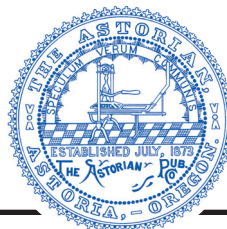


OPINION



the Astorian

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WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

The journalist politicians feared

If you work aggressively as a columnist in Washington, D.C., people will come after your job.

Pacific Northwest senators went after my clients twice while I was a correspondent for regional newspapers from 1978 to 1987. For the columnist Drew Pearson, it happened all the time, over a career that spanned presidencies from Franklin Roosevelt to Richard Nixon.

Pearson was a multimedia journalist well before every newsroom required multiplatform reporting. He delivered a daily column from Washington to newspapers across the nation, and he broadcast weekly radio and television shows. His continental reach made him a powerful political force. On many occasions, he was also a political actor, trying to broker outcomes.



STEVE FORRESTER

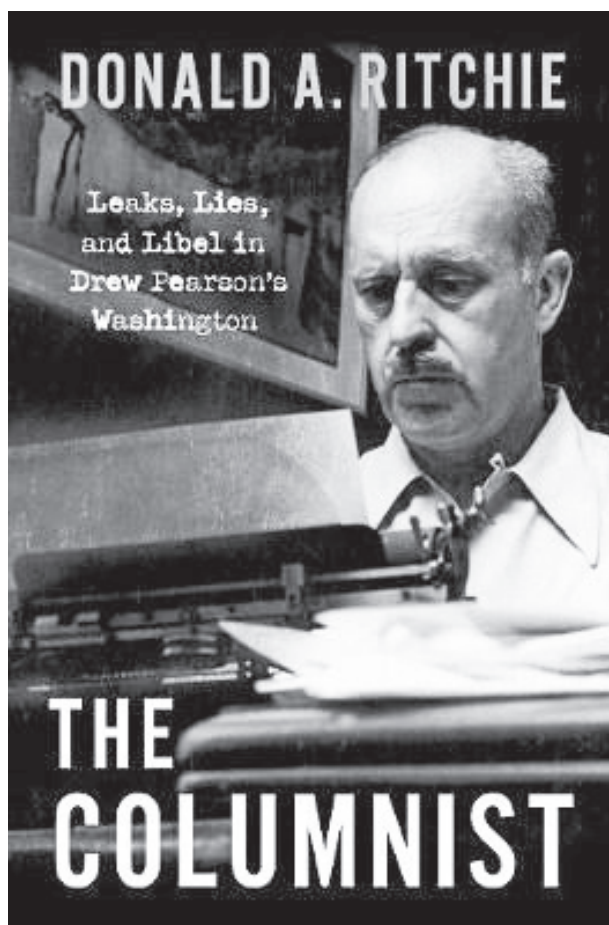
Donald Ritchie has written a compelling biography, titled "The Columnist: Leaks, Lies, and Libel in Drew Pearson's Washington." In this and another book, Ritchie has shown his readers that knowing how the Washington press corps works can be as interesting and revealing as knowing how Congress works — or in the present day, how Congress does not work. He is formerly the U.S. Senate historian.

While Pearson will be an unknown figure to many today, they might remember the name of his successor, Jack Anderson, and his weekly column in Parade magazine. The striking thing about both of these journalists is what you might call their ethical or religious underpinnings. In newsrooms today, we don't expect to learn reporters' religious backgrounds. But Pearson was a Quaker and Anderson a Mormon.

Among the values of this biography are its short, but detailed, histories of the McCarthy era, the dark side of the Eisenhower administration and Harry Truman's beneficence to old friends.

Ritchie's biography is rich with detail of Pearson's dealings with the formidable FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. Pearson used Hoover and Hoover used Pearson to an extent well beyond how such relationships work today. After Pearson's column carried unflattering coverage of the presidential spouse Bess Truman, Harry Truman gave the columnist an Oval Office scolding that Pearson said was the worst beating he'd taken.

Pearson's aggressive tactics were precursors to successors such as Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein and Seymour Hersh. But the breadth of Pearson's involvement in politics and government was beyond anything



THE COLUMNIST

'The Columnist: Leaks, Lies, and Libel in Drew Pearson's Washington' by Donald A. Ritchie

Oxford University Press

that would follow.

Both he and Anderson were witnesses at a congressional hearing. In his reckoning with U.S. Sen. Joseph McCarthy, Pearson took a physical beating from the demagogic senator while in the cloakroom at Washington's exclusive Sulgrave Club. During the Kennedy administration, Pearson and his wife traveled to Russia, where he interviewed Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev. Upon his return, Pearson was invited to speak with CIA analysts about what he had learned behind the



Encyclopedia Britannica
Drew Pearson speaking to a crowd gathered at City Hall Plaza in New York City to greet the Friendship Train in 1947.

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Iron Curtain. His enabling of Lyndon Johnson prompted the slur that he was "Lyndon's lackey."

The columnist maintained a large staff of legmen from the office of his Georgetown home. His wealth afforded him a farm on the banks of the Potomac. He made five-figure settlements in libel lawsuits.

Ritchie offers us a window on a phenomenon we'll not likely see again. Nor will we see the eras that fostered Pearson's empire of influence. But any journalist reading this biography will recognize the pressures that come with the job — then and now, on the national scene and in smaller markets across America.

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of The Astorian, is the president and CEO of EO Media Group.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Obscene

Obscene: Offensive to moral principles, repugnant ...

When I was a kid, obscene meant that you were looking at pictures of people without clothing.

The president of the U.S. makes \$400,000 a year; U.S. senators, \$174,000 a year; teachers, \$64,000 a year; police officers, \$60,000 a year; and one NBA player, \$46 million a year? Now that is what I call obscene!

CHUCK MEYER
Astoria

A July evening

Columbia River, July evening: The river, a huge theater with clouds rising from the horizon like a biblical backdrop. The forbidding clouds a wall of dark; but at the very top, a patch of light blue mixed with the yellow of the sun that set an hour ago.

The river mirrors the sky, a yellow gold on the top line of small waves. Dark blue just underneath the gold shine; beneath that deep, dark black.

Storm clouds, running fast, from the south-southwest. Separated from one another by brief patches of blue-gold. The bottom of the clouds dark blue, a shade away from black, heavy with rain. Seen from the Oregon side, looking north, the clouds dropping their rain load on Naselle, Washington.

In the midst of this grandeur, a freighter, 500 feet long, small in comparison, insignificant, heading upstream.

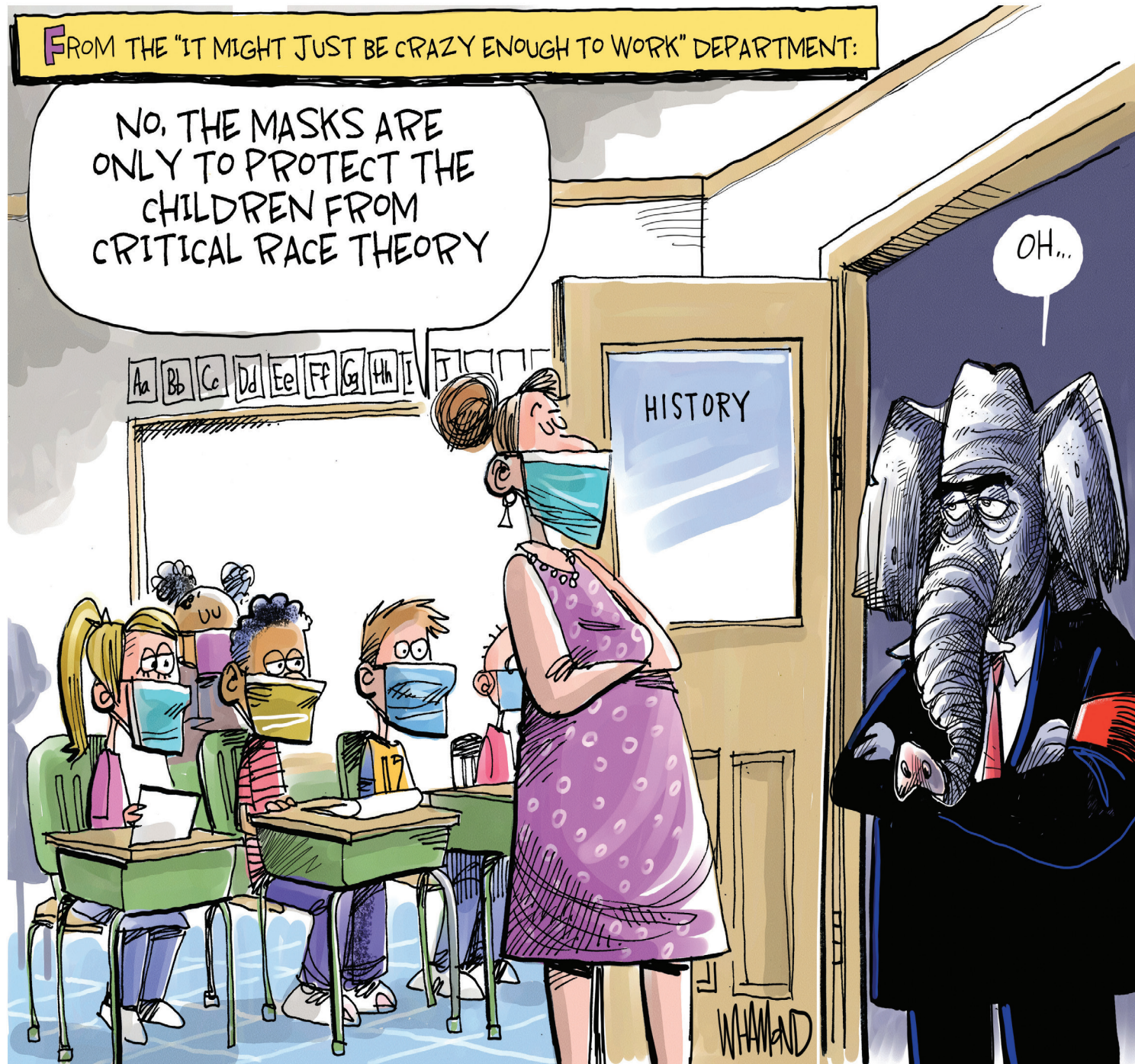
JIM HALLAUX
Astoria

Astoria, the next Portland?

A recent national news report noted that Burgerville's CEO cited deteriorating conditions in the surrounding area as a reason for a restaurant closure in the southeast Portland neighborhood where I grew up.

The CEO stated, "There is a humanitarian crisis happening throughout our region, and we need to come together around solutions." I feel sorry for a childhood friend who currently lives in my old house, as he and his family have to witness the deterioration of a once carefree place to live.

I'm not sure if I'm sad or angry about the current condition of my old stomping grounds, but one thing is for sure: The situation has occurred from poor



LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Astorian. Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship. All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month. Letters written in response

political leadership over the past few decades. Some blame must go to the voters, who keep voting for the pol-

to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil. Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at bit.ly/astorianletters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR., 97103.

iticians who allow my hometown to become a national disgrace.

But Portland's "humanitarian cri-

sis" stems from civic leaders who cater to unhealthy social behaviors that make the Portland metro area unlivable for the taxpaying citizens, and financially unsound for business owners to operate.

I mention the Burgerville story, as I believe it relates to two articles recently published in The Astorian, where the needle exchange program in the county reached 1 million syringes dispensed, and homeless-related calls to the police have doubled.

I've lived in the Astoria area for over 30 years, yet I have kept track of how Portland has fallen apart. I just hope city and county leaders don't allow Astoria to become a national joke.

MATT JANES
Jeffers Gardens