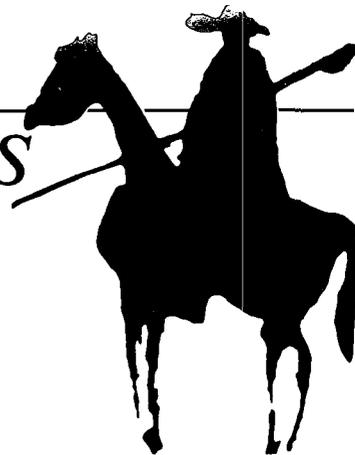


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# TILTING AT WINDMILLS



One reason the crime wave in the District of Columbia goes unchecked is that a citizen who calls the police and says he sees a drug deal or some other crime being committed across the street knows that the cops will arrive at *his* door, point across the street, and say, "You mean those guys over there," in full view of those guys. . . .

With the salary of federal judges rising to \$135,000 a year, a matter taxpayers might want to contemplate is the amount of energy expended by these jurists. *The Recorder*, a legal newspaper in San Francisco, recently studied how long it took judges on the Ninth Circuit to produce opinions. The four hardest workers took under a hundred days each. But the average for all judges was 147 days. Seven took more than 200 days, one 307. . . .

This year HUD will build only 5,000 public housing units in the entire country. The waiting list for public housing in New York City alone is

190,000. But HUD is building a swimming pool for Island Park, New York, a middle-class community, located less than one mile from one of the best public beaches on Long Island. Those among you whose souls are irretrievably warped by cynicism may suspect that the fact that Senator Alfonse D'Amato lives in Island Park has something to do with this development. . . .

Speaking of cynicism, you may have felt that I fell victim to it when, in reporting a few months back on a study in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* that suggested loss of sleep did not impair the performance of all those overworked interns and residents, I noted that this finding seemed to reflect the self-interest of the medical profession in perpetuating the practice of brutalizing its young.

But last month there was a long report in *The New York Times* headlined, "For Those Who Have Lost Sleep, the First Casualty Is Creativity."

One night of lost sleep results in loss of spontaneity, flexibility, and originality. With a second night's loss, things get worse, with a significant decline in ability to deal with multiple-choice questions or with emergencies.

Our solution to this problem is to have all hospital staff physicians work one or two nights a year so that the interns and residents can sleep. Most hospitals have more than enough doctors to handle such a schedule. Suburban Hospital outside Washington, for example, has 925. . . .

There were, of course, many reasons why *My Fair Lady* was the most successful Broadway musical of the fifties, including the songs of Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe and the performances of Rex Harrison and Julie Andrews. But one important reason has not, to the best of my knowledge, been explored. It is that, in saying that class could be taught, that Liza Doolittle

could learn to be a lady, it answered a hunger among many Americans who aspired to move up socially. Now they could do so. They could learn the ropes. Class was no longer conferred by birth alone.

As Jason DeParle's article (page 10) explains, the fifties were the time when moving up in class became possible for a large number of Americans because of the postwar prosperity and the education that millions acquired through the GI Bill. But could they? The play replied with a joyful yes—if Higgins could teach Liza, someone could teach them. For most of the upwardly mobile of that era, their Professor Higgins was *The New Yorker* magazine, which, with some help from *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*, taught them important lessons of style and taste. He was also the trip to Europe where you learned about painting and sculpture and architecture, about the tailors on Saville Row, the shops on Rue St. Honore and Via Condotti, and the difference between a burgundy and a bordeaux. Now you could be accepted at the Ball just as Liza was.

What has been wrong with this thirst for acceptance was first explored in the columns of this magazine by Suzannah Lessard in 1975 (see page 33), but it was suggested by another fifties musical, the film *Funny Face*. Audrey Hepburn is won away from a doctrine called Empaticalism and its leading guru, Professor Flastre (remember—existentialism and Sartre), by Fred Astaire, a fashion photographer modeled after Richard Avedon, who was as chic as you could get in the fifties.

The pursuit of style triumphs over the pursuit of wisdom. In

the case of the professor, his wisdom was as phony as he was, so Hepburn's choice was right. But when the wisdom is real, the choice in favor of the chic is wrong. And since the fifties, far too many intelligent Americans have made that choice, worrying more about what's in and what's out than about how to lead a decent life, have some fun but also be thoughtful about others and try to do something constructive, something that might make a difference.

*Spy*, like *Funny Face*, is highly entertaining and often right on target in its exposure of the Flastres of this world. But it is wrong to the extent it contributes to an intellectual climate in which the fear of ridicule inhibits or distracts people from thinking about and doing the things that count. . . .

**S**peaking of fashion, the latest in mineral water is headed east from California. It may smell moldy and taste musty, but it costs \$4 a glass because it's flavored with the essence of the rarest of fungi. If you'd like to try it, the product's name is Mendocino Truffle Mineral Water. . . .

In case you didn't know the hidden angles behind that \$135,000 salary for congressmen and the large increases for other top officials:

They were recommended by a commission whose chairman, Lloyd Cutler, is a Washington lawyer whose firm's business consists in considerable part of lobbying the very people he is giving the raises to; and the comparison the commission's propaganda used to justify the raises is that between the purchasing power of

# “STOP THEM DAMN PICTURES”

That's what "Boss" Tweed demanded when he saw the handwriting on the wall (Tammany, that is).



But the pictures didn't stop. "Boss" Tweed met his maker in the Ludlow Street Jail and Thomas Nast put bilingly eloquent political cartoons squarely and permanently in the middle of American political life. Tweed aside,

we think Emerson had it right when he said, "Caricatures are often the truest history of the times."

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congressional salaries in 1970, and today. The catch is that congressional salaries, adjusted for inflation, were at their highest level in 1970. The \$42,500 Congress got in 1970 was worth \$124,395 in 1987 dollars. So when we were told how bad off the poor congressmen were compared to 1970, no one was telling us just how well off the fellows were then. Also not emphasized by the commission were the congressional perks that the rest of us have to pay for—from minor but nice items like free parking, free health clubs,

and free stationery, to big tickets like health care and life insurance and one of the most generous pension plans in the nation. . . .

In contrast to the greed in Washington, there is the story of Bob Kelley, the city administrator of Kingsbury, California. In the past two years he has refused to accept four pay increases that he had a right to take. But he says his salary of \$40,000 a year is all he needs to live on. That's true of a lot of other public employees (did you know that more than 300,000 federal civil servants are now earning more than Kelley does?) who self-righteously demand much more. . . .

The two big unanticipated items in the federal budget for the next few years will be cleaning up the damage from nuclear plants and bailing out savings and loans. To all my conservative friends, I would like to point out that these expenses, amounting to at least \$200 billion, could have been avoided by tough regulation.

But while I'm campaigning for re-regulation in the many areas where it's needed, I should make it clear that I realize some regulations are stupid—like when the District of Columbia refused to let some ministers open a ten-bed home for the homeless because it lacked a fire ladder or when New York City officials refused to let a small restaurant open until it spent \$100,000 on facilities for the handicapped. Obviously rules and requirements that make sense for large businesses should not be used to crush struggling philanthropists or entrepreneurs, and the foolish

officials and laws that fail to make sensible distinctions should be subjected to unremitting ridicule. . . .

*The Washington Post* has a weekly health magazine that's truly outstanding. (One wonders how its weekly business magazine can be so bad—most of its articles read like Chamber of Commerce press releases.) Other media performers I've been meaning to recognize are David Margolick, author of the "At the Bar" column in *The New York Times*, for his remarkably perceptive coverage of the culture of the law, and Washington television stations for their fine investigators Jack Cloherty (WRC) and Mark Feldstein (WUSA) and consumer reporters Lea Thompson (WRC) and Roberta Baskin (WJLA). . . .

One cause of prison overcrowding that could be eliminated overnight is the 20,000 inmates who are more than 55 years old. These people are well past the crime-prone years—the teens and twenties—and most could be released without any danger to the community. One of them is Jean Harris, now in her late sixties, for whose release I have campaigned in the past. Certainly she killed Dr. Tarnower and should have been punished. But it was a crime of passion, not the kind of cold-blooded murder for which I of course concede extremely severe punishment is justified. She has been imprisoned for eight years. Surely that's enough punishment for an old lady who is obviously not going to shoot anyone else or commit any other crime. So why not let her out to make

# GIVE THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE.

Be a volunteer.



room in prison for someone who really is a threat to society? . . .

Another of the deregulatory triumphs of the Reagan administration is that the National Transportation Safety Board has fewer people working for it than it did in 1982, even though it is investigating more accidents. Now, I want to ask my conservative friends, do you really feel so safe up there in one of those ancient 727s with its rivets about to pop out or in one of those flimsy commuter planes with untrained pilots that you are really convinced that we don't need a tough NTSB? . . .

Tax incentives are not always bad. Those specifically designed to encourage entrepreneurs and new plants have long been advocated by this magazine. Another we liked was the one, enacted in 1981, to encourage the rehabilitation of historic buildings. It saved many wonderful old structures that otherwise were fated for the wrecker's ball. But the incentive was slashed by the Tax Reform Act of 1986. The result, according to Kirstin Downey of *The Washington Post*, has been that the number of historic preservation projects has plunged by two-thirds. . . .

There are a lot of things that are going to cost the government a lot of money that don't appear in the budget. One of these is the loan guarantees made by agencies like the Farmers Home Administration, the Export-Import Bank, the Veterans Administration, and the Small Business Administration. To

give you an idea of the extent of the problem, the total budget for the coming year is \$1.1 trillion. The total amount of outstanding loan guarantees not included in the figure is \$745 billion. And to give you an idea of how much of that \$745 billion could turn out to be money the taxpayers have to come up with, the General Accounting Office estimates that \$36 billion of the Farmers Home Administration total of \$90 billion is lost. . . .

**A** couple of months ago David Broder wrote a column arguing that it was wrong for people to go back and forth between journalism and government. I disagree. The most glaring deficiency of Washington reporters is their lack of inside knowledge of the government. Only a handful have worked in the bureaucracy, and they should be praised for it instead of being condemned. Certainly we should be suspicious of people who might use a high post in government to gain a similar position in journalism or vice versa. But the experience that is most valuable—at the lower and middle levels of the bureaucracy, where you find out what's really going on—should be sought by journalists and encouraged by their employers. It's good to know what you're writing about. . . .

The year before California increased the speed limit on rural interstates to 65 miles per hour, there were 1,690 accidents resulting in injury or death on those roads. The year after, there were 1,943. Worse still, the number of fatal accidents in which speed was the primary factor jumped more than three-fold. . . .

Senator Bob Graham of Florida has a practice I very much admire. He devotes what he calls "work days" to performing a variety of real jobs to learn firsthand about the life and problems of his constituents. In December, his 222nd such day since he started ten years ago while a member of the Florida legislature, was spent in a Florida soup kitchen feeding the hungry and homeless. He has been, among other things, a factory worker, a citrus grove hand, a public school teacher, a maintenance worker in a public housing project, and a college financial aid counselor. We all bemoan the insulation of life in Washington. Graham has found an excellent way of overcoming it. . . .

—Charles Peters

Thank You,  
**CHARLIE  
PETERS,**  
for 20 years of  
Tidbits and  
Outrages, Memos  
of the Month, and  
Tilting at  
Windmills, and  
best wishes for  
many more years  
of hell-raising,  
enlightening  
journalism.  
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smart people nervous about their status

# Spy Anxiety

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by Jason DeParle

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**N**ot long ago *The New York Times* Sunday real estate section ran an article about a gentrifying neighborhood in Brooklyn. The *Times* quoted one “Julian Frank, a freelance art director unhappily sharing a crowded flat in Manhattan,” on the proper weighing of the factors, pro and con, of moving to a decent place in Prospect Heights: “Once you’ve lived in New York awhile, you know there are a lot of cheap places to live, but there aren’t a lot of cheap acceptable places, in the sense that you can’t live there—you can’t tell people you live there, see? It’s not acceptable. A while ago this area was not acceptable, but now it is. It’s crazy, but it’s New York.”

What would happen to Julian Frank if he moved to an area that was not acceptable? It’s not too hard to conjure up his worries—not too hard, because you’ve probably had similar worries yourself. There’s a party, let’s say in a loft with a view of the river, the kind of party that makes you feel like a winner for being in attendance, full of interesting, successful, attractive people making bright talk. Let’s say in Julian’s case that a lot of art directors, illustrators, and photographers are there, so that there’s a kind of automatic career-building charge in the air. At one point somebody says, “Hey, whatever happened to old Julian? I haven’t seen him around lately.” There’s a moment of silence. Then someone else says, “I heard he moved to Rego Park—that’s in Queens. I thought about calling him the other day, but he’s in a different area code.” The

group laughs appreciatively and gaily moves onto another subject.

It’s a chilling prospect. The fear of making some gaffe that will cause consignment to a dreary outer circle of society is one that grips not just Manhattan but a vast portion of middle-class America, particularly from mid-middle class on up, and it seems to be getting worse. Is my child in the right kindergarten? Am I drinking the right scotch? Have I seen the right art exhibits? To paraphrase Ronald Reagan, do you feel less nervous about your place in the world than you did ten years ago? Probably not.

This pervasive status anxiety is what social scientists like to call an unintended consequence—a consequence of the great democratization of American society since the Depression. The engine of class leveling was the combination of economic prosperity and a more equitable distribution of income. And with the passage of the GI Bill, a college education, once the exclusive coin of the well-to-do, became common currency. The post-war boom that brought good jobs at good wages, home ownership, and college educations to the masses made snobbery, even in the conformist 1950s, seem doomed. Pick at random any book from the shelf of the liberal-consensus school of the 1940s and 1950s, and you’ll find the confident belief that snobbery was a peculiarity of the Gilded Age WASP economic plutocracy, a custom fast being crowded out of modern life.

Here in 1952 is Frederick Lewis Allen in *The Big Change*:

“What was striking about the social pattern of

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Jason DeParle is an editor of *The Washington Monthly*.