That tells me there's a grave," says Little. "If I were really looking for one, I'd stop and flag it."

Little has brought me to the historic Perry Cemetery in northwest Houston, in part to demonstrate her grave-divining skills and in part to explain how she became Texas' premier advocate for the cyber-privacy of dead folks. The dead, she argues, deserve to spend eternity resting underground in well-marked graves, not online in well-linked databases. Little believes that the myriad ongoing efforts to document cemeteries on the Internet are misguided. And it's *that* belief (rather than her faith in the divining powers of copper wire) which separates Little from her peers.

Dressed casually in jeans and hiking boots, Little gazes down through her sunglasses at the probes. Like oil witching and water witching, grave witching is a bit of classic, American folk juju. Using simple handheld sensors, certain charmed individuals can detect subterranean elements. Or so they say. "Kind of weird, isn't it?" Little says. "My husband's cousin's husband is a geophysicist. He says it has to do with the magnetism of the Earth. All I know is that it works."

For the last several years, Little has helped run this small, two-and-a-half acre cemetery in a placid residential neighborhood in northwest Houston where many of her husband's ancestors are buried. The cemetery sits along a leafy road, surrounded by houses, an industrial park, and a daycare center. Little jokingly calls it the "body farm," alluding to the legendary forensic facility in Knoxville, Tennessee, where police investigators learn to identify decomposing corpses. Little occasionally brings visitors here to teach them how to identify unmarked graves.

In addition to her copper probes, Little is also well versed in more formal methods of locating lost gravesites, such as surface stripping and ground-penetrating radar. She says that her fascination with unmarked graves dates back to 1999 when she and her husband began searching for the long-lost resting place of his great-great-great grandfather.

After dancing the bureaucratic two-step with countless county officials, Little and her husband eventually discovered the grave in an abandoned cemetery in a secluded forest outside of Houston. Prior to their arrival, the Hargrave-Hilton graveyard had fallen into obscurity and disrepair. Vandals had ripped down many of the tombstones and piled them in a circle, forming a crude fire pit. Little says that the sight of the tombstone fire pit ignited her indignation and helped inspire her to become a cemetery preservationist.

Despite her bewitchment with the fate of dead people, Little is anything but a morose person. Good-natured, blond-haired, hearty, in her early 40s, Little typically charges into a conversation, reeling off anecdotes and stories and jokes in a confident, full-tilt manner, noting whenever possible that she's not entirely "dead serious" about dead people. Then again, she's not someone to pursue her interests halfheartedly. Over the years, she's made several trips to Austin to testify in front of the state legislature on behalf of cemetery issues. Along the way, she's met more than enough lobbyists for the death-care industry to know that death in Texas is a for-profit business. But Little believes that there should be someone watching out for the dead who's not simultaneously watching out for the bottom line. So while her husband works full-time as an engineer, Little volunteers full-time as an "advocate for the dead."

As it turns out, protecting dead people is harder than it sounds. There is a saying that grave robbing is the world's second oldest profession, and Little remains vigilant against the threat. Tall fences surround Perry Cemetery on all sides. "No Trespassing" signs hang at intervals. On Halloween, Little stations volunteers on night-watch among the gravestones to scare off would-be vandals. But on the other 364 days of the year, Little isn't worried about teenage pranksters with rolls of toilet paper. She's concerned, instead, about middle-aged genealogists with digital cameras.

A few years back, an uninvited genealogist sauntered into the Perry Cemetery, copied down all of the information on the headstones, and posted the transcripts on www.rootsweb.com—a popular genealogy website. Months later, someone brought the transcripts to Little's attention. She was shocked, at first, and then angry. She didn't want the dead residents of Perry Cemetery spending the rest of eternity alongside the flotsam and jetsam, the rubbish, and the rabble of the Internet. By putting the information online, Little worried that the genealogy "do-gooders" were making the dead folks susceptible to grave robbers and identity thieves. She vowed to save her cemetery's residents from digital purgatory.

Thus, a new wrinkle was added to Little's mission. In addition to identifying anonymous gravesites, henceforth, she would also fight to keep those identities off the Internet. Now whenever Little lectures groups of students, genealogists, or

historians about cemetery preservation, she presents a list of the major threats facing Texas' dead citizens, including livestock, encroaching civilization, all-terrain vehicles—and the Internet.

These days, most people setting out to learn more about the resting place of a long-lost ancestor use search engines, not copper probes. When it comes to popularity on the Internet, genealogy famously rivals pornography. Over the last decade, many genealogy websites have sprouted sections devoted to the documentation of old cemeteries. Tombstones can often help a genealogist retrace a family's history. But collectively, tombstones are a vulnerable data set, open to the elements and prone to fading with each passing year.

Since approximately 1997, volunteers with the Texas Tombstone Project—part of a national effort organized by www.rootsweb.com—have set out to transcribe every headstone, in every cemetery, in every county in Texas and post the information on a publicly accessible website. Recently, with the advent of cheap digital cameras, the mission has shifted toward photographic documentation. Someday in the not-so-distant future, every tombstone in Texas will likely exist in duplicate, one dirty version and one digital.

Renee Smelley, who until recently volunteered as a photography manager for the Texas Tombstone Project, says that approximately 4,500 cemeteries have been surveyed so far in Texas and that the project is accelerating. She says that a few years ago, she would receive about 50 photographs a month. By last year, she was receiving 50 new tombstone portraits every week.

According to Smelley, her volunteers occasionally run into ornery cemetery directors, like Little, who try to keep them at bay. But resistance, she says, is useless. The volunteers will get the information one way or the other. To wit: she recounts the story of a genealogist who, after being banned from a cemetery, sat outside the entrance and transcribed the tombstones from afar—through a pair of binoculars. "The information on tombstones is just like any other public record," says Smelley. "Just like marriage records, divorce records, or land records."

Little, for one, emphasizes that in Texas death certificates are confidential for 25 years and birth certificates for 75 years. Little believes that posting photographs of tombstones on the

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Teri Little next to one of her charges

Photo by Felix Gillette

From Deep Throat to Downing Street

I hope this is not too Inside Baseball, but I am genuinely astonished by what the bloggers call "Mainstream Media." (In my youth, it was quaintly called "the Establishment press.")

The New York Times, The Washington Post and the *Los Angeles Times* have all gone way out of their way to deny that the Downing Street Memos (it's now plural) are news. Like many of you, during the entire lead-up to the war with Iraq, I thought the whole thing was a set-up.

I raise this point not to prove how smart we are, but to emphasize that I followed the debate closely and probably unconsciously searched for evidence that reinforced what I already thought. Most people do that. I read some of the European press and most of the liberal publications in this country. I read the *Times,* the *Post, The Wall Street Journal* and several Texas papers every day. It's my job.

But when I read the first Downing Street Memo, my eyes bugged out and my jaw fell open. I could not believe what I was reading. It was news to me, and as I have tried to indicate, I'm no slouch at keeping up. Yes, it has long seemed to me the administration had been planning the war for months before it began its pubic relations campaign to scare a skeptical public.

That was no easy task. Public opinion was still evenly divided at the time we invaded. The administration actually said it could invade another country without even consulting Congress or the United Nations. Pretty much everything that followed was a charade.

It was always weird that the White House kept saying it knew Saddam Hussein had WMD, but it would never tell the U.N. inspectors where. Yes, I suspected all that, but I was not the head of British intelligence in the summer of 2002, for pity's sake.

Here are some aggravating factors. Tom Friedman, columnist for *The New York Times*, recently wrote that "liberals" no longer want to talk about the war because we were against it to start with and probably hope it ends in disaster. Good Lord, who does he think we are? Does this man actually think we are out here cheering every time another American is killed?

Mr. Friedman, real, actual, honest-to-God American liberals are out here in the heartland, and we know the kids who are dying in Iraq. They are from our hometowns. We know their parents. That's why we hate this war. That's why we tried to tell everybody else it was a ghastly idea.

We are not sitting here gloating because it is the horrible mess we said it would be. We're in agony. There is nothing pleasurable about being a Cassandra. I have said from the beginning that if this thing worked out the way Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Cheney all said it would, I would be perfectly happy to get down on my knees and kiss George Bush's feet.

The second aggravation is that the very prestigious papers that are now dismissing the Downing Street Memos have already themselves admitted that their pre-war coverage was—I don't know, you pick the adjective. Slack? Inadequate? Less than rigorous? Wrong? And now they're saying, oh hell, this isn't news, we knew it all along.

Michael Kinsley out at the *Los Angeles Times*, which has certainly done some commendable reporting on this war and taken the heat for it, too, also dismisses the memos. I don't get it. You suddenly get evidence—I don't know if it proves or just strongly suggests—that this administration lied to all of us about war, and your reaction is not to go after the administration, but to dismiss the evidence? And to put down the people who are calling you screaming about why you haven't bothered to mention it? What is wrong with this picture?

It was always weird that the White House kept saying it knew Saddam Hussein had WMD, but it would never tell the U.N. inspectors where.

Also aggravating, the Republicans in Congress refuse to allow hearings. Rep. John Conyers of Michigan held "Democratic hearings," without the Rs, in a room described as a large closet, because they were not allowed to use an actual hearing room. Under these difficult circumstances, 30 Democratic representatives persisted in asking the important question, "Were Americans deliberately misled in the lead-up to this war?" When did we come to the point where the minority has no place?

I don't know if these memos represent an impeachable offense—although I must say, I don't want to bring up the Clinton comparison again. But they strike me as a hell of lot worse than anything Richard Nixon ever contemplated. He used the government for petty political vindictiveness. Heck, I'd settle for that again, over what we're looking at now.

The irony of Deep Throat surfacing after all these years in the midst of this memo mess is almost too precious. Does *The Washington Post* have any hungry young reporters on Metro anymore? I'd say, start with: Who did Dearlove meet with besides George Tenet? ■

Molly Ivins is a nationally syndicated columnist. Her most recent book with Lou Dubose is Bushwhacked: Life in George W. Bush's America *(Random House).*

Free Enterprise Socialism

Attention, class. We're now going to study the new and improved concept of "free enterprise," which has been redefined by modern corporate executives as the availability of free government money to make their enterprise profitable. Let's turn to the sterling example set by Cabela's Inc. This giant retailer of hunting, fishing, and other outdoor products recently graced the state of Texas with one of its megastores, but only after demanding and receiving a rucksack filled with government subsidies, including $600,000 cash, $36 million in road and construction costs, and $20 million in highway improvements. What we have here is the giveaway of roughly $57 million of Texas taxpayers' money to an out-of-state corporation to bribe it to come here and compete against local businesses that, ironically, are taxed to pay for Cabela's subsidy. Our governor, who's dimmer than a burned-out flashlight, hails this as a triumph of free-enterprise.

For its part, Cabela's is unabashed about its dependence on corporate socialism, even declaring in its annual report that grabbing public money is key to its business plan. But while it thrives on government giveaways, the retail chain has added a new twist to the game by demurely declaring that, as a private, for-profit company, its privacy rights would be violated if details about its public subsidy were revealed to the public. Thus, Cabela's has sued our state attorney general, claiming that it would suffer substantial competitive harm if the terms of its deal with the governor were publicly disclosed. A private corporation is funded by the state to give it a leg up on its local competitors, then declares that it must be exempt from the state's public disclosure law to protect its competitive advantage. Are we clear now on the new definition of "free enterprise"?

GLOBAL REBELLION Remember just a few years ago when the Powers That Be pointed to Latin America as their glowing example of globalization's glories? Washington, Wall Street, and the media were all beaming at a "new generation" of business-minded presidents in Central and South America, hailing them for privatizing their nations' public resources, waving in foreign corporations, cutting public services, and generally implementing the "free trade" ideology.

Have you noticed that the Powers That Be no longer beam at Latin America's grand globalization experiment? This is because it didn't take long for the ordinary people in these countries to realize that "free trade" is just another euphemism for the same old corporate exploitation, expropriation, and domination. Indeed, "free trader" is now a curse word in Latin countries, and an anti-globalization movement is sweeping the region. This is particularly inconvenient for W. and the corporate powers who are presently pushing for passage of a new glob of globaloney called CAFTA—the Central American Free Trade Agreement. The media in our country have largely ignored CAFTA, but it has become big news and a political flash point in the six Latin nations it would affect. Thousands of Guatemalans have poured into the streets in opposition, and the army there opened fire on them, killing two. In Honduras, angry protesters surrounded the capitol building after their congress rushed through CAFTA's approval, forcing the terrified lawmakers to flee. The protesters took over the chambers, proclaimed themselves the "true representatives of the Honduran people," and scrapped the congressional approval of CAFTA. Opposition is so intense in Costa Rica that the president won't even submit CAFTA for legislative approval. To join the global rebellion against corporate globalization, call Global Trade Watch at 202-588-7777.

JUST PEACHY Thankfully Republicans are in charge of several state governments, as well as our national government. We can always count on them to take care of the big problems—such as making sure that the wages of America's work-a-day majority stay low. Of course, W. and the congressional GOP have done their part, rejecting an effort earlier this year to hike the national minimum wage, which has been stuck since 1997 at a paltry $5.15 an hour. That's $10,500 a year gross for full-time work—a poverty wage that mocks moral decency. But I was particularly impressed by the extraordinary move recently by GOP leaders in Georgia to enforce this low-wage ethic in their state. Governor Sonny Perdue has now signed House Bill 59, barring any city in the Peach State from requiring corporations that get city contracts to pay higher wages than the poverty pay set by the federal government. This means that the state's so-called conservative leaders have come out flat-footed against local control, forcing duly-elected local officials to comply with a federal, low-wage standard. Of course, the governor and his gang are corporatists, not conservatives, acting at the behest of contractors who were apoplectic that Atlanta has been considering a living-wage ordinance that would set a $10.15-an-hour wage floor to be paid by corporations that profit from government contracts. That's hardly lavish pay—about $21,000 a year—but it would allow working families a middle-class possibility and would restore some integrity to the promise of America's work ethic. Lucky for them they've got stalwarts like Sonny Perdue ready to usurp local authority and stiff his state's working families. ■

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—Caddo Lake, continued from page 9

him bang out three ragtime-influenced compositions about alligators, herons, raccoons, and Caddo Lake on a dusty upright piano before going for a drive along the north shore of Caddo. We're looking for Buddy Man Andrews, the 85-year-old African-American wise man of the lake, but Buddy Man isn't home, so we meander over to Goat Island while Walker calls out birds by sound and sight—downy woodpecker, Acadian flycatcher, northern cardinal, summer tanager, juvenile little blue heron, blue jays, red-tailed hawk, red-shouldered hawk, Cooper's hawk, red-eyed vireo, white-eyed vireo, tufted titmouse, Carolina wren, blue-gray gnat-catcher, pine warbler, eastern phoebe, mockingbird, mourning dove, little egret.

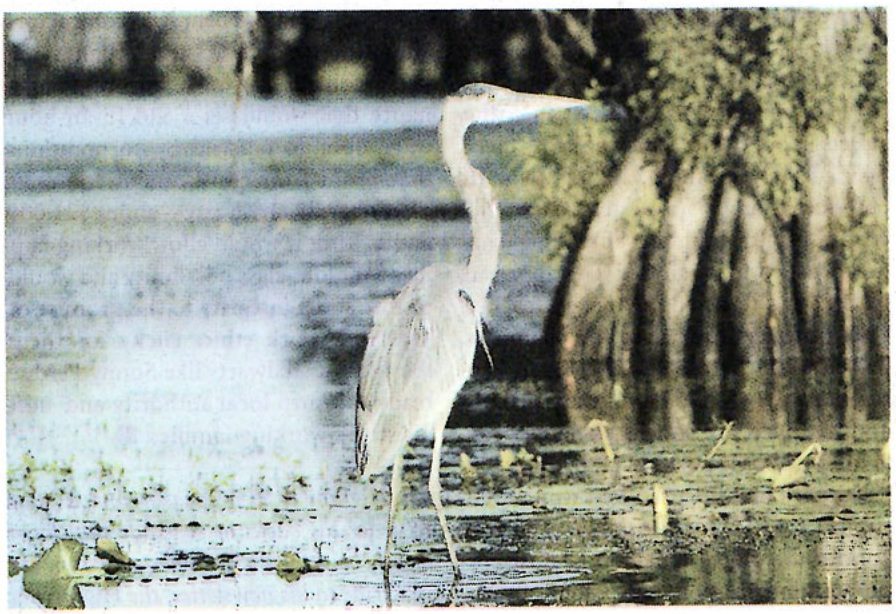
Dwight Shellman

During the drive, his family history rolls out. William P. Watson settled the homestead in the 1850s when he arrived from North Carolina and married Walker's great-great grandmother. Watson's father-in-law, Ward Taylor, founded the daily *Jefferson Jimplecute* in 1848. Watson's daughter, Molly, married Andrew Jackson Carter, for whom Carter's Lake, part of Caddo Lake, is named. The county road leading to his house is named after his father, Boots Walker.

We also talk about Christians and the environment. Walker is flustered that evangelicals flail against concepts such as minimal flows and conservation easements. "Those people think man's dominion over the world means exploiting it," he says. "Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden to take care of it. Noah had a responsibility to care for the animals."

We drive to Jefferson, pop. 2,912, 14 miles west of the lake and the most perfectly restored small town in Texas I've ever visited. Once the major steamboat port-of-entry where thousands of new arrivals first set foot on Texas soil, the one-time boomtown spent most of the 20th century as a ghost town thanks to the advent of railroads and highways, but it was rediscovered in time to save most of the historic structures and reinvent the eight-block downtown by the waterfront into a pedestrian-friendly tourism magnet that is packed most weekends with visitors from Dallas, Houston, and beyond.

Walker introduces Dr. Carroll Harrell, the program director of the Jeffersonian Institute, the town's equivalent of the Caddo Lake Institute, who breathlessly informs us Richard Subia, the great-great-great grandson of the last Caddo chief, is coming to the institute the next day to speak. Harrell's doctoral dissertation focused on the populations living in Marion County, including the Caddo, who she says maintained a strong presence around the lake even after Chief Tarshar signed a treaty with the white man in 1835 and most of the tribe moved to the Brazos River and later to a reservation in Oklahoma. "They were in a swamp, so nobody knew they were there anyway," she explains. "When [white] settlers moved in, there was a blending together." The Caddo word *tejas*, from which Texas was derived, means "friend." The Caddo word for African-Americans translates as "kin."



A Great Blue Heron on Caddo Lake.

Dr. Harrell knows a few things about the region's history. "Jay Gould is a myth," she says dismissively of the robber baron who is said to have placed a curse on Jefferson when the town would not accommodate his railroad. And while it's true that Howard Hughes' father developed the world's first offshore oil rig on the lake in 1917, the lake's permanent weir dam in Mooringsport, Louisiana, wasn't constructed for that purpose; it had already been in place for several years. And, no, Harrell insists, the Jeffersonian Institute is not just about preservation. "Our challenge at the institute is how do we create a sustainable economy utilizing the history, the culture, and the environment with education as the driver?"

The Jeffersonian Institute's driver is Jesse M. (Duke) DeWare, who wears many hats around town—City of Jefferson Attorney; Cypress Valley Alliance President; Jeffersonian Institute President; and director of the Marion County Industrial Foundation. After attending the Citadel and law school, he came home and broke into the cabal who ran Jefferson. DeWare purchased the last forest fire lookout tower in Marion County from the Texas Forest Service and reassembled it in downtown Jefferson as a historical artifact while adding a cell phone tower and a WiFi tower on top. He's been involved with the Army Corps of Engineers in an environmental restoration of the waterfront that will include an amphitheater, walking trails and boardwalks, and an outdoor education component to educate students about wetlands. He's also promoting nature tourism as a means to link together Jefferson and Caddo Lake in order to bring visitors to the region, rather than to a specific town.

"Here, we believe in economic development," he says with the certainty of one who's figured it out. "A big key to that is preserving your environment. It goes hand in hand. There is no conflict. You preserve your environment; you will have sustainable economic development. We want to embrace it in every way we can. We want to attract people here to protect it. People we've grown up with don't realize those assets; it's no big deal. The people moving in are choosing it."

In other words, Jefferson gets it, just like Austin gets it, Terlingua and Marathon get it, and Port Aransas gets it. Towns and cities in close proximity to parks and open space can make money off their location, as has happened to places like Moab, Utah; Bishop, California; and Port Angeles, Washington.

"My biggest challenge is to reinvent the community to keep up with everywhere else," DeWare says. "We want to be the most well-preserved city in Texas, but we also want to be a 21st-century pedestrian community with global technology. There are people who can live anywhere in the world as long as

they can communicate. If they can't communicate like they want to, you're not going to get those people."

As lush as the lake appears to be to a visitor's eye, locals point out that, like most of Texas, it is in the throes of drought. "It's almost down to the top of the spillway," Robby Speight says during a slow cruise around the lake. "If Marshall was pulling its full water right, you'd feel a reverse current," he says. He points out another threat to the lake's health. "See that purple flower? That's a hyacinth. It sucks the oxygen out of the water, and fish don't live underneath it." The Greater Caddo Lake Association is starting their own hyacinth suppression program to augment state efforts. After Speight attended the Flows Conference in Karnack organized by the Caddo Lake Institute in May, he came away supporting a study of controlled flooding of the lake to mimic nature. "They're not seeing any new growth of cypress," he says, "so scientists are looking at manipulating the flow.

"For a long time, I took this for granted," Speight smiles as he surveys the water around him. "Now, I don't."

At their next state convention, Texas Republicans might consider calling for the eradication of the ivory-billed woodpecker. The most sought-after bird in North America, thought to be extinct, was last spotted around Caddo Lake in the 1930s. This spring, the first sighting of an ivory-billed in 60 years was confirmed in the Big Woods of southeastern Arkansas, a similarly wooded swampland about 200 miles from Caddo Lake—close enough, as the bird flies, to make plausible an ivory-billed woodpecker sighting around Caddo Lake. If that happens, they'll have to build walls around the lake to keep birders out.

Dwight Shellman finally weighed in via e-mail after I'd returned from Caddo. He confirmed he's leaving as the institute's chief administrator in September although he says he may take on special projects "until the institutional transaction is accomplished to my and Don's satisfaction."

The lake people are now armed with the knowledge needed for community stewardship of the lake and its watershed, and to address issues such as mercury contamination, minimal flows, how to work with the Texas Council on Environmental Quality, water districts, and academics, and how to train local people to protect their lake and wetlands.

The National Wildlife Refuge designation is clearly a point of pride. Shellman wrote, "CLI worked for years with the decontamination effort to learn its dimensions, and then used that information to create very difficult technical GIS (Geographic Information Systems) mapping—to identify the 7,200 (7/8ths) uncontaminated acres that were ready for immediate refuge purposes and the 1,000 other acres to be taken into the Refuge—when cleaned of contaminants. We then facilitated the transition of that transfer with several federal and state agencies and the community and built them into a team rather than competitors.

"None of this would be possible without Don's unswerving loyalty to this place and willingness to raise money when the chips are down. He makes locals confident that they will be able to defend; it may also help careless or potential spoilers to be more careful about listening, learning and trying to join our conservation efforts rather than fighting them. There is usually scientific common ground to meet on, with everyone who is prepared and flexible."

This puts Shellman in an uncomfortable position. "I love the place and the people I have come to know so well in 14 years of work and living there," he wrote. "I am torn as to whether I need to get out of the way and be absent so successors can make the program their own, or continue to live there. Living there requires me to learn to keep my opinions to myself—a trait I am not celebrated for. So, it's not clear I will leave—or just put some burdens down or pass them on to new creative people and stay."

Whatever he does, the lake will still be here, and so will the lake people who have learned to love and fight for Caddo Lake as passionately as Henry David Thoreau felt about his beloved Walden Pond. ■

Joe Nick Patoski writes about water, music, Texas, and other subjects from his home near Wimberley. Texas Coast, *his second collaborative book with photographer Laurence Parent is being published by the University of Texas this fall.*

—Lavaca, continued from page 11

partner in the Victoria law firm of Cole, Cole & Easley, P.C. The overall goals are health care and long-term monitoring for people suffering from conditions caused by mercury contamination as well as compensation for damage to the fisheries.

Alcoa maintains that commercial interests have been "impacted by a myriad of other forces unrelated to the mercury contamination including ... extreme changes in the Bay's biological health related to freezes, floods, and natural occurrences," according to Cahill. Cole concedes that proving commercial damages will be difficult, but says there is considerable anecdotal evidence from fishhouse people and fishermen who say that many customers have quit buying fish from this area and have turned to farm-raised or fish imported from overseas.

Having a reputation as a toxic area can be part of the "pervasive damages" caused by Alcoa's actions, says Grover Hankins, an experienced litigator who has worked on multi-plaintiff environmental cases throughout the United States. Hankins' League City firm is the other part of the legal team planning to represent area residents in the case against Alcoa.

He frankly admits that the case will be challenging. And as he spoke to the crowd in Port Lavaca, it became obvious that the challenges go beyond the legal complexities. At one point Hankins, who is African American, mentioned having worked as general counsel for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Three men interrupted him with a muffled joke and laughter. A moment later, a white fisherman spoke out to say that "Gringos" were now the minority. The comments brought to mind the long simmering racial tensions in an area where the influx of Vietnamese in the 1970s and 1980s changed the fishing industry. Conflicts and intimidation led to the killing of one white fishermen by two Vietnamese, the incident eventually fictionalized and portrayed in the 1985 film, *Alamo Bay.*

But despite a history of conflict, the fishermen of Lavaca Bay may finally be discovering that they have more in common than they ever thought. The biggest round of applause at the Port Lavaca meeting last May came toward the end of the night. That's when a fisherman named Eddy Arnold spoke out. Arnold, whose shrimping nickname is Rhino, told his fellow fishermen that it was "time for somebody to stand up and tell the plants we're tired of this crap." For Arnold and so many others, it was time to try to take back the bay. ■

Diana Claitor lives in South Austin. She is a freelance writer and historical researcher specializing in early Texas and the Johnson presidency.

—Graveyard, continued from page 13
Internet makes dead folks more vulnerable to identity theft. She points out that once you know a person's date of birth and death, it's easy to track down their social security number using the same free genealogical websites where the photographs of tombstones are often posted. Little worries that stealing a dead person's identity is becoming as easy as, say, ordering a book from Amazon.com.

Most of the evidence concerning identity theft based on tombstones is anecdotal, but it does happen. During a recent criminal trial in suburban Austin, for instance, a 22-year-old woman admitted in court to helping her husband fake his own death and create a new identity with major help from the graveyard.

Three days before he was due in jail for a prior crime, Clayton Daniels and his wife dug up an old woman's grave, put the corpse in his car, pushed the car over a cliff, and lit the wreck on fire. Initially, police misidentified the charred husk of the corpse and pronounced Clayton Daniels dead. In the meantime, the grave-robbing couple stole the identity of a deceased man named Alexander Gregg. Eventually, the plan fell apart. During the subsequent criminal trial, prosecutors introduced into evidence photographs of Gregg's tombstone. Whether the Daniels found and exploited Gregg's tombstone online or by strolling through cemeteries is unclear. But during the trial, prosecutors suggested that the wife dreamed up the entire plan while surfing the Internet on her computer at work.

Such instances of identity theft are just a part of the problem, says Little. She also worries that digital photographs of tombstones will aid conventional grave robbers. Thanks to the popularity of sepulchral chic, all sorts of funereal items can fetch cash on the black market. Therefore, today's grave robbers rarely bother with the graves. Instead, they sneak into cemeteries and haul off wrought-iron gates, iron crosses, funereal statues, urns, and benches—even ornately carved tombstones.

Little worries that her fellow genealogists are inadvertently creating a giant treasure map for wannabe grave robbers. "That's why I think we should draw the line at pictures and maps," says Little. "You have a precious family heirloom, you're putting it out in the middle of nowhere, and you're telling people how to get to it and what it looks like."

No single law enforcement agency is solely responsible for investigating grave-robbing incidents, according to officials with the Texas Funeral Service Commission. Therefore, no statewide statistics exist documenting the frequency of grave-robbing crimes. Periodically, a national ring of grave robbers is busted, casting a brief spotlight on the shadowy nature of the underground market. In 1999, antique dealers in Louisiana and Los Angeles were busted with more than $1 million worth of statuary items stolen from the above-ground crypts of New Orleans. "I think antiquity led to infatuation," a detective told *The New York Times*. "These sculptures were forbidden treasure."

Gerron Hite, the cemetery coordinator for the Texas Historical Commission, says it's unclear how much gets stolen from Texas' 50,000 or so historic cemeteries each year, but he thinks it's a significant amount. Again, most of the evidence is anecdotal. Hite says that occasionally he receives phone calls from police officers in other states who are looking to return stolen cemetery items. He has also caught people trying to sell cemetery contraband on eBay. "The theft thing is still going on," says Hite. "Some of it's organized. Once the object is picked up, it's out of the state within a day."

But Hite says he is skeptical of the notion that today's grave robbers sift through digital photographs of tombstones before choosing a target. "I've never been convinced that people just go on the Internet and start looking for objects to steal from cemeteries," says Hite. "I think they're driving around looking to see what's easy to get into."

Even so, Hite says that he is judicious about what cemetery photos his organization posts on the web. Currently, the Texas Historical Commission is surveying cemeteries in numerous counties around the state. For each cemetery, the commission plans on posting a single photograph showing the entrance to the graveyard. "We do have other pictures that are available to people interested in doing research," says Hite. "But we're trying to be careful and not show off, you know, some amazing 8-foot-tall [funereal] angel."

At her home in northwest Houston, Little maintains her own stash of tombstone photographs. If someone from out of state wants to see the resting place of their ancestor in the Houston area, Little is willing to send them a snapshot, just not a digital copy. She keeps her entire collection of tombstone photographs neatly indexed in a little green box.

Sometimes Little flips on her home computer and breezes through websites, looking to catch yet another cyber-genealogist trespassing on her territory. "These people have too much time on their hands," says Little. "Of course, they could say the same thing about me."

Recently, she noted that one of her archrivals—a cemetery enthusiast who posts photos under the nickname Graveseeker—had taken a bunch of his work offline. Perhaps, Little thought, her constant needling was paying off.

"We have the money at our cemetery to hire attorneys," says Little. "But I'd rather save the money for mowing the grass and paying my fence insurance instead of fighting some idiot in court."

Rather than going the litigious route, Little continues to spread her argument for the cyber-privacy of the dead through education and outreach, talking to anyone who will listen. Photo clubs. Genealogical societies. Sons of the Republic of Texas. Daughters of the American Revolution. Boy scouts.

"At what point does someone's right to have a hobby interfere with someone else's right to rest in peace?" says Little. "That's the ultimate question. Do the dead have a right to privacy?" ■

Felix Gillette is a writer that is based in Austin.

SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

Beauty, streaming out of cracks
and moments, coloring days.
Bright orange and blue plates
stacked in the cabinet.
The abandoned sign amidst
the trees around the bend that
I smile at every day when I run by.
A pinwheel of tomato slices
alternating with mozzarella and basil.
The madly fluttering lime green
leaves of the wispy plum trees,
against the red brick wall of the
old home turned museum, worthy
of building just to be that backdrop,
even if no paintings were inside.
The lit windows for that small
restaurant on that quiet street
when only I am walking by.
Fourteen feet of water above
my head, pretending to be
the periwinkle blue of the walls
and the floor with black lanes,
shafts of sunlight cutting through,
until I run out of breath, and
push off to the surface again.

LISTENING WITH EYES

Six years old,
he'd been playing
all afternoon with his
nine-month-old cousin.
She can't say a word,
but often can understand
you, and tell you what she
thinks with her saucer eyes
or an exaggerated back
and forth of her round
head of slender hair.
So, looking from
the car window, at
the bushes standing
out in the windy day,
he said, "those leaves
have heads that say
'no, no, no'."

KAREN KELLEY is a native Texan. She grew up in Austin. She graduated from Rice University and the University of Texas Law School. She worked for several years as a Legal Aid lawyer in San Antonio, where she lives with her husband and their two sons. These are her first published poems. —Naomi Shihab Nye

Strom: The Sweet Old Bigot

BY STEVEN G. KELLMAN

Strom: The Complicated Personal and Political Life of Strom Thurmond
By Jack Bass and Marilyn W. Thompson
Public Affairs
368 pages, $27.50

According to a poll of Capitol Hill legislators that was conducted by *Pageant* magazine in 1964, the least effective member of Congress was Strom Thurmond. A similar survey of Washington journalists concurred. It was the same year that Thurmond voted against the landmark Civil Rights Act ("the worst, most unreasonable, and unconstitutional legislation that has ever been considered by the Congress"), switched his allegiance from Democrat to Republican, and supported the hapless presidential candidacy of Barry Goldwater.

In 1964, only eight years into a record-setting 48-year tenure in the United States Senate, Thurmond might have seemed little more than a bigot and a buffoon, a man who stood on his head to flaunt his vigor and on states' rights to rationalize his racism. From a longer perspective, it is clear that no senator of the past 50 years, except Lyndon Johnson, has had more emphatic an effect on American history. Because of Strom, as much as anyone else, the ship of state is now turned starboard. By campaigning for Richard Nixon and neutralizing the appeal of George Wallace, Thurmond delivered enough of the South to guarantee the defeat of Hubert Humphrey and begin eradication of the New Deal and the Great Society. From his perch on the Judiciary Committee, he was instrumental in dismantling the Warren Court and realigning federal benches. From his perch on the Armed Services Committee, the senator from South Carolina helped create the garrison state. His contempt for civil rights prolonged the agony in the death of Jim Crow and set in motion the transformation of the South into a white Republican redoubt. His early patronage of Lee Atwater and Armstrong Williams introduced toxins into the national body politic. Even in his final months in office, the Senate's only centenarian still had the power to topple the body's leadership; when Trent Lott publicly declared that if Thurmond had been elected president in 1948 the nation would have avoided many problems, the repercussions from this veiled attack on civil rights led to Lott's replacement as majority leader by Bill Frist.

It often takes a while to determine how to deal with something. Though the tin can was devised by Peter Durand in 1810, it took another 48 years before Ezra Warnet invented the can opener in 1858. To measure Thurmond's 48 years in the Senate—and 52 years elsewhere—now, two years after his death, is to open a can of political worms that well could pass for snakes.

"When he dies, they'll have to beat his pecker down with a baseball bat in order to close the coffin lid."

Though Thurmond recorded 16,348 votes, his legislative accomplishment was meager; the most notable bill that he, a teetotaler who daily downed an eight-ounce dose of prune juice, could take credit for mandated health labels on wine bottles. Thurmond was an obstructionist, most notably in 1957 when he filibustered for 24 hours and 18 minutes—still a record—against a civil rights bill that ended up passing 60-15. Accepting the presidential nomination of the breakaway Dixiecrats in 1948, he proclaimed, "I want to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that there's not enough troops in the army to force the Southern people to break down segregation and admit the Negro race into our theaters, into our swimming pools, into our homes, and into our churches." One of the authors of the Southern Manifesto that swore resistance to *Brown vs. Board of Education,* Thurmond maintained that, "The white people of the South are the greatest minority in this Nation." On July 9, 1964, desperate to block Senate confirmation of a moderate from Florida, he wrestled Texas Senator Ralph Yarborough to the floor to keep him from the committee room and creating a quorum.

In their new biography, Jack Bass and Marilyn W. Thompson, journalists who are longtime Thurmond-watchers, trace what, in their subtitle, they call "The Complicated Personal and Political Life of Strom Thurmond." Stressing the "complexity" of their subject, they aim to salvage him from the racist, sexist caricature that he himself did much to fashion. Without minimizing the man's villainy (Bass, an unsuccessful Democratic candidate for Congress from South Carolina in 1978, has no reason to stroke Strom, who once called him "a skunk.") they emphasize the paradoxes throughout his career. As governor of South Carolina from 1947-1951, Thurmond pursued a relatively liberal program—stronger child labor laws, an end to the poll tax, conservation of natural resources, prosecution of lynchers, and a state minimum wage. He advocated free textbooks, higher teacher salaries, and better—though separate—educational facilities for blacks. At the same time, Thurmond favored the death penalty, loyalty oaths, and restrictions on immigration. Bass and

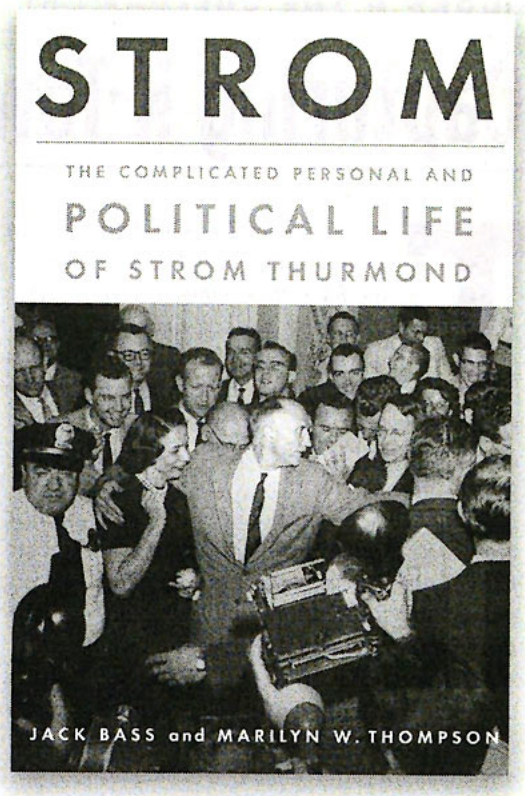
Thompson suggest that the exhilaration of his anointment as standard bearer for Southern white resentment, carrying four states—South Carolina, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi—against Harry Truman and Thomas Dewey in 1948, transformed Thurmond into the obdurate reactionary who entered the Senate in 1955 through a write-in vote (the only time anyone not officially on the ballot has been elected to either house of Congress).

Thurmond's "complexities" often turn out to be contradictions, even dissimulations. This is most apparent in two areas: sex and race. Though he affected the air of a courtly Southern gentleman, Bass and Thompson frequently refer to Thurmond as "a ladies' man," which they seem to use as a euphemism for erotomaniac. They describe Thurmond's marriage to Jean Crouch when she was 20 and he was 44, and then, after her death, to Nancy Moore when she, a beauty queen, was 22 and he was 66. But they do not trouble to document the Senator's prolific lechery, except to allude to his grotesque propensity for groping any woman within reach. An elevator ride with Thurmond often meant being chased with nowhere to hide. Bass and Thompson do recount one notorious episode in which Thurmond had sex with Sue Logue, a convicted murderer, while she was being driven from the women's penitentiary to the building in Columbia that housed death row. Senator John Tower, whose own sexual misconduct prevented his confirmation as secretary of defense, observed about Thurmond, "When he dies, they'll have to beat his pecker down with a baseball bat in order to close the coffin lid."

During his final years in the Senate, Thurmond, as if luring in forest creatures, took to handing out candy to his new female colleagues, even as he distributed unwanted pats and palpations. Thurmond was present when Bob Packwood was forced to resign his Senate seat over charges of sexual harassment. A middle-aged moderate from Oregon could not get away with the crude behavior that was tolerated, even chuckled over, in an old fart from South Carolina. Sally Quinn recalled a public dinner at which Thurmond grabbed both her and her mother by their derrieres. "Strom, you old devil," exclaimed Quinn's mother, as if age confers privilege even on the devil. Thurmond voted to remove Bill Clinton from office, for indiscretions not nearly as egregious as his own. Is this complexity or merely hypocrisy?

But Thurmond's pecker continues to keep his coffin open. As early as 1948, leaders of the South Carolina NAACP were accumulating photographs of a black woman they alleged was Thurmond's daughter. In his 1968 book *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, Robert Sherrill mentioned Thurmond's "paternal interest in a Negro girl," without specifying a name. Later, Thompson was convinced of her identity but could not get the woman to go on the record. However, shortly after Thurmond's death, 78-year-old Essie Mae Washington-Williams came forward to announce that she was indeed his daughter. As she explained in *Dear Senator: A Memoir By the Daughter of Strom Thurmond,* published earlier this year, Washington-Williams's mother, Carrie Butler, became pregnant at 16 while a domestic in Thurmond's parents' household. The new father abruptly skipped town, and Butler gave her baby to relatives in Pennsylvania. Essie Mae was 16 before she met her increasingly prominent father, whom she was never to acknowledge in public. Unlike Thurmond's white children, the daughter that he conceived with Butler lived her life as black, when, due in part to her father's policies, that meant diminished opportunities.

Bass and Thompson bracket their biography with accounts of the Essie Mae Washington-Williams revelations, and throughout the book they crosscut between developments in her life and in her famous father's. They see "complexity" in the discrepancy between Thurmond's racist politics and his generosity toward a black daughter whom, over the years, he secretly sent funds totaling more than $100,000. He was a patrician with the common touch, an indifferent orator who spoke for millions. Though he lived long enough to vote for the Martin Luther King Holiday and to extend the Voting Rights Act he had initially opposed, Thurmond, unlike George Wallace, never apologized for his role in maintaining apartheid in America.



"Ol' Strom. He's sump'n, ain't he?" marveled a bystander to Bass during a campaign stop by Thurmond in 1972. This biography, which reprints an effusive eulogy by Democratic Senator Joseph Biden, is written out of awe more than odium. But longevity and a folksy manner cannot camouflage the hardships and injustices caused by this man's extended hold on power. A life-size statue of Strom Thurmond erected in the Senator's native Edgefield, South Carolina, got it just about right, until a town leader removed a bug with a blowtorch. Beneath the great man's suit jacket, under his left rump, artist Maria Kirby-Smith had sculpted a cockroach. ■

Steven G. Kellman's Redemption: The Life of Henry Roth *will be published by W. W. Norton in August.*

Capturing K-Town

The "10 Under 10" film festival in Austin puts the lie to the idea that movies have to be long and expensive to be worthwhile. Produced by Ellen Spiro, a documentary filmmaker and University of Texas associate professor, "10 Under 10" is a festival of restrictions (a dirty word in Hollywood)—all films under 10 minutes long, all made for less than $10. The festival offers an opportunity for young auteurs to tell their stories without losing their focus or ruining their credit.

MFA candidate SunHee Cho took full advantage of the "10 Under 10" guidelines this year, stretching her meager minutes and dollars to explore the lives of Korean women residing in the United States, a topic that lies close to her heart. Her documentary, K-Town, Texas, *turns the camera on the city of Killeen, home to both the country's largest active military post, Fort Hood, and one of the most significant Korean populations in the state. In this most American of places, surrounded by a culture swimming in military pride and national self-regard, Cho chanced upon Pong Brown and Shin Morris—two of thousands of Korean women living in Killeen who left behind everything they knew to come to this new world with their American husbands. She then set about putting down on tape their impressions of life in Central Texas, impressions that are inextricably tangled up in issues of family, language, and self-determination.*

Passing notes over e-mail, SunHee (writing from her home in Seoul, Korea) and I spoke of the difficulties facing these women as they strive to strike a balance between two disparate cultures and about the various methods she employed to do justice to their stories within the confines of the "10 Under 10" format.

Texas Observer: *How did you find yourself in Central Texas?*

SunHee Cho: I was going to Dong-guk University in Seoul, majoring in creative writing, [and I was] looking for a place where I could improve my English in a short period of time: basically, a place where I couldn't find Koreans so that I could only speak English to survive. I started with attending an ESL program in Kingsville, Texas. There are a lot of places where I could study film, but I was inclined to come to Austin for many different reasons. I knew about the growing film community in Austin and the prestigious film program at UT. UT also was the only school that had a reasonable tuition rate (a big factor for an international student). Austin is a very unique place both culturally and geographically, which is inevitably attractive to those who want to make documentaries.

TO: *Were you familiar with Killeen before making the movie?*

SC: A couple of friends that I have met in Austin are interracial kids from Killeen whose moms are Korean and dads are American soldiers. When I visited Killeen with one of my friends, I was fascinated by the unusual setting of the town and thought to myself how odd it is for those Korean women to be in that environment. I immediately was drawn to the subject since I understood what it was like to live in a strange place, being an international student myself.

When a chance to make a short documentary for [UT professor] Paul Stekler's Directing a Documentary class, I just drove up there to Killeen, found a Korean restaurant, and (luckily) met a Korean woman, Shin, whose American husband is still in Iraq. Through her, I found out about this Korean church, where I saw more than a hundred interracial couples. That's where I met Pong.

TO: *Is this film similar in style to the other movies you've made or that you're*

SunHee Cho

interested in making, or did the restrictions of the "10 Under 10" format force you to change your approach?

SC: The "10 Under 10" format itself didn't really affect my approach to making this documentary until I had to cut it from 17 minutes down to 10. As far as the subject matter, yes, this is something I want to explore more: Korean women in strange places, women from the East who live on the opposite side of the world. As far as the style, this was something totally new that I had never tried before. The first documentary short I directed, *This Road* (2004)—which also was a part of last year's "10 Under 10"— I wanted to be poetic, a story driven by V.O. (voice over) and images that represented the states of the subject's mind. But this time around, for *K-Town, Texas*, I knew my subjects would open themselves more intimately when I approached them just as a Korean woman who's interested in hearing their stories. So, my becoming a part of the documentary, having my own voice heard, was a very conscious decision, which ended up making *K-Town* distinctive from *This Road.*

I wanted to bring to the surface what it means to be away from everything you love . . . to have a child who doesn't fully understand your culture . . .

***TO:** Do you see the imprint of your artistic influences on this movie?*

SC: I personally like cinema verité style. You are not to intrude on someone's life, but to blend into the circumstances that you are surrounded by. The camera is an extension of your eyes; what you choose to see is mainly drawn by your pure curiosity, just like when you are surrounded by new people and new environments. I don't like framing things first and waiting for those things to come into my frame because that's not how we usually see things. I observe things and follow them as I follow my own curiosity. It affected how I shot and edited *K-Town*. In editing this piece, I didn't have to create scenes by putting shots together or cutting them around because of the way I shot the whole thing. Most of the time, scenes were already there, so it was more a matter of deciding what I was going to include rather than making decisions on what I had to exclude.

***TO:** One of my favorite scenes from the film takes place in the Korean church, where the pews are filled with couples. All of the men are wearing headphones in order to hear the translation of the pastor's sermon. I was surprised to see how few of them understood Korean.*

SC: It's very strange to me how the wives are always the ones who learn their husbands' language. I thought about why it is. Does it have to do with some kind of power structure behind male/female or Caucasian/Asian relationships? I am not sure. One thing I know for sure from my own observation is that this kind of marriage has demanded more sacrifices from the wives than from the husbands.

***TO:** Shin says at one point that it's too difficult to teach her children Korean in an American home. Do you think that's the only reason she hasn't, or did you sense a desire on her part to make sure her children were fully assimilated Americans?*

SC: No, I didn't think she wanted her children to be assimilated American kids. Maybe the opposite, I would say. She said there was a stage when she tried so hard to teach them Korean, but at some point she just kind of gave up because she felt that her children weren't motivated to learn their mom's language when the rest of the world spoke to them in English. They go to a school that is inside Ft. Hood. You don't see many interracial children who fluently speak both languages there. I have closely [watched] a lot of children at the church where Pong goes. It's very interesting to see how they still are comparatively open to (or even like) Korean food, TV shows, or other sorts of Korean pop culture when they are not very familiar with [the language], usually the first thing to learn when you try to understand one's culture.

***TO:** Both Pong and Shin stress the significance of having a job, as if their survival as foreign wives were contingent upon their independence.*

SC: The best way, according to Pong and Shin, for them to adjust themselves to the new environment was to go out and find things they could do without their husbands' help: socializing themselves, making friends whom they could talk to and learn English from, and earning money, not just to support the family but also to do something productive other than staying home and watching Korean TV shows on tapes. When they start having confidence that they can live in the United States without anyone's help it's like a turning point where they finally are proud of themselves for their "achievements." That's when a strange place becomes home. Through their story, I wanted to bring to the surface what it means to be away from everything you love, to have married a man who doesn't speak your language, to have a child who doesn't always fully understand your culture, to be isolated from the world around you, and to find inner strength and conviction to overcome these challenges and finally be on your own.

***TO:** What's next for you?*

SC: My next big project, which I think will be my thesis project (for my MFA degree), is a feature-length documentary on a Korean nun named Mal-Ji Jung who has lived in Chalco [an extremely

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Monitoring the Myths

BY ROBERT JENSEN

War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death
By Norman Solomon
John Wiley & Sons
291 pages, $24.95

To put the problems of U.S. foreign and military policy into the quip-ridden language of contemporary politics: "It's the empire, stupid."

Understanding this big picture is crucial as we struggle to respond politically to the disastrous invasion and occupation of Iraq. Yes, the Bush administration is a threat, but it's not *the* threat. True, the neocons are a danger, but not *the* danger.

The threat and danger—the rot at the core of U.S. actions abroad—is not a single politician or school of thought, but a project of empire building, which has gone forward through Republican and Democratic administrations alike, most intensely and recklessly since the end of World War II, when U.S. power and domination peaked.

Take what is probably the single most obscene enterprise in this period—the U.S. attack on Indochina, what we call "the Vietnam War." Its roots were in the policy of a moderate Midwestern Republican, Dwight Eisenhower, who supported French attempts to recolonize Vietnam and undermined a political settlement after the Vietnamese kicked out the French. The violence necessary to prop up a client regime in the South was ramped up by the darling of liberal East Coast Democrats (John Kennedy) and then intensified to truly barbaric levels by a rough-edged Southern Democrat (Lyndon Johnson) and a rough-edged Western Republican (Richard Nixon).

In U.S. political mythology, we were either a well-intentioned giant that simply misunderstood the nature of Vietnamese society (the liberal view) or a well-intentioned giant kept from victory by a fifth column at home (the reactionary view).

In the mythology of U.S. journalism, the news media played the role of tough critic, holding the powerful accountable for their mistakes. In this story, reporters and editors are either heroes for their courage (the liberal view) or traitors for their contribution to defeat (the reactionary view).

The problem is that both myths are myths. The U.S. assault on Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia was part of a wider attack on independent movements in the Third World, which U.S. policymakers were eager to destroy. And the U.S. press was mostly boosterish about the war, especially in the early years, becoming skeptical only when larger forces in society turned critical.

At a point when abandoning these myths is crucial to building a left/progressive political movement that can challenge the U.S. empire, media critic Norman Solomon has written an engaging book that helps explain how the myth-making machine works. *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death* outlines how politicians and corporate journalists typically see the world in similar fashion, sometimes squabbling over the finer points of empire construction and maintenance, but with the same basic worldview.

Solomon's book is organized around 17 specific myths that presidents and pundits—even when they may be locked in what seems to be conflict—work together to maintain. The first is the most central to the imperial enterprise: "America is a fair and noble superpower." It is this American exceptionalism—the belief that, unlike other great powers, the United States is motivated not by the self-interest of some set of elites but by benevolence—that allows policymakers to sell wars designed to extend and deepen U.S. power as a kind of international community service. In the words of pundit Charles Krauthammer, "We run a uniquely benign imperium," a claim that is regarded as absurd around the world but is shamefully easy to peddle to the U.S. public.

Because we are this benign power, "our leaders will do everything they can to avoid war." Solomon methodically goes through the evidence for the opposite conclusion: U.S. leaders often strive to make war inevitable. Most important here is Solomon's attention to the first Gulf War and Yugoslavia. In the aftermath of the Bush II debacle in Iraq, too many folks (including, sadly, some on the liberal/progressive side) talked wistfully about how George W.'s father "did it right" in 1990-91 by building an international consensus before going to war. Yes, George H.W. displayed more savvy in derailing diplomacy and then bullying or bribing other nations to fight that war—which was necessary only to demonstrate U.S. power and establish greater dominance in the Middle East—but that's hardly something to celebrate. In the Clinton attack on Yugoslavia in 1999—a war that many liberals were willing to believe was "humanitarian" in intent and execution—Solomon describes how the United States made sure that diplomacy would fail in the negotiations by insisting on conditions which no nation could accept, clearing the way for war.

None of this should surprise anyone; it's how empires behave. In an empire that has expansive political and expressive freedom, however, we want to believe that journalists can check such abuses. Here, Solomon explains the folly of believing that "if this war is wrong, the media will tell us."

The strength of Solomon's analysis is that he doesn't caricature the news media. Journalists often do excellent work, and when the political conditions are right, they can be an important part of a healthy political culture. But Solomon points out that while stories

that critique the powerful do get written, challenges to the conventional wisdom typically run once, often buried inside the paper. Meanwhile, the pronouncements of the powerful are repeated day after day, often on the front page. Accurate and important reporting is usually overwhelmed by the drumbeat.

Solomon explains that in addition to the ideological similarities between journalists and policymakers, one key reason for this is the slavish reliance of corporate journalists on so-called official sources: politicians, policy advisers, military leaders, think-tank hacks, and the other "experts" created by the public-relations machinery. We have a free press, but one that doesn't use that freedom to act in a consistently independent fashion.

How bad is it, really? Karen DeYoung, a *Washington Post* reporter and former assistant managing editor, put it bluntly in an August 12, 2004 *Post* story that looked at the paper's failures in the run-up to the Iraq War: "We are inevitably the mouthpiece for whatever administration is in power. If the president stands up and says something, we report what the president said." DeYoung explained that contrary arguments tend to get pushed off the front page, down in the story where many will never read.

That's how bad it is: An experienced reporter can acknowledge that journalists routinely allow themselves to be used as conduits for lies; one of the top newspapers in the country can publish that acknowledgement; and the game between politicians and journalists rolls along without much interruption.

There are indications, however, that more and more people are tired of the empire and the news media's capitulation to power. We shouldn't overestimate the percentage of the U.S. population that is becoming critical; Bush and politicians of his ilk continue to dominate the political landscape, and much of the rest of the voting population accepts the empire-with-a-human-face that John Kerry, Hillary Clinton, and most Democrats continue to sell, but the seeds of a principled and committed anti-empire movement are here.

On the media front, things are similar; polls show that a majority of the public accepts the idea that the media's main problem is that they're too liberal. However, the seeds of not only a limited media-reform movement but also a more expansive and critical media-justice movement also are taking root.

Solomon is hopeful but not naïve. He knows that long-term grassroots organizing is necessary, and he's on the lookout for issues that can engage people. In recent weeks, he's written about the possibility of pressing for Bush's impeachment after the "smoking gun" memo from Britain, which made clearer the Bush administration's lies to manufacture the pretext for a war on Iraq. He's not promising that Bush could actually be impeached but arguing that a serious movement could "push over the media obstacles and drag politicians into a real debate about presidential war crimes and the appropriate constitutional punishment."

What will lead people to want to be part of that movement? No doubt some of the motivation will come from a realization of self-interest—while imperial conquest enriches a small elite segment of this country and provides some short-term material benefits to average Americans, it's inherently destructive and unsustainable. Solomon ends his book by pointing out that U.S. citizens also have a lot of moral self-reflection to do. "While going to war may seem easy, any sense of ease is a result of distance, privilege, and illusion," he writes in the book's conclusion.

Can we be the people we claim to be—with the values we claim to hold—and support the empire, whether it's Bush's full-bodied version or the Democrats' "empire lite"? The answer is clearly no, but breaking through the "War Made Easy" mythology is difficult, especially in a mass-mediated age. As Solomon points out, "The mass media are filled with bright lights and sizzle, with high production values and lower human values, boosting the war effort."

His final words contain the hope we need: "Conscience is not on the military's radar screen, and it's not on our television screen. But government officials and media messages do not define the limits and possibilities of conscience. We do."

Can we be the people we claim to be—with the values we claim to hold—and support the empire, whether it's Bush's full-bodied version or the Democrats' "empire lite"?

It's up to us not just to critique what politicians say and what's on television, but to understand where conscience must lead us: to take seriously the responsibility and risks that will be required to help dismantle the U.S. empire. ■

Robert Jensen is a journalism professor at the University of Texas at Austin, a board member of the Third Coast Activist Resource Center (http://thirdcoastactivist.org), and the author of Citizens of the Empire: The Struggle to Claim Our Humanity. *He can be reached at rjensen@uts.cc.utexas.edu.*

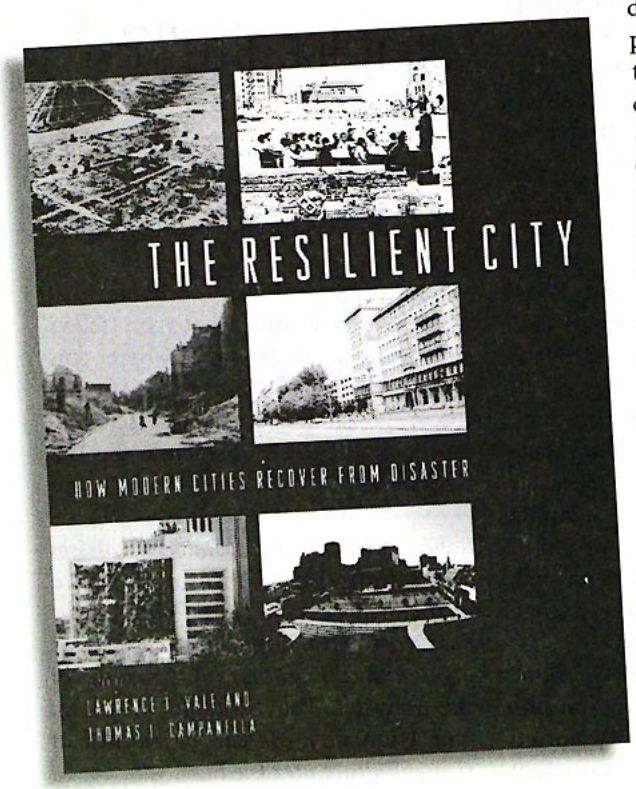
Trauma Centers

BY CHAR MILLER

The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster
Edited by Lawrence J. Vale and Thomas J. Campanella
Oxford University Press
376 pages, $24.95

Texas is a disaster waiting to happen. Come to think of it, the disaster has already occurred, and repeatedly so. Just flip through a century's worth of the state's major dailies for a gruesome tally of death and devastation—you'll discover plenty of it. Galveston heads the list: In 1900 a murderous hurricane churned across the Gulf of Mexico and smashed across the island, killing an estimated 6,000 people, the worst such loss in U.S. history. In subsequent years, the bad news just kept rolling in. Corpus Christi was torn apart by a 1919 hurricane; two years later, in Flash-Flood Alley, San Antonio, New Braunfels, San Marcos, and Austin disappeared beneath surging flood waters that swept away scores of citizens and made inhabitable large stretches of the built landscape. Goliad (1902), Waco (1953), Wichita Falls (1979), and tiny Saragosa (1987) have been among the many communities that have imploded when swirling, black-funnel clouds touched down, leaving indescribable havoc. And then there is Texas City. It was vaporized in 1947, along with 576 residents, after the SS Grandcamp, packed with ammonia nitrite, erupted in a fireball. A chilling echo of that deadly moment came this past March, when a unit of BP's local refinery blew up, killing 15 workers. The list could go on and on and on: The Lone Star State is one dangerous place.

Yet what is striking about this catalogue of woe is not that it happened, but where it happened. Always the city is our frame of reference, the backdrop for and the scale by which we measure the weight of what we dub "natural disasters." There is nothing particularly natural about them, for what we are really describing is their impact on us. Who notices when a Gulf Coast hurricane veers away from Brownsville and whips into little-populated Kenedy County? An earthquake that merely uplifts the desert sand is not nearly as riveting as the December 2003 temblor that within seconds reduced the ancient Iranian city of Bam to dust; a tornado that rips through a ranch has none of the clout of a twister that levels a trailer park (though flying cattle would be something of a photo op). Yet even such a bucolic curiosity does not qualify as an act of God—to achieve such a venerated (and uninsurable) status requires staggering, heart-rending human loss.



It is the same the world over, a point implicit in *The Resilient City.* Would anyone write for, or read, a volume dedicated to rural resiliency and the plucky farm families who rebuild their barns, mend their fences, and give chase to an airborne longhorn? But editors Vane and Campanella are correct in that there is something remarkable about the capacity of cities and their citizens to suffer great misery and then rebound. Between 1100 and 1800, for instance, only 42 cities "were permanently abandoned following destruction," a number that might have increased as in those same years "Baghdad, Moscow, Allepo, Mexico City, and Budapest lost between 60 and 90 percent of their populations due to wars." But they were rebuilt. Why?

That question animates this collection of essays, which grew out of a post-9/11 conference called to explore how past civilizations persevered when confronted with catastrophe, an exercise at once "scholarly and therapeutic." And if you like your therapy grim, this is just the book for you; the traumas it recounts are every bit as chilling as the politics of recovery are ugly.

Consider the case of Tangshan, China, where nothing happened in the early morning hours of July 28, 1976. That, at least, was the initial reaction of the People's Republic: A 7.8 Richter-scale quake, which in three seconds obliterated the city of one million with a force "roughly 400 times that of the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima," had not occurred. Two years later, the ruined city remained off-limits to foreigners. The government continued to shroud the death toll, conceding only that this earthquake had been "the deadliest in four centuries of Chinese history." When finally it estimated losses at 240,000 people, few believed the figure. Scoffed

one resident: "Not one single building escaped earthquake damage. How can government officials say that only one-quarter of the Tangshan population perished in this disaster?"

They did so by employing the same top-down authority that allowed them to impose their will on the post-quake city. Tangshan's original spatial design, writes Beatrice Chen, had been "crafted in the image of doctrinaire Maoist industrialization," wherein housing and factories were situated in dense proximity so that one need only walk to work. That streetscape had disappeared with a jolt, and following Mao's death, the new premier, Deng Xiaoping, determined that a new Tangshan must arise from the rubble. Rebuilding it with a wider street grid, more open space, and a segregation of workplace and residence was essential, planners believed, to creating a more earthquake-proof community that lost none of its economic productivity. By this scheme, Deng hoped to demonstrate "China's ability to modernize and to affirm the superiority of [his] socialist regime over Mao's outdated leftist ideology."

The PRI would have loved to have imposed a China-style news blackout on and wielded unchecked power over the recovery of Mexico City in the wake its 1985 earthquake. Although the one-party state imitated its Chinese peers in this respect—it consistently underreported the numbers associated with the disaster—the powerful September tremors, the largest of which registered 8.1 on the Richter scale, actually loosened the PRI's hold on power.

So argues Diane E. Davis, whose extensive writing about Latin American urbanization leads her to conclude that "resilience" is only partly about the reconstruction of the built environment; it must also factor in the human dimension. A telling example emerges in the public anger at the staggering number of sheered-off apartment buildings in the downtown core, many of which the government had constructed. Their decimated state, along with bodies showing signs of torture that were discovered in collapsed police stations, exposed the degree to which the PRI willfully ignored building codes and human rights. As evidence of corruption and malfeasance mounted, the earthquake "conveyed a larger message about the meaning and character of the city itself: Mexico City had been treated too long as a place," Davis reports, "where privileged people got rich on the backs of modest residents, and where people were abused (even to death) by authorities who acted in collusion with the nation's economic elite." The quake revealed social fault lines that undercut the ruling party's grip on the city, and, because of the city's powerful role in organizing national life, helped topple the PRI as the sole representative of the nation-state.

Nothing is quite so simple, of course, and Davis is deft in elucidating the complicated interactions between urban restoration and political change. So too are many of the other contributors. In his analysis of a certain "steamy southern backwater," which an inhabitant once described as a "meager village with a few bad houses and extensive swamps," and another lambasted as a "wilderness, dignified with the name of a city," Anthony Pitch deciphers the relationship between the restoration of Washington, D.C., following its 1814 incineration at the hands of the British and its increasing centrality in the emerging democratic society. Postwar Berlin was another capital whose rehabilitation was layered with nationalist yearnings, although, as Brian Ladd reminds us, this was complicated by its Cold War bifurcation into East and West. The two cities were "governed by two ideologically opposed regimes, each determined to claim the legacy of pre-Nazi Berlin, to display the clearer break with Hitler," and, if that was not enough, "to prove its cultural and political superiority." Which past and present were to be celebrated, which denied or buried, and who made those decisions, shaped the metropolitan reconfigurations, which then intensified with Berlin's 1990s reunification. "In its slow, episodic, and incomplete reconstruction," Ladd concludes, "Berlin has seen a unusual degree of resistance to honoring the past in the name of remembering its shame."

Similar tensions have shaped the repair of other war-torn or strife-ridden cities, including Guernica and Warsaw, Beirut and Jerusalem. Each has been weighted down with inflated expectations, each bears the scars of sectarian dispute, ideological conviction, or religious divisiveness, and each underscores just how profound and occasionally perverse an impact urban design and designers can have on the definition of human affairs. "Can't we just get along?" Rodney King famously pleaded in the aftermath of Los Angeles' brutal 1992 riots. Apparently not: The recovery of south-central LA has been troubled by a tangle of social forces, governmental agencies, and commercial interests.

But LA has nothing on New York City. The squabbling over who should design the 9/11 memorials, what they should look like, where they should be situated, and under what conditions and configurations they should be built, are of a piece with the egregious posturing of each plan's proponents and their always-vocal detractors—a cacophony that swells as the chattering classes make their case in print, over the airwaves, through television, and online. A little peace and quiet would be nice, and Edward Linenthal found just such a reflective moment when he traveled to Shanksville, Pennsylvania, to participate, along with two citizens from Oklahoma City, in a town meeting to discuss how best to remember those who perished aboard United Flight 93. That evening, Linenthal notes, "there was no lofty rhetoric, no evidence of cheap grace, just people moving through a dark time together. Perhaps this modest yet powerful form of resilience is the most honest. Perhaps this, the sober mapping of the struggle ahead, is what Oklahoma City has to tell us about the new normal that awaits." ■

Char Miller is professor of history and director of urban studies at Trinity University; author of Deep in the Heart of San Antonio, *he is also editor of* Fifty Years of the Texas Observer.

—PIs, continued from page 5
Klansmen be released. Within minutes, the police showed up to disperse the crowd, which complied, albeit slowly. What happened next is unclear, but four protestors, including two local black males, ended up in handcuffs and were given criminal trespass charges even though, according to Dan Elgin, a legal observer with Austin People's Legal Collective, "[they] were complying with the police order." By the end of the day, 12 protestors had been arrested, including two juveniles.

I SEE DEAN PEOPLE If you weren't part of the Deaniac following in the 2004 presidential election, you might have felt out of place at this year's DemocracyFest. The three-day conference held at Austin's Huston-Tillotson University on July 17-19 drew more than 1000 progressives. Many of them toted buttons, T-shirts, and even bags, proclaiming, "Dean speaks for me," "Generation Dean," and "I'm a Dean Democrat." This made some sense given that the conference was sponsored mainly by Democracy for America, the organization that emerged from the ruins of Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign. The weekend offered panels on various progressive issues and campaign training and included, of course, characteristic Republican bashing. But the gathering of so many impassioned liberals also offered glimpses of the shortcomings that have plagued progressives for years: a diverse coalition that sometimes fractures along racial lines, too often only unifies around specific candidates, and sometimes degenerates into gripe-fests.

"A typical liberal tendency is to go into a room and suck all the energy out by being really negative and not offering positive alternatives," said Rita Nakashima Brock, director of Faith Voices for the Common Good.

But DemocracyFest tried not to be a group whine-in. Participants focused on learning how to articulate their core values in clear, concise language. Many speakers during the weekend argued that liberals must create a unifying platform that office hopefuls can follow. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Illinois) suggested that the theme should simply be "building a more perfect union." Other panelists spoke of "love," "community," "unity," and reclaiming the word "moral."

At a panel on religion in politics, Andy Hernandez, head of the 21st Century Leadership Center at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, argued that Republicans, in fact, do not have a monopoly on the "moral vote." The moral vote, he noted, has actually decreased over the past few election cycles: 40 percent of voters in 1996 said they voted based on moral values; 35 percent in 2000; and 22 percent in 2004. So basically, he said, people vote how they'll vote, based on cultural predispositions, not necessarily religion—in 2000, morals were about defining the word "is" in 2004, morals were about gay marriage and abortion.

The issue of race bubbled up on more than one occasion during the weekend. One observer at the democracy and religion panel pointed out that none of the four panelists were black, nor was there any talk of the influence of churches in the black community. At a panel entitled "Framing for Communities," many in the largely Anglo audience became defensive at the suggestion that minority communities at times have felt excluded from Democratic politics.

DemocracyFest was ultimately about networking, coming together on issues, working for a progressive revival, and agitating about the current state of the federal government. Democrats should, however, heed the warning of Jim Hightower: "Agitation without organization is frustration."

PBS NOT HISTORY YET Jim Lehrer, host of "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer" on PBS, was at the University of Texas' Harry Ransom Center on June 16 promoting his latest novel, *The Franklin Affair*. The more than 40-year veteran journalist has learned to use his dry delivery to perfect comic effect. Noting that his wife's latest novel is titled, *"Confessions of a Bigamist,"* he deadpanned, "You tell them you heard it from me: Kate has never been and never will be a bigamist."

This is Lehrer's fourth consecutive novel to use a historical event or figure—in this case, Benjamin Franklin—throughout the story. The book, about historians who find documents revealing Franklin committed a murder, was motivated by Lehrer's love of history, which formed the subject of most of his talk. After the speech, Lehrer opened the floor to questions from the 150 audience members. Questions about the current state of journalism, the Bush administration, and, of course, the fate of the public broadcasting system dominated. On June 9, a subcommittee in the U.S. House of Representatives voted to cut PBS funding by 45 percent. Lehrer at first deflected questions about the future of PBS. Being a student of history, he noted that it has been threatened with funding cuts before. "It's unlikely anything significant will happen if past patterns hold," he told the audience.

Past funding threats have never made it through the Senate. The political reality, he said, is that "some of the most powerful senators are from sparsely populated areas like Wyoming and Alaska." Commercial stations do not serve many of these areas, so public broadcasting is the only source of local news. (Indeed, on June 23, the House voted to restore the funding.)

One man asked him to comment on recent statements by Kenneth Tomlinson, the Republican-appointed chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which oversees PBS and National Public Radio. Tomlinson hired a private investigator to review PBS shows like *Now* with Bill Moyers, looking for liberal bias. Lehrer reassured the audience that if he thought the threat to public broadcasting was serious, "I'd be the first to stand up and say so."

Lehrer, who began his career as a reporter for the *Dallas Morning News* and the *Dallas Times-Herald*, spoke of the value of public television. He said, "As the flow of news grows and the volume increases, you have to have a source you trust," noting that PBS news programming is more trusted than any other source, according to recent polls. ■

—Interview, continued from page 25

poor area outside Mexico City] for 20 years, serving underprivileged Mexican kids. This project is like an extension lead or a conclusion to the documentaries that I have made. Like I mentioned, I want to explore stories of Korean women in strange places and how the kind of extraordinary circumstances that these women have faced shape their character.

I want to stay in the United States for a couple of years, working. But eventually I'll go back to Korea and direct TV dramas or documentaries made for TV. TV dramas in Asia are huge. Right now, it is Korean TV dramas that are dominating Asian pop culture. There's even a word to describe this phenomenon: "The Korean Wave." This is a dream for a filmmaker who wishes to reach as many viewers as possible. If there's any chance for me later on, making fiction films in Korea would be nice, too.

I have submitted *K-Town* to [an international documentary festival] and the Seoul Women's Film Festival; I'm waiting to hear from them. Also, I've talked to a nationwide TV network. If everything works out, there's a possibility that we will work together to make this project longer to televise nationwide. ■

Josh Rosenblatt is an arts writer based in Austin.

PBS CHARACTERS RALLY FOR PUBLIC TELEVISION FUNDING

WASHINGTON (AP), June 21, 2005—Clifford the Big Red Dog joined Democratic lawmakers and other PBS supporters on Tuesday to protest proposed cuts in federal funding for public broadcasting.

At the Capitol Hill news conference, the lawmakers were surrounded by young children holding signs that read, "Don't Can Oscar," a reference to "Sesame Street" character Oscar the Grouch.

PBS CHARACTERS TESTIFY IN WIDENING SCANDAL

WASHINGTON (AP), March 13, 2007—A federal grand jury in Washington heard testimony today from three key witnesses regarding allegations of a wide-ranging influence-peddling effort in the 2006 elections and on Capitol Hill, allegedly organized by some of the biggest names in public broadcasting—a scandal that federal prosecutors are calling "Muppet-Gate."

Big Bird, Elmo, and Grover were seen leaving the federal courthouse today following their testimony before the grand jury. Neither the three Sesame Street stars nor their attorneys responded to shouted questions from reporters. Prosecutors also refused to comment.

The allegations center on a plan allegedly conceived by longtime Sesame Street actors in 2005 shortly after the Republican-controlled U.S. House attempted to cut federal funding for public broadcasting. The actors hoped, according to documents first published by *The Washington Post* last week, to win influence in Republican-controlled Washington in order to protect their federal funding stream. "If the Indian tribes can do it, there's no reason Muppets can't, too," wrote Oscar the Grouch in an early strategy memo—first reported by the *Post*—that carried the subject line "We can't just be puppets anymore." After more than 30 years in public broadcasting, Mr. Grouch has quickly become a Washington power player in the past two years. The reclusive political consultant is known among Washington insiders for spending much of his time in a garbage can from which he directs his bare-knuckled political tactics and allegedly maintains close ties with Karl Rove.

photo illustration: Matt Omohundro

Big Bird's meeting last year with Dick Cheney is part of the growing political scandal.

In November 2005, Mr. Grouch founded the A-B-C As Easy As 1-2-3 Political Action Committee, according to federal campaign filings. The PAC allegedly funneled corporate money through various front groups to the Republican National Committee and to GOP congressional candidates in the 2006 elections. According to documents published in the *Post*, Mr. Grouch struck a deal with U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, stipulating that if the ABC-123 PAC helped elect more Republicans to the U.S. House, then the GOP leadership would promise not to cut federal funding for public broadcasting.

The New York Times reported in yesterday's editions that Big Bird and Snuffalufagus met secretly in the White House in October of last year with Dick Cheney and executives from ExxonMobil. Three weeks after the White House meeting, Sesame Street aired its controversial "Climate Change" episode in which Snuffalufagus famously remarked "Kids, global warming is as imaginary as I used to be."

Other likely grand jury witnesses could include Cookie Monster, hired in 2005 at the prompting of DeLay to serve as a corporate lobbyist for RJR-Nabisco. In the past two years, Mr. Monster's influence has become legendary on Capitol Hill. Said one Republican staffer who spoke on condition of anonymity, "When he wants something, and he gets up in your face and gives you the business, and those googly eyes of his start rolling around, man, I'll tell you it's hard to say no."

In a brief phone interview with the AP yesterday, Mr. Grouch defended his group's actions. "These allegations are utterly false. They are fictions created by partisan Democrats and the liberal media," he said. "It's a partisan puppet-hunt, plain and simple." ■