

"Restore the Crown" referred to faith—but faith as ethnic identity, coupled with social concerns. The party's El Hama'ayan organization set up after-school clubhouses in poor neighborhoods, giving kids a way to get off the streets. "We were always told Sephardic culture was primitive," says El Hama'ayan head Amram Knafo, a 33-year-old rabbi. He's sitting in his office, a regulation picture of Ovadiah Yosef on the wall behind him. "The problem isn't that it bothered us to listen to Beethoven, but that, if you put on [Sephardic pop singer] Haim Moshe, you're worthless. That's what Shas grew out of."

After El Hama'ayan came a party-backed school system. Offering strict discipline and long hours, which help working mothers, it has tripled in size in the past six years and is estimated to teach three percent of all Israeli pupils. The schools were initially run along the lines of the ultra-Orthodox model, preparing students for a life of religious study rather than secular careers. But, as the party's critics point out, that approach won't lift the Sephardim toward economic equality. Today, Shas educators claim that they're emphasizing math, English, and computers. How far the shift will go remains an open question.

The schools are a key ingredient in Shas's political rise. In 1984, it won four seats in the 120-member Knesset; it now holds ten, making it the third-largest party. Deri has faced corruption charges, but they haven't hurt; many backers apparently view his endless trial as one more case of Ashkenazi oppression. One secret poll, leaked to the press last year, showed that Shas would now win 18 to 20 seats. The gain would be largely at the expense of the Likud, where politicians are counting on getting no more than 15 seats, even if a battered Netanyahu manages to get reelected.

Labor, meanwhile, still suffers from an anti-religious image, sharpened by its partnership with the hard-line secularist Meretz Party under the Rabin government. Meretz has led the fight against religious coercion, but its representatives often rail against religion itself. Meretz leader Yossi Sarid has mocked *mezuzah*-kissing and called Rabbi Yosef "a wicked soul" for using religious language to comfort the family of a victim in a military helicopter crash.

Ehud Barak, Labor's new candidate for prime minister, has tried to distance himself from Meretz but hasn't managed to shed his party's Ashkenazi, secular reputation. Labor, too, is expected to lose seats in the Knesset, particularly to a new centrist party. The likely result is a parliament fragmented as never before—in which Shas would be the largest religious party in Israel's history, with unprecedented clout.

Karif admits ambivalence toward Shas; he says it is "Eastern European and too extreme" religiously but has at least addressed Israel's social problems in a way supposedly leftist parties never did. The alternative, he says, is offered by the Rainbow, founded two years ago by Sephardim who had made it in Israeli society, and which seeks recognition of Sephardic culture as well as a redistribution of resources. "Either there will be social

democratic correction here," Karif warns, "or an ultra-Orthodox revolution."

But the Rainbow appears unlikely to enter electoral politics this year, in part for lack of funds, and Orthodox power seems likely to grow. And therein lies the ironic legacy of that vanishing school bus: The founding generation's determination to impose its secularism on the Sephardim has ultimately pushed the Sephardim—and possibly the rest of Israel—in the opposite direction.

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Impeachment and the culture war.

SAME OLD STORY

By Edward Rothstein

They just don't get it. It's not political, it's legal. It's not public, it's private. It's a lynching. It's McCarthyism. It's intimidation. They will pay.

In the midst of impeachment season, such are the cries and claims coming from various parties, and they will long survive whatever happens in the Senate this week. The temptation is to see this as a unique moment in history. But why, then, are the charges and countercharges so eerily familiar? In their structure and manners, the impeachment battles are part of a series of American morality plays that have riven our political culture in recent years.

"Not getting it," after all, was an accusation leveled in discussing the Clarence Thomas hearings in 1991 and the Bob Packwood scandal in 1993. It has now been used by figures ranging from Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle ("Republicans are so consumed by this they still don't get it") to editorialists attacking Clinton supporters. Lynching was a phrase invoked in arguments over the Robert Bork hearings in 1987 and by Clarence Thomas himself. McCarthyism has been a slur in all these cases to describe any group that opponents see as vigilant, ignorant, and intemperate (though, in the Clinton case, Hitler and Stalin were also invoked by at least one member of the House).

These varied cases have all involved the impugning of character and morals complete with probings about public virtue and private values. Each has had its own collection of accusations and justifications, animosities and defenses. Some issues were legal; many were political; a few were moral. Each case also has had its example of excesses that broke down categories of private and public in the name of a higher law: records of

video rentals, for example, were subpoenaed in the hearings about Robert Bork's nomination to the Supreme Court just as records of book purchases were in the investigation into President Clinton and private diaries were in the case of Senator Packwood.

Of course, there was a wide range in the justices or injustices done, and a wide range in the sins of the accused. The case of Senator Packwood, for example, was fairly clear: he had a recurring habit of making unwanted sexual advances and allegedly courting lobbyists for private gain. The congressional hearing over the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court—which probably riveted the nation more than the recent impeachment hearings have—was less clear. It concerned little more than a former employee's accusation of aggressive off-color conversation; the crux was more a matter of character than legality, since no court case was ever even brought.

In the Clinton case, of course, the crux itself is in dispute. It is often portrayed as a matter of sex, but it has more to do with penalties for giving false testimony when being accused in a sexual harassment lawsuit. And, with Bork, the issue was the record of his conservative legal scholarship, which suggested to opponents of his nomination that he would undermine liberal programs involving civil rights and abortion.

But, eventually, these have all become morality plays, in which the central figure has violated the norms of a powerful group and must do penance or pay penalties. A form of exorcism is sought along with appropriate contrition for violations, errors, misjudgments, lies, or betrayals. But the exorcism is virulently opposed; arguments are passionately mounted; and issues of proportion and distortion become highly contested. Each side sees clearly that the other "just doesn't get it." And each cites polls as justification for its attacks, while promising revenge.

As the Packwood example shows, of course, this doesn't mean that anything goes and nothing matters, that individual positions can't be argued for or these cases differentiated. The Packwood morality play—with its feminist cries that his supporters "just don't get it"—was really just getting started when the revelations proved too overwhelming for any defense. Packwood finally resigned, leaving at least this case uncontested.

The others lack any promise of crisp finality. This is partly because they have been political battles. Thomas represented conservative hypocrisy for the left as much as Clinton represents liberal hypocrisy for the right. The Clinton case has even been thought of as the right's attempt to seek retribution for the damage it suffered in the earlier attacks by the left.

These battles, with their attacks on the moral character of the ideas or the man, also wrestle over fundamental terrain, battling over a definition of "the good" and what should be sacrificed or compromised in its pursuit. For example: Bork's moral character was impugned, but the moral character of his ideas was even more vigorously attacked from a self-proclaimed high

ground of civic virtue. Even opponents of Bork later recognized that their portrait of the conservative judge as an extremist who, in Senator Kennedy's famous attack, would return the country to segregated lunch counters and back-alley abortions, was itself extreme; but the extremism was justified in the name of a higher social good. In the Clinton case, both the inquiries by Kenneth Starr and White House-inspired counter-inquiries into the sexual backgrounds of Republican opponents have also been aggressively conducted in the name of higher moral vision.

These conflicts have arisen so virulently in recent years because questions about the nature of public virtue lie at the heart of such different movements as feminism and fundamentalism, countercultural liberalism and regional conservatism. These are also cultural matters because culture establishes the unspoken, unarticulated premises of our social lives; it embodies our assumptions about what sorts of events are significant and which are insignificant; it creates a context within which we interpret the world. It also gives us some notion of the boundaries of the private and the public, mediating between these two realms of human relations.

Washington's morality plays bring all of these conflicts to the surface. And sex plays an unusually prominent role because it is in the realm of sex and sexual behavior that many debates over virtue and public life have been taking place. Consider just one example: Does the pursuit of justice over an accusation of sexual harassment justify sifting through the sexual silt of all participants' histories (as happened in both the Thomas and Clinton cases) and holding the participants publicly responsible? In the Thomas case, the liberal answer tended to be "yes" (though here, of course, there was no court case) because the supposed injustice of the Thomas appointment was factored into the vision of virtue; in the Clinton case, the liberal answer tended to be "no" because of the supposed injustice of a Clinton removal. Conservative opposition to sexual harassment law similarly shifted along with perceptions of the moral balance sheet. Confusions mount further because, in the name of public virtue, sexual harassment law seeks to expose the violations of private life by public authorities but then ends up breaking down the public-private boundaries, inquiring into pubic hairs and semen-stained dresses, porn movies and patterns of seduction. The Starr report was not an anomaly.

The sense of incompatible visions has even affected the ways in which we think about these morality plays. One influential explanation of the Thomas case, for example, argued that the clash of cultures was not between his supporters and his detractors but between the two central black characters in the drama and the white society judging them. At the time, the Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson suggested that, if Thomas did speak the way Anita Hill says he did, using vulgar sexual innuendo, the conversation was meant to

be understood in a "psycho-cultural context" of the "down-home" Southern black that Hill would have recognized. The meanings of such manners were so far outside "the cultural frame" of the white work world, Patterson wrote, that Thomas was justified in denying making the comments; there was no way his interlocutors would have been able to interpret them properly. This explanation may have also been what Clinton had in mind when, in his grand jury testimony, he asserted that both Hill and Thomas "thought they were telling the truth."

It may be what Clinton believes about his own truth-telling as well, since his and Patterson's argument ends up bizarrely suggesting that even perjury is culturally relative. In a piece on *The New York Times* op-ed page last September, Marshall Blonsky and Edmundo Desnoes suggested that this was precisely the point. They argued that Clinton is a postmodern relativist, believing not in Truth but in many truths. They asserted that he is a "product of the 1960s" who lived through the sexual revolution, Vietnam, and the end of the "bipolar world." And they concluded that the Clinton crisis may be between "two different generations, perspectives, and sets of values."

In these interpretations, the battles are over whether there really can be any shared culture, any standpoint for judging matters of law, character, and governance. But these morality plays are not really about relative values. They are over absolute ones. A recent editorial in *The Nation* agrees on the stakes, asserting that the

impeachment proceedings are "directed at civil libertarians, feminists, and anyone else on the wrong side of the right-wing culture war." This is not just politics. This is a war over which virtues are given priority in defining the goal of social good. Notions of both "social justice" and "judicial restraint" have such a goal in mind. So do prosecutions for sexual harassment and desires to limit the reach of harassment law. So do appeals for punishment in the name of perjury and for acquittal in the name of political propriety.

The phrase "they just don't get it" has become a mantra because these morality plays are really about confrontations between cultures that do have different ways of interpreting virtue and villainy. And there is so little agreement on premises or terms and so little context for disagreements that polls alone seem to offer any proof of who's right. Europeans have so much trouble making sense of these morality plays because they are so typically American: everything is up for grabs.

So does this mean I think there is no way to make refined judgments about this latest clash? Why, of course not. I, like so many other members of the chattering class, have enough of a penetrating vision to reject relativism. I see what the outcome of these varied culture wars should be. But I would have to find a way of convincing everybody else. And they just don't get it.

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Political witch-hunts, then and now.

WASHINGTON POSSESSED

By John B. Judis

Most of what happens in Congress can be explained by voter preferences, interest group pressure, campaign finance, and some combination of political ambition and high-minded principle. But the impeachment of the president and the resilient pressure to hold a Senate trial defies conventional explanation. There are too many anomalies, still unexplained as the proceedings begin this week.

For starters, simple political calculation can't explain this phenomenon. By impeaching Clinton, the Republicans were defying rather than courting public opinion. While some Republican congressmen were certainly feeling pressure from the Christian Coalition and from

home, the leadership knew—based on the 1998 results—that they were risking their control of the Congress in 2000.

Strange, too, is the fact that conservatives repeatedly assert they are impeaching the president to uphold the "rule of law," only to acknowledge, in the next breath, that Clinton's impeachment has little to do with constitutional "high crimes and misdemeanors." The impeachment debate was "about relativism versus absolute truth," House Majority Whip Tom DeLay declared during the final House debate. Impeachment, Judge Robert Bork has asserted, would "kill off the lax moral spirit of the Sixties."

The Republicans have insisted that Clinton be

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