

Dear Brian:

I guess everyone is finding de Tocqueville relevant.

Even more astonishing is that on page 28 of Nick Losches' biography of Dean Martin ("Dino - Living High in the Dirty Business of Dreams") de Tocqueville is also quoted. Actually the book is quite interesting if you can overlook the frequent expletives (what a shame that Losches felt the need to use them at all).

Shelby, where I live, is a small town of 9,000 equidistant between Cleveland and Columbus. There isn't much here but we do get both C-SPAN and C-SPAN2 ~~too~~ from Adelphia Cable. I wouldn't miss the Morning Journal but I haven't tried to call in yet.

Sincerely,



Hucksterism leaves sickening feeling

Say it ain't so, David. But he can't unsay it now. Can't take back that sappy ag-business ad on the news program revered as "the Brinkley show." Can't wipe out that black mark scrawled across a 50-year career as a tough, tell-it-like-it-is reporter.

All for a few pieces of silver: Watching replays of David Brinkley's treacly pitch for Archer Daniels Midland, I got the lurch in the stomach I feel when an airliner hits an air pocket: Disgust for the business we're in, pity for Brinkley.

What could Brinkley have been thinking to sell out at 77? It was the saddest humiliation since Clark Clifford, a Washington legend for integrity, blew it in a bank scandal at 84.

Never pretty to see heroes go in the tank.

How many rookie broadcasters stood in front of mirrors, trying to imitate Brinkley's acerbic, casual drawl? Away from the camera Brinkley was one of the good guys, minus inflated pomp of the blown-hair breed. I've seen Brinkley in the heat of political convention bedlam stop to help young reporters with a story angle.

Yet there was a smiling Cokie Roberts welcoming Brinkley as "our new sponsor" and congratulating him "on your new role."

Pardon me, but is it that simple to slide across the line from reporter-commentator to corporate huckster?

Worse was the sly way Brinkley finessed his striptease: "Since tele-



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Philadelphia Daily News

vision began, I brought you the news: wars, elections, victories, defeats. The news. Straight and true. I will still speak straight and true. I'll never change that but now I will bring you information about food, the environment, agriculture, issues of importance to the American people . . ."

We saw "Morning in America" footage of ADM, the grub conglomerate fined \$100 million for price fixing. Don't tell me Brinkley did a dive because Dwayne Andreas is a pal living in the same plush Bal Harbour, Fla., condo.

Nope, it's barf bag time. Doesn't matter that Chet Huntley fronted for American Airlines after leaving NBC. Or former "CBS This Morning" host Kathleen Sullivan peddled for Weight Watchers. Or ex-NBC newswoman Linda Ellerbee did Maxwell House ads.

Those were minnows. Brinkley was — sorry, it's past tense — a television icon. More slickly confusing, his peddling of Archer Daniels Midland dominated the show he launched in 1981, "This Week With David Brinkley." So much for 17 years of "speaking straight and true."

What's next? Walter Cronkite selling a new car line, Daniel Schorr peddling Avis rentals, Bernard Kalb huckstering for stockbrokers?

(Thankfully, no. They told the Washington Post's Howard Kurtz they nixed such offers and were dismayed at Brinkley's flackmanship.)

If you detect a priestly, purer-than-thou pride about journalism, I'm guilty. Tell you why Brinkley's role switch was a shock: As a journalist you use talent and energy to tell the truth, but as a celebrity admaker you're milking your fame to sell a product.

Not that Brinkley's the only sinner. Selling reputations for money has become an epidemic. I mean, there's an everything-must-go, absolute fire sale on political reputations.

I can shrug it off when Mikhail Gorbachev gets \$1 million for posing in a Pizza Hut ad: Welcome to capitalism, Gorby. The late Tip O'Neill popping out of that suitcase was funny. I didn't mind when Mario Cuomo gobbled Doritos chips or Dan Quayle did a Frito-Lay ad or Bob Dole capered for Dunkin' Donuts and Visa.

OK, pols are showmen and buffoons. They have as much right to clown for TV bucks as Michael Jordan or Arnold Palmer.

But a political sellout is taking place in Washington that, in a different way, is more scandalous than Brinkley's pratfall.

I speak of the big-bucks seduction by Big Tobacco — a/k/a Merchants

of Death — of three semi-legendary politicians: Ex-Sen. Howard Baker, ex-Gov. Ann Richards and ex-Senate leader George Mitchell.

The trio has become hired guns in Big Tobacco's fight to save its \$388.5 billion deal to forever stave off smokers' lawsuits. The five tobacco companies are selling it as a public health bonanza — same guys who swore the weed didn't cause cancer and wasn't addictive.

That Baker, hero of Watergate, would peddle his rep to Death Inc. is especially baffling. His wife, Joy, died of lung cancer. Chairman of the board of trustees of the Mayo Clinic, he resigned to take tobacco's pelt.

Richards, candid about her recovery from alcoholism, is a puzzling lobbyist for the addictive weed. So is Mitchell, who had an impeccable image in the Senate where he fought for health issues.

I don't know how to explain the queasy betrayal by Baker, Richards and Mitchell. Nor can I unravel the mystery of David Brinkley's sad metamorphosis to pitchman.

But Alexis de Tocqueville, after he roamed the country in the early 1800s, wrote in "Democracy in America" a wry line: "I have never seen a people so obsessed with making money."

Al, baby, nothing's changed.

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