

OCEANA REVISITED
A Political Junkie Searches for a Solution to the
Politics of "Mutually Assured Destruction"

Presented at the Philosophical Club of Cleveland, November 22nd, 1994

By
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I INTRODUCTION

Ten years ago, on October 15, 1984, I delivered my "maiden" paper to the Club on the topic of "Subjects Your Mother Told You Nice People Never Discuss: Politics, Sex, and Religion 1984."

In that paper I compared the political year 1984 with its literary counterpart and came up with some sobering trends, among them: first, was the growing political influence of the "Religious Right"--which then appeared intent upon enlisting the power of government to establish a social and political orthodoxy, greatly at odds with our pluralistic tradition; second, the simplistic appeal of politicians, and especially Ronald Reagan, to the nostalgic images of another day--an appeal based not on the demographic and social reality of the 1980s, but on those of the fifties--an appeal which, paradoxically, resulted in the overwhelming, bi-partisan, popularity of the President despite widespread disagreement with almost his entire political agenda; third, shifts in population, jobs, and corresponding political influence from city to suburb and from North and East to South and West further enlarging the gap between political rhetoric and the stark realities of the 80s; and fourth, the post-Watergate media's search for scandal in public life and especially in the private lives of public figures, undermining public confidence in politicians and public institutions and degrading the entire concept of protected privacy itself.

In sum, the fictional and calendar 1984 bore more than a passing resemblance to one another. Code words such as "nuclear family" and "traditional values" formed a kind of "Newspeak" for the intolerance of diversity and especially resentment of the expanding role of women. The public's separation from its beliefs on the issues turned President Reagan into a kind of pied piper for the Religious Right and its social agenda, threatening further to erode individual privacy and personal autonomy. Moreover, writers such as Francis Allen reminded us that there was not a fundamental difference between a society in which the "telescreen" cannot be turned off and one in which persons who, because of "cultural constraints, loneliness, apathy, and a diminished sense of personhood" can never bring themselves to turn off the television--and between a society having government Newspeak and one in which a good portion of the population has not acquired sufficient language skills to defend themselves "against the inroads of political propaganda and cultural imperatives into their private worlds."

While these were my observations and fears, I really couldn't bring myself to believe that the American public would throw in with this kind of "Moral McCarthyism" (as it was characterized by Walter Mondale), the view, as expressed by Rev. Jerry Falwell that Reagan and Bush were "God's instruments for rebuilding America." Most Americans I felt sure would be surprised to learn that God was a Republican. In fact, I knew that the President was in trouble when

Rev. Jerry Falwell sent me a letter saying that unless I sent him 25 bucks, the Moral Majority would close down on September 10.

So, too, the notion of gender bias seemed to be a loser. You will recall the "Wimp-Macho" debates resulting from Walter Mondale's selection of Geraldine Ferraro as his running mate. While there surely was a growing private sentiment on the right that the Women's movement had "gone to far," the macho appeal totally ignored the growing influence of women in the electorate, as well as the changing face of economic and family roles played by women in our society. Religion and sex, I felt, would soon be banished to the political bone yard and there would emerge a new generation of leadership energized by the lofty rhetoric of the Kennedy brothers and motivated more by compassion than greed, by tolerance rather than fear and convinced that public service was a high calling. They would see the contemporary world as it was and politics as I did--an appeal to the best and not the worst instincts of the electorate (the "better angels of their nature" as A. Lincoln observed).

II BEING WRONG (AGAIN)

And of course, I was wrong. The voting public, as George will put it, saw Ronald Reagan as the "past speaking to us and we want to remember with him." The selection of Geraldine Ferraro enabled the President skillfully to force Mondale (in the words of Barbara Ehrenreich) to "represent every chump who has been forced to wash the dishes and utter words like chairperson" and, of course, subtly to question whether she had the strength and character to be "just a heart beat away." Mondale himself presented a "target of opportunity" for the President who warned against the return of the "economic hangover" of the Carter years. Using typical Reagan hyperbole, the President said:

"We saw a once-proud nation staggered by steady erosion of economic growth, punishing inflation and interest rates, a record peacetime tax burden, rising unemployment and weakened defense. ..."

"In retrospect, there was only one thing fair about those policies. They didn't discriminate. They made everybody miserable."

The well over 50% of voters who were critical of the President's support from the religious right were apparently persuaded by the President's clever parry: "what some would do is to twist the concept of freedom of religion to mean freedom against religion."

We watched in wonder and awe as the old Democratic coalition yielded to the siren call of traditional values, of "morning again in America, "Of a "rocket of hope shooting to the stars."

Those of you who are new might not have grasped that being wrong politically has been something of a habit with me. As I pointed out in 1984:

In the Fifties, I discovered that I could be equally inoffensive to everyone with strong ideas and therefore perfectly popular and

held in esteem as a leader. In the sixties, I struggled to be part of the "radical chic" and wound up thoroughly despised as a "liberal." I was getting the hang of that around 1975, when everyone was being perfectly selfish "finding" themselves and forgetting about everyone else. I supported Morris Udall when it turned out the country was ready for Jimmy Carter. And just as I'd convinced myself that problems were more complex than I figured, that ours was an economy of scarcity, that small was beautiful, and that "malaise" was the watchword, along comes Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter "with a macho twist." "Forget about "complexity," "scarcity," and "malaise." (In fact, forget "problems" altogether.)

Because, in politics, I have found myself rather regularly on the losing side of campaigns and issues, as part of my "mid-life Crisis" I have re-examined the whole concept of "success," taking my approach from the work of one Stephen Pile who claims to be head of the Not-Too-Terribly-Good-Club of London. In his seminal work The Incomplete Book of Failures, he writes:

"Success is overrated. Everyone craves it despite daily proof that man's real genius lies in quite the opposite direction. Incompetence is what we are good at--it is the quality that marks us off from the animals and we should learn to revere it."

III PERFECT HINDSIGHT

The only trouble with lofty patriotic, nostalgic, and moralistic themes is that they can result in serious disillusionment unless the government can somehow close the gap between political rhetoric and reality. Sooner or later there needs to be some "shine" to the "shining City on the Hill."

Disenchantment with "Washington" was not, of course, even then a new phenomenon. As early as 1976 some 68% of the public felt that "officials in Washington are out of touch with the rest of the country." Voting participation had been in a steady decline since 1960. Paradoxically, while you hated Congress you still loved your congressmen. "Special interest" money, lobbying, and the omnipresent Washington Establishment made it relatively easy; however, for your congressperson gradually to shift from one of "us" to one of "them." Without noticeable results, however, public disenchantment can easily become alienation and anger.

And the mood did become considerably uglier in the 1988 presidential campaign. The increasing role of political "spinmeisters" gave us someone named Willie Horton and refinements in the weapon of negative campaigning. It seemed just as easy to vote against a disparaged candidate or "Washington" itself, as it was easy to vote for "Morning Again in America"; easier, in fact, to appeal to the resentments and fears of the public as to vote for particular reforms. Presidents Carter, Reagan, and (less believably so) President Bush, each saw the necessity to run "against Washington" but the public fumed as nothing much seemed to change.

By 1992 the disgusted electorate was ready for real reform--even if it meant voting for a third party. Bill Clinton and Al Gore seemed to be the "natural" instruments of change. George Bush, whose popularity had crashed over domestic policy, epitomized the tired Washington establishment--the dreaded "professional politician." His approach to re-election exemplified the "old" politics (New Yorker cartoon: "My goodness it's a check from George Bush for \$150,000 to fix the screen door.") Clinton and Gore, however, seemed to reflect the idealism of their generation, but also the conservatism and increasing economic and social influence of their "border" and southern constituencies. These were "New Democrats" with broad appeal. Unlike President Carter, they seemed to be aware of the necessity to deal with the Washington establishment while working for the broad scale reform demanded by a public goaded into action by an aggressive third party candidate.

Indeed, Ross Perot offered a kind of cost-free talk show reform but the campaign foundered over the role the candidate was to play. His own quixotic and unstable nature led me to utter one of my more enduring political remarks. "Ross Perot," I said, "may make you yearn for the days of the special interests." Nevertheless, the voters turned out for change and in the largest turnout since 1960, a plurality of voters took a chance on the New Democrats as instruments of change. A Democratic congress promised an end to "gridlock." The New Democrats appeared substantive enough to focus the country's attention on real problems and politically savvy enough not to make the mistake of remaining totally outside the Washington establishment.

What seems clear in retrospect is that the voters were not necessarily voting for a Democratic or any other traditional political agenda. In fact, it was the President's task to build a working majority from a plurality made up disparate elements; the somewhat reluctant, remaining "core" Democratic constituency and a hodge-podge of reform-oriented--or just plain disaffected--voters. In the 1992 presidential election evangelical Protestants became the largest single constituency in the Republican Party and sixty-two percent of them voted for Bush. The election of the Clinton-Gore ticket did nothing to bring them into the mainstream. Ominously, the percentage of all Americans who believed that our society was headed down hill remained well over 50%. And almost 60% thought that public officials still didn't care much about "what people like me think." The direction of "change" would determine the future course of electoral participation since the old alliances had weakened and only a spirit of reform against the old politics seemed to resonate with a majority of the electorate.

IV 1984 REVISITED

THE POLITICS OF MUTUALLY ASSURED DESTRUCTION, 1994

I ask you now to ponder with me the state of the electorate in 1994 measured against the trends we considered in 1984 and to review with me the mad, mad doings in an election characterized as "the nastiest of the past 50 years" (Otis Pike, *The Plain Dealer*, November 12) and by the "foulest and most noxious collection of political ads...ever seen" (Tom Feran, *Television critic The Plain Dealer*, November 10) ending in a result variously described as an "earthquake," "hurricane," "landslide," "tidal wave," or my favorite, a "Tsunami."

A. 1984 Revisited

Consider first the influence of the so-called Religious Right. By 1992 it had become the largest single constituency in the Republican Party. Jerry Falwell emerged in the early days of the Clinton administration to attack the president personally and to mobilize against the Administration's "Godless" proposals. The Christian Coalition led by Pat Robertson, distributed some 30 million election "guides" to identify "pro-family" candidates and 24 of the 30 House candidates it targeted won. One-third of all voters, in exit polls, identified themselves as white evangelical born-again Christians and 70% of them voted Republican. (Source: Ira Rifkin and George Spohn, Religious News Service, The Plain Dealer, November 12.) Abortion and School Prayer, issues which, in 1984 I suggested were really Newspeak code words for sexism and intolerance, are back on the national agenda.

Second, in 1984 I feared the separation of politics from issues that connected with the electorate over current realities, and was critical of nostalgic and simplistic appeals to the realities of another day--the day when Wally and Beaver goofed around all day instead of mowing the lawn. In 1994 it appears that elections have become even farther removed from the real issues of the day and have devolved into degrading personal attacks crafted by cynical gun-slinging spinmeisters—elections in which political leadership seems to consist of testing public attitudes and then stepping boldly out front.

Thirdly, we noted the profound effect of the demographic shifts then apparent from North to South and city to suburb, further separating traditional politicians from their natural constituencies. Consider now that Newt (or "Newtron" as he has come to be known) Gingrich of Georgia may become Speaker of the House and Jesse Helms Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. Southern Republicans have achieved majority status in Congress for the first time since 1872.

Finally, we had a disturbing word or two in 1984 about the media and its quest for ever more scandalous revelations about our political leaders. In this election, the media's uncritical acceptance of negative and even false campaigning, in the interest of sensationalism lowered even further the deplorable level of public discourse, demeaning politics, politicians, and government itself. It is not perhaps incidental that media figures themselves readily take huge speaking fees from special interest groups while railing against politicians for the same conduct. While it is difficult to accuse them of selling themselves for favors, one does wonder (with Rep. Obey of Wisconsin) whether this practice doesn't provide another incentive for media figures to be more "flamboyant." It is perhaps not too surprising--but certainly discouraging--that the public feels more connected with Rush Limbaugh than with its own political leaders. Carl Bernstein, the Pulitzer Prize winning founder of it all, has decried the creation by the Media of what he characterizes as an "idiot culture."

As in the literary 1984, language itself has fallen victim. The National Conference of Teachers of English gave GOPAC [Congressman Newt (now "Newtron") Gingrich's Political Action Committee] its second place award in 1991 for "grossly deceptive" public remarks and "language with pernicious political consequences" for a booklet entitled "Language a Key Mechanism of Control." The booklet suggested that the Republicans when speaking of themselves use such words as "environment," "peace," "freedom," "fair," "flag," "We-Us-Our," "family," and

"humane." When speaking of the other side, use words such as "betray," "sick," "pathetic," "lie," "liberal," "hypocrisy," "permissive attitude," and "self-serving." And similar experts in Newspeak gave us the "'94 Christian Coalition Voter Guide" in which, for example, incumbent House Speaker Tom Foley was matched against George Nethercutt, a Spokane lawyer never tested in the Congress on issues such as "Federal Government Control of Health Care," "Banning ownership of Legal firearms," "Voluntary Prayer in public schools," and "capital Punishment for Murder."

In sum, there is cause to believe that millennial America is showing a growing resemblance to fictional Oceania in 1984--the society in which personal privacy and free expression quietly yielded to orthodoxy and authoritarianism, where Newspeak substituted slogans for facts, and where the "proles" could have risen at any time in righteous indignation, but chose instead to "go along." Since I have been uniformly wrong before, I certainly hope my streak continues.

B. The Politics of Mutually Assured Destruction

I can't resist some final words on the election just concluded and then I'd like to suggest a way of looking at Governmental reform that does connect politics with reality and, at the same time, speaks to the public's anger over and alienation from, politics and from government itself.

First I'd like to comment on the breathtakingly bold Republican "Contract with America" and especially its emphasis on crime, and second, on the overwhelming use of negative television advertising in the 1994 election.

The Republican "Contract with America" seemed at first to turn upside down one of the basic and enduring tenets of American political life: that "all politics is local" and its corollary that "bringing home the bacon and good constituent services" is enough to assure long-term political survival. Instead, I believe that its agenda of "reform" skillfully exploited local divisions in the loose coalition of Clinton-Gore voters by making the election a national referendum not so much on the specific platform of the conservative agenda but, rather, on the general questions of taxes, big government, and the "permissive" society. Thus, the agenda was set directly to exploit the fears and anger of the electorate, and certainly not to appeal to the "better angels" of its nature.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the focus on crime. Not only did this suggest a breakdown of one of government's most basic services but also a kind of collective victimization of the electorate by the "permissive" policies of "liberals" in the Clinton Administration. "Willie Horton" writ large. It also represented an even more cynical disconnection of political rhetoric from reality since there is not much more, if any, violent crime today than there was 20 years ago and there is ample evidence that no easy "get tough" or other solution exists. As a political strategy, since no one is "for" crime it set up an absurdist competition to be "tougher" on crime, largely a local issue anyway, than ones opponent. (Doonesbury) It is also of interest that the daily "if it bleeds it leads" media coverage of crime, only 5% of the public named crime as the country's most important problem in June of 1993 but by February of 1994 it became Number 1 cited by 31%. I recall the New Yorker once observing that "The uninformed view of the many is not necessarily more important than the uninformed view of the few." I choose to believe that, at bottom, the public's view of crime really evidences a general sense of the isolation and powerlessness of the individual and the breakdown of communities and institutions such as the family and organized

religion. In any case, as former Governor Gilligan observed, in the 1994 elections, everyone was running for sheriff (paraphrase).

The relentless and almost unprecedented use of negative campaigning, of course, also characterized Election 1994. Never in modern times has the level of vitriol been so high. Political advertising on both sides was so foul and noxious that bumper stickers appeared reading "Be thankful only one of them can be elected." I was reminded of a "Shoe" cartoon in which the professor asks the waiter to "run down the specials for him" and the waiter says "certainly, sir. First the Chef has prepared a special veal dish which tastes a little like old sneakers. There is a Cajun special...blackened red snapper which is served on a bed of wild rice with a spicy sauce that will turn your dining experience into a nightmare of heartburn. The pasta special is a gloppy tangle of fleshy noodles which are drowned in garlic and a gut wrenching greasy sauce. Then there is a lamb special that we on the staff like to call 'road kill.' I'll give you a few minutes," and the Professor thinks, "Well, I guess I did ask him to run down the specials."

Negative campaigning seems to be the result of the increasing use of television and professional spinmeisters for whom it is just another "sales" technique that "works." According to Otis Pike (*The Plain Dealer*, 11/12/94), "[N]egative campaigns work because we have become accustomed to believing the worst about our nation, its leaders and its condition."

The New Yorker (in an article about James Carville and Mary Matalin in the September 26, 1994 issue) notes that the ultimate expression of the spinmeisters' creed is. "If the candidate acts in a sincere way and not as devised in the laboratory by the spinmeister, it should be treated as though it never happened." Jonathan Alter of *Newsweek* reminds us that unlike the "Kingmakers" of old, the spinmeisters who devise these strategies of "mutual assured destruction" do not have to govern afterwards. Surely negative campaigning demeans the very offices for which its practitioners are campaigning and cannot but further erode the public's already weak level of trust in the institutions of government.

And speaking of television, the 1994 election almost gave us the answer to the question whether a wealthy candidate could invent himself out of thin air by the use of expensive spot ads aimed directly at the appropriate demographics. Michael Huffington, it was said, was the "purest candidate of all—almost untouched by experience." "For a public that has come to regard politics itself as the problem, he seem[ed] to be a godsend." (The New Yorker, October 10, 1994) And it is one of the few rays of hope in the aftermath of the 1994 elections that even with \$27 million to spend, it didn't quite work.

While the election and its aftermath surely left observers dazed, there were some lighter moments.

- Representative Sherrod Brown (the only Democratic freshman to be re-elected in Ohio) commenting about an incident in which he broke Congressman Mike Oxley's arm in a House baseball game said: "most Americans can only dream of breaking a Congressman's arm."

- Dennis Kucinich trying hard to elevate his rhetoric about his opponent, (now former) Senator Anthony Sinagra, who was involved in a mini-scandal relating to his terms as Lakewood Mayor, had this exchange: Sinagra: "Our main weapon is results. Tony Sinagra gets things done. Dennis Kucinich rocks the boat." "Maybe (Sinagra) doesn't rock the boat," Kucinich observed, "but he might take it home for his personal use."
- Noting that the Right had picked up from the Democrats the politics of "victimology" in this case, the suggestion that voters are the victims of big spending, big taxes, big government, President Bill Clinton, bureaucrats, incumbents, "Washington," "social engineering," and out of control programs, E.J. Dionne in *The Washington Post* observed: "You'd imagine that the united states had not had a free election for half a century. II
- The candidate to replace Hamilton J. Fish, a Republican, was yet another Hamilton J. Fish, this time his son, a Democrat, who was endorsed by his father. This made it possible to be both pro and anti-incumbent in thelection.
- Noting the changes in Washington, Dale McFeatters in the *Scripps Howard Newspapers* observed that "Soee Pig Rib City, a Clintonite hangout, had overnight become "L'Auberge de Swine" and its Iranian Chef had ceased calling himself "Bubba" and was now "Etienne."
- My award for the Remark Uttered in Heat of Earlier Battle Most Likely to be Retracted: Newt Gingrich saying of Bob Dole: "He is the tax collector for the Welfare State."
- Finally, the new breed of "radical" conservative was described by Michael Kelly in *The New Yorker* this way: "[T]he men were the sort who pantsed people like Ralph Nader in high school, and the women were the sort who liked to stay up all night partying and then not having sex--at least not with you."

V PUTTING HUMPTY-DUMPTY BACK TOGETHER

Judging from the post-election media feeding frenzy, it is the solemn duty of pundits to come down from the hills after the battle is over and shoot the wounded. Mary McGrory in the *Washington Post* said that the president was "pretty much in the Ancient Mariner mode, haunted and babbling." You could choose among apocalyptic views: "a hubristic Republican Congress will overreach in its passion to remake America, and will repulse a public that is likely to be no more eager for the Right's version of what is politically correct than for the Left's" (Michael Kelly, *The New Yorker*, November 21) or the view that "The New Deal is over. ...It was a great ideology while it lasted—it was the ideology that built the middle class of America--but the policies that built the middle class can no longer earn their support...There is no party. There is no base. We

have lost the middle class, and instead we have minority voters, a few liberals, and union members" (Al From, Democratic Leadership Council) .I suppose something can be said for either view and that is one of the fascinations of politics.

I choose to take a less polarized view, however. My belief is that the anger, frustration, and hostility of the electorate is not about Republicans or Democrats, or about "abortion," gays in the military, school prayer, affirmative action, health care, welfare reform, term limits, crime, or even taxes. Rather, each of these can best be understood as a symbol for the overall feeling that Government, and especially the federal government, is out of control, that it is far too complex and intrusive, and that it is probably corrupt--not because politicians are any more venal than the public as a whole but because "bigness" and "complexity" invite corresponding influences of money and power and reduce the electoral "power" and influence of the voter. Whoever can best satisfy this deep spirit of reform may dominate politics for the next generation.

To my way of thinking the impetus and energy for broad- scale reform must come from a restoration of the sense of responsibility of the ordinary voter. Otis Pike, a Democratic Congressman from New York, on the occasion of his retirement in 1978 put his frustration with the voters this way:

"It may just be a sign of old or at least upper middle age but people bug me more than they used to. They are asking their government to do more for them and are willing to do less for themselves."
"The people who bug me most are people who are absolutely, positively sure they are right on issues which to me are very close or troubling."

The framework exists for a social movement that seeks to restore this sense of responsibility.

Its underlying premise is that "society threatens to become normless, self-centered, and driven by greed, special interests, and (the) unabashed quest for power" (Dean Konner of the Columbia School of Journalism) .What is required is a renewal of social or community bonds and political reforms which reduce the influence of special interests, require accountability, and refocus government programs to the smallest unit of government consistent with the scale of the problem addressed so that power cannot be separated from responsibility. It advocates greater citizen responsibility for the family, neighborhood, and the various communities of which we are a part. Above all, it does not shy away from the challenge to establish or restore "values" in public and private life. The solution to 1984 is for the "proles" to reorganize society from the ground up.

The blueprint for this social movement is a book by Amitai Etzioni, a professor at George Washington University and former presidential advisor, called The Spirit of Community (Crown Publishers, Inc. 1993). The name given to the movement is "Communitarian." Rejecting existing labels, Communitarians see a new balance between authoritarians on the one hand (the Moral Majority and Liberty Bell), and radical individualists on the other (libertarians, laissez faire conservatives, and civil libertarians), one which, rather than "building on government controls or

fear of authorities" instead sustains morality by drawing on the "gentle prodding of kin, friends, neighbors, and other community members."

In its initial meeting in November 1991, it attracted the interest of Senators AL Gore, Bill Bradley, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan on the Democratic side and Dave Durenberger and Alan Simpson on the Republican side with support also from former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Jack Kemp. As a political movement it links best with Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Movement. But it is primarily asocial rather than a political movement. Under the Communitarian Agenda, schools would be encouraged to teach values--ones on which there is a broad scale consensus: truth telling, tolerance, conflict resolution, democracy, work ethic, and the notion of rights carrying correlative responsibilities. The agenda is "pro-family" not as a code word for intolerance, but because family groupings are basic to society. The Agenda urges the re-establishment of individual responsibility for good citizenship: jury duty, voting, volunteer work and being a good constituent insisting that political leaders not disguise difficult issues and hard choices. For example, how many politicians during the health care debate were willing even to suggest that "health care for all entails sacrifice for many" (Elizabeth Auster in The Plain Dealer). Communitarians see society as a vast array of sub-groups linked by overarching values--respect for diversity, and responsibility for ones family and community.

The Communitarian Agenda has a strong city planning or architectural component as well (sometimes going under the name "The New Urbanism"). This movement emphasizes preservation, community facilities and spaces, and the prevention of urban sprawl. It seeks to create places "worth caring about."

VI CONCLUSION

Whether your antidote for creeping "1984ism" embraces Communitarian or more traditional approaches to political reform, there is little question but that the electorate shows disturbing signs of vulnerability to political extremism, extremism which John Gardner defines as "an excessively simple diagnosis and a conviction that there are identifiable villains behind it all." I am haunted by the image of former vice President Dan Quayle at a training conference of religious right activists in Fort Lauderdale earlier this year, standing at attention as the crowd of 2,000 recited in unison, "I pledge allegiance to the Christian Flag and to the savior for whose kingdom it stands, one savior crucified, risen, and coming again with life and liberty for all who believe."

But as Rev. James O' Donohue of Boston College reminds us: "the separation of church and state need not mean the separation of virtue and society."

In 1984, I began my paper with a "philosophical theme" drawn from that wise and popular philosopher, Lucy in the Peanuts comic strip. Lucy tells Charlie Brown that on the "ship of life" some passengers have their deck chairs facing the bow to permit them to see where they are going. Others face the stern so they can see whence they came. "On the ship of life, Charlie," she asks, "which way is your chair facing?" He replies: "I can't seem to get my deck chair unfolded."

In 1994, it is time for all of us to get our deck chairs unfolded.