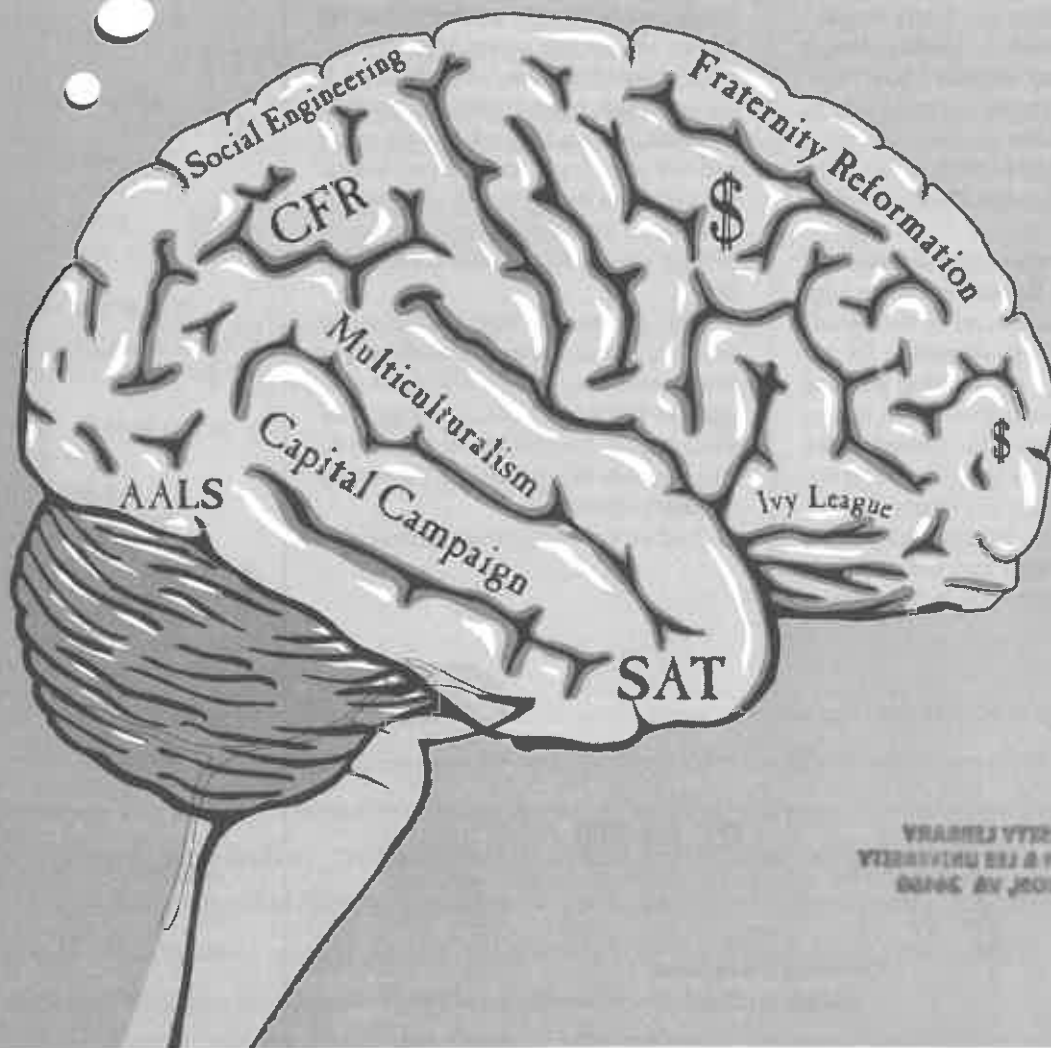


W&L Spectator

Volume 4, Issue 1 • October 1992

the mind of the University...



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Heard and Overheard...

EDITOR'S FORUM



WHAT DO THE PHRASES: "QUALITY IS JOB 1," "The Real Thing," and "Like You Could Do Better" all have in common? They are corporate mottos

for such esteemed organizations as Ford, Coke

and *The Ring-tum Phi*. "*The Ring-tum Phi...Like You Could Do Better*" Is this a joke? Maybe, but that is the slogan the *Phi* has reportedly chosen for its new line of T-Shirts. Kind of sounds like one of those ads from the movie "Crazy People." If you haven't seen it, Dudley Moore plays a half-crazy ad man whose "honest" ads save his career and make him all the rave on Madison Avenue. And while we're on the subject of honest ads, how about this: *The Ring-tum Phi...easier than thinking*.

Do you remember that ridiculous *Phi* photo featuring Baner pointing to large gaps between parked cars in the Corral? Well it seems that he wanted to fix that problem this year by painting parking lines. Simple enough of a solution, but not to Frank Parsons who turned down Baner's request to buy paint. Cost too much? Perhaps. The University Security budget did not have enough money to buy Baner an American car, either. That's why he's driving around in that ridicu-

lous Suzuki. Where is all the money from our parking fees going anyway? At least with no parking lines in the Corral Baner will be able to milk more parking fines out of the student body...You think he's happy about it though--neither he nor his Suzuki will see one penny of it...

Alumni sight-seeing on the east end of the colonnade better watch where they are walking, lest they fall into the crater that will someday be the Watson Oriental Art Gallery. I don't know if any students have fallen in, but one thing is for sure--Wilson's really dug himself in a hole this time...

This summer the *Wall Street Journal* ran a story about a new course offering at Stanford--"Black Hair." No joke. The study of black hair styles is allegedly of some import. A multicultural dream to be sure. Sounds like a possible University Scholars offering.

And we've only been back three weeks!

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OCTOBER

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The controversy over the humanities curricula is a struggle over definition, and what is at issue is not so much the nature or purposes of the American university as the identity of the American people.

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General *opinion*

ADMISSION NUMBERS · TEAR TEA · GENDER NEUTRAL · BEZANSON

Commencing With Numbers

President Wilson addresses the Class of '93 in George Will's absence.

George Will's unavoidable absence from this year's Opening Convocation was certainly a disappointment to most of the W&L community (except the faculty, perhaps), but in his place President Wilson gave an address meant to inspire the seniors in their last year at W&L.

Soon after presenting the Class of 1993 as the ceremony's "celebrated guests," and as possibly the "most tenacious" class the school has seen, President Wilson praised the statistics of the freshman and 1st year law classes. That the average GPA of the entering law class was 3.5, and that the undergraduate class of 1993 contains 149 athletic captains and 143 presidents or vice-presidents of major student organizations in high school is indeed impressive, but is also shows the administration's increasing interest in admissions numbers. This trendy number game that pollutes admissions departments across the country is apparently too tempting a policy for Washington & Lee to pass up in its quest to fit into the national college scene. We can

only hope that President Wilson's (and the Office of Admissions') concern truly lies in the characters and personalities of the entering classes as much as their board scores.

According to President Wilson, one of the factors contributing to the impact of the college experience is the humility we all feel as we realize how vast is the realm of human knowledge and how little individuals can possibly learn. He suggests that we should, in a sense, appreciate our ignorance and use it as an inspiration for our continued education. He applies these words of wisdom to his own experience, specifically lamenting his interest as a student of the Elizabethans, claiming that "the Elizabethan achievements were in some measure purchased with cruelty and callousness and imperious arrogance."

In his closing, President Wilson considers the accomplishments that we can look forward to this year. He specifically mentions "the development of a comprehensive plan for our new science facilities, the completion of the fraternity renovation program, the inauguration of the University Cinema..." and "the successful launching of the public phase of our campaign for Washington and Lee." One cannot help but notice the conspicuous absence of the Watson Gallery's opening from this list. Maybe even President

Wilson could not mention that "achievement" after earlier in his speech paying lip service to the "massive dignity of our architecture."

Diversity and Substantive Law

When Dean Bezanson wrote "I think that diversity is just as important a part of the preparation for practicing law as learning substantive law" none of his students took him seriously. Or did they?

Last year, the only incident of Lewis Hall vandalism receiving much attention surrounded the defacement of a minority student's carrel. It was not the only such incident, however. The Federalist Society's display so disturbed then third year law student, Ms. Diana Phillips, that she took her Magic Markers to it—rendering the board illegible and unusable. Did President Wilson consider this action a threat to the University? Nope. To his credit (but also his inconsistency) President Wilson allowed the Student Conduct Committee to adjudicate the matter. Ms. Phillips readily confessed to the crime before the SCC, but rather than express regret for the incident, she took pride in it. According to her, some destruction of private property is a constitutionally protected form of free

speech. Did such an unremorseful (not to mention stupid) hate crime result in suspension or expulsion for Ms. Phillips? Hardly. The SCC merely placed her on probation and required her to apologize to the Federalists. Hm...

Two years ago, three students from two fraternities were involved in an incident in which a bottle was thrown through a newly renovated fraternity house's window. Although the respective fraternities placed the men on probation, required them to apologize to the houses and collected the cost of repair from them, it was not enough. Not for President Wilson at least, who sent the three men home for a semester because he deemed the punishment did not fit the crime. We're still waiting to hear from President Wilson on this latest decision.

And what about Ms. Diana Phillips? Unsatisfied that her constitutional rights were protected by the University, she sued the Federalist Society president for defamation of character and asked for a cool \$7000 in damages. Is this a joke? The Rockbridge County Court obviously thinks so; they dismissed the case.

Is this the kind of lawyer that Dean Randy "I think diversity is just as important a part of the preparation for practicing law as learning substantive

law" Bezanson will continue to produce? And, if so, should we just view the L.A. riots as a possible new career field for our law grads?

"Our Mother/ Father Who Art In ..."

*Not even God escapes the
gender-neutral trend at W&L.*

"Let us now praise famous people, and those that begot us" is a line from

last spring's Baccalaureate Service for the Class of 1992. "Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begot us" is the corresponding line from the same service six years ago. This is one of eleven instances in which masculine references were excised from the latest "politically incorrect" Baccalaureate Service of 1986 to form the present, "up-to-date," version.

We should duly note this, lest we give Professor Handelman (or is it Handelperson?) of the Law School all the credit for

introducing W&L to the absurdities of gender-neutral language.

Tearrible Idea

*The IFC plans for a kinder,
gentler, Tear Night.*

Tear Night, the ceremonial rite of passage for freshmen pledging fraternities, has been under the scrutiny of the IFC after the record 12 hospital visits by freshmen after last year's event. The chief complaints about Tear Night are that the

massive volumes of alcohol consumed promote violence and also cloud the reasoning of the freshmen, presumably making them unable to rationally decide which house they wish to join. Since last year's Tear Night, the IFC (presumably at the request of the administration) has been considering the adoption of new protocol for this traditional ceremony of bid acceptance. Unfortunately, the present proposal offers little, if any, hope of reducing last year's hospital visits, and offers no guarantee of preventing freshmen from being persuaded to change their minds after tearing at a particular house.

According to the IFC, this year the freshmen, after painstakingly weighing the pros and cons of each fraternity from which they received bids, will don coats and ties (as opposed to the traditional Tear Night wear of jeans and a partially, soon to be fully, ripped T-shirt) and arrive at the fraternities of their choice between the hours of 5:00 and 8:00. Once there, they will announce their interest in "tearing" or formally accepting the bid, for which they will be greeted by the collective jubilation of all the active members (also in semi-formal garb). The freshmen present are then invited to spend whatever remains of the two hour period soberly rejoicing with the brothers as well as meeting the incoming

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members of their pledge class. But once the 8:00 "failsafe" time arrives, it's back to the dorms for the freshmen for a no contact grace period supposedly designed to allow them time to recuperate after the early evening's activities and also to prevent houses disappointed with a particular freshman's absence earlier from attempting to sway him by whatever means into reconsidering. Later in the evening the freshmen are invited to rejoin the active fraternity men for a slightly more lively celebration.

Tear Night should not only symbolize the beginning of a new fraternity year, but also the end of the laborious formal rush process. It is difficult to become very excited about tearing when the backdrop too closely resembles that of an Open House. And how is the IFC going to enforce a no-contact period after the ceremony? Are the officers of the IFC to guard the dormitory doors to prevent fraternity members from entering? The prospect that this grace period will reduce the traditional Tear Night violence is equally absurd. In fact, that time is most likely to be used by fraternity members to put themselves by potable means into the state of mind for traditional tearing.

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Does W&L Have A Choice?



AS ELECTION '92 APPROACHES, STUDENTS around the country are being constantly reminded to exercise their right to vote.

From neighborhood voting drives to MTV's "Rock the Vote" campaign, students are incessantly bom-

barded with pleas to become involved in this year's Presidential race between Republican President George Bush and Democratic candidate Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas. While such mundane questions as the fate of our nation seem fair game for democratic exercise, it is strangely ironic that at Washington & Lee, which prides itself on student autonomy and political involvement, the students are afforded no input whatsoever regarding the makeup or conduct of the administration under whose rule they are bound.

At W&L, the issues affecting our everyday lives mirror those issues framing the current debate between Bush and Clinton. Hitherto, even the most politically inept people are consciously aware of the issues in the national debate—issues such as economics, defense, family values, trust, and overall competence. Would it not be interesting to hold W&L President John D. Wilson, who has held office for nearly ten years, accountable by the same criteria as the national candidates? Since voters will soon judge President Bush after his first four years in office, and to a lesser extent, Governor Clinton for his 12 years as governor, it seems fitting in this highly publicized election year that President Wilson be similarly scrutinized for his tenure at W&L. Put bluntly, given the choice, would you vote to re-elect President Wilson?

National Security

With the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, the new role of the United States military in future geo-politics remains a major issue in the national political scene. Bush continues to favor a strong, yet slightly

scaled down military force, while Clinton proposes sweeping cuts in the defense budget under the pretense of reaping the illusory "peace dividend," made possible only by the Republican engineered victory in the Cold War. One might query as to how Wilson stands on the question of military readiness by recalling the law school fiasco concerning the recruitment manifesto proffered by the AALS, a second-tier law school accreditation agency.

The AALS mandated that *en vogue* PC law schools ban recruitment by the U.S. Military and affiliated governmental agencies for their discrimination in the hiring of homosexuals. At the behest of eleven hyper-sensitive, illiberal law professors and under Dean Bezanson's approving eye, W&L's recruitment policy was amended to comply with AALS standards. In the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* led media conflagration that ensued, President Wilson did his best Tammy Wynette, "standing by his man," Randall Bezanson, on the one hand, while stooping so low as to personally attack the author of the offending editorial (himself a W&L alumnus) on the other. As the media backlash aroused a response from influential alumni, Wilson changed his tune and abandoned the tenured homophiles in favor of an approach less likely to alarm would-be donors to his incipient Capital Campaign; *i.e.*, he suspended the policy. President Wilson's commitment to our Armed Forces can be questioned, though his respect for the dollar remains unchallenged.

Family Values

In addition to defense, the issue of family values has remained at the fore-

Richard Burke is a senior from Atlanta, Ga. Will Thomas is a senior from Charleston, SC.



front of the national political questions. As is well known, President Bush strongly supports traditional family values. And Clinton, whose clouded past somewhat undermines any family value credibility, has nevertheless also jumped on the family values bandwagon. To update a phrase from the 1988 Democratic Convention, "Where was John?" During his tenure at W&L, President Wilson has remained idle while the proponents of multiculturalism have attempted to transpose their values on a trusting student body and convert W&L's traditional curriculum into their own political pep-rally. [Using a Cabinet governmental model, Wilson should be, in some measure, accountable for the actions of the deans and the faculty of this University, but he hasn't been.] First there was an attempt to create "theme halls" in the freshman Dorms where students could be grouped together on a hall based on their "cause" or ideals as specified in a survey completed before assigning dorm rooms. The halls would range from an environmental hall to an animal rights hall, and presumably could be "sponsored" by any group with a "cause" (or at least an interest in indoctrinating freshmen). The fragmentation of the Freshperson [*sic*] class that the Administration so abhors when fraternities impose their brand of "social determinism" on the hapless freshperson [*sic*], seems to be legitimized by the correct political cause.

Another attempt to multiculturally indoctrinate students surrounds the implementation of trivial course offerings such as "Unconventional Writing by Women" and "The Theology of Martin Luther King, Jr." Courses such as these do not prepare students for any salient aspect of the real world. If a student really cares about the writings of some left-wing femi-Nazis, that student will explore the area on "his/her" own time. Academia should focus on serious scholarship; however, President Wilson seems to think that these courses actually enrich the mind.

Economy

If there is one thing that students learn at W&L, it is certainly economics. The same economic issues plaguing the country, such as raising taxes and inflation, exist right here on campus. There is actually a social tax, the infamous "Greek Tax," at W&L. Hard to believe, but nonetheless true. In order to participate in Greek activities, and to really enjoy yourself on a Wednesday night (or any other night for that matter), fork over \$400 up front or face exile to what Ken Ruscio deemed the

"social and cultural center" of the campus, Gaines Hall.

This tax suddenly occurred in the wake of the gross mismanagement of Phase I (one down, two to go) of the mighty Fraternity Renaissance program. In Frank Parson's latest adventure into capital management in the multi-million dollar range, Phase I went off like a "How To" book on deficit spending. Poor management of funds and shoddy workmanship plague and characterize the Renaissance. The University is guaranteed to make money off of the whole endeavor, as the students "saved" from their former squalor pay back the cost in the guise of the exclusive Greek Tax. The tax is equivalent to an exclusive tax on the middle class as Greeks are the most salient group on campus. Once again Greeks are unfairly called upon to subsidize the entertainment of the entire school out of their own pocket. Andy Rooney might remark, "Would you vote for a guy that did that?"

The orgiastic spending that has taken place here in the last ten years would make the most jaded tax-and-spend Democrat turgid with glee. W&L "needs" a new student center, a new science compound, *et cetera, ad infinitum, ad nauseam*. One must wonder just how many prestige edifices will be necessary to sate Wilson's voracious appetite. This may sound nutty, but why not divert some of that revenue to the search and hiring of more quality professors who have some understanding of the traditions and ideals of Washington and Lee: it is a strong faculty that determines the greatness of a university to a large extent, not its making the cover of Construction Quarterly. Few voters would ever let a national politician get away with this, but that is just what Wilson gets away with every year.

Bureaucracy

The size of government and job creation are two other issues receiving much publicity in this fall's presidential election. Both candidates are promising more jobs for Americans, and Clinton's plans call for an increased size/role of the federal bureaucracy. Give him his due, President Wilson has created more jobs at W&L than any other president in its history. Unfortunately, the bulk of these jobs were not for recent graduates (save a dorm counselor or two), but for W&L's own increasing bureaucracy.

Character Issue

By far the most important concept being bandied about by both candidates in Election '92 is trust. The Democrats are

wailing about Bush's breaking of his "no new taxes" vow, while the Republicans are feasting on the ample fodder provided by Clinton's chequered past, whether it be his non-inhaling, draft-dodging Oxford days or his "alleged" marital dalliances. Here at W&L, it is often difficult, as a student, to associate the word "trust" with President Wilson without a cynical chortle. It is difficult to find a suitable starting point in this category, as Wilson's duality in his dealings with the students has become somewhat notorious. The aforementioned Greek Tax and other "gifts" of the Renaissance (*i.e.* outrageous maintenance costs, the Draconian conduct codes, etc.) are enough to make any honest fraternity member feel as though they were on the receiving end of a screwdriver. The "Renaissance" itself is a misnomer, as the plan anticipates the termination, not the fruition, of certain fraternities as a necessary by-product of a drastically increased financial burden mandated by acquiescence to the plan. Wilson has continually touted the Renaissance to alumni groups as his commitment to the fraternity system at W&L, but in reality this Pyrrhic victory is tantamount to a death sentence for smaller houses and a deterrent to potential members based on cost alone. A queer remedy for the social lifeblood of this community.

As most of this community will recall, two winters ago when a bottle throwing debacle provided a sterling example of our President's oleaginous style of governance. In this gem of an executive maneuver, President Wilson suspended three students for bottle tossing under the aegis of the "Immediate Threat Clause." He claimed (falsely) that his actions were necessary because the student judicial mechanism, the Student Conduct Committee, had failed to act swiftly enough. If President Wilson were to read the student handbook, he would observe that the SCC is solely a referral committee, and had he really desired their action, he need merely to have brought the case himself as a formal complainant.

What he did instead was to fabricate circumstances to invoke his power as he did not trust the elected student officials to levy a degree of punishment he deemed "appropriate." In so doing, Wilson effectively rendered the system of student government, that W&L supposedly prides itself on, effectively moot. He then turned around and attempted to justify his actions by faulting the very judicial process he purposely ignored. To put it plainly, President Wilson knowingly breached the trust placed in him by the students in order to quell alumni misgivings about the Renais-



sance program, with three students paying the price.

"Your Vote Counts"

Wilson's duplicity can easily be seen by simply picking up a copy of W&L's alumni magazine. This sugar-coated, glossed-over, propaganda publication gives alumni a false sense of security that all is well at the old alma mater, so there is no reason not to give a magnanimous gift to the alumni fund. The W&L Alumni Magazine is the *Mother Jones* of W&L news publications. These examples show quite clearly where Wilson's accountability lay—in the alumni/dollar relationship. It is apparent that Wilson's strings can be pulled to provide the desired change in tune, given that enough dollars are at stake, or, God forbid, news of actual administrative foppery be leaked to interested and influential alumni.

The irony here is that more alumni involvement in school affairs would doubtless reduce the current comedy of errors plaguing the higher-ups in Washington and Lewis Hall. Alumni who remember fondly their years at W&L should show their support by endeavoring to find out more about what is really occurring in their absence and contribute accordingly with an explanation so that they will not be led like so many lemmings to the cliff, as President Wilson obviously would prefer.

The analysis of Wilson's presidency at W&L brings an obvious conclusion in this politically charged climate. If Wilson were involved in an election on this campus, it is clear that he would not stand much of a chance. Of course, as the old saying goes: "If a frog had wings, it wouldn't bump its ass a-hoppin'." Clearly, students can not make Wilson personally accountable for his actions by an election, but the way to exact some control over executive decisions is to inform and coordinate with the alumni. Remember, the alumni were once in our shoes, and it is difficult to think that they would want this school radically altered at the hands the President and his administration. The alumni possess the proven control over Wilson's action, the mighty dollar, and by soliciting their aid, the students can have at least an indirect input as to the way they are governed. However, as it currently stands, there will be no Decision '92 at W & L.

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ESSAY

Literature and the Curriculum

THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE HUMANITIES curricula is a struggle over definition, and what is at issue is not so much the nature or purposes of the American university as the identity of the American people. There have been many such

definitional combats in the past; the greatest of them led to the War Between the States. In all such struggles, whatever the nature of the dispute, the real object is always power. No one knew this better than Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty. After defining "glory" as "a nice knock-down argument," he explains to Alice: "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." When Alice politely suggests that the question is, whether one can make words mean what you want them to, Humpty Dumpty replies rather brusquely: "The question is which is to be master—that's all."

The first term, multiculturalism, is nothing more and nothing less than the latest rallying cry for all those who object to European man's European bias, although they have no objection to such bias whenever they find it "among oppressed peoples struggling to assert their identity." Indians, Africans, and Latinos; women, homosexuals, and defectives all have a right to their particular point of view, to a literature that can only be interpreted by members of the group, and to a curriculum based on their peculiar literatures.

The other term, "the arts," is no less political. Oh, the Romans used such expressions as *artes liberales*—translating literally from the Greeks' *technai eleutheriai*—and *bonae artes* and *artes humaniores* to refer to the various components of sound education: the study of grammar, rhetoric, literature, history, and philosophy. However, used without qualification, "the arts" has come to mean not just the high arts of literature, painting, music, and sculpture; it now comprises

everything from Rembrandt to the ceramic ashtrays my daughter made in second grade, from Sophocles to striptease.

Let me then clarify what I mean when I say arts. I mean principally what the Greeks, Romans, and civilized Europeans have meant by *artes humaniores*, that is, literature conceived of in its social, political, and educational aspects, and among works of literature I am including, in addition to poetry, fiction, and drama, the classic works of history, oratory, and philosophy. By extension, I am free to appropriate the fine arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, and music insofar as they fulfill the same functions.

In my last sermon on the purpose of literature (August 1992), I argued that it is by telling that we make moral sense of the world and pass down the deepest principles of our civilization to the wild animals we treat as human beings in the hope that they will someday live up to our expectations. A "classic" in this sense is not merely a work written in a classical language or even one that exhibits the qualities of construction and style of the best ancient works. A classic work ought to be an indispensable text of our civilization in the same way that a book of the Bible is not only supposed to teach what is true; it must also be a unique source for an important piece of doctrine or historical information.

I dislike the notion of a canon, because such canons tend to be drawn up by bookworms and so-called literary critics who are really the ghouls and vampires of culture, the undead who prey upon the living in order to give their putrifying souls the

This article originally appeared in the September, 1992 issue of *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*. It is reprinted here with the author's permission.

The first term, multiculturalism, is nothing more and nothing less than the latest rallying cry for all those who object to European man's European bias, although they have no objection to such bias whenever they find it "among oppressed peoples struggling to assert their identity."

illusion of vitality. As formulated by Alexandrian scholars, the original canons were an attempt to sort out the best of local Greek literary traditions in order to lay the foundation for a Panhellenic culture. It was also of some importance to kick out the cuckoos that had been fobbed off on important writers. But once the notion of a canon was diluted to mean nothing more than the books that a current consensus of English professors like to teach, once it included recent works of popular fiction as well as works intended to flatter this nationality and that minority, the canon lost all usefulness. Jane Austen and Scott Fitzgerald are writers that have given me a great deal of pleasure, but in what sense are they indispensable? For several generations now, at least since the creation of the first English departments, "the canon" has been a tool of cultural hegemony for several generations of critics, whose dream, borrowed from Matthew Arnold, was that culture could replace religion, literature take the place of Scripture, and—most important—that English teachers assume the mantle of priests and prophets. I say English teachers, because an "English scholar" is a contradiction in terms, outside of a few fields like Old English philology and textual criticism. It is time to abandon canons and fall back on looser and more general terms, such as "the classics," or "really significant books..."

The function of a general curriculum—whether it was our own classical course or the Sumerian and Akkadian texts that ancient Babylonians and Assyrians had to master—is always the same. It is to teach us who we are as a people and to impart the wisdom that is necessary for life within the tribe or nation. Every society has rules and regulations that must be learned: which fork to use for salad, what to do with a finger bowl, where to put your arms when you're not eating—in Britain and the States we must not put our elbows on the table, but in France and Italy it is bad manners to put your hands in your lap.

In Europe and the United States, the rule-bearing songs and stories comprise

Western literature. Our tribal rituals of initiation were a prolonged education in the languages, histories, and literatures of Europe. When these stones are no longer known, we shall disappear as a people—or rather as peoples. Mario Vargas Llosa in his novel *The Storyteller* portrays a Peruvian tribal people on the verge of extinction, but they are held together by the efforts of a traditional storyteller, who is actually an urban Jewish intellectual who has adopted their culture. This sort of adoption is rare, almost nonexistent outside the West, but our culture and languages have found some of their most eloquent defenders in refugees from other cultures: Sam Hayakawa the linguist and V. S. Naipaul, an Indian from Trinidad.

The classical curriculum endured, virtually intact, down to the end of World War I. By then reformers like Harvard's President Eliot and John Dewey of Columbia Teachers College had succeeded in designing a revolutionary curriculum to change the character of the American people. The old curriculum was elitist, undemocratic, and impractical. What they put in its place was a hodgepodge of social theory, propaganda in the guise of history, a handful of American novels, and at the best schools a one- or two-year survey of Western Civics that was straight out of *1066 and All That* or *Met Brooks' History of the World*. By the 1950's college-educated Americans were proverbial for their ignorance, and by the 1970's average American college professors had less general learning than the students of the 1900's. I been there.

In literature the liberal curriculum has proved to be a disaster. It has meant the abandonment of critical standards, the loss of all measures of excellence including craftsmanship. It has also produced two generations of clumsy ignoramuses who, whatever their talent, will never rise above the level of the creative writing seminar and will never produce anything more than what Donald Hall has called the McPoem. Literary modernism is more or less extinct and only survives on the basis

of government grants and MFA courses. Shouldn't we be asking why Alexandra Ripley gets millions for her sequel to *Gone with the Wind*, while critically acclaimed poets and novelists have no readers beyond their friends?

You will say that it took Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Faulkner years to find their audiences. That is true, but the late Delmore Schwartz has yet to find his, and if poets like John Ashbury ever find an audience it will only be in the Levittown suburbs of Dante's hell.

There have been various attempts to distinguish highbrow from lowbrow culture, erudite from popular art, redskin from paleface writers. All of these distinctions have some validity, but I believe that all the greatest art is ultimately folkish or popular in origin and inspiration. Shakespeare was the tribal storyteller for Elizabethan England, and more than one English statesman has taken his view of his country's history from *Richard II* and *Henry IV*.

For those of us who are or ought to be heirs of Athens and Rome, of Florence and London, our folkways include the tribunal stories of many peoples. The failure to hand on these languages and stories has reduced our writers to the level of our barbarian ancestors—with this very important exception. The Goths and Franks and Saxons all lived in coherent tribal societies with strict moral and social codes as well as standards of craftsmanship and aesthetic conventions. Anyone who has glimpsed the Sutton Hoc treasures in the British Museum or the Merovingian tombs in France will recognize the power and creativity of these barbarians. But we, cut adrift from our anchors, must sail upon the waves of commercial mass culture, and if I say that much of the best art of the past thirty years is to be found in film and popular music, I do not mean it as a compliment to Martin Scorsese and Lou Reed.

Good art, to say nothing of great art, is not created in a vacuum. It comes out of a context and it is created within a tradition. Thomas Love Peacock's complaint that "a poet... is a semi-barbarian in a civilized



Art now comprises everything from Rembrandt to the ceramic ashtrays my daughter made in second grade, from Sophocles to striptease.

community" is only the negative way of saying this, because the poet and painter bring us down from our penthouse apartment of global markets and world government to the primitive facts of life, love, desire, and hate; art puts us back in touch with that part of ourselves that remains in the childhood of the human race. If art is tribal, then my art must be the art of my tribe, and that tribe is classical and biblical.

The Greeks told the story of the giant Antaeus, whose strength was invincible so long as he remained in contact with his mother earth. In order to destroy him, Hercules had to rip him up from his source of power. Cut off from the deepest and most ancient roots of our civilization, we of the West grow too feeble to defend ourselves.

Much of what I have said about cultural tribalism applies with equal force to the

cultures of Oriental and African peoples as well as to indigenous Americans. If there are Chinese or Zulus or Hopi who wish to preserve and celebrate their cultural traditions, I salute their efforts and wish them nothing but the best, so long as their art derives from a love of their own people, rather than a hatred of mine. What I ask them to grasp is what I call the Golden Rule of nationalities. If it is right, as I believe it is, for Americans to want to put America first, then we must extend a similar privilege to the French, to Croatians, to the Khmer, and if Oriental or native American residents of this European colony wish to celebrate their traditions, then it ought not to be at the expense of mine.

The reality of the situation is quite different from what I have described. For the most part, multiculturalism is a war against the culture of the West and the

institutions of American life. Back in the 60's it was common to say that the history of the United States was an unbroken record of massacring Indians, lynching negroes, and abusing women. This was said not by Indians or blacks or women but by white male liberals.

"A liberal," said Robert Frost, "is someone who would not take his own side in an argument," and this wise saying accurately describes the multiculturalism debate in which European-American scholars will not tell the truth about such fraudulent books as Kirkpatrick Sale's *Columbus* or Martin Bernal's sci-fi travesty of scholarship *Black Athena*, or Alex Haley's *Roots*, a book that purported to be a true family history, although the author plagiarized some parts from a novel.

We are perhaps the only civilization in the history of the world to perish, not at the hands of its enemies or as a result of its vices. It is our virtue that is destroying us, our Christian zeal to save the world, our rational insistence upon seeing the other man's point of view. We assume that our values of rationality, self-restraint, fair play, tolerance, and the rule of law are universal. They are not nor should they be.

We have forgotten that we too are a tribal people with an exotic culture that we have generously opened up to the entire world. We have forgotten that our primary responsibility is to defend our interests and safeguard our inheritance. Instead, we are wantonly destroying it, as much as Cromwell's soldiers and the French Jacobins who toppled statues, shattered stained glass windows, and stabled their horses in cathedrals. So far from taking our own side, we cannot even remain neutral but insist upon slandering our ancestors. In Nebraska, I am told, they have removed the portraits of Washington and Jefferson from the state house, because they, like so many of our Founders, were slaveholders.

I do not know what can be said of a culture that tolerates, no encourages this combination of lies and self-hatred, except this: no good thing has ever come out of hatred. The creative force of man is in his capacity for love; this springs from his

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love of family and friends and neighbors and may eventually spread to his nation or even the entire human race. To love your own people naturally leads to that devaluation of others we call xenophobia, but the true name is philophilia love of one's own people. To love one's family and neighbors and ancestors more than a set of unknown strangers does not require explanation. The really bizarre and pathological sentiment of the modern world is not xenophobia but the misophilia that makes us like W.S. Gilbert's "idiot who praises in enthusiastic tone all centuries but this and every country but his own." Literature has its origin in the celebration of heroic deeds, of beautiful women, of the glory of gods. The literature of hatred and envy, such as there is, at best rises to the height of satire. More typically it sinks to the level of *Mein Kampf* or *Soul on Ice*.

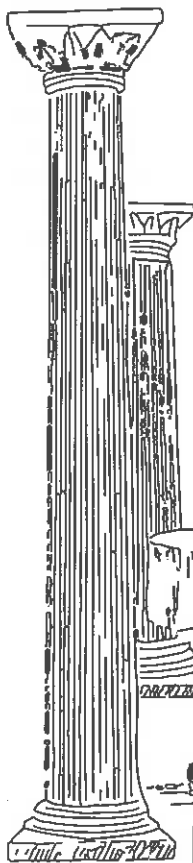
I do not know what the future holds for America or for its culture, but I will venture one prediction. If the current rage against our European culture continues, there will come the inevitable backlash. If there is to be black power and red power, black culture and yellow culture, black rights and homosexual rights, the less educated and less liberal classes will begin demanding white power, white culture, and white rights.

Ethnic hatemongers like Louis Farrakhan, Meyer Kahane, and David Duke may only be the first course in a long banquet of ethnic strife that is to come. And in the reassertion of whiteness, all the gentle virtues of our civilization will perish along with the humane lessons our ancestors learned from contemplating the fate of Trojan Priam.

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BOOK
REVIEW

THE CONSERVATIVE CRACK-UP, by
R. Emmett Tyrrell (Simon & Schuster;
1992; \$23.00)

A Conservative Crack-Pot



WERE THE CONSERVATIVE CRACK-UP AS prophetic, or merely as provocative and insightful, as its title suggests, then

R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.'s latest offering might well become the book of 1992 that Dinesh D'Souza's

Illiberal Education was the year before.

It isn't and it won't.

With George Bush trailing badly and potentially delivering the GOP a Carteresque defeat, there are few greater contributions Tyrrell could proffer the conservative movement than a probing and detailed analysis of its current condition. Regrettably, *The Conservative Crack-Up* offers little of the sort. The bulk of the book addresses Bob Tyrrell and *The American Spectator*'s rise to prominence, beginning with his days as a member of the University of Indiana swim team and concluding with him and George Bush at lunch. That only two chapters directly address a conservative crack-up at all speaks volumes about where Bob Tyrrell's priorities lie. And here Tyrrell unwittingly offers a brilliant example of what is wrong with the conservative movement as a political force: egos have replaced ideas and introspection has supplanted vision.

According to Tyrrell, the pivotal moment in the conservative crack-up occurred on July 1, 1987, with President Reagan's nomination of Robert Bork to the Supreme Court. Bork's defeat, Tyrrell argues, resulted from conservatives waning interest in national politics. The Liberal establishment, mobilized by this unexpected victory, was energized, while the conservative movement was demoralized. The *Zeitgeist*, key to Tyrrell's theory of cultural momentum, had turned.

In defining conservatism, Tyrrell gets it quite right in calling it a temperament rather than a philosophy. Conservatism is, after all, a disposition of the gut. But he gets it all wrong when he argues that conservatives are motivated by little more

than a simple desire to inhibit change. Tyrrell writes, "I noticed that today's issues have brought almost a complete reversal in positions once held to be conservative" (p 293). If it did little else, the Reagan Revolution impressed upon the nation and the world that *conservatives* are the change. Conservatives cannot simply be standard-bearers of the status quo, for the status quo yet remains dominated by the Liberal establishment and its ideology. With his New World Order (which is really an old, Wilsonian world order) and tax-and-spend economics, George Bush exemplifies what Bob Tyrrell apparently believes a conservative ought to be. They are both very, very wrong.

"Ideas have consequences," writes Richard Weaver, and although Tyrrell repeats this quotation in his closing lines, the reader really wonders why. For Tyrrell, the ultimate achievement of any political philosophy or temperament is the presidency. Ideas are not philosophical ends, but rather political means. One almost imagines Tyrrell at a cocktail party discussing what colors and designs conservatives ought to adopt in the coming political year. "Yes, I do like the way you show off a capital gains cut and inner-city initiatives. Scale back those family values, lay off abortion and you've got a winner. Work with me people; work with me."

Tyrrell spreads the blame for conservative crack-up among two groups, ideologues and "stupid conservatives." The stupid conservative, Tyrrell claims, is a creature of the 1980s. Before conservatism entered the political mainstream, indeed the political forefront, a form of natural selection prevented anyone who



lacked the intellectual means from becoming a conservative, as the Liberal dominated intellectual establishment silenced all but the most obstinate into submission. By the early 1980s, however, one could become a conservative by merely "parroting" a handful of ideas and values. Not only did these become easy targets for the *Kultursmog*, "a culture polluted by the politics of the infantile left" (p 55); they overwhelmed the second Reagan administration, robbing it of vigor and purpose.

As for the other extreme, the ideologues, Tyrrell blames them for emphasizing and dwelling on philosophical differences of little or no political import. He faults conservative icon Russell Kirk for remaining as philosophically steadfast in 1992 as he was in 1952. He mocks an entire subset of conservatives, the so-called paleoconservatives, for their fascination with Lincoln, states rights and Southern agrarianism. Finally, he asks why conservatives and libertarians can't put their petty ideological differences aside and cooperate politically.

While Tyrrell's request for political solidarity between disparate conservative and libertarian factions makes for fine rhetoric, it offers a shallow and fleeting solution to the conservative crack-up itself. The conservative movement as it largely exists today actually rests on three different ideologies: traditionalists, anti-Communists, and libertarians. The conservative movement, then, is actually a coalition or even a reaction against Communism abroad and New Deal Statism at home. For nearly forty years the power of its enemies without dwarfed the differences within. And so while the potential of a crack-up was minimal, the cracks nevertheless remained in the foundation. With the triumphs of the Reagan Revolution at home and abroad, however, the bonds uniting the disparate forces within the conservative movement weakened. Tyrrell calls this a tragedy.

It is nothing of the sort, but instead is a necessary outcome of victory. The current debate concerning prefixes and "-isms" is not a distraction, except for politicians.

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When a nation or a culture or a philosophy belittles or ignores its prophets and poets, it places itself in grave danger of forgetting what it believes and why. But as Thomas Fleming so often observes, nature abhors a vacuum; and if conservatives will not, or likelier yet, cannot, define who and what and why they are, then the Liberals and the moderates and the ignorant will readily do so for them. Perhaps this is why words and phrases like "right-wing," "reactionary," and "fascist" are becoming more and more prevalent not simply among the opposition, but also among the indifferent majority, who merely consume what is served to them. Single elections may be won with clever phrases and empty promises, but real political revolutions require firm and defined principles that speak to men's hearts and minds, to be sure, but also reach down into their gut and give them a queasy sensation of profundity. Half-baked politicians seeking only power and prestige coupled with crack-pot writers turning out self-important books very accurately encapsulate much of what is wrong with the conservative political movement.

But who cares? The movement, the nation, the *Zeitgeist*, have moved well beyond Bob Tyrrell and George Bush, though neither of them has seemed to notice. Yes, *The American Spectator's* place within conservative circles remains secure—albeit not so much as a conservative voice, but rather as a debunker of the

Left ("The Real Anita Hill" and "Lady Macbeth of Little Rock"). American politics is shifting away from Washington D.C., from its inner-circle cocktail parties and self-seeking bureaucrats in favor of the Indiana farmhouse Tyrrell left behind. Arguably the most influential conservative voice in America today neither resides in D.C. nor appears in print. His name is Rush Limbaugh, and he enjoys greater "readership" every day than Tyrrell will in a lifetime.

Tyrrell is very right to lament the crack-up for his own sake, for as go the cracks, go he and many others with him. Buchanan may have lost in the election of 1992, but there is little doubt who the real loser is. There is a rising tide of populism in this nation, and as Reagan observed a rising tide lifts all boats. But in order to float, one must have a boat. The tides are pouring over the banks of the Potomac, and scarcely a lifejacket can be found.

That there exists a conservative crack-up in the 1990s is no more news than Tyrrell's observation of a *Liberal Crack-Up* was a decade before. But the real question, "Where do we go from here?" remains as unanswered in the pages of *The Conservative Crack-Up* as Tyrrell fears it exists outside of them.

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