Movement to heal scars of tragedy at Port Chicago
Plan for national park could vindicate black sailors who were unjustly scorned

T.J. Hart remembers how the blast knocked down the wall of his barracks, how exploding shells and raging hillside fires lit up the night sky and how all they could find the next day were bits and pieces of the men killed at Port Chicago.

Hart's brown eyes get a faraway look and he leans heavily against the side of his sky-blue pickup truck while reliving the frantic hour following the tragic blast.

"I thought the world was coming to an end," said Hart, 78, of Pittsburg. "I'll never forget it.

More than 55 years after 320 men were killed -- 202 of them African American -- and 400 more wounded in an explosion at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine, an effort is under way to turn the site into a national park.

"The ones that were there, there aren't too many left," said Hart. "I'm one of the few. (A national park) will let the public know what went on."

Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez, has introduced a bill asking for a study of the feasibility of upgrading the Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial at the Concord Naval Weapons Station. If it wins designation as a national park, the site will become a historic landmark, one of only a handful highlighting African Americans. Miller's staff hopes to have the legislation approved by the end of the congressional session.

The study is a two-part process. The first part is to examine the cost of upgrading the site. The second part would determine if there are structures that need to be protected, if there is interest in the community for the change, what personnel needs the site would require, if there is public access and if the site represents the diversity in American history.

National park status also would allow the park service to buy the adjacent land, up to 200 acres owned by the Navy, and protect it for use as a wetland.

African American sailors were routinely assigned to load ships at the Contra Costa County munitions depot, a dangerous task made even more deadly when white officers pushed them to work faster and with minimal safety measures. On July 17, 1944, more than 5,000 tons of ammunition exploded.

Hart was on his knees in prayer, preparing for bed when the first of two powerful blasts rocked the base, knocking down the wall of his barracks.

Shells exploded into the air, and injured men were all around. The next day, the survivors were sent to clear the port of metal and human debris. The cause of the blast has never been determined.

"We were close, we all got along. I knew some of 'em from home, before we got drafted," Hart said of the men who, like him, loaded ammunition onto waiting ships.

Many black sailors, fearing for their safety, refused to return to work; 258 were arrested and 50 were court-martialed.

Condolence letters sent to victims' families by the Navy contained no details of how their loved ones died. Hart, who was not one of the mutineers, recalled how he and others were ordered not to talk about the incident to anyone, even relatives of the dead.

For decades, the Navy refused to acknowledge its mistreatment of the black sailors. The first pardon was granted only recently.

If the proposed park is approved, it would take about one year to make it a reality. The site now features four stark, granite memorials bearing the names of the dead.

"It's clear that Port Chicago and the story around Port Chicago is emerging as a major event on the World War II home front," said Miller, who lobbied to get the sailors' convictions overturned and to get a presidential pardon in 1999 for one of the sailors, Freddie Meeks.

Miller, who introduced the legislation that created the memorial in 1992, said making Port Chicago a national park would help put a
more accurate picture on what took place there.

"Instead of the stereotype that these were a bunch of people who didn't want to engage in dangerous work ... in reality, these (were) men who volunteered and expected to go over seas and fight for their country," Miller said. "It was racism that kept them from doing that." Segregation forced blacks to do the least desirable jobs in the military.

National park status would allow the park service to collect and display artifacts from the explosion and from survivors, said Glenn Fuller, superintendent of the memorial.

"Things from the explosion, parts of ships, letters of people who were survivors of the explosion, we've got all those things now stored at the (base) chapel," Fuller said.

Under current rules, visitors must call days in advance to get permission to visit the site.

Jan Frost of Concord, whose uncle, Albert Diede, was one of the white sailors to die in the explosion, said it should be easier for relatives and others interested in Port Chicago to go there.

"I took my mother a few times to see it," Frost said. "I also brought my cousin -- it was her father -- to the site. She was very moved, wanted to sit alone by herself for a while and look out over the water.

"The people that I've seen there are very touched by the idea that they can be at that spot."

Only 27 of the nation's 385 national park sites have African Americans as their focus, said Iantha Gantt-Wright, director of enhancing diversity programs at the National Parks Conservation Association.

Some are sites on slavery, like the Booker T. Washington National Monument outside Roanoke, Va. A number have civil rights themes, like the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial or the Brown vs. Board of Education site in Kansas.

Robert Allen, a Berkeley professor of ethnic studies who has helped lead the fight to clear the records of the Port Chicago mutineers and wrote a book about the mutiny, said a national park would be a permanent way of recognizing the contributions of black men and women to the nation's military.

At the modest Pittsburg home he bought not long after leaving the service and getting married in 1946, Hart said the men who died at Port Chicago deserve to be remembered.

After the war, Hart worked for 40 years at Shell Oil in Martinez. He raised four boys and two girls. One of his sons, Ed, won a gold medal in the 1972 Olympics in the 400-meter relay.

Hart still finds it hard to visit the port.

"I done grewed to be an old man," he said. "Thank God, I'm still here, 'cause I could have been one of the ones killed that night."

Learn more about Port Chicago Here is a sampling of resources to learn more about the history of Port Chicago:

-- "The Port Chicago Mutiny," by Robert L. Allen (Amistad Press, $9.95) was used as a basis for the documentary film "Port Chicago Mutiny: A National Tragedy."

Web sites include:

-- www.portchicagomutiny.com
-- www.cccoe.k12.ca.us/pc/
-- www.historychannel.com/exhibits/portchicago/
-- www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/fac/PC/
-- www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq80-1.htm
-- www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq80-4.htm
-- www.nps.gov/poch/index.htm
-- Jason B. Johnson

E-mail Jason B. Johnson at ibjohnson@sfcchronicle.com.

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Both races looked tight on the eve of primary
Hopefuls curb venom in New Hampshire
By Robert Cohen}

HUNDREDS SEEK COUNSELING AT SETON
Emotional and spiritual needs are great in wake of fire
By Kelly Hoyeboy and Alexander Lance

Boxing probe aims squarely at Don King
By Robert Fulghum

Jetliner crashes off L.A.
Alaska Air Flight from Mexico had at least 70 people aboard
By Jeff Wilson
New Jersey Weather

**Today:** Blustery

- High 28, Low 20
- Slight risk of showers, mainly during the afternoon.
- Northwesterly wind.
- Relative humidity: 50%.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: At times.
- UV Index: 5.

**Tonight:** Windy

- High 23, Low 16
- Southwesterly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 3.

**Tomorrow:** Windy

- High 29, Low 20
- Southwesterly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 4.

**Sunday:** Overcast

- High 27, Low 18
- Westerly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 3.

**Monday:** Cloudy

- High 29, Low 19
- Westerly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 4.

**Tuesday:** Cloudy

- High 28, Low 17
- Westerly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 3.

**Wednesday:** Cloudy

- High 26, Low 16
- Westerly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 2.

**Thursday:** Cloudy

- High 23, Low 14
- Westerly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 1.

**Friday:** Cloudy

- High 21, Low 10
- Westerly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 0.

**Saturday:** Cloudy

- High 22, Low 13
- Westerly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 1.

**Sunday:** Overcast

- High 25, Low 15
- Westerly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 2.

**Monday:** Overcast

- High 27, Low 15
- Westerly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 3.

**Tuesday:** Overcast

- High 28, Low 15
- Westerly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 4.

**Wednesday:** Overcast

- High 27, Low 15
- Westerly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 3.

**Thursday:** Overcast

- High 26, Low 15
- Westerly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 2.

**Friday:** Overcast

- High 24, Low 14
- Westerly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 1.

**Saturday:** Overcast

- High 25, Low 15
- Westerly wind.
- Visibility: 10 miles.
- Wind chill factor: Under zero.
- UV Index: 2.
Miss Small has graduated from the
Andrew Jackson High School

Musician shines,

SAFETY 

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HPViFtnF bdffifoined with the weekend's winter
sights to the fall 
NOW

As time went by, but he would have

The court-martial was "one
of the worst 'frame-ups' we
have come across in a long
time. It was deliberately
planned and staged to ....

The concept being favored by the
black sailors included 1,000-pound bombs, depth
charges and explosive mines, and favored
400-pound incendiary bombs. All of
it, along with the 8-inch cannon, was packed with
high explosives, blew up shortly after 10:30 p.m.
The crew of an Army Air Force plane
struggling to maintain a presence outside its region, has

Joseph Randolph Small was 75 when
he died in 1996, the U.S. Navy's charge of
mutiny had been reduced to a year and a half. The only other known
survivor, Jules Crittenden, did not seek a
pardon, contending instead that the
judges were "complicit in the crime.

Louise Small, "but I would have liked to
see my husband's name on the pardon,
acknowledges the wrong that was done to
him and looking at

They retrieved a very strong

northern California.

Black History

Orchestra shines,

Though President Clinton poked
a finger at Los Angeles, one
of only two known survivors of the
shocked totally to an extent as much as 15
pounds at hard labor. Miss Small had no official
affair in the records of the records of the minor
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The term melee used by the court
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Black crews were assigned to
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Black crews were assigned to
Ekberg sharpens her claws

Bill Maher loses in Iowa

Today's Gossip

Politically Incorrect

Bill Maher’s带有政治不正确的节目《实在的男人》已经成为现实。虽然主持人一直坚持在节目中无所顾忌地发表言论，但现在似乎到了一个阶段，他不得不更加小心地表达自己的观点。他的朋友们认为，这可能是由于他在公众面前的形象变得更为严肃所致。

Videotaped view

MCC’s《逼真地》是一个值得一看的节目。它展示了一个有趣的视觉效果，包括一个带有“政治不正确的角色”的男子。在这个节目中，他被描绘成一个政客，试图通过言论来改变观众的想法。

Marilyn Beck & Stacy Jemal Smith

Pamela says that “The View” has decided to kill off Dr. Phil, who has been a guest on the show for several years. She suggests that the decision was made because Dr. Phil’s presence on the show is no longer needed, and the producers want to bring in new talent.

The icing on the cake was the premiere of “Valley of the Dolls,” which was a huge success. The show featured several famous actors, including Susan Sarandon and Lindsay Lohan, as well as a cast of up-and-coming actresses. The storyline was about a group of young women who struggle with issues of love, friendship, and identity.

Playing the Fonz meant ‘Happy Days’ for Winkler

By Tamara Conrad

LOS ANGELES — Henry Winkler

Those are the same yoga pants that Henry Winkler wore in the 1970s sitcom “Happy Days.” They were bought for him by his mother, and he’s still wearing them. The Fonz, played by Winkler, is a character who was created for the show, which ran from 1974 to 1984.

Winkler was still “giving the response. And I’m just trying to

Role as editor in ‘Isn’t She Great’ is no stretch for David Hyde Pierce

By Joshua Maron

LOS ANGELES — In “Isn’t She Great,” David Hyde Pierce plays the role of a movie producer who is3

The former manager for David Hyde Pierce, who played the main character in the show, has been a fan of the actor for years. He was asked to join the cast of the show after he appeared in several guest roles. Pierce was excited to be a part of the series and said that he was looking forward to working with the cast and crew.

The show was a hit and ran for several years, becoming one of the most popular shows on television. Pierce says that he was proud to be a part of the show and that he learned a lot from working on it.

Judd back to being creepy

In the end, Pierce says that he is looking forward to the future and hopes to continue working in the entertainment industry. He is currently in talks to appear in a new movie and says that he is excited about the project.

Pardons

A matter of justice

Lois万达，Gwen Ove和Joe Smith at the opening of the documentary film about the Fort Chicago

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<tr>
<td>7:00 PM</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>&quot;Late Night with David Letterman&quot;</td>
<td>CBS</td>
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<td>7:30 PM</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>&quot;The Tonight Show with Jay Leno&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:00 PM</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>&quot;CSI: Crime Scene Investigation&quot;</td>
<td>CBS</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30 PM</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>&quot;American Idol&quot;</td>
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<td>9:00 PM</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>&quot;Desperate Housewives&quot;</td>
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<td>9:30 PM</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>&quot;Law &amp; Order: Special Victims Unit&quot;</td>
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<td>10:00 PM</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>&quot;Cops&quot;</td>
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<td>11:00 PM</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>&quot;The Drew Carey Show&quot;</td>
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**TUESDAY PRIMETIME**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00 PM</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>&quot;Lost&quot;</td>
<td>ABC</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:30 PM</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>&quot;48 Hours&quot;</td>
<td>CBS</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:00 PM</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>&quot;House&quot;</td>
<td>Fox</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30 PM</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>&quot;The Office&quot;</td>
<td>NBC</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00 PM</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>&quot;Grey's Anatomy&quot;</td>
<td>ABC</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:30 PM</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>&quot;Beverly Hills, 90210&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00 PM</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>&quot;CSI: Miami&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00 PM</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>&quot;General Hospital&quot;</td>
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**LATE NIGHT TO EARLY MORNING**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11:30 PM</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>&quot;Late Night with Jimmy Fallon&quot;</td>
<td>NBC</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00 AM</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>&quot;The View&quot;</td>
<td>ABC</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:30 AM</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>&quot;The Daily Show with Jon Stewart&quot;</td>
<td>Fox</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00 AM</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>&quot;The Late Late Show with James Corden&quot;</td>
<td>CBS</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:30 AM</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>&quot;Jimmy Kimmel Live&quot;</td>
<td>ABC</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:00 AM</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>&quot;The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson&quot;</td>
<td>Fox</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:30 AM</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>&quot;The Late Show with Stephen Colbert&quot;</td>
<td>CBS</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:00 AM</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>&quot;Jimmy Kimmel Live&quot;</td>
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**Primetime**

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<td>11:00 PM</td>
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<td>&quot;The O.C.&quot;</td>
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**Talkshow**

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**Halloween Scars**

8 p.m. (Fox) Congo: "Vampires" (9000 BC) (1998, Drama) Lily Tomlin as a Borg vampire that makes the Borg more deadly.

**The Empires Strike Back**

9 p.m. (ABC) "The Empire Strikes Back" (1980, Sci-Fi) Han Solo and Luke Skywalker vs. the Empire.

**Full Nelson**

9 p.m. (USA) "The Parent Trap" (1998, Comedy) Haley Joel Osment as a twin.

**Hollywood Scars**

9 p.m. (Fox) "Slam" (1999, Drama) Zendaya as a basketball player.

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Astonishing Medical Fact:

Placebos Work!
So why not use them as medicine? By Margaret Talbot
Even the most hardened mountain man knows enough to come in out of the cold. And that the next best thing to a warm fire in a snug, out-of-the-way log cabin is a pair of warm, power-adjustable, heated front leather seats in a snug, out-of-the-way Nissan Pathfinder. With the automatic temperature control set at, say, a balmy 78°.

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AND DON'T BE STINGY WITH THE JALAPEÑOS.
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“The emotional alliance between a doctor and patient is itself a therapeutic force. A compassionate and optimistic physician is a walking placebo.” From “The Placebo Prescription,” by Margaret Talbot, page 34.

28 Kadi Diallo’s Trial
BY TED CONOVER
She came from Africa to claim the body of her son Amadou. She ended up with a fast education in the tortured racial politics of New York.

34 The Placebo Prescription
BY MARGARET TALBOT
A sugar pill for the mildly depressed. Sham surgery for a bum knee. A hand to hold for the flu-stricken. Placebos aren’t real medicine, but they can often help patients heal. So why not exploit their power?

40 Finland’s Forte
BY GEOFFREY WHEATCROFT
How a small Scandinavian country conquered the world of classical music.

45 It’s All About Yves
BY AMY M. SPINDLER
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL THOMPSON
There were many trends at the spring shows, but only one predominated.

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BY MOLLY O’NEILL
The tale of how a giant squash became a small-town legend.

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ALICE C. DECHANT AS TOLD TO DAVID RAKOFF
“Sometimes You Get Wistful About Actually Looking Like a Person”


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Letters

AMERICAN PSEUDO

There is only one reason that I plan to see "The Talented Mr. Ripley": I am a die-hard Patricia Highsmith fan, and this is her most chilling and satisfying novel (Frank Rich, Dec. 12). I was glad to see that Rich gave the author due in his insightful article. With all the Hollywood hype about Matt and Gwyneth, let's not lose sight of the true star. Perhaps the movie will encourage those who want to savor the talents of Ripley and his creator to settle down by the fire with a good book.

PATRICIA J. LANG
Princeton Junction, N.J.

It doesn't matter that I have not yet seen the film; Frank Rich's superb writing, his level of critical analysis and his admirable ability to link societal phenomena with cultural events make this article (and, in fact, all his writing) a joy to read.

MELISSA FOX
Potomac, Md.

BEDSIDE STORY

Craig Cutler (Dec. 12) and his son Jack remind us that in this world only one or two things really matter. The rest are just frills.

GEORGE MALKO
New York

Movies like "A Christmas Carol" and "It's a Wonderful Life" have sentimental endings designed to create ersatz feelings of good will in the holiday season. None, however, can emulate the spirit and determination of Jack Cutler.

BARRY ROSUCK
Brooklyn

I was struck by the juxtaposition of your articles "American Pseudo" and "Bedside Story," Ripley embodies so much of American culture, creating new realities and escaping old ones. Jack, in his bout with cancer, is fighting to keep up with reality — not to escape it or create a new one.

BETH FENWICK
Cos Cob, Conn.

THE TROUBLES THAT WON'T GO AWAY

John Lloyd's article (Dec. 12) about paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland was deeply disappointing. It consisted largely of four anecdotes, three of which involved horrible acts of violence. While it is true that in recent years there has not been a decline in "punishment beatings," there has been a sharp decline in other important measures of paramilitary activity, including the number of deaths, injuries and firearms-and-explosives offenses. How could these and the many other facts that document the decline in political violence not be relevant to an article about political violence?

The statement "Peace is for the politicians and the media" was shocking in its cynicism. I have been involved in Northern Ireland for five years and can assure your readers that peace is the intensely felt concern of the people. What is taking place now is part of that concern. The politicians and the media are following the people, not the other way around.

There is not yet a durable peace; genuine reconciliation will take time. But contrary to your article, life is better for most people. Of course, paramilitary violence remains a serious problem; it must be condemned and opposed. And other problems remain; unfortunately, there are criminals doing bad things in Northern Ireland. But that is true in every society. Suppose that a magazine in Northern Ireland published an article that consisted largely of descriptions of the brutalization of Abner Louima, the killing of Amed Diallo and the pushing of Kendra Webdale under a subway train. Would the readers of that article be well informed about New York, or even about recent trends in crime in New York? Would they have a fair sense of daily life for most New Yorkers? Obviously not.

Understandably, space doesn't allow you to give a complete history of every society described in your magazine. But The Times prides itself on its fairness and balance. In this instance you have failed to meet those standards.

GEORGE J. MITCHELL
Washington

NOT A STRAIGHT STORY

Andrew Sullivan wants it both ways (Counter Culture, Dec. 12). He tells us he doesn't believe in "outing" people, yet he happily speculates in print over the sexual orientation of various public figures. Even worse, he presumes to tell them how he thinks they should conduct their lives. A lot of us gay folks are sick of being told how to live our lives, whether it's by our families, our government or magazine columnists. I like to think the gay rights struggle, at least in part, has been about fighting for the right of gay and lesbian people to live as they choose. And some of those people may choose to play footsie with the press. That's their choice.

ERIC MARCUS
New York

I agree with Sullivan's argument that the candor of prominent homosexuals has been one of the key factors in increasing tolerance for diverse sexual orientations. But I cannot accept his further assumption that all prominent lesbians and gay men must therefore discuss details of their private lives with the press. Like me, most of the gay and lesbian people I know make no effort to hide their orientation, but make no effort to publicize it, either.

More to the point, would Ed Koch have been the mayor who signed the city's gay rights law if he had not built widespread support? Privacy and ambiguity have indispensable roles in a country like ours, and ideologies like Sullivan need to open their eyes to the way things work in a diverse society.

HARRY MATTHEWS
Brooklyn

Correction: A gallery credit was omitted on Dec. 12 for the photograph in the "What They Were Thinking" feature, showing the photographer Lee Friedlander with his granddaughter Ava. The gallery was Janet Borden.

Letters should be addressed to Letters to the Editor, Magazine, The New York Times, 229 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. The e-mail address is magazine@nytimes.com. All letters should include the writer's name, address and daytime telephone number. We are unable to acknowledge or return unpublished letters. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.
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WHO NEEDS AN I.P.O.?

In 1999, venture capitalists doled out a record $21 billion to start-up firms. The online sector, naturally, led the way. These Internet companies got the most:

1) Webvan Group (groceries), $275 million.
2) Datek Online Holdings (online trading), $195 million.
3) VIA Networks (international Internet service consolidator), $128 million.
4) Emachines (computers), $119.5 million.
5) Digenet Americas (Latin American telecommunication networks), $90.1 million.

Source: The Industry Standard

The Downside
Of the Upside
Of the Downside

These days nothing succeeds like failure. By Louis Menand

Kozmo.com is the company that takes orders for movies, magazines and several kinds of saturated fat over the Internet and then delivers the stuff to your house in less than an hour. You’ve probably seen the television commercials. Kozmo.com currently has operations in four cities; the average order is $10. Venture capitalists have put $28 million into the business, and the company is planning to go public and raise possibly hundreds of millions more. It is unclear when, or even how, it will make a profit.

This is not, it turns out, a major concern. “The bottom line for me,” one of the company’s founders told a reporter from Vanity Fair, “is I fail, like, let’s say, six months after I launch the company. I just absolutely fail. So what’s going to happen? I’m going to apply to business school and have an incredible application.” Failure is, like, part of the business plan.

This is evidently an Internet industry mantra. “Failure,” a partner in one of the venture-capital firms that pumps money into start-ups like Kozmo.com said recently on CNN’s “Moneyline,” “is a badge of success on a lot of résumés today. It means you have experienced the downside.” He may have been understating the upside. The founder of Amazon.com, the online retailer that has never made a dollar and is estimated to have lost $350 million of them in 1999, was named Time magazine’s Person of the Year. Meanwhile, in the same week, Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew of New York was fired for (among other reasons, including, apparently, attitude) failing to raise test scores.

Failure is plainly a many-sided concept. Like a lot of other things in America, its cultural valence is partly a function of its size. Americans generally don’t mind failure so long as it’s spectacular. If your Honda Civic is repossessed, you are a deadbeat; if you blow $28 million, you have bought a ticket to the big time. You are, after all, a person who managed to get his or her hands on $28 million (whereas getting one’s hands on a Civic is widely thought to be no big trick). And it shows a decent respect for scale. If you are going to fall, try at least to fall off a mountain.

In this context, a low third-grade reading score does not qualify as a major résumé builder. On the other hand, what is the motivational value of test scores? Louis Menand teaches at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.
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THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE / JANUARY 9, 2000
In my college poetry class, we used a book that was translated by my professor, and my Accounting 101 book was written by my professor. This has more than the appearance of a conflict of interest. Shouldn’t colleges convey a higher sense of ethics?

— Martin Levitt, Rockaway, N.J.
Better Late Than Never

Seaman Freddie Meeks was convicted of mutiny 55 years ago in a racially charged incident that forever changed the Navy. Having just been pardoned, he talks about the long wait for redemption.

Q: Congratulations on your pardon, sir. Well, it’s been a long time coming, but it’s here. Thank God it’s here.

What do you remember about the Port Chicago incident?

We were living on the base at Port Chicago. And you know the story of the blacks and the whites. The whites didn’t do any of the menial tasks. We weren’t even allowed to talk to them. All the commanding officers were white. We would go out and load ammunition every morning. No whites loaded ammunition, no indeed. Me and my crew, we loaded ammunition on that ship one morning until about 2 or 2:30, and then we marched in to the base. We were given a three-day pass because we had done such a good job. Later they told us that there had been a big explosion and they wanted everybody to come back in. But we wouldn’t go back until our three-day pass was up. And when we got back they put us in the brig a few days. And they let us out, and then they ordered us back to load that ammunition.

What effect did the disaster have on you and your crew?

Before the explosion, we loaded ammunition in good spirits. Most of the guys were jolly. But after that explosion it kind of shook everybody up. To see the wreckage and all the people that were killed, the way it blew them all to pieces, you didn’t want to go and fool with it anymore. You see, there weren’t any bodies, there were just pieces of flesh they shoveled up, put them in those baskets and brought them into the warehouse.

So you and your crew refused to handle the explosives?

Well, it’s a funny thing how that happened. We tried to get a leave of absence just like the whites, to get our nerves together. They wouldn’t give us one, and they told us to write the Red Cross. They wrote back saying there was nothing they could do for us “boys.” That made us kind of mad. The whites got a 30-day leave, and they didn’t even handle the ammunition! And so after that we said we weren’t going to go back and load that ammunition. The admiral said, “You could be shot.” And so about 50 of us made up our minds that we’d sooner be shot than get back on that ship.

So you were charged with mutiny?

Yes, and I was sentenced to 15 years. What did we know about mutiny? We were just trying to stand up for our rights. So they took us to the federal prison down in San Pedro. And I happened to be in the same cell Al Capone had been in.

Really? Al Capone?

Yeah. He had his name written up on the wall. So I wrote my name under his so they’d know I was in there. I’ve been intending to go down there to see if my name is still there. It wouldn’t take me more than 20 or 30 minutes to drive down there, but I haven’t ever been back.

How did you get out?

If it hadn’t have been for Thurgood Marshall, I don’t know what would have happened. He got them to put us back on duty. President Truman ordered the services to be desegregated after that. We’re the cause of the service being desegregated.

A couple of months later, you received your discharge and returned to civilian life. Did you find the same kind of segregation there?

Well, heck, it’s still segregated now to a certain point. But it was different in civilian life because people were nice. I worked as a butler. My wife worked as a cook, a maid. We worked for Ann Sothern, the movie star. We worked for Sidney Sheldon, the writer. I even worked for CBS, and I’m the cause of them desegregating the guards in the red coats. They didn’t give the black workers front-desk jobs. They kept us in the back. So one day I got tired. I wrote Mr. Paley a letter, a good letter, about 1973. And he told them to integrate the guards in the red coats. They were so mad at me they could have fired me! But he told them they better not. Well, you know he was a powerful man; he owned CBS.

Did you tell any of those employers about your historic past?

I just told them I was in the Navy and let it go at that. I had kids and I didn’t tell them. The only time they found out about it was when Robert Allen wrote that book about Port Chicago. My son said, “Dad, why did you hide that?” and I said, “I didn’t want the kids giving you a hard time and saying, ‘Your Daddy was a jailbird.’”

You waited so long for a pardon. It must have made you very angry.

No, I wasn’t angry about it, because I was able to get jobs. You can’t go around carrying malice in your heart, so you just hope. There have been a lot of presidents, and they could have done something, but none of them did anything. But President Clinton took it on his own to grant the pardon. I think he’s a nice president.

It seems like you’re no longer afraid to let people know about what you did.

Oh, yeah, it’s going to be history and I’ll be a part of it for kids to read about. I want people to know about it now because it happened and it’s over with and my name’s cleared up.

— David Rakoff
Ruse is a ruse is a ruse.

That’s nothing but a ploy,” said Bill Bradley to Al Gore on “Meet the Press” last month.

The two men were locked in TV combat. Gore had just suggested that the two Democratic candidates pledge to shun TV commercials and engage only in debates. The vice president dramatically extended his hand and said: “I’m ready to agree right now. Debates aren’t ploys.”

Bradley looked at his opponent’s hand like an uninterested palm reader; he wasn’t having any part of the surprise offer: “No, to come here, shake my hand — that’s nothing but a ploy.” At Gore’s repeated usage of the word, Bradley edged it with increasing scorn, adding, “I’m not someone who’s interested in tactics, Al.”

Across America, the question arose: Was the no-commercials proposal a sincere suggestion, as Gore maintained, or was it merely a ploy, tactic, ruse, stratagem or trick, as Bradley insisted? Around the world, viewers asked a more fundamental question: What is a ploy, anyway?

The attack word is closely associated with the current campaign. Two months ago, Cragg Hines of The Houston Chronicle wrote that “Gore has repeatedly tried the weekly debate ploy against Bradley, who has refused to take the bait.” A month before that, when Gore relocated his headquarters to Nashville — the better to detach from Washington Beltway associations and re-establish middle-American roots — Tex Austin, a musician and cowboy-boot salesman, was quoted deriding the move in The Chicago Tribune: “This is obviously just a political ploy.”

This drew an observation from James Dao, a New York Times reporter: “History may someday show that voters viewed Mr. Gore’s headquarters shift as a disingenuous ploy or, more likely, a move that was forgotten the day after it happened.”

The word’s origin is shrouded in mysterious Highland vapors. Most etymologists believe it to be the product of aphesis, the process by which we clip unaccented vowel syllables off a word’s stem. That is how alone becomes lone and around becomes round. (“Is the Lone Ranger round here, Tonto?”) In this hypothesis regarding the origin of ploy, the Scottish dialect clipped the em off the verb employ to create a noun that meant “activity” and later “an amusing way to pass the time; an escapade, hobby or sport.”

In 1950, Stephen Potter, the British author of “Gamesmanship” and “Lifemanship” and the coiner of one-upmanship, gave the word a tongue-in-cheek sense of “a maneuver to gain the better of an opponent or co-worker.” He wrote, “Each one of us can, by ploy or gambit, most naturally gain the advantage.”

In the following decade, the Potter sense of the word was snatched up into the language of diplomacy. An occasional plot device in the 19th century novels of Anthony Trollope involved the misheard proposal or the misread caress. A man would say or do something innocuous; a Victorian maiden would interpret that word or gesture romantically and accept what she considered amounted to a proposal of marriage; and the poor (or lucky) fellow found himself affianced.

Lord Rufford makes such a gesture to the husband-hunting Arabella Trefoil in Trollope’s 1875 “American Senator” and finds himself in the center of Trefoil’s formidable attempt at landing a proper mate. (Her attempt does not succeed.)
Trollope uses the same ploy four years later in “John Caldigate,” in which John gets thrown into a linen closet with his cousin Julia and comes out, in Julia’s and her mother’s minds, engaged.

During the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, President Kennedy received two messages from the Soviet Union’s Nikita Khrushchev: one was informal and ambiguous, a later one more official and threatening. He chose to ignore the later one and to interpret the earlier one as an offer to remove Soviet missiles in return for a pledge not to invade Cuba — an inference that left Khrushchev with his nonoffer “accepted.” This deft maneuver was described in what some felt was the myth making that followed as “the Trollope ploy.”

In current usage, a ploy is more cunning than a subterfuge, not as overtly false or bookishly old-fashioned as a ruse and somewhat more creative than a tactic. It is not planned in as much detail as a stratagem, is less contrived than an artifice and does not have the coquettish quality of a wink. A ploy is more underhanded than a maneuver and not as playful or artful as a dodge.

Another synonym is gambit, which began as an opening move in chess that sacrifices a pawn to gain position for a more powerful piece. By metaphoric extension, a gambit can range from an enticing opening in conversation to a tactic in gaining advantage in business.

Was the no-commercials proposal a sincere suggestion, as Gore maintained, or was it merely a ploy, tactic, ruse, stratagem or trick, as Bradley insisted?

In the lexicon of trickery, a correct gamesman uses a gambit while an engaging rogue employs a ploy, and the mildest deceiver trots out a gimmick. When Bill Bradley’s spokesman, Eric Hauser, followed up his candidate’s ploy characterization by castigating Gore for “resorting to contrived gimmicks,” his use of contrived was redundant.

In politics, as we see, a ploy is double-edged; accusations of trickiness can get tricky. In dealing with nationalities, Winston Churchill observed in 1906: “Nothing is more fatal than a dodge. Wrongs will be forgiven, sufferings and losses will be forgiven or forgotten, battles will be remembered only as they recall the martial virtues of the combatants; but anything like a trick, will always rankle.”

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The Simple Solution

The flat tax is the perfect artifact of our one-click era.

I suppose I first developed a fondness for the flat tax when both Jerry Brown and Steve Forbes supported it. It had that energizing right-left whiplash I’ve rarely been able to resist. But these days, not only the fringes of political life support it. This year, every Republican candidate but one — Alan Keyes — supports a version of flatness, and even the cautious George W backs simpler, lower rates. One of Al Gore’s core strengths against Bill Bradley is that he is less likely to raise taxes than his more liberal rival. Compared with 25 years ago, when pre-Reagan tax rates clobbered anyone even faintly successful, or even 16 years ago, when Walter Mondale quixotically campaigned for a fiscal hike, the tax climate may not be flat but it’s surely flatter.

My fearless New Year’s prediction is that the flat tax will be the central political reform of the next decade. And the reason we’re headed for 180 degrees is at least partly cultural. There is almost no virtue more celebrated in America right now than simplicity. We are increasingly a one-click, one-rate, one-card, one-model culture. Once upon a time, companies might have broadcast their complexity to demonstrate their clout. Not so long ago, synergy was the buzzword. Now companies do all they can to project a simple image, a single product and a recognizable, simple brand. Amazon.com has one-click shopping; every consumer has a one-stop credit-debit card; most of Europe has one currency; and half the American continent has one tariff.

If you want to think of the purest representation of this simple-is-beautiful trend, think of a Gap television ad: white background; simple images; no words; one brand. Or think of the E-Z Pass, the electronic card in your car windshield that instantly charges you as you enter a toll road or toll bridge. The most successful products — from the iMac to AOL — include as many features as possible in one standard model. Sooner rather than later, in a broad-band world, even the distinctions among telephone wires, cables and satellites will be erased. There will be one cultural-economic tube, and you’ll be at the end of it — eagerly clutching your single credit card that can make telephone calls, get cash out of A.T.M.’s and earn you frequent-flier miles.

In this general cultural drive toward simplicity, one thing stands out like a very sore thumb: the tax code. If taxpayers could pick a tax system for the new millennium, and if entrepreneurs could compete to provide one, the chances of the winning product looking like our current mess would be close to zero. Think of its current, salient features: multiple rates, thousands of possible deductions, a tax code of countless exceptions to endless rules fatter than the average Yellow Pages. There’s a reason candidates get applause by vowing to abolish the I.R.S. and shrink our tax returns so they can fit on a postcard. It’s not just that voters think they might pay less tax. (Keep dreaming.) It’s that most people understand that paying taxes should surely be a little simpler in 2000 than the plot of a 19th-century Russian novel.

The standard objection to one-click tax payment is a political one, but even this is losing steam. It is the familiar liberal complaint that a simpler tax will inevitably favor the rich over the poor. In one sense, of course, this is a no-brainer. If you replace a tax system designed to ratchet up rates on the wealthy with a one-rate system, the rich pay less. But as the middle classes know, this is only part of the story. Complexity may be designed to penalize the prosperous, but it is also the rich man’s friend. The current tax code is so byzantine that the wealthy are often the only ones who can afford the tax lawyers who can really foil it. More important, as the middle classes also
December 25, 1776, the colonials needed a victory. What they got was a miracle.

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The Wall, Vindicated

A sturdy barrier between news and commerce enhances both.

This Information Century has begun with a noteworthy metaphor. The man who ostentatiously shattered the wall between news and commerce at one of the nation’s best newspapers can now be seen rummaging in the rubble for bricks to repair some of the damage he has done.

The man is Mark Willes, the chairman of Time Mirror, whose most valued product is The Los Angeles Times. His wrecking crew was almost crushed by the wall’s collapse, so he has sounded a retreat, heeding the protests from the newsroom that he used to scorn.

But Mark Willes is just a symbol — and perhaps even a victim — of the combination of fear and ambition that in recent years has led many managers of media enterprises to put stockholders ahead of readers or listeners. By giving priority to stock values and profit margins, they slighted their obligations to the public. Indeed, they have shown themselves ignorant or contemptuous of the ethical standards so long and painstakingly erected to protect the credibility of their news operations.

This heedlessness has taken different forms in different media. Television news programs, for example, now shamelessly promote movies, sports and other products of their parent corporations. Similarly, many magazines now routinely promote the products of their advertisers and the celebrities whose interviews and images they crave. They also freely admit advertisements — called advertorials — that contain paid features masquerading as journalism, while some companies publish promotions masquerading as magazines.

Many newspapers, too, now blur the line between news and commerce. They accept or create special sections that guarantee advertisers a friendly “environment.” Under the cover of good citizenship, many also collaborate in promotions and community activities with the same politicians and businesspeople they claim to be covering at arm’s length. And most media companies have barely begun to confront the ethical quandaries posed by their new Web sites: how to insulate their information services from the online merchandising and advertising that they conduct in all corners of every site.

The tendency of media companies to confuse their editorial and sales missions was already widely apparent when Willes was recruited from the packaged-food business five years ago to reverse the economic fortunes of The Los Angeles Times. But he chose to make himself the embodiment of the trend, loudly scoffing at the idea that reporters and editors needed to be insulated from commercial plans and pressures. He vowed to “use a bazooka, if necessary” to blow up the wall that most good newspapers claim to be covering at arm’s length. And most media companies have barely begun to confront the ethical quandaries posed by their new Web sites: how to insulate their information services from the online merchandising and advertising that they conduct in all corners of every site.

To the dismay of journalists everywhere, Willes ordered a paperwide collaboration in the design of corporate strategies. He wanted not just his top editors and executives to plan together but also their staffs many levels down. He pushed different news desks and sections to develop their own business plans. He asked reporters and editors to propose ideas for selling more papers and ads, and he expected the business staffs to shower the newsroom with moneymaking ideas for coverage.

All along, Willes insisted that his reporters and editors could be trusted to protect the integrity of their work and to resist him when necessary. And, indeed, no one has
yet judged his paper’s news coverage to have been seriously compromised. But corners were cut, some highly dubious deals were pursued and business-side operatives felt ever more entitled to look over the shoulders of their journalistic cousins. The growing boldness of one team and the simmering anxiety of the other were bound to collide, and three months ago they did, with a bang.

The Times was suddenly revealed to be the secret partner of a new downtown sports arena. It had agreed to divide the profits of an issue of its Sunday magazine devoted entirely to benign coverage of the project. Indeed, the arena encouraged its contractors and patrons to advertise in the magazine, which an independent newspaper might well have questioned as a kickback scheme.

To its credit, the news staff rebelled in rage and demanded an investigation. To management’s credit, it eventually printed a 30,000-word report on the affair by David Shaw, the paper’s media critic. He recounted the anxieties produced by demolition of the wall and discovered plans for other dubious deals. He blamed Willes and the publisher, Kathryn Downing, for their disregard of elementary journalistic standards and the editor, Michael Parks, for inadequate defense of them.

The uproar in the newsroom produced some vague new guidelines though not yet a design for a solid new wall. Willes virtually confessed, however, that he could have used the counsel of William F. Thomas, a former Times editor, who said, “When you take down a wall, you’d better understand why it was there in the first place.”

A wall is needed to insulate the gathering of news, which should be a selfless public service, from the pursuit of profit, which is needed to guarantee the independence of the business. Journalism, in other words, is a costly and paradoxical enterprise: it can flourish only when profitable, but it is most suspect when it seeks a profit at all costs.

The consumers of news ratify that proposition whenever they complain that news has been shaped “just to sell more papers” or to “drive the ratings” or to shill for an advertiser. They want their news unsullied by commercial motive, even as they respond to the ads that surround and subsidize it. And that ideal of purity can be approached only if the news purveyors and profit seekers in a media company are walled off in separate realms.

Like wary neighbors, the heads of these disparate teams need to talk across the top of the wall to accommodate their mutual interests. But their subordinates should not be worrying about profits while chasing the news or managing the news in the pursuit of profit. Mark Willes may hate straddling a wall down the middle of his office, but his assault upon it produced a timely affirmation of its enduring value.

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Takuji Wakagi, October 1999, Sekishi district of Hamamatsu, Shizuoka prefecture, Japan

I started gardening this half acre about 26 years ago. I felt that I just couldn’t sit in a house and do nothing. Now, I do it to keep my health good. It’s better than exercising. Also my son Kinya and his wife, Yuriko, can eat the stuff I grow. So somehow I’m helping them even though I got old and have no job.

The vegetable field is smaller than before, but I can’t use it all by myself. I don’t use machines, and my tools are all short-handled because I work sitting on the ground. I’m too old to work standing and carrying big heavy tools.

I’m 90 years old. I have already accomplished enough living in a long life. Better than other old folks who watch TV all day. I work in the morning, I get back home and have a few drinks, take a bath and go to take a nap until dinner. I’m old enough to die anytime. I worry about when that time will come. I have to keep my mind and body strong to not die. Other than that, I’m satisfied. I grow many kinds of vegetables. I have a good family. I have a warm home.

— Interview by Shingo Wakagi, Takuji's grandson

Photograph by Shingo Wakagi
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White Brilliance is a teeth whitening system that removes stains and discoloration quickly, safely and naturally. It is the professional-quality teeth whitening system from American Dental Supply that removes stains and discoloration quickly, safely and naturally. It seems that everywhere you turn these days someone is talking about beauty and health. Whether through makeup or hairstyles or perfectly toned bodies, being attractive has become a high priority. But everyone knows that the most attractive thing about someone is a big, beautiful smile. The most beautiful faces, without a smile, are not terribly attractive. Having a confident, bright smile and an easy laugh makes any face light up. You just want to be around that person.

The only problem is that over time, attractions to such things as coffee, tea, wine, nicotine and some foods can affect the teeth, making them stained and yellow. If they have not reached quite the yellow stage, they can appear several shades away from a true, gleaming white. Many people become disappointed after trying the drug store variety of whitening toothpastes that take forever and cost a small fortune. Others have spent their fortunes at their dentists in search of a professional product that can quickly and effectively restore brightness. Now there is a product you can use at home which actually gives the same results as the professionals.

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Kadi Diallo’s Trial

She came from Africa to claim the body of her son Amadou. She ended up with a fast education in the tortured racial politics of New York. By Ted Conover

The sight of Kadiatou Diallo stepping from a police van last February in front of 1157 Wheeler Avenue in the Bronx, seeing the place where police officers had killed her unarmed son and helplessly crying, “Amadou, Amadou,” until she collapsed in the arms of other West African Muslim women in traditional robes, was a haunting spectacle, replayed endlessly on television. Her grief attached poignancy to what until that moment had simply horrified: the unbelievable fusillade of bullets mistakenly aimed at this particular dark-skinned man. It let the world know that this victim was beloved, would be missed; it focused our horror, unease and anger in the person of one small mother from a tiny nation in Africa to whom New York had done such a grievous wrong.

Next we knew her because, in short order, she moved out of the hotel room the city had found for her and into one arranged for her by the Rev. Al Sharpton, and then further asserted her independence by refusing to meet with Mayor Giuliani. In a flurry of interviews over six days in the United States — and always with Sharpton — she assailed the injustice of the killing with apparently spontaneous lines like, “Amadou’s blood will feed the battle for justice for everyone.” Her efforts helped to crystallize an inchoate anger with the police into a protest movement that would eventually result in the Sharpton-orchestrated arrests at police headquarters of nearly 1,200 people, including David Dinkins, the former mayor; Kweisi Mfume, the head of the N.A.A.C.P.; the Rev. Jesse Jackson; the actress Susan Sarandon; and several members of New York’s Congressional delegation — the worst crisis of the Giuliani administration.

Kadi Diallo returned to Africa with her son’s body, Sharpton and a large contingent of reporters, who sent images of her loss around the world. Six weeks later, Sharpton flew her back to New York: the four policemen who had shot her son were being indicted on charges of second-degree murder. Following the arraignment, she began, with her son’s father, her ex-husband, what was planned to be a 16-city tour of the United States organized by Sharpton to decry police brutality. In the meantime, her son’s estate hired the O.J. Simpson “dream team” of Johnnie Cochran, Barry Scheck and Peter Neufeld to pursue a
To Sharpton’s partisans, Kadi had not only left the field, she had also — by hiring a white lawyer and wishing for peace — betrayed the movement.

Kadi had no thought of compensating the city that could net millions of dollars, despite Amadou’s near destitution. (Compensation in such a suit is usually based partly on lost future earnings.) And then, finally, in what appeared to be a further expression of her poise and self-possession, this untutored mother from Guinea fired the dream team and, after a round of very public disagreements with her ex-husband over control of her son’s estate, in August hired a white, non-celebrity lawyer to pursue her claims.

“From Grieving Mother to Forceful Celebrity,” a Times article was headlined back in April. By the end of summer, Kadi Diallo was trying to go back to grieving mother, to bring some closure to a healing process she had barely begun. She patched things up with her ex-husband. She distanced herself from Sharp­ton. And she awaited the trial that might finally shed some light on what happened that night.

The Diallo story can, in some ways, be told by its headlines: “Cops Blast Unarmed Man”; “1,000 Rally to Condemn Shooting of Unarmed Man by Police”; “A Mother Arrives from Africa to Mourn Her Slain Son”; “Slain Man’s Mother Rejects Mayor’s Aid”; “Battle­fired out of the story, its tragedy and circuslike aspects. Unity.” They convey the Tom Wolfe-ian nature of the political agenda dovetailed perfectly — for a while.

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in front of 1157 Wheeler Avenue in the Bronx. Then came the surprise announcement of Dec. 16: the trial was being moved to Albany. “The public clamor” over the case, according to an appeals court, made a fair trial in the Bronx impossible. Sharpton called, and she climbed into a car — it was time for another news conference.

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THE CALL FROM NEW YORK CAME WHEN IT was barely light on the morning of Feb. 4. On the other end of the line was Abdul Karim, Amadou’s cousin. Kadi’s younger sister picked up the phone. She knew something was wrong when Abdul insisted on talking to Oury, Kadi’s brother, “because in our tradition,” Kadi explained, “you cannot tell the woman bad news.

Kadi began to weep as she told this story. She phone rang a lot that night, she said. “People would ask me, ‘Have you heard the news?’ And I would say, ‘No!’ And they would hang up. Many times!”

And once I hung up the phone and started crying, and my daughter, Louraratou, she held me until I had the courage to call one of them back. And I said, ‘I believe in God — tell me, did my son die?’ And he said, ‘Yes.’” It wasn’t until about 4 p.m. that Kadi learned how.

“My second son, Ibrahim, he was reading the paper, and I saw he was looking down, and I said, ‘What happened?’ And he said, ‘Nothing, Mom.’ Because we teach men not to cry. But Ibrahim was crying. He was trying to be strong, but he could not believe it.” Then Ibrahim, 16, told her that the police had shot Amadou.

“They didn’t tell me how many bullets, be­}

Ted Conover is a contributing writer for the magazine and the author of "Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing," due out this spring from Random House.

to Conakry, the capital of Guinea. Through connections in the mining industry she ended up the highly paid representative of an Australian company interested in opening a gold mine; she went to the office every day, helping to arrange the needed permits and permissions. Amadou, who had earned a degree in computer science from a college in Bangkok, left on a tourist visa for the United States in September 1996. “He told me he wanted to realize his dream” of working in computers or electronics, Kadi said, “because he had seen me struggle to bring the children up and wanted to help me. His plan was to come back and assume his place as head of the family.”

The Diallos’ search for justice and Sharpton’s larger political agenda devolved perfectly — for a while.

Ted Conover is a contributing writer for the magazine and the author of "Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing," due out this spring from Random House.
I hope and pray that there will be a conviction—that’s why I’m calling for all the people to

From what I could tell, Kadi Diallo just didn’t believe that. When discussion moved from the particulars of her son’s case to a broader critique of American society, Sharpton’s political narrative ceased to be her own. At one point she told me of a sympathizer who had said to her, “I’m very sorry for your son — he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.” “No!” she had responded sharply. “He was in the right place!” Amadou, I had heard his uncle assert in the same vein, “loved America more than most Americans.” The rift between Sharpton and Kadi seemed to be about a built-in fork in the road, the place where an immigrant narrative of opportunity and fair treatment diverged from an African-American narrative about civil rights and historical injustice.

Kadi would not comment on my speculation. But when I asked her whether being in the public eye had helped her to grieve, she seemed to speak to it. “In one way yes, in another way no,” she said in November. “I wanted to express myself. What I was saying was the kind of thing that will ease my pain. But after that, I realized that I didn’t grieve. A few months ago, I came back to my senses, because the anger and the agony were gone. I don’t want to do that anymore—the speeches and things.”

As 1999 drew to a close, Kadi was crying a lot. She would wake up, she said, to find her pillow wet with tears. In Guinea, she said, it is thought that “if you keep on crying,” the deceased person “will be suffering because they are seeing you from where they are.” Prayer, she said, helps her to regain her composure.

Saikou Diallo, whose lawyers would let me speak to him only in their presence, also declined to talk about the rift with Sharpton. The speaking tour, he claimed, collapsed because of “bad communication” between himself and Kadi. But it is a matter of record that in June, Saikou publicly broke with Sharpton, saying his son’s death had become “too politicized” and “lost its main focus.” Shortly after, he incorporated his own, separate foundation and said he wanted somebody besides Cochran to represent the estate. Lawyers who have been involved in the Diallo matter say that the Diallos agreed to the Cochran-brokered arrangement because they were apparently unaware, having arrived in the United States only a few days earlier, that they could administer the estate themselves as long as each of them named a co-administrator who was a resident of New York state. (Through a spokesperson, Cochran insisted to me that he had made the Diallos aware of all the possible choices.)

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Robert Conason and filing a competing motion, amid blazing headlines, to be named administrator, asserting that a father who had abandoned his wife and children did not deserve any control over the estate. In November, Saikou and Kadi arrived at the power-sharing arrangement it seems they could have had all along. Now she fervently regrets the public acrimony.

“I will always respect him,” she said of Saikou. “We believe in our culture and religion — if you respect the father of your children, you will have blessings. It’s important for people to know that 10 years ago we divorced, we didn’t go to court. We have mutual respect.”

But resolution with Saikou didn’t end things. In a statement to Newsday, Conason, Kadi’s lawyer, inflamed the Sharpton camp by suggesting that his client would welcome the participation of Giuliani in the Amadou Diallo Foundation — “even, frankly, if he wants, to be co-chair with Dave Dinkins.” (Kadi denies ever entertaining such an idea herself.) Newsday further suggested that Kadi viewed the foundation as a necessary corrective to the “protests and mass arrests that followed the killing” and the “already poor relations between Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and the city’s minority communities.” The message was consonant with Kadi’s actions and with what she had told me: the time for fighting was past. Reconciliation was important to her own goals of healing.

But in movement politics things aren’t so simple. To Sharpton’s partisans, Kadi Diallo had not only left the fold, she had also — by hiring a white lawyer and wishing for peace — betrayed the movement. In an op-ed article this fall in The New York Amsterdam News that went unnoticed in the mainstream press, Sharpton’s ally Alton Maddox Jr. blasted Kadi.

“Make no mistake about it,” he began, “the mother of Amadou Diallo ... is no Rosa Parks.” While Parks “retained and stuck with an attorney of African ancestry,” he wrote, Kadi Diallo “has suspiciously chosen to replace attorney Johnnie Cochran with a Wall Street law firm which has no history of rocking the boat or threatening the status quo.”

Despite “all that the African community has done for Diallo,” he wrote, “she announced (through her recently retained white attorney) ... that it was time for the city to heal from the racial strife caused by the marches and demonstrations in the aftermath of her son’s death. She is either an opportunist or a fool or ... both. Civil disobedience did not cause this city’s racial strife.”

Not wishing to inflame matters further, Kadi says, she never responded to the attack.

I SPENT THE FIRST DAY OF RAMADAN, DEC. 9, with Kadi Diallo. At one point, our driver, an Israeli, deduced who she was and effusively offered his condolences.

We visited a 96-year-old Guinean immigrant to the United States, Mohammed Korka Diallo (no relation), at his senior citizen’s residence in Harlem. He was from their village, Kadi said. She had visited him often for conversation and comfort since coming to New York. Korka wanted to get out of his apartment for a while, so we set up a triangle of chairs in the building’s austere lobby. He told me how he had served in the United States Army in World War II, how he had been the host of Sékou Touré, the future president of Guinea, on Touré’s trip to New York on the eve of the country’s independence in 1958. Of Amadou’s death, he said angrily: “That should never happen here. Never! America’s the greatest country on earth. And America is the worst country on earth.”

Korka, with his rheumy eyes, gazed at Kadi admiringly. “Each time I look at her,” he said, “I feel like crying. How does she hold herself? How does she go through life? It’s too much —

Then, suddenly, on Dec. 16, the state Supreme Court Appellate Division changed the venue of the trial to Albany, saying that a fair trial in the Bronx was impossible. Jury selection is now scheduled to begin Jan. 31. To those seeking a conviction, this was seen as a disaster: the (white, upstate) residents of the capital, it is assumed, are much less likely to convict (white) policemen than are the (black and Latino) residents of the Bronx.

Stunned as I was by the news, I was even more surprised to see Kadi behind the microphones at Sharpton’s news conference that evening. She had given me the impression that she no longer spoke to him at all. The court’s decision, he began, was “immoral and an insult to the people of the Bronx.” He drew the inevitable, disquieting parallels to the trial of the policemen in the Rodney King case, which was moved from Los Angeles to suburban Simi Valley; the verdicts in the case sparked the Los Angeles riots of 1992.

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Placebos aren’t real medicine, but...

In the summer of 1994, a surgeon named J. Bruce Moseley found himself engaged in an elaborate form of make-believe. Moseley had 10 patients scheduled for an operation intended to relieve the arthritis pain in their knees. The patients were men — most of them middle-aged, all former military guys — and they weren’t ready to consign themselves to the rocking chair yet. So they had decided to take a risk and volunteer for a study that must have sounded, when Moseley first told them about it, rather peculiar. All 10 would be wheeled into an operating room at the Houston Veterans Affairs Medical Center, draped, examined and anesthetized. All 10 would be dispatched to the recovery room and sent home from the hospital by the next morning equipped with crutches and a painkiller. But there the similarities ended. For while two of the men would undergo the standard arthroscopic surgery for their condition — the scraping and rinsing of the knee joint — and three would have the rinsing alone, five would have no recognized surgical procedure at all. Their surgery would be a placebo, an exercise in just pretend.

Moseley would stab the placebo patients’ knees three times with a scalpel — to make it feel and look real, there had to be incisions and later, scars — but that was it. And he couldn’t break character. If he knew in advance which kind of surgery he was to perform, he might somehow give it away, so it wasn’t until he entered the gleaming O.R., scrubbed and in his greens, that he opened an envelope telling him whether he was doing a real procedure or a fake one that time. Only the anesthetist and the nurse assisting him were in on the secret.

In some ways, Bruce Moseley was an unlikely actor for such a role. As a surgeon and a team physician for the Houston Rockets, he wasn’t the kind of doctor given to woolly introspection about the Mind-Body Problem. He was simply skeptical about the specific benefit of arthroscopic surgery for arthritis of the knee and wanted to test its efficacy. Then Moseley started talking with a doctor named Nelda Wray who had been put in charge of health care research at the Houston V.A., and she asked him a startling question: How did he know that whatever benefit
Prescription

Jim was mildly depressed.

He needed surgery for a bum knee.

And to hold for the flu-stricken.

But they can often help patients heal.

Do patients exploit their power? By Margaret Talbot

came from this surgery wasn't a product of the placebo effect — that is, that those who improved did so not because the operation actually healed the knee joint but because they expected it would?

"I said: 'It can't be,'" Moseley recalls. "This is surgery we're talking about.' And she said: 'You're all wrong. The bigger and more dramatic the patient perceives the intervention to be, the bigger the placebo effect. Big pills have more than small pills, injections have more than pills and surgery has the most of all.'"

Moseley was intrigued, but before he could begin his study, it had to be approved by the institutional review board at Baylor and by the human-studies committee at the VA. "My first reaction was what anybody's would be," says Baruch Brody, an ethicist who consulted with the committees. "I said: 'You're going to do what? Cutting people up, pretending to do surgery when you're not?'"

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The placebo worked. Six months after surgery, the 10 patients still didn't know whether they had been faked out or not. But all of them reported much less pain. None were unhappy with the outcome of the operation. This was a pilot study — far too small to offer any definitive conclusions about the efficacy of arthroscopic surgery for osteoarthritis. But it was suggestive enough to set Moseley and Wray on an expanded version of the same research design — this time with 180 patients — for which they expect to have the results next October.

Sylvester Colligan, a 76-year-old World War II veteran from Beaumont, Tex., was assigned to the placebo group in Moseley and Wray's expanded study. Colligan's right knee had been giving him trouble for five years when a doctor at his local clinic told him he probably had arthritis and suggested he talk to Moseley. "I was very impressed with him, especially when I heard he was the team doctor with the Rockets," says Colligan, a courteous, soft-spoken retiree who worked for the local Coca-Cola bottling plant, first as an assistant to the driver of
a delivery truck and eventually as an account manager. “So, sure, I went ahead and signed up for this new thing he was doing.” Colligan doesn’t sound all that at ease with the term placebo, but he does know his surgery consisted of only shallow incisions. More important, he knows that he has no pain in his knee now, and that he can mow his yard again and walk wherever he wants. “The surgery was two years ago and the knee never has bothered me since,” he says. “It’s just like my other knee now, I give a whole lot of credit to Dr. Moseley. Whenever I see him on the TV during a basketball game, I call the wife in and say, ‘Hey, there’s the doctor that fixed my knee!’”

That operating-room fakery should exert a therapeutic effect on a patient is a remarkable notion. And yet it may be that the symbolic armature of surgery — the shedding of blood, the cultural prestige of surgeons, even the scars that call to mind a dramatic act of healing — is itself a powerful force in recovery. It may be that “placebo surgery” isn’t such an oxymoron after all.

Forty years ago, a young Seattle cardiologist named Leonard Cobb conducted a unique trial of a procedure then commonly used for angina, in which doctors made small incisions in the chest and tied knots in two arteries to try to increase blood flow to the heart. It was a popular technique — 92 percent of patients reported that it helped — but when Cobb compared it with placebo surgery in which he made incisions but did not tie off the arteries, the sham operations proved just as successful. The procedure, known as internal mammary ligation, was soon abandoned. Over the next decades, the whole idea of placebo surgery fell out of favor with ethicists and patient advocates. If placebo surgery didn’t violate the Hippocratic edict “First, do no harm,” what did?

Now, though, that taboo is fading, and Moseley and Wray are not the only ones arguing that new surgical techniques, like new medicines, ought to be tested with placebo controls. Doctors investigating a new technique for treating Parkinson’s disease, for example, incorporated a placebo control group — patients who had holes drilled in their skulls to simulate the real procedure, in which fetal cells are implanted in the brain — into a widely publicized study released last April. The study showed a significant placebo effect, though the motor ability of the patients who actually got the fetal implants improved even more. “This is just the beginning,” Dr. C. Warren Olanow, chairman of neurology at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, told Time magazine, “Tomorrow, if you have a new procedure, you will have to do a double-blind placebo trial.”

Some doctors argue, with reason, that the new enthusiasm for placebo surgery is driven by hospital bean counters and insurers who want hard evidence that an expensive procedure works before they’ll pay for it. And yet, with all due respect for medical economics, that isn’t the only explanation. If placebo surgery makes sense, it makes sense because of the growing body of evidence for the strength of the placebo effect in general. Maybe pretend operations are just the most sensational proof of a diffuse phenomenon that has never quite been explained, but that, as the historian of science Anne Harrington has written, continues to “haunt our house of biomedical objectivity.”

The truth is that the placebo effect is huge — anywhere between 35 and 75 percent of patients benefit from taking a dummy pill in studies of new drugs — so huge, in fact, that it should probably be put to conscious use in clinical practice, even if we do not entirely understand how it works. For centuries, Western medicine consisted of almost nothing but the placebo effect. The patient who got better after a bleeding — or a dose of fox lung, wood lice, tartar emetic or any of the other charming staples of the 19th-century pharmacopoeia — got better either in spite of them or because of their symbolic value. Such patients believed in the cure and in the authority of the bewigged gentlemen administering it, and the belief gave them hope and the hope helped make them well. There were exceptions — remedies, like quinine for malaria, the vaccine for smallpox and morphine for pain relief, that actually worked. But generally speaking, if all the drugs of the day “could be sunk to the bottom of the sea,” as Oliver Wendell Holmes observed in 1860, “it would be all the better for mankind — and all the worse for the fishes.”

In the postwar era, with the triumph of the biomedical model and the proliferation of drugs and techniques that did successfully extend life, many doctors would just as soon have forgotten about the placebo effect altogether. They now had proven remedies and methods: antibiotics for infection; dazzling surgical techniques like heart and liver transplantation; sophisticated diagnostic tools like magnetic reso-
actually harm themselves if they down the latest untested herbal panacea, while if they take an inert substance (or get a cheering speech) given by a conventional physician, they will do no worse and they stand a good statistical chance of doing better. There is something to be said, surely, for a little benign deception.

T

HOUGH A FEW DOCTORS ARE STARTING TO ARGUE for a more conscious use of the placebo effect, even for the deliberate prescribing of dummy pills, this is not an easy case to make. Placebos have long slunk around with a reputation as nuisances — necessary, but annoying. Most of us know them as the pharmacologically inert drugs given to some of the subjects in so-called double-blind studies of new drugs, in which neither the subjects nor the researcher know who is getting what. If as many subjects improve by taking the placebo as do by taking the active drug, then the active drug is thought to be a bust. It happens all the time, even to highly touted new medications. Last summer, the share price of a British biotech company called Peptide Therapeutics dropped 33 percent after it revealed that its new allergy vaccine was only as effective as a placebo. During the trials on food-allergy patients, a company spokesman had reported delightedly, 75 percent had improved to the point where they could tolerate foods they’d never been able to before. But when the control group data came in, so, awkwardly enough, had 75 percent of the subjects taking inert tablets. Last year, the pharmaceutical company Merck announced that it was halting development of MK-869, a new antidepressant it had been promoting for months as a blockbuster drug on the scale of Prozac. Alas, the dummy pills worked just as well. And in a recent study on VEGF, a genetically engineered heart drug announced with much fanfare by its manufacturer, Genentech, the placebo actually performed better. Two months after their treatments, patients who had gotten low doses of VEGF could walk 26 seconds longer on a treadmill, those who had gotten high doses could walk 32 seconds longer and those who had gotten a placebo could walk — go figure — 42 seconds longer.

Of course, patients are often far from pleased to hear how well their placebos have worked. “Once we did a PMS study where we treated people for a month with placebo and then told people who’d responded what they’d been on,” says Karen Weil, a clinical psychi­trist at George Washington University. “And as it turns out, it’s a very difficult thing to confront somebody with. Some people feel insulted, or silly. You’re telling them it’s all in their mind. We try to frame it positively — your symptoms aren’t so severe that you need medication; your mind has other ways of making you feel better. But that doesn’t always help.”

As if all this weren’t stigma enough, there’s the history of the placebo to taint it, too. The very word, Latin for “I shall please,” carries a faintly unwholesome connotation. It’s the first utterance you hear in the Catholic Vespers for the Dead, and in the Middle Ages, it referred, unflatteringly, to professional mourners who sang at funeral masses — toadies, sycophants. A medical dictionary of 1811 defined a placebo as something “given more to please than to benefit the patient.” Placebos were the sugar pills, the drops of colored water, the “tonics” dispensed to placate queralous or malingering patients. In the 19th and well into the 20th century doctors may have handed them out “by the bushels,” as the eminent American physician Richard Cabot once admitted he did, but they also regarded them with some embarrassment. Placebos smacked of deception and quackery, and what’s worse, upended the logic of Western medicine. “We all trust our sensation as a reflection of objective reality, and yet the placebo changes the sensation without affecting the objective reality,” lamented Patrick D. Wall, a pain specialist. (This was in an essay with the pithy title “The Placebo Effect: An Unpopular Topic.”)

Meanwhile, alternative-medicine types, who might be expected to think a little more loosely about such matters — and to acknowledge a role for psychological states in physical healing — are generally too wary of seeing their methods dismissed as “mere” placebos to take much positive interest in the placebo effect itself. Dr. Howard Brody, a professor of medicine at Michigan State University who is the author of a coming book on placebos, tells a story of two Korean acupuncture­ practitioners who met at a conference of alternative practitioners and chatted amicably until they discovered that each practiced a slightly different form of acupuncture. They then viciously accused one another of purveying a placebo.

AND YET THE INCONVENIENT EVIDENCE KEEPS TRICKLING IN THAT if placebos are lies, they can also be, in the words of one commentator on the phenomenon, “lies that heal.” In an influential article first published in 1955, the Harvard researcher Henry Beecher concluded that between 30 and 40 percent of any treated group would respond to a placebo. But studies since then have shown placebos working for certain conditions — pain, depression, some heart ailments, gastric ulcers and other stomach complaints — in closer to 50 or 60 percent of subjects, sometimes more. Indeed, it’s not unheard of for placebo effects to exceed those attributed to the active drug.

And strangely, the placebo effect is not limited to the subjective sensations of patients; some studies show actual physiological change as a result of sham treatments. Doctors in one study successfully eliminated warts by painting them with a brightly colored, inert dye and promising patients the warts would be gone when the color wore off. In a study of asthmatics, researchers found that they could produce dilation of the airways by simply telling people they were inhaling a bronchodilator, even when they weren’t. Patients suffering pain after wisdom-tooth extraction got just as much relief from a fake application of ultrasound as from a real one, so long as both patient and therapist thought the machine was on. Fifty-two percent of the colitis patients...
treated with placebo in 11 different trials reported feeling better — and 50 percent of the inflamed intestines actually looked better when assessed with a sigmoidoscope.

How much of this sort of improvement can be written off to spontaneous remission of an illness or regression to the mean (some people would have gotten better anyway; many illnesses wax and wane) and how much of it lasts (studies are often only 8 or 12 weeks long and placebo effects may flag sooner than "real" ones) are still open questions. Because we treat so many illnesses aggressively, we know less about their natural history — what would happen if we did nothing. Very few studies compare a placebo group with a group receiving no treatment at all, since that would tell us more about the placebo than the active drug, and it is the active drug most researchers care about.

"Some of what we call the placebo effect can surely be explained as the natural course of an illness," says Dr. Walter A. Brown, a professor of psychiatry at Brown University who has written extensively on the phenomenon. But not all of it, Brown believes. "There is certainly data that suggests that just being in the healing situation accomplishes something. Depressed patients who are merely put on a waiting list for treatment do not do as well as those given placebos. And — this is very telling, I think — when placebos are given for pain management, the course of pain relief follows what you would get with an active drug. The peak relief comes about an hour after it's administered, as it does with the real drug, and so on. If placebo analgesia was the equivalent of giving nothing, you'd expect a more random pattern."

With these kinds of observations to bolster his case, Brown has lately been making a highly unorthodox suggestion. If placebos accomplish so much in a research setting, why not let doctors deliberately prescribe them? Of course, the ethics of informed consent would require that a physician tell the patient what he was giving him. Brown, who thinks such a strategy would be appropriate for conditions like mild to moderate depression, pain, asthma and hypertension, in which a placebo has shown to be especially potent and in which distress plays an aggravating role, imagines the doctor saying something like this: "Mrs. Jones, the type of depression you have been treated in the past with either antidepressant medicine or psychotherapy, one of the talking therapies. These two treatments are still widely used and are options for you. There is a third kind of treatment, less expensive for you and less likely to cause side effects, which also helps many people with your condition. This treatment involves taking one of these pills twice a day and coming to our office every two weeks to let us know how you're doing. These pills do not contain any drug. We don't know exactly how they work; they may trigger or stimulate the body's own healing processes. We do know that your chances of improving with this treatment are quite good. If after six weeks of this treatment you're not feeling better we can try one of the other treatments."

Brown's proposal, which he has been airing for the past few years in venues ranging from the journal Hospital Practice to USA Today, has touched off a spirited debate, and it's easy to see why. In the eyes of some critics, there is something shady about the crafty bedside pitch he has scripted, one that seems intended to mislead as much as inform. Donald Klein, a psychiatrist at Columbia University, worries that deliberately prescribing placebo antidepressants would "play into the hands of those who depict psychiatrists as artful, exploitative manipulators who take advantage of the patient's gullibility."

There's a reason Brown's script is so subtle. Plenty of evidence exists that placebos can work in a clinical setting so long as at least one party believes they are the genuine article. Therapies that have since been wholly discredited — from mammary ligation for angina to milk-quaffing for ulcers — produced precisely the results they were supposed to until they were shown to have no scientific basis for doing so. But can a placebo ever make you better if you know it's a placebo? Doesn't its agency lie only in the reasonable expectation — the 50-50 chance, at least — that you're getting the real thing? Does a placebo cease to be a placebo when you call its bluff?

Maybe the best way to consider whether Brown's idea would work in practice is to apply it to depression. That was the ailment for which he first suggested deliberate placebo treatment, back in 1994, in an article in the journal Neuropsychopharmacology. Since then, evidence that depression is an especially placebo-sensitive condition has only been mounting. The splashiest comes from Irving Kirsch, a psychologist at the University of Connecticut, who contends that the multibillion-dollar success of Prozac and its brethren may be attributed almost entirely to the placebo effect. In a study published this past June, Kirsch and his co-author, Guy Sapirstein of the Westwood Lodge Hospital in Needham, Mass., analyzed 19 clinical trials of antidepressants and concluded that the expectation of improvement, not adjustments in brain chemistry, accounted for 75 percent of the drugs' effectiveness. Kirsch says a study he is working on now, based on the clinical trials that won F.D.A. approval for the drugs Prozac, Zoloft, Effexor, Paxil and Serzone, bears out the earlier one. "The critical factor," says Kirsch, "is our beliefs about what's going to happen to us. You don't have to rely on drugs to see profound transformation."

Kirsch thinks his research justifies a round of somewhat unorthodox studies in which half of the people getting the active antidepressant would be led to believe they were getting the placebo. "It would involve some temporary deception and then a debriefing," he says. "But I think it's acceptable because it would be the way to show a true drug effect. Do people who are taking the drug but think they are taking the placebo do as well as people getting the placebo? The companies don't know and they don't seem to want to know."

Plenty of informed people — and not just shills for the pharmaceutical industry or dedicated Listeners to Prozac — think Kirsch goes too far. It's as if "he set out to prove that all antidepressant medication is a

The placebo effect is so huge — between 35 and 75 percent of patients benefit from taking dummy pills in studies of new drugs — that it should probably be put to use in clinical practice.
DOCTORS WHO DELIBERATELY PRESCRIBE PLACEBOS AND PATIENTS who accept them are not unheard of, even now. Many of us, for example, enter into a tacit agreement to take a placebo when we ask for, and usually get, a prescription for antibiotics to treat a viral infection. (And since this is a dangerous placebo — it contributes to the problem of bacterial resistance — maybe it would be better, as Brown suggests, for doctors to "prescribe," as in write down, a suggestion to take an over-the-counter cold remedy. That way, they could assuage the common longing to leave a doctor's office with something in hand without contributing to a public health threat.) Moreover, plenty of Americans cherish the conviction that the body works in ways unknown and unknowable by Western medicine. "Health professionals and people of a scientific bent underestimate how strongly many people believe that the body heals itself and that synthetic drugs are bad for you and yada yada yada," as Brown puts it. "I don't think it would be as tricky as it sounds to tell somebody, 'I can give you this stuff, we don't know exactly how this works but one thing it probably does is to allow the body to generate its own healing function.'"

One patient I spoke with, a man who has been participating in a study of an anti-anxiety drug, found nothing particularly objectionable about the prospect of being treated with placebo, a concept he seemed thoroughly to understand. The man, a 60-year-old real-estate agent who didn't want his name used, said he had "been kind of hyper" for as long as he could remember. He was the kind of guy who couldn't stand hitting a bunch of traffic lights in a row, as he put it, and he'd had stomach problems since he was a kid, for which he dosed himself daily with over-the-counter antacids or baking soda and water. The study he's involved in has an unusual design that requires everyone to take the active drug for the first six weeks, and this man is convinced that he has benefited from it. He feels calmer, and his stomach hasn't been bothering him at all. But next week, when the study enters a new phase, he stands a 50-50 chance of getting only a placebo, and that doesn't worry him, either. "If a placebo works, that's fine with me," he says. "The important thing is that it works, not how it works. I'd find it kind of interesting if it did, to tell you the truth. That would be a sign to me that I need to work on my mind a little more."

And there is one small study, the only one of its kind, that suggests that a placebo prescribed openly could win over some patients. At an outpatient psychiatric clinic in 1965, two researchers from Johns Hopkins University gave 15 adult "neurotics" an inert pill identified as such. With straight faces, the doctors told them that "many people with your kind of condition have also been helped by what are sometimes called sugar pills, and we feel that a so-called sugar pill may help you, too. Do you know what a sugar pill is? A sugar pill is a pill with no medicine in it at all. I think this pill will help you as it has helped so many others. Are you willing to try this pill?" Fourteen of the patients were convinced by this vaguely smarmy-sounding pitch (the 15th dropped out after her husband made fun of the idea), and after a week all reported ameliorated symptoms. Some thought the pill definitely was a placebo and some thought it must actually be an active drug, but either way, they had faith that the doctor was trying to help them, and they improved. At the least, then, Brown's idea deserves to be tested out with a bigger, more reliable study.

Yet in the end it is also a bit of a gimmick. If you get too fixated on the ritual of swallowing a pill, you miss the larger meaning of the placebo effect. And the larger meaning has to do with a certain kind of empathic attention that a doctor — some doctors — give to patients. It has to do with faith and hope and a physician's capacity for marshaling those sentiments in the service of the sick. "The secret of the care of the patient," wrote Dr. Francis W. Peabody in a popular essay for doctors, "is in caring for the patient." It may also be the secret of the placebo.
Finland’s Forte

How a small Scandinavian country

A
ter the shattering final chords of Jean Sibelius’s symphonic poem “Kullervo” had died away, there was a shimmer of silence before the applause began. It was the sign of a good performance — and of a good audience. This was one of the last concerts of the 1999 Helsinki Festival, and I was part of a large crowd gathered inside the handsome Johanneck Kirko, or St. John’s Church. The setting was doubly apt. For many Europeans and Americans, art has become a 20th-century substitute for religion, attested to by the fact that churches are everywhere used for musical performances. But Finland is something else again: a country where classical music could properly be called the true secular faith.

Drifting out that September night with the rest of the audience onto Korkeavuorenkatu, the street that runs from the great leafy Esplanade down to the sea, I thought not so much of Sibelius as of his successors — and of something one of them had recently said to me. “Every country has its profile, its national image,” the composer Aulis Sallinen said. “For us, it’s all about music. It’s extremely important to us.”

And Finns have become important to music. Anyone who takes the most cursory interest in classical music today knows the names (even if they’re practically unspellable) of Sallinen, Einojuhani Rautavaara, Joonas Kokkonen, Magnus Lindberg, Jouni Kaipainen and Kaija Saariaho. These are but a few stars from the expanding galaxy of contemporary Finnish music.

The work of living Finnish composers has been embraced in concert halls around the world, including the United States. One of the few contemporary works ever to be greeted warmly on the Metropolitan Opera stage was “The Red Line,” Sallinen’s powerful 1983 epic about Finnish farming life. Last November, New Yorkers heard the premiere of Saariaho’s luminous choral symphony, “Oltra Mar,” at Avery Fisher Hall, as part of the “Messages for the Millennium” program given by the New York Philharmonic. And this April, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, known for its championing of the music vanguard, will devote an entire program to symphonic works from Finland.

Like their fellow composers, Sallinen and Saariaho have been inspired and helped by the parallel flowerings of Finnish vocal, instrumental and conducting talent. In the 30 years since I first heard the wonderful bass Martti Talvela singing the role of King Mark in Wagner’s “Tristan und Isolde” at Covent Garden, the stream of Finnish singers has hit flood tide. Opera houses across the world fight for sopranos like Karita Mattila and Soile Isokoski, the mezzo Monica Groop, the baritones Jorma Hynninen and Raimo Lauttala, and Talvela’s heirs, the basses Matti Salminen and Jaakko Ryhanen.

There is an equally impressive generation of Finnish instrumentalists — from the pianist Olli Mustonen to the dazzling 23-year-old violinist Pekka Kuusisto (who gave a lively recital at Avery Fisher Hall in November). As for Finnish conductors, they are waving their batons across the globe: Osmo Vanska in Scotland; Jukka-Pekka Saraste in Toronto; the celebrated Esa-Pekka Salonen at the Los Angeles Philharmonic.
Where does the music come from? Finns give the question new meaning. From left: Pekka Kuusisto, 23, who has performed at Avery Fisher Hall; concertgoers at the Finnish National Opera in Helsinki; the composer Einojuhani Rautavaara, a protege of Finland’s god of music, Jean Sibelius, who conquered the world of classical music. By Geoffrey Wheatcroft

All in all, this is an array of musical talent that would do credit to any of the larger European countries — or even to the United States. And this eruption of musical genius comes out of a Scandinavian country with a national population of only five million, roughly that of Missouri or Indiana. If there is a more disproportionate cultural phenomenon today, it is hard to think of it.

VARIOUS THEORIES, SOME QUITE CHARMING BUT DUBIOUS, HAVE BEEN proposed to explain the recent crescendo in Finnish musical output. One musician I talked to said skittishly that the country’s wealth of vocal talent comes from the Finns’ historical need to shout to each other across great spaces. Juhani Raiskinen, head of the Finnish National Opera, attributed Finnish musical prowess to three things: “forests and oxygen and lungs.”

But some argue that the Finns’ odd language has helped inflame their musical passions. Finnish has few major linguistic relatives; Hungarian comes closest, and even that is a stretch. Living in such verbal isolation, there has surely been an incentive to communicate in a language that needs no translation and knows no boundaries.

Others point, not entirely facetiously, to the weather. It’s well below freezing for much of the year in Finland. The cold of winter is compounded by almost constant darkness, especially in northern Lapland. It’s enough to bring out the brooding artist in anyone. Perhaps this explains why Finnish composers so easily identify with the dark tonalities that dominate the palette of 20th-century music.

Perhaps the most grounded explanation is that Finns, like the citizens of many small nations, have learned that the best way to make a splash on the global cultural scene is to specialize. Think of the art that poured out of half a dozen Italian cities in the quattrocento, or the playwrights England produced within a few decades during the Elizabethan era. Certainly in the economic sphere, Finland has discovered the benefits of carving a niche. In recent years, the land of pine and reindeer has become the prosperous land of Nokia. The telecommunications industry now drives the country’s economy. Perhaps the same logic that has turned Finland into Europe’s Silicon Valley is responsible for its efflorescence in classical music.

THE ROOTS OF FINLAND’S CURRENT MUSICAL CULTURE CAN PARTLY BE traced to two key events in that country’s history: the publication of the “Kalevala,” in 1835, and the birth of Jean Sibelius, in 1865. The “Kalevala” is the Finnish Saga, a series of verse epics passed down orally for hundreds of years before Elias Lonnrot collected and printed them at last. It’s hard to exaggerate what this belated transcription meant for the small Scandinavian country. Even if they can’t recite its many thousands of lines, all Finns know the “Kalevala.” It became at once a touchstone of patriotic pride — the country’s first indisputably great work of art — as well as the bedrock of Finnish cultural identity.

The rhythm and prosody of the “Kalevala” are now thoroughly embedded in the language of Finland — and in the country’s music as well. An English speaker can have a rough idea what the hypnotic-trochaic meter of the “Kalevala” sounds like, since Longfellow borrowed it for his poem “Hiawatha.” (It sounds better in Finnish.) The stories of the “Kalevala” have directly inspired practically every major Finnish composer: Sibelius, Rautavaara and Sallinen have all set parts of the epic to music. You don’t need to understand the language of the “Kalevala” to find it beautiful when sung; it is an inherently musical text. Indeed, the soprano Soile Isokoski told me
The Finns speak an unusual idiom that almost nobody else in the world understands. Surely there has been an incentive to communicate in a language that needs no translation, and knows no boundaries.

...
The gifted violinist Pekka Kuusisto, the \textit{Wunderkind} who looks several years younger than 23, was trained at one of these academies, named Ita Helsinki. The pupils there come from all walks of life; musical skill is all that's required. As one student boasted, “It’s possible for the child of an unemployed man to come here.”

The school’s Helsinki Junior Strings Orchestra is just one of many ways Finland nurtures its young musical talent. The school’s pedagogical method, known as the color-strings approach, is based on the recognition of two things about small children: they need mnemonics — four different colors and four different cartoons stand for each of the strings of a violin — and they love games. The teachers therefore make playing the fiddle or cello a game, “serving the happiness of the child.”

Ita Helsinki produces promising players. In one classroom, a coed group of 8-year-old cellists perform a routine rather like a basketball drill, with one member of the team shooting musical hoops as the others listen. Next door, a violinist named Geza Szilvay coaches 6-year-old girls. His first rule is, “It mustn’t be a chore.” He is gentleness itself as he instructs, “Relax your thumb for vibrato,” before taking them back to a simple pizzicato on the G-string. The hope, of course, is that these girls will one day be part of the Helsinki Philharmonic. Or become a composer, the way Kaija Saariaho did.

Those girls and boys won’t be playing a large part in the festivities for the year 2000, but most other Finnish musicians will, and there is a keen sense of expectation. Saariaho’s new opera will have its premiere at next summer’s Salzburg Festival, and Finland itself will throb with new music. Sallinen recently delivered the score of his latest opera, based on “King Lear,” to the Finnish National Opera. The work will have its premiere in September. In the summer there will be “The Age of Dreams,” an operatic triptych with a libretto by Paavo Rintala — the three parts composed by Kalevi Aho, Olli Kortekangas and Herman Rechberger. This will have its debut at the Savonlinna Festival, which is held in a medieval lakeside castle, and is one of Finland’s most attractive offerings for the musical pilgrim. Both Jorma Hynninen and Monica Groop will be creating roles for the production.

As in any other field, countries get what they pay for, they get what they want and they get what they deserve. Perhaps it shouldn’t be surprising, then, that Finns have become so dominant in the classical music world. Where else besides Helsinki does a new symphony elicit a long segment on the television news — and a new-music concert sell out as quickly as a rock concert? Rautavaara summed it up with wry satisfaction. “Music is extremely respected in Finland,” he said. “Even the politicians respect music here.”

The extent of collaboration in Finland might have something to do with the fact that so many of the country’s leading musical figures were schoolmates. Musical education in Finland is of a quality and quantity unmatched anywhere in the world. It’s romantic to think of the Finnish musical explosion as some inexplicable, God-given miracle. In reality, it is a product of something far less exalted: taxation.

Public money pays for dozens of lavish conservatories that are spread around the country. At one school in Oulu, a distant port on the Gulf of Bothnia, more than 1,300 pupils have access to a pipe organ, three Steinway grands, a modern recording studio and a concert hall.

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PLACEBO
Continued from Page 39

businesslike as possible. I cut down on the additional conversation and I do an assessment in 15 minutes where normally I might take half an hour."

This isn’t the first time a company has issued instructions aimed at controlling emotional atmosphere. Sometimes the request is for Dr. Adler to wear his lab coat in order to increase the sense of distance between him and the patients. But it’s the first time they’ve touched on something so basic to Scheetz: her ability to communicate with people and put them at their ease.

What Karin Scheetz has stumbled upon, what is for her something of an occupational hazard, is actually an important idea. Placebos may work because they create the pretext for a doctor or a doctor surrogate to listen carefully to our troubles and to pay us a close and committed and hopeful attention. Since researchers on clinical studies are so invested in retaining participants, they are usually generous with their time and care and enthusiastic about the treatment being tested. Placebos, then, are just the tokens of a faith that somebody is at last in league with us against our illness.

FOR YEARS, SCIENTISTS HAVE TRIED to come up with a plausible explanation for the placebo effect, and there are by now several contenders. One is classical conditioning: people who have experienced relief in medical settings or from ingesting a pill are primed, like Pavlov’s dogs, to do the same again. Another is the release of endorphins: several studies have suggested that placebo pain relievers, at least, work by stimulating the brain’s own analgesics. Still a third is that taking a placebo, especially if it is administered in an atmosphere of hope, relieves stress, which tends to aggravate the symptoms of placebo-sensitive conditions like asthma and hypertension.

What all of these explanations have in common — for they are certainly not mutually exclusive — is the element of expectation, the promise of help on the way that can only be imparted by another human being. This kind of hope seems particularly relevant when you respect the distinction made by Dr. Howard M. Spiro, one of the most thoughtful writers on the placebo, between illness and disease: illness is what the patient feels; disease is what the doctor finds. Hope can help soften the experience of illness, though it cannot cure the underlying disease. Says Walter Brown: “What we’re really talking about with the placebo effect is the reduction of distress, the reassurance from being in a healing situation that you’re finally in somebody’s hands.”

In fact, there is hard data to support the notion that the emotional alliance between a doctor and patient is itself a therapeutic force — that a compassionate and optimistic physician can be, as one writer puts it, a walking placebo, that words can be physically comforting. In 1987, a British doctor named K. B. Thomas tried a little experiment on 200 patients in his own practice who came to see him feeling under the weather, but with no abnormal physical signs. Thomas gave one group of patients a definite diagnosis and told them they’d be better in a few days. He told the other that he couldn’t be sure what was the matter with them and so couldn’t say when their symptoms would clear up. Two weeks later, 64 percent of the patients who received an encouraging consultation had gotten better, compared with 39 percent in the other group.

In a study on postoperative pain conducted at Massachusetts General Hospital, half of the patients were randomly chosen to be visited by the anesthetist the night before surgery and treated, poor dears, in a brusque, offhand manner. “My name is so-and-so,” the doctor would say. “Tomorrow I’m going to give you anesthesia. Don’t worry; everything is going to be all right,” and then off he’d go. The same anesthetist visited the other group of patients and this time put on a warm and sympathetic face, holding their hands as he sat on their beds, telling them exactly what to expect in the way of postop pain and assuring them that pain relief would be available. Those in the second group ended up requiring only half the amount of painkilling medication and were discharged an average of 2.6 days earlier.

A practitioner’s enthusiasm for a given treatment and his ability to...
On one level, Luis Buñuel's 1967 film "Belle de Jour" is a parable for our times: a bored young housewife takes a day job and ends up destroying her husband and their life together. But the fact that the day job happened to be in a whorehouse, that the actress was Catherine Deneuve and that the clothes were by Yves Saint Laurent did more than create the most scandalous, erotic film of the day. "Belle de Jour" gave a double life to luxury clothes so powerful that designers have been fantasizing about it ever since.

In fact, it was only the third day of the spring collections in Milan last September when astute fashion observers like Gilles Bensimon, the publication director of Elle magazine, and Suzy Menkes, the fashion editor of The International Herald Tribune, stopped muttering millennium and started talking, once again, about "Belle de Jour." Not that there was any outfit from "Belle de Jour" on the runway; it was the character who was. The clothes could have been in the closet of a woman like Deneuve's character, Belle: clothes for repressed upper-class women who may or may not be longing for a little illicit titillation.

This is the third time in a single decade that Saint Laurent has been revived and recycled by important designers. Yet it is never his Ballets Russes collection that is referenced, or his Mondrian dress. Designers never seem to draw on the particular talent that Women's Wear Daily articulated early...
This page, clockwise from top left: Silk blouse and skirt, $2,870. To order from Alexander McQueen, 011-44-171-278-4333. Cotton tank, $100, and skirt, $540, from Helmut Lang, 80 Greene Street. Cotton dress, $735, from Balenciaga “Le Dix” by Nicolas Ghesquiere. At Kirna Zabete, 96 Greene Street. Polyester blouse, $445, skirt, $570, and shoes by Junya Watanabe. At Comme des Garçons, 520 West 22nd Street. Mink-and-chiffon dress, $24,000, from Fendi, 720 Fifth Avenue. Opposite page, from left: Silk dress, $1,925. At Versace boutiques. Silk jumpsuit, $4,780, by Chloé. At Bergdorf Goodman.

The Iconoclasts Because without them, there’s no “design” in designers.

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The Bombs  Because female designers know how to turn up the heat.
The Hot Dots Because the time to be serious is winter. And winter is over.

This page, from left: Dress, $1,200, by Marc Jacobs. At Saks Fifth Avenue. Silk dress, $1,700, by Emanuel Ungaro Parallele. At Emanuel Ungaro, 792 Madison Avenue. Bikini top, $399, and pants, $1,695. At Polo Ralph Lauren, 867 Madison Avenue. Opposite page, from left: Coat, $1,290, by Calvin Klein. At Bloomingdale's. Python coat, $9,250, by Yves Saint Laurent Rive Gauche. At Barneys New York. Leather trench coat, $2,400, by Thimister. At Barneys New York. Leather trench coat, $3,500, by Oscar de la Renta. To order at Saks Fifth Avenue.
Because everyone has something to hide.
on, his gift as a “master colorist”; no designer has yet come close to marrying the hues that Saint Laurent still does effortlessly.

No, it is always one particular period that studiously hip designers like Marc Jacobs, Tom Ford of Gucci and Miuccia Prada return to again and again and again, and that is the “Belle de Jour” days — a precise decade from the time of the movie’s release: 1967 to 1977. In those years, Saint Laurent was indeed designing impeccably tailored clothes with an aura that became a uniform for French ladies who were “very classy,” as the procurers in Buñuel’s film might say. But it wasn’t just Saint Laurent. Other powerful image makers made these bourgeois clothes come alive by implying that they had a kinky subtext.

Deneuve, dressed in Saint Laurent throughout the movie, plays a frigid newlywed, sleeping in a single bed and not wanting to have sex with her husband, Pierre, described by one lothario as a sort of Cub Scout. “Belle de Jour” is the name she is given when, unable to suppress sexual fantasies in which she is degraded, she decides to become a prostitute by day. She arrives for work and puts her upper-class designer clothes in a cupboard until she resumes that role. But as her sexual life gets more dangerous, her sexual fantasies get more degrading, until in one, she’s tied to a tree and shot in the cheek. Yet she can’t help herself and doesn’t quit her working-girl life until she’s discovered by a friend of her husband. But alas, it’s too late.

In this black comedy (particularly if you’re French), Deneuve’s clothes get continual comments from her fellow call girls and their clients. One dress is “pretty but not that easy to take off,” according to a peer; another notes, “What a great cut, it’s really nice,” and “Money buys anything.” To which the man who becomes Belle’s first paying customer says, “But you can’t buy class.”

That’s what he thinks.

Saint Laurent’s clothes were proof that class could be bought. Even after she has caused her husband’s ruin, Deneuve, pressed in a tidy black Saint Laurent dress with white cuffs and collar, is told, “You look like a precocious schoolgirl.” But even those schoolgirl clothes have the same double life that Belle was having: they might look classy on the outside, but they cloaked a raging, unsatisfied sexual appetite.

Buñuel’s erotic parable profoundly influenced fashion photography when it was released. Helmut Newton’s images of Saint Laurent in the years that followed were full of the same Continued on Page 54
The Supersizers

Because the bigger the skirt, the bigger the entrance.
The Name-Droppers Because it's no secret these clothes costs a fortune.
The Purist

Because this season, Donna Karan stood alone. A peak performance.

It was a Newton photograph of the 1975 fall haute couture that forever defined Saint Laurent’s work visually. The famous photo was of an androgynous streetwalker in a “smoking,” smoking. The rest of the series shows more clearly the shoot’s intentions, as every model is dressed like Belle de Jour’s peers — in conservative clothes, waiting in the streets for a client. What’s so astounding is the power of imagery to define precisely who Saint Laurent was then and whom fashion connoisseurs see him as today. There is nothing in the clothes themselves to suggest what Buñuel and Newton projected onto them.

After dabbling in other styles, like the Ballets Russes in 1976, Saint Laurent returned again and again to the classics that Newton and Buñuel had successfully turned into provocative reference points. Deneuve never stopped representing the inscrutable woman, all icy repression on the outside and ravenous lust on the inside. (She played a vampire who seduces Susan Sarandon in “The Hunger” nearly 20 years after she made “Belle de Jour.”) But as Saint Laurent’s less iconic customers got older, men stopped seeing in them the 23-year-old virginal bride who really wants to work in a bordello.

Yet designers who followed Saint Laurent didn’t stop seeing that vision. “Belle de Jour” led them to develop an illusion of their own: if they had to create conservative clothes for commercial reasons, they could dream that the woman who bought them saw something deeper and more profound in them. Or, that she wasn’t as boring as she looked.

“Belle de Jour” may have addressed a certain male fantasy that all women would like to work part time as call girls, but it also addressed designers’ fantasies that even the dullest garments they produce might be considered racy.

Of course, modern times defy leaving much to the imagination. New versions of the floppy-tie blouse and dress that Saint Laurent invented are all sheer, and designed to show. (Saint Laurent’s were usually worn under suits). Bare legs have replaced the nude stockings that were so crucial to the sexual games Deneuve took part in, as in the opening scene, in which two groomsmen drag her through the woods, stockings yanked around her ankles, ready to ravage her. Or the moment when a particularly dangerous client, Marcel, tells her to leave them on as she undresses. “A girl tried to strangle me once. Poor girl.”

But what do so many clothes reminiscent of “Belle de Jour” — updated to scream what Buñuel only suggested — do for the modern woman? Well, for the first time in a long time, she has grown-up clothes to choose from, like the trench coats so prevalent on the runway (fashion’s strongest symbol of having something to hide), and the simple dresses that this season replaced suits (for women who work in offices and not bordellos). And the implication is that the woman who wears designer clothes has an inner life, something that the explicitness of most current fashion doesn’t allow.

Mostly, though, the suggestion is that designer clothes can give you something that ordinary clothes can’t. Not class exactly (especially with the trend, again, of logos decorating designer pieces). It’s something more catty than that, and more fitting for these times: they make you look loaded.

Continued From Page 48}
Mother Hubbard

The tale of how a giant squash became a small-town legend.

By Molly O'Neill

Nobody in our upstate town could talk about anything but the Hubbard squash. Every morning at the post office from late December to early January last year, the widows recounted its vital statistics: 20 inches high and 25 pounds, if it weighed an ounce.

Meanwhile, at MJ’s, as the scent of eggs over easy filled the air, the men in their camouflage fatigues and snow-covered boots spoke of little else. Everyone wanted to know what was going to happen to the poor Hubbard. They repeated the story of its arrival with a growing sense of helplessness.

It seems that in mid-December, Roswell Eldridge purchased a bushel of fruits and vegetables at Peter’s Orchard, a roadside stand in Carlisle, Pa., on the way from his home in Washington, D.C., to his family farm here. It was supposed to be his donation to the library’s holiday craft sale. But the traffic was bad, and when Eldridge arrived at the library, it was already dark and the event was pretty much over.

The only people around were the sale organizers, but Eldridge dropped off his gift anyway and went home. There was an awkward pause in the library meeting room. After all, a bushel of fancy produce is not the same as the conical needlepoint angels, banana bread and plates of homemade cookies that are normally donated. In the absence of a buying public, what should they do?

Eventually, someone jumped up to claim the clementines, and somebody else put dibs on the leeks, and the sound of loose change in the donation jar indicated that all was well in our town.

Suddenly a gasp was heard. There, tucked below the shiny apples and loose nuts, was a sight as shocking as Moses in the bulrushes: a knobby, sage green monster Hubbard squash.

The appearance of a vegetable so daunting hushed the room. Who would take such a gift? The squash had been given, and must, according to local mores, be received. Outside, the whirring of the snowplow seemed to accentuate the feeling of the squash as an
Wachowicz had a run on cookbooks. “Don’t you worry,” said Archa Wachowicz, the town librarian, “we’ll find you a home.”

By mail time the next day, Wachowicz had a run on cookbooks. Even as people signed them out, most confided that their knives weren't up to cutting a giant Hubbard with bark-thick skin. Gradually, those whose knives predated World War II came to resent the “new” folks whose knives were fashion statements.

And where were those “new” people with expensive knives in this moment of crisis? Wouldn’t they rescue the squash?

But no one did. The longer it stayed unclaimed, the larger it weighed on the town’s conscience. Over lattes in my kitchen one morning, Bill Bensen, the chef at Palmer House Cafe in Rensselaerville, N.Y., said visions of the Hubbard were stealing his sleep. Bensen said he had no choice but to turn the “thing” into a four-course dinner, which he did. The event, a squash feast for 20 people called “The Mother of All Hubards,” was held at his restaurant in mid-January 1999. (Some recipes follow.)

But it didn’t end. The big squash got people thinking. In late summer, a giant zucchini appeared on the table outside the library by the donation jar. It wasn't there long.

Now, as the smell of burning leaves is replaced with the scent of snow in the air, people are telling the story of the squash that came to dinner — especially when Bensen is within earshot. They tell it again and again. It’s the stuff of legend.

Pancetta-and-Hubbard Salad

8 cups peeled Hubbard squash (about 2 pounds), cut into 1/2-inch cubes
1/4 cup plus 4 tablespoons vegetable oil
5 cups Pullman (sandwich-style) bread, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
2 1/2 cups finely diced pancetta (about 14 ounces)
2 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
1 head (about 1 1/2 pounds) Napa cabbage, shredded
1 head green cabbage (about 2 pounds), shredded
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
1/4 cup white-wine vinegar.

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. In a bowl, toss the squash with 1 tablespoon of the oil; transfer to a sheet pan and roast, shaking the pan occasionally, until light brown and tender, about 12 minutes. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl, toss the bread cubes with 2 tablespoons of the oil; transfer to a sheet pan and bake, shaking the pan intermittently, until light brown and crisp, about 10 minutes. Set aside.
3. In a large kettle, over medium heat, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil. Add the pancetta and cook, stirring often, until well browned and crispy; transfer with a slotted spoon to a paper-towel-lined plate. Set the pancetta aside. Add the garlic to the kettle and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Raise the heat to high, add all the cabbage and cook, stirring, until wilted, about 6 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside.
4. In a small bowl, combine the mustard and vinegar and whisk, slowly drizzling in the remaining 1/2 cup oil, until smooth. Set aside.
5. In a large bowl, toss the squash, bread cubes, cabbage and vinegar mixture. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Transfer to a platter and top with the pancetta. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Yield: 8 to 10 servings.

Hubbard Stuffed With Venison Stew

10 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
2 tablespoons dark brown sugar
4 cups red wine
5 pounds venison stew meat, cut into 1-inch cubes
8 ounces dried chanterelle mushrooms (see note)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 cup all-purpose flour
1 cup vegetable oil
12 shallots, peeled and thinly sliced
8 ounces bittersweet chocolate, broken into small pieces
3 tablespoons finely chopped fresh rosemary
1 1/2-pound Hubbard squash, cut in 1/2 lengthwise, seeds discarded
2 tablespoons unsalted butter.

1. In a large bowl, combine the vinegetables, brown sugar and 1/2 cups red wine. Add the venison and set aside 1 hour. Place the dried mushrooms in a large bowl and add 8 cups boiling water. Set aside 1 hour.
2. Remove the venison from the vinegar mixture, discarding the liquid. Season venison with salt and pepper, place in a bowl and toss with the flour until well coated. Set aside.
3. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. In a Dutch oven, heat the oil over high heat. Working in batches, brown the venison and transfer to a plate. Lower the heat to medium. Add the shallots and cook, stirring, until soft and brown, about 5 minutes. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring, for 2 minutes more. Raise the heat to high. Return all the venison to the pot. Add the remaining red wine and cook, stirring, until reduced by 1/2. Add the mushroom liquid and chocolate and bring the mixture to a boil. Cover and bake in the oven until the venison is very tender, about 1 hour 50 minutes. Stir in the rosemary. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
4. Meanwhile, season the squash with salt and pepper. Place a tablespoon of butter in each cavity. Wrap each squash half in foil and transfer to a baking sheet, cavity side up. Bake until very tender, about 1 1/2 hours.
5. Transfer the squash to serving plates and divide the venison mixture between the 2 halves. Serve immediately.

Yield: 8 servings.

Note: Available from specialty stores or from Adriana’s Caravan, (800) 316-0820.

Hubbard Squash Purée

2 pounds Hubbard squash, peeled, cleaned and cut into 3/4-inch cubes.

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Place the squash in a baking pan and pour in enough water to come about half an inch up the sides of the pan. Cover the pan with foil and bake until the squash is very soft, about 1 hour.
2. Transfer the squash to a food processor and process until smooth. Pour the squash into a sieve over a bowl. Leave to drain 1 hour. Reserve the purée and the liquid. Use the purée and liquid for Hubbard flan. (See recipe.)

Yield: 2 cups purée and 1 cup liquid.

Hubbard Flan

For the custard:
8 cups whole milk
1 cup granulated sugar
1 vanilla bean, split
1 cinnamon stick
6 large eggs plus 6 large egg yolks
2 cups Hubbard purée (see recipe)
For the caramel:
2 1/4 cups granulated sugar
1 cup Hubbard liquid (see recipe for Hubbard purée).

1. To make the custard, in a nonreactive pan, over low heat, combine the milk and sugar and simmer, uncovered, 30 minutes. Add the vanilla bean and cinnamon stick and continue to simmer until the mixture is reduced by 1/2 (yielding 4 cups). Strain the milk mixture through a sieve over a bowl. Discard the vanilla bean and cinnamon stick.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs and yolks until smooth. While rapidly whisking the eggs, slowly pour in the milk mixture in a thin stream. Whisk in the Hubbard purée.
3. Meanwhile, make the caramel. In a large nonreactive saucepan, over medium heat, combine the sugar and Hubbard liquid and cook, brushing any sugar crystals down from the sides of the pan with a wet pastry brush to prevent crystallization. Do not stir. Cook until golden brown in color.
4. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Remove the caramel from the heat and pour a small amount into each of 10 3/4-cup ramekins or custard cups, turning the ramekins to coat the bottoms evenly. Divide the custard among the ramekins. Bring a kettle of water to a boil. Place the ramekins in a large, deep roasting pan and pour in enough hot water to reach the lips of the ramekins. Bake until the custard is set but still wiggly, about 40 minutes.
5. To serve, un mold the custards by running a thin-bladed knife carefully around the edges of the ramekins and inverting them onto serving plates. Serve warm or cold.

Yield: 10 servings.
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PLACEBO
Continued from Page 44

convey it to patients also seems to make a difference, whether the treatment is active or a placebo. “I think it may be the key factor,” says Daniel Moerman, a medical anthropologist at the University of Michigan at Dearborn. “If a physician thinks this new drug is the greatest thing since sliced bread or if he’s really excited about a new theory, it always makes a difference. That’s one reason why the effectiveness of older drugs often wanes when a new one comes along.”

Accept all this, though — that the placebo effect is real and that it probably works through a certain kind of expectation generated by empathic care — and you are brought face to face with a quandary. For many of the elements of the doctor-patient relationship most likely to produce a placebo effect are in decline these days.

Time, for instance. In 1943, the average visit to the doctor lasted 26 minutes; in 1985 it lasted 17. Under managed care, the incentives to jack up productivity — which is to say, the number of patients seen in a day — are only growing. In a 1995 survey of more than 1,700 doctors, 40 percent said they were spending less time with patients than they had even three years earlier.

“A large number of the depressed patients who enroll in our new drug studies do so because they’re unhappy with the care they’re getting through their H.M.O.’s,” says Dr. Angelo Sabianar, chief clinical investigator at an Atlanta drug-testing company. “They’ll say, ‘I’ve seen more of the staff here in two weeks than I did in two years at my H.M.O.,” or ‘Here you start me on a new medication and say come back in a week. My own doctor says call back in a month.’”

With employers constantly changing health plans, long-term relationships between doctors and patients have dwindled, to the detriment of the placebo effect. “Clearly, one of the economic factors that undermine the placebo response is changing doctors a lot,” says Dr. Howard Brody, the professor at Michigan State. “It under­mines the kind of solid relationship that builds trust and a sense that your doctor understands your story.”

Moreover, many doctors have shed some of the old-fashioned professional baggage that once transformed them into walking placebos. The availability of high-tech diagnostic tools and the shrinking of appointment slots means doctors are doing fewer physical exams, even though the laying on of hands is perhaps the most basic source of human comfort and the annual physical one of the tried and true bonding rituals between doctor and patient. Sensitive to charges of paternalism or even malpractice, many doctors are likely to hit the cautionary note harder than the hopeful one when they offer a prognosis, and to convey more ambiguous information and less direct advice than patients might actually want.

“A colleague of mine told me that he was on grand rounds with a physician who clearly had a strong recommendation about what would be best for a patient, but didn’t tell the patient,” says Brody. “My colleague asked him why, and he said, ‘Oh I couldn’t. You want his rights. But of course, there’s a difference between coercing people and making recommendations. Patients have a right to our recommendations and we have a duty to share them.” However savvy Internists patients may be, however indignant they might be at the thought of being patronized, many would still like reassurance from their doctors — and clear guidance too.

Sometimes our contemporary notions of informed consent, important though they are, interfere with a doctor’s capacity to offer hope and comfort. “When, for example, a patient who is about to undergo a straightforward surgical procedure anxiously asks the surgeon, ‘Doctor, am I going to make it?’ what should the surgeon say?” asks Dr. Walter Brown.

“Traditionally, the response would be to encourage the patient: ‘You’re in good

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Yet I have posed this scenario to a variety of physicians, both residents and attendings, and found that some consider themselves obligated to list the possible complications and the risk of death, even if the mortality rate from the procedure is minuscule."

Medical training that (rightly) values precise expression and a culture that values full disclosure and protection from liability may spur doctors to tell their patients the uninflected and deflecting truth even in the most dire circumstances. But surely telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth is not the most humane or practical of counsel for doctors. Someone I know of, a physician herself, was recently operated on for a brain tumor. Her daughter chose her first postop visit to her in the hospital to tell her she was never going to work again. It didn’t help her recovery much.

Meanwhile, doctors demoralized by H.M.O. bureaucracy may be less able to convey the aura of authority that soothed generations of patients. In the same study in which doctors reported spending less time with their patients, a third also said they were somewhat or very dissatisfied with medical practice. An 1995 study of 2,000 physicians across the country found that in regions where managed care predominated, doctors complained of pressure to see more patients and bemoaned restrictions on their ability to order tests and prescribe drugs. "Physicians’ time is increasingly consumed by paperwork that they view as intrusive and valueless," The New England Journal of Medicine editorialized recently.

Of course, physicians are not entirely helpless. "Someone wrote in a letter to The New England Journal saying, ‘Who’s preventing us from spending time with our patients?’" says Brody. "And he had a point. He said: ‘Look in your managed-care letter to The New England Journal of Medicine editorialized recently."
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Sometimes You Get Wistful About Actually Looking Like a Person

I was 33 and designing computer systems for an insurance company in Portland and had done community theater productions. One morning the radio said there was going to be an audition for “Cats.” I thought I should go just to see whether I still have it or whether I’m an old bag and should quit dancing. I sang a torchy song and a silly song and then I went back to my life. Two months later I got the call. I figured if I didn’t say yes, I would always wonder what it would be like, so I went out on the road.

I really didn’t think I was going to be doing it for 10 years, but I enjoyed it so much that I just kept working. I play Jennyanydots, who’s kind of a nanny. She keeps the kittens in line. I would say I’m less of a den mother than Jenny is. I’ve been on tour about six, seven years longer than anyone else, and I’m happy to give out advice about what I know, but as far as telling people what to do with their lives, I sort of try to keep my nose to myself. And I’m single — and if you’re going to get involved out here, you have to be smart about it, because if you break up and you both stay on the road, it could get ugly.

The show is out 365 days a year. You have your good days and your bad days. I have the hardest time when my hips and knee are hurting. And then there are days when you say: “Augh! I don’t know if I can do this anymore.” I’ve gone through about 15 costumes. But there has never really been a point when I said, “Oh, God, if I have to put on that leotard with the fake fur one more night, I’ll kill somebody.” Hopefully people appreciate the fact that I try to give a good performance every single night and not be jaded.

Sometimes you get wistful about actually looking like a person. But there are good things about looking like a cat too. You have your anonymity. Except some keyboard guy always seems to play “Memory” when I walk into the room. What, do I have it branded on my forehead or something? The rest of the cast look at me like either some eminence grise or just a crazy old bat who has been out here forever, I’m not really sure. Many a night I’ve been standing onstage thinking: “O.K., here I am, I’m in my 40’s, I’m dressed up like a cat, I’ve got yak hair on my head, I’m acting like a complete idiot. And I’m getting paid to do it. Life is great!” Either I’m a big idiot or I must have a pretty optimistic viewpoint on things.

I’ll miss the whole experience when the show is over. I’ll miss getting to see the United States the way we have. I’ll miss being up onstage just for the joy of doing it. People are starting to cry a little bit, but I don’t know how I’m going to react, if the tears are going to come two or three weeks after that or if I’m going to be a blubbing mess on closing night.

And I haven’t really formulated a secure game plan. If I were younger I might see myself moving to New York City and living there for an extended period of time for auditioning, but I’m 43 now; after 10 years of traveling, I really need to go home to Portland and just settle. I may go into the computer world again. But also, there’s a company of “Cats” over in Europe. I may try that, because I’ve never been there. I’d have to learn the show in German.

You know, I’ve never even had a cat. I’m not particularly fond of cats. I just find cats to be a little too . . . . I’m much more of a dog person.
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ABSOLUT TEXAS.
Answering the question: ‘What’s the best of American music?’

By Etienne Richard

No 80 the new year, the beginning of another century, with... — looking forward instead of looking back. But there’s still that sense that music from the moment fills the ears of professors and students with nothing as perfecting as the best of both of that, impressing them with scholarly audacity to knock imaginary scales from their pipes, each with different things like, “Absalom, Absalom” over “Tom, Ruffin, Bab!” Really, you can’t be serious.

You can be serious with books and classical music and theater and movies, putting together a list from building blocks and big nips, as you do, but you can’t write “Double Shot of My Baby’s Love” as the number one of the list of the rock/sop songs of the past half-century — because it is one, again, that those lug-dag lying on the front porch of a bar outside Fellsmere, just this side of the Monroe County line, deciding on the list of the best songs of the past half-century... — because it is the only one. Then you can’t just list all the songs from rough to smooth. You can’t just roll out a holler as quick as the squeezebox music. You can’t make you get up off the floor and waddle to the speakers for Mountain’s “Mississippi Queen” or... (The Son I Never Knew” and “Treat Her Like a Lady”)

Elvis Presley and Louis Prima doing “I’ve Got You Under My Skin”

Songs to play with the windows rolled down, to no sign in sight

► 2. “Mystery Train,” The Band.

Songs to play at night, in the kitchen, above the sink


Songs to play at night, thinking about Vietnam

► 3. “Help” by the Beatles.

Stones songs that don’t get enough play

► 1. “Parachute Woman.”
► 2. “I’m A King Bee.”
► 3. “2120 South Michigan Avenue.”
► 4. “Sympathy for the Devil.”
► 5. “Little Red Rooster.”

Eels songs that don’t get enough play

► 1. “Nancy (With the Laughing Face).”
► 2. “Here They,” Rosemary Clooney.
► 4. “Don’t Say I Never Said This Thing.”

Folk songs that you know you belong

► 1. “Sanfords’ Line.”
► 2. “Once I Was.”
► 3. “My Baby’s Just a SHen.”
► 4. “Brave Wulf.”
► 5. “Charlie.”

Pacifist songs that need you cleaning up the world

► 2. “Stop This War.”
► 3. “Sir I Love You.”
► 4. “I Won’t Go Civil.”
► 5. “I Don’t Want You.”

Songs to play on the front porch, laughing down a quiet street

► 1. “Key Play.”
► 2. “A Johns.”
► 5. “Bob Dylan.”

Songs to play while wearing your cowboy outfit, cracking wise to pitch some woo

► 1. “Rags to Riches.”
► 2. “Run.”
► 3. “Franklav Taylor.”
► 4. “Lonesome.”
► 5. “I Don’t Want You.”

Songs to play while wearing your cowboy outfit, cracking wise to pitch some woo

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Songs that need you cleaning up the world

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► 3. “My Baby’s Just a SHen.”
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► 5. “Charlie.”
Bill Jones' 'eGovernment'
The secretary of State wants electronic link to state services to allow citizens to pay taxes or register vehicles online.

Government doesn't enjoy a good reputation for providing good services, although there's always a lot of local lip service given to treating taxpayers more like customers. Politics often gets in the way of initiatives, including those of a potential Republican gubernatorial candidate, who Jones is. One Democratic suspicion is that his efforts are the result of his ambition. The flip side is that Democrats may decide to shoot down his proposal simply to frustrate him. 

Web sites for elections.
Believing in the power of technology to help the state government become more efficient and responsive, Jones has established an eGovernment initiative, including a list of pending initiatives, a live election results.

Regarding his editorial "Longing for democracy" (Dec. 26), I made the case that while sailors had noticed circular indicators, but hadn't been court-martialed, perused your segment in favor of Fred Lee's pardon by Governor Clinton. I should have been more prudent. You attempt to justify the Port Chicago in the wake of the key is that it's acceptable to refuse to act in a legal order if the soldering the order doesn't "taste". True, you have noted that they should have urged such repercussions to military men and women, especially during time of war.

Jones's understanding of the "good order and discipline" in the military is dangerous. But then, why should we expect the norm of a man who studied for seven years of me? I hope, especially considering the years I have passed my glasses on my face and my wisdom and judgment at 60, could reflect on the truth that Clinton has not been on record.

Jones's pardon of a misle is a slap in the face to the heroes of 862. He should be ashamed.

The former President called for the need to provide more Internet-ready computers in libraries around the state. Overall, we strongly support Jones' eGovernment initiatives, which Jones is. One Democratic suspicion is that his efforts are the result of his ambition. The flip side is that Democrats may decide to shoot down his proposal simply to frustrate him.

Trestler restores faith
Regarding Alexander Cockburn's column "We can't improve the protection of Lula solely by Lula" (Op-Ed, Dec. 31), I believe that I am not sure what effect Julia Hill's treesitter restores faith (Dec. 26): I believe that the inclusion in the U.S. Customs seizure of her powdered rhinoceros horn is roughly 2,500 miles west of Wake Island beats Guam (continued). As I have noted, I found several of the items I researched while acting as a judge and my judgment at 60, could reflect on the truth that Clinton has not been on record.

That I-am not sure what effect Julia Hill's treesitter restores faith (Dec. 26): I believe that the inclusion in the U.S. Customs seizure of her powdered rhinoceros horn is roughly 2,500 miles west of Wake Island.

South African Examiner
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