

# Stopping the Violence

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

Connoisseurs of the national follies await the requisite outcry against the brutal and gratuitous murder of Michael Jordan's father. Then too, we await the outcry against the claim that Deputy White House Counsel Vincent Foster, before committing suicide, tore his suicide note into thirty or so pieces without leaving any fingerprints.

Is it possible that the nation's pundits and keepers of the national conscience are going to accept that the note found in Vincent Foster's attaché case had no fingerprints on it? What happened? Did Mr. Foster don rubber gloves before writing the note? Or did someone wipe the scraps clean? And if so, why? And what of the palm print we now hear was found on the paper? The redoubtable William Safire tells us that Mr. Foster oversaw certain questionable financial dealings on behalf of the Clintons. Should there not, now, be the full investigation into the Foster death that some of us have been calling for? Instead, from Official Washington there is silence.

And what about the murder of James Jordan? It now turns out that, while resting by a roadside in rural North Carolina, he was shot by two hooligans with a dozen or so unprocessed crimes between them. One had spent two years in jail for slamming a fellow youth over the head with an

ax. The victim will be disabled for years, probably forever. The other brute had committed similarly ruthless acts and multitudes of other petty crimes. The brief lives of both can be duly characterized as crime sprees. Yet they were free in the early hours of July 23 to murder a man who was merely doing what all adults are advised to do when becoming weary behind the wheel, to wit, pull over and nap.

And what is the response from our pundits? Well, they urge that Michael Jordan, the victim's son, enter upon a personal campaign of pontification against violence, appearing in classrooms and on television ads. After all, as the *Washington Post* editorializes from the Fantasyland it inhabits, "Michael

Jordan is probably the most famous man on Earth." Perhaps this is an inadvertent admission of what vacuums our intellectual authorities have become. For decades, the writers, scholars, and general eggheads of the progressive miasma have been absorbed with the so-called rights of criminals, the hypocrisy of society, the fascinating human interest stories of common thugs. The progressives who still dominate our culture continue to doubt the efficacy of punishment and the justice of retribution. Hard-working and law-abiding men and women bore them, while they remain smitten by the perverse and the violent. Naturally their reflexive response to this murder is the humbuggery of "gun control."

Of course, the solution to the violence that spreads ever wider throughout our society is not gun control. A society that cannot interdict so many other species of contraband will not interdict guns. Moreover, there are so many guns in the country that the authorities will not even be able to collect them. Nor will a society that cannot lock away the kinds of savages that allegedly murdered James Jordan punish gun owners or even indict them. Our courts are already overwhelmed with cases, many of which are frivolous, the frivolous being heaved in with the serious.

Actually, the country has a pretty good idea how to relieve the present wave of violence. Speedy prosecution of violent

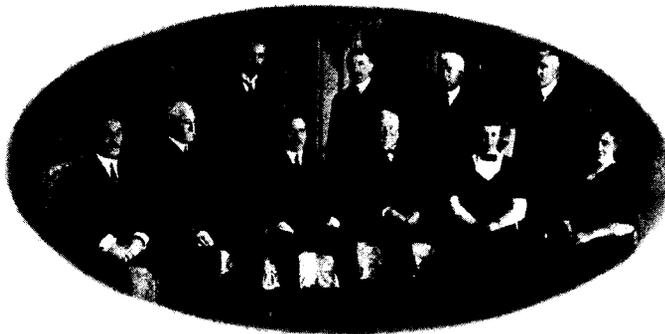


*Adapted from RET's weekly Washington Times column syndicated by Creators Syndicate.*

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offenders followed by severe sentencing is required. This, of course, means more courts and more prisons. It might even mean that judges give short shrift to the frivolous lawsuits that fill our courts and that laws be passed to dissuade litigants from bringing their personal problems into the courtroom. There, more critical matters are pressing. The alleged murderers of James Jordan should still have been in jail on July 23 if newspaper accounts of their lives are accurate.

Finally, it is about time that the intellectual and moral authorities of our society properly abominate criminals and come to the defense of society. Deride the fanciful violence that suffuses our entertainments. Denounce violence, whether it is found in the street, in pop music, or in sports. Advocate manners and law-abidingness. In other words, it is time our progressive intellectuals break with their time-honored rhapsody on a theme of perversity. □

fare. Animosities go back centuries here. Return to Yeats:

I walk in a battle fought over again,  
My king a lost king, and lost soldiers  
my men;  
Feet to the Rising and Setting may run  
They always beat on the same small  
stone.

Last fall, when I visited refugee camps and battle sites, the fear was that there would be mass starvation. That fear is alive again, along with fear that Serbs and Croats are going to obliterate Bosnia while Europeans and Americans wring their hands in feigned indignation. If this happens, the green light will go on for warlords all across the ex-Soviet Empire to carve up their fiefdoms.

To prevent this new world order, writers as disparate as that man of the left, Christopher Hitchens, and she of the right, Jeane Kirkpatrick, have urged a credible threat to bombard the Serbian army and an end to the international arms embargo that hinders the Bosnian defense. Such policies, if combined with assistance for democratic factions in Serbia, might have pacified the region. But then, midst moral vaporings, President Bill Clinton came into office.

His policy has been idiotic. He pontificated and stood aloof. He capitulated to the Europeans' pompous inaction. He threatened to send in ground troops, the kind of reckless move that only an anxious dove would lurch towards. Now he talks of air strikes—or has he passed on to other implausible roles?

Actually, air strikes against the Serbs are feasible. The option has been advocated by military strategists such as John Keegan, writing in London's *Daily Telegraph*. Yet I fear Mr. Clinton is going to drop us into the hills of Bosnia alone. His sorry, anile secretary of state has already made a hash of things with the Europeans. Having had a year to read and reflect on this timeless stew of hatreds, I have come to the opinion that it is a European problem. Europeans must be convinced to lead NATO in military intervention to save Bosnia as a nation. If the Europeans will not we should not, for as Yeats has said, we live in a world where the best "lack all conviction" and the worst "are full of passionate intensity." □

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## At Dawn to Cast His Flies

*Kitty Hawk, North Carolina*

I end my summers at the beach standing in the surf and depopulating the oceans of their fish. At this, I am uncommonly successful, and in the well of our friendship I shall confide to you my secret: between casts I shout out across the waters choice lines from the poet Yeats—

Why should not old men be mad?  
Some have known a likely lad  
That had a fine fly fisher's wrist  
Turn to a drunken journalist;

—and the fish are lining up to chomp my hook.

I also ruminate ceaselessly on the heroics of my president. This was a pleasant exercise in the 1980s, when we had a certain ex-actor in the White House. Today we have a practicing actor in there, though contemplating his act is not always pleasant and at times actually quite worrisome. Again, I summon Yeats:

But actors lacking music  
Do most excite my spleen,  
They say it is more human  
To shuffle, grunt and groan,

—and apparently to jog and to gnaw on the lower lip. Yeats goes on to sing that such actors knowing nothing of "What on earthly stuff/Rounds a mighty scene."

As our populist president disports with the down and out of Martha's Vineyard, perhaps a passing Kennedy

will apprise him of some of the stuff that "rounds a mighty scene." Bosnia is one of the mighty scenes he might consider with caution.

It was precisely one year ago while on this beach that I got a call asking me to fly to Croatia and Bosnia to review the condition of refugees there. Over the next few weeks, I made two trips with the entrepreneur Theodore Forstmann, who was leading a relief effort on behalf of refugees. In an open car, we bounced around the ever-changing war zones of Bosnia. We spent time in a beautiful city now wasted by the Serbian gunners in the mountains, Mostar.

Then the city's Muslims, originally comprising some 36 percent of the population, were in alliance with the city's Bosnian Croats, originally comprising 34 percent. The rest of the population had been Serbian, but now the city's population was in flux. Most of the fighting that I saw was defensive, Muslims and Croats opposing Serbian gunners above them. Last spring things changed, and now the carnage from Mostar suggests that the Croats are bombarding Muslim enclaves and starving their inhabitants.

What brought about this change? Some believe that Serbs dressed as Croat para-military forces provoked the falling out. Others believe that Bosnian Muslims were sent into Mostar from the countryside to ensure a Muslim preponderance in the event of elections. And still others insist that primordial Croatian irredentism provoked this war-

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## The “Client” State

by Tom Bethell

Within days of coming out to California, I met three people who said they would like to sell their house but “couldn’t afford to.” One problem is that if you bought a house in the San Francisco Bay Area for (say) \$50,000 in 1962 it may now be worth ten times that—in nominal dollars. But thanks to the state and federal governments’ refusal to index for inflation, the nominal gain is treated as a capital gain and taxed accordingly. Thus the government stands poised to expropriate the homeowner who contemplates selling his house, even though he may have done little more than invest in an inflation hedge. For those over 55, there is an exclusion of \$125,000, but this is insufficient to cover the loss in California’s high-priced coastal areas.

Adding to the problem is an unintended effect of Proposition 13, which in 1978 limited property taxes to 1 percent of the purchase price (with a maximum 2 percent annual increase). Those who bought thirty years ago pay low property taxes if they stay in the same old house. But if they sell and move to a smaller one—as many old people would like to do—their property-tax bills may increase by a factor of four or five. Tax incentives, then, strongly encourage people to stay put. (Perhaps they do some remodeling—if they can get planning permission.) The result is that Palo Alto, close to Stanford University, and generally considered one of the most desirable parts of the Bay Area, is beginning to resemble an old folks’ home. Older people can’t afford to move out and younger people can’t afford to move in. No-growth laws and environmental fanaticism see to it that not much new housing gets built. The result is

*Tom Bethell is The American Spectator’s Washington correspondent and a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution.*

a constriction of mobility and a stultification of the real estate market.

Do taxes affect behavior, then? Nah! According to the Clinton folk, that’s just right-wing talk—trickle-down economics. But the Hoover Institution’s Alvin Rabushka, a flat-tax supporter, told me the other day that H&R Block stock is up 11 percent since the Clinton tax bill passed.

Meanwhile the California real estate market has been dropping sharply, and if it goes down far enough it will take care of the “capital gains” problem. According to Jonathan Marshall of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the price slide is the longest since the Great Depression. Since 1990, prices are down about 20 percent. It’s not unusual to hear of top-end property selling for two-thirds of appraised value. I spent one afternoon talking to Scott King, who has a condo in a famous Art Deco building on Telegraph Hill overlooking the San Francisco Bay. (It was featured in *Dark Passages*, a Humphrey Bogart movie.) One unit in the building was bought by an experienced property developer, remodelled, and put on the market a year later. He asked \$500,000, received \$425,000.

King lamented the decline of San Francisco, which has lost 30,000 jobs in the past two years. “There’s no consensus about what sort of a city it should be,” he said. One of the freeways into the city has not been repaired since the 1989 earthquake. The liberals who run the city make the Clinton administration look like moderates, and they are ideologically opposed to freeways. They wouldn’t mind getting rid of all of them so that we would be reduced to mass-transit. (King is a medical-technology entrepreneur and an *American Spectator* reader. He tells me that his company is close to finding the cure for insulin-dependent diabetes.

When he does, he promises, he’ll give me the scoop.)

Like many others, King deplored the phenomenal number of panhandlers who reproach you from every corner in downtown San Francisco. One evening I walked through the business district with my friend Carlos Grider, denizen of Pier Nine and longtime resident of the city. He pointed out the office-for-rent signs along Sutter and Geary Streets, the waterfront restaurant where the parking attendant parks half as many cars as formerly, and the fashionable arcades near Union Square that must be hosed down and scrubbed every morning because the ubiquitous tramps use them as bathrooms. Herb Caen, the *Chronicle* columnist, today mentioned “the urine smell that now pervades the downtown area,” and earlier referred to Urine Square.

“The city offers a staggering array of costly social programs,” *Forbes* reported two years ago. “For instance, it grants general assistance relief of \$340 a month to a homeless person after only three days’ residency in the city, which explains why adjacent cities routinely bus their indigents in.”

Just to be sure that this was still true, I phoned the city’s Department of Social Services. Bobbie Rifkin, a “section manager” in the General Assistance program, told me that, well, no it isn’t. The monthly grant has now been increased to \$345 and there is no residency requirement at all. “Never has been,” she said.

“How many people receive this payment?”

“Approximately 15,000 every month.”

Which comes to \$62 million a year, by my math.

She said the city has no intention of