

Reading Comprehension

- 1 How is the GOP playing politics with its Medicare proposals, according to “A Serious Man”?
- 2 How do moneyed interests exercise their influence on the legislative process, according to “Curbing Big Money”?
- 3 What was the purpose of former President Jimmy Carter’s trip to Cuba? Does Peter Kornbluh feel it was a success?
- 4 What connection does Patricia J. Williams make between the Crusades, the mullahs in Afghanistan and Florida pastor Terry Jones?
- 5 Aside from its conservative politics, what is the real problem that Eric Alterman has with Fox News?

CHECK THE FACTS

Do additional research to find the answers to these questions:

- Follow up on the latest news about the State Supreme Court race in Wisconsin. What happened to the vote count? Who is ahead? Who is responsible for the latest controversy? What is her political background? Has the race been conceded? Analyze the results and their implications for both Governor Scott Walker and his opponents. What, if anything, does the outcome signal for progressives around the country?
- What held up last week’s vote on the federal budget? How was it resolved? Who came out ahead in the battle? Who lost? Explain. How will the outcome affect the 2012 elections?

YOUR TURN TO DECIDE

- At 86, Jimmy Carter has not retired from politics since he left the White House in 1980. Of all our ex-presidents, has he had the most honorable and productive post-presidential career? If not, who has? Who has had the least admirable post-presidential career? Why?
- What is the appeal of Charlie Sheen’s touring show? Would you purchase a ticket or go if someone gave you one? Why or why not?
- This is the last teaching guide of the school year. Critique it and send us your thoughts on how to improve it. Any comments can be e-mailed to astu-par@thenation.com.

VOCABULARY

DEFINE THE TERMS IN BOLD.

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“His administration opened the channels of diplomacy and free travel, but it never achieved the full **rapprochement** Carter envisioned.”

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“With **hubristic conflation** of his church and our state...”

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“...both Jones and the angry mullahs in Mazar-i-Sharif deploy language in an unyieldingly fundamentalist way: as though words are **incarnate**...”

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“And Afghan mullahs and their inspired mobs see Jones as the **reified** homunculus of institutional American force.”

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“And so it is that as citizens in the Middle East use Twitter and Facebook to democratize theocracies, religious extremists in the United States and South Asia use precisely the same devices to **instantiate** 900-year-old hatreds and reimpose a premodern order.”

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“As Boehlert noted in his masterful **forensic** audit of the story...”

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“The rest of the press corps swallowed and regurgitated Sammon’s item, all but **unmasticated**.”

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“The relaxation of state laws made **usurious** lending legal...”

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“...living off other crops like bananas and **manioc**...”

Reading Comprehension:

1 The author writes that senior citizens, who would be most affected by cuts in Medicare, are also the group that is most opposed to President Obama's healthcare plan. Recognizing that, the GOP has crafted a proposal that retains coverage for seniors but severely trims it for those under 55.

2 Moneyed interests often exert their power through their contributions to a candidate's campaign or by hiring influential lobbyists to make their case for them, by either appealing to candidates or by arranging financial contributions.

3 Former President Carter hoped that his visit would lead to the normalization of relations between the US and Cuba, including the end of the embargo. Kornbluh writes that the visit fell short, however. President Obama still sees ending the embargo as too risky politically. Cuba didn't help its own case by refusing to release an American prisoner being held on espionage charges.

4 Williams writes that the Crusades were an attempt to impose the Christian viewpoint on Muslims. That desire to impose their own ways (or "premodern order," as Williams puts it) on others is intrinsic to the thinking of the fundamentalists like Terry Jones and the mullahs in Afghanistan.

5 Alterman says that it's not just that Fox's programs espouse a conservative viewpoint, but that they lie. He cites as an example a tape made of network Vice President Bill Sammon, in which he admitted that he didn't believe the negative things he said about President Obama, calling them "rather farfetched...mischievous speculation."

Vocabulary:

rapprochement: establishment of or state of having cordial relations • **hubristic:** acting with exaggerated pride or self-confidence • **conflation:** blend or fusion • **incarnate:** invested with bodily and especially human nature and form • **reified:** regarded (something abstract) as a material or concrete thing • **stantiate:** to represent an abstraction by a concrete instance • **forensic:** relating to or dealing with the application of scientific knowledge for investigation • **unmasticated:** unchewed • **usurious:** the practice of lending money at very high interest rates • **manioc:** a plant grown in the tropics for its edible tuberous roots, which yield a nutritious starch

FURTHER READING AND ACTIVITIES

A SERIOUS MAN, p. 5: When and why was Medicare created? Who opposed it? Why? Why has Medicare been such a prominent target for conservatives since it opened for business? In general, how does Medicare work? How did it change our healthcare system? Why do its proponents feel it has been a tremendous success? Have students analyze the arguments made by its opponents and research any statistics they cite. Do their arguments against Medicare make sense? What are some reasons perhaps not cited by Medicare's opponents for high medical costs? How does the GOP want to change the system? Have students research their proposals. Who would benefit most from a reconfigured Medicare? Who would be harmed? Do students feel the plan is a good one? Why or why not? Do students feel that the Medicare system should be changed? If so, how?

CARTER IN CUBA, pp. 6, 8: When did the Cuban embargo begin? What were the political considerations behind establishing the embargo and maintaining it? Why do the Cuban exiles hold so much political power? What has been the impact of the embargo on Cuba? Do students feel it is hypocritical for the US to boycott Cuba while trading with other nations that have human rights records that are as bad as or even worse than Cuba's? Why or why not? What would it take to end the embargo? Do students feel we should end it?

AXIS OF FUNDAMENTALISM: GAINSEVILLE TO MAZAR-I-SHARIF, p. 9: Why did Terry Jones's church decide to burn the Koran? Have students comment on their actions and on the response in Afghanistan. Do students feel that Jones and his church should be prosecuted for burning the Koran? Why or why not? What do their actions say about the nature of religious fundamentalism in the United States?

THE LIARS' NETWORK, p. 10: Have students find the original story about Al Gore that Alterman cites in his column. Have students also find the follow-up stories run by the other news outlets. Did any of them do their own research into the allegations? If Alterman is correct, why do students think they didn't? Have students read Eric Boehlert's analysis of the story and comment on that. Last week, NPR reported on a survey about the politics of the guests on Bret Baier's Fox News talk program. Have students read the survey and comment. If Fox does knowingly air lies, what could or should be done about it?

BAD CREDIT, pp. 11-18: Have students pick up applications for a payday loan from the local office of Advance America or any other company in the business. Have students read the applications carefully. Does the fine print conceal onerous terms for paying back the loans? Have students pretend they are taking out a \$1,500 loan from one company and \$3,000 from another. How much would it cost them to pay them back? What is loan-sharking? Have students find out the terms that a typical loan shark might charge a client. How are they different from the terms of the Advance America contract? Given that companies like Advance America exist because they fill a need, do students think they should be made illegal? Why or why not? Have students find out whether payday loans are a problem in their community, and if so, what is being done about it. If possible, invite a credit counselor and a victim to your class to talk about the experience and about the dangers of taking on too much debt.

RECLAIMING THE POLITICS OF FREEDOM, pp. 18-23: How have politicians, businesses and others used the image of freedom to their advantage? Ultimately, are they really advocating true freedom? What is freedom to students? What, if any, limits should be placed on freedom? When the Tea Party talks about freedom, what does it mean? What is the concept of freedom that Corey Robin suggests the left should adopt? Have students design a political ad, button and campaign in the manner that Robin suggests and explain why they think it would be successful in countering the opposition's use of the concept.

From *The Nation*, January 15, 1936

How to Expose William Randolph Hearst

BY OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD

IF Dr. Edward Alsworth Ross of the faculty of the University of Wisconsin had made his speech before the fifth annual convention of the Pi Gamma Mu Society a few weeks before he actually delivered it on December 28, I should very strongly have urged him for a place on *The Nation's* Honor Roll for 1935. For he made a most admirable and practical suggestion of how to expose William Randolph Hearst and to stop his campaign against the supposed radicalism of our schools and colleges. He urged the formation of a committee to collect data regarding Hearst, "our chief and most pertinacious and malevolent assailant, as a man and a citizen, a property-owner and a taxpayer, newspaper owner and editor through forty years. It should show the deliberate deceptions which Hearst and his minions have been guilty." He then continued as follows:

THE NATION DIGITAL ARCHIVE
AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORY...SINCE 1865

There is not a community in the land infested by a Hearst newspaper that would not turn out in numbers for the high-school or college teacher who should announce a lecture entitled "The Truth About W. R. Hearst and the Hearst Newspapers." It would be desirable that slides be presented showing the vulgarity and viciousness of many of the cartoons which have appeared in the Hearst press through the years. Loan collections of such slides might be made available to teachers giving the lecture. . . . In this case, as often in warfare, the best defensive is an offensive.

There can be no doubt that any such organized movement would badly scare the Hearst organization; however Hearst himself may feel about the movement against him, there can be no question that the men upon whom he relies for his profits are in a very jumpy state of mind. Proof of this is a happening at Williams College last spring. The students of Williams struck against the Hearst news movies and propaganda pieces at the local theater. The royalty paid by that little concern was so small as to be trifling, but not less than four representatives of the Hearst organization turned up in alarm, one after the other, to see what had happened, and one of them went so far as to ask in obvious anxiety whether the boycott was going to be extended to the Hearst newspapers. Last summer there was formed in California a society to boycott the Hearst newspapers; the members attached stickers to all mail matter they sent out and in other ways endeavored to spread the gospel of an anti-Hearst boycott. The year 1935 also saw that magnificent denunciation of Hearst

by Dr. Charles A. Beard, which Hearst will never live down and which no future biographer of the world's worst newspaper owner can possibly overlook. But such a committee as Dr. Ross suggests would really alarm the Hearst forces, for Dr. Ross does not overstate the appeal that such a movement would make.

Moreover, the campaign would be an easy one to stage since one could make the lectures extremely interesting and very deadly merely by quoting from the Hearst newspapers. Thus it would be impossible for the Hearstites to claim that it was a biased undertaking instigated by prejudice and full of inaccuracies. Certainly Hearst could not complain if it revealed his part in bringing on the war with Spain and some of the falsities of his pro-Cuba campaign from 1896 on. His relationship to the assassination of McKinley and a good many other incidents could easily be set forth by facsimile reproductions of editorials and articles. Extremely valuable would be a presentation of how and why he at one time urged war with Mexico, and then turned round a few years later and took precisely the opposite tack. Equally stimulating to thought would be a recapitulation of Hearst's changes of front on every other conceivable subject since he entered journalism as a champion of the plain people against the money-bags and the Republican bosses, who, as he then correctly pointed out innumerable times, dominated the political life of the United States. But, after all, the most damning thing would be the portrayal of the low quality of his entire newspaper product, and of the injury that it has done to American press standards, to say nothing of public taste. In this connection a reprint of a speech of the late Congressman Johnson of California, the father of the present Senator from that state, would astound people.

It would not be necessary to say anything about Hearst's private life. That would be a mistake, and Professor Ross evidently realizes it, as he made no reference to it. That, after all, is Hearst's own affair. What is essential is that his attitude toward our American institutions be clearly and unmistakably set forth, so that the public may get a complete understanding of just how baleful his influence has been. Men like Hearst thrive because of the forgetfulness of the American public. It is amazing, for instance, to hear Wall Street men now praising Hearst when they themselves, or their fathers, in 1898 and again at the outbreak of the World War were violently denouncing Hearst and having his newspapers thrown out of clubs and libraries. Hearst is entitled to free speech as much as anybody, but on the other hand true patriots are entitled to state just what they think of the man, and how they rate his contributions — to American political, social, and

economic life. At least the bankers and brokers who are now so eager to praise their new champion ought to be reminded of some of the things he used to say about the business men of the country, those whom his cartoonists, Opper and Davenport, used to portray in prison stripes or with the dollar mark all over their clothes. There are few menaces as great in our American life as Hearst, espe-

cially since he has openly come out on the fascist side. In self-defense the forces of democracy have not only the right but the duty to strike back. A few mass-meetings of protest with speakers like George S. Counts, Professor Ross, and other 'brave men in public life would speedily put a different aspect upon matters in the Hearst offices.

QUESTIONS

■ Research William Randolph Hearst's background. How did he become involved in journalism? At the height of his power, how influential were his newspapers and magazines? Why?

■ Research the allegations leveled against Hearst in this story and elsewhere. Were they true? What did he do with the *New York Journal* after President McKinley was killed? How did that presage modern public relations efforts? What eventually led to his falling out of power? Assess his impact on American journalism and history.

■ Compare Hearst's and Rupert Murdoch's politics and influence on American life and culture. What are the major parallels in their careers? Is Murdoch's influence as strong as Hearst's was? Explain. Would you call Murdoch a positive or negative influence? Explain. Do you think Murdoch's properties should be boycotted in the manner proposed by Ross and Villard? Could such a boycott be effective? Why or why not?