

Graffiti for intellectuals



SIMON SAYS



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By Si Frumkin

A TEMPEST IN A CHINATOWN TEAPOT

(and an apology to the L.A. Times...)

I am going to do something unthinkable here: congratulate and praise the Los Angeles Times. Yes, yes, I know, I have been critical of the newspaper in the past. I have used it as an example of censorship by the media when only politically correct opinions are encouraged and the news is slanted, usually to the left.

I still believe that this is so, but the Times has now done something unexpected: it broke away from the pack of the other newspapers that are usually referred to as "influential", "authoritative", "prominent" and "important." The newspapers in this group – I almost said "gang" – are, of course the New York Times, Washington Post, Boston Globe and a few dozen others that mimic the leaders. So far, the only influential maverick that steers away from the mass-think of this club – I almost said "gang" again – is the Wall Street Journal that is usually mentioned with some sadness, regret and just a little malevolent sarcasm.

But on October 19, 2007, a front page story in the L.A. Times gave me hope that things may be changing and so, I salute you Los Angeles Times! Kudos, hurrah and all the rest!

In case you missed it, it was about the unexpectedly large amount of money that was donated to the Hillary Clinton campaign by the population in New York's Chinatown. It was unprecedented: in 2004, the Kerry for President campaign collected a total of about \$24,000; the Clinton campaign, so far, has collected over \$380,000, in April, from just one fundraiser! Hundreds of donors have been contributing amounts that range from \$500 to the \$2300 maximum while working as dishwashers, waiters and cooks.

The Times' reporters attempted to interview some of the donors but found that over 1/3 of them could not be located through addresses, telephones or business and employment records. The supposed neighbors and employers denied knowing these people. Voting records did not help – most of those who were found and interviewed admitted that they had never voted. Furthermore, out of the 74 who were con-

tacted, only 24 would comment in any way at all. Several admitted donors turned out to be non-permanent residents and thus not eligible to donate to political causes.

The reaction from the Clinton campaign was indignant puzzlement: "Yes, we solicit donations from all of New York, we check everything that is inappropriate and return those donations."



With Norman Hsu

There was much more but I think that you will agree that a major scandal was about to erupt. So, full of curiosity, I looked at the New York Times for its reaction and found nothing. OK, I said, there is a time difference and they may have missed the deadline or are checking the numbers, I'll see what they say tomorrow.

Here are the results: **October 19, October 20, October 21, October 22 and today, as I am writing this, October 23 – NOTHING! NADA! ZILCH!**

23 when in its blog – not the newspaper itself – it published the news that the Asian and Pacific Islander Vote organization has issued a press release the day before, criticizing what it referred to as "undue scrutiny on (sic!) a specific ethnic subgroup" and "negligent journalism". Howard Wolfson, a Clinton campaign spokesman, said, "Asian-Americans in Chinatown and Flushing have the same right to contribute as every other American."

A few weeks ago I wrote an article on the little noticed censorship by the media that have the right to exclude anything the do not wish to print. But now I had doubts: could it be that what I thought was important news of a major financial scandal was really not important? Did anyone except me notice this bit of investigative reporting by the L.A. Times?

And so I looked on the Internet – Google: "Clinton Chinatown Contributions" – and felt better. There were 101 pages with about 16,000 items of references, blogs and comments – most of them outraged. New York Times is still among the missing in reporting on something that has happened in its own backyard. There was nothing from the Washington

Post that managed to reach the printed page. UI reported the story by leading with an attack by John Edwards on Hillary Clinton for taking illegal contributions but

without giving any of the really scandalous facts (see above). So the Los Angeles Times should be congratulated and complimented for breaking the ranks. Let us hope this isn't the last time and that there is hope that it might eventually become a newspaper worth respecting. ¥



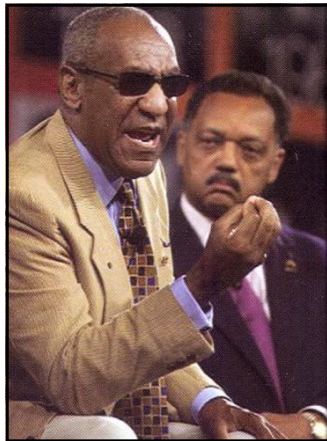
I then looked for the other leading member of the Influential Media group, the Washington Post. Here again there was nothing for 4 days until October

TOUGH, SAD AND SMART

By Bob Herbert, N.Y. Times, 10/16/07

They are a longtime odd couple, Bill Cosby and Harvard's Dr. Alvin Poussaint, and their latest campaign is nothing less than an effort to save the soul of black America.

Mr. Cosby, of course, is the boisterous veteran comedian who has spent the last few years hammering home some brutal truths about self-destructive behavior within the African-American community.



"A word to the wise isn't necessary," Mr. Cosby likes to say. "It's the stupid ones who need the advice."

Dr. Poussaint is a quiet, elegant professor of psychiatry who, in

public at least, is in no way funny. He teaches at the Harvard Medical School and is a staff member at the Judge Baker Children's Center in Boston, where he sees kids struggling in some of the toughest circumstances imaginable.

I always wonder, whenever I talk to Dr. Poussaint, why he isn't better known. He's one of the smartest individuals in the country on issues of race, class and justice.

For three years, Mr. Cosby and Dr. Poussaint have been traveling the country, meeting with as many people as possible to explore the problems facing the black community.

There is a sense of deep sadness and loss — grief — evident in both men over the tragedy that has befallen so many blacks in America. They were on "Meet the Press" for the entire hour Sunday, talking about their new book, a *cri de coeur* against the forces of self-sabotage titled, "Come On, People: On the Path From Victims to Victors."

"You can't land a plane in Rome saying, 'Whassup?' to the control tower. You can't be a doctor telling your nurse, 'Dat tumor be nasty.'"

There weren't many laughs over the course of the hour. Speaking about

the epidemic of fatherlessness in black families, Mr. Cosby imagined a young fatherless child thinking: "Somewhere in my life a person called my father has not shown up, and I feel very sad about this because I don't know if I'm ugly — I don't know what the reason is."

Dr. Poussaint, referring to boys who get into trouble, added: "I think a lot of these males kind of have a father hunger and actually grieve that they don't have a father. And I

think later a lot of that turns into anger. 'Why aren't you with me? Why don't you care about me?'"

The absence of fathers, and the resultant feelings of abandonment felt by boys and girls, inevitably affect the children's sense of self-worth, he said.

The book lays out the difficult route black people will have to take to free the many who

spite the most malignant forms of racism and that many are succeeding today.

"Blaming white people," they write, "can be a way for some black people to feel better about themselves, but it doesn't pay the electric bills. There are more doors of opportunity open for black people today than ever before in the history of America."

I couldn't agree more. Racism disgusts

me, and I think it should be fought with much greater ferocity than we see today. But that's no reason to drop out of school, or take drugs, or refuse to care for one's children, or shoot somebody.

The most important step toward ending the tragic cycles of violence and poverty among African-Americans also happens to be the heaviest lift — reconnecting black fathers to their children.

In an interview yesterday, Dr. Poussaint said:



are still trapped in prisons of extreme violence, poverty, degradation and depression.

It's a work with a palpable undercurrent of love throughout. And yet it pulls no punches.

In a chapter titled "What's Going on With Black Men?," the authors (in a voice that sounds remarkably like Mr. Cosby's) note:

"You can't land a plane in Rome saying, 'Whassup?' to the control tower. You can't be a doctor telling your nurse, 'Dat tumor be nasty.'"

Racism is still a plague and neither Mr. Cosby nor Dr. Poussaint give it short shrift. But they also note that in past years blacks were able to progress de-

neighborhoods and there are no fathers there. What you find is apathy in a lot of the males who don't even know that they are supposed to be a father."

The book covers a great deal that has

been talked about incessantly — the importance of family and education and hard work and mentoring and civic participation. But hand in hand with its practical advice and the undercurrent of deep love for one's community is a stress on the absolute importance of maintaining one's personal dignity and self-respect.

It's a tough book. Victimhood is cast as the enemy. Defeat, failure and hopelessness are not to be tolerated.

Hard times and rough circumstances are not excuses for degrading others or allowing oneself to be degraded. In fact, they're not excuses for anything, except to try harder. ★



Dr. Alvin F. Poussaint is Director of the Media Center of the Judge Baker Children's Center in Boston. He is also a Professor of Psychiatry and Faculty Associate Dean for Student Affairs at Harvard Medical School.

SHOCKING: SCIENTIST COMMITS HERESY!

By Paul Greenberg, November 2, 2007

"FACTS ARE STUBBORN THINGS; AND WHATEVER MAY BE OUR WISHES, OUR INCLINATIONS, OR THE DICTATES OF OUR PASSION, THEY CANNOT ALTER THE STATE OF FACTS AND EVIDENCE." - JOHN ADAMS

I almost spilled my coffee. I just stood there, dumbstruck right in my own kitchen. Flipping through the Wall Street Journal the other morning while waiting for the oatmeal to cool, my eye was caught by an article I had to read all the way through - then and there. It was the text of an interview with the latest Nobel Prize laureate. **No, not the one named Al Gore.**

Few may have noticed, but Mr. Gore shared this year's Nobel Peace Prize with a real scientist, or rather a whole slew of them on the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. That group's work is as unglamorous as its bureaucratic name. It's never even made a horror film (GLOBAL WARNING!) about the earth's being inundated as the polar icecaps melt.

This international panel just plods along trying to find out what's really going on with the climate. Facts are stubborn things, as our John

Adams once noted, and it takes a lot of patient research to find and evaluate them, then suggest an appropriate response. It's about as exciting as bookkeeping.

Being an alarmist is a lot easier; some politicians and pamphleteers make highly successful careers of it. Real scientists may not be pleased by the sensationalism that envelops the whole subject of global warming. But if they speak up, they could be labeled heretics and exiled to the farthest reaches of academic opprobrium. For global warming has become more of a fighting faith than a topic for calm analysis. Disagree and you're liable to be called not just wrong but anti-science. Today it is the ultimate heresy.

One of the scientific dissenters is John Christy, a member of both the UN panel and the University of Alabama's faculty. (He's the director of that university's Earth System Science Center.) In a break with tradition, Dr. Christy declined to perform the traditional pas de deux of mutual flattery when Nobel laureates share the same prize. Not when Al Gore's may be the first on record awarded essentially for the kind of PR that comes too close to being propaganda. It makes you wonder what propagandist will get it next year - Michael Moore?

It turns out there are indeed reasonable things to be said about global warming - and on television at that. I was amazed. The transcript of Dr. Christy's interview with CNN's Miles O'Brien is worth reading: (Just set down your coffee cup first.)

Miles O'Brien: *I assume you're not*

happy about sharing this award with Al Gore. You going to renounce it in some way?

John Christy: *Well, as a scientist at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, I always thought that - I may sound like the Grinch who stole Christmas here - that prizes were given for performance, and not for promotional activities. And, when I look at the world, I see that the carbon dioxide rate is increasing, and energy demand, of course, is increasing. And that's because, without energy, life is brutal and short. So, I don't see very much effect in trying to scare people into not using energy, when it is the very basis of how we can live in our society.*

O'Brien: *So, what about the movie ("An Inconvenient Truth") do you take issue with, then, Dr. Christy?*

Christy: *Well, there's any number of things. I suppose, fundamentally, it's the fact that someone is speaking about a science that I have been very heavily involved with and have labored so hard in, and been humiliated by, in the sense that the climate*

is so difficult to understand, Mother Nature is so complex, and so the uncertainties are great, and then to hear someone speak with such certainty and such confidence about what the climate is going to do is - well, I suppose I could be kind and say, it's annoying to me.

ing that the carbon dioxide levels are up. Temperatures are going up. There is a certain degree of certainty that goes along with that, right?

Christy: *Well, the carbon dioxide is going up. And remember that carbon dioxide is plant food in the fundamental sense. All of life depends on the fact carbon dioxide is in the atmosphere. So, we're fortunate it's not a toxic gas. But, on the other hand, what is the climate doing? And when we build - and I'm one of the few people in the world that actually builds these climate data sets - we don't see the catastrophic changes that are being promoted all over the place.*

For example, I suppose CNN did not announce two weeks ago when the Antarctic sea ice extent reached its all-time maximum, even though, in the Arctic in the North Pole, it reached its all-time minimum.

And so heretically on. There are others like Dr. Christy out there in the scientific community who don't believe the best way to approach science is in a panic.

For example, Daniel Botkin of the University of California's Center for the Study of the Environment. His is an opinion some of us mere laymen may share: "My concern is that we may be moving away from an irrational lack of concern about climate change to an equally irrational panic about it."

The planet does seem to be returning to one of its warmer phases, but the extent, cause and response to that phenomenon should be a matter for analysis and discussion, not frenzy. It's as if we've forgotten that the first qualification for doing science may be a certain skepticism. I come by mine naturally when the

subject is global warming, for I can remember being taught in school not that the planet is warming but that another ice age is almost upon us. It was a widespread assumption at the time taught as scientific fact. There was no doubt about it. All the scientists agreed. It said so right there in the book. I must have missed it somewhere along the way. Ω

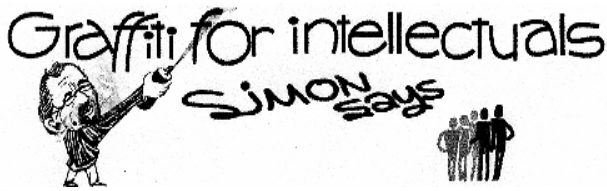
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Prof. Daniel Botkin of U. of California Center for the Study of the Environment



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O'Brien: *But you just got through say-*



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A DECENT OUTCOME FOR IRAQ

By Prof. Fouad Ajami
 10//2007

Peace has not come to the streets of Baghdad, but the center holds. Our very American "benchmarks" for measuring the progress of Iraq can't capture the reality of that land. There is no "oil law," it is true, but the oil bounty is being shared equitably across the regions. The Iraqi government, through a relentless insurgency, maintains and meets a payroll for 3.4 million of its citizens. And in the provinces, there is a scramble for budgets and economic projects. "A year ago, we could not give money to the provincial governors; they could not use it. Now they are in competition for funds, and economic life stirs," Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh, who oversees the service sector of the government, said to me.

We ask of the Iraqis "national reconciliation" and bemoan their inability to offer it in ways we can recognize, but a broad, subtle national accord is settling upon the land. The Kurds want (and have) their autonomy but have no eagerness to break out on their own to face alone the schemes of the Iranians, the Turks, and the Syrians. The Shiites have prevailed in the war for Baghdad; primacy in the government is increasingly theirs. The Sunni Arabs know that they have lost their war against this new Iraq, that the bet they placed on al Qaeda and neighboring Sunni Arab nations has been lost.

New realism. Beyond their pride, and the fury of their feuds, Iraqis of all stripes have now come to terms with their country's desperate need of American protection and patronage. Ignore the pollsters who tell you that Iraqis have had their fill of the American presence. There is a realism that comes to men and women who know calamities, and this realism teaches Iraqis that this American project is their country's chance for a way out of a history of grief and terror.

In late August, on a day of unsparing heat, I shadowed Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, our second most senior commander in Iraq, as he toured a Baghdad neighborhood that had once been a Saddamist stronghold. In a mar-

ket undergoing extensive renovation, he was besieged by petitioners. Men spoke to him of their plans for this market; a new restaurant was being readied with a front porch overlooking the river, and its owner pressed his case for a generator to provide the electricity he needs. A man with some flair and humor pointed to his old, dusty car and asked if the Americans, in their power and benevolence, might replace it with a new one.

It has not been pretty, this expedition to Iraq, and the man in that neighborhood will not get a new car. But the American determination to see this war to a decent outcome, and the fatigue of the Iraqi protagonists, have transformed the landscape. We have been burned before, and progress has often vanished like a desert mirage, but there can be no denying the change that has come to Iraq. The dispatches cite a recent "downward trend in violence." In September, 1,654 civilians were killed, a 29 percent decline from the 2,318 killed in August. The U.S. military fatalities dropped to 63 from 84 in August. A fight still rages in Iraq. This is not a country at peace, and all its furies have not burned out, but a measure of order has begun to stick on the ground.

It appears that the American debate has been transformed as well. There is to it the

quiet that follows a big storm. Two men of great talent and devotion came home to report about Iraq—our military commander, Gen. David Petraeus, and our diplomatic envoy, Ambassador Ryan Crocker. They told of achievements, and of frustrations. Above all, they delivered a sobering message about the consequences of failure: We are there under Arab and Iranian eyes; we can't quit the place, cede it to chaos and radicalism. And there came a startling and overdue message delivered by President Bush that there will be an "enduring" U.S. presence in Iraq. The Pax Americana, which has "security arrangements" with the regimes in Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, will now add Iraq into its orbit.

We shall not have anywhere near the current 160,000 military personnel, but there shall be a substantial U.S. presence for many years to come. In public, Iraqi leaders say that they don't wish to see their country as a battleground between America and Iran. But behind closed doors, there is an acceptance by Iraq's political class of an American presence on the Iran-Iraq frontier. We may sugarcoat the truth, but Iran shall be monitored from Iraq. And the American presence in Araby—historically in Sunni lands—now extends to a republic led by Arab Shiites. Ω