

DAVID BROOKS

# Anatomy Of a Slur

Today, I'm going to write about a slur. It's a slur that's been around for a while, but has spread like a weed over the past few months. It was concocted for partisan reasons: to flatter the prejudices of one side, to demonize the other and to simplify a complicated reality into a political nursery tale.

The slur concerns a speech Ronald Reagan gave during the 1980 campaign in Philadelphia, Miss., which is where three civil rights workers had been murdered 16 years earlier. An increasing number of left-wing commentators assert that Reagan kicked off his 1980 presidential campaign with a states' rights speech in Philadelphia to send a signal to white racists that he was on their side. The speech is taken as proof that the Republican majority was built on racism.

The truth is more complicated.

In reality, Reagan strategists decided to spend the week following the 1980 Republican convention courting African-American votes. Reagan delivered a major address at the Urban League, visited Vernon Jordan in the hospital where he was recovering from gunshot wounds, toured the South Bronx and traveled to Chicago to meet with the editorial boards of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines.

Lou Cannon of *The Washington Post* reported at the time that this schedule reflected a shift in Republican strategy. Some inside the campaign wanted to move away from the Southern strategy used by Nixon, believing there were more votes available in the northern suburbs and among working-class urban voters.

But there was another event going on that week, the Neshoba County Fair, seven miles southwest of Philadelphia. The Neshoba County Fair was a major political rallying spot in Mississippi (Michael Dukakis would campaign there in 1988). Mississippi was a state that Republican strategists hoped to pick up. They'd recently done well in the upper South, but they still lagged in the Deep South, where racial tensions had been strongest. Jimmy Carter had carried Mississippi in 1976 by 14,000 votes.

So the decision was made to go to Neshoba. Exactly who made the decision is unclear. The campaign was famously disorganized, and Cannon reported: "The Reagan campaign's hand had been forced to some degree by local announcement that he would go to the fair." Reagan's pollster Richard Wirthlin urged him not to go, but Reagan angrily countered that once the commitment had been made, he couldn't back out.

The Reaganites then had an internal debate over whether to do the Urban League speech and then go to the fair, or to do the fair first. They decided to do the fair first, believing it would send the wrong message to go straight from the Urban League to Philadelphia, Miss.

Reagan's speech at the fair was short and cheerful, and can be heard at: [www.onlinemadison.com/ftp/reagan/reaganneshoba.mp3](http://www.onlinemadison.com/ftp/reagan/reaganneshoba.mp3). He told several jokes, and remarked: "I know speaking to this crowd, I'm speaking to a crowd that's 90 percent Democrat."

He spoke mostly about inflation and the economy, but in the middle of a section on schools, he said this: "Programs like education and others should be turned back to the states and local communities with the tax sources to fund them. I believe in states' rights. I be-

## The real story of Ronald Reagan in Philadelphia, Miss.

lieve in people doing as much as they can at the community level and the private level."

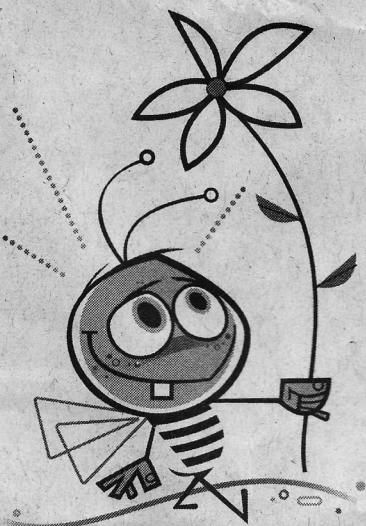
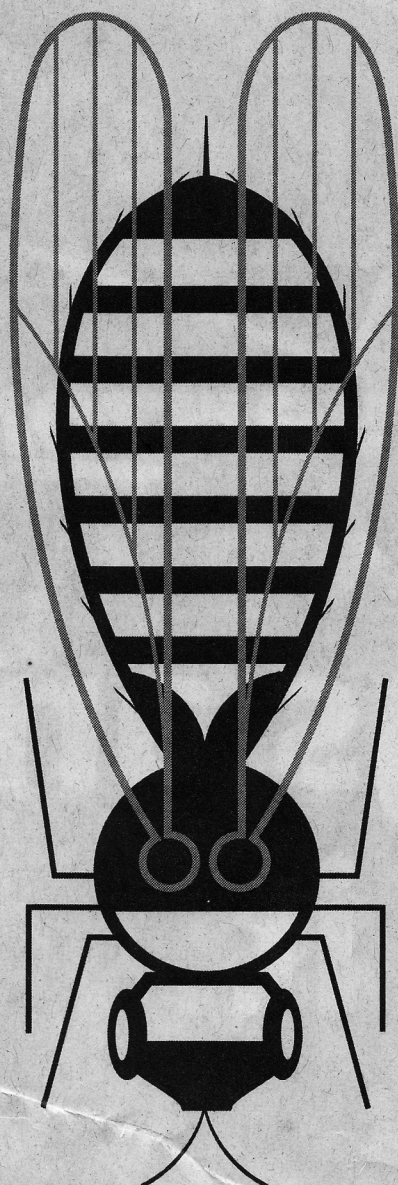
The use of the phrase "states' rights" didn't spark any reaction in the crowd, but it led the coverage in *The Times* and *The Post* the next day.

Reagan flew to New York and delivered his address to the Urban League, in which he unveiled an urban agenda, including enterprise zones and an increase in the minimum wage. He was received warmly, but not effusively. Much of the commentary that week was about whether Reagan's outreach to black voters would work.

You can look back on this history in many ways. It's callous, at least, to use the phrase "states' rights" in any context in Philadelphia. Reagan could have really made an impression if he'd mentioned civil rights at the fair. He didn't. And it's obviously true that race played a role in the G.O.P.'s ascent.

Still, the agitprop version of this week — that Reagan opened his campaign with an appeal to racism — is a distortion, as honest investigators ranging from Bruce Bartlett, who worked for the Reagan administration and is the author of "Imposter: How George W. Bush Bankrupted America and Betrayed the Reagan Legacy," to Kevin Drum, who writes for *Washington Monthly*, have concluded.

But still the slur spreads. It's spread by people who, before making one of the most heinous charges imaginable, couldn't even take 10 minutes to look at the evidence. It's spread in many cases by partisans more interested in organizing hatred than in looking at the facts in the round. And, of course, there are always people eager to believe this stuff. □



CHIP WASS

## The Real Life Of Bees

By Susan Brackney

**T**HE walking, talking, sneaker-wearing honeybees in Jerry Seinfeld's animated film certainly are cute. But if a beekeeper like me had been in the director's chair, "Bee Movie" would have looked quite a bit different.

In Hollywood's version, there are more than three times the number of male roles than female ones, but a cartoon of my own hive would have thousands of leading ladies and only a handful of male extras.

The nurses that tend the young and the workers that forage for pollen; the guards that keep predators like skunks away and the undertaker bees that unceremoniously haul out the dead: they're all female. And whereas the movie's protagonist is repeatedly told he must choose just one job and stick with it, my honeybees rotate through all of the available duties.

"Bee Movie" makes only passing mention of the queen. But she's the life of the hive, too busy producing perhaps a million eggs during her two-to-three-year existence even to feed herself (she has attendants for that). Were my Russian queen drawn for the big screen (think Natasha from "Rocky & Bullwinkle"), she would make quick work of the macho pollen jocks in "Bee Movie."

That's because non-animated drones don't collect pollen, or make beeswax, or even have stingers. If Mr. Seinfeld wanted realism (and an R rating), his male bees would be sex workers who do little more than mate with the queen — after which their genitals snap off. Worse: when winter comes, worker bees shove the freeloading males out into the cold. If drones are required in the spring, the queen will simply make more of them.

Apiarists haven't had much reason to laugh this year, because bees have been ravaged by colony collapse disorder, a mysterious malady that's caused some beekeepers to lose 90 percent of their hives.

But one of every three or four bites of food we eat is thanks to bees; we truck bees many miles to pollinate about 90 different crops, from apples and oranges to almonds and blueberries, a punishing circuit that overtaxes the few colonies left. Of course, in "Bee Movie," pollen jocks merely buzz past and barren landscapes bloom instantaneously into Technicolor glory.

But all these apiarian inaccuracies will be easy to forgive if wise-cracking animated honeybees finally get people to care about the rapidly disappearing real thing. □

Susan Brackney is the author of "The Insatiable Gardener's Guide."

# A Post-Iraq G.I. Bill

By Jim Webb and Chuck Hagel

**M**EMBERS of Congress and other political leaders often say that the men and women who have served in our military since 9/11 are the "new greatest generation." Well, here's a thought from two infantry combat veterans of the Vietnam era's "wounded generation": if you truly believe that our Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are like those who fought in World War II, let us provide them with the same G.I. Bill that was given to the veterans of that war.

In terms of providing true opportunity, the World War II G.I. Bill was one of the most important pieces of legislation in our history. It paid college tuition and fees, bought textbooks and provided a monthly stipend for eight million of the 16 million who served. Many of our colleagues in the Senate who before the war could never have dreamed of college found themselves at some of the nation's finest educational institutions.

Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey went to Columbia on the G.I. bill; John Warner of Virginia to Washington and Lee and the University of Virginia Law School; Daniel Inouye of Hawaii to the University of Hawaii and the George Washington University Law School; and Ted Stevens of Alaska to the University of California, Los Angeles, and Harvard Law School.

Veterans today have only the Montgomery G.I. Bill, which requires a service member to pay \$100 a month for the first year of his or her enlistment in order to receive a flat payment for college that averages \$800 a month. This was a reasonable enlistment incentive for peacetime service, but it is an insufficient reward for wartime service today. It is hardly enough to allow a veteran to attend many community colleges.

It would cover only about 13 percent of the cost of attending Columbia, 42 percent at the University of Hawaii, 14 percent at Washington and Lee, 26 percent at U.C.L.A. and 11 percent at Harvard Law School.

College costs have skyrocketed, and a full G.I. Bill for those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan would be expensive. But Congress has recently appropriated \$19 billion next year for federal education grants purely on the basis of financial need. A G.I. Bill for those who have given so much to our country, often including repeated combat tours, should be viewed as an obligation.

We must put together the right formula that will demonstrate our respect for those who have stepped forward to serve in these difficult times. First-class service to country deserves first-class appreciation. □

Jim Webb, Democrat of Virginia, and Chuck Hagel, Republican of Nebraska, are United States senators.

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