



Crying Games

by Benjamin J. Stein

Thursday

New Year's Eve at Morton's. I'm there with my new b.f. Maxine, visiting from Portland, Oregon. Tonight, the place is jammed with young rich people and a few middle-aged poor people, or at least one of us. Behind me, there's my co-star from *Honeymoon in Vegas*, Sarah Jessica Parker. She's with a huge table of young, rich-looking kids, all smoking cigarettes as if there were no tomorrow. Smoking is definitely making a comeback among the young in this town.

To my right, there's the staggeringly good-looking girlfriend of Steve Tisch with someone I gather is her hairdresser. Somewhere nearby is Marty Starger.

The people around me look happy, slender, rich, proud, but edgy. That's what's going on here. The recession. People look edgy.

As I ate my fresh tuna fillet and listened to the overpoweringly loud mariachi band, I thought about how I probably should have stayed in bed or at least at my tiny dining table, instead of being here in all of the noise. I feel edgy, too. Especially when I think about how much money I've lost in real estate. It makes my skin crawl.

My aunt Pearl once told me that when my grandfather lost his job during the Great Depression and couldn't get another one, a quiet settled over the house for years. A gloomy quiet. It's noisy at Morton's tonight, but there's

Benjamin J. Stein, author most recently of A License to Steal: The Untold Story of Michael Milken and the Conspiracy to Bilk the Nation (Simon & Schuster), is a writer, lawyer, economist, and actor living in Malibu, California.

an edge. There's still an underlying fear. I don't know. Maybe it's just me.

I slept on my couch in my living room. My neighbor at the Shoreham Towers, the lovely D., who had been extremely sick with what was thought to be an irreversible disease, and has now seemingly completely recovered, went away for Christmas and left me her tree. I bought colored lights for the tree and watched them flicker all night long. As I watched, I fell into a deep and serious fear about providing for my retirement. That's the way it is. It seems only yesterday that I was wondering how I could stretch my allowance to the end of the month in college.

Worry is the constant.
That's got to change.

Friday

New Year's Day. Day of Political Correctness. Day of Reckoning. *Dies Irae.*

I was awakened by a call from a secre-

tary at the *Commercial Appeal* in Memphis. That paper publishes my work frequently. I got to be friends with the editor, a fabulously thoughtful guy named Lionel Linder, at a banquet honoring my father when he won the Seidman Prize in Memphis about three years ago. Lionel and I became fast friends. He was deeply interested in social issues, particularly in how America was ever going to cope with the huge racial problems we faced. "There has to be a way for people to learn to live together," he said. "If we don't, we're in big trouble."

The last time I saw Lionel, in March, in Memphis, we had lunch at the Peabody and talked about race. "I read once that you started that mini-series, 'Amerika,' to show what life in America would be like if the Soviets took over, and why we needed a strong defense program," he said to me, or words to that effect. "Now it's time for you to do something about what's going to happen to us if we can't get along as different races."

"Maybe a movie about a race war in America," I replied. "A sort of Rhodesia/Yugoslavia in America, with actual warfare between and among the races, as the whole dream falls apart and the glue of tolerance and shared beliefs dissolves. A sort of *Christmas Carol*, a man's nightmare of what life in America's going to be if we don't learn to get along."

I can remember Lionel nodding vigorously. He was about to go to South America, he said, to see how countries of many different races were getting along. The goal of a lifetime.

Anyway, I have been working on that movie, and it's New Year's Day, and there's a secre-



tary from the *Commercial Appeal* on the line. "You're working awfully hard," I said. "I'm impressed."

"I have some bad news," she said. "Lionel Linder was killed yesterday. In a car accident. A drunken driver crashed into him a few blocks from the paper. Skidded on a wet street, and now we're having a memorial for Lionel . . ."

In my own 48-year-old way, I faded out for a while, and could only see Lionel nodding enthusiastically in that restaurant at the Peabody. Lionel laughing next to me at the dais at the Memphis Country Club. Oh, Lionel, how true it is that the good die young.

Lionel Linder, an editor who sweated and bled over the sorrow he reported, dead at 60 because some fool just had to drive after he was loaded. Lionel Linder, another one who cannot be replaced.

After I lay in bed in shock for a few hours, I got up, and with my new best friend Maxine at my side went off to see a movie. I rarely see movies, but I thought this would distract me. So it did.

At the Beverly Gonnection (sort of like a Connection), we bought tickets for *The Crying Game*. Everyone had raved about it, and I wondered what was going on. It was like, for the first time, every critic in New York and L.A. thought a movie was perfect, and I wanted to know why.

I soon found out. My first clue was that the theater was extremely heavily occupied by gay men and women. My second clue was that the first few scenes were of Miranda Richardson looking like Madonna, or a gay man's idea of what a woman is. My third clue was that the heavy early action in this spy-IRA-twists-and-turns movie had to do with an IRA man fondling a British Jamaican soldier's private parts and then sharing a cigarette with him. My fourth clue was that the shared love object of the IRA man and the Jamaican was a male transvestite.

The Crying Game is the first politically perfect movie of the Clinton era. It's the first cross-over homosexual love story to find its way to the big screen. The homosexuals are all great, compassionate, fun-loving guys. The women—woman—is a murderous, square-shouldered, cold-hearted witch. The straight men are bloodless and also murderous. Heterosexual love is sick and twisted—a

barely ambulatory British judge with a prostitute, the murderous Miranda Richardson with the hero even as someone is being tortured nearby.

And now we know why the critics loved it so much. Prepare for a lot more of this in the Clinton Nineties. Gay is in, straight is out. Not that it's wrong, of course. It's part of the mosaic of America.

Today happens to be the first anniversary of the death of Maxine's parents. She wanted to go to Friday night Jewish services to say prayers. Luckily, on our way out to the beach, we passed a synagogue in the San Fernando Valley. It was having services, so in we went.

Political correctness has reached far into the guts of *shul*. The congregants were almost all ancient Russian Jewish immigrants, who looked as tormented as people can be. I was touched by their clinging to the synagogue after all they probably went through in Russia.

The service has also changed. Where the prayer book has something like, "We thank God for all of His blessings on us," the Thought Police have altered it to

read, "We thank God for all of God's blessings on us." This change crops up over and over, deleting the politically questionable idea, passed on by those well-known sexist pigs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David, that the Almighty should be thought of in the male, ptooeey, gender.

Then there's that old ethnocentric baloney about us Jews being "God's chosen people." That's gone, too, even in the prayer book. The new line, straight from the Ministry of Truth, is that we are chosen to be *witness* to the equal feeling that God has for all of his people, and certainly not singled out for special favors.

Then there's the prayer that commands us to "respect the environment." Somehow I don't recall that one from my youth, either.

My favorite part, though, was the small sermon that the rabbi preached. He reminded us that it was New Year's Day, shabbat, then he told us that governments wanted people to stay in their place, and be slaves forever, but that as Jews, we wanted people to change and grow. Hmmm. What government? Nicholas I's?

Suddenly, a blinding thought came

STUDENTS



"All systems either of preference or of restraint, being completely taken away, the obvious and simple system of natural liberty establishes itself on its own accord."

—Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*

Summer Seminars on Individual Liberty, Tolerance, the Free Market, and Peace

"There are few other times when as much thought will result in as much fun and personal satisfaction."

—Kelly Young, *University of Virginia*

Call for information and application forms!

1-800-697-8799

(Monday to Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. EST)

Sponsored by the Institute for Humane Studies at George Mason University, 4400 University Dr., Fairfax, VA 22030. Week-long seminars are held throughout the summer on various college campuses. APPLICATION DEADLINES IN APRIL.

through my head. This is what it's all about—the media's hatred of authority, the media's hatred of the countryside, the media's rage at powerful business. It's all the working out of the fears that arose in the Russian Jewish people over centuries of terror at the hands of the Tsar, the Cossacks, the nobility, the Russian Orthodox Church, the peasants who drowned Jews in wells.

The fear is so deep that it bubbles out as anger even after we've been in America—a totally different animal from Tsarist Russia—for over a century. We (or some of us) equate Nixon with the tsar, equate the Army with the Cossacks, the executives of Du Pont with the Streltsy. Wow. Scary. I'll have to go over this with Irving Kristol.

Off to Hollywood to pick up The Imperial Child, his highness, Master Tommy Stein. He was loaded for bear.

"Daddy," he demanded, "I want a lizard."

"No," I said. "It's New Year's Day. The pet shop will be closed."

"Make them open it up," he said. "You're a movie star."

This kid.

"No, I'm not a movie star," I said. "I am a lowly day player. At best that's what I am. A lowly day player."

"Well, I want my lizard."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I said so," I answered. "And that's that."

"Daddy, can we stop at McDonald's on the way to the beach?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Why can we not stop at McDonald's? Is that your question?"

"Right, Daddy."

"Because the last time we did that, and the ten times before, you ordered food, got a miserable toy of some kind, and then wouldn't eat your food. Does that answer your question?"

"No."

"Well, then because I said so."

We drove through the night. How, I wondered, can Tommy ever be expected to be anything but little Caligula if everyone is always catering to him? He is five and he has his own Nanny who allows him to do anything, his own mother who is his total personality captive, teachers

who fall all over him to earn a smile. This is what makes little dictators. No, as I told myself, I will stand up to him.

How can he ever be expected to do any work if no one ever expects him to do anything but be waited upon? How can he ever be expected to show any self-discipline if he's endlessly praised, never criticized, and never expected to do anything but smile?

We got out to Malibu and stopped at the videotape store. He picked out several child's tapes and we went on our way.

Out at my house, it was drizzling. Various columns of ants marched through the house en route to God knows what. No dead rats, though, and that's a blessing.

I listened to my messages and went through my mail. It's become pretty clear that most of my callers are women. It's also clear that I soon won't be able to afford this lavish way of life with houses everywhere I turn. No, the next stop is a little trailer by a lake in Idaho. Yes, just a little trailer where I can read *Barron's* and *TAS*, occasionally stroll into town to play checkers with the boys at the barber shop, and prepare for the High Chaparral.

"Daddy," Tommy called from the bedroom, "I want my lizard."

"I already told you you can't have it tonight."

"I want it tonight and that's that."

"What?"

"Are you saying you're going to get my lizard? Is that what you're saying?" Tommy asked.

"What?" I asked in shock.

"What am I saying? Is that your question?" Tommy asked with a huge smile, as he burst into the living room.

Still, after he fell asleep watching TV, I thought about Lionel Linder. "One of the best. He was one of the best." That's what we say at funerals, and sometimes it's even true.

Wednesday

Ahh, but then there is Pepperdine. I started teaching my class in Advanced Securities Law there two days ago, and *I love it*. My class is in an underground room with no windows, which is a shame, since Pepperdine Law School offers the best views of any law school in the world, from a small mountain overlooking the Santa Monica Bay in Malibu. You can see the sunlight off

the waves on most days, and even today, when it's raining, you see a magical haze over the water.

I have only about twenty students, each one a jewel. Alert, polite, thoughtful, they even do their assignments. We talked about leveraged buyouts, about 14-a-9 and 10-b-5, about fiduciary duty, about everything, and then, *gar nichts*, back outside, into the pouring rain. One of my students followed me to my car anyway, talking about Metromedia and Delaware law. I love this job. If anyone would like for me to teach anything like Securities Law or Hollywood Culture, just say so.

Off in the deluge to a meeting with a producer. Through Malibu Canyon, through sheets of water, past a scary rock slide, through a flooded interpass, and then into the San Fernando Valley. It was pouring there, too. Los Angeles has taken on a green, emerald quality that's unusual. I like it. Ireland in Southern California. All that's lacking is the IRA.

Anyway, lunch at Solly's Deli to discuss a project with the producer. He's a likable, intelligent man of about 40, I'd say, with many kids and many ideas. We talked about my plan for a show about a race war, and he liked my pitch a lot. In fact, a great, great deal.

Then, after much chewing by me on a rubbery sandwich, he asked me who, in the race war story, would be the "oppressors."

"No one," I said. "People in this country aren't even slightly oppressed by any group."

"Yes," he said, "I agree, but it makes it better at the network if it's clear who the oppressors are, and preferably the white people." I disagreed.

"All right," he said. "People are sometimes bad, sometimes good. That's all right. The network will take that. But remember it's got to be correct."

I paused and thought for a moment. "Does that mean 'politically correct'?"

"Right," he said tonelessly, "politically correct."

So that's how it is now, Comrade. The commissars at the networks no longer even make any bones about it. A project has to be politically correct. That used to be implicit, and now it's explicit. Well, well, well. At least we know where we are.

Off to my new favorite hangout, The Borderline Cafe, near my home in Malibu. It's Electric Slide Night, and I get to look at the men and women (especially the women) going through their elaborate country routines on the dance floor. The women are generally the better dancers. They strut their stuff in tight jeans and cowgirl boots, and try to look seductive and often succeed.

A middle-aged woman in cowboy clothes came over to flirt with me. She told me she designed plant "environments" by "re-creating gardens indoors." I saw another woman who's a big-time record producer. Yet another is a mortgage loan officer. Then over in the corner are two Pepperdine students, both good friends, and then a beautiful former model, now a waitress. These three are pretty enough to make Clinton sign a tax cut for millionaires.

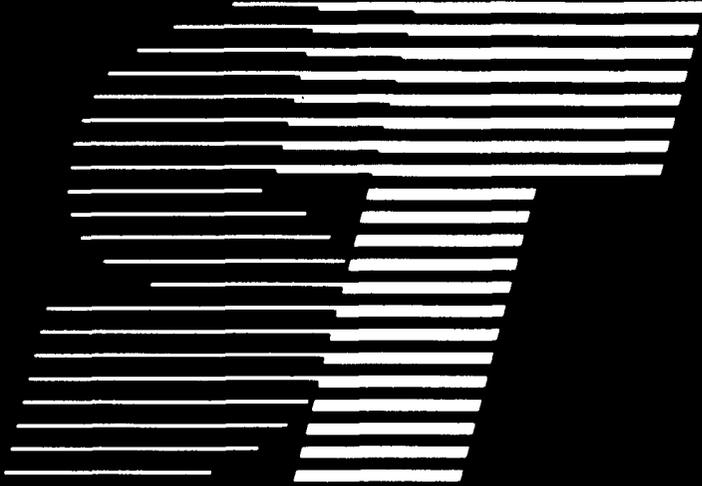
It all reminds me of sock hops at the Silver Spring Armory, circa 1959. There's yours truly, the nerd, sitting on the sidelines watching the pretty girls dance. More important, there are the girls, dancing and smiling. They're not demonstrating in favor of murdering their own children, whining about being exploited, or demanding preferential treatment. They're just having a good time.

Then on home to listen to my Martin Luther King disc. I listen to it every day, and always learn something. For example, I notice that Dr. King in his speeches does not quote African princes of some long-ago imaginary era. He does not claim to be a descendant of Ramses II. No, he quotes Shakespeare: "Love is not love/Which alters when it alteration finds." He quotes Wilhelm Reich and Sigmund Freud. He quotes Aristotle. He must have assumed that as a human he was heir to all that was best about human intelligence, and that all knowledge was his to explore and learn. His was a big view of man.

John Coyne says that we are making a lot of changes to accommodate people who will never be satisfied, and when we're through with the changes, we won't like what we have, but won't be able to go back. He's right, and it scares me.

Thence to sleep, as my TV shows photos of the Clintons. Someday, my TV is going. I have too much to do to watch the Clintons. □

SARKES TARZIAN INC



WRCB, CHANNEL 3, CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE

KTVN, CHANNEL 2, RENO, NEVADA

WTTS, 92.3 FM, BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

WGCL, 1370 AM, BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

WAJI, 95.1 FM, FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

CENTRAL OFFICE, BOX 62, BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA 47402
TELEPHONE: 812 332 7251

Providing the Best Radio and Television Service



The Set-Aside Set

by Terry Eastland

My text this month comes from a story by Thomas W. Lippman that ran in the *Washington Post* on December 1. The headline, "Energizing Minorities' Objectives," and subhead, "Legislation Offers Opportunity for the Incoming Administration," set the tone. The piece was less journalism than ad copy (indeed, it ran on the *Post's* "Federal Page"), about a provision added in the final stages to the voluminous Energy Policy Act of 1992, which was signed into law in late October.

The provision, as Lippman summarized it, "requires that at least 10 percent of all federal contracts for energy conservation in government buildings, purchase of natural gas-powered vehicles and energy research and development be awarded to small businesses owned by minorities or women, to historically black colleges or to universities whose student body is more than 20 percent Hispanic or American Indian." What we have here is a perfect example of a policy more commonly called a "set-aside," not that Lippman ever uses the term.

His piece is disturbing in several ways. The first concerns press coverage of government. As the textbooks tell us, Congress makes the law, the executive enforces it. Obviously, the press can't report on every new law or effort at enforcement. Journalists have to pick and choose, and they often are as much in the dark as the public they claim to serve. Still, I would argue that the kind of fishy law-making Lippman reported (I'll give him this much: I saw no other news story on the set-aside) ought routinely to attract press attention, if only because items tacked on late in the legislative

game are often ones their sponsors do not want debated in public.

The 10-percent set-aside was just such a debate-avoiding late addition. As Lippman observed, the idea "was hardly mentioned in all the months of hearings and floor debates over nuclear power, offshore oil drilling, and expanded use of natural gas"—the main stuff in the bill. The set-aside was the work of Michigan Democrat John Conyers, who "had no particular interest in energy as such," according to Lippman's congressional sources, and who "kept quiet so as not to



arouse opposition from legislators opposed to affirmative action 'quotas.'" Certainly there's a role for journalism in exposing efforts to make law with no one noticing.

Then there's the question of the press's skimpy coverage of civil rights policies, whether set-aside laws (a congressional staple in recent years) or the executive branch's support for racial and gender preferences. And when the press does cover these issues, it often finds it hard to be timely. (The Labor Department's practice of "race-norming"

the results of the General Aptitude Test Battery Examination began in 1981 but was not reported until 1990.) If Bill Clinton further tilts executive-branch enforcement in favor of measures that allocate jobs and other benefits on the basis of race and sex, will the press report it, and before the end of this century?

The open secret, of course, is that the press generally supports such measures and thus in effect colludes with politicians who advance them. Consider Lippman's lead paragraph:

President-elect Clinton, who has espoused a policy of racial inclusion and said he wants his administration to resemble the ethnic composition of the nation as a whole, may find a useful tool for achieving those objectives in . . . the Department of Energy.

But Candidate Clinton had also espoused an anti-quota view. Thus, the lead just as easily could have been: "President-elect Clinton, who has opposed racial quotas, may find himself at odds with a provision in the recently enacted Energy Policy Act of 1992." Lippman could only have assumed that the set-aside in question was either not a quota or hardly newsworthy even if it was. He withheld pertinent facts, such as that the set-aside does not require proof that its beneficiaries have suffered from past discrimination or that, if they have, it has undermined their ability to compete successfully for federal energy contracts. He also failed to mention that Congress, in passing the Energy Policy Act, didn't find that the legally preferred groups had endured past discrimination in federal procurement contracts. The 10-percent set-aside thus is not a "remedial" provision.

Terry Eastland is resident fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.