Backwater
To the editors:
How could race relations in so conservative a state as Texas be less rancorous than in liberal, progressive California? Why has there been a backlash against immigration in enlightened California but not in reactionary Texas? For Benjamin Soskin, the solution to this seeming paradox is simple: Texas is not as conservative as the stereotype might suggest ("Lone Star Joining," September 18). Let me offer an alternative hypothesis: California's high levels of public spending and taxes fuel nativism and exacerbate racial tensions.

In 1997, a household in Los Angeles with $50,000 in income could expect to pay $4,222 in state and local taxes. For households with $75,000, the tax bill was $7,526. By comparison, families in Houston with equivalent incomes paid between $2,453 and $3,898. Arguably, these taxes buy Californians more in public amenities and services. They also buy lots of political patronage and pork. With so much money at stake, disputes over spending between politicians from different ethnic communities are more likely to resonate beyond the confines of the statehouse.

Proposition 187 provides the best example of how lavish public spending pits different ethnic groups against each other. The measure passed because Californians' growing resentment of immigrants is fueled by the high cost of providing them with education, health care, and welfare. No such measure is likely here—Texas does not associate immigrants with higher taxes or fear the state is becoming a welfare magnet. Texas remains a very conservative place—the greater tolerance and ethnic harmony Soskin found is a byproduct of its failure to adopt California's "progressive" style of politics.

Michael Ben-Gad
Assistant Professor of Economics
University of Houston
Houston, Texas

losing by only about half a percentage point, I, and a lot of other disgruntled McCarthy and Robert Kennedy supporters, helped elect Richard Nixon, the only politician in America who had the mad tenacity to keep the Vietnam War going for another six years. That, the conservative Supreme Court still with us today, Watergate, and the general poisoning of American politics weigh heavily on those of us who stubbornly hold on to our grudges and refused to grit our teeth and support Humphrey. The Naderites should think long and hard about this lesson before casting their votes this year.

Doug Weiskoff
Cincinnati, Ohio

Code words
To the editors:
Sarah Wildman's recent story "Jewish Appeal" (September 18) incorrectly cited the Center for Responsive Politics as the source of research we did not do. Wildman wrote: "According to the Center for Responsive Politics, Jews account for more than one-third of the DNC's largest individual donors ($100,000 and above), based on reports released by the Federal Election Commission last month."

In fact, we made the list of top Democratic National Committee donors available to Wildman, and she's the one who figured out who was Jewish and who wasn't. We're not in the business of ethnic or religious coding of campaign contributors, nor will we ever be.

Larry Makinson
Executive Director
Center for Responsive Politics
Washington, D.C.

Sarah Wildman replies:
Larry Makinson is correct. The Center for Responsive Politics (CRP) provided me with the raw data—the DNC's list of top donors—and I investigated who on that list was Jewish. I did not mean to imply that CRP was involved in "coding" the ethnic backgrounds of political donors.

Minority leader
To the editors:
In your September 18 Notebook, you characterized as 'pretty over-the-top praise' a statement by Adam Clymer in The New York Times of August 11, 1996: "Probably not since Senator Everett Dirksen and Representative William McCulloch provided a critical balance in getting civil rights bills passed in the 1960s has any member of the congressional minority influenced the agenda as much as Edward M. Kennedy has this year." But Clymer