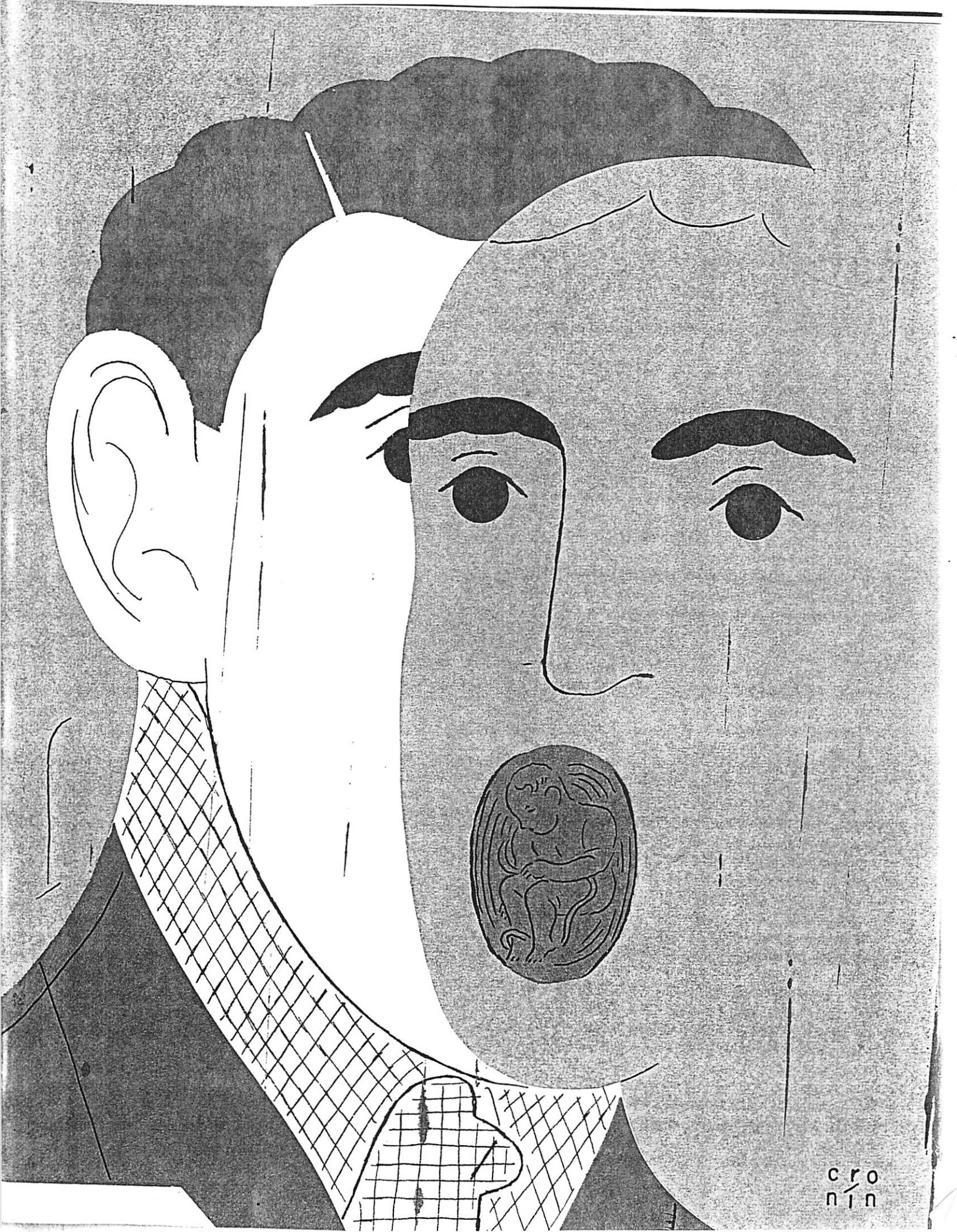


ABORTION INC.

THE TWO SIDES DEBATING ABORTION RIGHTS IN AMERICA OVER THE PAST 30 YEARS WILL NEVER AGREE. ONE BIG REASON: THEY'RE MAKING TOO MUCH MONEY TO EVER STOP ARGUING.

BY DANA KENNEDY
ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN CRONIN



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THERE'S A DIRTY LITTLE SECRET

about the battle over abortion rights in the U.S. It's not about the six-foot-tall pictures of fetuses carried at anti-abortion rallies, nor does it involve some of the more grisly tales about late-term abortion.

The truth? Americans, more or less, have already made up their minds about abortion. A recent Gallup poll indicated that most Americans reject extreme positions on abortion; they favor keeping it legal—but under limited conditions. For example, only 8 percent support third-trimester abortions. Even more telling, the poll—and others like it conducted this year—revealed that the public's consensus has barely budged since Gallup first asked about abortion in 1975.

Still, the debate, fueled by the two warring, volatile sides in the battle over abortion, rages on. Why? Here's the surprise. While no one doubts that ideology—whether it is that of the pro-lifers fighting for the sanctity of life or the pro-choicers battling for a woman's right to control her own body—drives both groups, there's another reason for keeping the abortion issue alive: It's become big, big business.

If it were a private enterprise, it might be called Abortion Inc. And the CEOs would be the old white boys who head the loose, right-wing, often evangelically based anti-abortionist networks, and the old white girls—clubby, close-knit Washington, D.C.—and New York-based veteran feminists—who lead the pro-choice movement.

George estimates show at least \$500 million in annual funding, or gross revenues, for the anti-abortion organizations, and \$660 million for the pro-choicers. If Abortion Inc. were a company, those revenues of \$1.16 billion would place it among the top 1,000 corporations in America today.

And Abortion Inc. isn't going out of business, because it's making lots of money. Which is another way of saying that the argument over abortion won't go away.

"Theoretically, both sides want the same thing—to reduce abortions," says Bruce Robinson, who has studied the abortion battle for a nonpartisan watchdog group, Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance (OCRT), which monitors religious freedom in North America. "But you'll never see them agree; mark my words."

Dr. Bernard Nathanson concurs. Nathanson, a co-founder of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL), performed 60,000 abortions, then had a change of conscience in 1977 and produced the seminal anti-abortion film *The Silent Scream*. Nathanson can picture a solution, but not for at least 50 years, and not because of pro-choice or anti-abortion activists, but in spite of them (see "The Future Solution" on opposite page). "Both sides are entrenched," he says. "They yell and scream, but they don't give any ground. We've made no progress toward solving the problem at all.

"In some ways, it's become like the cancer industry. If we solved the problem of cancer—or abortion—it would be great, but there'd be thousands of people out of a job. There are so many people with so much vested economically in abortion it would be a catastrophe for them."

When you consider the poll numbers, it's easy to see why neither party is pushing the issue. Republican presidential nominee George W. Bush

retained the tough anti-abortion party plank insisted upon by the religious right and named the virulently anti-abortion Dick Cheney as his running mate. But Bush has pointedly de-emphasized abortion in his campaign.

Moreover, as politicians'

recognition of the middle plurality solidifies, extremists on both sides are losing ground on the front lines of the fight. At noon on a steamy August day in St. Louis, for example, the Reverend Flip Benham, a self-proclaimed former drunk who unsuccessfully urged his wife to abort their twin sons 27 years ago, before he found God, was not even breaking a sweat at a demonstration by his anti-abortion group, Operation Save America.

Benham's gaze was fixed on a group of men as they removed a tiny white coffin from a black hearse and carried it across the shimmering asphalt and up the steps to a cross. These funerals for fetuses—or "preborn children," as anti-abortion activists call them—are standard practice for organizations such as Operation Save America, which stages them at rallies around the country. But back when Operation Save America was called Operation Rescue, in the anti-abortion activism heyday of the early 1990s, the tiny white coffins were not just symbolic. Usually, each contained the remnants of an aborted fetus—procured, Benham and others claim, with the help of sympathetic employees inside abortion clinics.

But at this St. Louis protest, the coffin was empty. Organizers had not been able to find a fetus in time. And though only a few hundred people showed up, compared with the thousands at similar rallies a decade ago, Benham was optimistic. "We're hoping to get arrested," he said.

Unfortunately for Benham, that didn't happen. The only controversy came in the form of one pro-choice protester carrying a banner reading, REDUCE ABORTION—HAVE MORE ORAL SEX.

After the rally, Benham sat down in the shade and tried to be philosophical about the movement in which he has spent 20 years. He showed off pictures of his twin 27-year-old sons, both baseball players with major-league farm teams. He reminisced about his greatest triumphs: converting Norma McCorvey, the plaintiff in the landmark 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, to Christianity, and baptizing her in 1995.

"At one point, I thought we'd end abortion sooner," he said. "But we're looking at this long-term now. You don't turn a big ship around on a dime."

Eleanor Smeal, president of the powerfully funded Feminist Majority Foundation, sees danger just around the corner. Like many other pro-choicers, Smeal contends that anti-abortion activists have become more powerful, if less visible, now that they have moved from showy street activism to mainstream politics. She points out, for example, that Ralph Reed, the charismatic former executive director of the Christian Coalition, is now a top consultant to Bush. And she talks about the seven anti-choice bills Bush signed into law in Texas, more than in any other state.

"The Republicans want the country to go to sleep," says Smeal. "They want us to think the right to an abortion is safe and that the anti-abortion movement has lost steam."

"We are down to one vote now on the Supreme Court," Smeal continues, referring to the recent 5-4 Supreme Court decision

overturning a ban on "partial-birth" abortion in Nebraska. Three of those justices are over 70, she points out, and several have health problems; it appears all but guaranteed that the next president will be able to appoint at least two, if not three, new justices.

"So many American women think *Roe* is forever, just because it's the law now," says Peter Montgomery, who monitors the religious right for TV producer Norman Lear's civil rights-advocacy organization, People for the American Way. "They take it for granted. They have no idea how close they are to losing their rights."

Separating the rhetoric from the often opaque reality of the abortion issue is difficult. One reason: Both sides, no matter how pure their ideology, can be somewhat disingenuous when it comes to keeping the abortion controversy alive, because it is so much a part of their identity. The abortion issue has proved to be a source of unlimited fundraising potential, a catalyst for mobilizing moribund voting blocs, and an irresistible platform to personal and political power.

"Let's put it this way," says OCRT's Bruce Robison. "It would be a disaster for both sides if they ever resolved the issue. It's gotten too big to let go."

Dallas Blanchard, a University of West Florida sociology professor and author of three books on violence in the anti-abortion movement, is even more cynical. "The March of Dimes made the mistake of curing polio," Blanchard says. "Then they chose birth defects, which was smart because they'll never cure it. If they solve the abortion problem, all those bureaucrats would lose jobs, and they'd have to go to work for a living."

When Blanchard talks about the bureaucrats, he is referring for the most part to those overwhelmingly middle-aged or older white, male conservatives who make up the pro-life movement—pioneers like Paul Weyrich and Jerry Falwell; perennials like Pat Robertson of the Christian Coalition and Joseph Scheidler of the Pro-Life Action League; violent extremists like Michael Bray; powerful icons like James Dobson of Colorado's Focus on the Family; as well as younger up-and-comers like Father Frank Pavone of the Staten Island-based Priests for Life.

They are just some of the key figures in the vast—and heavily funded—pro-life machine. The network is made up of some groups that focus only on abortion, others for whom abortion is one of several issues, and a labyrinthine network of fundamentalist Christian churches around the country.

Among the biggest organizations are the National Right to Life Committee, which gets \$2 million a year from the Republican party alone; Focus on the Family (budget: \$130 million); Campus Crusade for Christ (budget: \$300 million); the Traditional Values Coalition (budget: \$13 million); and the Christian Coalition, which launched a \$21 million fundraising drive last year.

Those numbers alone add up to nearly \$500 million in annual funding. And while some of that money may be used to support other causes, abortion is the hot-button issue for bringing in donations. When you consider the hundreds of organizations whose finances are hidden, \$500 million is probably a very low estimate of anti-abortion funding.

"There are hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars flowing through the American body politic supporting organizations and initiatives for which ending abortion is their sole purpose or part of a broader agenda," says Al Ross, president of the Institute for Democratic Studies. "It's never been clear to me how much Pat Robertson cares about a fetus, for instance. But there are certainly well-meaning people in the anti-abortion movement who believe a fetus is a person. There are also a lot who realize it's a useful issue to get out the vote and build support for a movement for which ending abortion rights is just a means to an end."

Frederick Clarkson, a scholar on abortion and an investigative journalist, agrees with Ross. "The issue has never been about abortion," says Clarkson. "If abortion were outlawed tomorrow, the pro-lifers in particular would have lost an extremely effective, mobilizing wedge issue. Every fundraising campaign must have a great Satan to rail against—a Jane Fonda, a Newt Gingrich—and that's what abortion has become."

Key players on the pro-choice, old-white-girl side are Smeal; NARAL president Kate Michelman and her executive vice president, Alice Germond; National Organization for Women president Patricia Ireland; National Abortion Federation executive director Vicki Saporta; and author-activist Gloria Steinem.

Smeal's Feminist Majority Foundation, which spends some of its multimillion-dollar budget on projects like the Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan, has been helped in part by grants like a recent \$400,000 contribution from a source that a spokeswoman would not name. But in general, "sugar daddies are a little harder to come by for pro-choicers," says Blanchard.

Sugar daddies may be scarce, but the pro-choice movement still makes money. Planned Parenthood, the largest abortion provider in the country, grossed \$660 million in the fiscal year ending June 1999. That figure represents income from all the services rendered by

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THE FUTURE SOLUTION

Ultimately, says Dr. Bernard Nathanson—a clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology at New York Medical College—the abortion debate will be resolved by science. Genetic breakthroughs will eradicate abortion by rendering pregnancy itself obsolete. That can happen, he says, within 50 years.

Now that the human genome has been mapped out, says Nathanson, the genes that control the ovulation process can be identified and genetically engineered to be "switched off." It will take only a quick medical procedure to do this, and the woman will have the option of having it "switched back on" at any time. But, if she chooses, she will no longer have to menstruate or become pregnant. Instead, eggs can be plucked from her body and frozen.

"The reproductive processes are being split in two," says Nathanson. "Procreation will become separate from pleasure. When all is said and done, the apparatus for becoming pregnant will be genetically obsolete by the time a girl reaches puberty. Genitals will be simply for pleasure."

When a man and a woman want to conceive a child, their frozen eggs and sperm will be placed in a dish, and all 140,000 genes contained within the nucleus of each cell will be checked by sequencing machines for any unusual or defective genes. Once the "perfect mix" is achieved, they will be implanted in an artificial womb.

This isn't just science fiction, says Nathanson. The first artificial womb was developed in Japan in 1997. And the popularity and effectiveness of in vitro fertilization is already leading the way toward the reproductive process he foresees. Of the 3.9 million babies born last year, 30,000 were conceived outside of the human body.

"At first, all this will be done just by the wealthy," says Nathanson, who is writing a book called *Prophecies*. "Then it will become less expensive, and all the classes will use it. The technology is new but it's promising. When it's developed, it won't matter what happens to *Roe v. Wade*. Nobody will care."

Except, perhaps, employees of Abortion Inc. —D.K.

THE WEST WING

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White House barbershop.

THE WHITE HOUSE cafeteria might refuse service to the newcomer. You can't eat there if the proper paperwork hasn't been filled out.

AND IT'S EASY to get lost in the White House if no one guides you.

Political shows have long been considered ratings poison in prime time, and Sorkin took an even greater risk by writing a political drama with a distinct point of view, the Democratic one. Whitford says Sorkin made a good pragmatic choice: It's better TV. "People respond to progressive Democrats," he says. "It's more heroic to fight for civil rights legislation than a tax cut."

But there's also a more personal angle to the decision.

At age 11, Sorkin volunteered to help out at George McGovern headquarters, mostly to impress a girl in his class. Incumbent Richard Nixon was on his way to White Plains, New York, for a rally, and the McGovern volunteers were deployed with signs that read, MCGOVERN FOR PRESIDENT. Just as Nixon's motorcade came around the bend, an old lady came up behind Sorkin, grabbed his sign, beamed him with it, and then stomped on it.

Part of him, Sorkin says, has been trying to get back at that lady ever since.

Whatever the motivation, *The West Wing* has become that rarest of rarities on the pop-culture landscape: a zeitgeist show, a reflection of the tenor of our times.

"Every three or four years, a show hits a pop sensibility," says *The West Wing* co-executive producer John Wells, who produced another blockbuster hit, *ER*. "People forget that *ER* came on in the middle of the Clinton health care debate. When we were on the cover of *Newsweek*, the headline was, 'A health care plan that really works.' That was what we tapped into.

"And that's what happened when *West Wing* came on. We'd reached a point in the culture where we assumed that people who want to choose public service have the basest of motives of self-aggrandizement and financial gain."

However, Wells believes that the public knows intuitively that not all politicians are like that.

He says, "The public wants to believe in the political process, wants to believe in politicians. Wants to believe that the people who are leading us are doing so—even if there are ideological differences—to make the country better."

Slowly, subtly, *The West Wing* has become as much a reflection of the current White House as a reflection upon it. Last winter, Sorkin wrote a moving episode about the death penalty in which a tormented President Bartlet decided not to commute the execution of a federal prisoner. This summer, Clinton went the other way—choosing to postpone the execution of federal prisoner Juan Raul Garza, on whose case the episode was based.

Near the end of last season, *The West Wing*

featured a story about campaign finance reform, with Bartlet deciding to buck special interests and appoint reformers to the Federal Election Commission. The *New York Times* then wrote an editorial proclaiming that Washington should imitate *The West Wing*.

The *West Wing* has detractors, and they consider the show corny. "Human beings? These characters aren't human beings—they're noble soldiers in a noble cause, and they have been washed clean of every impurity because of it," sneered writer John Podhoretz in a cover story in the conservative *Weekly Standard* last March. But most of the press reaction has been glowing. For its admirers, *The West Wing* has become an example of television that can entertain and educate and—in some measure—elevate viewers above the prevailing forces of political cynicism and ennui.

The show is particularly appreciated in Washington these days, where public servants often see themselves as underpaid and underappreciated. Nowhere was this fan base more in evidence than at the Democratic convention in Los Angeles. The *West Wing* party on the show's Warner Bros. set the Sunday before the convention—ostensibly a thank-you gift from the show to those in the nation's capital who've helped them—was a who's who of Hollywood meets Washington. Everyone—including Clinton chief of staff John Podesta, Chelsea Clinton, Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), and the editors of the *Washington Post*—were oohing and aahing at the authenticity of the ceiling-less Oval Office.

Even Republicans consider *The West Wing* a guilty pleasure. "I was prepared not to like it because it was about my sacred White House," says Fitzwater. "But from the second show on, I've loved it. It very accurately portrays so many elements of presidential life—the frantic urgency about issues and decisions."

Fitzwater acknowledges that the show has detractors in the GOP. "Yes, it's liberal-oriented," I tell all my conservative friends, "but that's the way the presidency works," he says. "And the truth is, my friends all love the show."

Over at Building 146 on the Warner Bros. lot, the signs of a show in its successful second season are everywhere. Outside, a 2000 black Porsche Carrera, top down, is gleaming in the 'A. Sorkin' reserved parking spot. His office has been transferred from the small, hutch-like suite it was in last year to a sprawling second-floor lair. The design is aggressively masculine—wooden desks, leather sofas, framed maps, and forest-green walls—lots of expensive stuff for a writer who spends most of his life occupied by his Power Mac, gummy bears, and Merits. There is a bar—Art Deco, stacked with unused martini glasses—and an of-the-moment U-Line stainless-steel fridge.

There is also a publicist occupying a back corner of the office, yet another nod to the show's newly acquired media heft. The seat-of-the-pants ethos of season one—when a visitor could wander from the set to the writing offices and back again—is long gone.

On the wall closest to Sorkin's desk is a bulletin board with memos about story elements for whatever episode he's writing. The elements come from the writing staff and Sorkin's political strategists, who include, in addition to Fitzwater, Noonan, and Myers, Democratic consultant Pat Caddell and Lawrence O'Donnell, a former aide to Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.). Sorkin rewrites every line that's given to him, but the staff provides the material that makes up the substance of the show. Sorkin keeps their memos and research papers in a blue binder that he calls, with great feeling, "a book of goodness."

Despite the death penalty show and a few others, Sorkin says he generally tries not to rip ideas from the headlines. "But every once in a while we want to remind you of something in reality," he notes. The driving force of the show is Sorkin's larger message about politics and public service—his deep, and deeply sentimental, sense of patriotism. In July, people from *The West Wing* were invited to a Los Angeles Dodgers baseball game, and Richard Schiff caught Sorkin staring, enraptured, at the sight of a row of American flags rippling in the breeze of the stadium.

"Look how beautiful that is," Schiff recalls Sorkin saying. "It struck me how much that man loves America, loves the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence. If a Republican president comes in, that's not going to change. We're more like a White House world that he'd like to see."

Indeed, one *West Wing* staffer—speaking on condition of anonymity—says, "Aaron Sorkin really doesn't like Clinton. He's very convincing on this subject."

The question is put to Sorkin: Does he despise Clinton? Sorkin laughs, and then he squirms in silence.

Finally, he protests weakly: "I like Bill Clinton. I voted for Bill Clinton twice. It would be silly for me to say anything more than that."

Beyond his political sentimentality, it is Sorkin's unerring dramatic instincts that shape the show. Even as a kid growing up in Scarsdale, New York, sneaking into Manhattan to go to the theater, Sorkin found he had an ear for the ebb and flow of dialogue, a knack for sensing the emotional hinge between serious and comic.

He dreamed of being an actor and majored in musical theater at Syracuse University. But then he began to write, starting with *A Few Good Men*, a play about a snotty Navy lawyer who learns the value of public service. It was based on a case he learned about from his sister, a Navy lawyer. The play was on Broadway before being bought for the movies by director Rob Reiner, who cast Tom Cruise as the lawyer and Jack Nicholson as the corrupt colonel. Reiner then commissioned Sorkin to write the romantic comedy *The American President*, starring Michael Douglas and Annette Bening, which took the writer on research visits to the White House.

That, in turn, propelled Sorkin to write a TV pilot, a behind-the-scenes drama/comedy about the White House—which sat ignored on the desks of network executives for two years. Meanwhile,

Sorkin wrote *Sports Night* for ABC, a behind-the-scenes dramedy about a sports news show. After the Monica Lewinsky scandal, with its media frenzy, NBC suddenly thought there might be an audience for politics after all. And *The West Wing* was born.

In last season's cliff-hanger finale, a fusillade of bullets felled the presidential entourage as Bartlet left a speaking engagement. The faces of three teenage skinheads in the crowd were identified as the perpetrators.

"So what's next?" Sorkin is asked during the summer. Who are the survivors? And what about romance? Will Josh date his secretary? Will C.J. get married to reporter Danny Concannon? Will presidential daughter Zoe carry on her interracial romance with presidential gofer Charlie?

And what about President Bartlet's multiple sclerosis?

Sorkin, canny dramatist that he is, says we will have to wait until the end of a two-hour episode to learn how badly the victims were hurt. He also says that Anna Deavere Smith (who played the White House spokeswoman in *The American President*) will join the cast as the new national security adviser. Finally, we will see no more of Moira Kelly as political consultant Mandy (and no, of course she had no connection to real-life Clinton consultant Mandy Grunwald).

Other than that, Sorkin says, he doesn't know exactly where the show is going, since he's only up to episode five. He says he writes an episode for eight days at a stretch, and takes about five minutes to pat himself on the back before plunging into the next script.

The central conflict of the episode he is working on involves the president and his wife, played by Stockard Channing (who had a memorable showdown with Bartlet in the Oval Office during the first season: "You don't *handle* me, Jed!"). They are trying to find time in their schedules to...have sex.

"The writers came to me and said, 'Here's an idea you're gonna hate. But sleep on it,'" says Sorkin, pulling off his geek-chic horn-rimmed glasses and rocking back in the leather chair behind his desk. The locks that fall across his forehead are brown, but his sideburns have gone grey. He is lean, wearing a green, button-down polo shirt and jeans, and chain-smoking. "They were right. It seemed silly to me." Pause. "And now I'm having the best time writing the story."

Does he think it wise to mix the presidency with sex given, y'know, the Clinton thing? "Well, you think about it," he acknowledges, "but I have faith in the show.... I believe that people will see episode five with Martin Sheen trying to have sex with Stockard Channing and not say, 'Well, why doesn't he just grab an intern in the hallway?'"

Dee Dee Myers has given Sorkin a memo detailing appointments that might keep a first lady busy (and thus unavailable for sex). Myers has suggested a dedication of a statue, among other things, which Sorkin has seized upon. He plans to have the first lady lecture the president for his off-

hand put-down of the statue subject, nineteenth-century journalist-adventurer Nellie Bly.

There are other strands in the works: one about military readiness in which press secretary C.J. faces down a general. There's also a story line related to the civil rights activist organization Southern Poverty Law Center, which Sorkin declines to discuss. Could it relate to our skinhead shooters?

The new Republican-era consultants are providing more than political balance. They bring with them behind-the-scenes anecdotes from previous administrations. Fitzwater, for example, who had an extraordinary 10-year run with Reagan and Bush, has already detailed an insider's version of Boris Yeltsin's first visit to the White House. Yeltsin was in Parliament at the time, challenging Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. He wanted to meet President Bush, but the president thought Gorbachev would take offense if he received Yeltsin in the Oval Office.

"Yeltsin refused to come in the building, in effect, unless he could meet the president," Fitzwater recalls. A compromise was struck: Yeltsin agreed to meet Bush in the national security adviser's office, "so he could say he met the president and we could say he never got into the Oval Office."

Sorkin loves the anecdote—and says it may show up in an episode. Still, he insists that he has no GOP-inspired contingency themes for after the election. Bartlet is Bartlet, he's a Democrat, he'll stay in power.

"I don't want to overstate our impact," says Cadell. "We're a TV show, after all. But a lot of people in politics and the press watch it intensely. I think its [influence is] more on a subconscious level than a conscious one."

"It's pretty easy to get too big for your britches," Sorkin demurs. "There's so much praise being heaped on us. It's easy to start believing it." He pauses and plays again with his glasses. "A show that got this much praise this fast is setting itself up for an ass-kicking," he finally offers. "We'd like to not hasten it at all by suggesting that we're good for you: like, 'Thank God we came along to tell you what to think about this—and Barbra Streisand will be out in a minute.'"

The magnitude of *The West Wing's* influence hit cast members when they were given a tour of the actual West Wing on the night of President Clinton's last State of the Union speech. The moment was already surreal enough, and suddenly the president dropped by to chitchat and suggested a story line: something having to do with a journalist and an information leak.

Sheen also sensed the show's power when they were shooting late at night in Georgetown and making a bit too much of a commotion for the neighbors. A middle-aged lady came down to inquire about the noise. And by the way, she said, why the heck doesn't the show have a secretary of state? And it should be a woman, she added.

The woman with the complaint was Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. ■

BIANCA JAGGER

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HE HAD NO CLOTHES ON?

Well, he was covered so you couldn't see his hands or legs—they were trying to keep them black-and-blue marks. His arms already had bruises in them for the poisonous substance that would flow into his veins. He also had a bruise on his head. As we walked in, he straightened up, *twists her head, like a horse trying to see through blinders*] to look over at me.

WHAT WERE HIS FINAL WORDS?

First, he turned to look at Lambert's family. "I'd like to tell the family of Bobby Lambert that I am an innocent black man, that I did not do anything. As Reverend Jackson led us in prayer, Gary spoke his voice: 'What is happening in America this evening is a lynching; there is clear evidence of my defense that has never been heard in this courtroom. What is happening here is a violation of a civilized country. We have lost this battle, but we are winning the war. We must continue to fight.' Then he invoked his conversion to Islam. His name is not Gary Graham, but Shaka. Make sure it is written correctly on my tombstone. DID HE ADDRESS YOU DIRECTLY?"

He thanked Jesse; then his eyes fixed on me and his voice weakened. "Bianca, thank you for all that you've done." And of course, I began to cry. The next day he said my name, I was in tears. He said to each of us, "I love you," and we said, "We love you" back to him. He fixed on me as he said, "I am part of the genocide of Africa. This is what happens to black people under a ruler sanctioned by the state. They are killing me this evening; they are assassinating me..." He finished speaking, but at 8:41 P.M., the police injected into his body to make him shut up. At 8:49 P.M., it was over. Everybody had told me that in the end, he would take a big breath and say, "Thank you." But Gary spoke all the way to the end.

AND AFTERWARD...?

We were then led back to a small room, away from the press for a half hour. I was supposed to do *Larry King* that night, but they told me to be sure that we didn't do that, nor did we get to speak at their prime-time press conference. Instead, the prison officials offered three journalists as witnesses, one of whom had seen the president's statement. They said Gary made an irate statement, "dying with one eye open, or both eyes wide open. And in no way was Gary rational. He was the powerful, eloquent statement maker, maintaining his innocence until the very end." DID YOU GET A CHANCE TO DISPUTE THEIR VERSION?

After they finished, we had our own press conference, but by then most journalists had already written words "a rambling statement" had already been on the wires and become fact.

HOW DID THE EXPERIENCE AFFECT YOU?

The death penalty makes you face up to your religious beliefs. I have never questioned whether or not I believe in God, but being in proximity to the circumstances makes you re-evaluate your own convictions. Seeing someone executed, w