

October 25, 2011

[Joe Nocera](#), in the NY Times, of all places, says the Bork nomination fight was the beginning of ugly in politics.

On Oct. 23, 1987 — 24 years ago on Sunday — Robert Bork's nomination to the Supreme Court was voted down by the Senate. All but two Democrats voted "nay."

The rejection of a Supreme Court nominee is unusual but not unheard of (see [Clement Haynsworth Jr.](#)). But rarely has a failed nominee had the pedigree — and intellectual firepower — of Bork. He had been a law professor at Yale, the solicitor general of the United States and, at the time Ronald Reagan tapped him for the court, a federal appeals court judge.

Moreover, Bork was a legal intellectual, a proponent of original intent and judicial restraint. The task of the judge, he once wrote, is "to discern how the framers' values, defined in the context of the world they knew, apply to the world we know." He said that Roe v. Wade, which legalized abortion, was a "wholly unjustifiable judicial usurpation" of authority that belonged to the states, that the court's recent rulings on affirmative action were problematic and that the First Amendment didn't apply to pornography.

Whatever you think of these views, they cannot be fairly characterized as extreme; Ruth Bader Ginsburg, among many others, has questioned the rationale offered by the court to justify Roe v. Wade. Nor was Bork himself an extremist. He was a strongly opinionated, somewhat pugnacious, deeply conservative judge. (At 84 today, he hasn't mellowed much either, to judge from [an interview he recently gave Newsweek.](#))

I bring up Bork not only because Sunday is a convenient anniversary. His nomination battle is also a reminder that our poisoned politics is not just about Republicans behaving badly, as many Democrats and their liberal allies have convinced themselves. Democrats can be — and have been — every bit as obstructionist, mean-spirited and unfair.

I'll take it one step further. The Bork fight, in some ways, was the beginning of the end of civil discourse in politics. ...

[Hot Air post](#) on Jindal's big win on Saturday.

Say, did you hear about the big election yesterday? Well, if you're like the majority of the country, you probably weren't even aware anyone was voting on Saturday. But for the politically addicted, you might have known that Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal was up for another term. So... how did that work out for him? [Not too shabby.](#) ...

Writing in the Las Vegas paper, [Sherman Frederick](#) says Harry Reid is nuts.

Harry Reid is showing up the Occupy Wall Street protesters. He takes crazy talk to a whole new level.

Last week, the bard of Searchlight stood on the floor of the U.S. Senate. In front of C-SPAN and everybody, he said -- and I'm not making this up -- "It's very clear that private-sector jobs are doing just fine. It's the public-sector jobs where we've lost huge numbers."

And all the good people of Nevada, along with all the wild horses, cattle, ground squirrels and sheep, lifted their heads and said: "Is Harry Reid out of his ever-loving mind?"

Nevada's economy has been missing for so long it's pictured on the side of milk cartons. And free-spending, deficit-hiking Harry Reid is listed as the No. 1 suspect.

When Harry tells the nation to "go left" economically, Nevadans instinctively lean to the right.

If being wrong were an art, Harry Reid's work would be on display at the Louvre. ...

The great thinkers of Washington have dealt us another mess; this time student loans. [NY Post](#) has the story.

Three years after the housing-market meltdown, a college education may be the next part of the American Dream to turn into a nightmare.

For the first time, Americans owe more on their student loans than they do on their credit-card bills, with a tally that could soon top \$1 trillion -- leaving millions of Americans with a crushing debt burden at a time when decent-paying jobs are scarce.

"I've paid on my student loans, but I owe just as much as when I started," says Laura Pounders, 56, who went back to college 16 years ago in hopes of securing a higher-paying job than the two she had.

"It makes me cringe when I hear politicians say we need people to go to college. Why? So you can accrue \$50,000 in debt and get a job that pays \$8 an hour? I'm going to die with this debt."

John Smith, 31, of Brooklyn, works part time at a Trader Joe's because he hasn't found work in his field for over a year, despite having a master's degree. He has about \$45,000 in student loan debt. His girlfriend, Meropi Peponides, 27, a graduate student at Columbia University, will have over \$50,000 by the time she graduates. ...

[Patrick Michaels](#) writes about the green energy crack-up.

History — of the U.S., Europe, the U.K. and its former dominions — repeatedly shows that environmental protection is a luxury good. When per-capita income reaches some threshold, the citizenry tire of opaque air and sleazy waters, various agencies and permanent bureaucracies sprout, and, as long as times are good, regulation is good.

Our friends in the U.K. and Europe are especially green. Just hop off the plane in London and pick up the papers. Global warming is everywhere, and, for decades, the religion's been that carbon dioxide reductions are fine, virtuous, and they're going to make everyone rich. I have a social security system I would like to sell them.

This all splatters to a halt when economies go south. And the crash can be especially jarring if greenness is one of the causes. Thanks in no small part to the debacle in Europe, in a very few recent weeks, we have witnessed the great green crack-up.

Admittedly, the first glimmers showed up a couple of years ago in Spain, which suffered the malady of economic miasma brought on by environmental populism. ...

Because he is such a good writer, and because the embarrassing quotes from Jackie were so off-the-wall, we have [Andrew Ferguson's](#) take on the latest from the Kennedy BS machine.

Is there a more empathetic person in the world than Diane Sawyer, the top newsreader at ABC TV? I'm sure there must be—around seven billion of them, probably. But is there anyone who looks more empathetic than Diane Sawyer? Not a chance. When she peers at you through the camera she has the look of someone who's just seen your lab results and is trying to figure out how to break the bad news. It must be terribly unnerving to see it close up, firsthand, in person—especially while she's sitting next to you on a couch, no less.

I give Caroline Kennedy a lot of credit for retaining her composure with those two moist peepers trained in on her. This was during a long interview conducted for a two-hour TV special that ABC aired September 13 called Jacqueline Kennedy: In Her Own Words. (Diane Sawyer told us the proper pronunciation of Mrs. Kennedy's first name is "Zsock-leen," though everybody called her Jackie, which must have made life less embarrassing.) The special was the trumpet blast alerting the nation to the publication of another product of the Kennedy apparat, Jacqueline Kennedy: Historic Conversations on Life with John F. Kennedy. The book consists of previously unheard interviews Mrs. Kennedy gave Arthur Schlesinger in early 1964—eight CDs' worth.

Every time you think that the Kennedy apparat is dead, there's some new burst of publicity that makes you realize it's still humming, or at least wheezing. These guys know how to move units. Here in the twenty-first century, in keeping with contemporary "best practices," a good deal of the work previously done by Kennedy toadies—court historians, speechwriters, bagmen, PR wizards—has been outsourced, and ABC is one of the chief contractors. For 36 hours the network became the Zsock-leen Channel, from Good Morning America to Nightline, and a week later, Historic Conversations was the bestselling book in the country.

The apparat continues work begun by the patriarch, Joe Kennedy, in the 1930s. One of his first moves was to hire Hollywood cinematographers to record the everyday doings (staged) of his toothy and, in a few cases, toothsome children, in Technicolor, on 35mm film. The scenes were then inventoried and cross-tabulated by activity and Kennedy kid—Touch Football w/Eunice, Part xxxvii; Touch Football w/Eunice, Part xxxviii—and stored in a flameproof warehouse in the Bronx. It was destroyed by fire, and the film canisters went up with it. That damn Kennedy curse.

The photographers kept at it, needless to say, and the stills and movies produced over the course of half a century are essential to the Kennedy mystique.

NY Times

The Ugliness Started With Bork

by Joe Nocera

On Oct. 23, 1987 — 24 years ago on Sunday — Robert Bork’s nomination to the Supreme Court was voted down by the Senate. All but two Democrats voted “nay.”

The rejection of a Supreme Court nominee is unusual but not unheard of (see [Clement Haynsworth Jr.](#)). But rarely has a failed nominee had the pedigree — and intellectual firepower — of Bork. He had been a law professor at Yale, the solicitor general of the United States and, at the time Ronald Reagan tapped him for the court, a federal appeals court judge.

Moreover, Bork was a legal intellectual, a proponent of original intent and judicial restraint. The task of the judge, he once wrote, is “to discern how the framers’ values, defined in the context of the world they knew, apply to the world we know.” He said that *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion, was a “wholly unjustifiable judicial usurpation” of authority that belonged to the states, that the court’s recent rulings on affirmative action were problematic and that the First Amendment didn’t apply to pornography.

Whatever you think of these views, they cannot be fairly characterized as extreme; Ruth Bader Ginsburg, among many others, has questioned the rationale offered by the court to justify *Roe v. Wade*. Nor was Bork himself an extremist. He was a strongly opinionated, somewhat pugnacious, deeply conservative judge. (At 84 today, he hasn’t mellowed much either, to judge from [an interview he recently gave Newsweek](#).)

I bring up Bork not only because Sunday is a convenient anniversary. His nomination battle is also a reminder that our poisoned politics is not just about Republicans behaving badly, as many Democrats and their liberal allies have convinced themselves. Democrats can be — and have been — every bit as obstructionist, mean-spirited and unfair.

I’ll take it one step further. The Bork fight, in some ways, was the beginning of the end of civil discourse in politics. For years afterward, conservatives seethed at the “systematic demonization” of Bork, recalls [Clint Bolick](#), a longtime conservative legal activist. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* [coined the angry verb](#) “to bork,” which meant to destroy a nominee by whatever means necessary. When Republicans borked the Democratic House Speaker Jim Wright less than two years later, there wasn’t a trace of remorse, not after what the Democrats had done to Bork. The anger between Democrats and Republicans, the unwillingness to work together, the profound mistrust — the line from Bork to today’s ugly politics is a straight one.

It is, to be sure, completely understandable that the Democrats wanted to keep Bork off the court. [Lewis Powell](#), the great moderate, was stepping down, which would be leaving the court evenly divided between conservatives and liberals. There was tremendous fear that if Bork were confirmed, he would swing the court to the conservatives and important liberal victories would be overturned — starting with *Roe v. Wade*.

But liberals couldn’t just come out and say that. “If this were carried out as an internal Senate debate,” Ann Lewis, the Democratic activist, would later acknowledge, “we would have deep and thoughtful discussions about the Constitution, and then we would lose.” So, instead, the

Democrats sought to portray Bork as “a right-wing loony,” to use a phrase in a memo written by [the Advocacy Institute](#), a liberal lobby group.

The character assassination began the day Bork was nominated, when Ted Kennedy [gave a fiery speech](#) describing “Robert Bork’s America” as a place “in which women would be forced into back-alley abortions, blacks would sit at segregated lunch counters,” and so on. It continued until the day the nomination was voted down; one ad, for instance, claimed, absurdly, that Bork wanted to give “women workers the choice between sterilization and their job.”

Conservatives were stunned by the relentlessness — and the essential unfairness — of the attacks. But the truth is that many of the liberals fighting the nomination also knew they were unfair. That same Advocacy Institute memo noted that, “Like it or not, Bork falls (perhaps barely) at the borderline of respectability.” It didn’t matter. He had to be portrayed “as an extreme ideological activist.” The ends were used to justify some truly despicable means.

Today, of course, the court has a conservative majority, and liberal victories are, indeed, being overturned. Interestingly, Bolick says Bork’s beliefs would have made him a restraining force. Theodore Olson, who served as solicitor general under George W. Bush, also pointed out that after Bork, nominees would scarcely acknowledge that they had rich and nuanced judicial philosophies for fear of giving ammunition to the other side. Those philosophies would be unveiled only after they were on the court.

Mostly, though, the point remains this: The next time a liberal asks why Republicans are so intransigent, you might suggest that the answer lies in the mirror.

Hot Air

[Jindal: Four. More. Years](#)

by Jazz Shaw

Say, did you hear about the big election yesterday? Well, if you’re like the majority of the country, you probably weren’t even aware anyone was voting on Saturday. But for the politically addicted, you might have known that Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal was up for another term. So... how did that work out for him? [Not too shabby](#).

Bobby Jindal, a Republican who championed stronger ethics laws in his first term as Louisiana governor, won re-election against nine other candidates in an open primary, according to the Associated Press.

Jindal earned 65.8 percent of the vote in yesterday’s ballot, negating the need for a November general election, according to the AP, which declared him the winner. Tara Hollis, a Democrat and schoolteacher making her first bid for public office, came in second with 17.9 percent of the vote, with 100 percent of precincts reporting.

Jindal, 40, is the first Indian-American governor in the nation. He was elected on promises to change the state’s reputation as a nest for corruption. Within months of taking office, he won approval for laws prohibiting public officials from holding state contracts and requiring them to disclose information about their personal finances.

Owing to Louisiana's somewhat unusual election laws, the primary election in this case automatically becomes the general election. Had some other candidate done better, leaving Jindal with only a plurality victory, they would have squared off again in November. As things stand, the race is over and Jindal secures four more years in office.

Not terribly surprising, since his latest poll numbers show him with a 63% approval rating. (A number which pretty much any elected official in the nation should envy.) His policies of reducing taxes and shifting government jobs to the private sector have brought Louisiana's unemployment rate down to just over 7%, well below the national average. If we weren't still locked out of a lot of energy jobs in the Gulf, he could conceivably gotten it down closer to five. (Thanks, EPA!)

This will once again fuel speculation of either a future presidential run for Jindal, ([birther nonsense](#) notwithstanding) or even talk of a VP slot for him next year. But for now, it looks like Jindal is content doing the best job he can for Louisiana. And a fine job it's been thus far by all appearances. Besides... the guy is only 40 years old. He's got plenty of time to ponder his options.

Las Vegas Review-Journal **[Has Harry Reid lost his mind?](#)**

by Sherman Frederick

Harry Reid is showing up the Occupy Wall Street protesters. He takes crazy talk to a whole new level.

Last week, the bard of Searchlight stood on the floor of the U.S. Senate. In front of C-SPAN and everybody, he said -- and I'm not making this up -- "It's very clear that private-sector jobs are doing just fine. It's the public-sector jobs where we've lost huge numbers."

And all the good people of Nevada, along with all the wild horses, cattle, ground squirrels and sheep, lifted their heads and said: "Is Harry Reid out of his ever-loving mind?"

Nevada's economy has been missing for so long it's pictured on the side of milk cartons. And free-spending, deficit-hiking Harry Reid is listed as the No. 1 suspect.

When Harry tells the nation to "go left" economically, Nevadans instinctively lean to the right.

If being wrong were an art, Harry Reid's work would be on display at the Louvre.

One can only wonder just where in his home state Sen. Reid sees the private sector doing "just fine."

Has he been to the suburbs of Las Vegas and seen ground zero of the national housing bubble? It was a bubble caused in large measure by Sen. Reid and his Democratic Party, with special credit to his policy cohorts, Sen. Chris Dodd and Rep. Barney Frank.

Has Harry stood at the dark northern edge of the Strip and seen the shuttered casinos, businesses and partially built hotels headed for implosion instead of opening?

Has he driven down Sahara Avenue between Interstate 15 and the Las Vegas Beltway, one of the main commerce corridors in the city? Closed and abandoned businesses sit idle in testament to Washington's mishandling of the economy. It is not lost on Nevadans that our economic policy failures span both Republican and Democratic presidents, but coincide exactly with Sen. Reid's time in charge of the U.S. Senate.

No, the private sector is far from fine.

Anecdotally, Harry is wrong.

Intuitively, Harry is wrong.

Statistically, Harry is wrong.

In the two years Reid and President Obama have controlled Washington, government jobs have increased 13.5 percent to 2.1 million.

During that same time, 2.5 million private-sector jobs were lost.

The unemployment rate in Las Vegas is 13.6 percent. The national unemployment rate hangs at 9.1 percent. But the unemployment rate for government workers sits at a mere 4.7 percent, the lowest of any category of worker.

In the face of all this, Reid says the answer is to pass a Senate bill called the Teachers and First Responders Back to Work Act. It would spend \$35 billion Washington doesn't have and allegedly "save or create" 400,000 jobs for unionized teachers, police officers and firefighters.

Let's just call that what it is: Nothing but the same old government-uber-alles program designed to waste taxpayer money scratching the backs of unions.

The formula doesn't work. It didn't work for FDR, it didn't work for Obama in 2009 when we spent a trillion dollars on "shovel ready" government jobs, and it won't work in 2011.

This isn't good economic policy. This is a politically inspired, short-term giveaway that creates few sustainable jobs. And it's being done at the expense of the real issue: the need to spur private-sector job creation.

A better name for the legislation is the More Dues For Unions Act. It failed to pass. That's a good thing.

But because Harry Reid's perception that the private sector is "doing fine" remains, we're far from a solution.

If you don't think you have a problem, you can't fix it.

That's how crazy works.

NY Post

[\\$1 trillion in student loan debt sparks furor](#)

by Janet Whitman

Three years after the housing-market meltdown, a college education may be the next part of the American Dream to turn into a nightmare.

For the first time, Americans owe more on their student loans than they do on their credit-card bills, with a tally that could soon top \$1 trillion -- leaving millions of Americans with a crushing debt burden at a time when decent-paying jobs are scarce.

"I've paid on my student loans, but I owe just as much as when I started," says Laura Pounders, 56, who went back to college 16 years ago in hopes of securing a higher-paying job than the two she had.

"It makes me cringe when I hear politicians say we need people to go to college. Why? So you can accrue \$50,000 in debt and get a job that pays \$8 an hour? I'm going to die with this debt."

John Smith, 31, of Brooklyn, works part time at a Trader Joe's because he hasn't found work in his field for over a year, despite having a master's degree. He has about \$45,000 in student loan debt. His girlfriend, Meropi Peponides, 27, a graduate student at Columbia University, will have over \$50,000 by the time she graduates.

"I don't know in the end what exactly this will achieve, if anything. But if it makes people wake up just a little bit, it's worth it," Peponides said. "The potential is huge. That's why I'm here. I felt the potential somehow."

Smith said he has sent out about 200 resumes in his search. He's looking mainly for work with nonprofit organizations. "The jobs that I've been applying for are all entry level jobs in my career field. I don't think I'm shooting for the stars trying to get those jobs." Smith said, noting that five years ago, before grad school, he was able to get work at that level.

He was carrying a sign that said, "I am the 99 percent," a slogan that resonated with him. "It's true," Smith said. "I am one of the many people that are having a lot of trouble finding ways to make it through things right now."

With college-tuition fees skyrocketing, student-loan debt has more than quadrupled over the past decade.

Much of that money has been handed out with even fewer checks and balances than the easy home loans that led to the 2008 housing-market implosion -- a situation that some say has created a ticking time bomb.

Just as Americans bought houses with the expectation that prices would keep going higher, they got loans to pay ever-increasing tuition rates based on the expectation the college degrees were passports to a middle-class life that would easily allow them to pay off the debt.

“The massive burden of student loans is already dragging on the rest of the economy,” says Glenn Harlan Reynolds, a University of Tennessee professor whose “Instapundit” blog highlights a looming higher education bubble that is set to burst.

Unlike home-mortgage holders who can get a fresh start by simply walking away, student-loan borrowers don’t have that luxury.

“You can’t get rid of student-loan debt in bankruptcy,” says Andrew Gillen, research director at the Center for College Affordability and Productivity. “It pretty much follows you to your grave.”

For every student who defaults on a loan, at least two more are behind on their payments. Only 37 percent of borrowers who started repaying their loans in 2005 are able to pay them back fully on time, a recent report from the Institute for Higher Education Policy shows.

“The problem isn’t going away and is getting exponentially worse by the day,” says Robert Applebaum, a Staten Island lawyer who started a petition urging the government to forgive student-loan debt in a giant bailout that would stimulate the economy.

“People are underwater on their student loans, just like they’re underwater on their mortgages. The degrees aren’t worth what people paid for them, and it’s affecting the whole economy. I can’t tell you how many people have told me they’re putting off starting families and buying cars.”

Since launching his Forgive Student Loan Debt petition six weeks ago, Applebaum has attracted more than 600,000 signatures from supporters.

The fallout from the tuition bubble could have a profound effect on the higher-education system, where some colleges have spent staggering amounts on state-of-the-art labs, luxurious residence halls and giant football stadiums to woo prospective students.

“Back in the day, education was something that was supposed to be good in its own right,” says Robert B. Smith, a Boston-based higher-education lawyer with LeClairRyan.

“But do we want to spend \$250,000 to send Johnny to college so he can study Renaissance poetry and become a barista at Starbucks, or send Sally so she can be a bartender at the latest club?” Smith added

Forbes

[The Great Green Energy Crack-Up](#)

by Patrick Michaels



History — of the U.S., Europe, the U.K. and its former dominions — repeatedly shows that environmental protection is a luxury good. When per-capita income reaches some threshold, the citizenry tire of opaque air and sleazy waters, various agencies and permanent bureaucracies sprout, and, as long as times are good, regulation is good.

Our friends in the U.K. and Europe are especially green. Just hop off the plane in London and pick up the papers. Global warming is everywhere, and, for decades, the religion's been that carbon dioxide reductions are fine, virtuous, and they're going to make everyone rich. I have a social security system I would like to sell them.

This all splatters to a halt when economies go south. And the crash can be especially jarring if greenness is one of the causes. Thanks in no small part to the debacle in Europe, in a very few recent weeks, we have witnessed the great green crack-up.

Admittedly, the first glimmers showed up a couple of years ago in Spain, which suffered the malady of economic miasma brought on by environmental populism. The government — which our president cited as his environmental role model in his last presidential bid — sought to buy support with outrageous subsidies, in the form of power purchases, to anyone who put a solar panel on his roof in sunny Seville. The government spent much more than it took in, sold bonds it couldn't back, and pretty soon your portfolio is going to pay the price.

(I'm not so bullish on the notion that the president is going to be touting Spain and solar power this time around).

The United Kingdom followed suit, but instead required that electric utilities pay the price, which is far more expensive than their coal (or gas) power. As occurred in Spain, people know a good handout when they see one and, just last month, there were over 15,000 new installations.

Nevermind that the U.K. is one of the cloudiest nations on earth — we're talking Prince Charles here.

At the same time, consumers got an extra bill to support wind farms that, because of the inconstancy of the wind, operate at 25% of their capacity (figure from the British Wind Energy Association) or 8% (according to E.on, a large operator of UK wind farms).

Guess what? Electricity prices have gone through the roof. The average U.K. household bill is a tad under \$200 per month, and so the thermostat goes down. It's pretty chilly there for much of the year, and a cold house has consequences. A study just came out today on the health costs of what they call "fuel poverty", commissioned by the Energy and Climate Change Secretary (don't we need one of those?), Chris Huhne. Bottom line: the chill from green taxes is now killing more Brits per year than car crashes.

London has suddenly awoken to the costs of indiscriminate greenness and is proposing to reduce the solar subsidies and — this is big — now threatens the multibillion dollar subsidies for its massive (and massively ugly) wind power scam.

That's just the tip of the iceberg that the green Titanic has run into. Just this week:

- Spain announced a 40% reduction in its wind power subsidy.

- The European Commission’s energy department is questioning the wisdom of its go-it-alone global warming policies, citing loss of economic competitiveness.
- The British government pulled the plug on its budget-bending carbon capture and storage facility. That’s where carbon dioxide from the combustion of coal is pulled out of the exhaust and sent back into the ocean floor. It sounds expensive and fanciful, and it is.
- Japan announced it is reconsidering its plan to cut carbon dioxide by 25% in the next 8 years. Minister Nobutani, of the Global Environmental Affairs Office stated that “Japan’s wealth has been draining out” in its attempt to meet the target.
- The price of carbon credits—what you buy as a “permit” to emit—has dropped off the table because the Greek and Italian (and soon, Spanish) crises are crashing the European economy. No one needs to buy a permit to emit carbon dioxide when the factory is down.

This last one has an additional feedback: by dropping the price of permits, there’s little incentive to invest in wind and solar, from whom the permits can be bought.

And so, as history teaches us, when times are good, green is great, and when economies crash, green cracks up.

Weekly Standard

[The Kennedy apparat swings into action again.](#)

by Andrew Ferguson

Is there a more empathetic person in the world than Diane Sawyer, the top newsreader at ABC TV? I’m sure there must be—around seven billion of them, probably. But is there anyone who *looks* more empathetic than Diane Sawyer? Not a chance. When she peers at you through the camera she has the look of someone who’s just seen your lab results and is trying to figure out how to break the bad news. It must be terribly unnerving to see it close up, firsthand, in person—especially while she’s sitting next to you on a couch, no less.

I give Caroline Kennedy a lot of credit for retaining her composure with those two moist peepers trained in on her. This was during a long interview conducted for a two-hour TV special that ABC aired September 13 called *Jacqueline Kennedy: In Her Own Words*. (Diane Sawyer told us the proper pronunciation of Mrs. Kennedy’s first name is “Zsock-leen,” though everybody called her Jackie, which must have made life less embarrassing.) The special was the trumpet blast alerting the nation to the publication of another product of the Kennedy apparat, *Jacqueline Kennedy: Historic Conversations on Life with John F. Kennedy*. The book consists of previously unheard interviews Mrs. Kennedy gave Arthur Schlesinger in early 1964—eight CDs’ worth.

Every time you think that the Kennedy apparat is dead, there’s some new burst of publicity that makes you realize it’s still humming, or at least wheezing. These guys know how to move units. Here in the twenty-first century, in keeping with contemporary “best practices,” a good deal of the work previously done by Kennedy toadies—court historians, speechwriters, bagmen, PR wizards—has been outsourced, and ABC is one of the chief contractors. For 36 hours the network became the Zsock-leen Channel, from *Good Morning America* to *Nightline*, and a week later, *Historic Conversations* was the bestselling book in the country.

The apparatus continues work begun by the patriarch, Joe Kennedy, in the 1930s. One of his first moves was to hire Hollywood cinematographers to record the everyday doings (staged) of his toothy and, in a few cases, toothsome children, in Technicolor, on 35mm film. The scenes were then inventoried and cross-tabulated by activity and Kennedy kid—*Touch Football w/Eunice, Part xxxvii*; *Touch Football w/Eunice, Part xxxviii*—and stored in a flameproof warehouse in the Bronx. It was destroyed by fire, and the film canisters went up with it. That damn Kennedy curse.

The photographers kept at it, needless to say, and the stills and movies produced over the course of half a century are essential to the Kennedy mystique. It's as if Joe foresaw that future generations of his family were going to have to seduce a population that was quickly sliding into a post-literate age. But he didn't ignore the written word, or the potential that books carry to turn myth into fact. In 1940, old Joe hired the *New York Times* columnist Arthur Krock to "edit" Jack Kennedy's senior thesis from Harvard, which was published under the title *Why England Slept*. It became an instant bestseller, after Joe instantly, and quietly, bought up 30,000 copies. The tradition of improbable bestsellers has continued even up to Caroline, who made a tremendous success a decade ago with a book called *The Best Loved Poems of Jacqueline Kennedy-Onassis*—not poems written by her mother; just poems sacralized into objects of veneration by the mere fact of her mother's liking them.

This new campaign—the book itself and its flogging on ABC—is slightly different from past Kennedy productions. Yes, there were the usual iterations of the Kennedy myth: lots of pictures and film of the photogenic family; vast overstatements about the political importance of the Kennedy administration and the cultural importance of Jack and Jackie (Zsock-ee?), along with dewy phrasemaking from Diane Sawyer about their "cultural claim to the American century" and how the newly released taped interviews "held the promise of a brand new century." (This is chronologically confusing, but you get the idea.)

In the normal course of the apparatus's work, elevating the Kennedys requires the denigration of the Eisenhowers, the 1950s, and the supposed dullness of the country that the Kennedys rescued us from—"our country of suburbs and Ozzie and Harriet, poodle skirts and one kind of cheese," as Diane Sawyer oddly put it, while the screen showed a golden brick of Velveeta. Jackie by contrast wore clothes by designers who would have gone into a dead faint at the sight of a poodle skirt. When the Kennedys moved in, added the court historian Michael Beschloss, "we had a White House that looked like a bad convention hotel." The Kennedys brought French cuisine to the White House, Diane Sawyer added. "No more Eisenhower cheese sauce and cole slaw. . . . In our middle-class nation, it wasn't easy for us to fathom this first lady." Jackie herself is heard complaining about the marks that Ike's golf shoes left in the flooring. Dwight Eisenhower, lumbering ox.

On the tapes Mrs. Kennedy makes a few snippy comments about Mamie Eisenhower, but not only about Mamie, and here's where the defensiveness proved necessary. While on the screen those sumptuous Kennedy images swim by, you can hear the protective tone in the voices of the apparatus.

"She helped America come of age," Beschloss said.

"She finds her voice," Diane Sawyer continued. "And she arguably changes history, global history, for America in the way she deals with foreign leaders because she's a very effective [advocate] of a very different kind of politics. And she gets it done."

Thank heavens for that word “arguably,” for without it Diane Sawyer’s statement would be thought self-evidently absurd by—well, by anyone who knows anything about anything. This is extravagant even according to the standards of the apparatus. But overstatement is necessary because the Jackie that Schlesinger spoke to back in 1964, and that we hear on the tapes, is not at all someone concerned with changing global history or introducing a new kind of politics.

The tapes make clear that Mrs. Kennedy’s politics were of the old kind. She boasts that she gets all of her political opinions from her husband. “Why wouldn’t I?” she asks. He was the professional politician, not her. “His opinions were the best.” She’s annoyed at women who assert themselves in the world of politics, like Madame Nhu in South Vietnam or Clare Boothe Luce closer to home. “Why are these women like her and Clare Luce, who both obviously are attractive to men, why are they—why do they have this queer thing for power?” And then, whispering to Schlesinger, she answers her own question: “I wouldn’t be surprised if they were lesbians.”

She says she never bothered her husband with questions about world affairs, except for one occasion when she inquired about Vietnam and got an annoyed dismissal: “Don’t remind me of that all over again.” At one point during the White House years she asked to receive intelligence reports but found they made her “bored” and depressed. “I stopped reading all those briefings and things, because I didn’t want to have to worry about anything.” Other public figures she assesses in entirely personal terms, more according to their effect on her husband’s public fortunes than anything else.

“I suppose women are terribly emotional,” she says, “and you never want to speak to anyone again who said something mean against your husband.”

Her disdain for Martin Luther King has been widely broadcast in the last few weeks. She calls him “really a tricky person.” After she was told about the infamous FBI tapes recording an orgy arranged for (and perhaps by) King in a Washington hotel, she remarked, “I just can’t see a picture of Martin Luther King without thinking, you know, that man’s terrible.” (She adds that when Jack heard about the tape, he said only, “Oh, well.” “He would never judge anyone in any sort of way,” she says. Certainly not in *that* way.) In a footnote to Mrs. Kennedy’s remark, Beschloss, who edited the transcripts for the book, writes: “The FBI tape to which Mrs. Kennedy refers was of King and his colleagues relaxing at the Willard Hotel”—a comical euphemism, but a good example of how the apparatus cushions the unpleasant facts of history.

Mrs. Kennedy’s personal approach carried over into diplomacy. Meeting world leaders, Diane Sawyer said, “she was able to analyze and see with clinical detachment what their strengths and weaknesses were.” But the tapes themselves show someone with rather different interests. When, at dinner, Nikita Khrushchev tried to recite some statistics about wheat production in the Ukraine, she demurred. “And I said, ‘Oh, Mr. Chairman President, don’t bore me with that,’ □” trying to draw the conversation back to Ukrainian folk dancing. She disliked de Gaulle because he was too haughty. (Who knew?) *Clinical* isn’t the word for her appraisal of Indira Gandhi either. “She is a real prune—bitter, kind of pushy, horrible woman. You know, I just don’t like her a bit. It always looks like she’s been sucking a lemon.”

The revelation of these taped remarks, and many more like them, has been treated as though they were somehow scandalous, an affront to our modern, progressive sensibility. And maybe they are. But here’s the thing: Mrs. Kennedy was right. Indira Gandhi was an old prune! Madame Nhu was power-crazed! And Martin Luther King—most scandalous of all—he was

tricky, certainly from the vantage of mulish politicians, like John Kennedy, whom he tried to manipulate into doing the right thing. Martin Luther King was a pain in the neck, by profession. If he's become something grander in death it's partly because he was so irritating to powerful men while he was alive. His beatification has obscured the workaday political realities he lived with, as well as his personal failings as a husband, none of which diminish his greatness as a symbol or a man. So they should stop worrying.

Symbols are what the apparat is in the business of preserving, which accounts for the tone offered by Diane Sawyer and Caroline and the crew at ABC, by turns disbelieving, apologetic, and exculpatory. *Who you gonna believe—us or your lyin' ears?* They're worried we'll pick up the wrong symbol: not "a woman absolutely in her own right," as Sawyer said, but a wife with an abiding devotion to her husband and his work and a strong interest in clothes, personalities, history, and interior decoration. Those interests led her to sturdy achievements—restoring the White House with original artifacts, preserving Lafayette Square and other landmarks from hideous, 1960s-era urban development. She was a thoroughly admirable woman, just not in the way the apparat would have liked her to be.

On *Good Morning America*, George Stephanopoulos selected one quote in particular: "I think women should never be in politics. We're just not suited for it."

He turned, incredulous, to Caro-line. "That's your *mom*?"

"She would have winced," Caroline assured us later.

The tapes offer "the private history we never thought we'd learn," Diane Sawyer said, "the voice we never thought we'd hear." She looked, as always, as if she might cry, but I think maybe this time she meant it.



With Gaddafi gone, Libya is being
taken over by Islamic extremists
who want to impose Sharia Law.
Thanks a lot!!

Aw, ... don't
mention it!

