

Oh, Brother!

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

Amidst all the public musings over the astonishing disarray of the Clinton presidency, is it not odd that hardly anyone has placed the blame on President Clinton's ideas? Some tell us that the disarray is a consequence of his staff's youthfulness. Others cite the Hamlet-like temperament of our Boy President. His erratic work habits are blamed, treacherous Republicans, something called "Washington Gridlock," a barber in Beverly Hills, California. And here is another oddity: no one blames the administration's accumulating botches on Mrs. Hillary Rodham Clinton, though all Washington's wise coves insist that she is her husband's preeminent adviser.

Meanwhile, the botches accumulate at a rate Warren Harding and Millard Fillmore could not maintain. Some are mere spectacles of buffoonery. Out there in Paradise, California, a retired janitor emerges from obscurity to reveal that for decades he, Mr. Henry Leon Ritzenthaler, has been Bill's half-brother, oblivious to his noble pedigree. The evidence adduced includes a birth certificate recording Henry Leon's father, who was also Bill's father, and the fact that both have "blue eyes with bags under them" and their shared passion for junk foods and, as Henry Leon's daughter attests,

"a hot temper," plus being "chronically late."

Bill vows to call Henry Leon: "I placed a call today but there was nobody home." Controversy ensues. The press contacts Henry Leon easily. H.L. is off to New York for the chatter shows. Bill still can't reach him. Bill's credibility suffers anew when earnest H.L. is pictured al fresco, telephoning the White House. Will these two clods ever get together? How about on Oprah?

Yet many of our hapless President's botches are serious. Just the other day he blundered again on the subject of Bosnia and all Europe was dragged in. To Germany's Chancellor Helmut Kohl he sent a letter with a sentence clearly urging Kohl to lobby the Europeans in sup-

port of arming the Bosnian Muslims. Kohl did so a day or two later at a regional meeting of the European Community, irritating everyone, particularly the French and British. Within hours, the irritation was transformed into astonishment when the Clinton administration disavowed the missive. Said a senior White House official to the *New York Times*, "Mr. Clinton never expected anything to come of his letter."

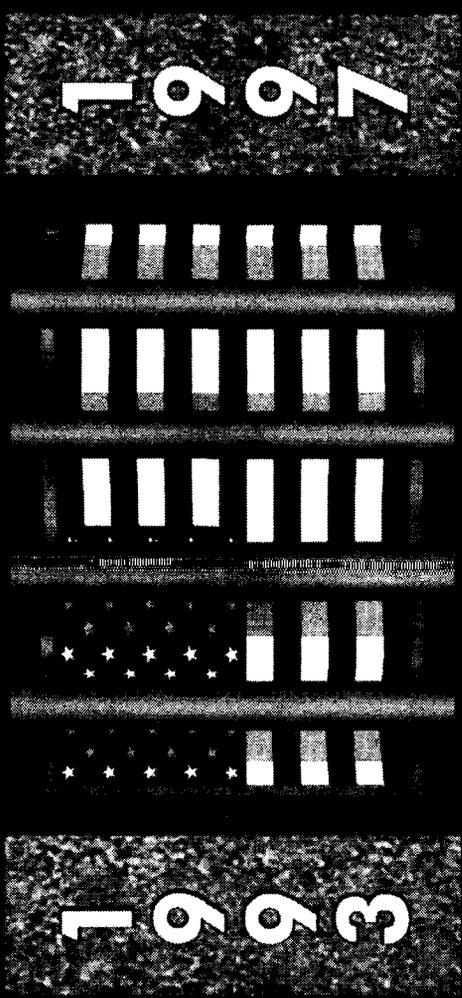
How does one account for such incompetence? Neither a youthful staff nor our Boy President's erratic soul is sufficient. Rather, I suggest that the analysts fix their attention on those sad delusions that the president calls his ideas and on that series of idiotic jingles that the president calls his philosophy of government.

They have so distracted him from the straightforward business of administering government that nearly a dozen policy initiatives remain to be introduced, though brief months ago the president was boasting of their imminent arrival. Scores of ambassadorial posts remain vacant. Hundreds of departmental appointments remain unmade, and the president dithers voluptuously, undoing past blunders, committing new ones, and complimenting himself on such absurdities as his budget. It includes the country's largest tax increase, despite feeble economic growth, and a promise to cut the deficit with a budget that increases spending. In fine and



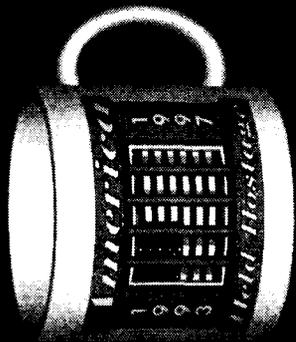
Adapted from RET's weekly Washington Times column syndicated by Creators Syndicate.

America



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in sum, it is a budget written by a schizophrenic and fit for a nation of masochists.

The old Clinton and the evanescent first lady are liberals. The irony is that for two decades liberalism has been cracking up into a riot of fanaticisms and con acts. Yesteryear's perfectly sensible drive for civil rights has been taken over by career racialists, such as Lani Guinier, the president's rudely aborted would-be civil rights administrator. Similar drives for the alleviation of poverty, for conser-

vation of the environment, for women's rights, for consumer protection, and for all the other relatively moderate and reasonable goals that liberalism once so arrogantly claimed as its own have all fallen into the hands of zealots and frauds. All care more about their gimmicks and nonce projects than about a successful Clinton administration. Their demands on the Clintons explain the administration's disarray, though that barber did not help. □

The combined forces of the feminists and the Puritans of all varieties have created a series of obsessions and contradictions in American sexual practice that is historically without parallel. For instance, American television, unlike French television, is beset with sex, much of it abnormal. In television drama (if that is the word), sex is as popular as the violence with which it is frequently confounded. In the talk shows, sex is equally pervasive and even more bizarre. One walks away from Oprah and her colleagues suspecting that no normal sex act is ever committed in the Great Republic and that the vast majority of Americans have suffered sexual harassment anterior to marrying a first cousin or mother's boyfriend (occasionally mother's girlfriend).

Pari passu with these obsessions have come moves to make sex an impossibility. Consider the contradictions. An actor can, during prime time television, graphically discuss and portray all sorts of lascivious inventions. In the schoolyard, if a student displays the least unwelcome sexual gesture or utters an unwelcome sexual remark, he or she can be jugged or, worse, handed over to some morbid counselor. And the contradictions worsen. Some primitive, panhandling on a street corner, can befoul himself, expose himself, or utter any rude or smutty observation with impunity (the lout can act this way in public libraries and a dozen other public buildings too, for that matter), but in the workplace and elsewhere, any neurotic can charge a person, usually a male, with sexual misconduct of the mildest and most dubious variety, and put the poor wretch in hot water.

No corroboration is necessary. One is deemed guilty until proven innocent. Would this happen in France? Impossible! The future of sex in America is anyone's guess. All the beneficiaries of the sexual revolution are either mad as hell (the women) or woebegone and nervous (the playboys). Over here the revolutions have been in politics, not sex, but it took two hundred years for the politics to calm down. Are Americans doomed to two hundred years of sexual enmity? Well, I can always seek refuge at the Paris Air Show. □

Come Fly With Me!

Paris

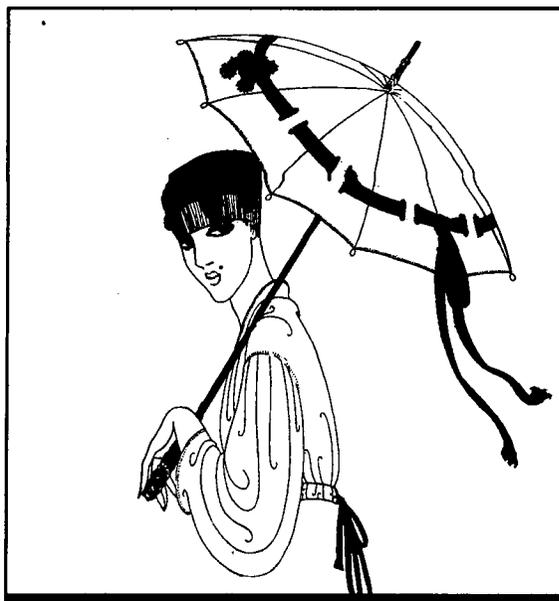
Somehow these perverse Parisians have gotten one thing right: sex. My presence here, I hasten to attest, has been prompted by more pressing matters, the Paris Air Show. Nonetheless, every now and again I lower my eyes from the skies above only to find them resting on the well-turned ankle of a *soignée* French lady. And there are many.

"Sex": the very word disturbs many Americans; the deed disturbs them more! Here the word, the deed, even the adjective "sexy," all are suavely accepted. In France the war between the sexes is as pervasive as it is in the States, but it is not so grisly. In fact, two distinguished warriors from both armies have recently fought an extended battle between the sexes in a best-selling book, and neither wants to kill the other or even to commence legal proceedings.

The book, entitled *Les Hommes et les femmes* and coauthored by Françoise Giroud (it is still ladies first over here) and Bernard-Henri Lévy, is a conversation between two combatants who with wit and knowledge lay out the conventional positions of both sides on amour, fidelity, infidelity, beauty, ugliness—the customary topics. As one might expect, there is disagreement. Mrs. Giroud believes that the modern woman is much more worldly and less puritanical than women of past generations. Mr. Lévy denies that women have changed. Their natures, he believes, are fixed in time as are men's. There

is one thing both authors do agree on in this amusing and instructive book: to wit, feminism in America has become intolerably destructive.

Actually, it is not just feminism in America that has rendered sex lurid and exceedingly dangerous. It is vestigial Puritanism, the Puritanism that finds its way into the pieties of the churchly, and—worse—the Puritanism that makes its absurd presence felt among the sex educators, who, by the way, are probably the most sexually disturbed of all Americans. Years ago I believed that the sex educators were going to ensure zero-population growth in the country, perhaps even depopulation, for they were making sex a colossal bore. Instead they have done their bit to make sex frightening.



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Doubting Dada Physics

by Tom Bethell

I reached Petr Beckmann by phone at the Community Hospital in Boulder, Colorado. He sounded very weak. He had an infected kidney, a complication of prostate cancer. He was eager to get back home so he could finish the July issue of his newsletter, *Access to Energy*. He would be telling his readers that he couldn't go on publishing it and that his good friend Art Robinson would soon take over. (A biochemist, Robinson was at one point scientific director of the Linus Pauling Institute.)

Beckmann has long been an inspiration to me. His newsletter exposes the political abuse of science, and brilliantly elucidates many scientific issues. In his house in the foothills of the Rockies, he has a printing press, and there he also publishes a journal called *Galilean Electrodynamics*. Over the last twenty years he has published many other pamphlets and books: *The Health Hazards of Not Going Nuclear*, *Musical Musings*, a book about language.

He was born in Prague in 1924. Both his parents were Communists. A refugee in England during World War II, he joined a Czech RAF squadron and repaired radar equipment. After returning to Czechoslovakia, he earned a Ph.D. in electrical engineering, then defected to the U.S. in 1963. He taught at the University of Colorado until he took early retirement in 1981. I have had the privilege of talking to him for many, many hours, and one day I hope to write a memoir of him. At some point in the next century, I believe, people will want to know more about this solitary genius, who found his own audience and published his own ideas and discoveries at a time of growing intellectual corruption in the academy. Above all, he is likely to be remembered for having undermined

Einstein's theory of relativity, and for showing how physics could be returned to the classical foundations from which it was dislodged at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Ever since he learned relativity theory, Beckmann felt there must be something wrong with it. When he retired from teaching, he returned to the subject, spending several years on a book called *Einstein Plus Two* (1987).¹ He believes now that relativity theory "has been confirmed only in a narrow sector of physics, leads to logical contradictions, and is unable to derive results that must be postulated, though they are derivable by classical methods." He also believes that the theory is definitely falsified by the aberration of light from binary stars. An article to this effect will be published in the next issue of *Galilean Electrodynamics*.

The problem that Einstein tried to solve, the new problems that arose with his solution, and Beckmann's brilliant resolution of all these difficulties, are not so difficult as they may sound. In fact, mystification has greatly enhanced Einstein's reputation. I hasten to add that Beckmann is a great admirer of Einstein, whose famous equation of energy and mass, $E=MC^2$, is unaffected by all this; in fact, it was derived independently of relativity.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the evidence that light travels in waves had become overwhelming; wave theory accounted for refraction, polarization, and many other phenomena of light. The great puzzle was to understand what medium it travels in. Sound needs air; light needs . . . what? It can travel through a vacuum, through interstellar space. But if it is a wave, there must be an oscillating medium, however rarified.

This medium was called the "ether" and the great challenge for nineteenth-century physicists was to detect it.

The most famous experiment was carried out by Michelson and Morley in 1887. Since the Earth must be moving through this ether in its orbit around the sun, it should be possible to detect an "ether wind," just as it is possible to feel the wind by putting your hand out a moving car. Albert Michelson, the first American to win the Nobel Prize in physics, designed the apparatus to measure it. But despite repeated attempts, no ethereal breeze could be detected. (Michelson's "interferometer" had been expected to measure a "fringe shift" where criss-crossing light rays were brought together.) This "null result" threw the world of physics into disarray. A wave without a medium!

Enter Einstein, fresh from the Bern Patent Office. He posited that there was no medium, and that the speed of light is the same in all directions, irrespective of the motion of any apparatus set up to detect it. His famous 1905 paper, setting forth the special theory of relativity, demonstrated that if these odd assumptions are made, everything can be shoe-horned in mathematically. But it was odd. If a sound wave moves toward you at 750 miles an hour, and you walk toward it at 5 mph, you will detect the sound approaching at 755 miles an hour. Observation agrees with common sense. The same is true of all other waves one can think of. But not electromagnetic phenomena (including light), said Einstein. The velocity of light was accorded a privileged, "absolute" status. Move toward the light source, and you will detect it approaching you at the same speed as someone who is standing still.

That was where absurdity came in. To preserve the absolute nature of the speed of light, space and time had to be distorted.

Tom Bethell is The American Spectator's Washington correspondent.

¹ Available for \$36 from Box 251, Boulder, Colorado 80306. Warning: It's technical.