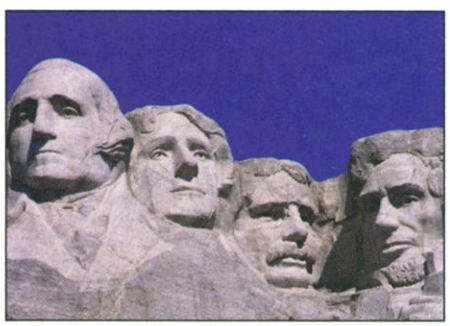
## Presidential Personalities

Presidents of the United States are not like you and me. A new personality assessment presented this week at the American Psychological Association conference in Washington, D.C., shows that, compared to the public they serve, presidents are more likely to be extroverted, assertive, and disagreeable. They're also less modest and straightforward.



Says who? Historians who have written book-length biographies of Oval Office occupants. Psychologist Steve Rubenzer of the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority of Harris County in Houston, Texas, and colleagues asked the biographers to fill out three standard personality inventories on their subjects, basing answers on the presidents' behavior during the 5 years preceding their reigns. The researchers compared the presidents' scores to population norms and compared the profiles of successful commanders-in-chief with those history hasn't smiled upon.

"Great" presidents, such as Jefferson and Lincoln, they find, "are attentive to their emotions, willing to question traditional values ... imaginative, and more interested in art and beauty than less successful Chief Executives." They're also more assertive, stubborn, and "tender-minded," which is a measure of concern for the less fortunate. Rubenzer hasn't analyzed the current presidential contenders yet—he prefers to have at least three "unbiased" historians fill out the forms for each president or presidential wanna-be.

## Antievolution Board Almost Extinct

Creationists were dealt a blow in Kansas last week. Three of four architects of last year's Board of Education decision eliminating evolution from the state's science curriculum were defeated in a primary election. The fourth won the Republican primary, but still faces a Democratic opponent in November.

The vote is an apparent backlash against the August 1999 resolution, passed by a 6-4 margin, to remove evolution from science teaching standards (*Science*, 20 August 1999, p. 1186). The board also removed references to the age of Earth and the big bang.

"The voices of moderation and reason have spoken," says a jubilant John Staver, director of the Center for Science Education at Kansas State University in Manhattan. "It doesn't get much clearer than that." Staver, who helped write the standards that were rewritten by conservative board members, expects the new board—which will take office in January—to quickly overturn last year's decision.

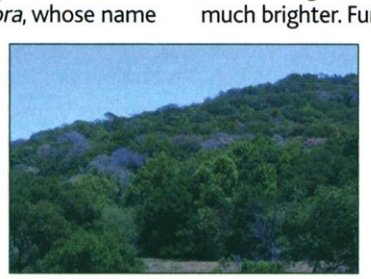
## Culprit Named in 'Sudden Oak Death'

A dread disease is striking California's coast live oaks with the ferocity of an oak-tree Ebola virus, causing the trees to sprout sores, hemorrhage sap, and become infested with beetles and various fungi. The trees die within a few weeks of their first symptoms.

Last week plant pathologist David Rizzo of the University of California, Davis, announced that his team had found the cause of the disease dubbed "Sudden Oak Death." The tree-slayer is a new member of the genus *Phytophthora*, whose name means "plant destroyer." Its kin include pathogens responsible for the Irish potato famine and die-offs in Australian eucalyptus forests and European oak groves. "We don't know if [the new species] was just recently introduced, or if it has always been here and something else has changed that has allowed it to go crazy," Rizzo says.

The first trees to succumb to the plague 5 years ago were tanoaks, which often grow in the understory of redwood forests. Last year the disease began hitting large numbers of coast live oaks, the signature species in scenic coastal woodlands. Alarmingly, the pathogen has begun to blight another species, the black oak.

Knowing the culprit doesn't make the outlook much brighter. Fungicides can save individual oaks, says Rizzo, but "we can't go to Mount Tamalpais and spray 10,000 trees." And prevention is largely limited to warning people not to carry oak firewood to uninfected areas. The Sierra Nevada hosts black oaks, and Rizzo fears the deadly spores could strike groves in beloved Yosemite Valley.



**A pox on California oaks.**

## Is There Anybody Out There?

Listening for alien signals doesn't come cheap. Last week two California philanthropists pledged real money to help build a vast array of radio telescopes tuned to extraterrestrial life. Technology investor and Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen will chip in $11.5 million, and Nathan Myhrvold, former chief technology officer of Microsoft, will provide $1 million for the $26 million project. "This new telescope will be the world's most powerful instrument for this search, and I'm pleased to support its important work," says Allen.

The instrument will consist of dozens of small radio dishes arrayed near Mount Lassen in Northern California. The telescope, which will be able to listen to a dozen star systems at once, will also be available for more conventional radio astronomy research.

Donations are still being accepted. Allen's pledge inspired the SETI Institute in Mountain View, California, to name the array after him; Myhrvold's name will grace an onsite electronics lab. For a mere $50,000, you too can be part of E.T. history—that's the going rate to name one of the array's radio dishes.

CREDITS: (TOP) SETH SHOSTAK/SETI; (MIDDLE) BILL LOSH/FPG; (BOTTOM) BRICE MCPHERSON