

most likely to brave the mosquitoes, alligators, snakes, and prickly palmettos of the birds' favored environment.

In preparing a book on the search for the ivory-billed woodpecker in Louisiana, Steinberg ran down many of the reported sightings. Photos are few, which is no surprise given the forbidding, dense terrain; the ivory-bill's reportedly fast, straight, ducklike flying pattern; and the likelihood that after generations of intense hunting, any surviving birds are probably selected to be wary of humans. But Steinberg concludes that the sightings are consistent enough to suggest that ivory-bills still exist.

The next evidence of the ivory-bill's existence, he predicts, will be produced by "a rural resident who may have little experience or even interest in bird watching." The birding world should prepare to take heed. To discount rural dwellers' reports "is not only shortsighted, it may be detrimental to ivory-bill preservation."

SOCIETY

School Choice Apostasy?

THE SOURCE: "School Choice Isn't Enough" by Sol Stern, in *City Journal*, Winter 2008, and "Is School Choice Enough?" responses, www.city-journal.org, Jan. 24, 2008.

THE INITIAL GAINS FROM THE school choice movement have fizzled, concludes Sol Stern, author of *Breaking Free: Public School Lessons and the Imperative of School Choice* (2003). While efforts to give parents vouchers for private

schools and establish charter schools have liberated thousands of children from stultifying public classrooms, experience has dashed Stern's hope that a powerful dose of the free market would cure morbidity in the nation's public schools.

Choice is not enough, he argues. Evidence is "meager" that voucher-financed competition from private schools has made public schools any better. Voters have resoundingly defeated voucher programs in five straight

School choice is not enough, one long-time advocate of the policy has concluded.

state referendums. Prospects for future voucher programs are undermined by the financial crises of inner-city Catholic schools. What is needed is not merely the invisible hand of competition fostering the best schools and driving out the worst. In a contest between economically oriented free-market visionaries (the incentivists) and curriculum and pedagogical reformers (the instructionists), Stern now tilts toward the instructionist camp. Improving the education of the nation's 50 million public-school children will require a rigorous, content-based curriculum and stricter teacher licensing.

This conclusion is borne out in New York City and the state of Massachusetts, he says. On the Monopoly board of school reform, New York City has placed all of its

hotels on choice and competition. Unfortunately, the city has pushed the free-market philosophy "far beyond where the evidence leads," Stern believes. New York City principals and teachers can get cash bonuses if they produce better student test scores, and parents can get money for showing up at parent-teacher conferences. But fourth- and eighth-grade readers have shown no improvement. By contrast, Massachusetts, where school choice is limited to only a few charter schools, has raised scores in both reading and math. The real Massachusetts miracle, according to Stern, is the state's strong content-based curriculum, certification regulations that require teachers to master that content, and serious testing.

Stern's critics have since responded to his article not only by attacking his ideas and facts, but also by accusing him of "apostasy and moral flaws," he laments. Jay P. Greene, the head of the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas, charges that Stern has broken a "truce" between education reformers who push choice and those who advance curriculum changes. Education reform is like curing cancer, Greene says. It's a slow process, but that's no reason to give up. Without competitive pressure, what would cause education leaders to adopt any changes at all in curriculum or teaching methods?

Andrew J. Coulson, director of the Cato Institute Center for Educational Freedom, says that Stern has mistakenly confused tiny and highly regulated school choice programs with real free-market schooling, which would require hundreds of

thousands of potential customers. And Robert Enlow, executive director of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, dismisses Stern for citing a tired list of “greatest hits

of teachers’ union talking points,” for making unfounded claims that school choice hasn’t made significant improvements in public schools, and for failing to mention

evidence that contradicts his views. The blistering retorts to Stern’s points suggest that hell hath no fury like the school choice movement scorned.

PRESS & MEDIA

Nut Gets Nukes!

THE SOURCE: “Paranoid, Potbellied Stalinist Gets Nuclear Weapons” by Hugh Gusterson, in *Nonproliferation Review*, March 2008.

PART OF THE REASON JOURNALISTS are about as highly esteemed as termite inspectors and telemarketers is their failure earlier in this decade to challenge U.S. government estimates of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Press critics charge that reporters downloaded the assertions of government officials and Iraqi exiles into news stories as uncritically as songs from iTunes. Then, even after Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction failed to materialize, writers repeated the same credulous performance in covering North Korea.

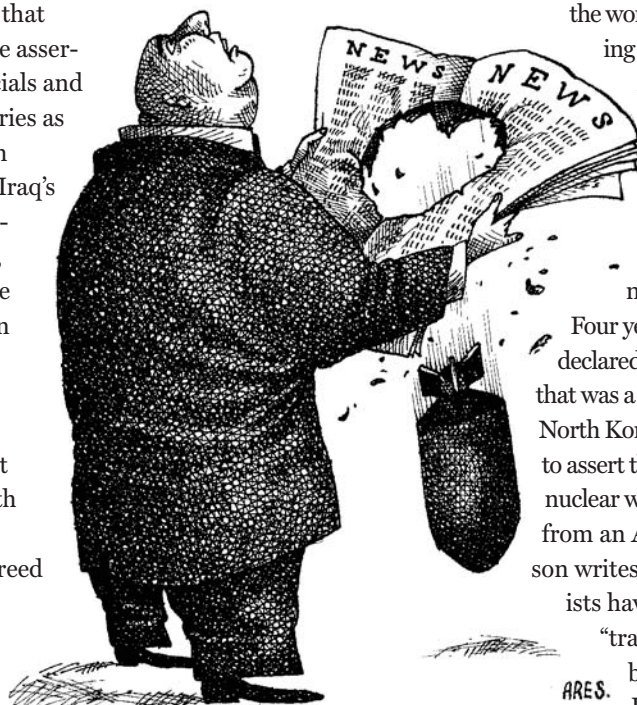
America’s largest newspapers presented a “simplistic narrative” that focused “entirely on North Korean duplicity” in the breakdown of a 1994 “agreed framework” between the United States and North Korea that was designed to persuade Pyongyang to abandon

its quest for nuclear weapons, writes Hugh Gusterson, an anthropologist at George Mason University. In truth, he says, neither side fully lived up to the agreement, but leading publications covered only accusations of North Korean perfidy. They relied almost entirely on anonymous diplomatic sources, retired gov-

ernment officials, and specialists in nuclear nonproliferation, rather than academics or other students of the Korean peninsula. They also failed to make enough international phone calls to experts monitoring the situation from South Korea.

Pundits tend to portray Kim Jong Il as a paranoid pygmy who watches Daffy Duck cartoons and spends nearly \$1 million a year of his impoverished country’s treasury on rare cognac. Entertaining reading, but it hardly advances understanding of what a former secretary of defense called “the most dangerous spot” in the world, Gusterson says. Relying mostly on unnamed American officials for their facts, reporters wrote in 2002 that North Korea admitted it had been cheating for years on its commitment to freeze its nuclear weapons program.

Four years later, *Newsweek* declared that “diplomats now say that was a translation error.” What North Korea had actually done was to assert that it was “entitled to have nuclear weapons” to safeguard itself from an American threat, Gusterson writes. (Some Korea specialists have since dismissed any “translation errors” as quibbling in light of North Korea’s announcement in 2006 that it had



The media dwell on odd or talkative people, sometimes missing the story.