

MARRYING KERRY: Forget the hype about blogs and backpacks. It's all about getting warm bodies to the polls. How John Kerry got his groove back, mucked up the Bush battle plan—and proved Democrats are thinking hard about who's the most 'electable' challenger to Bush.

BACK TO THE FRONT

GETTY IMAGES/POOL

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LOOMING LARGE:
Kerry was the only Democrat to outpoll Bush in NEWSWEEK's new national poll
PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID HUME KENNERLY FOR NEWSWEEK

BY HOWARD FINEMAN

IT WAS PITCH DARK AND zero degrees outside, and the driver had dimmed the fluorescent lights in Sen. John Kerry's "Real Deal Express" for the long ride across New Hampshire from Claremont back to Manchester. The campaign day had been a good one, as, indeed, they all had been since Iowa, where months of dogged work—patiently answering hour upon hour of questions from voters in town halls, learning to speak in the crisp cadences of the campaign trail, not in Sen-

atese—had paid off in a come-from-behind victory. But the gloom in the bus reflected Kerry's mood, which was subdued, almost grim, as he jabbed at the soggy remnants of a salad and contemplated what could be a grueling, lengthy contest for the Democratic nomination. A year ago the pundits had christened him the front runner; instead, Howard Dean had blogged his way into the role. Then, in Iowa, Dean had collapsed, and added to his woes with a primal scream of a concession speech. Now, post Iowa, Kerry had roared to the lead in the New Hampshire tracking polls, but the results were by no means set. Dr. Dean, performing emergency surgery on his campaign, calmed his delivery and advertised his unassuming wife in an effort to show that he was a regular fellow; Sen. John Edwards, a trial lawyer, addressed the jury of voters in his earnest, po' boy style. Anything could happen, Kerry said; he had to work—harder. "I don't believe in numbers," he said. In Vietnam, many years ago, he had learned to live with the fact that an invisible sharpshooter on a riverbank could kill him in an instant. "I learned to tough it out," he said.

Can John Kerry "tough it out" all the way to the White House? Can he do it against a political machine—Bush-Cheney '04—as wealthy, powerful and remorseless as any in modern history? It is an urgent question to Democrats, who yearn to unseat President George W. Bush with an apocalyptic fervor that makes one word—"electability"—the

defining idea in the race. "I've never seen anything like it," said Jeanne Shaheen, former governor of New Hampshire. "Voters care more about electability than anything else." Twenty years ago Shaheen led Gary Hart's insurgency in the state against Walter Mondale's party establishment. This time she's

backing Kerry—who was endorsed last week by Mondale. In 1984, the driving issue was the direction of the party. This time the argument has little to do with philosophy or programs (most of the candidates substantially agree on most of the issues) than with the hard-eyed calculus of the Electoral College.

'The more the guy loosens up, the better,' says a Kerry adviser. 'It's good for him as a candidate and person.'



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SEE YOU IN NOVEMBER: Bush visits Ohio yet again, Dean launches a counter-offensive, Edwards seeks to manufacture workers' support

“Soon enough, everybody's going to be running out of money.”

—PAUL MASLIN



Even Deaniacs couch their case in electability terms, contending that only their hero can appeal to the young and estranged.

For now, at least, Kerry has emerged as the new answer to the question: "Who can beat Bush?" In the new NEWSWEEK Poll, he has vaulted into a national lead among Democrats, with 30 percent, far ahead of a low-teens pack of Edwards, Dean and former general Wes Clark. Faith in Kerry, temporary as it may be, seems well placed: he's the only contender to best the president (by a 49-46

percent margin) in a general-election test matchup. The Massachusetts senator has the highest "favorability" rating, with the personable Edwards, of North Carolina, rising fast—and Dean losing some altitude in the aftermath of his Munch moment. The Democrats can take heart from indications of Bush's weakness on domestic issues. On the three concerns uppermost in their minds—jobs, health care and education—the voters said a "Democratic president" would do a better job than the incumbent Republican one.

The White House, to be sure, has erected the defense of its Electoral College majority with military precision. In his State of the Union speech last week, the president laid out his basic, tripartite strategy: meet concerns about health care and education with specific, market-oriented proposals; feed the Red State cultural base with a stirring defense of marriage, sexual abstinence and "faith based" welfare programs; dare the Democrats to engage him on what polls show is his strength, the war on terror. "It is

not enough to serve our enemies with legal papers," he said. "The terrorists and their supporters declared war on the United States, and war is what they got." America, he added, "will never seek a permission slip to defend the security of our people."

Sometimes precision targeting goes awry, or the target moves. Bush's speech was aimed at Dean, who never served in the military and who rose to prominence as an ardent foe of the Iraq war. A Bush-Kerry fire fight on military matters could be a closer-run thing. A decorated Vietnam veteran, Kerry was patrolling rivers in the Mekong Delta while Dean was skiing in Colorado on a 1-Y deferment, and Bush was in the Air National Guard, protecting the skies over Houston (when he wasn't slipping away to work on a Senate race in Alabama). Kerry contends he could neutralize Republican soft-on-terror attacks. "I not only welcome that fight, I relish it," he declares. "If that's what they want, then I say to them, 'Bring it on!'"

Kerry wouldn't be in the electability game at all had he not been able to revive his moribund campaign this winter. After 9/11/01, his experience in foreign policy, his liberal legislative record, his military background and his personal wealth (from his wife Teresa's Heinz fortune) made him the favorite of Washington wise guys. But Kerry's campaign was inert for most of last year, anesthetized by his lordly demeanor, verbose style and aura of entitlement. He was, moreover, a supporter of the 2002 resolution that authorized war in Iraq—a vote he has had trouble defending in a concise and convincing way until recently. To make matters worse, Kerry was diagnosed with prostate cancer, and had to drop off the trail last summer. When he came back in the fall, his lean frame had turned gaunt, and he lacked the boyish energy he had managed to preserve through his 50s. "I had no choice, but I probably came back too soon," he said. "I wasn't up to speed."

Convalescing on the run, Kerry made two critical tactical moves. One was to shake up his staff. Campaign manager Jim Jordan, a shrewd, Washington-based inside player who had laid organizational groundwork, was let go. He had clashed

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Taking the Battle to The Decision Belt

The stakes in the Democratic race may be highest in the close-call states of 2000, where the winner could tip the scales red or blue this fall. A road map to the must-win territories:

BATTLEGROUND STATES
■ Won by Bush ■ Won by Gore
5.6% Margin of victory in 2000 election

THE WEST

5.6% WASHINGTON: Dean has the edge, but Kerry just sent 12 more staffers. His military experience bodes well on bases in Tacoma, and his alternative-energy stance appeals to environmentalists.

0.4% OREGON: A May 18 primary leaves the state quiet for now. Dean supporters are crossing the border north to whip up support in Wash.

3.5% NEVADA: Kerry and Clark earned points by opposing controversial nuclear-waste dump. Edwards seems out of step to locals.

.06% NEW MEXICO: Dean reaped the benefits of powerhouse Gov. Bill Richardson's praise, along with his efforts to turn out Latino voters. Clark has made inroads and is polling a close second.

THE MIDWEST

2.4% MINNESOTA: Primary voters often follow Iowa's lead: Minneapolis mayor supports Dean; Mondale wants Kerry.

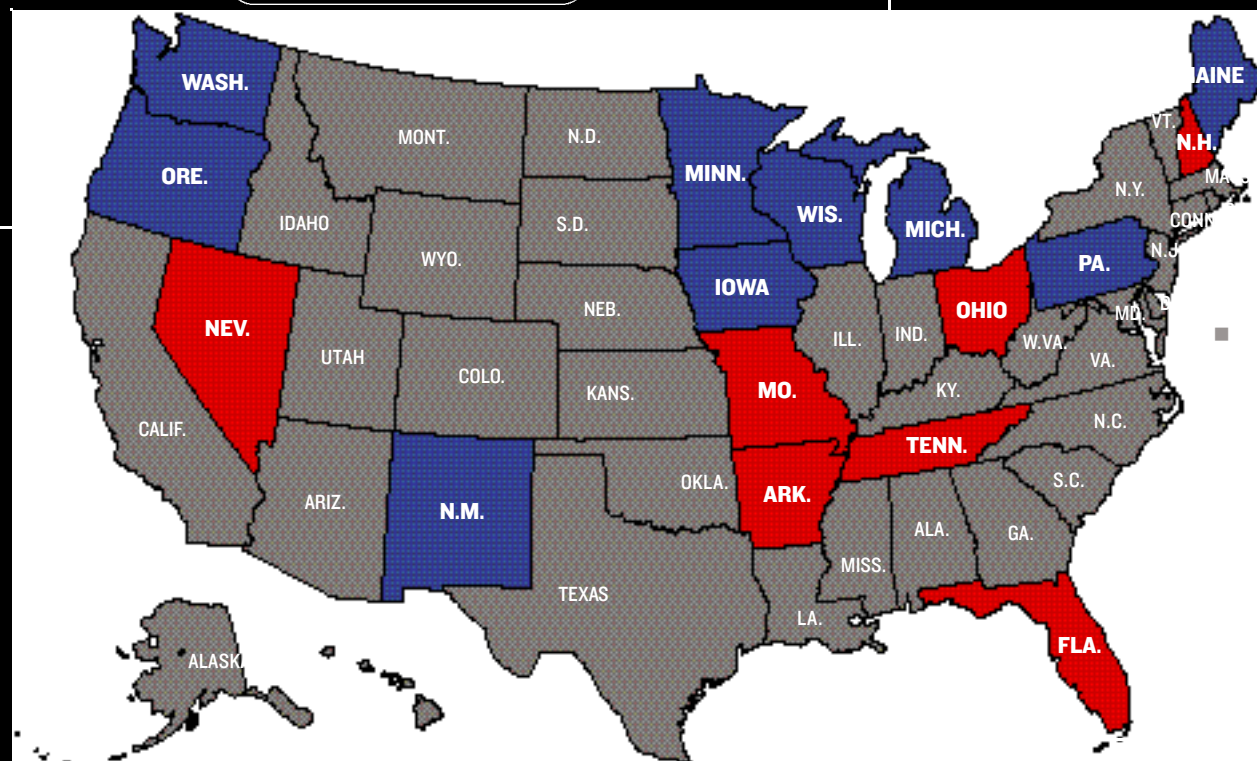
0.2% WISCONSIN: Dean has grass-roots support, but left Badger State out of his Iowa rant, angering cheeseheads.

5.1% MICHIGAN: Whoever inherits Gep's union troops has a leg up here. Gov. Granholm could have sway.

0.3% IOWA: Kerry loves Iowa, but it's going to be a long-distance relationship. No Dem will be back until the fall.

3.3% MISSOURI: Watch 'em line up to kiss Gep's ring. Kerry, Dean buying air time; Clark, Edwards sniffing around.

3.5% OHIO: Jobs are the issue, economic populism in vogue. GOP gov. hiked taxes; Bush can't stay away.



THE NORTHEAST

5.1% MAINE: Kerry and Dean both have offices in Bangor, but Dean's anti-gaming stance as governor made enemies; the Native American Times endorsed Clark, who has some tribal support.

1.3% NEW HAMPSHIRE: Lieberman picked up Union Leader's key support. Dean busy revamping national image, while Kerry leads in polls.

4.2% PENNSYLVANIA: State treasurer and local reps endorsed Kerry three months before the state's primary. Big Steel may tip outcome.

—MEREDITH SADIN

THE SOUTH

5.5% ARKANSAS: Clark is banking on his home state, but Edwards is putting up a fight—saying Dean and Kerry can't appeal to Southern voters.

3.9% TENNESSEE: Gore couldn't carry his home state in 2000: will his endorsement of Dean mean much? Clark showed "True Grits" on tour and schmoozed veterans.

.01% FLORIDA: Ground zero. Lieberman visited 10 times, wooing Southern Jewish communities. Kerry's been 10 times, while Dean's made six trips. Bush has made 18.

repeatedly with the more media-oriented "Boston crowd," led by the Kennedy clan and its professional consultant outriders. Other key members of that group were Kerry's brother, Cameron, and his wife, Teresa—who blamed Jordan for the campaign's lack of evident progress. Jordan was replaced by Mary Beth Cahill, Sen. Ted Kennedy's respected former chief of staff. "It's run smoothly since," said one insider.

The other audible call was to focus the

campaign on Iowa, where Kerry had been well received early on. Most of the campaign's staff and resources were sent west, and Kerry won the backing—first private and then public—of Christy Vilsack, the popular wife of the Democratic governor. The notion was that Kerry could use momentum gained in Iowa to slingshot into New Hampshire, where Shaheen, a legendarily effective organizer, would be ready to switch on her machine. It worked.

So is the result a truly "electable" candidate in the fall, or merely one who learned—not a moment too soon—how to compete in the early innings of the Democratic race? There is, for one, the matter of Kerry's public persona: he can seem aloof, condescending and soporific. A close friend admonished him to "quit looking to see who else is in the room when you shake hands with someone." Stories are legion of Kerry's forgetting names of local figures he's met several, even dozens, of times. As a senator for 20 years, and with a bright mind sensitive to nuances in all things, Kerry tends to explain things at great length—as much, it seems, to show off his knowledge as to communicate. "Just because someone asks you the time you don't have to explain how to build a watch," one good friend told him. He often exudes a sense of entitlement to power. In

2002, Kerry told NEWSWEEK, in effect, that his time had come. "Everybody in my class already has run for president," he said—meaning that the other Democrats elected to the Senate in 1984 had done so. The implication: I have been patient. I've schooled myself. Now everyone should admit that I'm The Man for the job and the moment.

The antidote for all this—to the extent that there is one—was Iowa. There, Kerry worked on being a humble listener in hour after hour of town halls. The senator with 20 years' seniority did his best to unlearn legislative language. And he worked on dealing with the person in front of him, not the ambition ahead of him. "That was a fair criticism at one point," he admits. "But you live and learn, and I think I am doing better at it."

He is, in part by campaigning with those who represent the emotional wellspring of his campaign: Vietnam veterans. Starting a few weeks ago, Kerry began featuring men he had led as skipper of one of two Swift Boats along the coast of Nam. They testify to his courage, leadership and humor, and draw other veterans to the events. In Iowa, Kerry unveiled another such ally—a Green Beret named Jim Rassman, whom Kerry had fished out of a river under fire. Kerry won a Bronze Star with a "V" for valor as a result. "I'm a Republican," Rassman told a cheering crowd in Des Moines last week, "but I'm switching registration to vote for John Kerry." The two men embraced—a gesture Kerry repeats with other vets. "The more the guy loosens up the better," said an adviser. "It's good for the him as a candidate and person."

Does Kerry—reared in wealth, connec-



PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID HUME KENNEDY—GETTY IMAGES FOR NEWSWEEK

tions and European boarding schools—understand the gritty realities of American life? Not enough to be the most electable candidate, argues Edwards. “I am more electable because I know what it’s like to grow up in a working-class family,” he told NEWSWEEK. Kerry admits he never had to deny himself any but the most lavish of material wants. But that’s irrelevant to electability, he said. “It’s not the circumstances you come from; it’s the values you fight for,” Kerry said. “If working-class roots were the standard, we would have been deprived of the leadership of great presidents—Franklin and Teddy Roosevelt, and John F. Kennedy, to name three.”

Is Kerry too much of a Washington insider to be electable? That’s Dean’s argument,

vehemently expressed on the trail for a year and a flood of attack sheets at last week’s debate in Manchester. Kerry doesn’t take money from political-action committees, but he does take contributions—and lots of them—from individuals who work for or own the same companies that form PACs. It’s a distinction that Kerry insists is crucial, but is functionally meaningless.

But would America elect a Massachusetts senator whom Bush might easily be able to brand as out of step with the mainstream? Republicans have calculated that Kerry in many recent years has had a more “liberal” voting record than Ted Kennedy, who campaigned heartily for Kerry in Iowa. Kerry insists that he doesn’t fit the label, noting that

as a decorated veteran and former prosecutor—and supporter of the middle-class portions of Bush’s tax cuts—he doesn’t fit the stereotype. He’s an expert shot, though his hunting attire is perhaps too Orvis for the average deerstalker in Pennsylvania or the duck-blind habitués in Louisiana.

Is a non-Southern Democrat electable? Recent history says “no.” The last three Democratic presidents (and four of five if you count Harry Truman) were from the Southern or border states. The only exception was one of Kerry’s idols and role models, John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts. It’s Edwards’s argument that only a Southerner can win in November. “The South isn’t George W’s backyard, it’s *my* backyard,” he

bellows on the stump. But White House strategists—and Kerry campaign insiders—scoff at the notion that Edwards could win in the region. (“He quit the Senate because he wasn’t going to be able to get re-elected in North Carolina,” says one GOP aide.) And some Democratic strategists think that their candidate can win in the fall without a single Southern state as long as they can win in the Southwest, New Hampshire and, perhaps, Ohio. “The notion that we need the South is a myth,” said one Democrat.

Before he can answer any of these questions, Kerry has to win more delegates, and he may face a long slog in doing so. Dean was prepared to fight to the end, pulling his coast-to-coast ad strategy and replacing it with one

that focuses on key states that vote next week, particularly Arizona and New Mexico. “It’s not the strategy we wanted, but it’s the one we’ve got,” said Dean polltaker Paul Maslin. “We are in it for the long haul.” So is Edwards, who stands to show well in South Carolina.

Much of the attention next week will be on Missouri, a fiefdom of Rep. Dick Gephardt—until he finished a dismal fourth in Iowa and dropped out of the race. Other campaigns descended on the carcass of Gephardt’s organization there, and were busy wooing the many unions Gephardt had had on his side. Barring a set of victories by Kerry, the prospect was for a long contest for delegates, especially if Dean managed a comeback of any dimension in New Hamp-

shire. “Soon enough, everybody’s going to be running out of money,” Maslin said. “This could be a long struggle.”

Kerry, who carefully husbands his health, especially in the aftermath of prostate surgery, seemed ready for the marathon. The only medication he takes, he said, is “vitamins in the morning.” As his bus rolled to a stop at a hotel in Manchester late last Friday night, he advised departing passengers—reporters and staffers alike—to “get a good night’s sleep.” It was looking like a long campaign, and everybody would have to tough it out.

With HOLLY BAILEY, T. TRENT GEGAX and ARIAN CAMPO-FLORES on the campaign trail and TAMARA LIPPER in Washington

SOUTH CAROLINA

After New Hampshire, all roads lead to a sprightly 63-year-old congressman whose voice carries a long way in Dixie

The Southern Man to See

BY RICHARD WOLFFE

In South Carolina, they call him their third senator, but the way the presidential candidates are courting him, he might as well be king. It’s not just his distinguished presence—his salt-and-pepper hair or his years in state and federal government—that places James Clyburn on a political pedestal. He’s the most senior African-American politician in a state where about half the Democratic-primary voters are minorities. For the six white Democratic hopefuls, facing their first Southern test next week, Clyburn is far more than the U.S. representative for the Sixth Congressional District. He’s the guy whose ring you’ve got to kiss in South Carolina.

For the moment, Clyburn says he’s “chilling out,” spending the weekend with his wife, Emily, at their lakeside vacation home in Santee. His first choice for the party’s presidential candidate was his old friend and mentor Dick Gephardt, whose economic message resonated in a state that has lost jobs for the past three years in a row. Within 48 hours of Gephardt’s withdrawal, six of the



PICK ME! The candidates hope support from Clyburn (above with Gephardt, Graham and Kerry) will deliver a win in South Carolina

seven surviving candidates called the sprightly 63-year-old Clyburn to seek his support. Yet, as Clyburn readily admits, even he can’t deliver Democratic votes on his own. “I have said from day one: I got 67 percent of the vote when I ran for re-election,” he told NEWSWEEK. “That means 33 percent of the people in my district wouldn’t listen to me.”

Such modesty means little to the presidential campaigns that are facing critical tests in next week’s vote. A block away from Clyburn’s offices in downtown Columbia, the

Kerry campaign tried to resuscitate its lifeless organization with the endorsement of the state’s most senior Democrat: the irrepressible 82-year-old Sen. Fritz Hollings. Yet Hollings’s support is no substitute for Kerry’s own people. Callers to Kerry’s South Carolina headquarters are greeted with a voice-mail saying, “Don’t forget to RSVP the September 12th fund-raiser”—the last time Kerry visited the state.

One floor below Kerry’s dark and empty offices, the Wes Clark campaign is staffed by two dozen volunteers calling likely voters and

stuffing envelopes late into the night. Like his Southern rival John Edwards, Clark desperately needs to win here to prove he is a viable candidate. But it’s Edwards, drawing on his local roots, who has generated more buzz on his 20 visits to the state with his pitch about America’s working poor. Still, both Southerners have failed to pull away in local polls, edging only slightly ahead of Al Sharpton, who has proved a dogged campaigner across the state. In fact, before Iowa’s upset, the front runner was Howard Dean by a slim three-point margin, and Dean aides believe he will hold onto more than 90 percent of his supporters. State director Don Jones says, “We are looking to be the success story of the Dean campaign.”

Those same polls show that half the state’s likely voters are like Clyburn: undecided. Clyburn says he won’t choose until after the New Hampshire vote. But he makes it clear that Dean shouldn’t hold his breath. “I said a long time ago the Dean campaign is very, very problematic,” he told NEWSWEEK. “It was more of a crusade than a campaign.” In contrast, Clyburn warmly cites Kerry’s emotional connection with Vietnam vets in the state, many of whom are African-American. Clyburn insists that ultimately his wife’s voice will be the only one he heeds in making his decision. But that won’t stop the flood of candidates from coming to call on the man to see in South Carolina.

THE GENERAL

Wes Clark won a war, but ran afoul of his Pentagon masters and lost his job. Here’s how. A NEWSWEEK exclusive.

Did Clark Fail to Salute?

BY EVAN THOMAS AND T. TRENT GEGAX

One of the most damning charges against retired Gen. Wesley Clark has also been the vaguest. After Clark entered the Democratic race last September, Gen. Hugh Shelton, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters that Clark had been sacked as commander of NATO forces after the 1999 Balkans war because of “integrity and character issues.” Shelton has refused to comment further, and Clark’s civilian boss, the then Defense Secretary William Cohen, has also remained silent.

The doubts raised by Clark’s own bosses have cast an uneasy pall over his presidential candidacy. What really happened? According to a knowledgeable source, Clark ran afoul of Cohen and Shelton by being less than totally forthcoming in morning conference calls during the Kosovo war in the spring of 1999. From his NATO headquarters in Brussels, Clark wanted to wage the war more aggressively, but back in the Pentagon, Cohen and Shelton were more cautious. They would



TEN HUT: Clark now says his bosses at the Pentagon ‘weren’t in touch with the situation well enough to tell me everything to do’

give Clark instructions on, for instance, the scale of the bombing campaign. “Clark would say, ‘Uh-huh, gotcha,’” says NEWSWEEK’s source. But then he would pick up the phone and call [British Prime Minister] Tony Blair and [Secretary of State] Madeleine Albright].” As Clark knew full well, Blair and Albright were more hawkish than Shelton and Cohen. After talking to the State Department and NATO allies, Clark would have a different set of marching orders, says the source, who has spoken about the matter with both

Cohen and Clark. “Then, about 1 o’clock, the Defense Department would hear what Clark was up to, and Cohen and Shelton would be furious.”

Was Clark going around them? Not really. As NATO commander, Clark told NEWSWEEK, “I wore two hats.” He reported to Washington, but also to America’s European allies. And within the U.S. government, he was within his authority to seek guidance from the State Department and certainly from the White House, as well as from his nominal bosses at the Pentagon.

“I was forthcoming,” Clark insisted. “If [Cohen and Shelton] gave me an instruction, I did it. I would never have not done what they told me to do. But the truth is, they weren’t in touch with the situation well enough to tell me everything to do. It’s why you have the title supreme ally commander... The buck usually stopped on my desk... I had, by necessity, a certain independence. Yet no matter how many times I tried to bring Hugh Shelton and Washington to understand the allied side, it didn’t compute. They just didn’t see it.” General Shelton, Clark’s aides are quick to note, is now listed as an unpaid adviser to the John Edwards campaign.

The problem may have been partly a matter of Clark’s tone and manner. As an ambitious officer, Clark gained a reputation among his peers for telling different people what they wanted to hear, without seeming to realize that his listeners might later compare notes and accuse Clark of being two-faced. Clark might have done better if he had adopted a more straightforward manner, perhaps leavened with a spot of humor. Consider, for instance, the approach used by Secretary of State Albright. When she first pushed to threaten force against the Serbs in Kosovo, a senior administration official exclaimed, “You people always want to bomb someone. It’s some kind of orgasm.” Albright silenced the men in the room by remarking, “I forget what an orgasm is.”