

# CORRESPONDENCE

## America's load

### To the editors:

In your editorial "The Tie That Binds?" (October 1), you assure us that the "salient" Arabs would cheer an American bombing of Iraq, that the "savvier" Arabs would be thrilled with an American military strike. Is this like saying the "good" Arabs would be on our side?

Before we expend too much force patting ourselves on the back because Egypt and Saudi Arabia have agreed that Saddam Hussein is a danger to them, we should remember that President Mubarak has for many years been perceived by the vast majority of Arabs, even Egyptians, as an American stooge. As for Saudi Arabia, King Fahd and his family have been kept fat and happy on American oil deals for years. Are these the types of savvy Arabs you are talking about? Your editorial was a dangerous form of self-delusion. The Arab people—savvy, salient, or otherwise—would never, ever cheer American B-2s flying over their lands.

Finally, you castigate other nations for not joining in America's military buildup in the region. These nations are not pulling their load, you claim. What you forget is that it is basically an American load in the first place. America is the nation that for ten years has been searching for an excuse to impose a military presence in the Persian Gulf, and it has finally found one. America is the nation that has for years been cutting deals with corrupt monarchs and emirs for cheap oil at the expense of the Arab population. Our whining when all the nations of the world don't help us pay to support a dying, cruel system of rule smacks of self-righteous hypocrisy.

True, Hussein is a dangerous abuser of human rights. However, a panicked military strike, with the intent of replacing the "rightful" government of Kuwait, would be nothing short of disaster. And a long, hot, ugly disaster at that.

MYKAL MAYFIELD BANTA  
Jersey City, New Jersey

## Defense mechanisms

### To the editors:

Regarding Pat Choate's *Agents of Influence* ("The Nefarious East" by Michael Kinsley, TRB, September 24): if Japa-

nese firms spend more on lobbying than other foreign firms, it is not because they are venal. Since we have singled out the Japanese for exceptional and hostile attention (leading to the imposition of voluntary export restraints on Japanese, not German or French, autos), this has necessitated their greater engagement in the totally legitimate—and entirely American—process of explanation, defense, and negotiation, which makes Washington lawyers and lobbyists rich men.

It is ironic indeed that those whose Japan-bashing has produced the necessity for Japan to incur outlandish lobbying expenses should now cite those expenses as grounds for indulging in yet another round of Japan-bashing.

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The writer is the Arthur Lehman professor of economics at Columbia University.

## Clean genes (cont'd.)

### To the editors:

Now that the dust has settled, I would like to throw my proverbial two cents into the matter of Robert Wright's "Achilles' Helix" (July 9 & 16). I am also responding to David Drubin's September 3 letter to the editor ("Clean Genes").

Drubin characterized Wright's description of my brother David Botstein's role in the human genome project as "extremely unfair." Wright was not unfair but simply wrong. My respect for the veracity of TNR's reporting is such that I would hesitate to leave this perhaps small stone unturned.

I am not a scientist, and I am as subject to sibling rivalry as anyone else, so this defense of my brother is certainly not sentimental. When my brother participated in the "compromise" of 1987, he was on his way out of MIT to take a job at Genentech. He could not have participated in any "pork-barrel politics" simply because he would not have been eligible for any kind of large grants. Wright implies that David accepted the compromise because of some strategic judgment that the compromise would be useful to him, presumably at Stanford, where he is now. But in 1987, when David was entering the private sector, the idea of Stanford didn't exist, making moot the entire issue of grant-getting.

The problem with Wright's reporting, therefore, is twofold. He manufactured an explanatory logic that does not fit the chronology or the facts. Second, as the recent book *Genome* amply makes clear, it is not in David's character to be indirect

or devious. His enemies and friends alike know that this kind of shrewd maneuvering and back-room-style juggling is completely out of character. My brother is, I believe, a scientific genius, but he is no politician. In short, Wright's explanation is clever but wrong and, frankly, a touch insulting.

Among other things I respect about David is his almost excessive commitment to saying precisely what he thinks and his ruthless distaste—often to his own detriment—for the kind of maneuvering and thinking that Wright imputes to him. Compromise is not David's long suit, which leads me to believe that he did what he did because he thought it was the right thing to do without any regard for his own advantage. In this way, Wright had underestimated my brother's arrogance, which is to say that David believes that the sheer merit of what he does will, as it should, command the respect and support it deserves.

LEON BOTSTEIN

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The writer is president of Bard College.

### Robert Wright replies:

Leon Botstein says his brother David's change of heart about the genome project after it was expanded to encompass his line of research couldn't have been an example of pork-barrel politics, because while at Genentech, a private company, David was not eligible for "any kind of large grants." Wrong. Several genome grants of more than \$250,000 have already gone to private-sector researchers, and the genome project's five-year plan states that private companies are also eligible for the soon-to-be-awarded "research center grants," which are typically worth millions. Besides, even if David had been eligible for no grants while at Genentech, that wouldn't refute the charge of pork-barrel politics; surely a "scientific genius" is capable of imagining that at some point during the fifteen-year genome project he might be working at a university, and might then seek a grant. And indeed, David Botstein has now gone to Stanford and applied for one of those big research center grants. (Actually, none of the above, strictly speaking, is relevant to Leon Botstein's charge that I was not merely "unfair" but "simply wrong." I never made any allegations about David Botstein's motives. I just reported that other people—critics of the genome project, I noted—were making them. Of course, had the allegations been transparently implausible, I would have been unfair—not inaccurate—in reporting them. But they weren't, so I wasn't.) •

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