

ROBERT REID ON THE ACLU

Robert Reid's column on the ACLU is unfair. It misleads and misrepresents on a matter blown entirely out of proportion by self-seeking politicians and ~~thus~~ thus becomes part of their political campaign. In effect, it is an attack on our Constitution, particularly its Bill of Rights. And it represents a cardinal journalistic sin, being based on a single, second-hand source and even then, that is second-hand, too—quoted from "conservative columnist Patrick J. Buchanan" ^{SH} ~~quoting~~ quoting from writings by Heritage Foundation scholar William A. Donahue. ^W

Is it possible that so experienced a journalist as Mr. Reid can't read the briefs filed by the ACLU for himself and give his own interpretations or opinions and instead accepts without question the dubious ^{S/}versions of a biased source, a right-wing think tank, retailed by an even more biased source, Mr. Buchanan, who does not represent mainstream conservative thinking and belief but is more extreme.

From Mr. Reid's column your readers are led to believe that the ACLU is a political monolith, is against religion, for murderers and Communists, for pornographers, would subject our children to evil influences, is for ^ddrug usage, and, his words, wants "all criminals except murderers to be given suspended sentences,"

The American Civil Liberties Union is many things, a small national office and various local offices throughout all outstates. Most of its litigation is handled by established lawyers who are not in its employ and work ^{bono} pro bono, in the public interest and without fee. Most are from established law firms and a rather high proportion from prestigious law firms. They take cases that involve basic Constitutional principles, often dealing with civil and human rights.

The Maryland ACLU recently won a case for prisoners in the Dorchester County jail. This did not mean that they defended murder or rape or child molestation or robbery. They were, in fact, defending the Constitution and the rights of all under it. There is no such thing as a Constitutional right that applies to one person only.

The Dorchester jail housed three prisoners in six-by-seven-foot cells, without

adequate ventilation even when the outside temperature was 100 degrees. The federal court held this to be cruel and unusual punishment and a denial of rights under the Constitution. It held those jail conditions "shock the conscience" and "shatter any standard of human decency."

This, like the other cases the ACLU takes, is the exact opposite of Mr. Reid's representation of "left-wing, bleeding-heart liberals (in) this freakish outfit whose very canons outrage traditional" Americanism. He is, in fact, entirely ignorant of the real ACLU. With which, it happens, I also have disagreed from time to time.

In the Dorchester case, as in all others, the ACLU was representing basic American principles, not murderers or rapists. It is, alas, Mr. Reid who departs from these principles in his unfairness and misrepresentations.

Is the ACLU "left-wing, bleeding-heart, knee jerking liberals" in representing Oliver North? Not at all. Odd that Mr. Reid overlooked this and so many other cases like it. The ACLU was defending the Constitutional right against self-incrimination.

The national office of the ACLU, despite the strong opposition of some of its state branches, recently proposed and got enacted an exemption from most of the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, with which I've had much experience. Is this "knee-jerking liberalism" of in any way "left-wing"?"

The rights of all of us, under our Constitution and law, are endangered when the rights of any one are violated. It is not with bishops that these rights ~~are~~ ^{well} established but most often with criminals and thus, in those cases, the rights of all have been affirmed.

In a current case, "bleeding-heart," perhaps, the ACLU represents the parents of a fourth-grader the State of New Hampshire wants to administer drugs to against their wishes and objections.

Can it be that Mr. Reid is so young he knows nothing about the representation of Communists in the courts and the principles of law and Constitution involved in them? Does he not know that the most eminent Republican of his time, Wendell Willkie (right), that outstanding and wealthy capitalist and public-utilities lawyer, took the William

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schneiderman case to the Supreme Court and won?

Can he be so oblivious to what is currently on TV that he did not see the conservative movie actor, Burt Lancaster, who is currently supporting George Bush, on TV to denounce the misrepresentations about the "outfit" of which he, too, is a "card-carrying member?"

Too many ~~of us~~ have forgotten the real basic American principles about which they prate, mistaking their own, often narrow, beliefs for these great and always-endangered principles, our charter of freedom, what distinguished us from the ~~the~~ rest of the world 200+ years ago. And too many ~~never~~ ^{do not} ~~understand~~ ^{and} our charter of rights and freedom.

As a matter of law and Constitution, Mr. Reid's rights and those of these papers depend on the legal rights of phonographers because the law applies ^{equally} ~~equally~~ to all. "Equal Justice Under Law" is the motto over the Supreme Court building. The ACLU ~~lawyers~~ are not defending pornography and, contrary to Mr. Reid's representation, do not espouse ^{it} ~~pornography~~. They are addressing basic legal principles, the form of the law, which can be applied to others, not only pornographers. The same is true of the movie film ratings system. They do not endorse X-rated films.

Mr. Reid omits the fact, reported elsewhere, that the ACLU also represents the Catholic Church where such principles are involved. ~~Not unlikely, Jewish lawyers~~

doing it, too. It is neither for nor against Catholics. It defends a legal principle. It was for Nazis or the KKK. It was upholding equal principles.

It ought ~~not~~ be strange to Mr. Reid that some of us do things from principle and that this is essential to our system of justice. I, for example, was James ^E Earl Ray's investigator. My investigation got him a hearing to determine whether or not he would get a trial. Imagine, an American accused of a heinous crime, ~~who was in jail for the rest of his life, without having had a trial.~~ ^{killing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.} I conducted the investigation that got him a hearing on this and for that hearing. And that judge actually held that Ray's guilt or innocence ^{was} ~~was~~ immaterial. ^{was} This does not mean that I am for murder or was against Dr. King and neither is true. It means only that I wanted our system to work. And like the ACLU's lawyers, I did it without ^{pay} ~~fee~~, free.

It is a sad commentary on where we are when in a campaign for the most important office in the free world ^{where} (such utter dishonesty, such relatively trivial and grossly misrepresented matters become a major factor and thereby ^{are} misused to avoid all the truly great issues that confront us today.

This kind of thing, of which Mr. Reid has made himself and these papers part, corrupts the political process and thus really subverts it. This is no way for the people to decide who should be president. But if it were, where is the reporting of Mr. Bush's past, including as head of the CIA, when a man close to him, Felix Rodriguez, formerly CIA, admitted in a recent UPI story that he sheltered a convicted terrorist who'd blow ^{up} an airplane and killed more than 70 people? This is not news but that Mr. Dukakis is a member ^{of} of an organization that upholds the Constitution and our laws makes him a danger to the country is news? Or fair commentary?

Why does not Mr. Reid inveigh against the present ~~the~~ attorney general, in Mr. Bush's government, who was a director of the Pittsburgh ACLU until he assumed responsibilities that led him to resign?

The ACLU is not liberal or conservative, not Republican or Democratic, although it ~~had has and always~~ ^{always} has had members in ~~the~~ governments of all levels and parties.

Appealing to prejudice and ignorance, ^{distorting}, misrepresenting and inflaming, particularly during a political campaign, ^{are} is not good or traditional American journalism or commentary.

And in my reporting days, it was traditional that we went to original ^{sources}, did not quote some partisan's misrepresentation of them and pretend that the misrepresentation was the real thing. Surely in his past Mr. Reid has done as I did so often and spent many unpleasant and time-consuming hours ^{doing} living up to this, our old and fine tradition. ^{as} a result, under the ^{cover} disguise of a column, he has become a disguised political partisan, slipping up on the blind side of his readers to promote one candidate by an unfair diatribe against the other.