

Observer

RUSSELL BAKER

Bestrides Like a Colossus

Noot things to do:

1. Get the whole family together around the TV set and hiss Connie Chung.
2. Write a letter to the editor in praise of orphanages.
3. Write an angry letter to Charles Dickens for giving orphanages a bad name.
4. Get into virtual reality in a really big way.
5. Take a trip to the State of Washington and boo ex-Speaker Tom Foley.
6. Get half a dozen people to disagree with you about something, then crush them by calling them "elitists."
7. Phone Rupert Murdoch and tell him not to feel bad just because a few mean-spirited soreheads say he's the kind of fellow who'd give \$4.5 million to have a friend in Washington.
8. Do some white-guy things like:
 - (a) drinking a six-pack while driving around in a pickup truck;
 - (b) telling some Hillary jokes to the other guys, and;
 - (c) staying awake all the way to the end of the Super Bowl.
9. Start a grass-roots campaign to get Rush Limbaugh the next available seat on the Supreme Court.
10. Do a lot of faxing to get in shape for the incredibly futuristic machinery that will improve the world after one of those coming waves of the future gets here.
11. Find out why the future will come on waves instead of little cat feet as predicted by Carl Sandburg.
12. Organize a search party to find

A bunch of Noot things to do, including privatizing the courts.

a liberal, then get a good feeling all over by telling him, "You just don't get it, do you?"

13. Think up a lot of new amendments that will make it unconstitutional for people to do things they shouldn't, like:

(a) busting the family budget with wild spending on luxury cars, unaffordable real estate, toney colleges, fancy vacations and outrageous credit-card billings;

(b) leading a life that's offensive to your neighborhood's churchgoers;

(c) being an illegitimate child;

(d) becoming welfare queens.

14. Help build more prisons by sending the Governor a bag of cement, a couple of really neat locks or a rock that's worn out its welcome in the garden but would be a swell addition to any prison rockpile.

15. Read The Federalist Papers, as per Noot's instructions, or — better yet — get hold of a friend who's read The Federalist Papers and ask if he'll sum it up in a couple of paragraphs if you buy the beer.

16. Get up a neighborhood petition against socialized government. Demand an end to socialized streetlights, socialized storm drains, socialized road paving, socialized traffic signals, socialized police patrols, socialized firefighting and other such stuff that ought to be privatized.

17. Get up a study group to consider whether privatized courts wouldn't be a whole lot better for the country than all the bureaucratic rigamarole we have now and whether the Constitution allows for privatizing them.

18. If not, get some good political philosophers like George Will and Pat Buchanan to push for an amendment to privatize everything from Chief Justice Rehnquist down to the local traffic magistrate.

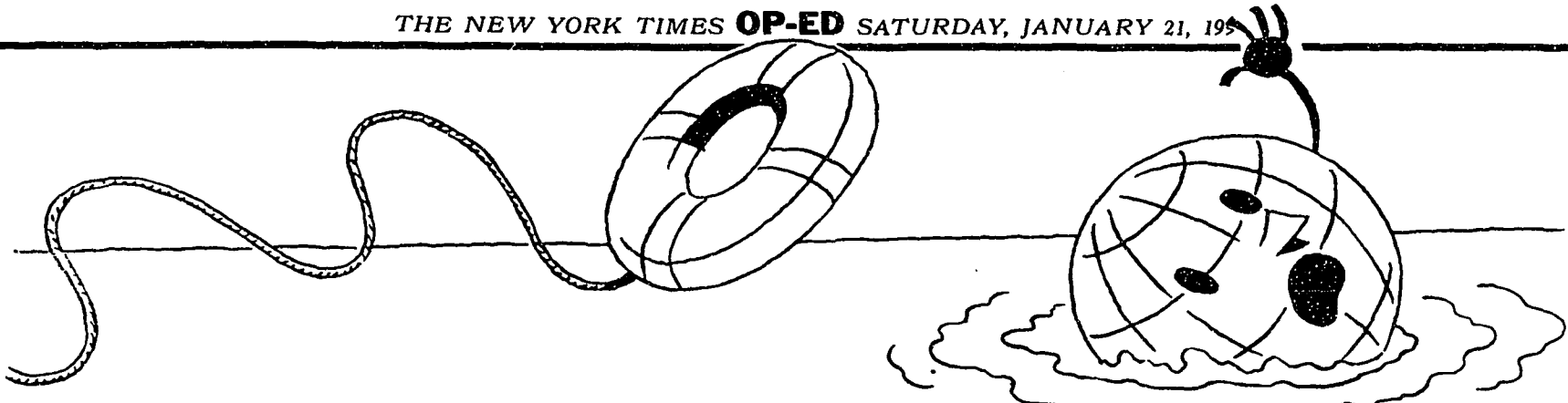
19. When somebody asks how you expect Noot to balance the Federal budget by cutting taxes, crush him by saying, "You just don't get it, do you?"

20. Show you're as tough on crime as the next guy by getting somebody with influence to get you a ticket to an execution.

21. Show you've had it up to here with foreigners by firing any illegal immigrants working for you if they start to get surly about taking a pay cut.

22. Elevate the neighborhood's moral tone by preaching that people who don't respect family values ought to be denied welfare and immunization against plague.

23. If one of your neighbors asks, "Does Noot's divorce show a contempt for family values that disqualifies him for anti-plague serum?" simply explain, "You just don't get it, do you?"



Illustrations by Steven Guarnaccia

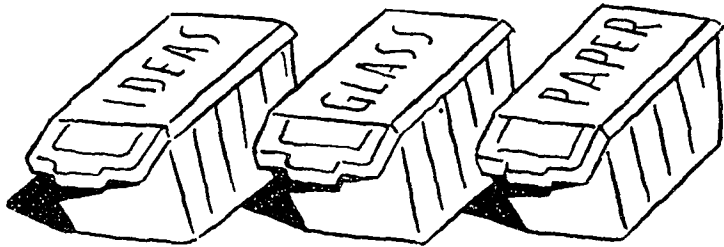
Six Enviro-Myths

By Robert M. Lilienfeld and William L. Rathje

We recently participated in an environmental festival at the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minn., the largest indoor shopping center in the country. Having spoken with literally thousands of parents, children and teachers, we were appalled at the public's wealth of environmental misunderstanding. We were equally chagrined by the superficiality of what we heard, and have coined a new term for this type of sound-bite-based, factoid-heavy understanding: eco-glibberish. Here are half a dozen examples:

ANN ARBOR, Mich.

Recycling Is the Key

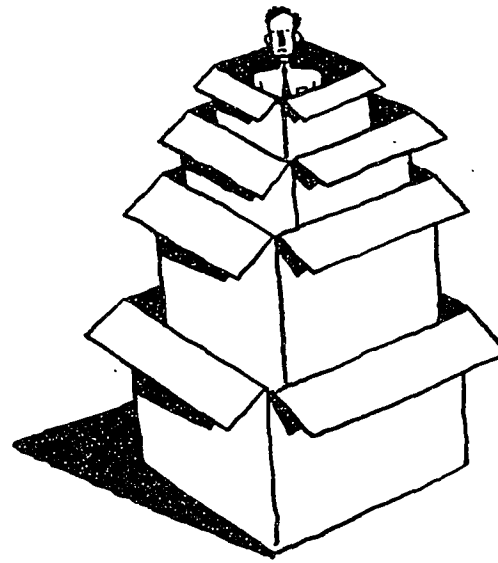


Myth: The most important thing we can do is to recycle. Actually, it's one of the least important things we can do, if our real objective is to conserve resources. Remember the phrase "reduce, reuse and recycle"? Reduce comes first for a good reason: it's better to not create waste than to have to figure out what to do

with it. And recycling, like any other form of manufacturing, uses energy and other resources while creating pollution and greenhouse gases.

Rather, we need to make products more durable, lighter, more energy efficient and easier to repair rather than to replace. Finally, we need to reduce and reuse packaging.

Packaging Is the Problem



Myth: Packaging accounts for a growing percentage of our solid waste. If you were to examine a dumpster of garbage from the 1950's and a dumpster of garbage from the 1980's, you would find more discarded packaging in the first one. Packaging has actually decreased as a proportion of all solid wastes — from more than half in the 1950's to just over one-third today.

One reason is that there was more of other kinds of wastes — old appliances, magazines, office paper — in the 1980's. But the main causes were two changes in the packaging industry.

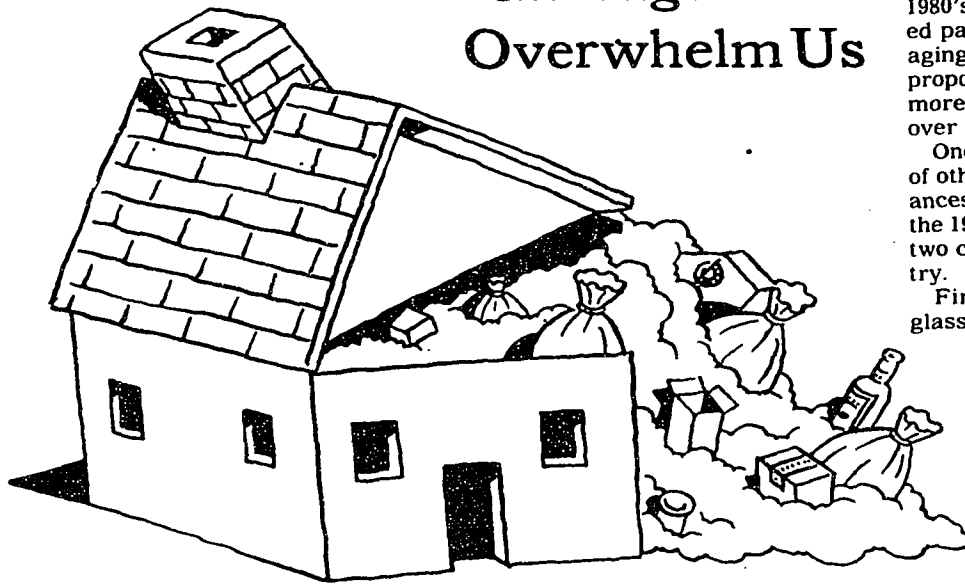
First, the heavy metal cans and glass bottles of the 1950's gave way

to far lighter and more crushable containers — about 22 percent lighter by the 1980's. At the same time, many metal and glass containers were replaced by paper boxes and plastic bottles and bins, which are even lighter and more crushable.

Second, the carrying capacity of packages — the quantity of product that can be delivered per ounce of packaging material — increased hugely.

Glass, for example, has a carrying capacity of 1.2, meaning that 1.2 fluid ounces of milk or juice are delivered for every ounce of glass in which they are contained. Plastic containers have a carrying capacity of about 30.

Garbage Will Overwhelm Us



Myth: There's a garbage crisis. The original garbage crisis occurred when people first settled down to farm and could no longer leave their campsites after their garbage grew too deep.

Since then, every society has had to figure out what to do with discards. That something was usually unhealthy, odiferous and ugly — throwing garbage in the streets, piling it up just outside of town, incorporating it into structures or simply setting it on fire.

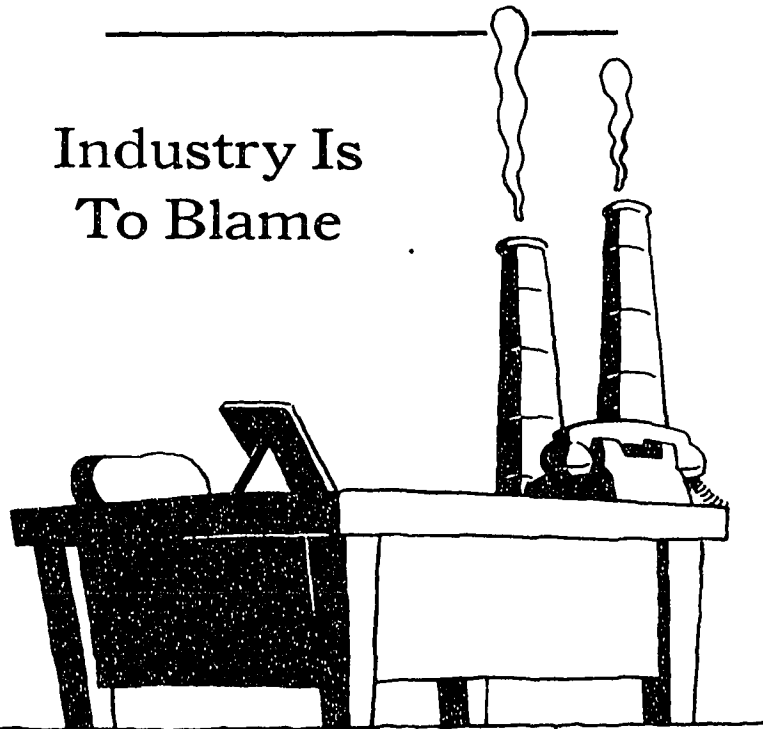
Today we can design history's and the world's safest recycling facilities,

landfills and incinerators. We even have a national glut of landfill capacity, thanks to the fact that we've been building large regional landfills to replace older, smaller local dumps.

The problem is political. No one wants to spend money on just getting rid of garbage or to have a garbage site in the backyard.

The obvious solution is to stop generating so much garbage in the first place. Doing so requires both the knowledge and self-discipline to conserve energy and to do more with less stuff.

Industry Is To Blame



Myth: It's all industry's fault. No, it's all people's fault. Certainly industry has played a significant role in destroying habitats, generating pollution and depleting resources. But we're the ones who signal businesses that what they're doing is acceptable — every time we open our wallets.

And don't just blame industrial

societies. In his recent book "Earth Politics," Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker wrote that "perhaps 90 percent of the extinction of species, soil erosion, forest and wilderness destruction and also desertification are taking place in developing countries." Thus, even non-industrialized, subsistence economies are creating environmental havoc.

Americans Are Wasting More



Myth: Americans are over-consumers, since the per capita creation of solid waste continues to climb. Each person generates about 4.4 pounds of garbage a day — a number that has been growing steadily. The implication is that we partake in an unstoppable orgy of consumption. The truth is far more mundane.

In reality, increases in solid waste are based largely on the mathematics of households, not individuals. That's because regardless of the size of a household, fixed activities and purchases generate trash.

As new households form, they create additional garbage. Think about a couple going through a divorce. Once there was one home. Now there are two. Building that second house or condo used lots of resources and created lots of construction debris. Where once there was one set of furniture, one washing machine and one refrigerator, now there are two. Each refrigerator contains milk cartons, meat wrappers and packages of mixed vegetables. Each pantry contains cereal boxes and canned goods.

To make matters worse, households are growing at a fairly rapid rate, almost double the rate of population growth. That's because we're all living longer and away from our children, divorcing more frequently and becoming far more accepting of single-parent households.

Census Bureau numbers tell this story: From 1972 to 1987, the population grew by 16 percent. The number of households grew by 35 percent. Municipal solid waste increased by 35 percent, too.

If Americans were really creating more trash by overindulging, we would be spending more on trash-generating items: nondurable goods like food and cosmetics. These all generate lots of garbage, since they are used and discarded quickly, along with their packaging. But household expenditures for nondurable goods, as measured by constant dollars, declined slightly from 1972 to 1987 — by about one-half of 1 percent.

Does all of this mean we can sit back and relax? No. The earth's resources are finite. Habitats are being destroyed. Biodiversity is declining. And the consumption of resources is expanding.

But it does mean that we must be less willing to accept glib, ideological pronouncements of right and wrong, good and evil, cause and effect. Thus, to truly change the world for the better, we need more facts, not simply more faith.

Robert M. Lilienfeld and William L. Rathje publish The ULS Report (for Use Less Stuff), a newsletter about preventing waste.

Russian TV's Freedom Fighters

By Ellen Mickiewicz and Dee Reid

DURHAM, N.C.

If there is one redeeming feature in President Boris Yeltsin's blunder in Chechnya, it is the nearly miraculous coming of age of an independent, aggressive and professional Russian journalism — especially in television, the prime news medium.

In a visit to Moscow early this month, we found that a highly motivated news corps is winning the battle over freedom of the press, and it took the tragedy of Chechnya to make it so.

Of course Russia's evolving media are not perfect. The news is not always objective, free of corruption or adequately financed. And the media must operate with few real legal protections in a country where broadcast signals, including those from privately owned television studios, depend on state owned and controlled transmitters and satellites.

Despite such conditions, the news from Chechnya has been remarkably comprehensive. It has not been easy given the Government Press Center's thin handouts, which reflect the cynicism of hacks trying to please their superiors. The official version of the conflict often is ludicrously at odds with eyewitness reports from the front. No wonder that in public opinion polls taken by the sociologist Vsevolod Vilchek, respondents reject all the official reasons advanced for the assault.

The Government's failure to develop even a barely adequate information policy suggests how poorly planned the Chechnya operation was and how remote Mr. Yeltsin's advisers are from the expectations of TV viewers and the motivations of new investigative reporters. Even Genady Shipitko, news director for Channel 1, the main state channel, told us candidly that it was difficult to maintain credibility in light of the Government's paucity of informa-

Yeltsin's version of Chechnya fools no one.

tion. No one we spoke with is satisfied with the Government's performance in providing information about the war. Oleg Dobrodeyev, news director for NTV, a major new independent broadcast company based in Moscow, told us, "For the first time, there is unanimous agreement about the stupidity and wrongness of official information."

Yesterday, the guest on Channel 1's "Person of the Week" program was NTV's president, Igor Malashenko. He described Government threats he has received since the beginning of the conflict. The host, Elena Sarkisian, praised NTV's coverage in the face of the criticism.

Privately owned TV was fully prepared to cover Chechnya. NTV sent two groups of reporters to Grozny three weeks before any other Russian TV station. The footage was dramatic. Mr. Dobrodeyev told us NTV showed pictures of the carnage not to sensationalize the conflict but to substantiate factual reporting in the face of intense Government scrutiny of the channel. While we were at NTV, it received notice that its activities were "under discussion" by the National Security Council, Mr. Yeltsin's powerful executive body.

Perhaps even more surprising than the first-rate coverage on private TV has been the increasingly independent reporting from state-owned Channel 2, after a gray beginning. During the early days of the conflict, "Vesti," Channel 2's prime-time news program, relied primarily on Government handouts. But very soon the feisty president, Oleg Poptsov, and his anchors and reporters were underscoring the divergence between the real news and the official version. Viewership of Channel 2 soared.

But Mr. Poptsov's uncertain fate tells another important part of the story of Russian TV. Sergei Kovalyov, chairman of the President's commission on human rights, told the media that Mr. Yeltsin had signed a directive to dismiss Mr. Poptsov. The order never materialized, no doubt as a result of TV coverage of the story and strong support for Mr. Poptsov from colleagues at Channel 2 and other stations. Still, the threat continues.

Despite such pressures, Russia's journalists are providing a range of news never available before, precisely because they understand what is at stake. So far, an emerging press freedom is the only victory of the war.

Ellen Mickiewicz is professor of public policy at Duke and a fellow at the Carter Center in Atlanta. Dee Reid teaches journalism at Duke.