

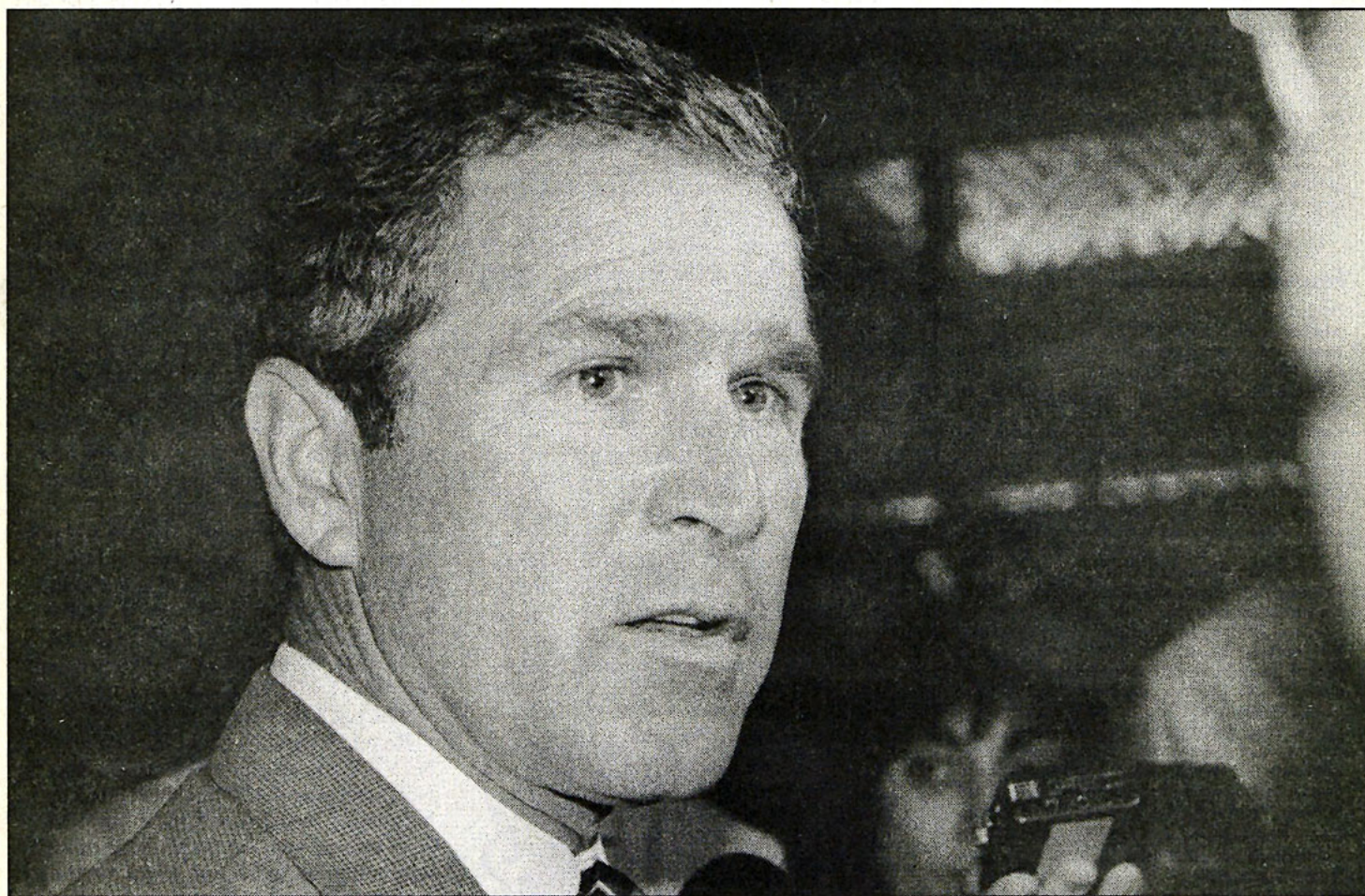
THE TEXAS Observer

A JOURNAL OF FREE VOICES

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Jack Brooks v. the Department of Justice

The Beaumont Congressman (Still) Wants to Get to the Bottom of the Inslaw Scandal

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Bankers, Bullies and Bastards

Texas Megabanks Want to Cripple Your Credit Union



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

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

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DIALOGUE

West Texas Waste Dumps

Ann Richards has been appearing with her grandchildren in recent campaign ads and it is a comforting, touching portrait. How fortunate for all of them that her grandchildren, unlike the children of Sierra Blanca, don't have to grow up in the shadow of adjacent sewer sludge from New York and nuclear waste from Texas and our first compact partners, Maine and Vermont. [See "Balancing Nuclear Waste, TO 9/2/94.] The sludge, which zipped through the state licensing process in a record 23 days after its hauler made a \$1.5 million sludge research grant to Texas Tech, contains pathogens and heavy metals. The Surgeon General's battle cry of Zero Tolerance for lead (because of its disastrous effects on young children) is echoed by all branches of the EPA save one—the Sludge Risk Assessment Division. They have a number for safe lead levels. The nuclear waste en route will contain, along with the medical gloves and booties touted by Gov. Richards' minions, plutonium and cesium-137, among other horrors. The idea is to take a thousand-year toxic, pack it in a hundred-year container and bury it in a 40-foot trench near an isolated, poor, minority-heavy community in an area of recent seismic activity. Now, the big Texas utilities want the cheaper dumping rates that will result from the increased volume that waste importation—perhaps massive waste importation—will provide. So Ann

tells us that, in order to avoid having to accept nuclear waste from other states, we first must accept nuclear waste from other states. Well, this is Texas, so you expect to hear politicians saying wild things like that, and people even vote them into office afterwards, amazing as that may seem to the denizens of the less-colorful world outside our borders. It is tough, though, to understand how such a sweet grandmother, who seems to care so much for her own grandchildren, could do such a thing to the little children of Sierra Blanca.

Gary Oliver, Marfa.

Mexican Lit Lives

For someone like myself who lived in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon (Mexico) for 20 years, Mr. Kellman's article in the September 30 issue, "Literary Free Market," [on the Eighth Annual Inter-American Book-fair and Literary Festival in San Antonio] was confusing: "... NAFTA has put Mexican governments out of the business of publishing imaginative literature. ... book-fair guests ... Abraham Nuncio ... Andrés Huerta come from Nuevo Leon and can offer evidence of the benefits and banes [?] of socialized publishing."

I know both columnist Nuncio and poet Huerta and they know as well as I that Mexican publishing is alive and kicking, be it in the publication by the federally sponsored CULTURA DE FONDO ECONOMICO, by the privately owned Monterrey's IXTLACIHATL, or the University of Vera Cruz's output.

Remarks like this about the "effect of NAFTA" are as unfounded as the fears by Northamerican labor that their factories, because of NAFTA, will dash off to Mexico. Anyone with any knowledge of the production infrastructure of the latter can easily verify that such apprehension is equally groundless.

Sarah P. Simon, Houston

Spare That Snake

When Jim Hightower ("Ban Dioxin," TO 10/14/94) looks at dioxin and sees snakes, you have to wonder what brand of poison he's been into. Listen, Jim, the real cowboy code teaches that when you're confronted by a big, coiled snake you mind your own damn business, which is all the snake asks you to do. Snakes are here to help the earth maintain a healthy balance of species, so let's be sure to place the blame where it belongs: man-made dioxin, not snakes, are a plague on the natural environment.

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Bush Deals and PAC Pigs

CALIFORNIA REPUBLICAN Senate candidate Michael Huffington's statement "I want a government that doesn't work," brings to mind the oxymoronic stupidity of Francisco Franco's fascist cheer: "Long live death." Miguel de Unamuno rose from his chair at the University of Salamanca and in one sound bite revealed the general and his generals as the fools that they were. But Huffington, a displaced Texas oilman who in 1992 bought a seat in the U.S. House with \$5 million of his own money and who is now spending more than \$20 million of his own money to buy a U.S. Senate seat, might actually want a government that doesn't work.

George W. Bush, the oilman who never left Texas, understands the importance of government that does work, as *Austin American-Statesman* political writer Dave McNeely explained in a column looking at how government has worked for Bush's Texas Rangers. "Public bonds paid \$135 million of the \$191 million the stadium cost. A half-cent sales tax in Arlington will pay for \$84 million of the bond payoff."

"The city," McNeely wrote, "owns the land for the time being, but the Rangers have total control over what happens on it. And in as few as a dozen years, while the citizens of Arlington pay most of the cost of the stadium's construction, the entire facility can become the Ranger's property."

McNeely also wrote of the Rangers' persuading the state to allow the team to acquire property through eminent domain.

So George W. Bush understands the importance of government that works—for him. He also knew how to make government work for himself and friends several years before he became a candidate for governor of Texas. In 1988, according to David Corn's report in this issue, Bush Jr. made a pitch to the government of Argentina on behalf of Enron, a Houston-based petroleum company. When the Minister of Public Works seemed reluctant to grant the concession to Houston-based Enron (a company packed with family friends and big contributors to Bush Sr.), George W. applied the pressure. "He tried to exert some influence to get that project for Enron," Cabinet member Rodolfo Terragno told the *Nation's* Corn. "He assumed that the fact he was the son of the [future] president would exert influence...I felt pressured. It was not proper for him to make that call."

Bush, who recently has kept his father at a

distance, made a decision early in the campaign to establish his own identity and would often bristle when reporters asked about the advantage of carrying his father's name into a political race. But he didn't mind carrying it into Argentina, where along with a half-page project proposal it might have helped sell a pipeline.

KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON is a Senator who might take issue with Michael Huffington's "government-that-doesn't-work" line. Government has worked for her husband's (Ray Hutchison) law firm, where government bond work can be almost as risk-free as some government bonds are tax-free—and far more lucrative. But Senator Hutchison is not financing her own campaign and her corporate sponsors will expect a government that works—at least for them. One major corporate sponsor is the pesticide PACs, according to reports compiled by Washington- and Austin-based environmental groups. "The pesticide industry suffered a major court loss in 1992 and is fighting to have Congress overturn it," said Kelsey Wirth of the Washington-based Environmental Working Group, which along with the Texas Center for Policy Studies compiled and published the Pesticide PAC report.

The chemical companies are counting on Hutchison—who holds a commanding lead in contributions received from corporate interests out to weaken the "Delaney Clause," enacted to protect the country's food supply. The junior Senator from Texas took in \$150,000—in less than one year in office. Daniel Coats, an Indiana Republican, placed second with \$94,700, although it took him four years to collect it. Texas Senator Phil Gramm ranks 13th, with only \$56,100 in Pesticide PAC money collected over the four-year period monitored by the environmental groups. Texas Democratic Representative Greg Laughlin, who squeaked into office in 1988 because of a last-minute campaign blitz by Clean Water Action and other environmental groups, placed second among House recipients of pesticide money, collecting \$39,700. Rio Grande Valley Democrat Kika de la Garza was 13th, taking in \$24,500, Houston-area Republican Jack Fields ranks 20th with \$22,500, Republican Joe Barton of Ennis is 37th with \$16,000 and Amarillo Democrat Bill Sarpalius proved that the blank look on his face doesn't necessarily mean what his critics say it does, by beating out Georgia's

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Newt Gingrich, one of the more notorious House PACPIGS. Sarpalius collected \$15,500 for 40th place, to 44th place Gingrich's \$13,863, proving wrong many of the State House press corps who once swore then-Senator-Sap couldn't spell 2,4-D.

Two-hundred-twenty-four House members now co-sponsor the pesticide industry bill written to weaken food safety protection; 22 Senators also co-sponsor it.

— L.D.

George W. Bush in Argentina

BY DAVID CORN

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, Rodolfo Terragno, an Argentine Cabinet Minister, received a telephone call from George W. Bush, son of the then-Vice President. When he hung up, Terragno was annoyed, he now says, for the younger Bush had tried to exploit his family name to pressure Terragno to award a contract worth hundreds of millions of dollars to Enron, a Houston-based firm close to the Bush clan.

During this past year, as Republican George W. Bush campaigned throughout Texas to replace Democratic Governor Ann Richards, he portrayed himself as a successful businessman who relied on "individual initiative," not his lineage. Contacted recently in Buenos Aires, Terragno, now a member of the Chamber of Deputies, offered an account that challenges Bush's campaign image.

In 1988, Terragno was the Minister of Public Works and Services in the government of President Raul Alfonsín. Terragno oversaw large industrial projects, and his government was considering construction of a pipeline to stretch across Argentina and transport natural gas to Chile.

Several U.S. firms were interested, including Enron, the largest natural gas pipeline company in the United States. But Terragno was upset with the corporation's representatives in Argentina. They were pressing Terragno for a deal in which the state-owned gas company would sell Enron natural gas at an extremely low price and, he recalls, they pitched their project with a half-page proposal, one so insubstantial that Terragno couldn't take it seriously. Terragno let the Enron agents know he was not happy with them.

It was then, Terragno says, that he received the unexpected call from George W. Bush, who introduced himself as the son of the Vice President. (The elder Bush was then campaigning for the Presidency.) George W., Terragno maintains, told the minister that he was keen on Argentina's proceeding with the pipeline, especially if it signed Enron for the deal. "He tried to exert some influence to get that project for Enron," Terragno asserts. "He assumed that the fact he was the son of the [future] President would exert influence.... I felt pressured. It was not proper for him to make

that kind of call."

George W. Bush did not detail his relationship with the pipeline project or Enron, according to Terragno. The Argentine did not know that Enron and the Bush set are cozy. President Bush is an old friend of Kenneth Lay, the head of Enron for the past 10 years. Lay has been a major fundraiser for President Bush. After the 1992 election left Secretary of State (and Bush pal) James Baker jobless, he signed on as a consultant for Enron. An article by Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker* last year disclosed that Neil Bush, another presidential son (the one cited by federal regulators for conflict-of-interest violations regarding a failed sav-



George W. Bush

CARMEN GARCIA

ings and loan in Denver), had attempted to do business with Enron in Kuwait. Enron's PAC and the families of its top officers have donated at least \$100,000 to George W. Bush's gubernatorial campaign.

Shortly after his conversation with George W. Bush, more Bush-related pressure descended on Terragno, the former minister asserts. Terragno says he was paid a visit by the U.S. Ambassador to Argentina, Theodore Gildred. A wealthy California developer appointed ambassador by President Ronald Reagan, Gildred was always pushing Terragno to do business with U.S. companies. This occasion, Terragno notes, was slightly different, for Gildred cited George W. Bush's support for the Enron project as one reason Terragno should back it. "It was a subtle, vague message," Terragno says, "that [doing what George W. Bush wanted] could help us with our relationship to the United States."

Terragno did not O.K. the project, and

the Alfonsín Administration came to an end in 1989. Enron was luckier with the next one. The pipeline was approved by the administration of President Carlo Saul Menem, leader of the Peronist Party and a friend of President Bush. (The day after Menem was inaugurated, Neil Bush played a highly publicized game of tennis in Buenos Aires with Menem.) Some Argentine legislators complained that Menem officially cleared the pipeline project for development before economic feasibility studies were prepared.

Replying to a list of questions from *The Nation* asking whether George W. Bush spoke to Terragno about the pipeline project and whether he had any business relationship with Enron, Bush's gubernatorial campaign issued a terse statement: "The answer to your questions are no and none. Your questions are apparently addressed to the wrong person." This blanket denial covered one question that inquired if Bush ever had discussed any oil or natural gas projects with any Argentine official. George W. Bush's response on this point is contradicted by a 1989 article in the Argentine newspaper *La Nacion* that reported he met that year with Terragno to discuss oil investments. The newspaper noted the meeting took place in Argentina but Terragno says he saw Bush in Texas.

Theodore Gildred, a private developer again, is currently traveling in Argentina; his office says he is unavailable. An Enron spokesperson said, "Enron has not had any business dealings with George W. Bush, and we don't have any knowledge that he was involved in a pipeline project in Argentina."

In late August, several members of the Chamber of Deputies—Terragno not among them—submitted a parliamentary request for information, calling on President Menem to answer dozens of questions about the business activities of the Bush family in Argentina. (In 1987, Neil Bush created a subsidiary of his oil company to conduct business in Argentina. In early August, a Buenos Aires newspaper reported that on a forthcoming trip to Argentina the former President would lobby the Menem government to allow a U.S. company to build a casino in Argentina. The one-time President said this was not true.) One of the deputies' queries asked, "Did Menem know if George W. Bush had attempted in Argentina to capitalize on his father's position?" So far Menem has not responded. □

This article is reprinted from *The Nation*, where David Corn is a staff writer.

Quisling Show

In November 1959, Hans J. Morgenthau, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago, published an article in The New York Times Magazine defending Columbia University for dismissing instructor Charles Van Doren for his part in the "Twenty-One" quiz show scandal. The article prompted a flood of anonymous letters from Columbia students, all of whom opposed Van Doren's firing. The following is an adaptation of Morgenthau's response to the students, which ran in the December 21, 1959, issue of The New Republic.

You are stung by my assertion that you are unaware of the moral problem posed by the Van Doren case, and you assure me that you disapprove of his conduct. But my point is proved by the very arguments with which you try to reconcile your disapproval of Van Doren's conduct with your petition to rehire him. Your concern is primarily with the misfortune of an attractive teacher, your regret in losing him and the rigor of the university's decision. You support your position by five main arguments: The confession has swept the slate clean, Van Doren will not do it again, his teaching was above reproach, academic teaching is not concerned with substantive truth and the university acted with undue haste. These arguments, taken at face value and erected into general principles of conduct, lead of necessity to the complete destruction of morality.

If confession can undo the deed, no evil could ever be committed and no evil-doer ever brought to justice. If wrong could be so simply righted and guilt so painlessly atoned, the very distinction between right and wrong, innocence and guilt, would disappear; for no sooner would a wrong be committed than it would be blotted out by a confession. Confession, even if it is freely rendered as an act of contrition and moral conversion, can mitigate the guilt but cannot wipe it out.

The argument that the morally objectionable act is not likely to be repeated assumes that the purpose of moral condemnation is entirely pragmatic, seeking to prevent a repetition of the deed. Yet while it is true that according to the common law a dog is entitled to his first bite, it is nowhere written that a man is entitled to his first murder ... or his first lie. The moral law is not a utilitarian instrument aiming at the protection of society, even though its observance has this effect.... Oedipus did not think it was all right to marry his mother once since he did not do it again. Or would you suggest that evil-doers like Leopold and Loeb should have gone free because it was most unlikely that they would repeat what they had done?

The arguments of the good teacher and of teaching not being concerned with substantive truth go together. You assume ... that the teacher is a kind of intellectual mechanic who fills your head with conventionally approved and required knowledge, as a filling station attendant fills a tank with gas. You don't care what the teacher does from 10 a.m. to 9 a.m. as long as he gives you from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. the knowledge which he has been paid to transmit. You recognize no relation between a teacher's general attitude towards truth and his way of transmitting knowledge, because you do not recognize an organic relation between transmitted knowledge and an objective, immutable truth. Yet the view that knowledge is but conventional—one conception of truth to be superseded by another—while seemingly supported by the radical transformations of physics, finds no support in the fields

of knowledge dealing with man. If it were otherwise, Plato and Aristotle, Sophocles and Shakespeare ... could mean nothing to us, except as objects for antiquarian exploration.

[The argument] that the trustees of Columbia University acted with undue haste is the most curious of all, and it gives the show away.... You look for reasons which justify your unwillingness to transcend that three-cornered relationship among yourself, your teacher and your university and to judge the obvious facts by the standards of morality rather than adjust them for your and your teacher's convenience. You are sorry about losing an attractive teacher and you hate to see that teacher suffer; nothing else counts. But there is something else that counts and that is the sanctity of moral law.

All men—civilized and barbarian—in contrast to the animals, are born with a moral sense; that is to say, as man is by nature capable of making logical judgements, so is he capable by nature of making moral judgements.... Civilized man shares with the barbarian the faculty of making moral judgements, but he excels over him in that he is capable of making the right moral judgements, knowing why he makes them. He knows—as Socrates, the Greek tragedians ... the Biblical prophets and the great moralists and tragedians of all the ages know—what is meant by the sanctity of moral law.

The moral law is not made for the convenience of man, rather it is an indispensable precondition for his civilized existence. It is one of the great paradoxes of civilized existence that ... it is not self-contained but requires for its fulfillment transcendent orientations. The moral law provides one of them.

You will become aware of the truth of that observation. For when you look back on your life in judgement, you will remember it, and you will want it to be remembered, for its connection with the things that transcend it. And if you ask yourself why you remember and study the lives and deeds of great men, why you call them great in the first place, you will find that they were oriented in extraordinary ways and to an unusual degree to the things that transcend their own existence. That is the meaning of the passage from the Scriptures, "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

This connection between our civilized existence and the moral law explains the latter's sanctity. By tinkering with it, by sacrificing it for individual convenience, we are tinkering with ourselves as civilized beings, we are sacrificing our own civilized existence.

The issue before you, when you were asked to sign that petition on Charles Van Doren's behalf then, was not the happiness of a particular man nor, for that matter, your own, but whether you and your university could afford to let a violation of the moral law pass as though it were nothing more than a traffic violation. Socrates had to come to terms with that issue, and he knew how to deal with it. You did not know how to deal with it. And this is why you hide your faces and muffle your voices. For since your lives have lost the vital contact with the transcendence of moral law, you find no reliable standard within yourself by which to judge and act But once you have restored that vital connection with the moral law from which life receives its meaning, you will no longer be afraid of your own shadow and the sound of your voices. You will no longer be afraid of yourself. For you will carry within yourself the measure of yourself and of your fellows and the vital link with all things past, future and above.

Brooks vs. the Justice Dept.

The Texas Delegation's Dean Seeks INSLAW Answers

BY RICHARD L. FRICKER

AN EFFORT BY U.S. House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jack Brooks to bring a decade-long dispute between a computer software designer, INSLAW Inc. and the U.S. Department of Justice into open court failed in the waning hours of Congress this past month. The little-noticed bill that would have allowed the company to challenge the Justice Department in open court died on a procedural matter—but only after Attorney General Janet Reno and her Republican predecessor Edwin Meese, himself a central figure in the INSLAW controversy, made phone calls urging defeat of the bill.

Brooks, a Beaumont Democrat and dean of the Texas Congressional delegation, has been the most vocal and powerful high-level advocate of moving the decade-long fight out of Congress and into the federal courts. If Brooks—who is being targeted by Republicans as a 42-year House veteran—is defeated, further investigation of the software scandal probably goes down with him. Since the scandal has been linked to the "October Surprise," by which operatives for Ronald Reagan allegedly manipulated the release of American hostages in Iran in 1980 to hurt Jimmy Carter's re-election chances, as well as a domestic surveillance program Oliver North ran out of the White House, some Democrats are asking why Reno was collaborating with Iran-Contra apologist Ed Meese in an attempt to stop the investigation the House Judiciary chair has been promoting for at least four years.

The bill, introduced by Charlie Rose, a North Carolina Democrat, and passed on a partisan vote by the House Judiciary Committee, would have allowed an airing of claims that the Reagan/Meese Department of Justice stole the INSLAW Inc. software, known as PROMIS (Prosecutors Management Information Systems), converted it for intelligence use, allowed it to be sold on the open market by a friend and political associate of Reagan and Meese, gave it to foreign intelligence agencies, then refused to pay millions in court-ordered damages and engaged in a cover-up spanning three administrations and four attorneys general.

Richard L. Fricker is an investigative reporter living in Tulsa.

Reno's jumping into bed with Reagan's closest political adviser in an effort to block legislation introduced by her own party has not gone unnoticed by Democrats in Congress or the White House. Speaking from his Beaumont office in early October, Brooks told the *Observer*, "The committee adopted legislation to allow the federal claims court to hear the case with no presumption for either DOJ or INSLAW and the Republicans blocked it. I'm sorry the department decided to weigh in against the legislation ... because it was ill-advised and because they are a party of interest."

The INSLAW affair has maintained a place on the House Judiciary Committee agenda since April 1990, when Brooks ordered an investigation into the software company's claims. After a two-year investigation, the committee concluded in a report dated September 10, 1992, that "it is clear that high level Department of Justice officials deliberately ignored INSLAW's proprietary rights in the enhanced version of PROMIS and misappropriated this software for use at locations not covered under the contract with the company. Justice then proceeded to challenge INSLAW's claims in court even though it knew that these claims were valid and that the Department would most likely lose in court on this issue."

The committee also found that, "Attorney Generals [Edwin] Meese and [Richard] Thornburgh blocked or restricted congressional inquiries into the matter, ignored the findings of two courts and refused to ask for the appointment of an independent counsel. These actions were taken in the face of a growing body of evidence that serious wrongdoing had occurred which reached to the highest levels of the Department."

"The evidence," the committee reported, "clearly raises serious concerns about the possibility that a high level conspiracy against INSLAW did exist and that great efforts have been expended by the Department to block any outside investigation into the matter."

Reno waited until September 29, when a Judiciary subcommittee was considering the Rose bill, to release her own internal investigation clearing her department and recommending that the whole matter be laid to rest without compensation to INSLAW or further court hearings.

The Reno report was based on the findings of an earlier internal investigation conducted by retired Federal Judge Nicholas Bua. He concluded that the INSLAW claims were without merit and that the House investigators who had spent two years on the case had misunderstood much of what they discovered.

Bua was appointed as a Special Counsel by then-Attorney General William Barr on November 7, 1991, in anticipation of the Brooks investigation report. Reno referred to Bua during a press conference as a "special prosecutor." The two positions are vastly different; a "special counsel" reports directly to and works for the attorney general; a "special prosecutor" is allowed to conduct his own independent investigation.

Commenting on the Reno report, Brooks said:

"While I respect the seriousness of their [DOJ] effort, I suspect that the same career officials were relied upon by the department in preparing this report as were relied upon in preparing the Bua report. It was a total waste; he exonerated everybody. I thought they (INSLAW) had been mistreated and were entitled to some fairness. The only way we can do that is we need a statute to waive the statute of limitations they've run against INSLAW partly because of the delaying litigation tactics of the department. I intend to work next year, despite the blocking efforts of the Republicans to pass a bill that would lay this whole thing to rest once and for all. We've had enough departmental investigations and press speculation. I want a federal judge to decide the matter."

Among the House members contacted by Reno was Representative John Bryant, a Dallas Democrat. Bryant declined to characterize the call as lobbying, describing it instead as something of a position statement. Bryant told the Attorney General that he disagreed with her and that he would stand behind the Rose bill.

But the bill, which had barely passed the Senate, died in the House when Representative F. James Sensenbrenner, a Wisconsin Republican, objected on procedural grounds. The *Observer* was told by a Republican Congressional source speaking on

background that Sensenbrenner decided to block the bill without consulting with party leadership and that Sensenbrenner was not lobbied by the DOJ or by other interested parties.

But the off-the-record account of Sensenbrenner's involvement doesn't exactly square with events surrounding the Senate's passage of the bill. The Senate was prepared to vote on the Rose bill at about 11:30 p.m. October 7, when Minority Leader Bob Dole placed it on hold. The *Observer* has been told that Sen. Dole informed members of his party that he was responding to a request from former Attorney General Ed Meese. Dole ultimately withdrew his hold in exchange for another Senator clearing a bill Dole wanted passed before adjournment.

Some Senate staffers claim no knowledge of Meese's involvement. However, others close to the legislative body claim to have firsthand knowledge of the Dole remark and say the Minority Leader changed his mind after he reconsidered the controversy surrounding INSLAW and DOJ. What is known is that the bill passed along party lines an hour after Dole released it, and Dole—whose interest in the Republican presidential nomination is on the record—deprived opponents of a potential campaign issue.

Sensenbrenner was able to kill the bill because under the House rule used to bring this particular bill to the floor, only one objection is required from any representative to stop passage. But Dole's hold maneuver and Reno's phone calls leave room for speculation as to whether Sensenbrenner acted without consulting party leadership.

On the Democratic side, there have been rumblings about Reno's part in closing the door, for the moment, on the "INSLAW Affair." One congressional source, speaking on background, told the *Observer* that Reno's actions were, "a slap in the face at the committee's report and that the committee is determined to see that the actions recommended by the report are delivered. It [the INSLAW Affair] is now a problem of this [Reno's] Justice Department. I have a feeling there are people in the White House

that are quite upset about this." Another source familiar with the legislation and the current administration said, "there is some considerable sentiment in the White House that Reno is not a team player."

Reno's work on blocking the legislation even caught the eye of a French newspaper, *Le Monde du Renseignement*, which cited Washington sources who said President Bill

Bush administrations.

WHAT STARTED as examination of a contract dispute has become a journey to the dark side of American politics, where no answer is complete and motives are often, at best, obscure. INSLAW Inc. was formed by Bill and Nancy Hamilton as an outgrowth of a non-

profit organization funded by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA). The non-profit INSLAW had been contracted by LEAA to develop a system to help law enforcement collect money owed the government by career criminals and to track court cases, witnesses and career criminals. This original PROMIS was and remains in the public domain because it was developed with tax dollars. INSLAW Inc. merely contracted to install PROMIS.

The system—which could integrate the CIA, DOJ, IRS and other federal agency databases—was well-received among the target agencies. Ed Meese, then a special counselor to President Reagan, told a convention of law enforcement officials in 1981, just prior to awarding the INSLAW contract, that PROMIS, "provides one of the greatest opportunities for success in the future."

In May 1981, DOJ approved a project to install PROMIS in 20 U.S. Attorney offices across the country, with an eye toward eventually installing the software in all of the nation's Justice Department offices. In March 1982, INSLAW was awarded a \$10-million contract to install PROMIS in 94 additional Justice offices. At that time the 10 largest offices were using INSLAW's

computers on a time-share basis until the program was installed on site.

Although the original PROMIS was public domain, the improvements or, as they are known in the trade, "enhancements," to the program belonged to INSLAW Inc. Justice agreed in April 1982 to accept the enhanced version and pay INSLAW for the enhancements. But, the Justice/INSLAW marriage got off to a rocky start and soon the two were immersed in contract disagreements. Under an agreement still in dispute, IN-



Jack Brooks

STEWART F. HOUSE

Clinton was "furious" with Reno. The paper also said Democratic Majority Leader Richard Gephardt had "sternly lectured" a Reno aide and interpreted the Attorney General's actions as a "clear sign that Reno is not running Justice." So the "INSLAW Affair," which began in the early days of the Reagan Administration, now raises questions about Reno's ability to run the Department of Justice—perhaps, in part, because she has failed to replace much of the agency infrastructure created by the Reagan and

SLAW agreed to turn over a copy of its "enhanced" version for inspection to allow Justice to determine what additional monies were owed the company. Justice determined that it owned all of the PROMIS program and payments to the company were cut back and eventually suspended.

INSLAW, faced with the prospect of not getting paid and losing the multi-million dollar contract, filed for bankruptcy court protection on February 7, 1985. The company claimed that DOJ not only stole the INSLAW software but had made a concerted effort to force INSLAW into bankruptcy.

After several weeks of hearings and hours of testimony, bankruptcy judge George Bason ruled that Justice, through "Trickery, Fraud and Deceit," had stolen INSLAW's version of PROMIS. In an exhaustive ruling he systematically discredited every Justice witness, and found, as stated in his ruling, that Justice testimony was not only unreliable but unbelievable. Bason, who has published widely on bankruptcy and is considered an expert in his field, issued his ruling on January 25, 1988. He was told within a few days thereafter that his appointment to the bankruptcy court would not be renewed by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. After the Bush Justice Department announced that Bason would not be reappointed, Kevin Reynolds, a lawyer who had served as an aide to Connecticut Senator Christopher Dodd, spoke to about 20 bankruptcy lawyers and later said that everyone suspected that Bason was removed because of his INSLAW ruling. Bason was replaced by an IRS attorney who had represented the government in a case against INSLAW.

Bason ordered Justice to pay INSLAW \$6.2 million in damages. His ruling was upheld by a federal district court. But the Washington, D.C. appeals court dismissed INSLAW's case against the Department of Justice and vacated Bason's ruling on the grounds that the case had been heard in the wrong court. The Supreme Court refused to review the appellate ruling. (And in the interim, INSLAW's time to file suit lapsed. The Rose bill was introduced to set aside the appellate ruling by, in effect, rolling back the clock on the statute of limitations.)

When Justice refused to pay the damages ordered by Bason, INSLAW turned to Senator Sam Nunn, chairman of the Governmental Affairs subcommittee on investigations, who ordered his staff to look into the matter. The staff reported on September 29, 1989, that it could find no evidence of a conspiracy to defraud INSLAW. However, the staff did report that, "The absence of a broad conspiracy within the Department does not absolve the Department of the serious implications of the Bankruptcy

Court's findings or of this Staff Study. The staff finds that the Department exercised poor judgement in ignoring the potential for a conflict of interest in its hiring of the PROMIS Project Director, and then, after receiving allegations of a bias on his part, in failing to follow standard procedures to investigate them in a timely manner.

"The staff study is also critical of the Department for its lack of cooperation with the Subcommittee in this investigation. In the Staff's view, the Department's intransigence on certain issues resulted in substantial delays and seriously undercut the Subcommittee's ability to interview in an open, candid and timely manner, all those Department employees who may have had knowledge of the INSLAW matter." The report also called into question, as did Bason, the truthfulness of several Justice witnesses.

Justice remained steadfast in its position that nothing wrong had happened. INSLAW remained equally resolved that they had been wronged and turned to the House Judiciary Committee.

Bua, meanwhile, found Bason's ruling faulty. In his report, Bua suggested that since he was a retired Federal District Judge and Bason only a Bankruptcy Judge, Bua's own findings would be more correct. Bua then proceeded to find that Bason was in error, a finding that contradicted what fellow District Judge William B. Bryant had ruled. Bryant not only read the entire transcript, as did Bua, but also listened to tapes of the actual bankruptcy hearing. Barr never actually accepted Bua's finding, preferring to defer to whoever the new President would appoint to the attorney general's post. Barr himself landed a job with a prominent Washington law firm and Reno accepted Bua's findings.

AS THE HOUSE investigation was winding down and Bua was gearing up, other allegations had surfaced, not the least of which was that Dr. Earl W. Brian was linked with the alleged PROMIS theft. INSLAW alleged that Justice turned PROMIS over to Brian, a long-time Reagan friend and former California Secretary of Health, for private sale by his company, Hadron.

Brian had faced similar charges in California when he acquired 300 reels of the state's computerized welfare records through a contract arrangement signed during the waning hours of the Reagan governorship. Robert L. Gnaizda, interim health director to then-Governor-elect Jerry Brown, discovered during a 1975 audit of the Health Department that the tapes were missing. The tapes, he found, had been contracted out to Brian at the University of Southern California. Brian decried the audit, saying, "The entire matter is a blatant political ploy intended to obfuscate the

abortive Gestapo raid ordered by the health director." The tapes eventually were returned to the state.

Meese and Brian worked closely during the Reagan California years. An investigation of Meese by an independent counsel during the early years of the Reagan Presidency found questionable business dealing between Meese, Brian and a member of Meese's staff who reportedly acted as a conduit for loans from Brian to Meese and his wife.

Brooks' committee report called for additional investigation of Brian, his company Hadron and its relationship with the Department of Justice. Bua saw things differently and his report cleared Brian. Reno's report also cleared Brian of any involvement in the INSLAW affair. (Brian also was the subject of a June 28, 1993, Securities and Exchange Commission report that alleges he inflated profit reports on his Financial News Network, ran an elaborate leaseback project which in essence amounted to FNN paying itself for use of its own equipment and "attempted to conceal the fraudulent equipment sale/leaseback transactions from auditors...")

While the Brooks and Bua reports circulated, allegations were evolving that the PROMIS theft was only a part of a larger picture that included the software's use by foreign governments such as Israel, which reportedly used the program to track troublesome Palestinians, and U.S. intelligence agencies such as the CIA and the National Security Agency (NSA)—sometimes known as "no such agency" because of its super secret nature.

It had also previously been alleged that Oliver North had a computer link to PROMIS while, as a national security aide in the Reagan White House, he directed a program that tracked dissidents and potential troublemakers in the United States in an emergency preparedness program commissioned by Reagan's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The program was so sensitive that when Brooks asked a question about it during the Iran-Contra hearings the committee immediately went into a closed secret executive conference. By using PROMIS, North could have drawn up lists of anyone ever arrested for political protest or who had ever refused to pay taxes or otherwise come under government review.

Although the Canadian government denies having PROMIS, court documents include two letters Canadian government officials wrote to INSLAW, requesting detailed user manuals. (INSLAW officials wondered about the request as they had never sold PROMIS to the government of Canada.)

When Congressman Brooks' investigators came calling, the CIA also denied hav-

ing the INSLAW version of PROMIS. However, two years ago, a former top-level member of the agency stated privately, "The Congressional committees were after us to look into allegations that somehow the agency had been culpable of what would have been, in essence, taking advantage of, like stealing, the technology. We looked into it and there was enough to it, the agency had been involved."

In her attempt to clear Brian, Reno's report uses Bua's findings and cites the Senate Governmental Affairs subcommittee, which found no evidence of a Brian-Justice-Meese conspiracy. But far from being an absolution of Justice, as Bua and Reno have portrayed it to be, the Senate report graphically described Justice stonewalling and speculated about "heavy-handed" tactics against employees. In fact one section of the report is entitled, "THE SUBCOMMITTEE EXPERIENCES PROBLEMS WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE." The staff also pointed out that while they couldn't find any conclusive evidence of a conspiracy, they were prevented by Justice from conducting a full investigation.

During Bua's questioning of Brian, the doctor claimed that he had managed to kill a story the *American Bar Association Journal* was preparing on INSLAW. An *ABA Journal* story on INSLAW by this author in 1992 was in fact killed by the chairman of the editorial board, Norton Webster, who felt there was no INSLAW story to write, and that if printed the story could be construed as biased against President Reagan.

If the story had run, it would have recounted allegations of Brian's possible involvement in the 1980 "October Surprise" during which an agreement allegedly was reached between functionaries of the Reagan campaign and the Iranian government concerning the date of the Iranian hostage release.

A joint Congressional task force headed by Lawrence Barcella reported that such an agreement was never made. However, much of the evidence used by the task force has come under suspicion. This suspicion continues to grow because of information developed from unofficial inquiries in Europe and in the Middle East, which suggest either

that Barcella's report is a whitewash or that he and his investigators were seriously deceived. It is known that Barcella declined to interview Brian about his alleged trip to Paris.

PLO leader Yasir Arafat confirmed during a taped interview with this author on December 3, 1993, that Reagan campaign functionaries did contact him in October 1980 about providing introductions to the Iranians. The person who contacted Arafat is believed to have been William Casey, Reagan's campaign manager who was later appointed director of the CIA. Court docu-



John Bryant

ALAN POGUE

ments in Canada assert that Brian was in Paris during October 1980, on the same dates that an agreement between the Reagan campaign and the Iranians was allegedly concluded. INSLAW has claimed that these connections and allegations require a full public airing of its claims.

INSLAW has also cited Justice's supplying the government of Israel with a copy of PROMIS, which Justice claims was the public domain version of the program. But, as the Brooks report concludes, Justice considers all versions of PROMIS as public domain. There has been some speculation and allegations that Justice distributed the pro-

gram to foreign governments after installing a "trap door" that allows U.S. intelligence agencies to monitor information the PROMIS software gathers for foreign national security agencies.

Brooks and Bryant have both said they want INSLAW to be compensated for losses and damages or at the very least be provided a day in court. Justice says there is nothing to argue about because their own investigations have absolved them of culpability.

However the box score compiled over the past 10 years says that the Senate staff didn't find anything but was blocked by Justice in many of its efforts. The bankruptcy court found that DOJ stole INSLAW's software through "trickery, fraud and deceit" and the court found much of the testimony provided by DOJ employees "suspect" to say the least. When the case was appealed to the federal district court, that judge concurred with the bankruptcy court. The appellate court never disputed the facts or findings in the case, only the jurisdiction of the bankruptcy court. The House Judiciary Committee found suspicions of wrongdoing and has asked for the appointment of an independent counsel and, if that is not granted, special legislation to pay INSLAW what the court had ordered.

The only reports clearing Justice come from within the department itself. The only opposition to a public airing of the INSLAW affair comes from Republicans whose party was in power at the time the alleged theft occurred, and the Department of Justice, which remains staffed with people Reno describes as "dedicated career professionals" (DCP's) who were DOJ DCPs while PROMIS was allegedly stolen and Reno stands behind her DCPs.

Even with the contradictions in the various reports and the questions which arise about the Department of Justice's conduct as well as questions about the intelligence community and the Reagan campaign of 1980, it is doubtful if any further investigation will occur if Jack Brooks loses his election. Or if Brooks wins and the Democrats lose control of the House of Representatives—making Brooks the ranking minority member rather than Chair of the Judiciary Committee. □

The Bankers' Lament

BY ROBERT BRYCE

PITY THOSE POOR bankers. They are coming off a decade in which federal taxpayers provided subsidies worth several hundreds of billions of dollars. Between April and June of this year, they had their second-best quarter in history, earning \$11.2 billion, an increase of 8.5 percent over 1993. During the same period, commercial banks in Texas earned \$487 million. Loans are up, failures are down. Consolidation and new interstate banking laws have provided opportunities for big banks to dominate the business as never before. But that isn't quite good enough. So bankers from Asheboro, North Carolina, to Houston, Texas, have filed a series of lawsuits against the National Credit Union Administration, alleging that credit unions are unfairly competing for customers.

To get an idea of how much competition credit unions are giving banks, consider this: The country's 12,733 credit unions have \$301 billion in total assets. The nation's 10,715 commercial banks have \$3.6 trillion in assets. The average credit union has \$22 million in assets. The average bank, \$336 million. The largest credit union in the country, the Navy Federal Credit Union in Vienna, Virginia, has \$8.3 billion in assets. Bank of America—the largest bank in the United States—has \$146 billion in assets. The three largest banks in the United States—Bank of America, Chemical Bank and Wells Fargo—have more assets than all the country's credit unions combined.

Bank profits are increasing because banks are charging individual customers for everything from the use of cash machines to checking accounts. Since 1983, U.S. credit unions' assets have tripled. Much of the growth can be attributed to credit unions' lower fees. They usually charge a fraction of what commercial banks charge for the same services.

Four lawsuits are currently pending against the NCUA. The most recent suit was brought by the Texas Bankers Association and five Houston-area banks. They are suing over the expansion of the Communicators Federal Credit Union, in Houston, which was given permission by the

NCUA to expand its membership to include all people over the age of 50 living within 25 miles of the facility. As in the suit brought by the North Carolina banks, the Texas bankers believe the expansion should be disallowed because it violates the so-called "common bond" requirement by which credit unions are chartered.

AN ACHIEVEMENT of the New Deal, the Federal Credit Union Act became law on June 26, 1934. Sponsored by Wright Patman, the Texarkana Democrat who served 24 consecutive terms (from 1929 to 1976) in the U.S. House of Representatives, the act was amended in the mid-'60s to allow credit unions to provide deposit accounts and checking services for members. The law restricts credit union membership to "groups having a common bond of occupation or association, or to groups within a well-defined neighborhood, community or rural district."

Non-profit cooperatives run for the benefit of their members, credit unions have their roots in Italy's *montes pietatis* (poverty banks) of medieval times. Guild-based lending institutions that developed in several countries gave farmers, blacksmiths and other tradesmen access to capital. In the mid-1800s, Britain, Germany, Italy and France all adopted the credit-union concept, which reached Canada in 1900. The first credit union in the United States was established in 1909 in Manchester, New Hampshire, for French garment workers unable to get credit at banks. Another was established about the same time in Boston by merchant Edward Filene. Then, credit unions were established in New York, Rhode Island and North Carolina.

Over the past few years, credit unions have been growing at a rate of approximately 10 percent a year, while banks have been struggling to recover from the economic disasters of the 1980s. For banks, eliminating competition from credit unions certainly would help profits.

Because the members of Texas Bankers Association (TBA) believe the NCUA's approval of the expansion of the Houston credit union violates the common-bond provision, on July 28 the bankers filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C. Before the suit got very far along, the plaintiffs lost an important battle. On September 15, U.S. District Judge John H. Pratt ruled against the American Bankers

Association (ABA) and five North Carolina banks in a case involving the expansion of the AT&T Family Federal Credit Union in Asheboro, North Carolina. Judge Pratt determined that while the law was "ambiguous," the NCUA's interpretation of the common bond provision was reasonable. "Until Congress addresses this matter," Pratt concluded, "the Court will defer to the agency's interpretation of the statute at issue."

Robert Harris, president of the TBA, says Pratt's decision was a setback and the TBA is considering what it will do next. "Credit unions are the only financial services providers that are exempt from federal and state taxation," Harris said. "If you have to compete with an entity that is not subject to federal taxation, there is an obvious competitive advantage on deposit and loan side. It's a turf war and what's driving it is the issue of taxation."

But Bob Loftus, a spokesman for the NCUA, says the taxation issue is bogus and that a tax on credit unions wouldn't work because the institutions would eliminate their reserves rather than pay taxes. He calls the TBA lawsuit "ongoing whining by banks that credit unions are giving them too much competition. If banks want to compete with credit unions, let their customers run the bank. Banks could have the same advantages that credit unions have if they gave up their profits and stopped paying their directors."

DESPITE BANKS' dominance of the national market, Michael Crotty, the ABA's deputy general counsel, says that "all competition is local." Crotty says that banks compete against local credit unions and that if "the violations of the common-bond provision are not stopped, there is no telling the limits of credit union growth. Every dollar that goes into a credit union is a dollar that doesn't go into the banks."

On September 23, the ABA filed an appeal in the North Carolina case. Industry observers are predicting that this case, or another challenge to the common-bond provision, will ultimately be decided by the Supreme Court. In the meantime, federal taxpayers are getting nicked by bankers yet again. Since the NCUA is a federal agency, defendants in the lawsuits are represented by attorneys from the Department of Justice. □

Austin Chronicle contributing editor Robert Bryce writes on environmental and economic issues.

Right-Wing Stealth

Madison, Wisconsin

Heads up, Texas voters! A slate of stealth candidates is running for the State Board of Education on the Republican ticket. These are your basic radical right-wing Christian fundamentalists hell-bent on teaching creationism in biology class. It's one of those deals where we all end up looking like idiots if enough of us don't pay attention to an obscure down-ballot race.

Think back to the time we elected the wrong Don Yarbrough to the Texas Supreme Court, the occasion on which we put a dead person in the Senate and all the years we voted for Jesse James because his name was so funny. It's that kind of deal. If we let these home-schoolers take over the public schools, we're going to regret it; not only will the kids suffer, but we're bound to lose droves of good teachers, too. We can live with the snide remarks from late-show jokers and the skits on "Saturday Night Live," but the schools happen to be at stake, too.

Texas Republicans bear a particular responsibility in this regard. I know those now running the state party are officially endorsing the Republican slate for Board of Education, but I rather suspect that many of them think, as JFK once said, that "sometimes party loyalty asks too much." I also understand that many on the Christian right entirely endorse the ideas of the home-schoolers and all those moronic, endless textbook censorship fights for which Texas is so famous. You suburban Bush Republicans are going to be royally embarrassed by this crowd. Should Shrub Bush win the governorship, which is quite possible, I seriously doubt you want him saddled with this collection of dingbats on the State Board of Education.

There are 15 members on the board, and three or four of them are already fundamentalists; six more will give them an easy majority. Responsible Republicans should cross over at the bottom of the ballot, and responsible Democrats should make sure they get down that far.

You can tell what's at stake here by the level of deceptiveness in the campaigns being run by the Christian right. "Do you want your children taught about HOMOSEXUALITY?" inquire their false and misleading brochures. They quote out of context from the teachers' editions of some board-approved health textbooks and imply

Molly Ivins, a former Observer editor, is a columnist with the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

that this is what students will be taught. Same old scare tactics.

They have further taken it into their tiny heads that Goals 2000, the program started by George Bush the Elder, is some plot by the federal government to take over education. As those who have looked at it know, Goals 2000 is an effort to set high educational standards with implementation left entirely at the local level. If Texas rejects the grant money that comes from the program, we'll be cutting ourselves off from millions of dollars to improve our schools.

The Republican Board of Education candidates' support is coming from the usual coalition of flakes—the Eagle Forum, the American Family Association, CARE, etc.

Resolved: No woman over 50 is allowed to wear Peter Pan collars in public.

As a rather basic test, we can assume that those who are supporting home schooling and the voucher system to pay for private schools probably do not have the best interests of the public schools at heart.

The Texas State Teachers Association and the other established education groups are trying to get out word on how flaky some of these candidates are. I fully agree that much of the education establishment needs to be shaken up or given the old heave-ho, but the teachers themselves are still the heroes of the system, and they're appalled by this bunch.

One of the oldest educational maxims holds, "It's not what you think, but how you think" that matters. It's interesting that one of the education reforms that most grates the fundamentalist candidates is the effort to teach critical thinking.

They are apparently prepared to reverse the maxim and teach students what to think without teaching them how to think. Wrapping themselves in the flags of patriotism, respect for authority and chastity until marriage, these candidates imply that they are all that is standing between us and condom-distributing promoters of mad promiscuity and homosexuality. I wish I knew what it is about sex that reduces so many people to gibbering buffoons. We cannot protect our children from drugs, AIDS, homosexuality and

changing family structures by pretending they don't exist. Removing pictures of professional women from textbooks to substitute pictures of professional men is not protecting our children from anything. It's silly.

So don't forget the down-ballot races on November 8—unless, of course, you want the school curriculum and textbooks dictated by folks with a fundamentalist religious agenda.

AM EVERYWHERE asked about our Texas governor's race, much less often about our Senate race. I'm resigned to the re-election of Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, but I think the Legislature will have to pass a law saying that no woman over 50 from our state is allowed to wear Peter Pan collars in public. What she chooses to wear in the privacy of her own home is her affair entirely, but I fear Texas will not be taken seriously if our senator the Breck Girl keeps dressing like Alice in Wonderland. I'm not advocating that she become macho and wear leather cowboy clothes or anything drastic. Pink is fine with me; just no Peter Pan, no ruffled pinafores, OK?

Keeping one's eye on the old ball in a political year this weird is even harder than usual. "God, guns and gays" are popular issues in Oklahoma and have, of course, absolutely nothing to do with why the political system is such a mess. Exactly the kind of "hot-button" issues that campaign consultants like to find and push that are completely beside the point when it comes to why the middle class is getting shafted. Money, as usual, is the root of all evil, and politicians continue to dance with them what brung 'em. This was crudely spelled out to a group of Washington lobbyists last week by House Republican Whip Newt Gingrich.

Why the national press corps failed to set off bells and whistles and send up flares when the Gingrich story appeared is beyond me; maybe they just don't get it either. Gingrich told the lobbyists (and note, this is the way politicians really talk to lobbyists when they're not on the record) that the Republicans had saved them from the "Stalinist" anti-lobbying measures proposed by the Democrats—bills that would have forced lobbyists to disclose their activities and would have shut down the practice of lobbyists' paying for golfing trips and tennis jaunts and "fact-finding" missions in the Bahamas in winter. And Gingrich expects some generous contributions from those same said lobbyists in exchange for killing those terrible bills. □

JIM HIGHTOWER

NAFTA Shams

Here's a trick question: What word actually becomes shorter if you *add* two letters to it? Give up? Short!

Here's another: What international trade deal makes America weaker if you add two side agreements to it? NAFTA—the North American Free Trade Agreement.

The dirty trick in NAFTA was the environmental and job-loss problems that everyone knew would be caused by this corporate boondoggle. So to paper over the problems, labor and environmental "side agreements" were stuck onto the deal—kind of like chrome on an old Buick. As we learned in October, these side deals were shams designed to make NAFTA look good enough for Congress to buy it, but be useless when it came time to deliver anything. In its first test case, the NAFTA side agreement on labor proved as effective as a Jello doorstop at stopping unfair labor practices. Being paid barely a dollar an hour, workers at both a GE and a Honeywell plant in Mexico tried to organize, only to be fired. They protested under NAFTA, but the corporations argued that the side agreement only applies to *government* action not to corporate practices. Washington agreed with this toothless interpretation—giving workers the SHAFTA.

Meanwhile, on the pollution front, both U.S.- and Mexican-owned factories in Mexico are creating a toxic nightmare all along our border. So where's the NAFTA agency that was supposed to deal with this? Nowhere. It's not even staffed, though U.S. and Mexico officials already have quietly agreed to rules severely restricting your and my participation in the agency's pollution cases and allowing the agency to make its decisions behind closed doors.

Having lied to us about NAFTA, Washington is now trying to trick us into taking another, even bigger trade scam called GATT—which simply means "Gotcha Again." When you hear their promises about GATT, remember their lies about NAFTA.

Congressional Money Game

Ever so rarely, one of the secret doors to the inner sanctums of Washington will inadvertently slip open just a crack, giving us peasants a peek at Congress' whorish cozi-

Jim Hightower, a former Observer editor and Texas agriculture commissioner, does daily radio commentary and a weekend call-in talk show on the ABC Radio Network.

ness with corporate power.

We know that a corporation's political action committee can legally put \$10,000 into the pocket of a lawmaker, but that's chump change to executives and politicians who really know how to play the game.

Consider two top-ranking congressmen: Republican leader Newt "The Newt" Gingrich, and Democratic majority leader Dick Gephardt. Both have established what are called "leadership PACs," to which corporations wanting favors from Congress are invited to contribute wheelbarrows full of cash. Sixteen of Newt's givers, for example, are in for more than \$100,000 each, with one topping half a million.

Gephardt has also hauled in millions, some from the same executives who give to Newt—you see, it's all one big party in the inner sanctums; just leave your political registration, your scruples—and your cash—at the door.

Gephardt specializes in vacation retreats for his corporate givers. Last winter, for example, wealthy businessmen could buy into four days of skiing, gourmet meals, sleigh rides and up-close schmoozing at a Colorado resort with Dick. As a Seattle shipping executive put it, "It was a chance to get some quality time with the congressman." And to get some favors too: a few weeks later, this executive's bill to subsidize his shipping business steamed right through the Congress.

Gephardt says his little vacation getaways are "a way to keep in touch. It's kind of like a family gathering."

Yeah, Gephardt and Gingrich gather up the contributions, corporations put the touch on us taxpayers—and your family and mine get stiffed. To find out who else is on the take, contact the Center for Responsive Politics on 202-857-0044.

Roadkill on the Infobahn

High-tech is threatening to overwhelm us. A lady gave a ballpoint pen to her six-year-old son. He examined it for about a minute, then said: "OK, I give up. How do you turn it on?"

I'm doomed, old before my time. I'm electronically impaired, computer-challenged and digitally disabled. The "notebook" I use for writing is not a Powerbook—it's one made of paper, actual paper! Ooohhh, I'm going to be roadkill on the Information Superhighway.

Well as Patrick Henry put it: "I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me...The Lead Pencil Club."

At last, a club for us cyberspace rejects.

If you're one, write them at P.O. Box 380, Long Island, New York 11975. You can join up for free, and you can even buy a T-shirt featuring a sharpened, No. 2 yellow pencil emblazoned with this excellent question: "What's the hurry?"

Everyone from Al Gore to your local cable TV owner is pushing to get us all on that interactive, intergalactic, fiber optic Information Superhighway from hell, rushing us pell-mell to—well, to where?

The multibillion-dollar mega-corporations driving this thing talk about connecting us to all sorts of razzle-dazzle, such as electronic town meetings, without going to town or meeting anyone; buying groceries or gold rings without ever rising from our La-Z-Boys; and don't go to the doctor—just tune in video diagnosis: "If you're experiencing mild pain, touch one; severe pain, touch two; pants-wetting pain, touch three..."

Notice that while all this razzle-dazzle connects us electronically, it *disconnects* us from each other, having us "interfacing" more with computers and TV screens than looking in the faces of our fellow human beings. Is this progress?

It's not that us Lead Pencil Clubbers are against high-tech, but that we'd like it to *add* to our quality of life, rather than subtract. □

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The Congress of Business/ The Business of Congress

Washington, D.C.

You gotta hand it to the business types. They've been getting all they want from Bill Clinton and the national Democrats. A big story in the *Washington Post* recently listed the major business wins in the 103rd Congress: passing interstate banking and NAFTA legislation while killing health care reform, campaign finance reform, the BTU energy consumption tax, the prohibition of replacement workers, and the economic stimulus package.

But guess what? They still don't like either Bill or the Congressional Democrats. They want representatives who don't just do what they're told, but who do it without being told. Kind of like Everyteen's fantasy sexual partner.

So the business types, on the whole, are supporting Republicans. Business donations to Democrats are way down from where they were in 1992. The nasty Clinton jokes continue to be repeated in country clubs and at Lions, Moose, Elks, Rotary and Junior Achievement functions everywhere.

If businessmen were as hard-eyed realists as they like to claim, they would be supporting Democratic incumbents and the President with not just money but volunteers, all produced with enthusiasm. But the businessmen seem to want, not palatable results, but absolute control. But the need for absolute control is a pathological psychic state, not a precondition of success. Maybe business's Clinton problem is what Leonard Cohen's song "Sisters of Mercy" diagnosed as having to "leave everything that you cannot control."

Judges wholly complaisant to business arguments were almost invariably appointed by Reagan and Bush, and sometimes Carter, who between them appointed a vast majority of the federal judiciary. Clinton has sent up the most diverse set of judges of any of his predecessors—more women, more blacks, more Hispanics, than even Carter managed, or than Reagan/Bush ever dreamed of.

Yet his two Supreme Court appointments, Stephen Breyer and Ruth Bader Ginsburg, are only considered "economic liberals" by the terminally squint-minded. On business issues, each has a history more in tune with the Fortune 500 than with your friendly local wage-earner, possibly even including yourself and certainly including me.

James McCarty Yeager edits Minority Business Report in Bethesda, Maryland.

So where it counts immediately, on the Supreme Court, Bill has done what the businessmen would like him to have done: "Please, no 'flame-throwing' civil libertarians or 'wild-eyed' economic justice crusaders."

But that's not enough for the business types, apparently. They want some guarantees that none of the newest federal Circuit Court or Court of Appeals judges are dangerously in favor of the people or, even more recklessly, not automatically disposed to treat corporations as the highest form of American life. And there are no such guarantees as to the Clinton appointments to the lower courts, since they are so diverse and, well, so Democratic.

Of course, most of Clinton's judges will turn out to be middle-of-the-road supporters of the status quo. After all, they're all lawyers. "Radical lawyer," these days, is about as much a contradiction in terms as "Kay Bailey's compassion," "Phil Gramm's conscience," or "Jeb Bush's intelligence."

A recent Associated Press headline was "White Men Vote Republican." The story noted that Shrub Bush held a 30-percent lead over Ann Richards among white males, though she has substantial strength among GOP women. And it is here that the small business, corporate and country club ethic stands revealed. These guys are so insecure they can't imagine anyone who wasn't in their fraternity being able to lead.

Partially this is a long-term trend. Lyndon B. Johnson, for all his personal pathology, led the party and the nation on civil rights. Half the South, starting with the suburbs, promptly seceded—first to George Wallace, then to the Republicans. Lyndon simultaneously tried to buy off the Republicans and conservatives by holding an anti-communist war for them. They grudgingly supported it, but not him.

In a certain way, every Democratic minority candidate—whether woman, Latino or black—by her or his very presence reminds the business types that the Democratic party's mandate is not always ruled by the corporate ledger. And this is a scary thought to those who frequently explain stock market declines with the astonishing, though frequently repeated, observation that "the market was hurt today by uncertainty about the future." I was taught that the only certainties everyone must endure are death, taxes and the counsel of the bore. I suppose that's why I'm merely an inadvertent businessman: The only things in the future I'm not uncertain about are things I'm in no hurry to confront.

The short-sightedness of U.S. business

cannot be overestimated. Liberal Democratic policies, if we were abler than at present to find very many politicians to espouse them, would result in a more economically equitable, therefore more stable, society; and lower military, thus less wasteful, public spending. These are both preconditions to sustained and sustainable economic growth, from which businessmen would profit; for the essence of a military-spending-driven economy as perfected under Reagan and Bush is that economic growth is neither constant nor continuous.

Yet liberal Democrats are called "wasteful" despite the fact that they would remedy flagrant and persistent public ills. Our nation is busily abandoning 25 percent of our families without health insurance, the average wage has been falling for more than a decade, and the only remaining component of the Soviet military threat is the opposing apparatus we continue to maintain. And nothing the Republicans have suggested will do anything about any of that except make it worse.

It is ironic that Democrats are judged on their rhetoric, which is far more egalitarian and reformist than their practices; while the Republicans are judged on their behavior, which is much more punitive than their ideology. Some observers have noted that the imminent collapse of the conservative wing of the Democratic party is a natural consequence of the two-party system in the South, and the resultant dedication of Republicans to racially divisive policies need surprise no one.

If the polls are to be believed, even with the rebounding Democratic prospects, we are about to enter the Gridlock-Squared Congress, the 104th, in which conservative Southern Democrats join with Republicans in blocking not only any legislation not approved by the Fortune 500 but, no doubt, judicial and executive appointments. We will hear a lot less about the President's prerogative to appoint whom he likes than we did under Reagan and Bush.

Still, even if the most wretchedly conservative Democratic Congressperson is likely to vote only one extra time in favor of the President's policies, he or she is a better deal than even the most moderate of Republicans—if there were any, the howls of the Religious Reich to the contrary notwithstanding. The unsavory alliance among business, conservatives and the suburban and trailer-park televangelized masses may yet fall apart of its own weight. But its further solidification can be delayed, and possibly even prevented, by a few well-placed votes.

— JAMES MCCARTY YEAGER

On the Run in Guatemala

BY GUY LAWSON

IT WAS 6:30 IN the morning, and I was already drenched with sweat. We had been slogging our way through the dense jungle on narrow, muddy trails for about 45 minutes on our way to the day's work site. No one spoke, but the jungle provided a symphony of sound.

We tramped on for a half an hour more before emerging into a clearing, and into the full light of day. The men had come here three weeks ago and slashed and burned about three acres of jungle for planting. The clearing climbed up a small hill and went down the other side where it ended in a solid wall of green jungle.

The men went to work sharpening the points of the sticks they would use for planting. I was to act as look-out with Vicente. We climbed to the top of the hill and positioned ourselves to watch the far treeline.

I asked Vicente how his wife was. They had just lost their 5-year-old son a few days back. One day the child was fine, and the next he developed a very high fever. By the end of the day he was dead.

I don't remember what Vicente's answer was.

The first mortar round fell about 150 meters away. The explosion was deafening, and I felt the ground vibrating beneath me with the shock. I looked at my watch: 7:41 a.m., May 31, 1994. As the second round fell, there was a burst of machine-gun fire. The battle was taking place in the jungle to the south of us, but stray bullets were crossing the field.

Vicente and I looked for cover. We found a hole big enough for both of us, left by the roots of a fallen tree. We lay there peering over the edge, watching the treeline. If the soldiers came through, we would have to run. I was scared.

The battle went on for about 20 minutes. Then, as suddenly as it started, it ended. I climbed out of my hole and looked back over the other side of the hill. The men had already begun planting. They worked their way across the field side by side in a row: solidarity.

Guy Lawson is a graduate student at the University of Texas in Austin who spent the summer as a human rights observer in the community of San Luis in Ixcán, Guatemala.

I turned back around to watch the treeline. If the soldiers came through ... would we run? I looked at my watch; it was 8:04 a.m.

I have been living with the Communities of Population in Resistance in the Ixcán jungle of Guatemala. The Communities of Population in Resistance (CPR) was born out of the brutal "scorched earth" campaign conducted in the early 1980's by the successive military dictatorships of Gen. Romeo Lucas García, 1978-83, and Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt, 1982-83. [In recent congressional elections, Ríos Montt was elected to the congress and his right-wing party won approximately 30 percent of the vote.] Entire villages of men, women and children were murdered, sometimes burned alive, by the army. Their remains were buried in hundreds of clandestine cemeteries that dot the Guatemalan landscape. Human rights groups claim that more than 400 villages were destroyed during this period. The army's rationale was that the population provided the base for the growing guerrilla movement. Their strategy was to "remove the water from around the fish," thereby killing the fish. The water, in this case, was tens of thousands of unarmed men, women and children, mostly indigenous campesinos.

Hundreds of thousands of people were forced to flee from their homes. Many thousands crossed the border into Mexico and became refugees. Thousands more fled to the urban centers of Guatemala. Some chose a different path. They remained hidden in areas outside of the military's control: in the highlands, in the Ixcán, and in the northern jungles of the Peten. These people, unarmed civilians, who have spent the past 12 years in hiding, defending their land by their presence, have come to be known as the CPR.

At times, the army, which claims that they are part of the armed guerrilla movement, has pursued them relentlessly with air raids and military incursions. "We suffered a great deal at the beginning," recalls Francisco, a community leader in the CPR-Ixcán. "We were very hungry, and there was no food. We learned to eat many different kinds of roots, berries and leaves. Many of our children died from sickness and hunger."

But they organized, and learned that by working together they could share the necessary tasks for survival. They maintained constant surveillance and developed temporary camps that could be abandoned in less than 20 minutes. All cooking was done and fires extinguished before sunrise so that the army's helicopters couldn't spot the smoke rising up through the trees and call in air strikes. By 5 a.m. all possessions had to be packed and ready to go at a moment's notice.

During military offensives in their areas, the CPR was sometimes forced to flee and relocate as many as 15 times a month. The army burned their crops and their communities, and destroyed or stole any possessions left behind. But the CPR always managed to stay together and start anew.

The CPR has developed highly organized, democratic, and self-governing communities based on collective work. The men farm communal fields, and the production is distributed equally among the population.

Collective production has also allowed the CPR to provide a number of basic services. Each community has school from kindergarten through fourth grade. Community members have trained their own teachers and developed their own curriculum. All children go to school and learn, among other things, reading, writing, math, history and ecology.

Each community has a clinic and its own trained health promoters. Carlos, a promoter in the community of San Luis, informed me that promoters treat a variety of illnesses by combining natural remedies, Western medicine, and even acupuncture. When I left the communities in early August, some promoters were learning to make and fit dentures.

The CPR has its own human rights network that provides workshops on human rights and how to defend them. There are youth groups, women's groups and an organization of catechists that provides religious services.

Once a year a General Assembly is held in which all of the communities come together. For two days, the work of elected leaders and the performance of the various services are evaluated, plans are set for the coming year, and new leaders are elected. Majority vote wins, but more emphasis is

placed on reaching consensus through open discussion than on imposing decisions by majority rule.

This level of self-government has been achieved in spite of constant military repression, and the refusal of the government to recognize the CPR as civilian. Army press releases often refer to the CPR as "Communities of Population in Retention," implying that the CPR is being forcibly held by the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG, an armed guerrilla organization). The army maintains a tight military cordon around the area that the CPR occupies in the Ixcán, located in the northern part of the Quiché department on the border with the Mexican state of Chiapas; eight bases surround an area of approximately 22 square kilometers.

During the XIII General Assembly in August 1993, the CPR decided to come out from the shadows of the jungle and form open communities. Several factors played into this decision. On January 20, 1993, the first organized return of Guatemalan refugees from Mexico took place. Some 2,500 refugees returned to the Ixcán and founded the community Victoria 20 de Enero. With them came increased international attention. Also influencing the decision was the installation of former Human Rights Ombudsman Ramiro de Leon Carpio as president of Guatemala. As Human Rights Ombudsman, Carpio visited the CPR in February 1991, when he witnessed firsthand that they were a civilian population. With his inauguration, there was hope that the CPR would receive recognition as a civilian population.

Instead, Carpio has taken a much harder line with the CPR, demanding that they recognize the authority of the government and all of its institutions, including the army. The CPR responded by agreeing to recognize any legal authority acting within the constraints of the Guatemalan Constitution, effectively denying recognition of the army and the Civil Defense Patrols (PAC). Negotiations broke down there.

Nevertheless, the plan to come out into the open continued, and the date was set for February 2, 1994. The seven communities of the Ixcán would form five public and open settlements and request the presence of national and international observers. The people, who had lived for years under plastic tarps, would construct houses, schools, and clinics.

February 2 was the "Salido al Claro" (Coming into the Open). Since then there have been no airstrikes, shellings or incursions into the new settlements. Only once,

in early May, soldiers approached to within 20 minutes from the community of San Luis. Several shots were fired and the population was on the verge of evacuating when the soldiers turned back.

The army maintains a hostile, threatening posture towards the CPR and the refugees who have returned from Mexico. In May, the army established a new base 4 kilometers from San Luis. They destroyed several acres of beans and corn, and stole the community's tools and possessions. They halted river traffic and made it impossible for residents of San Luis to harvest what was left of their crop. Boatmen from San Luis were accused of ferrying guerrilla troops and supplies. A boatman from Victoria 20 de Enero was temporarily detained on June 1, ac-



Children at Play in San Luis

GUY LAWSON

cused of similar activities, and his life was threatened.

The army abandoned the base on June 24, but returned two weeks later, to occupy an area 10 kilometers to the south near the collective fields of Los Altos. In the days before I left in early August, there were reports of army troops moving back to reoccupy the abandoned base.

A recent report by the Center for Human Rights Legal Action (CHRLA), a Washington-based human rights organization, points out that the army is employing a "dual strategy" in the Ixcán. The goals of this dual strategy are: 1) to present a new image of the army as one that respects human rights and protects the civilian population and 2) at the same time to distort the reality of who is or is not "civilian population." Additionally, army propaganda often exaggerates the conflictive nature of the zone. By the army's own estimates, there are no more than 250

guerrillas in the area.

The army's strategy was adopted following the signing of a Global Human Rights Accord between the government, the military and the URNG on March 29, 1994, and the preliminary visit to discuss setting up a UN Commission to verify compliance with the Accord. The Commission was approved by the UN in September and has not begun full operations. But human rights violations have increased at an alarming rate. Bodies are appearing almost daily in Guatemala City, often with visible signs of torture.

On August 4, the URNG announced that it would suspend any further peace negotiations until the UN Commission becomes a reality. The action has allowed the army to claim that the guerrillas are not interested in a negotiated settlement. In an August 19 article published in the Guatemalan daily *Prensa Libre*, Defense Minister Mario Enriquez was quoted saying, "What is necessary is understanding at an international level so that friendly countries realize who has the real political will to end the armed conflict; is it the government or the URNG?"

In statements made three days earlier, Enriquez had cautioned that if the URNG was not willing to negotiate, the army would finish the guerrillas off by force. In the August 19 article, he warned that "the offensive capacity of the army was demonstrated in 1980-82 when there was the need to confront the insurgency when it was at its strongest." The 1980-82 offensive is the same "scorched earth" campaign that resulted in massive displacement of population and the massacres of thousands of civilians.

So this story does not have a happy ending. In the week before, I left the Ixcán cannons and machine guns were fired all night, every night. It is difficult to say whether there were battles taking place, or if the army was just firing off rounds into the jungle. (It is suggested that they fire at nothing in order to say they are being attacked, thereby justifying their presence.)

The communities that I spent the past three and a half months with, the Communities of Population in Resistance, are in great danger. They are completely surrounded by an army that is threatening to invade their settlements. The CPR consists of organized, truly democratic, civilian communities. But all of the organization and democracy in the world cannot stop thousands of well-armed soldiers and I wonder if the open settlements will be abandoned and their residents forced back into hiding under the trees again before this year ends. □

Howl

BY ANN WALTON SIEBER

THE ZOO WHERE YOU'RE FED TO GOD.

By Michael Ventura.

255 pp. New York: Simon & Schuster. \$21.

IN MICHAEL VENTURA'S wild and woolly philosophical essays, a recurring theme is the need to plunge into the less controlled, less exposed parts of the psyche: as teenagers undergoing tribal initiations, as jazz and rock musicians carrying on the torch of a buried tribal religious impulse, as an entire culture on the brink of riotous apocalyptic collapse. (Mind you, riotous apocalyptic collapse isn't all bad to Michael Ventura.) Ventura loves to concoct modern applications of primal rituals like voodoo and Australian dreamtime. In his second novel, *The Zoo Where You're Fed to God*, Ventura continues these shadowy explorations, as his protagonist, a middle-aged quiet-but-deep type, nervously flirts with madness—finally deciding oh-what-the-hell, the world has pretty sketchy requirements when it comes to sanity anyway. As he says to his teenage son's therapist, "Am I crazy, Dr. Benjamin? Alright, I am. For now. But—I can't think of a reason not to be. I honestly cannot."

Although Ventura might be better known for his screenplays for *Echo Park* and *Roadie*, as the *LA Weekly's* chronicler of the counter-cultural temperature for 15 years and one of the alternative paper's founding editors, essays have been the meat and potatoes of his writing output. Last year, when *LA Weekly* editor Kit Rachlis was fired, Ventura was part of the contingent that walked out in protest. Ventura's now splitting his time between LA and Austin, and the *Austin Chronicle* has become the host paper for his biweekly column, "Letters at 3 a.m.," which is carried on and off by about a dozen papers nationwide and is semi-frequently reprinted in various alternative publications such as the *Utne Reader* or the *Whole Earth Review*.

Ventura's essays have been collected into the 1985 *Shadow Dancing in the USA* (its anchor essay, "Hear That Long Snake

Moan," forever changed the way I thought about Elvis Presley and, indeed, all of rock 'n' roll) and last year's *Letters at 3 a.m.* In 1992 he collaborated with psychologist James Hillman on a series of free-ranging conversations that, although speckled with interesting ideas, probably would not have found its way into book form were it not for the name recognition of the authors.

In *The Zoo Where You're Fed to God*, Ventura's main character, surgeon James Abbey, finds himself in one of those situations so popular among writers of fiction: a Turning Point. James' wife has recently left him after many years of marriage and we can see why. Distracted, absent, unfocused, he seems to drift through life on a philosophical cloud. Now, alone in his big house, his son living with his ex-wife and barely wanting to talk to him, James can't sleep and he's really losing it. He sits night after night in his kitchen with the lights out.

However, without realizing it, James is making himself available to what Ventura calls Possibility. A coyote comes close to the house, and this, oddly, compels James to go to the zoo. Much further down his path toward enlightenment—or endarkenment, to use Ventura's own language—James understands that the coyote would not have approached a lit house. You have to be willing to sit with the dark forces submerged in your soul—get it, get it?—even if you're scared of them. Indeed, that's how the book begins, "He turned off all the lights in the house because he was afraid of the dark."

The zoo becomes James' gateway to insight—all those animals to lead him back to his native wisdom—and the tiger is his main guide. (The book is intended as the first in a trilogy, called *The Tiger, the Rock and the Rose*.)

James starts hearing the tiger's voice, giving him cryptic instructions reminiscent of the talking billboard in *LA Story*, or what was told to Kevin Costner's character in *Field of Dreams*: "If you build it, he will come." James' tiger says things like "Remain," "Return," "I am your help," "Take the help that's offered, or be lost."

The tiger seems to be steering James toward a meeting with Lee. (Like some psychic treasure hunt—with lots of interesting animal trivia along the way—the coyote

leads him to the zoo leads him to the tiger leads him to the girl.) Lee is another zoo weirdo, as she calls it, a free-spirited yet troubled young punk who sleeps with most anyone who asks and sings folk songs to the animals. When she sees James crying while watching the delicate deer-like geruniks, and follows him to the tiger cage, where she sings "Danny-Boy" to him, and the friendship begins. Two lost and troubled souls cling to each other, at times, literally, as in various disturbed states they stumble arm in arm around the zoo.

FROM ODYSSEUS to Dorothy, it's an old theme, even archetypal, the seeker's journey to far-off lands—be it an actual trip, or a journey into madness—to find oneself. But in *Zoo*, it feels minor and rather predictable. James takes a short trip and really doesn't get too far—perhaps to leave something for books two and three. A book of modest length, for a novel, *Zoo* seems to have the content of a chapter, despite the fact that (or perhaps because) James "crosses a line," or has "defining moments" every dozen pages. The old writing-teacher's saw warns "show don't tell," but Ventura loves to tell, which is what makes him an essayist. In his convoluted style, he draws lots of bells and whistles and arrows around his character's epiphanies. (For instance: "these two people had left the world that calls itself 'the world,' though they seemed to be moving within it: they cared neither about avoiding pain nor inflicting it; they cared only about how one moment's beauty demands audacity in order to lead to the next moment's beauty; and they cared about nothing, when together, but fulfilling the demands of that audacity.")

Ventura the essayist is also very much present in the thought processes of his protagonist, and although the story is told in the third person, at times it takes the form of a stream-of-consciousness narrative. Essays that continue for paragraphs are obviously interior monologues and are interrupted now and then when they find their way to the surface in the form of a sentence or two of dialogue. Dialogue, the world of the surface and the seen, is not uppermost in Ventura's concerns, but instead what James describes as "something both

Ann Walton Sieber is a freelance writer in Houston.

sweeter and darker."

Zoo is definitely an interior book, a dreamy book, moody that induces a sort of emotional vertigo. Not the book to read if you're a little tenuous about reality yourself.

MICHAEL VENTURA is a writer whose digressions into triviality and self importance are usually balanced by the freshness and vigorous "audacity" of his insights. The novel form does not serve him well, and in *Zoo*, he can get pretty heavy-handed, with unfortunate observations like, "In the shower, under its

cool spray, he knew that everything beyond words had somehow taken a step toward him." Although *Zoo* has moments of clarity, moments of successful poetry, Ventura's essays give more payback.

Michael Ventura is also odd; in essay after essay he has laid out his "street kid" beginnings, and can write about them movingly, even if there is a touch of strutting, of "I'm the real article," of anti-intellectualism. In *Zoo*, he describes the canvases of James' ex-wife: "Yet for all their movement and energy they were intellectual. Willed. It was almost as though that was their point and their

strength, a quality of will which, more than the colors, made them attractive." The same could be said of Ventura's novel—despite its howl for primalism and "everything beyond words," it is really quite willed. And this willed writing, in the final analysis, works better in that willed form, the essay, than in that flow of imagination, the novel. □

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Plight of Eagles

BY DARVYN SPAGNOLLY

TWO EAGLES: The Natural World of the United States-Mexico Borderlands. Photographs by Tupper Ansel Blake. Text by Peter Steinhart. 256 pp. Berkeley, California: University of California Press/The Nature Conservancy. \$55.

THE INTENTION behind *Two Eagles* is to show the area of the American-Mexican border not as the dull, dusty waste it is popularly imagined to be, but as a place rich in wildlife and opulent landscapes. The result is a stunning book, in the impact of its beautifully printed photographs as well as in its huge format (13" x 14", 146 color plates, dangerous if dropped). A one-man "natural history photographic survey along the entire 1,936-mile United States-Mexico border, covering a 100-mile swath," as Blake describes it, it is divided into chapters roughly corresponding to varying biotic regions, reinforcing the impression of great diversity.

Blake is a wildlife photographer born in Kerrville who has published in *National Geographic*, *Audubon* and *Natural History*. He has an uncanny ability to combine moments illustrative of a particular animal's behavior with aesthetically flattering settings, especially in cases of birds. The border is home to an amazing variety of parrots, hawks, orioles (its splendid orange plumage accented here against gray branches and a gray sky) and egrets, among others. The eagles, which, as the book points out, play a large role in the national

symbolism of both Mexico and the United States, are a high point among high points: An immature bird in its rough nest of twigs, its wings slightly blurred in motion, is a particularly striking example of Blake's art.

The landscapes are occasionally too imposing. There are a number of sunsets and storm-cloud-laden summer skies, perhaps too over-beautified for a book that bends over backwards, in Steinhart's text, to disabuse us of our cultural prejudices towards nature. But this is more than compensated by photographs that integrate the animals and their environments, such as an aerial view of pronghorn antelope: tiny figures against a forbidding brown desert scrubland, which shows both the desert's life and its (in conventional terms) honest ugliness.

Blake has also photographed centipedes, jaguars, wolves, new-hatched sea turtles, butterflies and gila monsters, in addition to many varied landscape studies. Together, these give an unexpected, powerful and saddening impression of ecological richness—saddening, because so many of these animals are vanishing. This book was published with funding assistance from the Nature Conservancy, which also gets a percentage of the royalties. The Conservancy works to protect areas of ecological significance through gifts, purchases or cooperative management of land, either with government or private landowners. Among the more than 1,600 Conservancy-owned preserves is Gray Ranch, 500 square miles of New Mexico borderland that hosts one-third of the state's amphibian species and about half of its reptile, bird and mammal species.

It would have been of some encouragement if there were more straightforward natural history in the essays accompanying

the pictures. Steinhart's musings, sometimes thoughtful, sometimes pedantic in a *National-Geographic-with-an-axe-to-grind* way, can be out of synch with the photography. His essay on the desert regions begins and ends with endangered bats, but there are no bat pictures. There is a striking picture of "forb-covered dunes" but no accompanying explanation of what forb is. He does give useful historical background and provides some interesting observations, but they could probably be summarized enough to leave space for the forb.

He also seems a little too eager to interpret the desert than to let it tell its own story, preferring to tell us about the "distorting lens" of our culture rather than paint us a clearer picture. This is really not a book for the reader who wants to be stunned and educated at the same time, but is a beautiful reminder of all that is worthy of preservation and appreciation, even in unexpected places — and would be a tasteful and fascinating addition to any coffee table able to bear its weight.

The photographs in Two Eagles comprise a Smithsonian Institution Travelling Exhibition Service (SITES) exhibition which opened in San Diego in 1993, and which will be visiting Texas on the following dates:

San Antonio: Witte Museum, Jan. 21 through March 19, 1995.

Dallas: Dallas Museum of Natural History, Sept. 9 through Nov. 5, 1995; Nov. 25, 1995 through Jan. 21, 1996.

Lubbock: Museum of Texas Tech, Feb. 10 through April 7, 1996.

El Paso: University of Texas-El Paso Centennial Museum, April 27 through June 23, 1996. □

Observer editorial intern Darvyn Spagnolly is a graduate student in journalism at the University of Missouri.

Black Guys Jump

BY STEVEN G. KELLMAN

HOOP DREAMS

Directed by Steve James

ANOTHER WILLIAM GATES, not the Microsoft mogul, grew up black and poor in West Garfield Park, among the mean streets of Chicago. An indifferent student, Gates tested at fourth-grade level as a high school freshman, but he excelled at basketball, the city game that lifts a very few black giants out of the inner city. Ogden Nash dismissed basketball as "a game which won't be fit for people until they set the basket umbilicus high and return the giraffes to the zoo," but the game made a prophet out of Isiah Thomas, the NBA star who started in the playgrounds of Chicago.

William Gates venerates Thomas, and so does Arthur Agee, a youngster living in the Cabrini-Green Housing Project and dreaming of dribbling to riches and renown as an NBA athlete. Professional success in basketball is such an unlikely long shot that most inner-city boys are better off developing a layup.

Hoop Dreams opens with parallel shots of 14-year-old Gates and 14-year-old Agee each gazing intently at a TV broadcast of the NBA All-Star Game. An extraordinary exercise in empathy, the nonfiction film traces five years in the adolescent lives of Gates and Agee as they pursue their goals of courtly glory. The finished product was honed to a little bit less than three hours, but filmmakers Steve James, Frederick Marx and Peter Gilbert accumulated 250 hours of footage, in a project that required the epic patience of baseball, even cricket, rather than the frenetic intensity of basketball. *Hoop Dreams* offers thrilling sequences in crucial games, but, like *Friday Night Lights*, H. G. Bassinger's study of football culture at Permian High School in Odessa, Texas, this is vivid contemporary ethnography. High school basketball supplies the context for understanding how race, class and economics shape the lives of American urban blacks.

After Earl Smith, a freelance scout, discovers Agee and Gates in separate pickup games, their lives are transformed utterly. They are taken for auditions at St. Joseph, a private high school intent on perpetuating

its athletic prowess by stocking the basketball team with imported talent. A pitch from Isiah Thomas, an alumnus of St. Joseph, leaves Agee and Gates enthralled, and the two young men are soon spending three hours a day commuting to and from their new suburban school. Gates initially blossoms at St. Joseph; he is accepted onto the varsity team while only a freshman, and he even manages to raise his grade level to nine within a few months. Agee, however, flounders, disappointing both the school's demanding coach, Gene Pingatore, and his academic teachers. "I just never been around a lot of white people," says the boy about the alien environment into which he has been brought in order to produce. When Agee's family, dependent on welfare, is unable to make reduced tuition payments, he is unceremoniously expelled. Gates seems more promising, and his costs are covered by a generous white angel, Patricia Weir, the president of Encyclopedia Britannica.

Agee is thrust into Marshall Metro High School, a dreary public institution where guards search for weapons at the door. *Hoop Dreams* begins to take the shape of a prince-and-pauper melodrama, crosscutting between the privileged life at St. Joseph and the meager one at Marshall. While Gates munches pizza in a Princeton dormitory during the Nike summer camp where All-American prospects are scouted by Bobby Knight, Joey Meyer and other eminent coaches, Agee is back in Chicago toiling for minimum wage at Pizza Hut. Until sidelined by a torn cartilage, Gates, courted by dozens of colleges, seems destined for grandeur, while Agee, failing Spanish and science, is lackluster on a losing Marshall team. But the plot thickens and twists, and *Hoop Dreams* becomes something other than *Rocky* with foul shots. Producers James, Marx and Gilbert no doubt hoped to document the rise of a new Isiah Thomas, but they stuck with the project even after basketball failed to beatify the two boys they bet on.

Hoop Dreams records the consequences of ambition, not just for the principal dreamers. In fact, Arthur Agee and William Gates remain remarkably elusive for all the time they spend in front of the camera. It comes as a surprise when we learn that each is a father, since we did not have a clue that each had a lover. We gain a clearer idea of pugnacious Gene Pingatore than of the shy boys he coaches. But it is in its portraits of

the Agee and Gates' families that the film hits its buckets.

William's older brother Curtis is a former high school basketball star who is convinced that he could have been a pro if only his career had not gotten untracked at the University of Central Florida. When Curtis loses his job as a security guard, William's benefactor finds him work at an Encyclopedia Britannica warehouse. But Curtis counts on the benefactions of William's success to redeem him from his own failure. Also living vicariously through a promising young athlete is "Bo," Arthur's wayward father. He, too, is convinced that he could have made it in the NBA, though he has trouble coping with ordinary life in Chicago without resorting to drugs. Bo periodically deserts the family, and he spends time behind bars for burglary and battery. (Willie Gates abandoned his family when his son William was but a baby). Arthur's mother Sheila is the most inspiring figure in the film. Struggling to pay the family's debts, she nevertheless manages to complete a program to be a nurse's assistant and earns the highest grades in her training group. Her modest graduation ceremony is one of the most moving scenes in a film that neither spurns nor sentimentalizes the lives of its hapless subjects. Except for occasional, unobtrusive narration, particularly to explicate the basketball games, *Hoop Dreams* allows its characters to speak for themselves.

As if to confirm T. S. Eliot's observation that mankind cannot bear too much reality, Spike Lee has announced that he intends to remake *Hoop Dreams* as a fictional feature to be broadcast at the time of the NBA finals. Even if Emilio Estevez and Keanu Reeves are not cast with cork in the leading roles, there is as much need for a fictionalization of this fascinating film as for a sequel to *Gone with the Wind*. Why tamper with the truth? Lee himself offers an answer, during a brief appearance at the Nike scouting camp that is included within *Hoop Dreams*. The diminutive director, a basketball junkie who is rabidly devoted to the New York Knicks, encourages the adolescent stars who are assembled at Princeton. But he warns them about a career in basketball: "This whole thing's involved around money." Money skews the lives of athletes, even at the high school level, even as it taints the making of movies. *Hoop Dreams* is an exceptional achievement. □

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Continued from pg. 24

nanny problems. Democratic challenger Rolando Rios had been hammering Bonilla's opposition to Democratic initiatives such as the earned income tax credit and the crime bill, but Bonilla's nannygate got the attention of radio talk show hosts.

✓ **LINING UP.** It's not too early to worry about the forces that will be arrayed against the commonwealth during the next Legislature. Eighteen agencies are up for Sunset review, including the Public Utility Commission, whose reauthorization was put off two years ago when the last Legislature was unable to come to terms; workers' compensation, always a mess of conflicting interests; the Racing Commission and Equine Research Account Advisory Committee; the Texas Department of Agriculture and affiliated boards; the Office of State-Federal Relations; five agencies relating to historical preservation and the arts, including the Antiquities Committee, the Texas Commission on the Arts, the Historical Commission, the Library and Archives Commission and the Preservation Board; and other agencies added by the 73rd Lege, including the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority and the Teachers Retirement System as well as the PUC and Office of Public Utility Counsel. The utility review is likely to include a battle over deregulation of electrical generating and distribution, as Destec Energy Inc., a Houston-based wholesale generator, is seeking the opportunity to supply electricity to industrial and commercial users. Telephone companies also are pushing for deregulation that would allow them to get into interactive technology, while potentially competing communications companies such as long-distance carriers and cable TV companies have allied with Consumers Union and the Office of Public Utility Counsel to submit an alternative plan. Casino interests, clearly hoping to grease the skids in next year's legislative session for a bill to legalize casino gambling, gave Lieut. Gov. Bob Bullock another \$57,500 from July through September, bringing Bullock's take from gambling interests to more than \$200,000 this past year, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* reported. Bullock, who presides over the Senate, has said he is personally opposed to casino gambling but he would not hinder a measure. Juvenile crime is likely to come up for a rewrite as law-and-order advocates seek to reduce the age at which juveniles can be tried as adults. The state's banks will be pushing for a review of the ban on home-equity loans; the prison-industrial complex will be pushing for more lockups; and land developers will be promoting "property-rights" legislation to limit environmental protection; and business interests will pursue more limits on liability in the courts.

✓ **FUNNY MAN.** In three years with the Attorney General's office, Drew Durham has risen to chief of the criminal justice division and death-penalty litigation. He also has a history of racist and sexist comments, according to a report by Robert Elder Jr. in the Oct. 31 *Texas Lawyer*. Former Travis County Commissioner Jimmy Snell, who worked for Durham in the AG's intergovernmental affairs division, said Durham, a former West Texas prosecutor, routinely told "nigger jokes," while former consumer protection chief Joe K. Crews said it was common knowledge within that agency that Durham "has a problem on racial issues and on gender issues." Ray Buvia, who quit the AG's office March 31, said Durham referred to a black lawyer as "our newest Sambo" and bragged that he had told Morales, "Where I come from Mexicans work for white men, not the other way around," although Buvia doubted Durham had told Morales any such thing. Buvia said Morales looked upon Durham as a political asset because he "can go out and help him get the good-old-boy vote."

✓ **WISE ABUSE.** Neighbors of the Gibraltar Chemical Resources Inc. hazardous waste disposal plant in Winona, after hearing conservatives complain about federal regulations encroaching on their property rights, issued a press release wondering when state and federal authorities were going to stop polluters from "taking" the use of neighbors' property without consent or compensation. "We've heard about property owners whose rights could be abridged by efforts to protect an endangered songbird," said Phyllis Glazer, president of Mothers Organized to Stop Environmental Sins (MOSES). "We have property owners in Winona, many of them people of color whose families have farmed here for generations, whose land and very lives already have been severely impacted by Gibraltar Chemical Resources Inc." Since state and federal authorities have allowed plants such

as Gibraltar's to operate with lax enforcement, she said, neighbors' property values have dropped and air and groundwater pollution has caused health problems. Glazer also recently was notified that the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has determined that jurisdiction exists to process a complaint from MOSES that the state's regulation of Gibraltar has the effect, if not the purpose, of discriminating against African-American members of MOSES.

✓ **PEOPLE'S CHOICE.** In a Texas Poll conducted the second week of October and released Oct. 31, 51 percent of respondents said abortion should be legal, 39 percent said it should not, 8 percent were unsure and 2 percent did not answer. The poll has a statistical margin of error of 3 percentage points. Gov. Richards supports abortion rights while George W. Bush would allow abortion only in cases of rape or incest or to save a woman's life. The results mirrored a September poll in which 52 percent of respondents labeled themselves "pro-choice." The Texas Abortion Rights Action League PAC endorsed Richards, Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock, Attorney General Dan Morales, Treasurer Martha Whitehead, Land Commissioner Garry Mauro, Railroad Commissioner Mary Scott Nabers, Betty Marshall for the Court of Criminal Appeals and Alice Oliver Parrott and Jimmy Carroll for the Texas Supreme Court.

✓ **TWO GIANTS PASS.** Journalism on the left lost two giants this past week with the deaths of Andrew Kopkind, associate editor and senior political writer for *The Nation*, on Oct. 23 and Erwin Knoll, editor of *The Progressive*, Nov. 1. Kopkind, who was 59, was, in the words of Alexander Cockburn, "the best radical reporter and writer of his time." Knoll, who was 63, was remembered by Progressive publisher Matthew Rothschild as "a pugnacious pacifist." Both were longtime friends of the *Observer*. □

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Through A Lens, Darkly

BY SUSANNA SHEFFIELD

FOTOFEST'S FIFTH International Festival of Photography, scheduled for November 10-30 at Houston's George R. Brown Convention Center, continues a long-term engagement with cross-cultural issues through *American Voices*, *Latino/Chicano/Hispanic Photography in the U.S.*—a ground-breaking exhibition by 39 Latino/Hispanic photographers working in the United States. As the title suggests, the exhibit is about one and many. In this case, it is Mexican American, Puerto Rican and Cuban American: the three oldest, largest Spanish-language cultures in the United States. Curated by four Latino artist/scholars, the show assembles a large and diverse body of work never seen together. Reclaiming history and creating cultural memory—through family, community, religious tradition, political and historical iconography—are recurrent motifs of this show, which ranges from straightforward photography to three-dimensional installations.

Amassing this much photo-based information in one place reveals U.S. Latino photography to be deserving of mainstream critical attention and new scholarly investigation. It will be interesting to see if audiences and critics find parallels to better-known Anglo-American photographic art and if differences in history have made for differences in creative expression between one Latino culture and another. As Kathy Vargas, co-curator of the Mexican American section of *American Voices*, comments, "As we look at images of ourselves, we share ourselves within our communities, among our communities and outside our communities."

A three-day symposium, scheduled from November 11-13, will provide a forum for Latino artists, curators and educators from

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the U.S., Mexico and the Caribbean. On the same weekend, FotoFest looks at other aspects of Latino culture, with events honoring Houston's Arte Público Press, the oldest and largest Hispanic press in the United States, a street fiesta, and other exhibits.

FotoFest's second principal exhibit

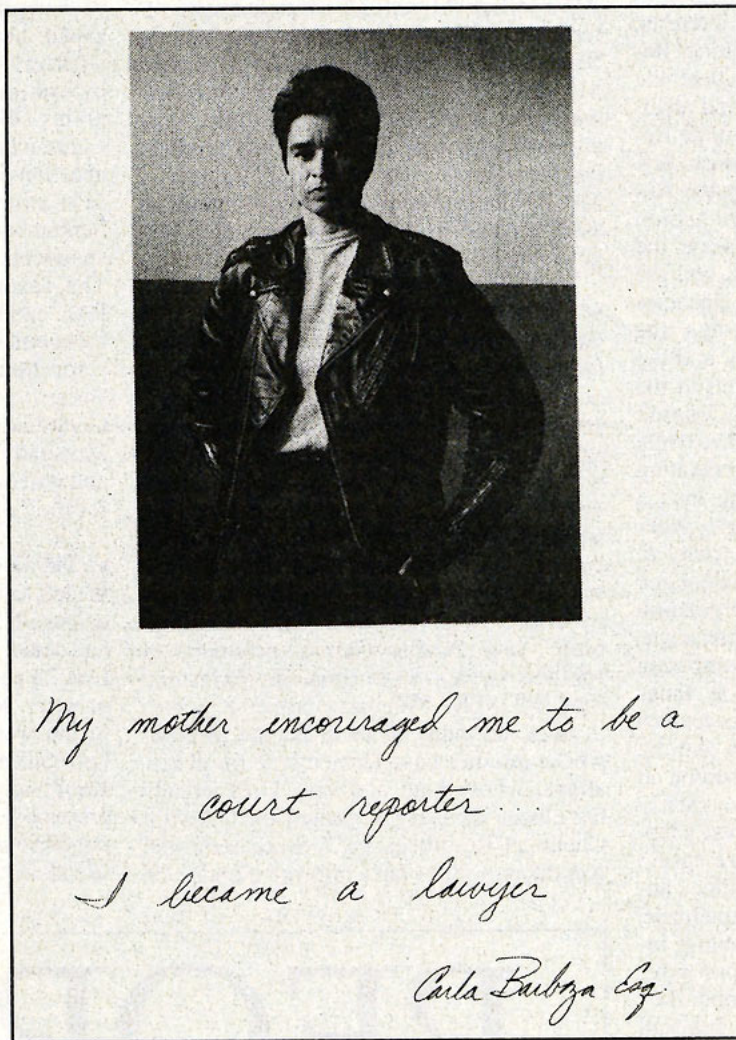
doned gods of Angkor Wat. Endangered species; remnants of war; life in the inner cities; effects of toxins on farm workers, Chernobyl on children, rapid development and agribusiness on the arid American West: "Images of the World" is a wake-up call.

These images lead into the Hall of Globes, a darkened room illuminated by 80 to 100 free-standing globes that depict worldwide geopolitical and environmental conditions. Hall of Globes is the creation of Ingo Günther, a German, New York-based, conceptual artist whose independent and unorthodox approach to assembling data makes this exhibit a provocative experience and something of a lesson that geography classes never taught us.

The Global Environment culminates in an on-line interactive earth science information center called the Earth Forum. Gigabytes of global data and images allow visitors to surf the information highway by way of six world workstations. Recognizing the educational potential of the Earth Forum, the World Resources Institute, National Geographic Society and NASA have donated large data banks for the exhibit. Global population data assembled by internationally known development economist Robert Fox are an essential component of each world workstation. The Earth Forum will remain in Houston as a permanent exhibit at the Houston Museum of Natural Science.

FotoFest's third show, *Fashion: Evolution/Revolution*, explores another side of image-making and its relation to our world. It does so through a compact survey of nine decades of fashion photography, which traces the changing ideas of beauty and style from the soft-focused glamor of early 20th century photographers to the hard-edged, androgynous, street-smart work of post-modern artists.

For FotoFest's 10th anniversary (its exhibits are scheduled for every other year),



From American Voices

LAURA AGUILAR

crosses borders to look at the condition of the earth. *The Global Environment* is a three-part look at the world and the ways we use imagery to shape our perceptions. The exhibit opens with "Images of the World," a collection of images which, when seen together, inform the viewer that the world is hauntingly beautiful but fragile and in jeopardy. Portraits of Brazil's beleaguered Yamomani Indians share a space with photo-documentation of the aban-

the University of Texas Harry Ransom Center is allowing the world's first photograph to be exhibited from November 18-26. This will be the first time the fragile heliograph by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce has left Austin since the Ransom Center acquired it 30 years ago, as a gift from collector Helmut Gernsheim.

Gernsheim will also be a participant in the International Meeting Place, a focal point for international curators, critics and editors who review work of novice and established photographers. To help support this event for artists, who can meet critics and professionals from all over the world, FotoFest will hold its first Fine Print Auction, on November 17.

The FotoFence, a display of photographs and writings of student participants in FotoFest's ongoing Literacy Through Photography program in inner-city Houston schools, illustrates FotoFest's involvement



ANTONIN KRATOCHVIL

'Pollution' from Global Environment

in education. The student work on the FotoFence is a colorful, moving insiders' view of family and neighborhood life in Houston.

Some 20 area-wide museums, alternative spaces and galleries are augmenting FotoFest's programs with other photography-related exhibits. FotoFest is also spon-

and Wendy Watriss bring a global perspective and years of international photo-journalistic experience to the festival, which has developed international support and following. It is almost impossible to leave this event without a sharpened awareness of the impact of pictures and a sense of being re-connected to the world. □

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The Beige Place

BY CAROL REEVES

WHEN JIMMIE DALE Gilmore played his first gig here in Indianapolis, he claimed he was from Austin, never guessing that someone in the audience knew he had grown up in Lubbock, someone who had lived there in the '70s, listening to him, Joe Ely, Butch Hancock and Terry Allen cut their musical teeth at Main Street Saloon, Stubbs BBQ, and Fat Dawgs.

For some reason, Gilmore's reluctance to claim Lubbock as the place he was really from annoyed me. So, I yelled out some well-known Lubbock hot spots: "The White Pig! Fat Dawgs! Prairie Dog Town! Taco Village!" He looked down on the dance floor, empty except for me and my partner, and quipped in his typically metaphysical style: "A person from Lubbock! Well, Indianapolis is a good place to be from Lubbock."

I know what most of you in Austin and San Antonio and Dallas think of Lubbock—you think it's an armpit. You laugh at the billboards along your freeways advertising "Lubbock—For All Reasons." ("For what reasons? For all reasons if you happen to like monotony.") You can't imagine anyone choosing to live in Lubbock or being homesick for an armpit.

You've observed how those who have chosen to live there maintain a certain defensiveness when they visit you in Austin. As you sit in a traffic jam, they'll remark—"No such thing in Lubbock, why you can drive around the loop all by yourself if you've a mind to do such a thing." Or when you take them to crowded Sixth Street bars in Austin with no room to dance, they'll remind you that up home, people don't sit around looking cool; they dance. A Lubbock friend gives the following homily every time I talk to him: "Life is so easy and simple. You don't have to drive forever. You have plenty of time to think. People are closer. The air is dry and clean."

You think this is all psychological justification for living in an armpit? Well, it's not, and I'm here to tell you why.

Lubbock is space to fill up. A beige land-

scape needing some color. It's an itch that needs scratching.

It's an atmosphere full of negative ions and fundamentalism, itchy results of hovering low pressure systems, one physical, one spiritual. Sandstorms, tornadoes and fiery sermons all seem to take their energy from that interminable, taunting, brown flatness, that empty space that seems to want filling up. It's easy to give in to the flatness, to settle into beige, treeless plains so that when the wind blows through, you have burrowed far enough in to avoid the pelting sand.

But it's also possible to resist that flatness, to take energy from it, and to make your own turbulence—joyful creativity as well as sorrowful depression. It's a place that makes you want to fill it up, color it up, itch to create and to leave—all at the same time. I've known Lubbock folks who, like swaying willows, can go all directions at once. They have a metaphysical bent, only they wouldn't call it that. Anyone who grows up in this flat, beige universe will have a gift for filling empty space, ferreting out color and scratching metaphysical itches.

Every Sunday, I'd ferret out the color as I sat with my family in church. Just behind the red-faced preacher, hanging over the mildewed water in the baptistery hung a painting of a green valley filled with flowering trees, a blue pond and grazing deer—a picture of heaven for us flatlanders. Then, of course, there was my mother's lipstick—bright copper—which she bought from the mustachioed Avon Lady who carried a huge carpetbag full of mysterious jars and lovely smells and colored up our lives once a month.

When there's nothing much to do, you learn to turn everything you notice into an object of study. Where else but Lubbock can you make a study of these questions: Just how high were the hairdos at the Red Raider Inn Nightclub before it burned down and is there some connection? How do they get gravy to turn out that color at Chandler's downtown? How many cases of Coors can be consumed between the "wet" strip and Avenue Q by a good ole boy from Idalou driving a '67 Ford pickup and pulling a load of steers—in the middle of a

dust storm? How would you build a mathematical model of a cyclist peddling with the wind, between Pinkies and the Loop, with a case of Coors strapped to his or her back? How much wind would it take to swoop this person off the highway? What happens to the psyche and one's clean underwear during a St. Patrick's day snow dirt storm?

How do people who live in "cool" places ever learn to be good critical thinkers? How do they ever become ambitious? We all know that the itch to leave a place is, in itself, a source of energy and ambition.

FOR A WHILE, my Lubbock friends and I ignored that itch to leave, vowing to stay in Lubbock where we'd grown together out of desperation and remained together out of love. In places where there are few things to do, strong bonds of friendship are forged out of necessity. We planned to spend the rest of our lives eating chili rellenos at Taco Village (now Taco Pueblo), dancing to the Maines Brothers, and waiting for Ely and Butch and Jimmie Dale to come back and play for us once in a while. We'd watch the playoff games together while outside, blowing sand pelted our pickups, and in the summers, we'd sit on our porches in cool, dry evenings. We hoped to watch each other's children grow up. But Joel's girlfriend, Donna, just had to move to Austin, and naturally, Joel just had to move with her. Then Paul followed. Then Brenda. Then everyone else. Like thirsty Herefords rushing for the creek after a little shower. They'd pull their U-Hauls up to my house on their way out of town: "Now, you come on down, too. It'll be the same old group but in a better place." I'd give them a smile and a hug, all the while thinking that it was this place that had made this group.

When I visited my friends in Austin, I found them living exactly as they had lived in Lubbock. They were still gathering together, still watching the playoff games, still searching out the best *hevos con chorizo*. (They never found *rellenos* as good as those we got at Taco Village in Lubbock.) The main difference is that they had a view of Lake Travis, more than one good choice to make about anything, and no sandstorms.

Carol Reeves teaches English at Butler University.

Of course, the attraction of a place is all relative. What Austin was to my Lubbock friends, Lubbock was to me as a child growing up on a farm between Floydada and Silvertown. Lubbock was the big city, the cultural Mecca. For me, taking a trip to Lubbock once a month was like taking a trip to another planet. Dad's handmade boots from San Angelo and his shrink-to-fits stood out like careless weeds in the line at Furr's Cafeteria where "city" men wore suits and ties instead of Levis, and the women seemed to have arrived from Paris. Even though she regularly combed Vogue magazine at Betty's beauty shop to keep up with fashions, mother would stand there, checking herself against the women in the line and suddenly notice, much to her horror, that her hemline was longer or shorter than it should be or that her fingernails were dirty from pulling up a weed in her petunias that morning as we walked out to the car.

And to Gerry Berkowitz, my friend from Long Island, New York, living in Lubbock rather than New York and studying agriculture at Texas Tech rather than medicine at Brandeis was not just a way to make his mother crazy. It was also a place for stories he could collect like arrowheads and take back with him to civilization. One of his stories is this: On the day he arrived in Lubbock, he took a taxi to a boot store where he bought a new pair of bright red, roping-heeled Justins. While walking gingerly toward the campus, his pants legs stuffed into the boot tops, a pick-up full of rednecks offered him a ride and took him out to a cotton field where they stole his new boots and beat him up. "You just don't look right in those boots with your curly hair and fat butt," they yelled at him as they drove away. Whether this story is true or not—and it is most likely not—the point is that Lubbock inspires such stories. You can't leave Lubbock without one.

THIS IS ONE OF my Lubbock stories: On the morning of my wedding, I jumped into my Volkswagen Rabbit, deciding to make a break for New Mexico. I figured I could get to Fort Sumner by noon and call from my uncle Homer's motel. I'd say: "I'm sorry, but I just can't go through with this thing." Everyone—all the relatives who'd driven days, all the friends who'd flown in from brighter places—would just eat cake and go home. I could wait out my embarrassment in one of uncle's dingy motel rooms and have conversations with his parrot, Pete. Then I remembered that both Pete and uncle Homer had died. The motel had been demolished to make way for a Taco Bell. So I drove around and around loop 289, a lonely circle built after the tornado hit Lubbock in 1971. There I was, sweating in my white wedding suit, driving with the windows down, the entire freeway to myself. I

used up a half tank of gas, then drove to the church, a little late, a little windblown.

Jimmie Dale is right, though. To be from Lubbock in Indianapolis or most any place but Texas is to be considered exotic. When they hear the word "Lubbock," most people up here in "Naptown," as we call Indianapolis, have a list of impressions that includes Buddy Holly, desert landscape, oil wells and gun-toting cowboys. They assume people from Lubbock must be interesting characters, especially if they speak with the correct slow, nasal, tight-lipped twang. You could be the most boring person in Lubbock county and come up here and be the hit of a party just by saying "Hi. I'm from Lubbock." A friend of mine thought my accent was thick until he visited Lubbock with me and heard an undiluted version. One afternoon, we sat in a tiny, dark bar on University Avenue, listening to the conversation between the bartender and one customer: "Weeeeel, Ah thaaank Ahhhhl haaaave ah-hhnother wuuuun ahhhh thozе Currrrz." My friend thought these people were just hamming it up for his benefit: "People really talk like that! Amazing."

INDIANAPOLIS IS IN some ways a larger version of Lubbock, only without the wind, the sand, and the brown. There are trees, color, and water here. The landscape here often reminds me of the picture of Heaven over that baptistery. The people are friendly and trusting; the politics are conservative. Dan Quayle lives up the road. Like Lubbock, the artistic space is open, uncluttered. No well-worn tracks. Unlike some places, everyone here is not writing books, making movies, or cutting CDs—or feeling compelled to lie and say they are doing such things. Creative or restless people are caught in the "Lubbock Dilemma": to leave—to take that job in Austin or Los Angeles or Manhattan where you would not be the only songwriter or publishing fiction writer or painter and where your audience might be larger, more knowledgeable and more critical—or to stay and keep telling yourself that simplicity is all. Like in Lubbock, in Indianapolis, you may miss the atmospheric intensity and verve of a critical mass of creative minds crammed into one place but, then, you won't miss the competition. People who live in places like Lubbock and Indianapolis are like party guests who don't mind sitting in the corners, who don't flock to the kitchen just because it is full of people.

Despite what he might have you believe, Jimmie Dale Gilmore and the rest of the flatlander musical entourage inherited a metaphysical bent while hovering in the cultural corner of Texas, itching to leave for Austin. What is more metaphysical than living in a place whose observable features make you want to leave so desperately that

you push yourself to outgrow it? It's realizing later, after examination, that you can't outgrow a place. You can only outgrow yourself in that place, the place that gave you the unseen energy, the itch, to move on.

But you haven't really outgrown that self if you can't pay your debt to the place you had to leave.

METAPHYSICS examines things independently of what observation seems to tell us. Lubbock is the quintessential home of the metaphysician. Heidegger would have loved the place. Observation seems to tell us that we are surrounded by dry and dusty cotton fields and dry, slow-talking flatlanders. We can only see monotony. But what we can't see when we look out over that flat plain but what we can examine metaphysically are the flatland's invisible seas—one a secret, underground river in the Ogllala formation and the other a sea of wind that blows up an occasional dust devil. And what we can't see when we sit with tight-lipped flatlanders in a dark bar on a hot, windy afternoon in Lubbock, Texas, but what we can examine metaphysically, is their secret energy that comes from swimming against a river of electric winds running through that vast expanse of sky.

We might actually get to see this energy if there happens to be a dance floor in this bar.

You know the kind of thing that really gets me homesick for Lubbock? The last time Gilmore played up here, after he had finished his fourth song of the first set and noticed an empty dance floor, he said, "Now, y'all come on down here, fill up this empty space." I interpreted this as an invitation to dance, but when my partner and I went down to dance, there was no room. Hoosiers were sitting on the dance floor where they remained all evening. Lead butts, I thought. "This would never happen in Lubbock, Texas," I commented to a man standing next to me. "Well, this isn't Lubbock," he said.

I suddenly got a flat, dull, beige feeling in the pit of my stomach. □

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POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE

✓ **ELECTION PROSPECTS:** A week of Newt Gingrich boasting about his plans as House Speaker and voters focusing on the potential cost to the middle class of the Republican "Contract with America" put a brace in Democratic election hopes as the mid-term elections approach. In Texas, although several Democratic incumbents were still said to be in trouble, the GOP threat to close the 21-9 gap in the U.S. House delegation appears to have receded. Vulnerable Democrats still include Rep. Bill Sarpalius of Amarillo, after reports that a grand jury was investigating his ties to a moving company interested in military contracts; Rep. Greg Laughlin of West Columbia also has been accused of getting favors from the moving company. But Democrats are starting to breathe easier about Reps. Ron Coleman of El Paso, Martin Frost and John Bryant of Dallas, and Jack Brooks of Beaumont. Swing districts include the 25th in Houston, where Ken Bentsen is hoping the marginally Democratic district will turn out to elect him over big-spending, right-wing Republican Gene Fontenot, and the Southwest Texas 23rd District, where Democratic challenger Rolando Rios has been buoyed by reports that freshman GOP Rep. Henry Bonilla of San Antonio, who has embraced the Republican push toward tighter immigration controls, employed an undocumented nanny for seven years. Rios is still rated a longshot in the sprawling but Democrat-leaning Border district.

In the Senate, where the GOP hoped to hold its 13 of 31 seats, endangered Democrats include Sen. Steve Carriker, D-Roby, and conservative Sen. Bill Sims, D-Paint Rock, who moved into a new West Texas district. Mario Gallegos Jr., a Democratic state rep from Houston, is unopposed in his new Hispanic-majority 6th District while David Cain, a Democratic state rep from Dallas, is favored to pick up the 2nd District in Northeast Texas. Rep. Mike Martin, D-Galveston, hoped to unseat Sen. Jerry Patterson, R-Pasadena, in a Galveston Bay district and Democrat Margaret Ross Messina of Granbury, although underfunded, was taking the fight to Sen. David Sibley, R-Waco, in a marginally Democratic district in North Central Texas. Democratic hopes of keeping vacant East Texas District 3 were enhanced by reports that Republican candidate

Drew Nixon had been picked up by police in Dallas in the company of a prostitute in February 1993, which undercut his family-values-oriented campaign in favor of former Rep. Curtis Soileau, D-Lumberton.

Little change is expected in the 150-member Texas House, where Republicans hold 60 seats but generally form a coalition with conservative Democrats anyway. Races to watch include three party switchers: Rep. Ric Williamson of Weatherford and Rep. Pete Nieto of Uvalde both switched to the Republican Party last year and face Democratic challengers while Rep. Bernard Erickson of Burleson switched to the Democratic Party and faces a Republican challenger. In West Texas District 74, Rep. Pete Gallego, D-Alpine, faces a challenge from Robert Garza, R-Del Rio, backed by Hudspeth County residents outraged by Gallego's support, albeit reluctant, for a nuclear waste dump at Sierra Blanca. In West Texas District 80, the seat given up by conservative Democrat Jim Rudd, Democrat Kevin Jackson of Andrews faces Republican Gary Walker of Plains. In Dallas District 105, the seat given up by progressive Democrat Al Granoff, Democrat Dale B. Tillery faces Republican Mike Anderson. In Harris County District 144, freshman Rep. Robert E. Talton of Pasadena, whose 1992 victory was tainted by charges of voting irregularities, faces Democrat Scot M. Doyal, son of a former mayor.

✓ **FISHER HEADS SOUTH.** Richard Fisher won the Democratic primary by beating Jim Mattox in South Texas but his advantage among Hispanic voters had eroded by the second week in October, when the Texas Poll found only 37 percent of Latino voters supported him, down from 51 percent in August, as the number of undecided Hispanics grew to 37 percent, according to Southwest Voter Research Institute. An all-time high of 1,278,234 Hispanic voters had registered for the November election, the institute reported, accounting for 14.8 percent of the potential Texas electorate of 8.6 million. One million Hispanic voters were registered in 1990, but only 30 percent went to the polls, compared with the 54 percent turnout of non-Hispanic voters in 1990. Still, the Latino vote, which went approximately 80 percent for Richards in 1990, was enough to turn the tide for the Governor, who received

47 percent of the non-Hispanic vote.

While Richards expects to get the lion's share of the black and Hispanic vote, Democratic campaign officials were concerned about turnout. In Houston, where the Richards campaign was hoping for a turnout of 50 percent of registered black voters, black turnout in gubernatorial elections is normally about 35 percent, a difference of 30,000 votes. National black leaders such as Jesse Jackson, Barbara Jordan and Commerce Secretary Ron Brown were scheduled to campaign in Houston for Democrats, including Congressional candidates Ken Bentsen, who faces an uphill battle, and Sheila Jackson Lee, who should win easily in the majority-black district.

✓ **LENA'S REVENGE.** George W. Bush's Tex-Mex radio ad, playing on Tejano radio stations statewide, that criticized Richards' appointment of Lena Guerrero may have backfired. Bush reminded Hispanic voters that Guerrero, the state's most prominent Latina official when she was named to the Railroad Commission in 1991, had misstated her educational background, which led to her electoral defeat in 1992. As Sylvia Moreno of the *Dallas Morning News* noted, that is still a sensitive political topic among Latinos in Texas.

✓ **CONGRESSIONAL COYOTE?** Rep. Henry Bonilla, R-San Antonio, called for crackdowns on illegal immigration just a few months after the Justice Department decided the statute of limitations had run out on prosecution of the Bonillas on a charge of smuggling a British nanny into the United States, the *Houston Post* reported. The nanny told immigration investigators that the Bonillas knew she was entering the United States on a tourist visa only to go to work for them, the *Post* reported; Bonilla said he kept INS apprised of her whereabouts. He said the nanny was never a burden on taxpayers, although the nanny told INS investigators that neither taxes nor Social Security were withheld from her pay, which was given to her largely in cash. The Bonillas fired the nanny in 1993, shortly after Zoë Baird's nomination as Attorney General was derailed by her own

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