

POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

Looking Forward. George Bush with Victor Gold. *Doubleday*, \$18.95. There is nothing so galling as a good ghostwriter. Here I was primed for mining some easy humor and cheap invective out of the droll notion of George Bush writing his autobiography just in time for the Iowa caucuses. I envisioned a political version of *Vanna Speaks* replete with helpful hints on how to choose the proper color watchband for a state funeral. Or better yet, a political memoir filled with telling omissions and Freudian undertones. But what I was not prepared for was the competence of former Spiro Agnew speechwriter Vic Gold, who has managed to make Bush's life story half-way interesting without providing much ammunition for either cynical reporters or curious rivals. Perhaps the best thing that can be said for George Bush after reading *Looking Forward* is that the guy does know how to hire decent help.

Still, with a little digging we can find some inadvertent humor in this up-from-Andover saga of Bush's life through 1981, with a nervous eight pages thrown in on the Iran-contra scandal. There is, for example, the gloriously obtuse footnote in which Bush purports to be puzzled by unshakable charges of "preppyism" without mentioning that he did indeed prep at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. Then there is Bush's bold prediction in the book's last chapter (an ersatz question and answer session) that the dominant issue in the 1988 campaign will be "leadership itself and how the various candidates perceive it." Connoisseurs of banal understatement might appreciate Bush's reflections on the loss of two crewmen when his plane was shot down during World War II ("I still don't understand the 'logic' of war—why some survive and others are lost in their prime"). But my favorite is the historical ignorance that prompted free-market, conservative oilman George Bush to name his company after a Mexican revolutionary, because he and his partner had just seen Marlon Brando in *Viva Zapata*.

It is, alas, pretty thin gruel. Little in the book helps us unravel the central mystery of George Bush and his Amazing Resume: how one could have done so much, accomplished so little, and remain so unaffected by the experience? There are moments when one fears that "Doonesbury" has Bush pegged perfectly as the Invisible Man. Take Bush's reaction when he was asked to become the first outsider in history to head the CIA. Does he reflect on the role of good intelligence in the East-West struggle? Does he wonder whether he knows enough to oversee covert operations? Of course not. In a characteristically arid passage, Bush reflects, "After 13 months of duty in China, I liked the idea of administering a worldwide organization, a job that would require 110 percent effort from early morning to late night."

But it is unfair to ridicule the vice-president as totally devoid of principles and beliefs. As Bush reveals in this memoir, he made a courageous stand when he ran into confirmation problems over his nomination as CIA director. Told by GOP supporters that he would have to publicly reject the possibility of serving as Jerry Ford's 1976 running mate to win Senate approval, Bush petulantly refused. "Enough was enough," he writes. "Being at the service of the president was one thing, but catering to partisan demands to be confirmed was asking too much." That incident could be read another way: the only cause that ever prompted Bush to rise above ambition (to be CIA director) was greater ambition (to be Ford's vice president). Even this brief profile in courage was marred when the would-be CIA director agreed to a face-saving compromise in which Ford announced that Bush would not be on the 1976 Republican ticket.

What then are we to make of George Bush on the cusp of achieving that final line of the resume? My guess from reading this memoir is that Bush once knew precisely who he was and what he wanted. Up until his fortieth birthday, Bush

concedes, he viewed money "as the ultimate measure of achievement." There is a sincerity about this admission that rings true. But Bush never says precisely what replaced avarice. He talks vaguely about "having passed the age of 40, I'd concluded that there were other important ways to contribute to our children's future." That notion has driven many men into public service. But most of them have had a much clearer vision of what they wanted to accomplish. For George Bush, however, the strategy has always been to get ahead and figure out what to do once he got there. It is an odd and scary reason to seek the presidency.

—Walter Shapiro

Los Angeles and the Automobile: The Making of a Modern City. Scott L. Bottles. *University of California Press*, \$25. This past summer, motorists on the clogged freeways of Los Angeles took to shooting each other,

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wounding and occasionally killing fellow commuters. Southern California's fixation on the automobile has always drawn criticism from the national (i.e. eastern) press, but this outbreak seemed to confirm that L.A.'s car culture had gone mad.

Southern Californians are hardly alone in their passion for the automobile. Nationwide, the post-war suburban boom and the more recent growth beyond the suburbs suggest that, for good or ill, most Americans prefer to live in places that can be reached only by car. But Los Angeles has led the way in urban decentralization.

How did it happen? Scott Bottles provides convincing evidence that Los Angeles became a car-oriented city not because of bad planning but in spite of good planning. Far from encouraging use of the automobile, the city's planners spent the early part of the century promoting mass transit and trying to build up Los Angeles's urban core. The city even went so far as to ban downtown parking in 1920. After a huge public outcry, the ban was repealed in less than a month. Angelenos would not be denied their cars.

Mass transit buffs who like to criticize Los Angeles's "love affair with the automobile" usually overlook the fact that it was trolleys and commuter trains, not automobiles, that initially created the city's urban sprawl. Indeed, rail transportation put Los Angeles on the map. The city was a backwater community until the Southern Pacific railroad linked it to the rest of the country in the 1880s. Rather than develop into a traditional "walking city" like Chicago, which grew up just a few decades earlier, Los Angeles used the new rail technology to evolve into a large, decentralized metropolitan area linked by inter-urban train to Long Beach, Pasadena, and other Southern California cities.

Across the country, "streetcar suburbs" were attracting families eager to escape the city. But the cities continued to grow, too, drawing immigrants and farmers. By contrast, Los Angeles's city center lacked the housing that provided a

counterweight to the suburban urge in other cities. Streetcar companies took advantage of this situation by purchasing tracts of land far removed from downtown, building houses, and then extending their railway lines to the new developments. Soon Los Angeles had the largest electric railway system in the world.

Why did this mass transit system disappear? Bottles lays most of the blame on the inefficiency of the trains and trolleys. Riders complained of overcrowding but at the same time demanded that fares be kept down. Mass transit just couldn't compete with the pleasure of driving your own automobile. In fact, the electric train tracks got in the way. Streetcar companies made one last attempt to boost their fortunes in the 1920s with a plan to build elevated tracks, but the *Los Angeles Times* crusaded against them, decrying "their darkening shadows and their depressive gloom," and the proposal was defeated at the polls. By the 1940s, city planners were ready to throw in the towel. They started building freeways.

Bottles fails to explore the deeper issues raised by Los Angeles's inexorable sprawl, the most serious being the isolation of social classes. As other metropolitan areas follow Los Angeles's lead, class barriers around the country seem certain to harden. On a more prosaic level, Bottles does make a persuasive case that Metro Rail, a multi-billion dollar subway currently being dug beneath the city, will fail, and not just because it will serve too few people. Southern Californians have become hooked on the freedom and convenience of the automobile. It will take more than snipers to break the habit.

—Timothy Noah

Abortion and Divorce in Western Law. Mary Ann Glendon. *Harvard University Press*, \$25. Americans tend to think of abortion as a black-and-white issue. Protest groups, like Right to Life and NOW, fight over whether it should be legal or illegal. But as Glendon shows in this short but enlightening book, the issue is

not nearly so divisive in Europe, where most nations have no idea why we're still shouting.

For Glendon, a Harvard law professor, the key difference is *how* abortion laws are formed. While the U.S. has put major abortion decisions in the hands of the judiciary, European countries have left them to their legislatures. When courts create upheaval, she argues, citizens are more likely to become angry, feeling that the law is imposed on them and that major decisions have been taken out of their hands. By contrast, laws passed by legislatures, while often unpopular, are nevertheless more likely to be shaped by public opinion and thus more widely accepted.

The laws the Europeans have come up with are designed to navigate a middle ground. While the U.S. has the least restrictive abortion laws in the West, most European countries require a brief waiting period before granting approval and put a limit on abortions after ten weeks. What's more, they spend much more on family planning, to prevent unwanted pregnancies in the first place, and generously support child care programs to make raising children an attractive alternative to terminating pregnancies.

Another small but telling difference is that in Europe, abortions are discreetly administered in state-owned hospitals. Only the U.S. has a profit-making abortion industry that advertises in newspapers and at bus stops.

Glendon acknowledges that the U.S. tradition of privacy and individualism is probably too strong for a simple consensus to develop here the way it did in, say, Sweden. In her analysis of the American difference, however, she fails to acknowledge an even more significant factor hindering an abortion compromise. Religiously, ethnically, and culturally, we're just too diverse to easily reconcile this issue. And "turning it back to the states" is no panacea. Even if Berkeley and Birmingham were allowed to have abortion laws reflecting their different community standards, it's hard to believe that the right-to-life movement would be