

## C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

**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 Soskis, 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 \$2,433 and \$3,888. 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.

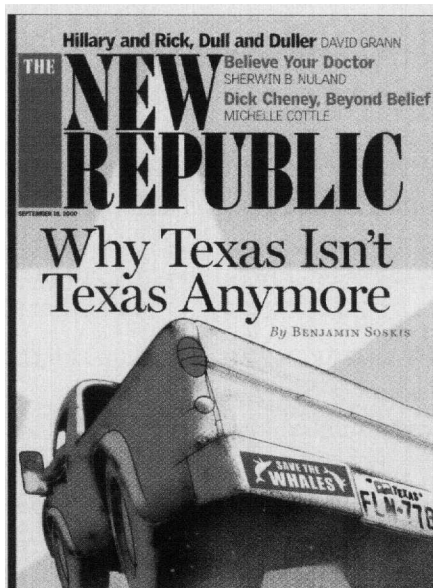
Proposition 187 provides the best example of how lavish public spending pits different ethnic groups against each other. The measure passed because Californians' growing resentment of immigrants is fueled by the high cost of providing them with education, health care, and welfare. No such measure is likely here—Texans do 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 Soskis found is a by-product of its failure to adopt California's "progressive" style of politics.

MICHAEL BEN-GAD  
*Assistant Professor of Economics*  
*University of Houston*  
*Houston, Texas*

**Half empty**

TO THE EDITORS:

Paul Berman's "Left Behind" is a reminder of one of the worst features of our political system and why reformers like myself are with Ralph Nader (September 18). We Nader supporters are supposed to switch to Al Gore, according to Berman, not because without us George W. Bush might win but because without us Gore might not get more than 50 percent of the vote. In most of the world's democracies, no party gets 50 percent, because there are multiple parties. Parties other than the



two biggest share power, thanks to a system of proportional representation. But in America, Berman tells us, winning isn't enough. The winner must have 50 percent of the vote.

If we cast our votes to put Gore over the top, Berman claims, we'd be giving Gore a nice "left-wing boost." No: Gore would interpret his victory as a "mandate" for more of the incoherent mélange of policies Clinton has given us for almost eight years. Those of us who want America to start acting like a mature advanced democracy—with proportional representation, public campaign financing, single-payer health insurance, and so forth—know that a vote for Gore isn't a vote for any of those things. A vote for Nader is.

MATTHEW SHUGART  
*Professor of Political Science*  
*Graduate School of International*  
*Relations and Pacific Studies*  
*University of California, San Diego*  
*La Jolla, California*

TO THE EDITORS:

I was glad to see, at last, the phenomenon of the Nader voters addressed and dealt with as a political consequence. Paul Berman is correct in stating that, even if Al Gore wins the election, a 3 to 5 percent vote for Ralph Nader may deny the vice president a clear mandate to present a progressive agenda as president. In the worst case, it could even result in the election of George W. Bush, which would mean there would be no progressive agenda at all in America for years to come.

Berman took me back to the painful memory of my first vote, in 1968, when I wrote in Eugene McCarthy's name for president rather than vote for Hubert Humphrey. Since Humphrey ended up

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 held 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 WEISKOPF  
*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