

READING THE CONSTITUTION (ATLANTA'S, THAT IS)

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For more than thirty years now over the morning cup of breakfast coffee, we have inflicted on ourselves as a measure of penance the reading of the *Atlanta Constitution's* editorial pages. It has become a daily ritual to be endured in much the same manner as an old timer's morning dose of turpentine and calomel to get the bile flowing properly. Perhaps it is just a personal streak of masochism, an act of self debasement to show repentance for our sins of stubborn conservatism. Or perhaps it is just a curiosity to know how the anti-conservative mind operates. Whatever the reason, we've considered it a duty to suffer the constant barrage of liberal propaganda and greet each day with a growl.

But all has changed. Ever since the Reagan administration took over, mornings have become more pleasant. Now it is the *Constitution's* editorialists, columnists and political cartoonists who do the morning suffering, and we've been enjoying their discomfort.

Ralph McGill, the late editor and publisher, who has long since been deified by his *Constitution* successors, along with Margaret Mitchell (she wrote a book about Atlanta), Bobby Dodd and Martin Luther King, Jr., was writing when we first subscribed. He was a superior craftsman and, during the early '50s, was interesting and entertaining to read. As an early champion of desegregation and integration, he took seriously his role as the "voice of enlightened liberalism in the Deep South." However, his obsession with the Negro and civil rights became such that, like Westbrook Pegler in his dotage who could scarcely complete a column on any subject without fulminating about Eleanor Roosevelt ("La Boca Grande"), McGill became a bore on the subject.

Gene Patterson is probably the most intelligent and capable editor the *Constitution* has known, who, though liberal, restored under trying circumstances some measure of balance to the paper's editorial pages following McGill. But Patterson left to go to Washington in the mid '60s, and a couple of lightweights have followed. First, Reg Murphy, who stumbled on in confusion, particularly after he managed to get himself kidnapped and locked in a car trunk, and who left finally for the fogs of San Francisco; and now, Hal Gulliver, an ultimate, small town southern liberal who attached himself to the Carter administration and found it glorious, and who often addresses his readers with the down homey touch of a carney pitchman, as "Friends, . . ."

Although the *Constitution* will print a column of "archconservative" James Kilpatrick once or twice a week to demonstrate its impartiality, the opposed line-up of liberal talent is overwhelming: Anthony Lewis, Carl Rowan, Richard Reeves, Tom

Wicker, Jesse Jackson, James Reston, Ernest Ferguson, Ellen Goodman, Joseph Kraft, Mary McGrory, Baldy's cartoons and Doonesbury (of course), with Jules Feiffer thrown in on Sundays. Because of Reagan's popularity, the columnists and cartoonists are moderately cautious about any direct personal attacks; their venom is concentrated on the scoundrels of his administration—Alexander Haig, David Stockman, James Watt and Donald Regan. The *Constitution* sheds copious tears daily on behalf of its constituents, the oppressed minorities, the welfare mothers, the starving artists, the environmentalists and the old-age pensioners, all of whom are being done in by the Reagan villains.

After all this time, it is heartwarming to find the *Constitution* so constantly unhappy. We hope to look forward to enjoying morning coffee for the same number of years that the *Constitution* enjoyed the Kennedy-Johnson, late Nixon and Carter years.

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