

THE NEWT DEAL

A REVIEW BY JOHN ED PEARCE

To Renew America

By Newt Gingrich
HarperCollis
260 pp., \$24

The reviewer is a retired *Courier-Journal* columnist and editorial writer. His column appears Sundays in The Forum.

ACCORDING to a recent poll only 35 percent of Americans had ever heard of Newt Gingrich, a sad commentary on Americans. Don't they ever read?

Well, let us hope that those who do not know about Newt do not get their information and impression of him from his new book *To Renew America*. This man is Speaker of the U. S. House of Representatives. He has written books. He has been a college professor (that may not mean much. I have known some pretty loony-tune professors), and to judge by this book, which is making him rich, he is at least eccentric, if not worse.

First off, it is a dull book, and silly in spots. If you or I had written it, any publisher would have demanded return postage for the manuscript. And at times it drips with hypocrisy. Even before we learned recently about THE MANNING WOMAN (after hearing him and his cohorts blast Bill Clinton for allegedly having a mistress), we were treated to details of his divorce and how he pressured his wife to sign the decree as she lay fighting cancer in a hospital. But now he offers guidance in manly virtue (this the man who called the President's wife a bitch!) and morals to America, and shows how lack of moral fiber has brought us down.

The decline, he makes clear, is the work of liberals (as what is not?). This time around he does not blame them, as he did in his election campaign, for Susan Smith's murder of her children, but he does manage to hang O. J. and Tonya Harding on them and their loose ways, and he shows how they have violated his primary prescription for national salvation: Make God central. He also speaks highly of encouraging fathers to be responsible for their children, the creation of opportunity rather than handouts, and the restoration of virtue. He would also "bring back extinct species." If he can do that, reforming welfare should be a snap. Jurassic Newt.

In his dauntless crusade against crime, drugs, taxes, and the counterculture (I wish he had explained what the counterculture is; I never

quite understood it), Newt has good things to say about southern industrialists who have helped finance his political career, and bad things to say about such liberal ideas as gun control. "For some psychological reason (which one? Whose?) liberals associate guns with violence." No! He must be kidding! Who could dream up such a thought? And he points out that in Israel people walk around with Uzis at their sides and people feel secure because of it. He does not point out that the Uzi carriers are soldiers with legal weapons, not young ghetto gunmen or militiamen armed against their government.

The Speaker (or his ghost writer) makes it clear that, underneath his tough exterior, needed in the fight against liberals, he is really lovable, and cute as a button. "At heart," he says coyly, "I am still a happy four-year old who gets up every morning hoping to find a cookie." Critics who sneer that the book contains only bromides mouthed by all the other candidates should take note of this. To my knowledge, no other candidate admits that he wakes up dreaming of cookies.

But along life's way the happy cookie hunter has picked up an amazing store of knowledge. "I have spent my life studying the problem of how civilizations survive," he tells us, and at the tender age of 14 he put off being cute to become a fighter for the right. "I realized," he writes, "that our civilization was facing a mortal threat from the Soviet empire, and that some people had to be willing to dedicate their lives to protecting our way of life." In order to stay safe and thus available for this dedication, he went so far as to dodge the draft for Vietnam. To make up for it, he "began an in-depth grounding in military history and analysis that has served me well ever since." (Why fight if you can analyze? And why didn't Bill Clinton think of that?)

Along life's highway from cookie cutie to his country's savior, Newt encountered the futurist Alvin Toffler

and, deeply impressed, began his near obsession with space and cyberspace, whatever that is. This enabled him to see into the future and predict that in another 25 years we will be able to sit in a diagnostic chair in our own home and find out what is wrong, without having to see a doctor; that is, of course, unless liberals, who have screwed up everything else for the past 30 years, get hold of things again.

This also led him to his by-now-famous predictions about honeymoons in space (a little sex here, to give it a little spice, wink, wink) in which weightlessness would enable the happy couple to be happy without so much exertion, and have their pleasure multiplied by views of the earth from space. ("Honey, look at this! An ocean!" "I've seen it already. Float back to bed.")

One must keep in mind, while wading through this jungle of platitudes, that this is not just some nut talking, but the Speaker of the House, the man who bulled through his Contract with America, wants to shrink government and its ability to help the less fortunate, and adopt tax and spend plans that would further enrich the rich and burden the poor. Seen in this light, the book really isn't all that funny.

Special to The Courier-Journal

LITERARY LIONS

Writing Was Everything by Alfred Kazin (Harvard, \$17.95, 152 pp.)

This fabulous genre, memoir and criticism, this Monday morning quarterbacking on history and culture and literature, surely must be the Tiffany watch we allow our lifelong literary critics. The name-dropping, the constellations reconfigured, the slights on which a career is made or broken, could anything be more delicious? The sure-footedness of these great creatures who once roamed the Earth — Hart Crane, Delmore Schwartz, Edmund Wilson, Simone Weil, Robert Lowell — cutting through those obscene decades (the '30s, '40s and '50s), never doubting for a moment their commitment to their own genius, even if history failed them, even without bus fare home.

And the magazines! The glory of *The New Republic*, with book editors Edmund Wilson (who once confided to Kazin in his arrogance that he "often rewrote in his sleep the book he had just been reading"), then Malcolm Cowley, "handsome and coolly macho as Clark Gable" as he handed out the few available review assignments to Kazin and other young luminaries like John Cheever sitting on the "hunger bench" outside his office. "I have never recovered from the '30s or wanted to," Kazin writes. "The rage against capitalism was everywhere. . . ."

— Susan Salter Reynolds
The Los Angeles Times

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ILLUSTRATION BY ELEANOR MILL

Gingrich: His new book is dull and "silly in spots."