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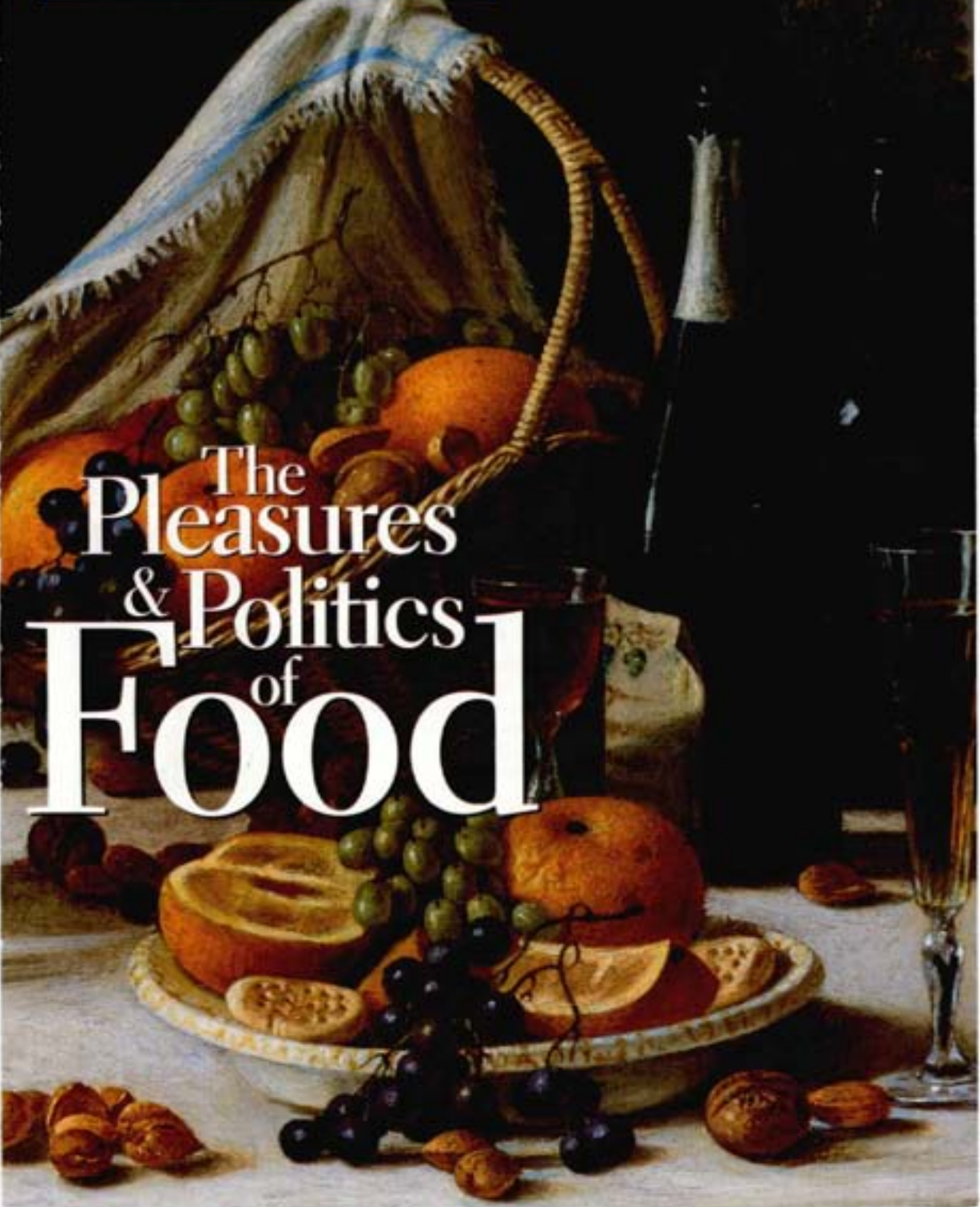
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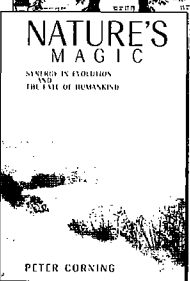
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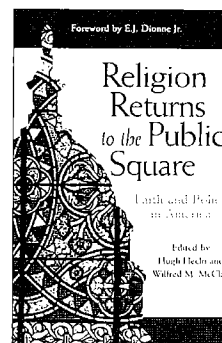
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by Martha Bayles

Hollywood war films have sent Americans into combat for a lot of different reasons over the years. The mayhem on screen is now more graphic than ever but less connected to any cause.

20 THE CASE THAT MADE THE COURT

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What your civics textbook didn't tell you about *Marbury v. Madison*, the famous case decided by the Supreme Court 200 years ago.

29 THE PLEASURES AND POLITICS OF FOOD

Daniel Akst • Blake Hurst • Lis Harris • David Appell

The first question to ask about food is straightforward: How does it taste? Additional questions introduce complication: Where does it come from? How did it get here? What gives it that color, or makes it so big, or keeps it so fresh? The questions seem innocuous, yet each carries political, economic, or environmental baggage. An ear of corn can cause a peck of trouble.

66 DO IDEAS MATTER IN AMERICA?

by Wilfred M. McClay

The charge of anti-intellectualism that's sometimes leveled against America is unjust. Ideas, including the idea of America itself, have shaped the history of the nation from the start.

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Editor's Comment

Some years ago, I invented a fanciful social indicator I called the Häagen-Dazs Index. The idea was simple: To gauge the socioeconomic status of a neighborhood, simply count up the number of shops per square mile run by Häagen-Dazs, which was then the country's first trendy purveyor of luxury ice cream. The higher the number, the more affluent the area. What particularly pleased me about the Häagen-Dazs Index was that it also measured an American cultural contradiction or, you could even say, American hypocrisy: Affluent Americans exalt the trim physique and worship at the church of Häagen-Dazs.

If Sigmund Freud were alive today, he might find food a juicier topic than sex. Food is not just an obsession and fetish of individuals, it's an engine of collective action. Driving across France last year, I was dumbfounded to see endless fields of corn and wheat and other crops carpeting the land, doubtless yielding far more food than the French could profitably use. All of this in cosmopolitan France? We must be in Kansas, I thought. So it was hardly a surprise earlier this year when the French government so adamantly resisted cuts in the huge subsidies needed to sustain the country's farms that the entire Doha round of international trade talks seemed to be in jeopardy. A key aim of those negotiations is the reduction of farm subsidies in the industrialized world, which economists see as a barrier to free trade and a burden on farmers in developing countries. Low domestic politics and loftier *raisons d'état* help explain the French position, but it can't be completely understood without consideration of the mystical connection between farm and kitchen in France—a connection that becomes palpable every time a visitor sits down to eat. In the view of the French, their farms are essential to their kitchens and to their culture. Americans, of course, have their own mystical attachments and costly commitments to the farm.

These and other culinary matters are the ingredients for this issue's four-course cover story. *Bon appétit!*

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What's Causing the Warming?

I agree with Jack M. Hollander ["Rushing to Judgment," *WQ*, Spring '03] that the argument that climate change should be the single most important priority of the world's governments (or that we should "obsess" about it) is off base. Climate change issues can't be allowed to push immediate crises such as poverty and public health off the table. Yet neither should these more immediate challenges justify doing nothing about climate change.

Hollander charges that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has been "transformed" from an effort at scientific cooperation into some sort of out-of-control political organization. In fact, the IPCC is made up of hundreds of the earth's leading scientific and technical experts, hailing from the world's premier universities and research institutes. It was established by the World Meteorological Organization and the member countries of the United Nations and charged with the task of assessing the state of knowledge in many fields of scientific and technical research. These assessments summarize and review the published work of leading researchers; the IPCC does not conduct its own research, nor does it tell governments what to do. Each chapter of assessment is written by a different group of relevant scientific and technical experts, who are hardly radical "greens." Government officials can and do make their views known in these processes, and at times they seek to water down the language.

In other words, the IPCC is a scientific and technical assessment body, similar in structure and mandate to hundreds (perhaps thousands) of such bodies around the world. The U.S. government, for example, routinely relies on input from such bodies in setting environmental, health, safety, economic, and defense policies. As Hollander notes, such bodies are often criticized as "hybrid scientific/political organizations," and because the Bush administration shares Hollander's dislike for the

IPCC and its conclusions, other panels of eminent scientific and technical experts have been convened to review the IPCC's work. In general, these groups have found little fault with the conclusions of IPCC assessments.

Hollander decries the general politicization of climate change issues, implying that climate research is not scientific. Let's be frank. The climate change research agenda has enormous ramifications for how 21st-century societies, economies, and politics will be organized. Given this inescapable fact, what exactly would a "nonpolitical" statement about climate change be? With varying degrees of success, individual researchers—like larger scientific and technical assessment bodies—seek to minimize the influences of particular political interests. Yet scientific research agendas and findings cannot magically become "nonpolitical," particularly when they appear to conflict with entrenched power and interests (just ask Galileo).

Hollander uses a number of rhetorical devices to cast doubt on the conclusions and political implications of climate change research. For example, he charges that media representations are often alarmist or one-sided, overstating the case for climate change. Where's the evidence for this? Environmentalists often make the opposite claim (with an equal amount of evidence, it should be noted). They charge that media coverage often treats the claims of thousands of climate change experts and those of a few skeptics (often funded by industry groups) as equally legitimate. Of course, empirical reality is likely more complex than either of these charges.

Hollander also seeks to gain rhetorical advantage by framing the many uncertainties and unknowns of climate research as essentially the same. In this area, the essay by V. Ramanathan and Tim P. Barnett ["Experimenting with Earth"] is an excellent rejoinder. As they point out, some facets of the climate system are known, others are uncertain, and some are unknown, which is to say not well understood. But Hollander acts as if there are only two



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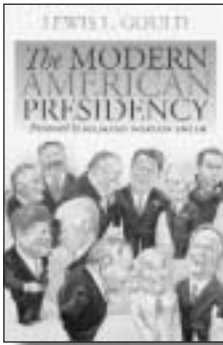
categories of knowledge, the known and the unknown, with anything else unworthy of consideration.

Many who are concerned about the complete lack of effort by the U.S. government even to begin to stem emissions of climate change gases believe that policymaking should be informed (not determined, note) by what is known—and by what other evidence suggests. Hollander, like the first Bush administration, appears to believe that a few more years of research (and more research funding) will yield a kind of certainty. This is unlikely (but not certainly so, naturally).

Hollander wants climate models to account for the “full complexity” of the climate system. Yet, by definition, models are simplifications. They do not spit out scientific and technical certainties—or policy recommendations to address complex social and political problems.

Policy decisions must often be made in the face of scientific and technical uncertainty. Decades ago, long before the uncertainties of cancer research approached zero, U.S. government officials began advising people not to smoke. Millions of Americans reduced their cancer risk because some U.S. government officials were willing to act on the basis of uncertain science. Continuing to churn out ever-increasing emissions of the major climate-change gases while we wait for incontrovertible proof that they are causing the planet's climate to change is a lot like smoking through pregnancy to see if your fetus has been harmed. When we are certain, it will be too late.

Finally, there is Hollander's dislike of the Kyoto Protocol. He notes that the agreement would require larger cuts in emissions and larger costs for the United States than for most other developed countries. He fails to mention that the United States is far-and-away the largest contributor of emissions to Earth's atmosphere and that its per capita emissions are much higher than those of most other nations. And U.S. emissions climbed steadily in the last decade, with no serious policymaking efforts to reduce even their rate of growth. Meanwhile, many other developed countries have been pur-



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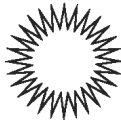
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suing policies designed to enhance energy efficiency and slow, and ultimately reduce, fossil fuel use. But the current Bush administration's position amounts to a policy that U.S. climate change emissions will—and should—continue to grow indefinitely into the future.

Hollander cites only those studies of Kyoto's economic impact that suggest the costs are significant. But many other studies argue that the costs would be minimal, or that well-designed reductions in fossil fuel use might actually have positive economic (and human health) results. A simple example helps to make the point: Hollander cites a \$2.3 trillion figure for the costs of Kyoto implementation “over the coming decades.” The figure sounds huge. Yet how much will the United States spend on “defense” over those same decades to ensure that ever-larger quantities of fossil fuels flow out of the Middle East? At the current rate of military spending (almost \$500 billion annually), it will take less than five years for the United States to spend \$2.3 trillion.

It matters less whether the United States ever joins the Kyoto Protocol than it does that

the country's leaders and citizens get serious about stemming U.S. emissions of climate change gases. With about five percent of the world's population, this country emits nearly one-quarter of humanity's greenhouse gases. Reasonable policies designed to limit U.S. emissions would send signals to the markets and to innovative people that energy efficiency and energy alternatives are future priorities. Doing nothing at all about these emissions will send the opposite signals. Ramanathan and Barnett are correct, but too polite: It is time for Americans to slow their dangerous experimentation with Earth's climate system.

Stacy D. VanDeveer

Ronald H. O'Neal Asst. Professor of Political Science

University of New Hampshire

Durham, N.H.

America's reluctance to ratify the Kyoto Protocol during the Clinton era, followed by the Bush administration's refusal to have anything to do with the agreement, has led the rest of the world to conclude that the United States is no longer pushing the envelope in international

FROM THE CENTER

In mid-June, as news reports from the Middle East spread gloom about the prospects for the “road map” to peace, a very different perspective was offered by speakers at a Wilson Center conference on the post-Iraq Middle East. While some struck a pessimistic note, several of the speakers—government officials and others from the Arab world and the United States—were hopeful, noting among other things that many ordinary Palestinians want peace with Israel.

Indeed, both sides may be ripe for peace. After a visit to Israel last year, I came away from conversations with Israeli and Palestinian friends convinced that people on both sides are fatigued by the conflict and desperate to stop the killing and pursue peace. Hamas and other terrorist groups are determined to derail any such efforts, of course, but as our Wilson Center conference showed, the forces for peace are gathering.

Much of the fresh impetus is a result of the U.S. effort in Iraq, which has fundamentally altered the political dynamics of the Middle East and other regions. Even as we met at the Wilson Center, young people were filling the streets of Iran’s cities, demanding change. Syria, long a hostile presence, has cooperated in rounding up fleeing members of the Iraqi Baath Party. Even North Korea has retreated from its policy of threat and bluster over its nuclear program.

In the Middle East, Israel and the Palestinian Authority have taken the first steps along the road map to peace, a possibility that was virtually unimaginable a year ago. Over the longer term, the issue of utmost concern to Israelis is the character of any state created by the Palestinians. Will it be a moderate, quasi-democratic entity living side by side in peace with Israel, or will it turn out to be an adversarial state and a haven for future terrorists? For Palestinians, key issues include the shape of their future state and the status of Israeli settlements in the lands under discussion.

One of the great tragedies of the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict is that the outlines of any likely agreement were present in Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak’s Camp David proposal, which Yasir Arafat rejected three years ago. Although the plan needed refinement, its key elements were sound. They include: (i) the partition of Jerusalem to give the Palestinians some stake in that city; (ii) a “law of return” allowing some Palestinians to return to land controlled by Israel, and entitling others to compensation; (iii) Israeli agreement to start closing down some settlements; (iv) the return of approximately 95 percent of the land on the West Bank and Gaza to the Palestinians; and (v) Israel’s recognition of a Palestinian state if all conditions were met.

Before there can be further progress toward these larger goals, the violence on both sides must cease. Achieving this and longer-term goals will take strong leadership, and it must come not only from President George W. Bush and his Israeli and Palestinian counterparts but from moderate leaders in the Arab world. By failing to pressure Arafat three years ago, moderate Arab leaders contributed to the collapse of the Camp David accord. Let Anwar Sadat be their inspiration. A strong stand against terrorism and firm support for the efforts of Palestinian Authority prime minister Mahmoud Abbas to steer the Palestinians away from violence could tip the balance.

Real peace will not come overnight. The language of peace in the Middle East is a language of “road maps” and “steps,” of dialogue and steady, measured progress. At the Wilson Center, we spread the language of peace by bringing scholars, policymakers and others from around the world to study, to debate, and to reflect—and to return home with fresh understandings and perspectives. These are the seeds of peace everywhere.

—Joseph B. Gildenhorn
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environmental affairs.

In the past, the European Union was rarely as proactive as certain member states would have liked. While it proposed strategies to move the negotiations forward, the EU often concluded that its proposals needed U.S. support to be viable. But as last year's World Summit on Sustainable Development, in Johannesburg, made clear, EU and U.S. climate policies have grown apart. For the first time, the EU indicated that it was willing to move on without waiting for the United States to ratify Kyoto.

To retake the initiative, the United States needs to reverse its reactionary policy, which leaves little doubt in the eyes of international observers that the Bush administration is too friendly with the oil industry to care for the needs of future generations.

Jack M. Hollander attributes the U.S. reluctance to be an equal partner in the Kyoto Protocol to the high costs of compliance. Instead of focusing on such immediate costs, the Bush administration should consider the future costs of *not* turning away from reliance on fossil fuels. Irrefutable evidence of the connec-

tion between greenhouse gas emissions and climate change will take decades to produce, if, given the uncertainties inherent in science, it can be produced at all. And while the United States is waiting, the damage will have been done, with tremendous costs as a result.

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V. Ramanathan and Tim P. Barnett seem to rely on man-made global warming as predicted by theoretical climate models rather than on hard data that show insignificant recent warming. No one doubts greenhouse theory. But data collected from the complex atmosphere-ocean-cryosphere system can suggest warming effects from sources other than just greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide.

For example, all climate models agree that increased warming of the oceans leads to more evaporation of water vapor, which in turn can produce more clouds. The amount of cloud cover and its thickness determine the amount

of sunlight that is reflected back out into space, thereby reducing surface warming. But the number and sizes of cloud droplets both depend in a complicated way on the number and types of cloud condensation nuclei present in the atmosphere. That's where the models fail. To make matters worse, models also lack the spatial resolution to simulate clouds and are forced to create a "best guess" kind of cloudiness based on simplifying assumptions that often have no basis in physical reality.

The distribution of water vapor in the air, not well simulated in climate models, or even well known from actual measurements, presents other difficulties. Water vapor is the most important greenhouse gas—seldom mentioned because its concentration in the atmosphere is not under direct human control. But its influence, whether in the form of vapor, liquid cloud droplets, or solid ice, is generally much greater than that of greenhouse gases emitted from human activities.

Ramanathan and Barnett's most curious argument refers to the satellite observations of atmospheric temperatures that have shown little if any warming since 1979 while surface temperatures—which may be contaminated by the well-known "urban heat-island" effect—have climbed. They favor a recent re-analysis of the satellite data because it is "in closer agreement with greenhouse models." Can a calculation based on an uncertain model decide which observation is correct?

Nothing illustrates the inadequacy of current climate models as graphically as the so-called National Assessment of Climate Change, published by the Clinton administration to illustrate the impact of a future warming on different regions of the United States. The strategic error made by the promoters of the NACC was to use two climate models instead of just one. In half of the 18 regions the two models give opposite results; in the rest they diverge widely. For example, one model predicts that greenhouse warming will turn North Dakota into a desert; the other turns it into a swamp.

In spite of the lack of underlying scientific evidence, Ramanathan and Barnett urge that "the time to act is now." But Yale University economist William Nordhaus calculates that it would cost \$3 trillion (in present dollars) to cut emissions by five percent below the 1990 level. At the same time, all agree that Kyoto would produce

an imperceptible reduction of any future warming. To echo Jack M. Hollander's theme, just imagine the impact on world poverty and the environment if we were to invest even a fraction of that \$3 trillion productively.

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Hiroshima Revisited

"Hiroshima Revisited," a summary of military historian D. M. Giangreco's article in *Pacific Historical Review* ["The Periodical Observer," WQ, Spring '03], states: "Barton J. Bernstein has maintained that there's no proof [President] Truman ever saw" Herbert Hoover's May 30, 1945, memo to Truman forecasting 500,000 to 1,000,000 American dead in the invasion and related operations against Japan.

Such a contention about what I "maintained" is provably incorrect. Indeed, I was probably the first to publish that Truman forwarded Hoover's memo to Secretary of War Henry Stimson and, also, that official military analysts in mid-1945 dismissed Hoover's numbers as outlandish for planned American operations against Japan. I would cite both the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (June/July 1986), pp. 39–40, including note 7, as well as the *Journal of Strategic Studies* (March 1999), where I also discussed Hoover's memo and noted that Truman had sent it to Stimson.

The basic interpretive issue is not whether Truman saw that memo. Nearly all concerned scholars agree that he did. But did Truman and his top military advisers in May–June 1945 trust Hoover's huge estimate? There is no reliable evidence that they did, and powerful evidence that the most important dismissed Hoover's number.

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We accurately reported the contents of D. M. Giangreco's article as it appeared in the scholarly journal Pacific Historical Review. However, evidence does support Professor Bernstein's contention that he has acknowledged that Truman saw the Hoover memo, and we apologize for reporting a claim to the contrary.

—The Editors

Findings

Competence and Complexity

From “benign neglect” to “defining deviancy down,” the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan had a singular skill for distilling complex ideas to their essence. For all his catchy phrases, though, the scholar and statesman (and one of the Woodrow Wilson Center’s founding fathers) abhorred the American tendency to oversimplify. He made the point with characteristic pungency in 1970, when leaving a position in the Nixon White House.

“Our great weakness,” Moynihan told President Nixon and members of the Cabinet, “is the habit of reducing the most complex issues to the most simplistic moralisms. About Communism. About Capitalism. About Crime. About Corruption. . . . It has made it difficult for Americans to think honestly and to some purpose about themselves and their problems. Moralism drives out thought. . . .”

“We have acquired bad habits of speech and worse patterns of behavior, lurching from crisis to crisis with the attention span of a five-year-old. We have never learned to be sufficiently thoughtful about the tasks of running a complex society.

“The political process reinforces, and to a degree rewards, the moralistic style. Elections are rarely our finest hours. This is when we tend to be most hysterical, most abusive, least thoughtful about problems, and least respectful of complexity. . . .”

“A century ago the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt foresaw that ours would be the age of ‘the great simplifiers,’ and that the

essence of tyranny was the denial of complexity. He was right. This is the single great temptation of the time. It is the great corruptor, and must be resisted with purpose and with energy. What we need are great complexifiers, men who will not only seek to understand what it is they are about, but who will also dare to share that understanding with those for whom they act.”

World Cup of Kindness

Social science now confirms what tourists have long observed: Altruism varies from place to place. Psychologist Robert V. Levine of California State University, Fresno, developed field experiments to measure “simple acts of assistance, as opposed to Oskar Schindler-like heroism,” he explains in *American Scientist* (May–June 2003). For instance, would a passing pedestrian retrieve and return a dropped pen? Would a stamped and addressed letter left on a sidewalk get mailed?

Levine and his students first tried the experiments in 36 American cities. People proved most helpful in small and medium-sized cities in the Southeast, and

least helpful in large cities of the Northeast and the West Coast. New York City came in last. “Far and away the best predictor, we found, was population density,” Levine reports. “This parameter was more closely tied to the helpfulness of a city than were the crime rate, the pace of life, the prevailing economic conditions, or environmental stressors—say, noise or air pollution.”

Levine’s team next took the study to other countries. Some experiments resisted export:



The late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in a 1993 photograph

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In Tel Aviv, “where unclaimed packages have all too often turned out to contain bombs, people actively avoided our suspicious-looking envelopes,” Levine says. From the experiments that did translate, the researchers learned that population density didn’t have the predictive potency it had in the United States. Instead, people tended to be especially helpful in countries with low economic productivity, “in cities with a slow pace of life (as measured by pedestrian walking speeds), and in cultures that emphasize the value of social harmony.” Rio de Janeiro ranked as most helpful, and Kuala Lumpur as least. New York City came in next to last.

Strange Bedfellow

Eric Hobsbawm, the historian and lifelong communist, sounds like a rock-ribbed traditionalist on the topic of identity politics in academe. “As identity is defined against someone else, it implies not identifying with the other. It leads to disaster,” he writes in his memoir *Interesting Times* (Pantheon). “That is exactly why in-group history written only for the group (‘identity history’)—black history for blacks, queer history for homosexuals, feminist history of women only, or any kind of in-group ethnic or nationalist history—cannot be satisfactory as history. . . . No identity group, however large, is alone in the world; the world cannot be changed to suit it alone, nor can the past.”

Tanglewood Tantrum

“The splendor of nature is surpassed only by the magnificence of music,” touts the Tanglewood Music Center, summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, located in the Berkshire Mountains of western Massachusetts. A different view comes from the man who popularized the name Tanglewood with his *Tanglewood Tales* (1853): Nathaniel Hawthorne.

In 1849, when the White House shifted from Democrat James Polk to Whig Zachary Taylor, Hawthorne lost his patronage job at the Salem Custom House and decided to relocate. He and his wife found a red

farmhouse in the Berkshire town of Lenox—“as red as the *Scarlet Letter*,” he wrote—and the family moved there in 1850.

Despite a warm friendship with neighbor Herman Melville, Hawthorne soon grew disenchanted, as Paul Auster shows in his introduction to Hawthorne’s family chronicle *Twenty Days with Julian & Little Bunny by Papa* (New York Review Books). The house was “the most wretched little hovel that I ever put my head in,” Hawthorne complained, and the mountains “grow wearisome with the same strong impression, repeated day after day.” He told his publisher, “I am sick to death of Berkshire, and hate to think of spending another winter here.”

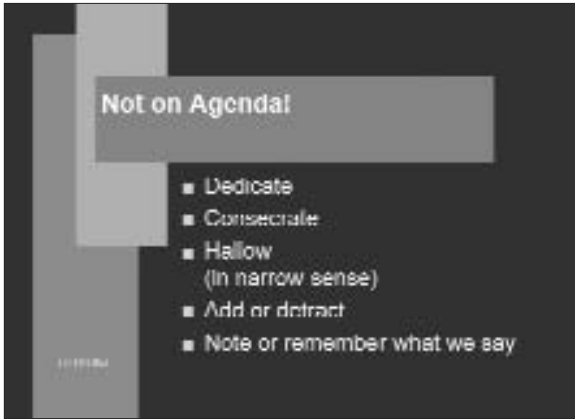
Summertime was no better, Hawthorne ranted in a July 1851 entry in his journal: “This is a horrible, horrible, most hor-ri-ble climate; one knows not, for 10 minutes together, whether he is too cool or too warm; but he is always one or the other; and the constant result is a miserable disturbance of the system. I detest it! I detest it!! I de-test it!!! I hate Berkshire with my whole soul, and would joyously see its mountains laid flat.” Four months later, the Hawthornes moved to West Newton.

Come the Revolution

With his new film *The Weather Underground*, Bill Siegel seeks to remind Americans of those heady days when “some of the best and the brightest” set out to “overthrow the country.” Appearing at Filmfest D.C. this past spring, Siegel said he hoped the documentary would reach a large audience and “get some ideas of revolution out there.” Costs of the film, he noted in passing, were partly underwritten by the federally funded Independent Television Service.

PowerPoint Corrupts

Those all-but-ubiquitous PowerPoint presentations may have met their match: Edward R. Tufte, an emeritus professor at Yale University and the author of *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* (1983).



A portion of the Gettysburg Address as processed by the Microsoft PowerPoint AutoContent Wizard.

In his self-published essay “The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint” (for sale at www.edwardtufte.com), Tufte argues that PowerPoint “routinely disrupts, dominates, and trivializes content.”

In his indictment, the typical PowerPoint presentation embodies a distinct, and distinctly inferior, cognitive style: “foreshortening of evidence and thought, low spatial resolution, a deeply hierarchical single-path structure as the model for organizing every type of content, breaking up narrative and data into slides and minimal fragments, rapid temporal sequencing of thin information rather than focused spatial analysis, conspicuous decoration and ‘Phluff,’ a preoccupation with format not content, an attitude of commercialism that turns everything into a sales pitch.”

Tufte develops the argument and applies it to several examples, including a PowerPoint presentation NASA relied on early this year in deciding, disastrously, that the space shuttle *Columbia* would be able to return to Earth safely.

Psychedelic “Summertime”

Around the time Nixon did *Laugh-In* 35 years ago, Joplin did Gershwin. “Summertime” appears on *Cheap Thrills*, the album that helped make Janis Joplin a star in 1968. The *Porgy and Bess* lullaby from 1935, with music by George Gershwin and lyrics by DuBose Heyward, got reconfigured by the San Francisco “freak rock” band Big Brother and the Holding Company, on an

album the musicians wanted to call *Sex, Dope, and Cheap Thrills* (prudish Columbia Records shortened it), with cover art by R. Crumb and a Hell’s Angels seal of approval.

Guitarist Sam Andrew was behind the offbeat selection. Soon after Big Brother formed in 1965, he persuaded his bandmates to give “Summertime” a try. Andrew wrote a complex arrangement, blending a half-tempo motif from a Bach prelude with a psychedelic-sounding guitar solo. He and bassist Peter Albin took turns singing it until Joplin joined the band in 1966.

With her raw and raucous voice, Joplin made the Gershwin tune “one of the warhorses of our repertoire,” Andrew says now. “People loved that song,” reports Alice Echols, author of the Joplin biography *Scars of Sweet Paradise* (1999).

Haight-Ashbury met Tin Pan Alley. “One time,” Andrew remembers, “I went to lunch with Johnny Marks, this wonderful old songwriter—he wrote ‘Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer’—and he said he had played the Janis ‘Summertime’ for Ira Gershwin.” Marks told Andrew that Gershwin, lyricist brother of the “Summertime” composer, “really liked it—maybe he was just being nice, but I don’t think so.”

Joplin quit Big Brother and the Holding Company while *Cheap Thrills* was atop the album chart, and the band split up. Three of the musicians reunited in 1987. On July 27, Big Brother will perform a Central Park concert, including “Summertime,” in tribute to Joplin, who, had she survived a heroin overdose in 1970, would have turned 60 this year.



Janis Joplin unleashing her unique vocal stylings during a 1969 Madison Square Garden concert.

Portraits of Mars

In Hollywood war movies of the 1940s, American soldiers fought for a sense of national purpose. In subsequent decades, they fought mainly for the sake of their buddies. Now, when the mayhem in war films is more realistic than ever, Hollywood seems unwilling to give the violence a larger context.

by Martha Bayles

Honor, fear, and interest. Of the three motives Thucydides gave for war, honor came first. That was because, as an officer, he understood that fear and interest do not rank high among the reasons men march into battle. What soldiers know, artists know too. For millennia, poets, sculptors, storytellers, and painters have depicted war as driven less by fear (“weapons of mass destruction”) or interest (“blood for oil”) than by motives such as those the historian Donald Kagan, writing in the journal *Commentary* (1997), included in a definition of honor: “the search for fame and glory; the desire to escape shame, disgrace, and embarrassment; the wish to avenge a wrong and thereby to restore one’s reputation; the determination to behave in accordance with certain moral ideals.” For almost a century now, the movies, too, have been portraying those same motives for war.

Only a fool or a totalitarian would draw a direct causal relationship between what people see on the screen and what they’re willing to fight for. Yet war films have always stood midway between art and propaganda. If the recent conflict in Iraq is a harbinger of things to come, and if political scientist Andrew Bacevich is right in suggesting that the war on terrorism is likely to be “an all but permanent and inescapable part of life in the 21st century,” then it’s worth pondering how war will be depicted in the world’s most popular art form.

The most constant but least honorable element in war is blood lust. The all-too-human propensity toward aggression is

found in what historian John Keegan calls “the endemic warfare of nonstate, even pre-state peoples,” as well as in the “habits of loot, pillage, rape, murder, kidnap, extortion, and systematic vandalism” that characterize “irregular” troops from Cossacks and Hussars to today’s genocidal paramilitaries. The ancient Greeks sought to ennoble blood lust by making war a contest between equals. In Homer, the wrathful Achilles is compared to a lion, but when his ferocity is finally unleashed, it’s directed solely at other champions. The classical ideal of honor, then, was prowess in battle, where every virtue is heated to a molten state and then forged into noble character.

The Enlightenment introduced a new version of honor, based on the idea of war as a rule-bound, principled undertaking. This ideal sought, through universal military service, to expand the personal glory of the warrior to the nation as a whole. The philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote, “War itself, provided it is conducted with order and a sacred respect for the rights of civilians, has something sublime about it, and gives nations that carry it on in such a manner a stamp of mind only the more sublime the more numerous the dangers to which they are exposed, and which they are able to meet with fortitude.”

This Enlightenment ideal took a beating in World War I. As millions were mowed down on the mechanized killing fields, poets such as Wilfred Owen portrayed national honor as a deceptive veneer over blood lust. Soon the infant art of film



Sergeant York (1941): a chestful of medals in the good fight for freedom and democracy.

picked up the theme. During the war, Hollywood produced a handful of belliscose films (among them, *Escaping the Hun* and *The Kaiser, the Beast of Berlin*). But the tone of movies changed in the 1920s, and by 1930, when Universal released its memorable adaptation of Erich Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the dominant tone of war movies was pacifist.

Then came the Good War. In July 1941, five months before Pearl Harbor, Warner Brothers released *Sergeant York*, a film biography of

the Tennessee rifleman who, by killing 23 Germans and capturing 132 in a single battle, became the most decorated American soldier in World War I. Film historian Thomas Doherty suggests that *Sergeant York*, starring Gary Cooper and directed by Howard Hawks, "recast the Great War as a reasonable national enterprise, not as the crazy slaughterhouse depicted in literature and film for the previous 20 years." In this light, *Sergeant York* can be viewed as the first movie to foster public support for America's entry into World War II by dramatizing a new, democratized ideal of

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honor—which, Kagan argues, emerged between the wars:

War itself, in this conception, was believed to be *morally* wrong, its causes connected with the aggressiveness natural to authoritarian and despotic regimes. Democracy, by contrast, was right and good in itself and also a force for peace. Over time, the idea took root that the only just war was a war in defense of democracy and self-determination.

Sergeant York exemplifies this new ideal by showing how the title character, a simple Tennessee farmer who at first refuses to fight because the Bible says “Thou shalt not kill,” is guided by a wise commanding officer to the realization that freedom cannot be taken for granted. Heeding the call, Sergeant York renders unto Caesar and is richly rewarded with a chestful of medals, a ticker-tape parade, and a coveted piece of farmland. (It helps that this hugely popular film depicted trench warfare not as mass slaughter but, in Doherty’s phrase, as “just another turkey shoot.”)

This became the preferred formula for almost all the war movies made between 1942 and 1945 under the auspices of the Office of War Information and other federal agencies: feature films, morale-building documentaries (such as Frank Capra’s “Why We Fight” series), and military instructional films. Most of the feature films played up the skill and heroism of the ordinary GI, and played down the carnage of battle. In retrospect, it’s easy to knock these movies for relying on what film critic Richard Schickel calls “some mystical connection between the dumb, dutiful decency of the average American and the great and necessary moral task [such Americans] accomplished.” But as Schickel himself adds, audiences were all too aware of the harsh reality, not only from the newsreels shown along with the films, but from the thousands of telegrams bringing grief to their doorsteps.

This early-1940s formula lasted into the postwar era because it was effective at promoting and perpetuating the

democratic ideal of honor. Like its predecessors, the democratic ideal posits a link between virtue and victory. On the level of fact, it’s well documented that Japanese, German, and Russian soldiers fought valiantly during World War II. But on the level of myth, it was important to show the sons of democracy fighting more valiantly than the sons of dictatorship. In 1949 Hollywood released eight films that did just that, including *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, starring John Wayne. It’s hard to argue with an icon, and like its famously photographed climax, the raising of the Stars and Stripes on Mount Suribachi, *The Sands of Iwo Jima* is an icon. But by the time the Korean War came along, the 1940s formula was starting to feel stale.

Among the crop of movies made about Korea, one of the few still worth watching is *Pork Chop Hill* (1959). Directed by Lewis Milestone (who 29 years earlier had directed *All Quiet on the Western Front*), the film is about an army platoon ordered to take a hill with no clear strategic importance. Casualties are heavy, and the commanding officer, Lieutenant Joe Clemons (Gregory Peck), has grave doubts. The film ends with a voice-over claiming that the platoon’s sacrifices helped others to breathe free, but the real message emerges when a fellow officer asks Clemons, “Is this hill worth it?” and Clemons replies, “Worth what? It’s not worth anything militarily. Americans wouldn’t give you a dollar for it. No Chinese would give you two bits. But values change. Sometime, somehow. Maybe when the first man died.”

In a subtle way, this speech undermines the 1940s formula. Like most war narratives, *Pork Chop Hill* focuses on the experiences of a single unit. This is really the best way to dramatize battle. But the formula requires that the unit serve as a microcosm of the larger society, and that the lowly grunt embody the strengths of democracy. Showing respect but not slavish obedience toward his officers, the grunt must be able, when circumstances require, to think for himself—to seize the initiative, improvise,

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Saving Private Ryan (1998): buddy helping buddy, in the midst of bloody battle.

and, when it comes to making “the ultimate sacrifice,” do so willingly, because he believes without being coerced that the cause for which he is dying is his own dignity and freedom.

Lieutenant Clemons’s speech does away with the idea of the unit-as-microcosm. Soldiers, Clemons says, die for their comrades. We accept this narrowing of the focus because we know that in the heat of combat soldiers do not think about abstract ideals, they think about their comrades. They act out of loyalty to them, out of fear of letting them down, and (at most) out of a desire to uphold the honor of the unit. Sociologists call this “unit cohesion,” and every war story must acknowledge it, just as it must acknowledge blood lust. The war films of the Vietnam era acknowledged both these things, with a vengeance.

It’s a cliché that young Americans went off to Vietnam with visions of John Wayne dancing in their heads. But it’s also true. After citing several sources on this point, the military historian Richard Holmes concludes that “middle-ranking infantry officers in Vietnam in the late 1960s would have been in their early teens when *The Sands of Iwo Jima* first appeared; it is, perhaps, not surprising that its impact was so tremen-

dous.” Holmes does not mention Wayne’s terminally klutzy Vietnam movie, *The Green Berets*. Made in the style of 1949, set in the confident days of 1963, and lobbed like a grenade into 1968, *The Green Berets* was ridiculed by soldiers in the field for such incongruities as having the Viet Cong attack in close formation and the sun set in the east.

More attuned to the times was Robert Altman’s *M*A*S*H* (1970), set in Korea but clearly a black comedy about Vietnam—and the first movie to portray the American soldier not as an exemplar of democracy but as an avatar of alienation. The character had already appeared in literature: In Joseph Heller’s best-selling novel *Catch-22* (1961), the protagonist Yossarian is an antihero, part opportunist and part rebel, who (like Hawkeye and Trapper John in *M*A*S*H*) thumbs his nose at the hypocrisy of the system and lives by his own unerring code. This lone wolf type is, of course, a staple of classic American genres such as the western and the detective story, but it was new to war movies. Given the importance of the unit in that genre, the lone wolf was not a natural fit. It’s worth noting that *M*A*S*H* is

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set not in combat but in a field hospital, and that *Catch-22* (adapted for the screen in 1970) is set at the end of World War II, when, as Yossarian explains, “the Germans will be beaten in a few months.” None of these antiheroes are shown fighting a real enemy.

The lone wolf persisted in the first two commercially successful Vietnam films, *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979). The former is a better film in many ways, not least because it does not insult the memory of those who fought. But its hero, Michael (Robert DeNiro), is too clever and resourceful by half. He goes to Nam with his two best buddies from a Penn-

sylvania steel town but never has to rely on anyone but himself. Even when the three are captured by sadistic Viet Cong and forced to play Russian roulette, Michael alone engineers the escape. Lone wolf heroics do not work well in combat, but that doesn’t matter in *The Deer Hunter*, because there isn’t any combat.

In this one respect, the extravagantly flawed *Apocalypse Now* is actually more probing. As Captain Willard (Martin Sheen) journeys up river in search of the mysterious Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando), the trope of the lone wolf warrior defying the half-baked orders of quisling superiors is slowly but surely turned on its head. As everyone knows, *Apocalypse Now* is based on Joseph



The Deer Hunter (1978): the epitome of the Lone Wolf.

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. But what exactly is the darkness evoked by this bizarre film? Surprisingly, it's anarchy. One of Willard's stops along the way is a free-fire zone where all the American officers are dead. Encountering one soldier, a severe-looking young black man who is obviously the most ruthless killer in the place, Willard asks, "Hey, soldier, do you know who's in command here?" The young man gives him an icy stare: "Yeah." Kurtz's realm is the same, only larger in scale. Unlike *The Deer Hunter*, *Apocalypse Now* sends the lone wolf type into combat, and the result is a man such as Kurtz, who has made "horror" his "friend." In other words, the triumph of blood lust.

The 1960s and 1970s saw the elimination of virtually all film industry controls over violent content in the movies. Along with the demise of the Hays Office, this development made it possible to depict battle more graphically than ever before. The technical challenge of rendering combat—the ultimate action sequence—became an obsession, and war films could soon boast of a whole new level of simulated mayhem.

Yet the 1970s also saw a growing realization that Vietnam veterans were taking an unfair drubbing. In celebrated movies such as *Taxi Driver* (1976) and obscure ones such as *Rolling Thunder* (1977) and *The Ninth Configuration* (1979), vets were cast as emotional time bombs, just waiting to explode. One solution to this problem was the cartoonish figure of Rambo, Sylvester Stallone's Vietnam-vet-turned-super-patriotic-hero. The Rambo films were popular not just for their action but for their handling of a darker theme: veterans' resentment of a government that failed to wage the Vietnam war to the hilt. Rambo's most famous line, after all, is "Sir, do we get to win this time?"

So along with the challenge of making war look gorier came the challenge of making vets look nobler. The two goals were not easily reconciled, especially by filmmakers who had opposed the war in Vietnam. In the 1980s three films managed to accomplish this reconciliation, with compelling results, but they also relied on an expedi-

ent—combining state-of-the-art gore with an unprecedentedly tight focus on unit cohesion—that was ultimately evasive.

The most enduringly popular of these films is Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986), praised by vets for its intense evocation not only of combat but of the discomfort caused the troops by everything from monsoons to mosquitoes. Less well evoked, however, is the moral ambiguity of the war. The two sergeants assigned to the cherry lieutenant, Chris (Charlie Sheen), are stock figures, a villain and a hero. Wicked, scar-faced Barnes (Tom Berenger) gets all the nasty jobs, such as interrogating villagers, while kindly, graceful Elias (Willem Defoe) gets all the nice ones, such as tracking North Vietnamese regulars through the sun-dappled greenwood. And their followers divide along tidy countercultural lines, with the bigoted whites sharing Barnes's taste for booze and killing, and the soulful blacks smoking herb with Elias. *Platoon* is a gripping film, but it's also a melodrama.

More obvious are the manipulations in *Full Metal Jacket*, Stanley Kubrick's 1987 film based on *The Short-Timers*, a novel by war correspondent Gustav Hasford. After a vision of marine boot camp as pure sadism, the movie shifts to Hue, where Cowboy, the buddy of the protagonist, Joker, is killed by a sniper. The unit hunts down the sniper, who turns out to be a girl. Badly wounded, she begs Joker to kill her, which, after some hesitation, he does, thereby earning the label "hard core." Joker is something of a lone wolf, existentially hip to the war's meaninglessness. Yet rather than follow this logic to its conclusion, Kubrick makes Joker into a hero in the buddy-helping-buddy sense. When Cowboy is shot, Joker braves sniper fire to embrace him before he dies. This scene comports with marine tradition, but not with Hasford's novel. Kubrick actually softened the message of *The Short-Timers*. In the book, Joker does not risk his life to reach the wounded Cowboy. On the contrary, he saves himself by blowing out Cowboy's brains.

The best 1980s Vietnam War movie is John Irvin's *Hamburger Hill* (1987), which draws a complex portrait of soldiers alienated from the way the war is being fought but

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not necessarily from its purpose. Like *Pork Chop Hill*, *Hamburger Hill* focuses on a Pyrrhic victory, the all-too-temporary conquest of Hill 937 in May 1969. The final assault on Hill 937 is widely agreed to have been a tactical disaster, and the film makes clear that the grunts hate their orders even as they obey them. One of the most painful scenes in the movie depicts a soldier receiving a Dear John letter that calls him a war criminal. Unlike *Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket*, *Hamburger Hill* does not try to make its characters appear antiwar. But it pays the price of not connecting their struggle to anything larger than the ethos of buddy helping buddy.

Ironically, this ethos now dominates almost all war movies, including those that self-consciously depart from the pattern laid down by antiwar directors such as Stone, Kubrick, and Irvin. In *We Were Soldiers* (2002), Mel Gibson's promilitary reconstruction of the 1965 battle of Ia Drang Valley in Vietnam, the first American casualty says, "I am glad to die for my country." But by the end of the film, a voice-over attributed to the hero, Lieutenant Colonel Hal Moore, is intoning that the men of the Seventh Air Cavalry "went to war because their country asked them to, but in the end they fought not for their country or their flag. They fought for each other."

They fought for each other. Sometimes this new formula works, as in such highly regarded recent films as *Saving Private Ryan* and the HBO series *Band of Brothers*. It works because the cause, World War II, is already well understood. Indeed, when *Band of Brothers* includes an episode called "Why We Fight," in which Easy Company stumbles into a Nazi death camp, the effect is almost too didactic. The audience already knows why they fight.

The formula also works in two of the most riveting World War II films ever made: *When Trumpets Fade*, about the Hürtgen Forest battle in November 1944, and *The Thin Red Line*, about the campaign for Guadalcanal Island. Both were released in 1998 and overshadowed by *Private Ryan*—which is too bad, because they do something quite extraordinary: They evoke a dimension of war that previously belonged only to lit-

erature. I call it the *war sublime*, using *sublime* in the philosophical sense to mean an acute awareness of life, consciousness, and moral freedom inspired by proximity to death. For some, the experience is both aesthetic and spiritual. Novelist Tim O'Brien has written that while war is ugly and horrible, it also contains a "powerful, implacable beauty" that can provoke in the soldier "an intense, out-of-the-skin awareness of your living self—your truest self, the human being you want to be."

A vicarious version of the war sublime—a sudden rush of exaltation amid mayhem—is now clearly the goal of every production designer, cinematographer, music director, and special-effects wizard who works on a war film. Steven Spielberg achieved it in the astonishing first 20 minutes of *Private Ryan*, and many other battle scenes come close. Along with buddy helping buddy, the war sublime is now part of the accepted mode of depicting war in the movies.

The war sublime skirts a very tricky idea of honor, the ancient one that makes prowess in battle the whole point of war. Here the rush is not just aesthetic or emotional, but transcendent. In the war movies of the 1940s there was a surprising amount of religiosity, albeit in the form (quoting Schickel) of "pink clouds, heavenly choirs, busybody angels, and a God who appeared to be rather like my grandfather." That was not the war sublime; it was kitsch comfort for a stressed-out people. The war sublime is something else: a romantic inducement to battle as the greatest of all highs.

Along with a pacifist literature, World War I produced a literature of the war sublime. In several books written in the 1920s, the German veteran Ernst Jünger celebrated modern war as a "storm of steel" in which "the enthusiasm of manliness bursts beyond itself to such an extent that blood boils as it surges through the veins and glows as it foams through the heart. . . . It is an intoxication beyond all intoxication." The next step, for Jünger, was war for war's sake. In 1922 he wrote, "What is essential is not what we fight for but how we fight. The quality of fighting, the engagement of the person, even if it be for the most insignificant

idea, counts for more than brooding over good and evil.”

The danger of such sentiments is obvious: They lead to the kind of cult of aestheticized violence that lies at the heart of all fascist—and, I might add, terrorist—movements. Should this concern us? Of course. But we must also be careful not to condemn either the vividness of war films or the pleasure we take in watching them. In the words of Aristotle: “We enjoy contemplating the most precise images of things whose actual sight is painful to us, such as the forms of the vilest animals and of corpses. The explanation of this . . . is that understanding gives great pleasure.” The issue is one of *understanding* as well as spectacle, *honor* as well as flying body parts. Aristotle also argued that there is nothing wrong with “spectacle” (he was thinking of the stage effects of the Athenian theater) so long as it does not have priority over plot and character. He placed plot and character first because they are the seat of moral action, and without moral action spectacle is vulgar. One does not have to endorse all of Aristotle’s prescriptions to see his point illustrated daily in the nation’s multiplexes.

If American war films are wandering into dangerous territory, it’s not because they’re getting good at simulating the spectacle of combat. It’s because, in an effort to avoid political controversy, they offer underdeveloped plots and characters to serve an outdated and dysfunctional definition of honor. To separate comradeship from cause while the bullets are whizzing past may be dramatically necessary (and sociologically accurate), but that separation can be carried only so far. At some point the shooting stops, and soldiers ponder why they fight. If no adequate reason presents itself, then they grow less willing to walk back into hell. This is what happened in Vietnam (which is why films such as *The Green Berets* and *We Were Soldiers* focus on the early years), and this is what *could* happen in the war against terror. So it’s worth asking how well the post-Vietnam formula works in 21st-century films about 21st-century war.

There is one recent film that attempts to deal with the problem of dramatizing a contemporary conflict. *Three Kings* (1999),

David O. Russell’s flawed but fascinating movie about the 1991 Gulf War, begins with a scene of self-indulgent chaos not unlike the opening sequences in *Apocalypse Now*. Amid drunken celebrations of victory in Kuwait, a band of cynical American grunts decide to venture into Iraq to steal some gold. But unlike the Americans in *Apocalypse Now*, who descend into the heart of darkness, these adventurers encounter a group of desperate Iraqis involved in the thwarted uprising against Saddam Hussein. By helping them to escape, the Americans ascend to a state of surprisingly convincing moral clarity. The film is full of black humor and graphic violence, but at the end it achieves something like a modern vision of democratic honor.

Unfortunately, *Three Kings* does not seem to be the template. Much more popular and commercially successful has been *Black Hawk Down* (2002), an eye-popping extravaganza that shows a group of virtually interchangeable Delta Force and Ranger soldiers battling in the streets of Mogadishu to save a group of stranded comrades. The film brilliantly evokes the physical aspect of modern high-tech warfare, but unfortunately it also goes out of its way to avoid showing why these fresh-faced lads are fighting in Africa in the first place. And because this is not World War II, the audience cannot fill the vacuum with its own understanding.

The result? A movie that continues the drift away from meaning and toward violence for its own sake. *Black Hawk Down* leaves us shaken by its sheer assault on the senses, but because the thrill is vicarious, it makes war seem more exciting than horrible, closer to a video game than to a deadly serious undertaking. Richly produced, poorly scripted spectacles of this sort ignore the bitterest but most important lesson of defeat in war—namely, that the willingness of one soldier to sacrifice for another, however potent in the short run, depends in the long run on his knowing “Why We Fight.” When the cause is perceived as meaningless or unjust, unit cohesion dissolves and battle spirals into a dishonorable nightmare of every man for himself. Surely that’s not a movie any human being wishes to see. □

The Case that Made the Court

Two hundred years ago, amid a dramatic clash of great principles and great men in the early Republic, Marbury v. Madison established the doctrine of judicial review. The case and its implications are still hotly debated today.

by Michael J. Glennon

The most monumental case ever decided by any court in any country began as a petty dispute over a patronage job. The underlying controversy quickly blossomed into a clash between two titans of the early American republic, and it ended with the unveiling of a new judicial doctrine that would alter the course of American history and spread around the world to protect the liberty of hundreds of millions of people.

The doctrine was judicial review—the practice by which courts strike down acts of other governmental entities—and it led to such epoch-making Supreme Court judgments as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which ended the legal racial segregation of public schools, and *United States v. Nixon* (1974), in which the Court ordered President Richard Nixon to turn over certain potentially relevant audiotapes to the Watergate court. It also gave the nation *Roe v. Wade* (1973). Judicial review is American constitutionalism’s greatest gift to the world—an arguably greater gift than the U.S. constitutional model itself. Unlike many other features of the new American government, the practice was virtually without precedent when the Supreme Court announced it in *Marbury v. Madison* (1803). An English case in 1610 had intimated that an act of Parliament “against common right and reason” was void under the common law, and the English Privy Council was later empowered to invalidate colonial statutes that ran counter to the colonial charters or English law. But nowhere in the world before 1803 did the courts of any country engage in the practice of striking down laws inconsistent with the national constitution.

William Marbury (1762–1835), a prominent Maryland land speculator who sued the U.S. government to claim a job as a federal justice of the peace, was only a bit player in the high drama to which he gave his name. Two larger figures—Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), the third president of the United States, and John Marshall (1755–1835), who was chief justice of the Supreme Court from 1801 to 1835—dominated the stage.

President John F. Kennedy hardly exaggerated when he told a group of Nobel laureates that they constituted the most distinguished group ever to dine in the White House—with the possible exception of Thomas Jefferson, when he dined there alone. Jefferson owned one of the largest private libraries in North America and was said to read sometimes for 12 hours without a break. Expert in agronomy, archeology, botany, enology, architecture, ornithology, literature, political theory, law, and philosophy, he represented the apotheosis of the American Enlightenment. “I cannot live without books,” he said. When he tutored his young aide Meriwether Lewis for the upcoming exploration of the newly acquired Louisiana Territory, Jefferson taught him botany, introduced him to the Linnaean system of classification, and showed him how to use a sextant—giving Lewis, as historian Stephen Ambrose observed, “a college undergraduate’s introduction to the liberal arts, North American geography, botany, mineralogy, astronomy, and ethnology.” “You can never be an hour in this man’s company without something of the marvelous,” President John Adams



Marbury was the first crucial step toward establishing the authority of the Supreme Court, but it wasn't until 1935 that the Court, long a tenant in the U.S. Capitol building, got a home of its own.

said, before the two had their falling out.

Today, political activists of all stripes call themselves “Jeffersonians.” In Jefferson’s day, however, his political philosophy was distinctive. Jefferson was the original advocate of “small is beautiful.” He favored the states over the federal government and preferred a limited federal government and (until he became president) a weak presidency. He believed that an enlightened electorate was the path to good govern-

ment, and that civic virtue lay more surely in small farms than in big business or citified commerce. Decentralized authority was essential, he thought, to keep government close to the people and responsive to their wishes. Many opponents of the new U.S. Constitution shared Jefferson’s views, though Jefferson himself, as American emissary to France during the 1787 Philadelphia convention, avoided formally having to resolve his own ambiva-

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lence toward the nation's new charter.

Jefferson's philosophical antagonist is less known to Americans, at least to those outside the legal profession. John Marshall was the longest-serving chief justice in the Court's history, and easily the most influential. The rumpled, outgoing, athletic Virginian was the first grand master of the Court's internal politics and oversaw the disposition of more than a thousand cases. He wrote the opinions for 508 of them.

Marshall's power flowed from three sources: political canniness, disarming charm, and a riveted focus on his unvarying long-term strategic objective: establishing the supremacy of the federal judiciary. Before his appointment by President Adams in 1801, the Court's six members wrote separate opinions, limiting the Court's potential institutional strength. Marshall changed that. He encouraged his colleagues to speak with one voice. He even cajoled them into joining him in taking rooms at Conrad's, a Capitol Hill boarding house, where they dined together, drank together, and argued together. (Justices in those days had no offices, and the unnoticed Court met in a small room on the first floor of the Capitol.) In his first three years on the Court, Marshall participated in 42 cases. The opinion of the Court was unanimous in every one of them, and John Marshall wrote every opinion.

Some years later, when President James Madison appointed Massachusetts's Joseph Story to the Court, Jefferson warned that he would fast be drawn into Marshall's political orbit. Marshall was described in a contemporary newspaper account as "irresistibly winning." Madison assured Jefferson that Story's commitment to Jeffersonian principles would not flag. Within a year, Story was Marshall's strongest ally. "I love his laugh," Story wrote. "It is too hearty for an intriguer." Story later worried that Jefferson's influence might "destroy the government of his country," but he eulogized Marshall as "the great, the good, the wise." The two became fast friends. Story recalled Marshall's fondness for Madeira, with which Marshall would enliven the Court's conferences on rainy days. One day, when the chief justice asked him to look outside and check the weather, Story reluctantly reported that the

skies were clear. Surely, Marshall replied, it was raining somewhere within the Court's vast jurisdiction. Drinks were poured.

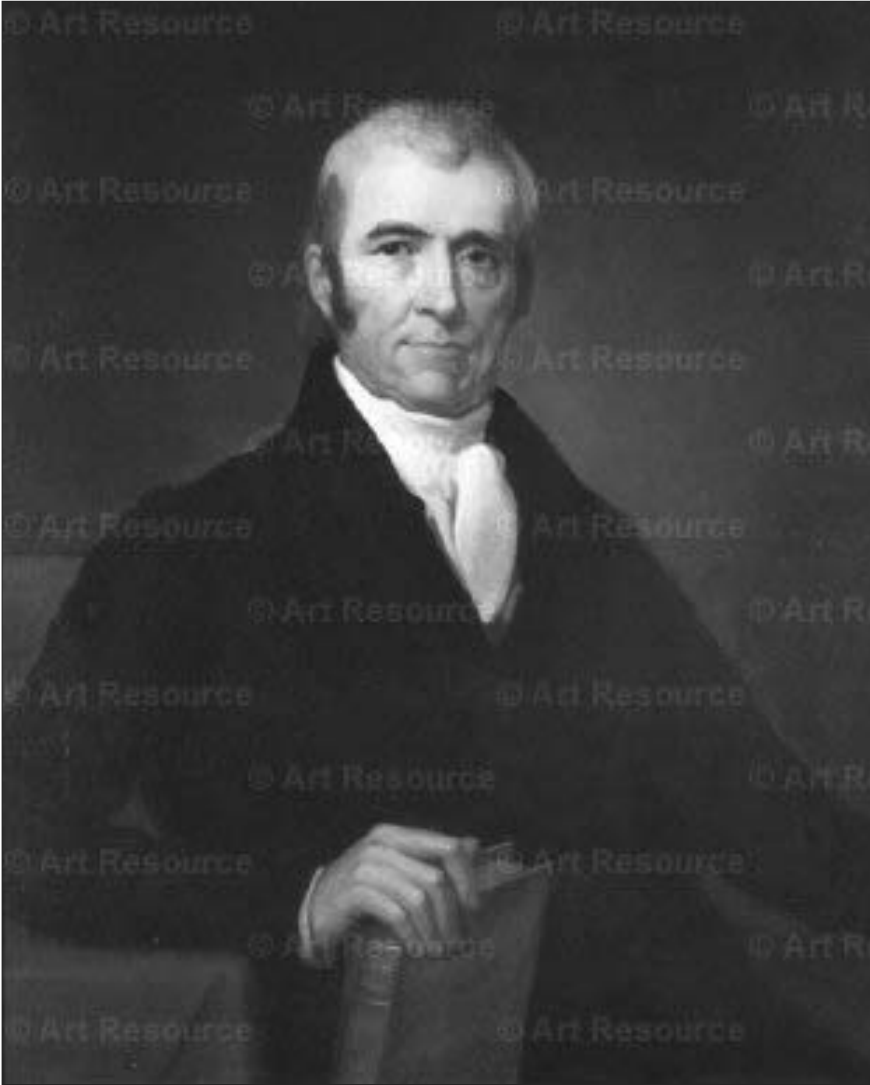
The first of a family of 15 children, Marshall was born in a log cabin in 1755 in the rural Virginia village of Germantown. His comportment reflected his country roots, though he quickly rose to the top of the Virginia elite. He was fastidious in neither dress nor demeanor. With 10 children of his own, he often had nowhere to work while practicing law in Richmond and was wont to spread his books and papers under a large oak tree. On a visit to Philadelphia, he was once denied a room because of his shabby appearance. In the nation's capital, a churlish teenager who found it demeaning to carry home a turkey for his mother offered a passing stranger 25 cents to carry it for him; the chief justice obliged.

Yet in "strong reasoning powers," said Thomas Sedgwick, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Marshall was "almost unequaled." His first great career opportunity came at the Virginia convention that had been called to consider ratification of the proposed federal Constitution. Marshall, a 33-year-old lawyer, assisted James Madison (who would become a friend). The case against ratification was presented in a masterful three-hour summation by Patrick Henry, then reputed to be the continent's leading orator. Virginia's endorsement, and the Constitution's approval, both appeared in doubt. Marshall, already a respected member of the Virginia bar, gave the rebuttal.

Twelve years later, during his sole term (1799–1801) in the House of Representatives, Marshall defended President Adams in a major foreign policy dispute. Opponents of Adams urged their floor leader, Albert Gallatin, to answer Marshall's argument. "Gentlemen," Gallatin responded, "answer it yourself; for my part, I think it is unanswerable."

Even Jefferson was intimidated by his fellow Virginian's intellect. "When conversing with Marshall," Jefferson said, "I never admit anything. So sure as you admit any position to be good—no matter how remote the conclusion he seeks to establish—you are gone. So great is his sophistry, you must never give him an affirmative answer, or you will be forced to grant his

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John Marshall (portrayed in 1831) said that a constitution must “approach immortality.”

conclusion. Why, if he were to ask me whether it was daylight or not, I'd reply, 'Sir, I don't know. I can't tell.'" Yet when Jefferson needed a lawyer to sort out his tangled real estate dealings, he retained the best: John Marshall.

Part of Jefferson's animus toward Marshall grew out of their diametrically different political philosophies, which traced in turn to very different life experiences. While Jefferson punctuated periods of service to state and country during the Revolution with interludes spent entertaining captured English and Prussian officers at Monticello, Marshall passed the winter of 1777 at Valley Forge. The stench, cold, and hunger were unbearable, and 3,000 men—one-fourth of the Continental Army—died. The misery left an indelible

impression on the 22-year-old Marshall. The troops knew, as did he, that the colonies were not poor and that there was no shortage of foodstuffs. But the Continental Congress had no power to requisition supplies. It's hardly surprising that Marshall's every effort throughout his 34 years as chief justice would be directed at solidifying the authority of the federal government over the states, and the authority of the judiciary over Congress and the executive branch.

Marshall saw Jefferson as an aristocrat masquerading as a commoner. After Jefferson fled before English troops advancing in Virginia in 1781, Marshall had little respect for him—and was apparently encouraged in his contempt by his wife and her family: Jefferson had once

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courted Marshall's mother-in-law, who retained little affection for him. And then there was the matter of political philosophy. Jefferson's admiration for French revolutionaries and his dangerous willingness to entrust major issues of governance to the unqualified masses made him ill suited, in Marshall's view, for the presidency. "Every check on the wild impulse of the moment," Marshall wrote Story, "is a check on [Jefferson's] own power."

But the bitter election of 1800 gave the presidency to Jefferson. The Electoral College had deadlocked between Jefferson and Aaron Burr, leaving the election to be decided in the House of Representatives. After 36 ballots over a period of six days, Jefferson finally received a majority of the states' votes. It was the first time in the history of any major country that the full basket of governmental power had been passed peacefully, as the result of a vote, from one political party to an opposition party. The Federalist Party of John Adams and John Marshall had been wiped out, losing both houses of Congress as well as the White House to Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans. Unless some way could be found to survive the Jeffersonian onslaught, the Federalist Party would become extinct.

Jefferson himself speculated that the Federalists would retreat "into the judiciary as a stronghold the tenure of which [would] render it difficult to dislodge them." That's exactly what the lame-duck Federalists did. Among other provisions, the Judiciary Act of 1801 created 42 new justices of the peace. These were not the lowly judicial nonentities of today but, in some cases at least, officials who exercised substantial local power. Adams's appointments naturally went primarily to Federalist Party loyalists, one of whom was William Marbury. The final stage of the appointment process was rushed, however. After Adams signed the appointments, the requisite seal was added to the stack of commissions on the administration's last night in office, March 4, 1801. The work was done in Marshall's State Department office. (During Marshall's first days as chief justice he also served—simultaneously—as the secretary of state, who then as now was the chief administrative officer of the cabinet.) Helping Marshall complete the paperwork was his younger brother James. James left to deliver some of the commissions but appar-

ently did not take all of them. At four in the morning, Adams departed by coach for Massachusetts, loathe to participate in the installation of his successor.

Jefferson had sent Marshall a note urging him to be on time for the inauguration, and, promptly at noon the next day, the chief justice administered the oath of office to Jefferson and listened to an unexpectedly conciliatory inaugural address ("We are all republicans; we are all federalists"). Later, Jefferson dropped by the State Department and noticed the pile of undelivered commissions sitting on a table. He asked what they were, was told, and thereupon ordered that the commissions not be delivered. That, at least, was his own later version of events, in which he emphasized that he, the president of the United States, not James Madison or some other administration official, was personally responsible for the directive; the point was meant to underscore Marshall's effrontery in the *Marbury* opinion. At the end of the day, Jefferson, according to legend, returned to Conrad's boarding house (where he too was staying), stood in line for dinner, and ate at the far end of the table.

When, after 10 months of waiting, Marbury had still not received his commission, he decided to act. Joined by three coplaintiffs, he appeared before the Supreme Court on December 16, 1801, and asked it to issue an order to the secretary of state—by this time James Madison—directing him to show cause why he should not be ordered to deliver the commissions. How, one might ask, were the plaintiffs able to appear at the outset before the United States Supreme Court? The Court normally sits as the nation's highest appeals court, hearing cases that come up from U.S. courts of appeal and from state supreme courts. The answer lay in section 13 of the Judiciary Act of 1789, a provision of the law that gave "original jurisdiction" to the Supreme Court in cases involving writs of mandamus. A writ of mandamus is a court order directing a government official to perform a certain act—which is what the plaintiffs here had requested. Under section 13, plaintiffs were permitted to proceed directly to the United States Supreme Court, with no prior or intermediate steps required. Hence, the unusual trial in front of the six Supreme Court justices. (Congress set the

number of justices at nine only in 1869.)

The Jeffersonians, in any event, were irate at this turn of events. Fearful that Marshall would order delivery of the commissions, their congressional cohort proceeded to abolish the 1802 session of the Court and to commence impeachment proceedings, first against a Federalist district judge, John Pickering, and later against Marshall's Federalist colleague on the high court, Samuel Chase. The courts may not have changed political hands with the rest of the government following the election of 1800, but impeachment was then a tool of undefined scope. With early successes as precedent, it might be used, thought some of Jefferson's more rabid followers, to bring the judiciary in line with the latest will of the people. The political atmosphere was thus an explosive one in which to press for an expansion of judicial power. A single misstep could not only end one's judicial career but permanently weaken the federal courts.

So prudence counseled that Marshall proceed with the utmost caution. At the outset, he was slow to accept the plaintiffs' assertions of fact. They confronted, in today's terms, a serious proof problem. How could the Court know that Marbury and his coplaintiffs had in fact been nominated? Since they could produce no commissions, what evidence was there that they had actually been appointed? Marshall, despite his earlier involvement in the appointments, could hardly have appeared as a witness himself. (Under modern standards of judicial recusal, Marshall would never have been permitted to sit in judgment in *Marbury*, let alone testify in a case over which he himself presided.) It was necessary, accordingly, for the plaintiffs to produce some probative evidence that Adams had appointed them.

The plaintiffs turned first to the secretary of state, James Madison, who gave no satisfactory reply.

Their next stop was the United States Senate. The appointments in question had required not only presidential action but Senate confirmation. Obviously, the best evidence would be the official records of the Senate. But the Senate's records were not public, and the Senate was now in the control of the Republicans, so when Marbury and his companions asked for copies of the relevant documents, they were politely told to get lost. The

request, exclaimed one Republican senator, was "an audacious attempt to pry into executive secrets, by a tribunal which has no authority to do any such thing." (This was the first assertion of "legislative privilege," a doctrine that exists to this day, though it is seldom asserted.)

Thus rebuffed, the plaintiffs turned to the executive branch. They proceeded to call as witnesses two State Department clerks. One testified that he could not recollect whether he had seen any commissions in the office. The second testified that he did not remember any of the names in the commissions, nor did he know what had become of the documents.

Their plight increasingly desperate, the plaintiffs turned to another administration official conveniently present in the courtroom, the attorney general of the United States, Levi Lincoln. Lincoln was, in fact, the logical official to whom the questions should have been directed, given that he had been serving as Jefferson's acting secretary of state when the commissions disappeared. At first, Lincoln, like the State Department clerks, declined to answer. Upon reflection, however, he asked for the questions in writing. Marshall gave Lincoln the questions, and there then occurred one of the most remarkable—and un-remarked-upon—events in American legal history: Thomas Jefferson's attorney general pleaded the Fifth Amendment before the United States Supreme Court. He ought not, he testified, be compelled to answer anything that might tend to incriminate him. In addition, Lincoln said, he did not think himself bound to disclose his official transactions while acting as secretary of state. Marshall, in reply, told Lincoln that he might want to take some time to think about the answers he would give to the questions. Lincoln responded that he would like to have until the next day.

The following morning, Lincoln appeared before the Court and said that he had no objections to answering all the questions but one—the final question, about what had become of the commissions. This, apparently, was the question on which he had feared self-incrimination, perhaps because he himself had destroyed the commissions or assisted others in doing so. The other questions, he proceeded to answer. He did not know whether the commissions had ever come into the possession of James Madison, or whether any of them

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related to the plaintiffs. Nor did he know anything else that might be relevant to the plaintiffs' cause. Marshall did not press to find out where the commissions had gone: If the commissions had never come into Madison's possession, he said, it was immaterial what had happened to them. That seems to have made it unnecessary for Lincoln to reiterate his reliance upon the Fifth Amendment. (To this day, historians do not know what became of the commissions.)

Now Marbury and the others had hit a brick wall. There seemed no remaining options that would meet the Court's evidentiary requirements. But there was, they remembered, one final witness—a witness whom the chief justice would trust like a brother. The star witness, indeed, was the chief justice's brother—James Marshall, the person who had last seen the commissions as the clock ticked away the final minutes of the Adams administration, and who remembered well that, yes, William Marbury and his three coplaintiffs had in fact been among those individuals whose commissions had been signed and sealed on that fateful night. James Marshall promptly executed an affidavit so certifying, and the case, at long last, moved ahead to argument on the merits. Curiously, the record of the oral argument sets forth extensive comment by counsel for the plaintiffs, Charles Lee, but is virtually devoid of any substantive response by Attorney General Lincoln, who may, in effect, have boycotted the proceedings on the merits, reasoning that his appearance would lend legitimacy to the Court's actions.

While they waited for the Court's decision, the Jeffersonians must have believed that Marshall was boxed in, and that neither of his apparent options would be attractive to him. Marshall could order Madison to deliver the commissions, but Jefferson might then direct Madison simply to ignore the Court's order, thus leaving Marshall with no means of enforcement—and creating a precedent that the executive branch is not subject to judicial direction. Such a course, moreover, might well play into the Republicans' impeachment plans and make it possible to replace the entire Court—thereby establishing, perhaps, the even broader precedent that a change in administration carries with it the

right to appoint new, sympathetic Supreme Court justices. Marshall's second option—to decide in favor of Madison and hold that, for one reason or another, he was not required to deliver the commissions—was no better. It, too, would have been a devastating victory for the Jeffersonians, not merely a triumph on the law but a highly visible political capitulation of the Supreme Court in the face of apparent political threats.

On February 24, 1803, two weeks after the *Marbury* trial ended, Marshall delivered the opinion of the Court. It was, as usual, unanimous, and was, as usual, signed only by him. The text lacks the sweep and flow of Marshall's more majestic opinions, such as *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819), or the timeless logic of *Gibbons v. Ogden* (1824), but it is a masterwork of calculated restraint, feint, and cunning, an opinion that laid claim for the courts to the greatest of governmental powers—the final say as to what the law is—even as it left Marshall's opponents no effective response.

The opinion is pure Marshall in its gradual, almost imperceptible movement from the obvious to the arguable, and in the understated, inexorable, syllogistic force of its reasoning. The chief justice began with the undisputed facts that the plaintiffs' commissions were signed by the president and sealed by the secretary of state (himself); therefore, he concluded, because the appointments were made and the commissions were complete, the plaintiffs had a right to them.

For every abridgement of a right, he continued, there is a remedy. This is “the very essence of civil liberty.” If the government of the United States should provide no remedy for the deprivation of a vested legal right, it should cease to be a “government of laws and not of men.”

Whether the plaintiffs were entitled to the remedy they sought—a writ of mandamus—depended upon the nature of the writ and the power of the Court. Marshall moved into more dangerous territory. “It is not by the office of the person to whom the writ is directed,” he wrote, “but the nature of the thing to be done, that the propriety or impropriety of issuing a mandamus is to be determined.” In other words, there was nothing in the Constitution that precluded the Supreme Court from telling the secretary of state—or the president of the United States—to do what the law required. At

issue was what the Court would order to be done. Here, Marshall said, the test was whether the administration's action had been discretionary or non-discretionary: If the action was purely discretionary, the question presented would be political and not within the Court's power. But if the action had not been discretionary, then there would be no ground on which a court could refuse to order it to be carried out. Delivering a completed commission incident to a valid appointment, Marshall noted, was something that Madison was directed by law to do; it was therefore a non-discretionary act, which the Court could properly order Madison to carry out.

By this point in the opinion, then, Marshall had thoroughly excoriated the Jefferson administration for violating the law and suggested in plain terms that Madison's failure to deliver the commissions was nothing less than a breach of duty. Would he take the final step and order that the commissions be delivered? That depended, Marshall continued, in a neat tactical twist, upon whether the Court had power to decide the case.

Jurisdiction was granted, remember, by section 13 of the 1789 statute that conferred original jurisdiction upon the Court in cases such as this. The Constitution, however, also conferred original jurisdiction upon the Court in specified cases. It provided that the Court could sit as a trial court in "all cases affecting ambassadors, other public ministers and consuls, and those in which a state shall be a party." Was it within Congress's constitutional power to expand that list by law, as it had done in 1789, and did the Court therefore have jurisdiction to hear this case?

Marshall's stunning answer was no—stunning because the issue of Congress's power to

expand the list in the Constitution had not been raised in the briefs presented, or even in passing in the oral argument; stunning because Marshall himself, in an earlier case, had relied upon section 13 in finding valid jurisdiction; stunning because section 13 was written by Oliver Ellsworth, one of the framers of the Constitution—who, as chief justice before Marshall, had also relied upon the statute to find valid jurisdiction; stunning because nearly half the members of the Congress that approved section 13 had been members of the Philadelphia convention. But there it was: Congress had



Judicial review at work: In 1952, the Court barred President Truman from seizing strike-threatened steel mills, even though the U.S. was at war.

acted beyond the scope of its constitutional power in enacting this statute. Any contrary interpretation, Marshall wrote, would render the Constitution's list of specified cases mere surplusage. The consequence, Marshall went on to conclude, was that the 1789 law was of no force and effect: An "act of the legislature, repugnant to the Constitution, is void." Then came the monumental point: "It is emphatically the province and duty of the judicial department to say what the law is." In other words, the Supreme Court has the power to determine

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whether a law is repugnant to the Constitution.

Marshall thus succeeded in publicly labeling the Jefferson administration as a lawbreaker, lecturing Jefferson on his obligation to obey the Constitution, and establishing a precedent for judicial supremacy. He accomplished all this, moreover, in a manner that immunized him and his fellow justices from retribution, because the Court itself, after all, was the “victim” of its own abnegation.

The opinion is not a paragon of logic; much of it is circular, in particular the question-begging final argument that the Court has the power to invalidate a statute at odds with the Constitution. Nothing in the constitutional text directly supported that conclusion. Nonetheless, as many commentators have pointed out, the opinion was a small step backward (Marbury and his fellow Federalists never got their jobs as justices of the peace) and a huge step forward in Marshall’s lifelong quest to establish the United States Supreme Court as the final arbiter of the meaning of the Constitution.

The decision was widely covered in the press of the day, and roundly debated. Jefferson himself said nothing publicly. The next year, however, he did criticize the opinion in a letter to Abigail Adams. Giving judges “the right to decide what laws are constitutional, and what not,” he said, “would make the judiciary a despotic branch.” The three branches retained for themselves, he believed, the right to decide upon the constitutionality of a given act, “in their spheres.” None of the three had a constitutional right to impose its interpretation of the Constitution upon another.

History has long since rejected Jefferson’s doctrine of “coordinate review.” It is now clear that the Supreme Court *can* “decide what laws are constitutional, and what not,” for all three branches. By 2000, the Court had struck down 151 acts of Congress, 1,130 acts of state legislatures, and 129 local ordinances. But for many years after *Marbury*, the authority of the courts to declare invalid the acts of other governmental entities remained controversial. The Court did not again strike down a federal statute until 1857, when it held the Missouri Compromise violative of slaveholders’ due process rights—and helped precipitate the Civil War.

Long after *Marbury*, many mainstream

observers continued to believe that the Court lacked the power to make law obligatory for any but the parties to the case before it. As late as 1861, for example, Abraham Lincoln held that, while a decision of the Court was entitled to “a very high respect and consideration” by other branches of the government, the decision was actually binding only “upon the parties to a suit.” It was not until 1958, in *Cooper v. Aaron*, that the Supreme Court explicitly rejected Lincoln’s theory.

Still, arguments continue to rage over whether there’s justification for permitting judges to substitute their will for the will of the elected representatives of the people—and even over whether that’s the right way to look at what happens when a court strikes down a statute. It’s pointed out, for example, that the reviewing judge has hardly assumed judicial authority without the permission of “the people.” The people, after all, elected the president who appointed the judge, and the Senate that confirmed him, and, before that, the people approved the Constitution under which the whole process takes place. Thus, judicial review is hardly “undemocratic” in the strict sense of the term. The philosophical problem is more complex, involving multiple, conflicting “wills” of the people, indeed of different groups of people, with one will having been expressed at the time of the framing, another at the time of the president’s election, another at the time of the various senators’ election, and another at the time the statute was enacted.

How different our history might have been without John Marshall is a matter for endless debate. “A great man,” Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., said, “represents a strategic point in the campaign of history, and part of his greatness consists of being there.” What’s not debatable is that Marshall accurately foresaw the nation the United States would become and the needs that nation would look to its courts to fulfill. *Marbury* was not fully discovered, or rediscovered, in the United States until the 20th century. It was then that the Supreme Court began its vigorous enforcement of the full panoply of civil rights and political liberties guaranteed by the Constitution. *Marbury*, we see now, with the perspective of 200 years of history, was the lever that made it all possible. And it was John Marshall who gave us the lever. □

THE PLEASURES AND POLITICS OF FOOD

Food is one of the great unacknowledged legislators of human life. A necessity akin to air and water, it's also a source of vast and various pleasures, potent emotions, and powerful political impulses. We've waged wars and conquered continents for the sake of spices and tea, yet we also make peace by breaking bread. Here, a look at what may be on the menu for the 21st century.



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Cheap Eats

by *Daniel Akst*

Throughout history and across disparate cultures, humanity's many conceptions of paradise seem to have a single characteristic in common: free food.

This goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Nobody had a smaller grocery bill than Adam and Eve, at least until they succumbed to temptation and ate of the forbidden fruit. Establishing a pattern for exasperated fathers everywhere, Yahweh wrathfully threw these two freeloading flower children out of the Garden and made them go to work for a living—"to till the ground" and eat bread "in the sweat of thy face," as the King James version has it. For the first time in human history, food was going to cost something.

Biblical food-price inflation was severe. Esau, after all, traded his entire birthright for a bowl of porridge—an absurd bargain to be sure, but not at all a bad metaphor for the human condition. Despite a birthright of almost infinite capacities, humanity for much of its history was forced to lay aside self-actualization in favor of the ceaseless struggle to put food on the table. Most of the time and in most places, food was obscenely expensive, requiring almost all of one's waking efforts just to keep body and soul together. In 18th- and 19th-century Europe, for example, chronic malnutrition was widespread (in early-19th-century France, one in five workers had only enough energy to perform three hours of light work daily). As recently as 100 years ago, Americans spent about half their income merely keeping themselves fed.

Those were the days when the phrase "another mouth to feed" was a fearsome prospect indeed. The land of milk and honey, a chicken in every pot, the iron rice bowl—in one form or another, all these locutions express the natural human longing, ever since the Fall, for a place where food was plentiful and cheap. When the English got to the New World, they found it.

In America today, food is cheaper than it has ever been. The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas reports that in 1919 the average American had to work 158 minutes to buy a three-pound chicken; nowadays, 15 minutes get you the bird. Americans spend less than six percent of their after-tax income on groceries, a figure so low they can afford to spend another four percent eating out. It's likely that in no other country is food as cheap as it is in the United States. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, using 1996 data, reports that the Japanese spend 16 percent of disposable income on food, and the Germans 17 percent. But even those figures pale in comparison with Third World countries. People in India, for example, still spend nearly half their disposable income on food.

Not only is a square meal cheap in this country, it can be prepared with less effort than ever. Harvard University economists David M. Cutler,



Paradise on Earth, by Haitian artist Wilson Bigaud

Edward L. Glaeser, and Jesse M. Shapiro assert that reductions in food preparation time lowered our cost per calorie by 29 percent between 1965 and 1995. In 1919, after all, you not only had to work 158 minutes to earn that chicken; you also had to spend a lot of time plucking it, cooking it, serving it, and cleaning up afterward—instead of just stopping at KFC on the way home from work. As the Harvard trio blandly notes, “This effect could be large enough to explain the increase in consumption we observe.”

But cheap food has come under attack on a number of fronts. In many communities where large, low-priced supermarkets have been planned (including Red Hook, New York, near where I live), serious opposition has sprung up. In addition to raising aesthetic objections, people worry that the new stores will drive out established retailers. Such opposition has occurred even in inner-city and minority neighborhoods where residents have long complained of high prices, limited selection, and few employment opportunities. In the largely black Springfield Gardens section of Queens, New York, for instance, neighborhood opposition delayed the construction of a Pathmark supermarket that now gets rave reviews from residents for, among other things, its prices. The most reliable lightning rod of all, of course, is Wal-Mart, which has become the world’s largest grocer by emphasizing low prices above all else.

Cheap food is in fact scary, and astute observers (most of them well fed)

have long recognized that it implies social change. John Maynard Keynes, writing in the early 1930s, used it as an object lesson in the importance of knowing when to apply “the usual pecuniary tests” and when not. In this case, he was ready to suspend them: “We have until recently conceived it a moral duty to ruin the tillers of the soil and destroy the age-long human traditions attendant on husbandry if we could get a loaf of bread thereby a tenth of a penny cheaper. . . . Today we suffer disillusion, not because we are poorer than we were—on the contrary even today we enjoy, in Great Britain at least, a higher standard of life than at any previous period—but because other values seem to have been sacrificed.”

The English philosopher and farmer Roger Scruton, who is unlikely to spend much time worrying about how he will pay for his next meal, appears to be very worried about where it might be coming from. In a recent essay, he warns that “global food distributors—who can descend like Wal-Mart” (the dread colossus again) “on the periphery of any town anywhere in the world, with a tempting array of cheap food wrapped in plastic—pose a threat to local economies and lifestyles comparable to that posed by a tribe of belligerent invaders.”

It’s a measure of how astonishingly far we have come from the hand-to-mouth existence of our forebears that rock-bottom food prices, once a utopian prospect, are now seen as a threat to the well-being not just of Americans but of countless unwitting foreigners who don’t know enough to temper their relief at not having to go to bed hungry. The latest reason for concern is that, in a single generation, an epidemic of obesity has left three in five Americans overweight. Like so many diseases of late, this one seems to know no borders. Carried by prosperity, the bacillus now reaches from London to Beijing. People are getting fatter all over the world, although nowhere is the trend as pronounced as in this country, where a landscape filled with cheap and very nearly ready-to-eat food—a description that might have applied just as well to the Garden of Eden as to the American suburbs—is now being implicated in the crime. It’s a wonder Adam and Eve never got fat.

Cheap food is not a recent phenomenon in this country, or an insidious corporate plot. On the contrary, if there’s a single salutary trend that has characterized American life throughout our history, it’s been falling food prices. Over time, cheap food has shaped not just our bodies but our country and our culture. Our ability to yank prodigious amounts of calories from the land—and distribute those calories in the most efficient possible way—has affected who we are, how and where we live, and the role we’ve adopted in the world. And, for the most part, the effects have been beneficial.

Enemies of McDonald’s can take some grim solace in the knowledge that America has always been the home of fast food. The earliest Europeans to arrive on these shores were struck by the unbelievable fecundity of the place, even if, like the Puritans, they weren’t particularly adept initially at feeding themselves. Commentators such as John Smith extolled the amplitude

>DANIEL AKST is the author of *St. Burl’s Obituary* (1996), a novel about a fat man who becomes thin. Copyright © 2003 by Daniel Akst.

of game running hither and yon (an early version, perhaps, of Meals on Wheels), while Samuel de Champlain and Jacques Cartier were amazed by the flocks of passenger pigeons that quite literally darkened the sky—and were so quickly and easily caught that they eventually became extinct. In 1607, a settler commenting on the fertility of Virginia called it “nature’s nurse to all vegetables,” while Francis Higginson, writing of New England 21 years later, said that “the abundance of Sea-Fish are almost beyond beleiving.” Comestibles of every type were *bigger* than back home, too, including giant salmon, lobsters, and strawberries. It was as if nature, like some benevolent counter clerk, had taken it upon herself to “supersize” New World portions without being asked.

Thanks in large part to such bounty, America’s food culture has always been more egalitarian than Europe’s, where hunting was a gentleman’s sport and meats were reserved for the gentry. In the New World the common people always ate more meat, starting with the game on which newcomers depended at

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first. By the Revolutionary War, Americans had achieved a level of meat consumption not reached in Europe until the mid-1900s, when World War II food rationing actually improved the diet of the English working class.

Strong evidence for the early superiority of the American diet comes in the form of data on human height. In developing countries today, height is a pretty good predictor of productivity rates—even in the modern U.S. economy, tall people earn more money—just as it is a pretty good indicator of nutrition standards. “Americans achieved modern heights by the middle of the 18th century,” writes economist Robert W. Fogel, a Nobel laureate, adding that “they reached levels of life expectancy not attained by the general population of England or even by the British peerage until the first quarter of the 20th century. The early attainment of modern stature and relatively long life expectancy is surprising. Yet it is by no means unreasonable. By the second quarter of the 18th century, Americans had achieved diets that were remarkably nutritious by European standards, and particularly rich in protein.”

To the extent Europeans were eating better, New World crops get some of the credit. Who could imagine Italian cooking without the tomato, or Ireland without the potato? The historian Lynn Harry Nelson notes that an acre which yielded 600 pounds of wheat to a medieval peasant could later yield 50,000 pounds of potatoes. “If the introduction of potatoes produced a caloric revolution,” Nelson writes, “the acceptance of corn brought about a protein revolution” by providing 1,800 pounds of animal feed from an acre. “The Europeans, in turn, introduced corn into Africa and sweet potatoes in China, where these new foods also changed conditions dramatically.”

America’s bounty, like its freedoms, has long made it a magnet for immigrants. People who choose to uproot themselves and come to America are often hungry metaphorically as well as literally. Short immigrants tend to have



taller children, and gargantuan family meals seem to be a feature of the lore of virtually every immigrant ethnic group here, including my own—proving once again that any paradise, even the remembered paradise of Grandma’s house on a holiday, is well vilted almost by definition. Of course, in coming to America for its famous bounty, immigrants have also contributed to that bounty. Northern Europeans who planted their skills and energy in the Midwest helped it grow into the world’s breadbasket. Mexican immigrants drove down the cost of farm labor in California, which helped make fruit and vegetables cheaper. Immigrants such as Jurgis Rudkus, the tragic protagonist of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906), took jobs in the packing, canning, and



“Strive mightily, but eat and drink as friends,” Shakespeare advised. These men at a 1901 banquet for New York theatrical producer Harrison Fiske implemented the advice with gusto.

processing plants that were further reducing the cost of calories through their relentless industrialization of American food.

All praise and hosannas to organic farming cooperatives and the like, but at the risk of culinary philistinism let’s also say a little something on behalf of the Armour brothers, Joseph Campbell, Gustavus Swift, and all the other legends of American agribusiness who helped make it possible for the great mass of people to eat their fill affordably. Their companies brought technology—railroads, refrigeration, assembly lines, and the like—to food production and distribution, with profitable results for themselves and, it might be argued, for their customers. One of the things they accomplished, after

all, was to reduce food preparation time, a development to which housewives seemed not to object. By the 1920s, in a pattern that would persist to this day, Americans were getting more choices at lower prices than ever before.

They also got bigness and homogeneity, as critics complained long before Roger Scruton. These trends would later be amplified by yet another transformative technology—television—but not before the government did its part. As *The Jungle* made painfully clear to Theodore Roosevelt and Congress nearly a century ago, government has a role to play in safeguarding the food supply, to say nothing of the food workers. But mandatory meat inspection, pure food laws, and food safety regulations had the unintended consequences of encouraging bigness and elevating barriers to new firms. The historian Harvey Levenstein notes, for instance, that pasteurization laws led to a rapid consolidation in the milk business: “In Detroit there were 158 milk dealers when the pasteurization law was passed. Within three months the number declined to 68.”

Reduced competition didn’t make food any cheaper, and other government policies—intended to support farm prices and otherwise aid agriculture—actually made it more expensive. James Bovard, a journalist who has spent a lot of time chronicling America’s expensive and contradictory farm programs, has calculated that during President Bill Clinton’s term of office, federal farm policies cost taxpayers more than \$230 billion, in addition to which these policies raised food prices by more than \$110 billion. Bovard figures that if you put those two numbers together, the government could have bought all the farmland in 35 states.

In 1996 President Clinton signed a bill that was supposed to phase out agricultural subsidies. But the Republican administration that succeeded him, sworn enemy of big government though it may be, has added billions of dollars and many years of life to the farm subsidy programs, despite their detrimental effects on the environment, food prices, and the small farms most taxpayers might think they are supporting. These programs, which date back to the New Deal and beyond, largely benefit agribusiness and are often wildly irrational. Over the years, various government programs have benefited tobacco growers even as the government sought to discourage smoking, and artificially raised milk prices while leaving soda prices to the marketplace. I encountered my favorite such episode in 1991, when California was having a terrible drought. At the time, Washington was expensively encouraging farmers in dry parts of the state to grow rice—which requires inches of standing water—and then subsidizing its export to dispose of the surpluses this policy was producing. Yet state officials in Sacramento were struggling to cope with the drought by means of a farm program of their own: They were offering to pay these same farmers *not* to grow rice.

But if government farm programs have raised food prices, other government actions—opening the West, for example, or providing funds for massive water projects, agricultural research, and the rural electrification of the 1930s—have had the opposite effect. Farmers suffered during the 1920s and 1930s, but for most Americans in the Great Depression food wasn’t cheap enough. And nobody complained about the low cost of food during the two world wars. The motto of Herbert Hoover’s U.S. Food Administration when



Farm subsidies in Europe and America help make food cheap and plentiful but they also make it harder for farmers in developing countries to compete at home and in world markets.

the doughboys were sent to Europe the first time around was “Food Will Win the War.” Food undoubtedly helped.

After World War II, technology accelerated the centralized processing of food, which helped pave the way for women to pursue paid work outside the home. Women’s magazines, incidentally, reflect the increasing affordability of food over time. Little more than a generation ago, it was common for these journals to feature budget-conscious recipes and advice for reusing leftovers. Since then, food-oriented editorial fare has undergone a radical shift toward dishes that seem to take no account whatsoever of cost in their pursuit of the novel and delicious. The rise of modern cooking porn has made it easy to overlook the importance of innovators such as Clarence Birdseye, who pioneered frozen foods. Better packaging allowed prepared foods to be better preserved. “Cole Porter,” writes historian Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, “included cellophane in his list of ‘the tops,’ along with a summer night in Spain, the National Gallery, and Garbo’s salary. By 1959 Americans were spending \$2.7 billion annually on frozen foods.”

Any freshman economics student can tell you that if people eat for less, more money is available for other things, including steel mills, interstate highways, movies, and babies. Consider housing. Lower food prices freed household funds for homeownership (Americans have the highest homeownership rate in the world), even as increased agricultural efficiency freed up land. Although the relentless market forces that drive down our food costs have been blamed for despoiling the environment, these forces may also play a role in preserving it. As Yale University economist Robert E. Evenson observes, “In the United States, low food prices are associated with ‘high-yield, high-input’ agriculture. High-yield agriculture means less

land devoted to crops and pasture. This means less habitat destruction.”

Vast amounts of land have always made food more affordable here than elsewhere, but America is continually producing more food on less territory. Since 1920, land devoted to farming in this country has decreased from nine acres per capita to just four. The farm population, by the way, is down to a mere two percent of Americans, all of them evidently supremely productive,

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which leaves the rest of us well fed yet free for other pursuits—such as generating the wealth, skills, and knowledge that will further drive down the real cost of food. Some of us are even free to create art or become philosophers.

Of course, all this change is not without cost. Far from rejoicing at their escape from what Marx called “the idiocy of rural life,” many Americans miss this connection to the land, as well as the ethos associated with it. Thus, as farmland turns to suburb, we take some of the vast nonfarm income we produce and use it to recapitulate, in our backyards and lawns, the agrarian heritage that many of us are nostalgic for but that most of us have never experienced firsthand.

It’s in those sprawling suburbs, ironically enough, that America’s long love affair with cheap food may have met its match. Out there, you drive everywhere—especially to fast-food restaurants, giant supermarkets, and vast club stores that sell all manner of groceries in Brobdingnagian sizes. Out there, the cost of food in relation to income is probably at its lowest. And out there, people are fat.

The question now is whether the cost of America’s long and rewarding relationship with cheap food is starting to outweigh the benefits. “The single most important problem with food in this country is that it is vastly overproduced,” says New York University’s Marion Nestle, a nutrition expert. “The single most important nutritional problem is obesity. These issues are clearly related, and cheap food is a factor in both. Food companies compete fiercely for our food dollars and do everything they can to induce us to eat their products and to eat more food, regardless of the effects on waistlines and health.”

The economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has observed that famines don’t happen in free societies, where governments are more responsive to the people and less likely to get in the way of the economic system. With its smothering plenty, America seems to be testing the converse of Sen’s thesis: Is a free society more likely to do itself in by overeating? Are we doomed by the relentless logic of overproduction and overconsumption? I doubt it. Overproduction is a longstanding characteristic of U.S. agriculture. Technology—and therefore efficiency—has long outpaced population growth, and government programs to cope with the problem have often made it worse. Yet the size of America’s waistline was relatively stable

until around 1980. In the past 20 years, though, the proportion of Americans who are obese has swelled to 31 percent; another 34 percent are merely fat.

A lot has changed since 1980, enough to give ammunition to proponents of almost every possible theory as to why we're getting so fat. One simple answer is that we're eating more. Even allowing for imports and exports, the U.S. food system produces 500 calories more per person per day than it did in the 1970s. And surveys of people's eating habits suggest that they're taking in more calories, partly because they're eating out more and restaurant portion sizes have exploded. "Portion sizes began to grow in the 1970s, rose sharply in the 1980s, and have continued in parallel with increasing body weights," says a study by Nestle and her NYU colleague Lisa R. Young. Science writer Ellen Ruppel Shell notes that from 1970 to 1997, annual soda consumption rose from 21 to 56 gallons per American. "It is a staggering fact," she writes, "that in the last decade, soda eclipsed coffee and tap water *combined* as the American beverage of choice."

Reductions in food preparation time also offer a partial explanation for obesity. Americans started to get fat around the time the microwave oven became ubiquitous, and today they spend more money than ever on prepared foods and restaurant meals, which eliminate cooking altogether. In my own household no one is fat, but the advent of a single prepared food, Hormel precooked bacon, could threaten the waistline status quo.

Bacon was something we rarely cooked at home. It was fatty and time consuming to prepare, and it made a mess of the stove—plus you had to do something afterwards with all that grease. But when my sons came along, with their elephantine appetites, bacon somehow became a favorite food, and we tried a package of the precooked variety. The taste was shockingly not bad. You can microwave a plateful in a minute or less, serve it to a pair of ravenous six-year-olds before school, and leave cleanup to the dishwasher. In fact, I am willing to risk my bobo credentials here by asserting that, once you get the hang of it, precooked bacon is a damned sight better than no bacon at all. But now that bacon is available not just on occasional lazy Sundays but every day of the week, that's how often my sons want it. Bacon-and-tomato sandwiches have become a plausible lunch item, and a turkey club is no longer a rare indulgence (meaning we eat more store-bought mayonnaise, too). But to understand the true magnitude of what's going on here, you need to know that an eight-ounce package of precooked bacon is equal to *three pounds* of the stuff raw, and around our house the three males have something approaching a two-pack-a-week habit. Food technology and bad parenting, in other words, have combined to take our weekly bacon consumption from zero to five pounds almost overnight.

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We make amends by never setting foot in a fast-food restaurant, something that separates my kids from their peers as effectively as a pair of antlers. Consider that the number of fast-food eateries per capita in this country doubled between 1972 and 1997 (while the per capita number of full-service restaurants rose 35 percent). The fare at these places is cheap and fattening, and linked to the lack of time or energy for cooking. Economists Shin-Yi Chou, Henry Saffer, and Michael Grossman contend that the fast-food boom results from the massive movement of women into jobs outside the home, a movement that has caused the very people who traditionally did all the cooking to have much less time to cook. In analyzing the relationship of weight to incomes, food prices, work force participation, and other variables, the economists conclude that the growing prevalence of fast food is to blame for 68 percent of the increase in American obesity. And in a somewhat complementary study for the Joint Center for Policy Research, researchers assert that there's a link between maternal employment and overweight children: The more hours a mother works in a week, the greater the likelihood of her having an overweight child. Roger Scruton and likeminded critics may be on to something when they condemn the shift from eating to feeding, stripped of all ceremony and social significance.

The carbohydrate school, meanwhile, focuses on that classic fat target, expert advice. For years, experts and government officials have been telling us to eat more carbohydrates, and for years Americans have been doing just that. Now some people are beginning to wonder whether this is the problem in a nutshell: that maybe we need fewer carbs and more—are you ready for this?—fat. One theory is that refined carbohydrates and starches might themselves be the cause of excessive hunger. What's observably true is that, as Americans have shifted their diets from fats toward carbohydrates in recent years, they have only gained weight.

On the other side of the balance sheet, it's very likely that Americans aren't putting out calories the way they used to, thanks largely to technological change, especially the reconstruction of society around the automobile, the television, and the computer. More Americans than ever live in places where walking isn't even an option, and some part of the national weight problem can probably be laid at the door of traffic engineers, zoning officials, real estate developers, and others responsible for the sprawl that has covered much of the landscape in the past generation. Darius Lakdawalla and Tomas Philipson, two more economists, in effect blame technology for obesity. They argue that about 40 percent of the growth in weight in the last 20 years is due to the increased supply of food (higher incomes, lower prices), while 60 percent is due to more sedentary employment. Once upon a time, physical exertion was what you got paid to do. Now you get paid to talk on the phone and type on a computer.

And in the category of "no good deed goes unpunished," efforts to get people to stop smoking may also be making them fatter. A 1995 study in the *New*

England Journal of Medicine blamed giving up smoking for about a quarter of the increase in the number of overweight men during a recent 10-year period, and for about a sixth of the increase in the number of overweight women. Remember, too, that smoking has grown a lot more expensive even as food has gotten cheaper. Is it so far-fetched to think that, for those in search of some oral gratification, a little simple substitution might be going on?

Given the transformative effects of cheap food and the extent to which they are identified with the broad American culture, a backlash was perhaps inevitable: Some consumers have indicated a willingness to pay higher prices for what they eat. A recent poll of food attitudes found 71 percent of Americans claiming that they wouldn't mind paying more to buy food grown near where they live or food grown in ways that protect the environment. While it's hard to believe that none of these Americans are to be found at Wal-Mart, their sentiments are manifesting themselves in the marketplace. Retail sales of organic foods, which cost considerably more than regular items, are growing at a torrid pace. The Department of Agriculture expects them to hit \$20 billion a year by 2005, up from \$1 billion in 1990.

Farmers, meanwhile, are connecting directly with consumers as part of the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) movement, in which individuals contract with farmers for a season, sometimes paying for food in advance and taking on risk by agreeing that their money is nonrefundable even if the crop fails. "I think farmers ask much too little of the people who buy their food," an organic farmer from upstate New York named Elizabeth Henderson tells the Department of Agriculture in a publication called *The New American Farmer*. "They don't ask them to pay enough or to contribute in other ways." On Henderson's farm, which sells food to subscribers under a CSA model, people don't only write checks. They come out and do some work.

Physical work—physical activity of some kind—is probably the best hope for all of us. We need to get out of our cars and expend some calories, maybe even reconsider this idea of flinging car-oriented subdivisions all over the place. Food is a lot of things, but it's mainly fuel, and given the unlikelihood of famine in this country, there's little point in having all the citizens carrying around their private strategic energy reserves in rolls of fat on their bodies. Nor is food as cheap as it seems once you factor in the yearly costs of obesity—perhaps \$100 billion or more in medical bills, perhaps 300,000 premature deaths—as well as the direct and indirect costs of agricultural subsidies, government-sanctioned produce cartels, and the like. These costs fall disproportionately on the poor, who are more likely than others to be fat even though food is most expensive to those with the least income. A better accounting might help us appreciate the costs and benefits of cheap food, which has helped make America the richest and most powerful nation on earth, even as it has spurred social and technological achievements inconsistent with the genetic legacy of a species designed to spend a lot less time on its duff. □

Up on the Farm

by *Blake Hurst*

Food these days makes a political statement. We no longer eat only for nourishment or enjoyment. We now have to consider the message we send by eating a Big Mac or buying a pound of shade-grown coffee. What's natural? What's organic? Where is our food grown, and how? And where should we shop for it? We worry about the sustainability of the food system, the environmental effects of food production, and the damage beef cattle do to national forests. Many believe that food grown on small farms is better than food grown on large farms, and that food produced without modern technology must surely be safer than bioengineered foodstuffs grown by heartless corporations. We have never worried so much about the *quality* of what we consume, even as we consume so much that the greatest health threat comes not from where or how our food is produced but from the sheer quantity of it that we eat. We've never had so much—so many choices in such variety and at such low cost—but we can't seem to enjoy our bounty.

The concern about what we eat has brought unwanted attention to farmers like me. If you believe our critics, we farmers are slaves of large corporations, mindlessly applying dangerous and unneeded pesticides to our crops, fouling streams and rivers, denuding the landscape of all that's beautiful. Our nitrogen causes hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico, our phosphorous causes algae to bloom—and many of us smell bad. Or at least our animals do. Farmers and the organizations they belong to have stood idly by, the argument goes, while the family farm has been replaced by the profit-seeking, countryside-despoiling corporation. Everyone decries the disappearance of the family farm, yet many hold the simultaneous and contradictory view that the present-day residents of rural America are the last remaining repositories of bigotry and ignorance—armed and angry white males, standing in the way of progress, diversity, and sensitivity.

It's a measure of the success of farmers, processors, and everyone else involved in the complex workings of our food system that Americans have the luxury of these worries. If our stomachs were empty, our problems would be more particular and our needs more immediate. But since we're fortunate enough to be able to worry about *who* produces our food and *how* they do so, we ought to be better informed about the system that puts lunch on the table.

The system has not evolved through accident, or conspiracy, but rather through a series of choices made by farmers and consumers. Consumers want cheap food and farmers want to cut costs. Many of the technologies we use have made farming a much pleasanter occupation, which is important to farmers, and should be important to our customers. As a youngster, I used to spend



On the author's Missouri farm, soybeans emerge from the stubble of an old corn crop. His no-till farming involves a tradeoff: more chemicals but less soil erosion.

a month each summer with a hoe, walking down soybean rows cutting weeds by hand. That activity was good for my character, I guess, and it certainly qualifies as natural and organic. But it was a miserable way to spend my summers, and we happily and quickly adopted chemical and biotech substitutes for what was backbreaking, boring labor. The costs of various technologies are important to everyone in the food chain, and even 12-year-olds swinging hoes are more expensive than pesticides. Consumers cannot enjoy the prices and variety we farmers provide without embracing the technologies we use.

The fastest-growing segment of the food market is organically grown produce, with the market for “natural” foods increasing by 20 percent a year and totaling more than \$11 billion annually. Once the province of Birkenstock-wearing '60s Berkeley burnouts, organic food has now hit the big time, and even a subset of political conservatives has staked out a position as “crunchy-cons,” emphasizing the traditional over the modern in food production as well as social and economic policy. Some of the most successful food companies on Wall Street are organic or natural food marketers, including Whole Foods Market, whose stores, boasting rapid growth and higher sales per square foot than traditional supermarkets, appeal to upscale consumers who practice a sort of food snobbery. Because organic food prices tend to be substantially higher than those for more plebian fare, upscale consumers, of necessity, are the target market. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has

just established standards for organic certification, and, earlier this year, the Senate was tied in knots over those standards when meat producers in the South sought an exemption for feeding nonorganic grains to their animals. A provision had been included in the standards that would have allowed producers to purchase nonorganically grown grain if the price of organic grain was more than twice the market price of corn and other feedstuffs grown nonorganically. The change was beaten back by organic purists, proving once and for all which way the political winds are blowing, and ensuring organic poultry's position as a luxury

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item. On the other hand, perhaps organic food producers on a budget will just cheat, since no test exists that can easily discern the diet of a chicken sold through organic channels, and taste tests consistently show no difference in taste between organically and traditionally grown foodstuffs.

Bending the rules can be a problem with all "natural" products. On our farm, we grow petunias, marigolds, and other bedding plants, and we were recently surprised to find that one of our customers was selling our plants at an organic farmers' market. We explained that, though our pest control program relies on biological pesticides, we do use nonorganic fertilizer. She kept right on loading her truck, and her customers at the organic farmers' market no doubt feel superior to those despoilers of all that is right and good who add to the world's problems by purchasing flowers from garden centers and Wal-Marts.

Farming, by its nature, is a physical process that operates in predictable ways. That may not seem a controversial statement, but it's a reality sometimes ignored when people talk about the way food is produced. The preparation of food may be satisfying on an emotional level and full of delights for the senses, and eating may be a spiritual experience (if you don't believe that, you should try a cherry pie prepared by my daughter from cherries grown fresh on our farm). But growing corn, to take one example, is a physical process that depends upon concrete relationships among the factors needed for growth. Corn uses nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium in large amounts, and several other minerals in smaller amounts. It needs sunlight and water. The tilling of the soil is important, and competition from weeds and pests will limit production.

But to hear the advocates of organic farming tell it, your average corn plant has a conscience and will grow better if inputs are derived from "natural sources." That just isn't so. Corn needs nitrogen and cannot differentiate between nitrogen from animal waste, legumes that fix nitrogen, or a large fac-

>BLAKE HURST, a contributing writer to *The American Enterprise*, is a farmer in northwestern Missouri, where his family raises corn, soybeans, and bedding plants. He and his wife, Julie, have three children, and the oldest works on the family farm. Copyright © 2003 by Blake Hurst.

tory. Using each of these forms of nitrogen incurs both economic and environmental costs. For example, if I apply enough animal waste to my land to supply the crop's nitrogen requirements, then I've applied too much phosphorous. That can be an environmental disaster if the excess washes into a nearby stream during a spring thunderstorm. The costs of various technologies are also important to everyone in the food chain. I recently received a catalog of organic products. Included was some "Sup'r Green Chicken Manure, the most natural of fertilizers." To apply the fertilizer my corn crop needs using this product would cost around \$1,000 an acre more than I'm spending now. My family raises nearly 2,000 acres of corn. Perhaps it might surprise those who read about huge subsidy payments, but we don't have an extra \$2 million to spend on fertilizer. Of course this example is extreme, and there are cheaper ways of fertilizing organically, but the principle still applies: The costs of various technologies matter, and the economics of farming are merciless. Even if I had a source of animal waste to use for fertilizer, my neighbors



would no doubt complain about the smell and the environmental risk (chiefly due to the runoff of phosphorous) of applying manure to my fields. Most of the controversy here in the Midwest over environmental issues involves just this problem: how to dispose of animal waste without threat-

In 1801, when this medallion was struck, 90 percent of Americans lived on farms. Today, far fewer farmers produce far more wealth.

ening the health and well-being of nearby communities.

If I plant legumes and plow them under to fertilize the next year's corn crop, then I lose a year's production of corn, and somewhere more land must be put into production to supply that corn, land that is likely to be less productive and more environmentally sensitive. If I don't use chemicals to control weeds, then I have to use tillage, which leads to increased erosion. To farm organically is to farm more land, leaving less for wildlife and open space. To farm without using chemicals is to increase erosion. Using no-till methods of farming, we have been able to cut erosion on our farm by around 10 tons per acre. That's nearly 40,000 tons of irreplaceable topsoil per year. If consumers demand organic methods, that's the way we'll farm. But they should recognize that their choice entails environmental costs as well as benefits.

Whenever the benefits of "natural" products are touted, I'm a bit skeptical. After all, anthrax is natural, and arsenic, and nicotine. The USDA has just released the requirements farm products must meet to be labeled "organic"—among them, that all minerals used in their production must be organic. But what does that mean? It's been a long time since my last chem-

istry class, but aren't minerals sort of the definition of inorganic? I suppose USDA means that the minerals must appear in nature and not be produced by nasty artificial processes. But how in the world will a corn plant know the source of those minerals? Look, I'll sell you whatever you want to buy. If you want me to perform ancient pagan fertility rites while I plant my corn crop so that my John Deere tractor and I are one with nature, I'll do it. It's also fine with me if you want to call Miss Cleo on the Psychic Hotline. But don't expect me to take either action seriously.

Crop production, then, is relentlessly physical, a chemical process turning on ironclad relationships between inputs and outputs. But are those who *raise* the food merely parts in a mechanical process, too? Is farming a business like any other, and may the lowest-cost producer win? Does it matter *who* farms? Is there an intrinsic value to having our food produced by families working together?

There's no doubt that farmers are romanticized, and from a farmer's point of view, that's not a totally unpleasant experience. But sometimes I just have to shake my head at some of the things people say about us. People such as Christopher Shustak, a Massachusetts resident who was profiled in a recent *Boston Globe* story. Mr. Shustak spends most of his free time in search of locally produced organic food, "locally produced" to be interpreted loosely, as he drives 85 miles each week to buy milk and makes a 1,000-mile trip each year to buy peaches. He buys the milk—whole and unpasteurized—from a Connecticut farmer because it tastes better (no

surprise there; fat tastes good) and because the Connecticut farmer "knows his herd of cows." Well, knowing a cow is different from loving a cow, as I can attest from personal experience and more than a few cuts, scrapes, and frustrations supplied by the

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bovines that used to reside on our farm. After my wedding day and the days my children were born, I'd have to say that the day the last cow left Hurst Farms was the happiest of my life. The *Globe* article goes on to say that small farmers treat animals more humanely than they're treated on large farms. That ain't necessarily so; the treatment of animals depends upon the management ability and character of the farmer, and those traits don't correlate all that well with size.

Of course, Mr. Shustak is not alone. The homepage of the Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance asks a question that had never occurred to me: "Why can't we know our farmers the way we know our friends?" That's not necessarily an attractive prospect to me; I'd have to shave every day. One of the great joys of farming is solitude. Anyway, there aren't enough consumers within 100 miles of here to support a farm our size, let alone those of our neighbors. I don't need to know the guys who made my truck, or the folks who manufacture my overalls, or the people who print my newspaper. I do value my



Farming's good old days? The sisters in this 1928 photograph probably didn't think so.

relationship with my mechanic, but other than that, I'm usually just interested in the price and quality of the good I want to purchase, not the spiritual relationship I might have with the person producing it. Farmers as a group are blunt, taciturn, and maybe a bit unpolished, not characteristics that lend themselves well to meeting the public. We value hard work and efficiency and doing things the right way. That's why we chose this profession, and why we fight so hard to remain on our farms. We'd just as soon leave salesmanship to used-car dealers and politicians.

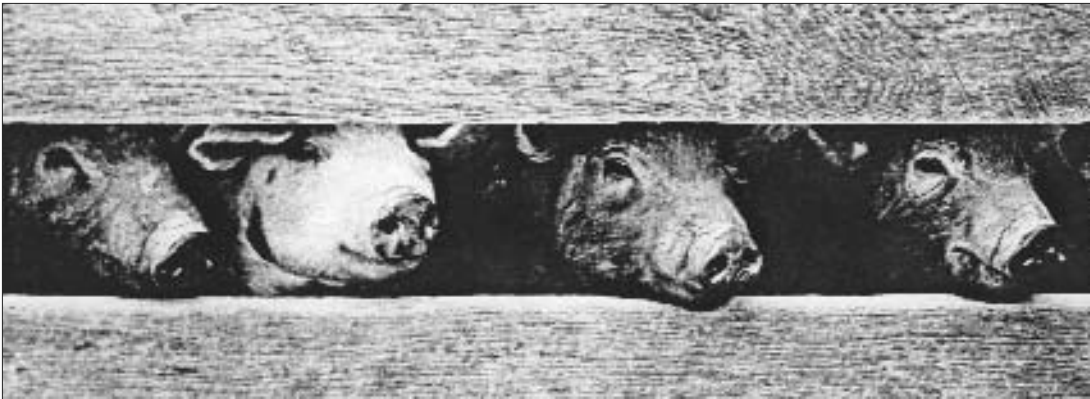
So we ought not romanticize tillers of the soil, and we should be prepared for a certain lack of charm when we get a chance to meet "our" farmer. (By the way, doesn't that sound just a bit patronizing? I'm not your family pet, but rather an independent businessman who works hard, takes huge risks, and is immensely proud of his profession and his way of life.) Yet there is something about farming and ranching that makes them different from other professions. A community made up of family farms is a place that cares about the land's past, present, and future, because we hold it in trust for our children and their children. When I combine corn on the field we call the "Craig Bottom," I'm traveling over acres that my grandfather cleared with a mule in the 1930s, and I'm proud to be part of that tradition. Now some may have noticed that I'm lacking in consistency here, as I argue for my spiritual connection to this land while making light of the consumers' desire for a better connection with the people who produce their food. But the connection I feel—my allegiance—is to place, not to the products I produce. With continuing good fortune and hard work, our farm will last generations more, and that allegiance will be repaid as my children take their place on this piece of land.

The Pleasures and Politics of Food

Working on the farm with my father and grandfather, I learned lessons that made me a better citizen and a better person. Kids raised on farms are in touch with their environment in a way that's not possible for kids raised in a suburban subdivision, no matter how much time they spend worrying about recycling and preserving green space. Farming teaches a brutal work ethic that serves society well when farm kids move to the city. If farm work is not done well, and on time, there's no management committee to whom blame can be shifted. Every harvest is a report card on how we've done, and failure to perform ends with an auction: A life's work is sold to the neighbors.

It's a truism that family farms are no longer viable now that farms are getting larger and big corporations are responsible for most food production. Farms *are* getting larger, but it doesn't follow that there's no place left for the family farm. The number of farms in the United States has decreased from around six million in 1940 to fewer than two million today, and less than 10 percent of the remaining farms produce half of all sales. But of the two million farms that remain, almost all are still family farms. According to the 1997 census of agriculture, only 4.4 percent of farms, fewer than 100,000, are organized as corporations. Of the farms organized as corporations, around 85 percent are family corporations, set up chiefly for tax, liability, and estate-planning reasons. Those evil corporate farmers have average annual sales of less than \$400,000 each. By any measure, in an economy as large and complex as ours, these are tiny businesses.

Our own family farm is a fairly good proxy for what has happened to the structure of agriculture. There are six families involved: My two brothers, a nephew, my daughter, her husband, and I farm with my father. We're a large farm, I suppose—working more than 4,000 acres—but that still makes us a fairly small business, with gross sales that barely equal those of a McDonald's franchise or a large gas station. Family members provide all of the farm labor, although we hire seasonal help in the greenhouse that my wife and I own. We own the majority of our land, but do rent some land from family members, and we also rent land from a family that has leased it to our family for more than 70 years. Even though we would fit in the “very large family farm” class, as defined by the USDA, we aren't the kind of farm that would arouse much interest among critics of the structure of agriculture. We've made our compromises



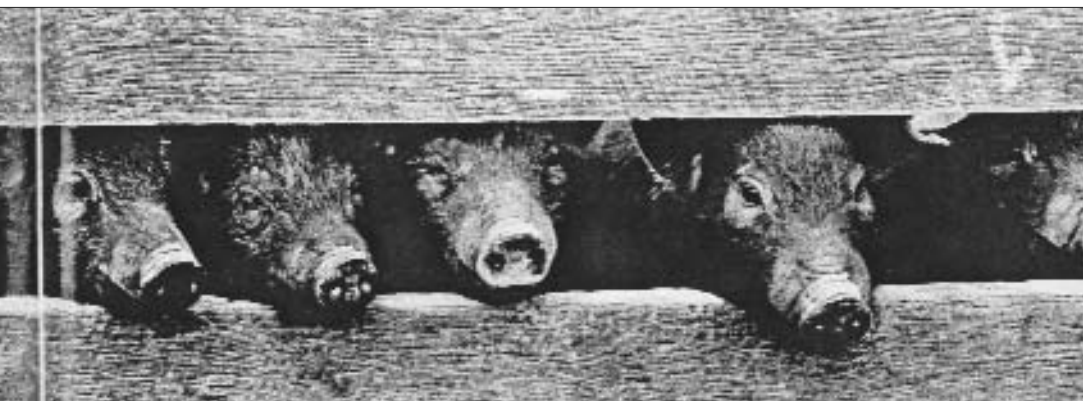
with technology and with a market that rewards size, but we've kept the family nature of our business. If we split our farm six ways, we would all be "small family farmers." We might well not be viable as individual entities, however, because we are much more efficient farming together. Our size is more a function of our ability to get along as a family than our rapacious nature or unbridled greed.

Family farms are not the predominant organization in all of farming, however. There are large producers in Florida, and California is populated with corporate farms that operate on a large scale. Small firms managed and owned by families dominate the great swath of agriculture in the middle of the country. These farms may cover several square miles, because technology allows farmers to work more acres, but in no way do they resemble the corporate agriculture that's part of the public's perception. The authors of *Against the Grain: Biotechnology and the Corporate Takeover of Your Food* (1998) suggest that agribusiness dominates agriculture the way Microsoft dominates software. That just isn't so. Large corporations will never be much interested in farming, because the profits are just too low and the risks too high.

The most visible and worrisome exception to the predominantly family-controlled structure of agriculture is in the production of pork, a \$40 billion industry. The last couple of decades have seen huge changes in the pork industry, as many relatively small operations have given way to giant producers. The 20 largest hog producers, those selling more than a half-million hogs a year, account for more than a third of the hogs sold in the United States. In *Dominion* (2002), Matthew Scully writes that this is a very bad thing. He's not happy with the way "factory" farmers treat livestock. He describes a tour of a factory farm: "A bedlam of squealing and chain rattling and guttural, roaring sounds I didn't know pigs could make greets us as Gay throws open the door. They are locked, about six hundred of them, not only in the barn but each between bars fitted to size. 'Confinement' doesn't describe their situation. They are encased, pinned down, unable to do anything but sit and suffer and scream at the sight of the gods."

These large factories do confine hogs on slatted floors, without the benefit of bedding, and in small places. But the hogs are raised this way to protect the babies from their mothers. The hog in a state of nature is not the pretty thing that Scully seems to imagine. Scully makes much of the maternal instinct in all crea-

Fecund and fast-growing, hogs were once known as "mortgage lifters" among small farmers. But today, industrial-style hog farms increasingly dominate the business.



Facts from the Farm

(All data from 2001 unless otherwise indicated)

U.S. farm output (2000): \$214.7 billion

U.S. farm workforce: 2,923,100

U.S. food industry work force: 24 million

U.S. agricultural exports: \$53.7 billion

Percent of farm revenues from government subsidies:

U.S.: 23 European Union: 34 Japan: 59 Australia: 4

Size of U.S. farms (1997):

Under 10 acres: 154,000

10–499 acres: 1,407,000

500–1,999 acres: 277,000

2,000 acres and over: 75,000

Number of U.S. farms with sales of \$100,000 or more (2001): 349,180

Percent of U.S. farmers age 65 or older (1997): 32 percent

Total U.S. land in crops: 941.2 million acres

Percent in GM crops: Corn (34) Soybeans (75) Cotton (71)

Percent of Americans' disposable income spent on food:

In 1950: 20.6 In 2001: 10

Undernourished pop. in developing countries (in millions, 1998–2000):

India: 233

Sub-Saharan Africa: 196

Other Asia and Pacific: 156

China: 119

Latin America and Caribbean: 55

Near East and North Africa: 40

tures great and small, but my perspective on confinement was formed as a boy after watching my sow eat her litter and put a premature end to my 4-H project.

Confinement may be necessary, but the appearance of huge hog factories has not been good for agriculture. Environmentalists act as if this were the first generation of hogs to defecate, and we've never had to deal with animal waste before. But of course we have. The difference now is the concentration of waste in small areas. The old saw that the "solution to pollution is dilution" perfectly captures the problem we face. When every farm had hogs, the waste was an asset, and each farmer applied it to his own fields to provide fertility and organic matter. I know now of only two or three hog producers in my area, formerly a major pork-producing center. We've concentrated the waste problem, the smell, and the dust. That's bad for the areas where hogs are raised, and for the folks who live near hog farms.

It's not too late to question the direction in which the hog industry is moving. The state of Florida has recently done so, by outlawing all forms of confinement for the production of pork. It's a decision without much practical import because there were only two hog producers left in Florida. But perhaps it's a harbinger. We may, as a nation, someday decide that we won't raise hogs in confinement, or we may decide to limit the number of hogs in a geo-

graphical area. If we do mandate how hogs are produced, we'll have to make some other choices as well, including moving away from free trade, because our competitors will not be so squeamish and will be able to produce cheaper pork. Pardon me for saying this, but there ain't no free lunch. People will still eat pork, but it won't be raised on an American farm.

The virtues of natural food may be oversold and the quest for organic foodstuffs may often verge on the mystic, but that doesn't mean the discerning consumer should give up supporting small farms that raise animals and crops in traditional ways. A trip to a farmers' market, for example, where the actual producers of food are selling what they've grown, may well ensure fresher, better-tasting food—although it will taste better because it hasn't spent a week on a truck, not because it's been raised according to Zen-like principles. It's regrettable that so many farmers are located far from cities with the populations to support that sort of marketing. If consumers want and are willing to pay for beef grown without hormones, or chickens that have pecked in the dirt, then farmers should produce them.

But sometimes the decision about how much technology to use is not so easy. Most of the corn I produce cannot be exported to Europe because I plant genetically modified (GM) seed. There's no reason—of science, safety, or morality—to reject GM crops, and we've been consuming them in the United States for nearly a decade without incident. Even Europe imports some GM crops. A cynic might note that European nations tend to reject "tainted" GM corn and other imports that compete with European-grown crops, but readily import genetically engineered soybeans, which have no ready replacement grown in Europe. Be that as it may, our exports have suffered because European governments reject most GM crops. The answer for farmers should be easy, I suppose: We shouldn't produce things the market doesn't want. But we suffered a drought here in the Midwest in the summer of 2002, and it caused the widespread appearance of aflatoxin, an opportunistic mycotoxin that appears in drought-stressed crops. (Aflatoxin, which can cause liver cancer, is one of the compounds Saddam Hussein was suspected of developing as a biological weapon.) It happens that GM corn is more resistant than traditional varieties to aflatoxin. So if I produce "what the consumer wants" and reject the best technology, I expose the consumer and the people who work on my farm to greater risks of disease. Are we supposed to take comfort in the fact that those risks have an "organic" source?

Farmers aren't stupid. We don't make choices because of glossy ads in farm magazines, or in response to a mindless search for the latest, glitziest technology. In fact, we're the original conservatives, extremely slow to adopt new technologies of any kind. But we're faced with physical problems that don't lend themselves to spiritual solutions, so we've adapted the latest technologies to our ends. Weeds have to be killed, plants require nourishment, and people need food that's safe and affordable. Those are the realities, and to ignore them while making supper a sacrament and "natural food" a religion will raise the price of food and decrease the variety available to consumers. That may suit upper-class professionals and so-called crunchy conservatives, but it ill serves the middle class and will devastate the poor. □

The Seductions of Food

by Lis Harris

I was in my twenties in Paris when I had my first glimpse of what I believe was the dawn of the new age of American gastronomic exploration (the predawn was known to the so-called lost generation—but Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and the rest were too alcohol befogged to pay much attention to what was on their plates). Playing hooky from the painting classes I was supposed to be attending, I sat in on the far more revelatory cooking lectures of the Cordon Bleu culinary school. Nearly all the students were young Americans with a determined look in their eyes, or long-stemmed Brits who seemed to be undergoing some kind of culinary-religious conversion. The chef whose classes I attended was amusingly pedantic, moody (he actually indulged in tantrums when his pink-cheeked assistant brought him produce he deemed inferior), and fond of lapsing into lengthy disquisitions on the chemistry of the onions and pears he would hold aloft before us like sacred icons. I learned to make a *gâteau de riz* and savory stews with varieties of mushrooms that would not become available in the United States for more than two decades. Some of the students were hoping to open restaurants back home, and French cuisine was the gospel they intended to preach.

My rapt exploration of French gastronomy continued when I found a job with a European art magazine. Weekends, with not always happy results, I'd plunk down the larger part of my nearly nonexistent wages at some Paris restaurant mentioned fondly in the essays of A. J. Liebling, the *New Yorker* writer and trencherman who was my hero. At a famous restaurant near the Bourse that Liebling frequented, I ordered one of his favorite dishes: *tripe à la mode de Caen*. I'd never before laid eyes on the dish, much less sniffed it, and when it was placed before me with a flourish (it was the restaurant's specialty), its acrid smell nearly made me gag. All around me were well-tailored, prosperous-looking bankers and waiters who resembled philology professors. I certainly couldn't eat the dish—or send it back. What to do? As if in a dream, my hand moved to open the clasp of my pocketbook, and, when the waiter turned his back, I dumped the entire contents of the plate into my purse, a gesture that awes me to this day.

A few years later, I made what turned out to be a quasi-comical pilgrimage to the towns and cities of France highlighted on 10 regional culinary maps provided by the foreign correspondent and food scholar Waverly Root in his delightful *The Food of France*. Though Root published the book in 1958, most of his recollections unfortunately reached back to the 1920s, and many, if not most, of my inquiries at the small villages I sought out specifically to taste a *milliard*—a special kind of cherry tart—or carp in wine sauce were met with a shrug and a shake



The real revolutionary of the 1960s? Julia Child, on her television show The French Chef.

of the head, or, less often, a dim recollection. Oh yes, a certain Mme. T. sometimes served that in her restaurant, 10 kilometers away, on Fridays. But the restaurant, regrettably, had just closed for vacation. If we Americans were moving at that point toward the discovery of Real Food, the French were disengaging incrementally from some of their oldest regional traditions, a process stalled but not entirely arrested by the Slow Food Movement, the by-now international eco-gastronomic association that originated in Italy in 1986 and is dedicated to preserving the taste and regional integrity of products and dishes in danger of disappearing.

Alice Waters, the owner of the much admired Chez Panisse restaurant in Oakland, California, and avatar of the support-your-local-farmer-and-buy-organic-whenever-possible movement, has many times told interviewers that when she traveled to Paris in that same period, the 1960s, she had “an awakening.” That’s probably how a great many young Americans felt who studied or traveled then in France. They came back with a new appreciation of the importance of fresh

ingredients and foods grown to *taste* good rather than merely *look* good, and with a heightened sense of how choices made about food could affect the fabric of their lives. The country they came home to, alas, was not yet ready to accommodate them. The culinary landscape of the United States at the time (except for great local establishments that were mostly unknown to outsiders, and certain temples of gastronomy in New Orleans and a few other major cities) was still pretty much dominated by the shrimp cocktail and the T-bone steak.

But it would be hard not to notice the great leap forward in American culinary sophistication that has occurred over the past two or three decades—taking us from Dipsy Doodles to *pain au chocolat*, and from chop suey as almost the only foreign game in town to a virtual United Nations of gastronomic choice. The circumstances driving this change are no secret: a spike in immigration from diverse cultures with assimilation-resistant culinary traditions, faster ways of transporting foods, more adventurous palates developed over decades of relatively unimpeded travel, and, to some extent, the determination of the post-World War II generation to incorporate into their lives the best of everything: houses, cars, clothes, and food. Our avowed ideals in the realms of education and health care may be receding further and further from sight, but here is one area, however modest, in which we have progressed: The current generation regards a good cup of coffee and crusty bread as inalienable rights. And that would have been inconceivable 25 years ago.

The supermarkets that have largely replaced the local grocery stores where our grandparents shopped clearly reflect our changing tastes, as do the restaurants where we like to eat. Foods that would have been considered exotic a couple of decades ago—sushi, pad thai, radicchio, balsamic vinegar, raw-milk cheeses from remote European hamlets—look as familiar in our shopping carts as boxes of Jell-O. And even that humble iconic staple has needed readjustment. Whereas our mothers were warned against adding pineapple to their Jell-O molds because it would prevent them from setting, today's cooks are additionally warned not to throw in any bits of kiwi, ginger root, papaya, or fig. Americans are working harder and eating out more, but they're also lavishing more money on pots and pans and expensive kitchen gadgets that they may or may not use. In 1999, they spent more than \$1 billion on cookware, yet chances are they'll be repairing to it less frequently than they will to their takeout Croissan'wich, their everything bagel, their mesclun salad, or their chips and guacamole—which they may comfortably down in front of their TVs while watching celebrity chefs on the Food Network. And though the market for convenience foods has boomed, many consumers are at least pretending that they go home to cook: In 1998 (the latest year for which statistics are available), 1,060 cookbooks were published in the United States. Even in households where the elaborate home-cooked meal is only a dim memory, a handsome array of cookbook spines neatly aligned along a kitchen shelf is commonplace.

The entrance of organic foods into the marketplace, which also

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occurred during the 1970s and '80s, was associated at first with radical politics, feminism, and back-to-the-land communes. And for the most part, the shriveled carrots and desiccated lettuces that showed up in markets were simply manifestations of the marginality of the counterculture: Not on our counters! But Julia Child, whose TV show, beginning in the early 1960s, brought French cooking to the multitudes, became mainstream. Child made the more-than-a-little-intimidating idea of mastering the complexities of the cuisine seem like fun, and, when she dropped something big on the floor and shrugged it off with a wisecrack, even slapstick fun. But she didn't really address

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the growing concern about where and how the foods she so cheerfully flung about were grown. If the tomato she sliced into had little resemblance, sadly, to its homelier, tastier French (or Italian) cousin, or the "nice" joint of beef she recommended was suffused with antibiotics and hormones, well, there was only so much she could do. Alice Waters was not a TV performer, and thus affected fewer people initially, but she had in her sights both complex cooking techniques and the big questions about food safety and healthfulness and the impact of our eating habits on those who supply our food. (One unintended side effect of the new demand for exotic fare is the ecological danger it can sometimes pose, as is the case with the Chilean sea bass, which, in the course of a few years, has nearly become extinct.)

The "buy local" movement turned out to be more than merely a romantic, Luddite idea. (Nowadays most produce travels 1,500 to 2,500 miles and can take a week or two to reach American plates, and much of its freshness and taste is lost en route.) The well-publicized preference of contemporary chefs for buying locally, choosing organic foods when possible, supporting regional farmers, and rejecting the stiff formalities of the traditional French restaurant has changed the tone of restaurants across the country. The state of the economy also affects public eating habits: Boom times spawn restaurants with high pretensions and prices to match; lean times inspire eateries with names like "Bob's." The sorts of people drawn to the culinary world in recent decades—former investment bankers, English professors, biologists—have changed, too. In a world dominated by technology, the sensual directness of cooking has great appeal. Courses on food culture have even proliferated in the academy: Some 300 anthropologists in the United States specialize in food studies.

Traditional culinary institutes continue to graduate many of the nation's chefs, but many others have not attended those institutes, and young chefs drawn increasingly to a more homegrown way of looking at what they do have disengaged from the fancy, three-fork French restaurant tradition. Today there's scarcely a major American city that can't boast restaurants serving extraordinarily good food, and, according to Bob Evans, the chef and owner of Hugo's, in Portland, Maine, even smaller metropolises such as his are likely to have



No longer meant only for eating, food is increasingly an object of voyeuristic consumption.

at least one first-class eating establishment. On a cold winter day, most of Evans's patrons clump into his restaurant in heavy boots and anoraks and peel down to plaid shirts and thick, sensible sweaters, but the food they eat betrays the background of a chef who trained with Thomas Keller at the French Laundry in Yountville, California, one of the best restaurants in the country. Evans's goal, which he believes is shared by many of the chefs he knows, is to bring the highest standard of cooking and the freshest local ingredients to his restaurant, while making certain that customers regard what he offers them as "approachable."

But however wholehearted the attitude of American chefs toward their métier, it is still light-years removed from the Michelin- and GaultMillau-terrorized, perfection-seeking universe of the chefs of France. It's unimaginable that even the most obsessive American chef would suffer the fate of poor Bernard L'Oiseau, who shot himself to death in the winter of 2003 after learning that the GaultMillau guide had dropped his popular restaurant, Côte d'Or, in Burgundy, from a rating of 19 points (out of 20) to 17—for being inad-

equately “dazzling.” L’Oiseau fared better with the Michelin inspectors, who let him keep his three stars, but they too rendered an apparently insupportable blow when they let him know that his clientele was getting a little bored seeing the same dishes on his menu. And few Americans, even die-hard foodies, would think of expending as much energy as the French group De la Question Gourmande has, trying to get Pope John Paul II to remove *gourmandise* (gluttony) from the list of seven deadly sins.

Less droll was the fury aroused in France—in 1999, long before the war in Iraq—by the American government’s decision to slap duties of 100 percent on many French imports, including Roquefort cheese, mustard, foie gras, and truffles. The United States apparently levied the tax in response to the decision by the European Union (EU) to ban imports of hormone-treated U.S. beef. At first, French farmers protested only the high duties, but in time they turned their attention as well to the larger issue of globalization, which was fostered by the United States, they said, and threatened regional products and the farmers’ traditional way of life. Equally important, the protests highlighted problems raised by the American go-go attitude toward agribusiness and the bioengineering of food.

Waters has just such matters in mind when she talks about a new way of focusing on how our understanding of food and the choices we make as consumers affect the people who grow food and the land on which it’s grown. She has characterized this new approach as a “delicious revolution.” *Revolution* was also the word used not long ago by a food service executive quoted in *The New York Times* to describe the changing (decidedly for the better) food tastes and cosmopolitan habits of college students across the country. Like the students of a New York City private school that hired a chef from the Culinary Institute to prepare its cafeteria meals and provide a nutritious, junk-free diet, the college students not only lapped up the better food but grew more and more unwilling to eat any other kind.

But wait. Intriguing as these changes may be, do they really qualify as revolutionary? A very minor revolution, perhaps, in a rather small principality. What has been truly revolutionary over the same period is the genetic modification of our foods. It was acknowledged as such in January 1998 by the protesting farmers of the Confédération Paysanne, the second largest union of French farmers, when they destroyed sacks of genetically modified maize. Jose Bove, one of the farmers who participated in the event, admitted at his trial that what he and his fellow farmers had done was illegal, but they’d felt, he said, that the way the corn had been imposed on European countries had left them no alternative. “When was there a public debate on genetically modified organisms? When were farmers and consumers asked what they think about this? Never.”

In the United States, about 75 percent of our soybeans and 34 percent of our corn are now grown from genetically modified (GM) seeds, and our supermarket shelves overflow with products made with GM crops. But we have as yet no way of gauging the long-term effects of GM foods—maize, soybeans, wheat, bananas, and the rest—on the environment, animals, and humans, and that’s the danger. Europeans have so far taken such concerns far more seriously than Americans have, which has led to an increasingly tense dispute over the trade in GM foods.

Yet almost without our noticing, complex public-health issues involving

food have also burgeoned in the United States. Over the past few decades, while Waters's "delicious revolution" was taking place, a major threat to our good health developed: We became very, very fat. This may not qualify as a revolution, but it's certainly a cause for alarm. Sixty-five percent of Americans are overweight, and nearly half of these people are considered obese. (More than five million Americans are sufficiently obese to qualify for a draconian surgical technique, "gastroplasty," in which the stomach is surgically altered to keep food from being digested.) As a result, these individuals are suffering, or will probably suffer in time, from diabetes or ailments of the pulmonary or cardiovascular systems. The condition has become so widespread and alarming that, four years ago, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identified obesity as an epidemic.

How did this happen? Medical journal articles, newspaper reports, and books have scrutinized this great American burgeoning, and though it may seem counterintuitive, given what is supposed to be our national obsession with physical fitness, the big story is that a powerful combination of social, economic, agricultural, and—hugely—market forces have caught too many Americans in a nasty trap.

The persuasive collective narrative includes many players. One was the optimistic and ever colorful Earl Butz, secretary of agriculture under President Richard Nixon. Butz, who was known for (and forced to resign because of) tasteless jokes, encouraged intensive corn production and helped usher in the era of widespread use of high-fructose corn syrup—six times sweeter than sugar and far less expensive—in hundreds of thousands of convenience foods and pastries, and most soft drinks. To keep Malaysia, a major palm oil producer, as a U.S. friend and global trading partner, Butz encouraged the importation of palm oil, which has seven percent more saturated fat than lard. Though its use in commercial cooking (in fast-food restaurants, for example, to cook French fries) has declined, palm oil has been clogging arteries across the land ever since.

Among the other players are the schizophrenically divided U.S. regulatory system, which is guided by the traditional pro-business attitudes of the Department of Agriculture and dependent for enforcement on a perpetually understaffed and underfunded Food and Drug Administration, and the food industry's aggressive marketers, who have long promoted

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bigness, supersizing, More!, etc., and have made gorging a national pastime. Fast-food chains, Saturday morning TV commercials pushing junk food, and "cute" characters such as Ronald McDonald have had a particularly disastrous impact on children: Twenty-five percent of all Americans under 19 are either overweight or obese; since 1980, the rates of overweight have doubled among small children, and tripled among adolescents. Our growing national hurriedness and its handmaiden, food prepared away from home, have also been part of the story. In 1970, 25 percent of the U.S. consumer food dollar was spent on food prepared outside



Only in America? “Competitive eating” now has its own international federation.

the home; in 1999, the figure was 40 percent—and much of that food, fast or otherwise, was increasingly fat infused and increasingly caloric.

Umbilically attached to computer games and to softly glowing TVs bar-raging them with snack cues, many children haven’t a chance. Studies have shown that the more time spent watching TV, the fatter the child. Among city children, the poor are particularly vulnerable because their parents, away at work, want them at home, not roaming around (it used to be called playing) in unsafe neighborhoods. Weight problems, unsurprisingly, are more prevalent among the poor, though of late obesity has been making inroads into the middle class.

Just as our educational and health-care systems are divided absolutely along class and economic lines, so, too, are our changing eating habits, and no one has much of a grip on the problem. As far back as 1988, George Bush *père* appointed Arnold Schwarzenegger, a fitness enthusiast and self-made Hercules, to head the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. But much to his chagrin, even Schwarzenegger could elicit little more than yawns from national and state bureaucracies when he tried to interest them in doing something about the bad shape of the citizenry.

And what has been the response to the problem, other than a constant flow of diet books and a continuing search for the perfect antifat pill? A lawsuit! Having chewed reflectively for a while on the success of suits against the tobacco industry, Sam Hirsch, a New York City attorney, decided to file a suit against McDonald’s on behalf of children, alleging that the chain “negligently, recklessly, and intentionally pushes on children foods that are high in salt, sugar, fat, and cholesterol.” Inspired by the apparent success of the tobacco suits, visions of mass tort disputes involving countless fast-food companies are undoubtedly dancing in the heads of more than a few lawyers, along with visions of attractive fees, but

at least for the moment quite a few of their brethren think the McDonald's suit is pretty silly. Unlike tobacco, junk food isn't addictive, and most people believe that eating habits, however bad, are a personal matter.

Nonetheless, those same lawyers and many food industry executives know very well that some of the same arrows loosed against the tobacco industry, which may eventually be forced to pay \$246 billion to the states, may also be in the quiver of the food suit attorneys. Preeminently, in December 2001 the U.S. Surgeon General noted that the public-health costs deriving from overweight and obesity were approaching \$117 billion annually—a figure not as high as, but certainly closing in on, the estimates for the public-health costs of tobacco (\$140 billion a year). The Surgeon General also disclosed that about 300,000 deaths per year are now associated with overweight and obesity, and that these conditions might in the future be responsible for as much preventable disease and death as smoking.

Though the McDonald's case may seem frivolous, legal analysts have pointed out that once the discovery stage is reached, documents may well emerge, as they did in the tobacco cases, demonstrating that the food-industry companies knew far more than they have admitted about the health impact of their products. The big-food industry companies that would have to spend millions of dollars in legal fees if the suit were ever to be broadened—Coca-Cola, Kraft, and many others—have thus far maintained a granitic silence. But the trade group for the industry, the Grocery Manufacturers of America, has pooh-poohed the lawsuit and dismissed “finger-pointing, reckless accusations, and lawsuits that won't make anyone thinner.” Still, the industry has to be paying close attention. Just recently, a San Francisco lawyer filed a suit against Kraft, the maker of Oreos, seeking to ban the cookies in California because an ingredient, hydrogenated oil, contains unhealthy trans fats, though nowhere on the Oreo package is this revealed.

Even if the McDonald's suit is unsuccessful, the media uproar it has started has already inspired changes in the industry's marketing practices (portion sizes look smaller on boxes, a balanced diet and exercise are recommended along with snacks)—and may well inspire schools to get rid of their junk food vending machines and rethink their commitment to fitness. The suggestion by the director of Yale University's Center for Eating and Weight Disorders that junk food be taxed like liquor and cigarettes—the derisively dubbed “Twinkie Tax”—is already 10 years old and not likely to be taken up anytime soon, but someone had better come up with a realistic way of dealing with the problem before we slurp and lick our way to an even greater national health crisis.

Happily, sweeping changes have regularly characterized eating habits over time. Thus, McDonald's, the belly of the Beast, long ago stopped frying its potatoes in palm oil and now offers low-fat yogurt for dessert, and some California schools no longer allow soft drinks in their vending machines. Who knows? Perhaps the time will come when the Evian sippers and the Whopper chompers will dine as one. If our ancestors could swing down from the trees and evolve to the baguette, anything is possible: The age of pizza and a 32-ounce shake may one day look like an interregnum. □

Future Food

by David Appell

Starving people mass in front of an African warehouse, desperate for food. Ignoring their pleas, a guard stands before the doors, behind which are hundreds of bags of corn. The doors are locked, and the food inside, donated by the United States, is slowly rotting. It's been labeled "poison" by Zambian president Levy Mwanawasa, even as more than half the children in his country suffer from malnutrition. Disappointed and frustrated, the crowd eventually disperses, mumbling to one another, wondering if they will eat tonight or must wait yet again until tomorrow.

Welcome to the front lines of this century's most important and controversial science, biotechnology. Why did Zambians go hungry in the midst of a drought-induced famine last year while millions of tons of food aid were allowed to go to waste? Because the corn was genetically modified. Scientists have added a gene to the corn's genome, isolated from a naturally occurring soil bacterium called *Bacillus thuringiensis* (B.t.), an organism that farmers have used for decades as an externally applied insecticide. The inserted gene allows the corn itself to produce a substance toxic to insects.

At the peak of the Zambian crisis last fall, as cargo ships bearing food were being turned back, Andrew Natsios, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, skewered environmental groups for spreading fears about the dangers of genetically modified (GM) food. "They can play these games with Europeans, who have full stomachs," Natsios told *The Washington Times*, "but it is revolting and despicable to see them do so when the lives of Africans are at stake."

"It is arrogant to tell the Zambians what food they must accept," countered Doreen Stabinsky of Greenpeace. Activists argue that Washington could send money rather than in-kind aid, and accuse it of favoring the interests of the U.S. agriculture industry over the needs of malnourished people overseas. Meanwhile, the fear of GM foods appears to be spreading. In January, India rejected a \$104 million U.S. food aid consignment of corn and soya and called for suppliers to submit documents attesting to the food's bearing on human and animal health.

There are more than 800 million people in the world who are too undernourished to carry out the tasks of daily living. They're caught in the ugly middle of this fight, as are the nonprofit relief agencies that aim to help them. "We're not the scientific arbiters of whether the food is safe or not," said Helen Palmer of Oxfam. "We're inclined to take a cautious approach, and we don't think that the situation these governments have been put in is a fair one. On the other hand, people with no food have a right to food, and life must always be paramount, and if people on the ground are saying give us anything, then they should be given anything."

In the United States, meanwhile, the food that the governments of Zambia and India find too dangerous to touch is consumed like, well, popcorn. Hundreds of millions of Americans eat GM food every day. Up to 75 percent of all food sold

in U.S. supermarkets, from breakfast cereals to frozen pizza, contains ingredients (such as corn syrup) derived from GM plants. The products of the first wave of GM food research have been on your dinner plate since the mid-1990s, and a second wave of more sophisticated products—crops with multiply altered genes, genetically engineered fish and trees, and “biopharm” plants that yield drugs and chemicals rather than food—is nearing commercialization.

Developed in the 1980s, GM crops have been grown commercially in the United States since 1996. They include B.t. corn and cotton, and soybeans modified to withstand applications of the herbicide Roundup. In the five years after 1996, GM crop acreage grew from near zero to 130 million acres, an area nearly the size of Texas. GM crops are grown in 13 countries by about five million farmers. But the lion’s share of them (more than two-thirds) is grown in the United States.

Biotech companies are now on the cusp of commercializing the past decade’s worth of research. The technology’s advocates envision a cornucopia of benefits: increased yields, lower prices for food and other products, and reduced need for pesticides and herbicides. On the near horizon are crops engineered with multiple new genes, or more complex genes, to express multiple traits: a plant with novel genes that make it resistant to multiple herbicides; a B.t. crop that is also resistant to Roundup; plants with increased tolerance of frost, drought, and salt. Genetically altered animals are coming, too, designed to reproduce faster, grow larger, or make more milk. (“Weapons-grade salmon,” activists quip.)

Also in the pipeline are “nutraceuticals,” foods that have been genetically altered to supply critical micronutrients. Consumers in developed countries get many micronutrients—vitamins, iron, iodine—from foods that have been fortified during processing, such as milk, bread, and breakfast cereal. But in the developing world, with its poverty and decentralized food production and distribution systems, it’s not easy to fortify foods on a mass scale. By putting the micronutrients in the crop itself, GM foods could accomplish that task, proponents say. “Golden rice,” for example, containing Vitamin A, is touted as a solution to a vitamin deficiency that can cause blindness. The late D. Gale Johnson, a noted agricultural economist at the University of Chicago, has argued that in India alone, golden rice could spare perhaps 50,000 children a year the fate of lost sight. Poor farmers would reap other benefits from growing GM crops, Johnson said, and improved crop varieties better suited to local conditions would allow many farmers to stay on the land.

Viewed from another angle, however, the genetic revolution is cause mostly for foreboding. Environmental activists, organic farmers, and assorted others consider GM foods a product of science gone amok, a suspicious technology pushed on unsuspecting consumers by big corporations seeking to control the world’s food supply. And poor farmers, they argue, won’t be able to afford the high-tech seeds that are supposed to save them.

In Europe, where more traditional foodways prevail, there is strong resistance to GM foods. It’s been intensified by some spectacular failures of government oversight of food safety, notably the outbreak of mad cow disease in Britain in

>DAVID APPELL, who holds a Ph.D. in physics, has written for *Scientific American*, *Wired*, *New Scientist*, *Nature*, and many other publications. Copyright © 2003 by David Appell.



The Farm 2000, by Alexis Rockman

the mid-1990s. In 1998, the European Union imposed a highly controversial moratorium on the approval of new GM crops for sale within its borders. Critics blame the moratorium, along with Europe's general hostility to the new technology, for persuading starving countries such as Zambia to turn away GM food aid. The countries are afraid that Europe will reject their agricultural exports as contaminated, or impose costly restrictions on them.

The moratorium has also become a major irritant in transatlantic relations. Washington sees it as unsupported by any real scientific evidence, a devious trade barrier that is illegal under international trade law. The ban has cost U.S. agricultural producers hundreds of millions of dollars annually. While the European Commission has moved to lift the moratorium, it's also moving toward a requirement that GM foods be labeled and traceable, with a clear paper trail stretching from field to grocery store shelf. That's unnecessary and virtually impossible to accomplish, says the Bush administration. Along with several other nations, the United States has begun proceedings against the EU with the World Trade Organization. Given the high stakes and the fact that few things arouse more intense emotions than the food we eat, there's a distinct possibility that another major transatlantic blowup is in the works.

Last year, on a rainy Friday night in an old hotel along the Ohio River, Dan McGuire, director of the American Corn Growers Association, spelled out the sorry state of U.S. corn exports. "We estimate that the U.S. has lost about 400 million bushels of corn exports in total since GM corn varieties were introduced in 1995–96," McGuire said, speaking in Louisville, Kentucky, at a public forum sponsored by the Genetic Engineering Action Network. (Prices paid to

farmers fell as much as a dollar a bushel in 2002; corn now sells for less than \$2.50 per bushel.) The crowd consists mainly of local farmers worried about their livelihood and activists adamantly opposed to GM-anything. McGuire himself is no fan of Big Ag, and, to loud applause, he criticizes the power of the large agricultural companies and their close links to the federal agencies that are responsible for regulating biotech crops and public food safety.

Despite shrinking exports of GM corn, American farmers don't appear to be abandoning the crop, which, to varying degrees, saves money on pesticides, increases yields, and reduces fieldworkers' exposure to unwelcome chemicals. A dual system—GM crops grown for the domestic market, non-GM crops for export—seems impractical, because it would be costly and probably ineffective. Pollen drifts from one field to another, and grains cling to machinery and get transferred to other fields.

There is little evidence that eating today's GM foods is unhealthy, except in rare cases of allergenicity. Scientific panels sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences, the British Royal Society, the World Health Organization, and other reputable bodies, while emphasizing the need for careful research and oversight, have concluded that biotech crops are safe for both humans and the environment.

Still, there are lingering concerns about America's food supply—about pesticides, an epidemic of obesity and diabetes, and growing corporate control over food that was once produced locally. "There are a lot of changes in the disease spectrum of the U.S. population within the last 10 years," says Martha Crouch, "such as increases in certain kinds of cancers, in autism, in Parkinson's disease—and an extreme increase in obesity." Crouch is a plant molecular biologist, a former consultant to biotechnology corporations, and a retired University of Indiana professor who abandoned her research in dismay over the uses to which it was being put. "PCBs, dioxins, the effects of endocrine disruptors, attention deficit disorder, contaminated fish. There are lots of theories about foods that have been on the market for 30 or 40 years and may be having extremely serious health consequences, and it's been difficult to link those foods to the health consequences because of how ubiquitous they are in the food stream and how little of that kind of testing was done when they were put on the market," Crouch says. "And I consider our GM foods to be in that category—they could be having very widespread and serious consequences that we won't know for 30 years."

Critics also raise the possibility of gene transfer between GM and non-GM crops, a process that could have unpredictable results. Last August, scientists at the University of Lille in France discovered that their experimental GM sugar beets had swapped genes with other sugar beets, making the beet "weeds" potentially harder to control. The French scientists admitted they had underestimated the likelihood of such contamination.

But even though the biotech world is getting more difficult to police, the larger world can't afford to turn its back on the vast potential GM foods offer. In the absence of scientific evidence showing that they are harmful, it's a tragedy that, when readily available, they've been denied to desperately hungry people around the world.

Yet critics do raise important questions about this unprecedented experiment with the world's food. Do scientists and governments know enough? Are regulatory agencies up to the task, and can their staffs keep up with the leapfrogging feats of academic and corporate scientists? Can policymakers resist the powerful commercial pressures to charge full speed ahead? For example, many trials of GM products in the regulatory process are kept confidential by government regulators. Such secrecy is typical in evaluations of commercial products, and there are often good reasons for it. But given the stakes involved in manipulating the genome, a higher level of transparency may well be justified. Biopharming—using genetically modified plants as a medium for creating drugs and chemicals—is an area of particular concern. Among the biopharm experiments now being discussed or attempted are spermicide-producing corn and tobacco plants that can be harvested and processed to yield the abortion-inducing compound trichosanthin or growth factors such as erythropoietin. “There are some 400 biopharm products in the pipeline,” says

Bill Freese, a policy analyst with Friends of the Earth, “and over 300 open-air field trials have already been conducted in unidentified locations across the country.”

The Genetically Engineered Food Alert Campaign, a coalition of activist groups, has called for an end to open-air biopharming. Their demands grew louder last year after an incident in which a small quantity of biopharm corn engineered to include a vaccine against diarrhea in pigs came close to entering the food supply. In the wake of the incident, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration wrote new regulations to keep pharm crops separate from crops bound for the food supply. And the Biotechnology Industry Organization, a trade association, announced a moratorium among its members on growing biopharm crops in major food-producing areas. Perhaps what's needed in addition is a policy restricting biopharming to plants that are not used, even in their unaltered state, to produce foods that humans eat.

Many activists see the debate over GM foods in apocalyptic terms. Jessica Hayes, director of the Genetic Engineering Action Network, speaks of “a crisis in democracy.” Yet the solid science behind the conclusion that GM foods are safe to eat does not justify such claims. There are good reasons to be vigilant, to demand accountability, and to ask questions about the impact of this new technology on farmers, consumers, and the worldwide agricultural system. At a time when millions still cry out for food, and when genetic technologies offer so many potential health and environmental benefits, these debates should be only beginning, not ending. □

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Possibilities and Pragmatics (1990) by Vivian E. Torrence

Do Ideas Matter in America?

Americans like to think of themselves as a pragmatic people, with little use for professors and fancy ideas. Yet they also live and die for abstractions such as freedom and equality. That's not just some inexplicable paradox but a key to understanding the American intellectual landscape.

by Wilfred M. McClay

In his classic study, *Childhood and Society* (1950), the psychologist Erik Erikson observed that “whatever one may come to consider a truly American trait can be shown to have its equally characteristic opposite.” Though a similar ambivalence can be found in many national cultures, traceable to a variety of causes, Erikson insisted that the bipolarity was especially pronounced in the modern American instance. In none of the other great nations of the world, he contended, were the inhabitants subjected to more extreme contrasts than in the United States, where tensions between individualism and conformity, internationalism and isolationism, open-mindedness and closed-mindedness, cosmopolitanism and xenophobia were powerfully felt.

Sweeping generalizations of that sort about “national character,” American or otherwise, have come to be regarded as artifacts of the 1950s. They’ve been superseded by doctrines that emphasize pluralism and social heterogeneity and stress the “inventedness” of the modern nation-state. But there is plenty of evidence for the cogency of Erikson’s dictum, which is nowhere more vividly illustrated than in the paradoxical role of ideas in American culture. One can make an equally plausible case that ideas are both nowhere and everywhere in America, that they have played a uniquely insignificant role in shaping America or a uniquely commanding one.

So which of the two assertions is the more accurate? At first blush, one would have to acknowledge that there is a strong basis for the familiar view that Americans are a relentlessly action-oriented people, constituents of a thoroughgoing business civilization, a culture that respects knowledge only insofar as it can be shown to have immediate practical applications and commercial utility. Alexis de Tocqueville voiced the theme early in the 19th century: To the extent that Americans cultivated science, literature, and the

arts, he remarked, they invariably did so in the spirit of *usefulness*, not out of any high regard for the dignity of thought itself. His observation presaged what would become a consistent complaint of intellectuals from Walt Whitman to Matthew Arnold to Sinclair Lewis to George Steiner today: America is a philistine society, interested only in the arts of self-aggrandizement and enhanced material well-being, reflexively anti-intellectual, utterly lacking in the resources needed to support the high and disinterested curiosity that is the stuff of genuine cultural achievement.

A variation on this theme, also sounded early on by Tocqueville, was that America embodied a fresh and distinctive theory of government, even though its citizenry couldn't begin to articulate *what* that theory was. Tocqueville claimed that there

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was no country in the civilized world where less attention was paid to philosophy—and yet Americans seemed enthusiastically committed to a particular, and very modern, philosophical method. Their country, he quipped, was the place where “the precepts of Descartes are least studied and best applied,” since it was the place where everyone believed that one should “seek the reason of things for oneself, and in oneself alone.” Yet the range of ideological possibilities

in America was narrow, with comparatively little space between the supposed opposites of “left” and “right” and relatively little deviation from fundamental liberal principles. The very notion of intellectual debate as a process of public wrangling about alternative ideas of the political and social order tended to be regarded as anathema, even dangerous.

In 1953, the historian Daniel Boorstin went so far as to argue that the absence of debate over American political theory was one of the nation's chief *virtues*. The unpremeditated “givenness” of American political institutions constituted for him the genius of American politics and defined the difference between the placid stability of American politics and the ideology-ridden horrors that had so recently erupted in European politics. “Our national well-being,” said Boorstin, is “in inverse proportion to the sharpness and extent of [our] theoretical differences.” So breathtaking a statement formulates on a national scale the powerful, if largely informal, everyday American social taboo against discussing either religion or politics in public. The taboo makes for a considerable measure of social peace, but it would

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be hard to imagine a deeper devaluation of the role of ideas.

Small wonder that Boorstin became one of the principal exponents of the “consensus” view of American history that was prevalent at midcentury: A rough but stable ideological homogeneity, built upon the cultural and economic premises of liberal capitalism, encompassed nearly the entire American people. Contemporaries of Boorstin who were associated with this view, such as Richard Hofstadter and the political scientist Louis Hartz, had a less positive regard for the alleged homogeneity—yes, they sighed, Americans all think the same way, and more’s the pity—but they did not challenge its basic outline. Nor, for that matter, was there much fundamental disagreement to be found in the writings of the consensus theorists’ immediate predecessors, such as historians Vernon Louis Parrington, Charles Beard, and Frederick Jackson Turner. Although all of these scholars saw conflict rather than consensus as the most salient characteristic of American history, they conceived the conflict primarily as one between rival material interests, in which ideas and ideologies played, at best, a supporting or derivative role.

Thus, a well-established tradition, shared by intellectuals and non-intellectuals alike, holds that ideas have been largely irrelevant to the nation’s practical concerns, and therefore tangential to the real business of American life. That belief has often figured in the tension-ridden relationship between America and Europe, of whose persistence we have recently been reminded. The contrast between America and Europe was thought to be the difference between youth and age, novelty and venerability, innocence and experience, purity and corruption, guilelessness and sophistication, naturalness and artificiality. But however distinct it may have wanted to be, America’s intellectual culture was from the start an extension of Europe’s, linked to European evaluative standards. Hence, that culture should be understood, at least in its early history, as an “American province,” to use historian David Hollinger’s apt term, with all the ambivalence it implies about Americans’ feelings of connection to, separation from, and competition with Europe. America was a province in the sense that its best and brightest minds yearned to be found worthy by the metropolitan arbiters of taste and sensibility. Their ultimate validation came not from Boston or New York, but from London or Paris. Yet the province yearned to breathe free, and it resented the cultural subordination in which it found itself becalmed long after political independence had been achieved.



The quest for originality, a passionate concern of such writers as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, became one of the themes of 19th-century American culture. But the goal was more easily articulated than met. At the start of the 20th century, intellectuals were still complaining that the emergence of an authentic, indigenous American culture was being blocked by the smothering influence of artificial, European-derived, Anglo-Victorian notions of high culture. In their view, slavish imitation of the mother continent bespoke cultural immaturity and a lack of

intellectual self-confidence and vigor. One of the most influential statements of this theme was made by the Spanish-born American philosopher George Santayana in a 1911 lecture titled “The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy.” The lecture bequeathed to subsequent observers an indispensable term of analysis — “the genteel tradition” — to describe what was wrong with American art and expression. More than that, it offered a far-reaching diagnosis of a fault line in American culture. American intellectuals responded to Santayana’s critique with what one scholar has called “the rebellion against Victorianism,” a rebellion that would turn out to be one of the organizing principles of 20th-century intellectual activity, particularly in the realms of arts and letters.

According to Santayana, American intellectual life was split in two. “One-half of the American mind,” he asserted, the part that was “not occupied intensely in practical affairs,” had remained “becalmed,” floating “gently in the backwater” of American life — prim, polite, refined, and irrelevant. Meanwhile, the other half of the mind — the part concerned with material innovation — “was leaping down a sort of Niagara Rapids,” surging ahead of the entire world “in invention



George Santayana

“Although Americans . . . usually say that thought is for the sake of action, it has evidently been in these high moments, when action became incandescent in thought, that they have been most truly alive, intensively most active, and although doing nothing, have found at last that their existence was worth while.”

—from *Character and Opinion in the United States* (1934)

and industry and social organization.” The division was between what was inherited and what was native born, between the legacy of Europe and the immediacy of America — or, in Santayana’s words, between “the beliefs and standards of the fathers” and “the instincts, practices, and discoveries of the younger generation.” The division could be neatly symbolized in architectural terms: The former resembled a colonial mansion, the latter a modern skyscraper. “The American Will inhabits the skyscraper,” he continued, while “the American Intellect inhabits the colonial mansion. . . . The one is all aggressive enterprise, the other is all genteel tradition.” Each side needed, but lacked, the corrective of the other, and so both were diminished. The realm of ideas was so unsatisfactory in America because it was not nourished by the vital streams of the nation’s life.

Santayana’s brilliant analysis was further elaborated and pop-

ularized by literary critic Van Wyck Brooks in *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915). For Brooks, the American mind was riven between highbrows and lowbrows, transcendent theory and “catchpenny realities,” “academic pedantry and pavement slang,” the pipe dreams of professors and the banal rhetoric of a William Jennings Bryan. The literary highbrows issued works of fastidious refinement and aloofness that were too prissy to have any salutary influence on the coarse and unkempt lowbrows. Yet the lowbrow culture, for all its vitality, was too vulgar and business-oriented to accommodate serious criticism or disinterested reflection. Between the two, Brooks lamented, “there is no community, no genial middle ground.”

Like Santayana, Brooks blamed this state of affairs on the early influence of Puritanism, less because of its specific tenets than because it forced upon early America an elaborate imported theology that was too arcane to address the real problems of men and women struggling to build a civilization in the wilderness. As a consequence, a parallel track of Yankee practicality developed, a streetwise mindset that valued skill in tinkering and shrewdness in business, and that would have nothing to do with the theological track issuing from Calvinism or other sources. The sets of issues thereby created were separated into two distinct currents in the American mind. The highbrow current of piety ran from Jonathan Edwards in the 18th century through the classic American writers of the 19th century, and led to the “final unreality” of most of what passed for official high culture in Brooks’s day. The lowbrow current of “catchpenny opportunism” found expression in the cracker-barrel maxims of Ben Franklin, the folksy tales of A. B. Longstreet and other American humorists, and finally in the vulgar and jocular atmosphere of the era’s business life.

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Despite certain differences of emphasis, both Santayana and Brooks were driving at the same point: Americans had a disordered relationship to the realm of ideas, treating ideas as entirely abstract and ethereal, rather than as useful instruments for making sense of practical experience. The analysis struck a resonant note with intellectuals of the early 20th century. “A philosophy is not genuine,” Santayana remarked near the beginning of the “genteel tradition” lecture, “unless it inspires and expresses the life of those who cherish it”—the very things that the “hereditary philosophy” of America had signally failed to do. With those words, Santayana captured the spirit of what was to come: Opposition to the genteel tradition in American art and expression swelled into a generational rallying cry and set the tone for much of the century’s art and thought.

The rise of pragmatism—the school of thought so often touted as America’s chief contribution to philosophy—was a response to the same perceived philosophical inadequacy, and, as such, an effort to make ideas useful once again. Pragmatists asserted that ideas were most vital and

valuable when they were understood as tools for adaptive living or blueprints for action, and when their truth or falsehood was judged not by arid deductive reasoning but by the real-world consequences that ensued from them. “What difference would it practically make to any one,” asked philosopher William James in *Pragmatism* (1907), “if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then . . . all dispute is idle.” James (a colleague of Santayana’s at Harvard) sought to banish unprofitable metaphysical pursuits and bring the ordering principle of utility, and the empirical discipline of the natural sciences, to the notoriously misty and self-referential enterprise of philosophy. Anti-abstractionism and antiformalism became the defining marks of a whole generation’s worth of fresh contributions to American thought, from the 1880s to the 1920s, ranging from the sociologically informed jurisprudence of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. to the economic contextualism of historian Charles Beard and social critic Thorstein Veblen and the pragmatic experimentalism of John Dewey.

The bottom-line bluntness of James’s question—and answer—showed the influence of Darwinian biological science upon pragmatism, and how compatible both were with certain ingrained patterns of American thinking. Human cognition was to be understood as an adaptive tool in the struggle for evolutionary survival, like the wings of a bird or the claws of a cat, and ideas themselves were compared to

species, whose viability can be evaluated only by testing their ability to survive in action. Thus, intellectual life was a ceaseless flow of challenges and adaptations, with absolutes nowhere in sight. Equally notable, however, was James’s willingness to talk frankly in the language of low-brows—to evaluate ideas in terms of their “cash value” and

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their ability to produce fruitful outcomes. Although pragmatism is nearly always depicted as a radical departure, it did nothing, in fact, to challenge the contention that ideas matter only insofar as they have a demonstrable practical use.

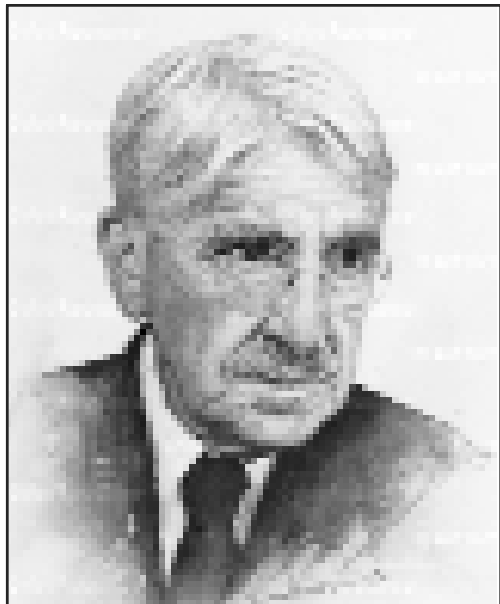
The Progressive movement of the early 20th century became, at least in part, a political expression of the pragmatist outlook. It provided an environment in which ideas were esteemed to the degree that they could be generated and put into action by a vigorously activist government for purposes of social, political, and economic reform. Progressivism was an effort to institutionalize the usefulness of ideas, in the name of preserving the workings of democracy against the corruption threatened by the rise of industrial capitalism. In the Progressive vision, as articulated by thinkers such as Herbert Croly, Walter Weyl, and John Dewey, an army of middle-class specialists, trained in the “science” of governance by the burgeoning new universities and municipal research bureaus, could run the apparatus of government, where they would use ideas as blueprints for social reform and the protection and cultivation of the public interest. The experts would be disinterested arbiters, bound by the logic of science and the rational autonomy

of professional organizations rather than by the vagaries of economic self-interest or power politics. Staffed with such workers, government would in time come to play the same flexible and organic role in the life of the nation that the mind plays in the life of an individual, adapting and reformulating its policies and initiatives in response to shifting circumstances.

A dispensation of this sort would seem to elevate ideas to a high level indeed, by making them essential partners in democratic governance. Yet the fact remains that ideas were handmaidens rather than equal partners in the arrangement, because they were bound to the practical logic of purposive activity and dedicated to the triumph, in Walter Lippmann's 1914 formulation, of "mastery" over "drift." In short, ideas had to deliver the goods. As with pragmatism, ideas had no value independent of their practical use. Thus, rather than assert the independent importance of ideas, pragmatism and progressivism actually codified their subordination. And in downplaying the "ideal" aspect of ideas, pragmatism also downplayed their value as points of friction with reality that enable us to stand in judgment of existing arrangements and recall us to higher purposes—in a word, that *inspire* us.



In the face of all this evidence, can one seriously entertain the opposite side of the Eriksonian paradox—that ideas have played a *commanding* role in American history? Indeed, one can, for the idea of America itself has remained powerful and alluring and multifaceted. If we do not readily perceive the pervasiveness of ideas in American history, it is for the same reason that deep-sea fish do not perceive the existence of water. Ideas provide the very medium within which American life is conducted. From the start, the nation's history has been weighted with a sense of great destiny and large meaning, of visions found not on the fringes of the story but at its very core, actively shaping the minds of those who make the history and those who write about it.



John Dewey

"The great scientific revolution is still to come. It will ensue when men collectively and cooperatively organize their knowledge for application to achieve and make secure social values; when they systematically use scientific procedures for the control of human relationships and the direction of the social effects of our vast technological machinery."

—from *Philosophy and Civilization* (1931)

One cannot tell the story without reference to the visions.

Talk about “the idea of America” is likely to be dismissed these days as a species of “American exceptionalism.” But invoking that familiar catchphrase simply fails to do justice to the matter. The concept of America has always carried large, exceptional meanings. It even had a place in the European imagination long before Columbus. From Homer and Hesiod, who located a blessed land beyond the setting sun, to Thomas More and his Utopia, to English Puritans seeking Zion, to Swedish prairie homesteaders and Scotch-Irish hardscrabble farmers and Polish and Italian peasants who made the transatlantic voyage west in search of freedom and material promise, to Asian and Latin American immigrants who have thronged to these shores and borders in recent decades—for all of these, the mythic sense of a land of renewal, regeneration, and fresh possibility has remained remarkably deep and persistent.

Though almost everyone is convinced that America means *something*, there are disagreements—sometimes quite basic—about what that something is. For example, is the United States to be understood as a nation built upon the extension of European—and especially British—laws, institutions, and religious beliefs? Or is it more properly understood as a modern, Enlightenment-based, postethnic nation built on abstract principles such as universal individual rights rather than with bonds of shared tradition, race, history, conventions, and language? Or is it rather a transnational and multicultural “nation of nations,” in which diverse sub- or supranational sources of identity—race, class, gender, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual identity, and so forth—are what matter, and only a thin and minimal sense of national culture and obligation is required? Or is it something else again?

Each of those propositions suggests, in its own way, that American history has a distinctive meaning. Americans of years past actively sought a broad, expansive, mythic way to define what distinguished the nation. Consider this short list of appellations America has accumulated over the years: City upon a Hill, Empire of Reason, *Novus Ordo Seclorum*, New Eden, Nation Dedicated to a Proposition, Melting Pot, Land of Opportunity, Nation of Immigrants, Nation of Nations, First New Nation, Unfinished Nation, and, most recently, Indispensable Nation. Other nations sometimes earn names of this sort, but they are not so numerous, and they lack the universalistic implications that complicate the sense of American exceptionalism.

Nor should one neglect the religious dimension of Americans’ self-understanding, which continues to be powerfully present, even in the minds of the nonreligious. The notion that America is a nation chosen by God, a New Israel destined for a providential mission of world redemption, has been a near-constant element of the national experience. The Puritan settlers in Massachusetts Bay’s “city upon a hill” had a strong sense of historical accountability and saw themselves as the collective bearers of a world-historical destiny. That same persisting conviction can be found in the rhetoric of the American Revolution, in the vision of Manifest Destiny, in the crusading sentiments of Civil War intellectuals, in the benevolent imperialism of fin-de-siècle apostles of Christian civilization, and in the fervent speeches of President Woodrow Wilson during World War I.

Few presidents after Wilson cared to make a direct appeal to Americans' sense of chosenness by God as a justification for foreign policy, and the disastrous intervention in Vietnam provided an especially severe chastening of such ambitions. But Wilson's belief in America's larger moral responsibility—particularly its open-ended obligation to uphold human rights, defend democracy, and impart American-style institutions, technologies, and values to the rest of the world—did not vanish with him. Indeed, by the time of the second American war against Iraq, that aspect of Wilson's legacy had become the preferred position even of American conservatives, and in the oratory of George W. Bush, arguably the most evangelical president in modern American history, the legacy's quasi-religious dimension seemed to have survived intact. "The advance of freedom is more than an interest we pursue," the president declared last May. "It is a calling we follow. Our country was created in the name and cause of freedom. And if the self-evident truths of our founding are true for us, they are true for all."

To be sure, other strains of American thought have operated, including a sober realist tradition grounded in John Quincy Adams's famous assertion that the United States does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy. There has been a reflexive, if shallow, reluctance in many quarters to "impose our values" on the rest of the world, although even in the protests of the critics it's implicit that the temptation and the power to do so are somehow uniquely American. There's a counterstrain, too, represented by the radical political views of the influential linguist Noam Chomsky, that envisions the United States as a uniquely *pernicious* force in human history, unexcelled in its guilt rather than its virtue. One could say that this is American exceptionalism with a vengeance—but exceptionalism nonetheless.

All of which goes to show how difficult it has been for Americans, and others, to think of the United States as "just another nation." The *idea* of America, and of its national destiny, clings as tenaciously as ever to the nation's self-consciousness, and if only by virtue of the influence of this one large idea, the second half of the Eriksonian paradox would seem to hold. That many Americans have believed steadily in their nation's special mission is a fact of American history. In the 20th century it became a fact of world history, and by the early years of the 21st, it had almost come to seem a pattern for universal emulation.



How and when did this overwhelming sense of America as an idea take hold? Part of the answer can surely be found in the way the country has managed its changing ethnic and racial makeup. For much of the nation's history, the primacy of English-speaking Anglo-Saxon Protestants was a reality to which immigrants and other minorities were expected to accommodate themselves. But by the beginning of the 20th century, that primacy had begun to weaken rapidly (by now it is largely gone). When commonalities of race, religion, ethnicity, history, and even language were eroded, they ceased being a basis for the cohesiveness of the nation, and abstract ideas moved in to take their

place. America came to be defined increasingly in terms of the large ideas for which it stands—such as liberty, equality, and economic opportunity—rather than in terms of the history, geography, religion, customs, or culture that most Americans had shared to that point.

Hence the rise in the 20th century of concepts such as “pluralism” and “multiculturalism,” which had played no part in the thinking of the nation’s founders. Pluralism proposes that the national culture of the United States ought to be able to make room for robust and independent subcultures, usually based on race, ethnicity, religion, or country of origin—and often on all four

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at once. The philosopher Horace Kallen, a German-Jewish immigrant and chief proponent of the concept of “cultural pluralism,” asserted that American culture in the 1920s was best understood as a symphony orchestra, whose musical richness was enhanced precisely by the tonal distinctiveness of

each of its members. The assimilationist ideal of a “melting pot” would, he believed, destroy that symphonic richness and substitute for it a bland unison. Of course there was a need for some kind of national culture, just as there was a need for a national government. But Kallen and other pluralists assumed that the national culture could be thin and limited in character, allowing the depth and richness of more particular affiliations to be preserved.

Pluralism proved surprisingly compatible with American patterns of thought and was embraced in schools and in public oratory. Perhaps the tension between particularistic and national identities bore some similarity to the tension between state and national identities that was built into the Constitution’s federal system. But pluralism has its limitations. A delicate concept, poised between particularism and cosmopolitanism, it partakes of both while wholly embracing neither. Some of the chief problems with pluralism have been passed along, and augmented, in the even more elusive idea of “multiculturalism,” which has come to mean almost anything one wants it to, from taking a generous view of ethnic foods and customs to believing in the inviolable separateness of the various subcultures that make up modern America. Among intellectuals, that latter form of multiculturalism has been an important expression of the mood of post-modernism, with its fondness for the politics of identity (based on attributes such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation) and its programmatic suspicion of all overarching generalizations (except those occurring within certain approved groups). Because it offers no principle of national commonality in whose name disparate groups can be enjoined to cooperate, multiculturalism has become a recipe for the destructive factionalization the politics of identity can induce in the political and social order.

But even in its exaggerations, multiculturalism has raised useful questions that pluralism largely evaded: How does one simultaneously protect both the *distinctiveness* of racial and ethnic groups and their *membership*,

both collectively and individually, in the polity? How much diversity can America stand and still maintain its cohesiveness as a nation? How much of a uniform national culture does American society really *need*? And what will be the source of that uniformity? The last two of these questions have found their way into policy debates over immigration and education, two areas of contention where platitudes about “celebrating diversity” inevitably come up against the hard fact that there does seem to be a core of Americanness to which all immigrants and children must be trained if we are to have reliably loyal and competent citizens. The quest to define America is by no means concluded—and the task is far more than an academic exercise. If America is to be presented as an idea or a set of ideas, we had better make sure they’re the right ones.



Far from being devoid of ideas, then, it would appear that the American scene is virtually awash in them. But that fact often goes unacknowledged, or is not given its rightful weight by Americans themselves, who continue to fancy themselves a largely practical people and still tend to see their way of life as the unforced fruit of certain self-evident and universal truths, a system that entails merely doing—in the words of Annie Oakley—what comes naturally. Hence, the Eriksonian paradox may, in the end, be more apparent than real, born less of practical-mindedness than of unreflectiveness.

Such a condition is very different from anti-intellectualism. But it is not unrelated to the peculiarly unfruitful relationship between American ideas and American life that the generation of Santayana and Brooks, and the generation of Emerson before them, identified and lamented—a condition remarkably resistant to correction. One can be utterly besotted with ideas, yet fail all the more readily to make use of them in the right way. In some respects, the emergence in the 20th century of an entire class of individuals who deal professionally in ideas—and the more ideas the merrier—has only deepened the problem. Thinking, like lovemaking, changes its character dramatically when it’s turned over to the professionals. And ideas, like currency, may be more readily devalued by abundance than by scarcity.

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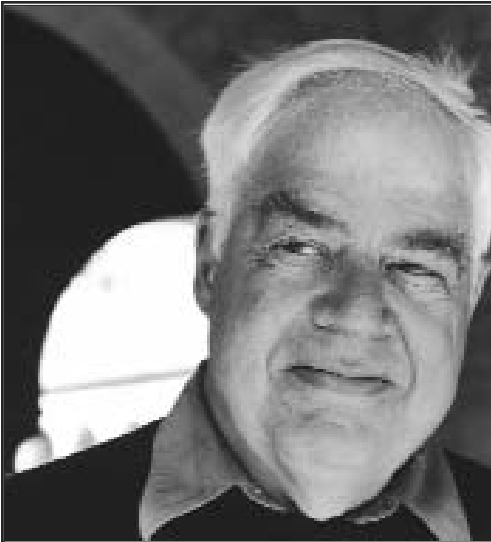
Perhaps, then, it would be helpful to step back a bit and attempt to identify some of the chief clusters of ideas that formed the general American outlook in the century just past. Three subjects in particular—science, culture, and liberalism—seem to have been especially influential in setting the horizons of American thought, organizing the inquiry, and propelling the discussion. Like magnets set down among iron filings, these topics established the field of forces that shaped much of the debate.

As it had been for much of the 19th century, science in the 20th century continued to be taken as a model by any field of human endeavor that made a claim to thoroughness, accuracy, reliability, and disinterested truth. There was a comparative purity about the scientific ideal, not to mention a more impressive record of achievement than that of its competition. Indeed, the steady advance of scientific knowledge and technological innovation throughout the 20th century—the perfecting of air and space travel, the unlocking of the atom, the discovery of the DNA double helix, the mapping of the human genome, and countless other fabulous accomplishments—has to be accounted one of the great success stories of human history.

That success inevitably gave rise to attempts to apply scientific methods to the solution of the full range of human problems, and no thinker of the 20th century more consistently epitomized the effort than John Dewey, whose links to pragmatism and progressivism make him a symbol of much of the century’s intellectual distinction. His astonishingly wide-ranging oeuvre, embracing subjects from aesthetics to education to epistemology to politics to metaphysics, was imbued with reverence for the tentative, provisional, experimental methods of science, which he regarded as both the highest expression of human intellectual striving and a model for democratic discourse. For Dewey, who described his own intellectual journey as “from absolutism to experimentalism,” most of the questions that had preoccupied Western philosophers in the past were no

longer worthy of attention. What was needed was a fresh approach, building not upon inherited moral formulations or other forms of idealism but upon careful attention to experience and to the supple, nondualistic interplay of mind and world. Science was the most refined elaboration of that effort. And science, because it was inherently transparent and non-authoritarian, and therefore theoretically accessible to all, improved the prospects for participatory democracy by making scientific knowledge an equal opportunity good rather than a possession of priests and elites.

The social sciences came to be dominated by schools of thought that set out to be as rigorously scientific as possible, which often meant redefining the animating questions of a field—or even defining the old questions



Richard Rorty

“Both humanists and the public hanker after rationality in the first, stronger sense of the term: a sense which is associated with objective truth, correspondence to reality, and method, and criteria. We should not try to satisfy this hankering, but rather try to eradicate it.”

—from *“Science as Solidarity”* (1987)

out of existence. For example, behaviorism in the field of experimental psychology and behavioralism in the field of political science decreed that only observable and measurable external behaviors were to be studied, and that the murky realms of introspection and values were to be eschewed entirely. Growing knowledge of genetics has fueled the rise of various forms of sociobiology, which seek to ground social thought in the physiological bases of human behavior.

The rallying cry of these and other academic disciplines was “to push back the frontiers of knowledge”; to do so credibly, they had to examine problems that were susceptible of being formulated in precise—and preferably quantitative—terms. Even the humanities, where the “frontiers of knowledge” metaphor has always been highly inappropriate, were affected by this development. Thus, in the spirit of Dewey, and in the wake of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell, A. J. Ayer, and Rudolph Carnap, various forms of analytic philosophy sought to emulate the rigorous spirit of science and, in the process, often elected to dispose of philosophers’ perennial questions—the existence of God, for example, or the meaning of good and evil—by dismissing them as mere byproducts of linguistic confusion.

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ic philosophy sought to emulate the rigorous spirit of science and, in the process, often elected to dispose of philosophers’ perennial questions—the existence of God, for example, or the meaning of good and evil—by dismissing them as mere byproducts of linguistic confusion.

A culmination of sorts for this triumphalist strain of scientific thought came in the lavishly ambitious 1998 book *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, by the distinguished entomologist Edward O. Wilson, a pioneer of the sociobiology movement. In *Consilience*, Wilson proposed that a common body of inherent principles underlies the entire human endeavor. The Enlightenment thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries had it generally right, he believed: We live in a lawful, perfectible material world in which knowledge is unified across all the great branches of learning. Once all fields of inquiry are brought under the cope of science, we’ll be able to explain everything in the world through an understanding and application of a finite number of natural laws.

Needless to say, the reception given Wilson was not universally warm. The poet, novelist, and social critic Wendell Berry wrote a scathing rebuttal called *Life Is a Miracle* (2000), and such influential figures as the philosopher Richard Rorty brushed *Consilience* aside with faint contempt. Even many of Wilson’s fellow scientists found in it an element of overreaching. The critical response showed that even the prestige of science has its limits in American intellectual life.

Indeed, there has been a reaction in recent years against the hegemony of science. One reason for the reaction is a growing anxiety about some scientists’ alarming—and increasingly conspicuous—lack of social and moral responsibility. When atomic physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer famously described the development of sophisticated nuclear weapons as a “technically sweet” pursuit, in which one first invents and then decides what to do with the invention, he

seemed to many Americans to epitomize the problem with science. Compared with the fevered pronouncements of some of today's biotechnological wizards, Oppenheimer's statement seems a paragon of responsible self-awareness. Small wonder that the general public is anxious, particularly given the paucity of evidence that the scientific community recognizes any moral limits within which it's willing to constrain itself. Moreover, the sprawling organizational demands and staggering expense of modern science have given it a vastly more corporate, bureaucratic, and results-oriented character, depriving the work of much of the moral and intellectual heroism it once had.

The hegemony of science as a worldview has been challenged as well, albeit indirectly, by the continued flourishing of religious faith and practice in America. Of all the surprises the 20th century had in store, none was greater than the amazing persistence of piety. It was not what the sociologists had expected. To be sure, there was a renegotiation of the terms of separation between religion and public life, mostly favoring the strict separation of the two. But the grand predictions of secularization theorists that, in becoming modern, America would also become secular have not been borne out. The precise relationship between religion and science is not easily defined, and the two are by no means mutually exclusive. But at the very least, the persistence of religion shows the profound inadequacies of science, which can tell us a great deal about how the world works, but very little about how to live in it.

A third challenge to the dominant position of science attacked its claim to epistemological superiority and purity. Science was to be understood, instead, as something inherently social and political, the work of particular communities of inquiry (i.e., accredited groups of scientists), rather than as a heroic endeavor to disclose the objective truth about nature. In 1962, Thomas Kuhn proposed that new theories are accepted by a community of scientists not because they meet objective criteria of truth but because of the way those theories address the concerns of that particular community. Others took this position further. In contending that the "foundations" sought by "objective" science were illusory, Richard Rorty argued that the work of science is really no different from the work of any other intellectual community. There's nothing special about scientific knowledge. It stands in a continuum with all other forms of knowledge, in being made "true" not by objective verification but by the assent of interested parties. So much for the disinterested heroism of science.



If the great project of modern science was the conquest of nature, the concept of "culture" might be said to have pursued that conquest too, though by quite different means. No word in the language was made to do more heavy lifting in the 20th century than *culture*. In the 19th century, culture had referred both to a process of intellectual and moral cultivation and to a body of distinguished works of arts and letters produced by and for elite groups. Matthew Arnold considered culture the counter to commerce, and a morally formative substitute for the lost verities of religion. As such, culture had a highly prescriptive element: It was the tutor

of the human soul. Culture made one better.

The meaning of culture shifted dramatically, however, with the emergence of cultural anthropology early in the 20th century. It came to mean life simply as it was, not life as it should be or might become. Columbia University anthropologist Franz Boas and his many talented students, including Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, developed an approach to culture that involved the sympathetic, descriptive, nonjudgmental study of comparative social structures, with a strong presumption that every functioning culture has its own validity. Cultural anthropology promoted a sense of the plasticity of human nature and of the extent to which norms thought to be grounded in nature—the respective social roles of men and women, for example—were instead products of culture.

Thus, much of what we had thought of as natural was actually culturally conditioned (or, in the more recent usage, socially constructed). Such an idea, in optimistic and reform-minded America, tended to be used for progressive purposes, and cultural anthropology served as yet another tool in the rebellion against Victorianism. The field had perhaps its most powerful effects in the study of gender, sexuality, and family structure, underwriting a wholesale reconceptualization of those three subjects. The very use of the term *gender*, which was redefined in the 1970s to mark a distinction between the cultural and social characteristics ascribed to the sexes and those that are strictly biological, is an indication of the central role played by the concept of culture. Feminists had long seen biological determinism as their sworn enemy, and “culture” gave them a way of defeating it, by understanding human identity and relations as being more malleable than the concept of nature would permit.

The anthropological notion of culture enjoyed enormous influence, both scholarly and popular, and supported a certain vague but amiable relativism that became an essential marker of good intellectual breeding in the 20th-century West. But by the end of the century, the word *culture*, fraying from overuse, was in danger of turning into an empty signifier. In what sense could one speak of the culture of the United States, the culture of Microsoft, the culture of NASCAR, the culture of Harvard, the culture of PS 148, and the culture of poverty with any confidence that one was using a meaningful term? The cultures that make up American multiculturalism are clearly not all coherent or genuine cultures in the same sense as the cultures found in “native” countries. And a taboo in America against judging other cultures began to seem ridiculous in the context of grotesque violations of human rights and such practices as clitoridectomy and suttee in some parts of the non-Western world.

Thus did liberal (and Judeo-Christian) universalist notions begin to return to the mainstream of Western discourse, a development that one saw emerging with great strength and clarity in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on America and the subsequent debates about the Western response to Islamist terrorism. In addition, the newly vitalized biological disciplines—sociobiology, evolutionary psychology, and other emerging fields brimming with energy and confidence—mounted a fresh challenge to the predom-

inance of culture as an explanatory tool. The battle between nature and nurture was being refought, and, as the century turned, culture was steadily losing ground.



In restoring the respectability of universal ideas, the events of 9/11 may also have had the effect of revitalizing liberalism, by presenting us with a vivid example of the very poisons that classical liberalism was devised to counter. But this could turn out to be a mixed blessing. The liberalism dominant in the United States at the end of the 20th century had its genuine vulnerabilities, deficiencies that were not likely to be addressed merely by invoking the negative example of murderous religious fanaticism.

By century's end, liberalism had become essentially a rights-based political philosophy that subordinated considerations of the common good to the sovereign liberty of rights-bearing individuals and exalted the choice-making capacity of an autonomous self over all else, including commitments to family, community, nation, and religion. The older, progressive liberalism of Herbert Croly had emphasized the cultivation of social solidarity and national consciousness and regarded the individualistic tendencies of liberalism as

a potential threat to other valuable goals. Not so the later liberalism, which proposed that individual rights trump all other considerations.

The shift that occurred in liberal thought led to its own excesses, including a corrosive tendency to reduce all questions of law and social

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policy to simplistic “rights talk,” and gave new plausibility to conservative alternatives, as represented by the political theory of philosophers Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, the historically informed social criticism of Richard Weaver and Russell Kirk, and the work of sociologist Robert Nisbet. In addition, the hypertrophy of rights talk precipitated a countermovement within liberalism called communitarianism, which incorporated conservative elements and established itself as a fresh alternative by the end of the 20th century.

Political scientist Michael J. Sandel, one of the most influential liberal-communitarian critics of rights-based liberalism, argued against what he called “the procedural republic”—a liberalism that makes government the referee of fair procedure and guarantor of individual rights, yet insists that government be scrupulously neutral when it comes to passing judgment upon the substantive ends that individuals elect to pursue. This liberal-neutralist philosophy, Sandel asserted, was inadequate to the needs of a democratic republic because it failed to inculcate the civic virtues and qualities of character necessary to sustain liberty and self-gov-

ernance. In its place, he invoked the republican tradition of early American politics, which exalted participation in the civic life of the res publica—through specific institutions and practices to which contemporary rights-based liberalism gave too little attention.

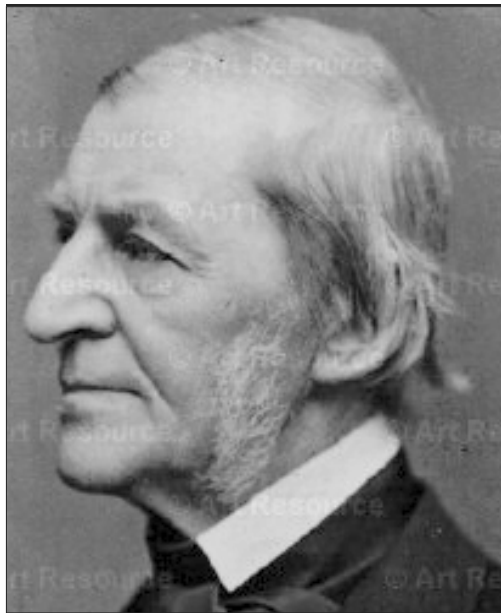
Communitarianism thus addressed a central problem of late-20th-century thought: the inability to attend equally to both the liberal ideal of individual freedom and the various contexts—social, historical, cultural, linguistic, among others—in which the self is formed and embedded. The historian Thomas Haskell perceptively noted that, at century’s end, academic thought seemed simultaneously and equally committed, on the one hand, to rights talk and the inviolability of individual liberty and, on the other, to the thoroughgoing cultural “situatedness” and historicity of the self. Given such confusion, the public mind could count on little help from the ranks of political theorists.



The great underlying trend of intellectual life in the past century was the ascendancy of the academy.

The modern research university has by now absorbed into itself an astonishingly large part of the nation’s intellectual life, with consequences yet to be fully grasped. One should acknowledge that, in many respects, this new institutional reality has been a good thing. The academy provided a haven for free and disinterested intellectual inquiry in a commercial society and gave those who work with ideas a place to make a decent living while plying their trade. The division of knowledge into academic disciplines and distinct communities of interpretation made for greater rigor and clarity in the production of studies in nearly all fields. Whatever its failings, the academy supplied a highly serviceable context for intellectual activity of a high order.

Yet there were costs, and they stemmed largely from



Ralph Waldo Emerson

“The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. . . . [T]his confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs, by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar. We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe.”

—from “The American Scholar” (1837)

success, not failure. The modern university still proceeded from Enlightenment assumptions about the nature of knowledge—that it can be objective, universal, progressive, and cumulative. Those assumptions worked fairly well for the natural sciences, moderately well for the hard social sciences, and not at all for the softer social sciences and the humanities, which found themselves in deepening crisis. The logic of specialization contributed to the problem by dividing inquiry into smaller and smaller subunits, each with its indigenous jargon and distinct community of interpretation, and each with little to communicate to the world beyond itself.

But this understates the extent of the problem. The abandonment of the general educated reader as a cultural ideal over the course of the century was, in fact, an intellectual, cultural, and moral calamity, and a betrayal of the nation's democratic hopes. The situation at century's end bore an uncomfortably close resemblance to what Santayana and Brooks had described nearly 100 years before. The split in the American mind still existed (as sharply etched as ever), and it still divided highbrows and lowbrows. But the highbrows became ponderous, impenetrable, professionalized academics, whose air castles of thought were surrounded by moats of jargon designed to keep the dabblers and dilettantes at bay. They were the true legatees and custodians of the genteel tradition, despite the disappearance of almost every trace of Victorian reticence and belletristic pretension. The lowbrows, meanwhile, were the manufacturers and purveyors of commercial mass entertainment, with debased aesthetic standards and a coarsening effect on the populace. Instead of being elevated by contributions from on high, political discourse was debased by the domination of the low.

As a result, the vital center of ideas still stood largely unoccupied. The leavening effect the two halves of the American cultural schism might have had upon one another—and occasionally did have—was hard to find, and harder to sustain. Those few hardy souls who were able to cross over—a Leonard Bernstein in music, a Tom Wolfe in literature, a David McCullough in history, an Andrew Wyeth in painting—won the scorn (often masking envy) of the illuminati and were dismissed as middlebrows, popularizers, and sellouts. Yet it is precisely in that vibrant democratic middle ground, where ideas drawn from elite and popular cultures mix and mingle, and where the friction between idea and lived reality is most powerful and productive, that the genius of American culture has been found in the past. Such was the hope of Emerson and Lincoln, whose uncommon eloquence sprang from the commonest of roots. Such was the promise of jazz, whose tangled and improvised mongrel beauty became the very image of modern America. The bifurcation of American culture, intensified by the heavy hand of the academy and the numbing effects of mass culture, has made it no easier for peculiarly American ideas of this sort, possessing both intellectual sophistication and wide democratic scope, to flourish and find a receptive audience. But an American artist or thinker can have no worthier goal than to reach that audience. □

THE PERIODICAL OBSERVER

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

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Economics, Labor & Business	92		& Environment
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When Worldviews Collide

A Survey of Recent Articles

During the past year, as the U.S. push for war in Iraq sent Western Europeans' favorable opinion of the United States into free fall, there was one think piece about the transatlantic divide that had chattering-class tongues wagging on both sides of the ocean—and it was written by an American, Robert Kagan. “On major strategic and international questions today, Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus,” asserted Kagan, a senior associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. His lengthy essay, “Power and Weakness,” was published first in *Policy Review* (June–July 2002), then as a book, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (2003).

“Europe is turning away from power,” preferring to dwell in “a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation,” Kagan argued. “It is entering a posthistorical paradise of peace and relative prosperity, the realization of Kant’s ‘Perpetual Peace.’” The United States, by contrast, continues to exercise power in “the anarchic Hobbesian world where international laws and rules are unreliable and where true security and the defense and promotion of a liberal order still depend on the possession and use of military might.” As Europe seeks to export its “perpetual peace” to the rest of the world, America’s power—which has made Europe’s “new Kantian order” possible, and now sus-

tains it—stands in the way.

In the past, when the United States was weak and the European great powers were strong, their strategic perspectives were reversed, Kagan contended. Now, the United States “behaves as powerful nations do,” while the European nations employ “the strategies of weakness.” Europeans’ new outlook, with its emphasis on diplomacy, commerce, international law, and multilateralism, reflects “a conscious rejection of the European past, a rejection of the evils of European *machtspolitik*.”

Hailing Kagan’s thesis in *Commentary* (June 2003), British political analyst David Pryce-Jones asserts that it “outlines the shape of the future. . . . Unable or unwilling to recapture greatness through power, Europe has no choice but to resort to the tools of the weak.”

But some strong critiques of Kagan’s provocative thesis have begun to appear as well. Is Europe really “weak,” just because it spends less than America on defense? “Europe is not planning to assert military hegemony over the world, nor is it expecting an American military invasion,” observes David P. Calleo, a professor of European studies at Johns Hopkins University’s Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, in *The National Interest* (Summer 2003). Europe’s smaller military budget, he writes, may simply reflect more limited aims and greater fiscal prudence. Even at that, Britain, France, and Germany spent a

combined total of about \$90 billion on national defense last year—more than Russia, China, or Japan. Perhaps the United States, at \$350 billion, is spending too much?

“Military clout is not the appropriate way to measure the European contribution” to America (or to NATO), argues Richard Rosecrance, a political scientist at the University of California, Los Angeles, also writing in *The National Interest* (Summer 2003). “Without the [financial] help of Europe and Japan, the United States could not have undertaken or sustained its frequent international military operations.” Since the late 1960s, Europe has repeatedly come to the financial rescue of the United States, allowing it “to maintain an essentially unbalanced economy while acting as the world’s gendarme.” Both Europe and America are powerful, Rosecrance maintains, but they “act in different spheres—and they desperately need each other.”

In *The New Republic* (June 16, 2003), meanwhile, economist Philippe Legrain musters statistics to show that Europe is the economic equal of the United States—and is soon likely to outpace it. And columnist Andrew Sullivan notes, without pleasure, that the European Union’s ongoing constitutional reform could soon make it a formidable political competitor.

The European preference for shaping the world through “soft power” (economic influence, diplomacy, and culture) may indeed require U.S. “hard power” to keep “the world’s bullies and gangsters” in line, Calleo acknowledges. But even a superpower’s military might is of limited use against an enemy armed with nuclear weapons, and the Bush administration’s aggressive campaign against the spread of weapons of mass destruction “runs a high risk of being self-defeating. Relatively weak countries, targeted as ‘rogue states’ and repeatedly threatened with military attack, are naturally desperate to achieve the deterrence that only weapons of mass destruction can provide.”

Writing in *The New York Review of Books* (Apr. 10, 2003), Tony Judt, director of the Remarque Institute at New York University, challenges the basic assumptions behind Kagan’s analysis. “Kagan repeatedly labels ‘Hobbesian’ the international anarchy that he invokes to justify America’s muscular unilateralism,” says Judt. “But this is a crass misreading of

[Thomas] Hobbes’s position.” The 17th-century philosopher “argued that the very laws of nature that threaten to make men’s lives ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutal, and short’ require us to form a common authority for our separate and collective protection.” By analogy, Judt argues, states in a Hobbesian world “would come together out of their shared interest in security, relinquishing some autonomy and freedom in return for the benefits of a secure environment in which to pursue their separate concerns. This was the genuinely ‘Hobbesian’ solution devised by the American statesmen of an earlier generation, who built the international institutions that Kagan would now tear asunder.”

As for the Europeans’ supposed “Kantian paradise,” Judt continues, “Kagan has forgotten the very recent past, in which European infantrymen died on peacekeeping missions in Asia, Africa, and Europe while American generals forswore foreign ground was lest U.S. soldiers get killed. If Americans are from Mars, they rediscovered the martial virtues rather recently.”

Kagan’s contention that “weaker powers” historically seek to use international structures to constrain stronger powers is also “misleading,” Judt maintains. The United Nations and other contemporary international agencies “were the work of strong powers—notably the U.S. By universalizing and institutionalizing their own interests, great powers have a much better chance of convincing others to do their bidding, and can reduce the risk of provoking a ‘coalition of the unwilling’ against them.”

Since Kagan’s essay appeared a year ago, it has been “endlessly quoted in all European capitals,” observes British scholar Timothy Garton Ash in *The New Statesman* (June 16, 2003). He notes the irony: “So it’s not just that our fast food, films, fashion, and language are American. Even our debates about Europe itself are American-led.”

Whatever the outcome of the debate over geopolitical strategy, America’s influence in Europe remains immense. “To be European today,” writes Ash, who is director of the European Studies Centre at St. Antony’s College, Oxford, is “to be deeply intertwined with America—culturally, socially, economically, intellectually, politically.” This is so, he says, “whether we like it or not (and I do like it).”

Security vs. Liberty?

“Can We Be Secure and Free?” by Thomas F. Powers, in *The Public Interest* (Spring 2003), 1112 16th St., N.W., Ste. 140, Washington, D.C. 20036.

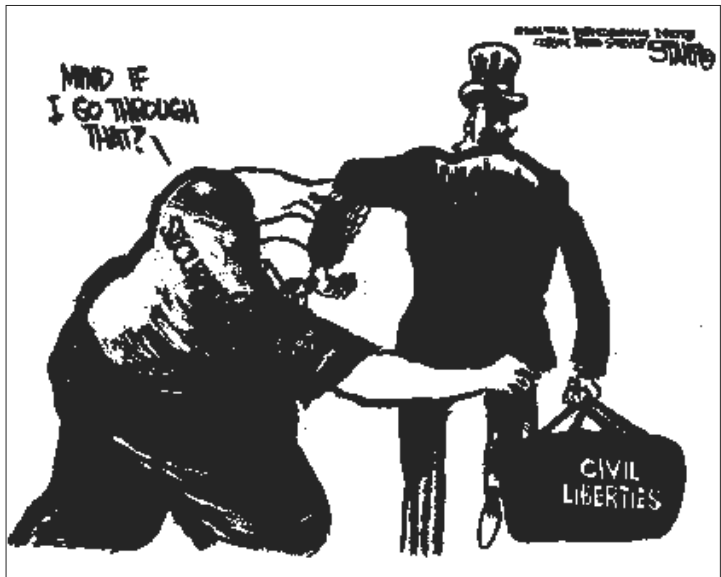
The expansion of police powers in America since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, has civil libertarians crying out about the loss of liberty—and conservatives invoking the need for security. But the debate has been wrongly framed and is needlessly divisive, argues Powers, a political scientist at the University of Minnesota, Duluth.

The American Civil Liberties Union and kindred groups have strongly criticized the Bush administration on a number of points including “extraordinary detention, the civil rights of noncitizens, government secrecy, and the treatment of terrorist captives outside the United States.” But most of the controversy has been about “due process” issues, Powers says. The biggest concern of civil liberties advocates is that the 2001 USA Patriot Act and other measures have made it easier for government agencies “to conduct surveillance, use wiretaps and searches, obtain access to personal records, and track and question designated groups,” such as Arab and Muslim non-citizens.

Change in these areas was inevitable, Powers writes. Terrorism, by bringing war to American soil, and by requiring local police forces to join the military in what amounts to war fighting, requires fresh thinking about civil liberties. But by pitting liberty and security against each other, Powers contends, “the current debate has exaggerated disagreement and launched a dialectic of mutual recrimination and mistrust, now elevated to the

level of ‘constitutional’ conflict.” The result is “a pointless game of blame-casting that reawakens the old partisan divisions of the Vietnam era.”

“Liberty” is not threatened only by abuses of the police and other state agents, and “security” is not threatened only by criminals and external enemies, Powers points out. As James Madison, John Locke, and Montesquieu understood, liberty and security are bound up together. “Every threat, from whatever source, is as much a threat to our liberty as it is to our securi-



ty.” To assume a basic conflict between the two is “to misunderstand the essential logic of liberal politics,” says Powers. “In a liberal republic, liberty presupposes security; the point of security is liberty.”

The current debate should be recast around the need to balance “one threat to liberty against other threats to liberty, one threat to security against other threats to security,” he says. That would not make the difficult choices involved easier, but “it would permit us to make them more clearly and without fearing that we are being either unprincipled or softheaded.”

How Labor Can Be Big Again

“Organizing Power: The Prospects for an American Labor Movement” by Margaret Levi,
in *Perspectives on Politics* (Mar. 2003), American Political Science Assn.,
1527 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036–1206.

Can organized labor recover its political mojo? “Big Labor” was once feared and courted by politicians because it represented more than 33 percent of the nation’s wage and salary workers. Today organized labor is often regarded as just another special-interest group, representing, Levi notes, “only 13.5 percent of all wage and salary workers” and “only nine percent of private-sector wage and salary workers.” (Unions had their highest absolute number of members, 20.2 million, in 1978; by 2001, that number had declined to 16.3 million.) Nonetheless, she is hopeful about the future of unions and believes that they are vital to democracy.

Labor needs “to become once again a social movement,” argues Levi, a political sci-

entist at the University of Washington. “In order for organized labor to play its critical role as a countervailing power within the American political system, there must be intensified organizing, internal democratization, increased electoral and lobbying clout, and social-movement unions willing to mobilize with others and, if necessary, on the streets.”

A study last year, commissioned by the AFL-CIO, found that there has been a surge of support for union representation since 1984, when no more than 35 percent of nonunionized workers wanted a union. Now, 50 percent do. To boost their rolls, Levi contends, unions must do more than try to improve members’ paychecks, benefits, and working conditions. They must also encourage members to get involved in

EXCERPT

Old-Time Ambiguity

Opinions of the founding generation were scattered all across the spectrum on the question of the assistance government could give religion. Consider the Baptists, the most ardent separationists in the Founding Era. Some Baptists in Massachusetts and Maryland actually favored selective state financial subsidies for churches; others, while disapproving financial support, encouraged the state to print and distribute bibles; Virginia Baptists opposed both measures but were happy to accept public accommodations for church services. Presbyterians were divided over state financial assistance to churches, as were political leaders in virtually every state. Statesmen like George Washington changed their minds on the issue. James Madison participated intermittently in public religious acts for 30 years, i.e., in issuing religious proclamations, which in the privacy of retirement he deplored. Jefferson permitted church services to be held in federal office buildings but was accused of hypocrisy for doing so.

Confronted by opinions so diverse and problematic, the best scholarship can be of only limited assistance in supplying the “correct” answer about the framers’ precise intentions regarding government assistance to religion—a painful conclusion for a supporter of the “jurisprudence of original intent.” Yet, according to a Massachusetts commentator in 1780, the meaning of the term “establishment of religion” was even then “prodigiously obscure.” If so, do today’s judges not deserve a degree of sympathy as they try to tease out the intentions of the drafters and ratifiers of the First Amendment?

—James H. Hutson, chief of the manuscript division at the Library of Congress,
and author of *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic* (1998),
in *Claremont Review of Books* (Spring 2003)

“larger issues of democratization (within the union and within the larger polity), social justice, and economic equality. . . . Members pay dues and strike but are also expected to mobilize on behalf of causes beyond their own.” Such “social-movement” unions, Levi maintains, “tend to be democratic and participatory.”

Since their election in 1995, AFL-CIO president John Sweeney and his “New Voices” colleagues have been shaking up the labor union bureaucracy, says Levi. “Redefining its program through action,” the AFL-CIO has gotten involved in campaigns against sweatshops and for “global

justice” and a “living wage.” About 80 cities and counties around the country have enacted “living wage” ordinances, obliging contractors to pay wages that are usually above the federal minimum.

Levi believes that the “fresh vitality” she detects in American unions has come none too soon. Unions “offer collective influence to those who lack individual clout in important political and economic domains,” and, for that reason, they’re “essential to a vigorous American democracy.” If unions “mobilize as a social movement,” she says, they’ll be better able to get that message across.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Germany and Japan—and Iraq

“Occupational Hazards” by Douglas Porch, in *The National Interest* (Summer 2003), 1615 L St., N.W., Ste. 1230, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Some proponents of preventive war in Iraq suggested that postwar nation-building after the war would be a snap. Look at how

the United States turned Germany and Japan into model democracies after World War II. But the task, in fact, wasn’t so easy



No cheering: Japanese officials oversee an American-backed election during the 1950s.

then, and it will be even harder in Iraq, argues Porch, a professor of national security affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California.

“The truth is that a full decade after World War II’s finale, many U.S. ‘nation-builders’ considered their efforts a *nearly complete failure*—and for good reason,” he writes. In surveys taken at the time, a majority of Germans said that their country’s “‘best time in recent history had been during the first years of the Nazis.’” Instead of gratitude and an enthusiastic embrace of democracy, U.S. reformers in Germany and Japan “encountered torpor, resentment, and resistance,” says Porch.

During the 1950s and 1960s, both the Germans and the Japanese overcame their resentment, and the two nations evolved into flourishing, peace-loving democracies. But that resulted less from Allied occupation policies, Porch says, than from various other factors, including “enlightened political leadership, ‘economic miracles’ spurred by the Marshall Plan in Europe and the Korean War in Japan, and the precedent, however frail, of functioning democratic government in both countries.” The Germans and the Japanese were talented, technologically advanced peoples, eager to put the devastating war behind them. “Above all, though, fear of the Soviets caused leaders in both countries, supported by their populations, to take shelter under the U.S. military umbrella.”

“Post-Saddam Iraq is a poor candidate to replicate the success of Japan and Germany,” Porch maintains. “Though once a relatively tolerant, pluralist society, Iraq has

become a fractured, impoverished country, its people susceptible to hysteria and fanaticism. They are historically difficult to mobilize behind a common national vision, and no Yoshida Shigeru or Konrad Adenauer can be expected to emerge from a ruling class that inclines toward demagoguery and corruption.” Despite the problem Iraq poses for the U.S., there’s no equivalent of the Soviet Union to induce Iraqis to welcome U.S. protection. And “as for prewar experiences of Iraqi democracy, there are none.”

When most U.S. forces came home after World War II, the task of running Germany and Japan was, in effect, “swiftly turned over to the locals” in each country, says Porch, “with the U.S. military retaining vague supervisory powers.” In Iraq, by contrast, “a large U.S. garrison” is likely to be necessary for “the foreseeable future,” inevitably arousing further resentment.

Learning from the mistakes of the de-nazification effort in Germany, the United States should let the Iraqis “carry out their own ‘de-Baathification lite,’ complete with war crimes trials of Saddam’s top henchmen.” Instead of conducting “an invasive campaign of democratization and cultural engineering,” U.S. nation-builders should aim “to ‘normalize’ Iraq fairly quickly by putting a responsible leadership cadre in place while retaining a supervisory role with enough soldiers to back it up,” thus preventing the country from sliding into chaos.

The U.S.-British reconstruction of Iraq will be “neither brief nor cheap,” Porch says, but, “with any luck,” it will succeed eventually, as reconstruction succeeded eventually in Germany and Japan.

UNdone

“Why the Security Council Failed” by Michael J. Glennon, in *Foreign Affairs* (May-June 2003), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

The dramatic rupture of the United Nations Security Council over Iraq earlier this year made evident that the grand dream of the UN’s founders—subjecting the use of force to the rule of law—had failed. But the fault lay not with the United States or France or other member nations, argues Glennon, a professor of international law at Tufts University’s Fletcher School. Rather,

it lay with underlying geopolitical forces “too strong for a legalist institution to withstand.”

Given the recent evolution of the international system, the Security Council’s failure was “largely inexorable,” Glennon says. Well before the debate over confronting Iraq, world power had shifted toward “a configuration that was simply in-

compatible with the way the UN was meant to function. It was the rise of American unipolarity—not the Iraq crisis—that, along with cultural clashes and different attitudes toward the use of force, gradually eroded the council’s credibility.”

In response to the emerging U.S. predominance, coalitions of competitors predictably formed. “Since the end of the Cold War,” Glennon writes, “the French, the Chinese, and the Russians have sought to return the world to a more balanced system.” As Hubert Vedrine, then France’s foreign minister, explained in 2001, “We have to keep defending our vital interests just as before; we can say no, alone, to anything that may be unacceptable.” U.S. secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld could not have said it better.

“States pursue security by pursuing power,” observes Glennon, and in doing that, they use the institutional tools available. For France, Russia, and China, the Security Council and their veto power were the tools at hand in the Iraq crisis. Had Washington been in their position, it probably would have done as they did. And, Glennon believes, had the three nations

found themselves in the position of the United States during the Iraq crisis, each of them would have “used the council—or threatened to ignore it—just as the United States did.”

No rational state today would imagine that the UN Charter protects its security, says Glennon. The UN Charter permits the use of force only in self-defense and only “if an armed attack occurs.” But the provision has been flagrantly violated so often since 1945 that it has been rendered inoperative. NATO’s humanitarian intervention in Kosovo in 1999 was as blatant a violation as the recent preventive war in Iraq. “The charter has gone the way of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the 1928 treaty by which every major country that would go on to fight in World War II solemnly committed itself not to resort to war as an instrument of national policy.”

If a new international framework is to be designed in the future, Glennon warns, it must reflect “the way states actually behave and the real forces to which they respond.” If it is built again on “imaginary truths that transcend politics,” such as the notion of the sovereign equality of states, it is doomed to failure.

America’s Blind Spot

“The Paradoxes of American Nationalism” by Minxin Pei, in *Foreign Policy* (May–June 2003), 1779 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Though Americans are among the most patriotic people on earth, they have a hard time acknowledging and dealing with the nationalism of others—a blind spot that can spell trouble for U.S. foreign policy, argues Pei, codirector of the China program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

“American nationalism is hidden in plain sight,” he observes, sustained chiefly by civic volunteerism rather than, as in authoritarian regimes, by the state, and all the more authentic and attractive for it. Even before the 2001 terrorist attacks, a survey showed that 72 percent of Americans were “very proud” of their nationality. That was less than the 80 percent of Mexicans, 81 percent of Egyptians, and

92 percent of Iranians who said they were “very proud” of theirs, but it was far more than the 49 percent of the British, 40 percent of the French, and 20 percent of the Dutch expressing national pride.

Americans do not regard their nationalism as nationalism at all, says Pei, because it is not based on notions of cultural or ethnic superiority. They view it, rather, as being founded on a set of universal political ideals that the rest of the world should gladly embrace. But, as Pei notes, even in Western Europe, “another bastion of liberalism and democracy,” a recent survey found that less than half the respondents “like American ideas about democracy.”

Unlike nationalism in most other countries, he says, American nationalism is

based on past triumphs, not past humiliations and defeats. It's forward-looking, imbued with "a missionary spirit and a short collective memory." But the U.S. effort to "liberate" Iraq, for example, looks like something else to inhabitants of the Middle East, who are "haunted by memories of Western military invasions since the time of the Crusades."

Washington's "insensitivity" to foreign nationalism stirs resentments and prompts accusations of hypocrisy, Pei believes. What's more, it undermines efforts by the United States to isolate hostile regimes such as North Korea. "The rising nationalism of South Korea's younger generation . . . hasn't yet figured in Washington's calculations concerning Pyongyang's [nuclear] brinkmanship."

Americans' own insularity compounds the problem. Pei cites a survey showing that, in the past five years, only 22 percent of Americans have traveled to a foreign country, compared with 66 percent of Canadians, 73 percent of Britons, 60 percent of the French, and 77 percent of Germans. And even in the wake of September 11, 2001, Americans are not much interested in international affairs. In an early 2002 survey, only 26 percent said that they were following foreign news "very closely."

Little wonder, then, that American nationalism evokes "mixed feelings" abroad. That might not matter much under other circumstances, says Pei, but when the nationalism drives U.S. foreign policy, the unfortunate result is "broad-based anti-Americanism."

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Is the Revolution Over?

"IT Doesn't Matter" by Nicholas G. Carr, in *Harvard Business Review* (May 2003),
60 Harvard Way, Boston, Mass. 02163.

Information technology (IT) was once thought a vital strategic tool for gaining an edge on competitors. But these days, argues Carr, *Harvard Business Review's* editor at large, IT has become just another humdrum means of doing business.

"You only gain an edge over rivals by having or doing something that they can't have or do," he points out. "By now, the core functions of IT—data storage, data processing, and data transport—have become available and affordable to all."

Before IT was so widespread, many companies—including Mobil Oil, American Airlines, and Federal Express—were indeed able to steal a march on competitors by their innovative use of proprietary IT. But, says Carr, as happened with other "infrastructural" technologies—the telegraph, railroads, electric power—"the window for gaining advantage" remained open only briefly. The cost of a technology drops, "best practices" are quickly identified and disseminated, and the opportunities for breakthrough uses decrease. Today, hardware and software available right off the shelf have much more power

than most companies need. As a result, Microsoft, IBM, Sun, and other IT producers are rushing to reposition themselves as suppliers of "Web services"—charging annual fees and becoming, in effect, utilities.

IT "is entwined with so many business functions . . . that it will continue to consume a large portion of corporate spending," Carr writes. But a kind of mania drove IT expenditures during the 1990s from about 30 percent of all capital spending by U.S. corporations to nearly 50 percent. He urges companies to cast a cold eye on the amounts they spend for IT. Most workers don't need the latest blazingly fast PC to do their jobs, and a huge investment in data storage simply to save employee e-mails and files makes no sense.

What's more, Carr maintains, being stingy with IT dollars is unlikely to damage a firm's competitive position. A consulting firm that looked at 7,500 large U.S. companies last year found that the typical company spent 3.7 percent of revenues on IT. But the 25 firms with the highest financial returns spent, on average, less than one percent.

The New Colossus

“Beyond Markets and Hierarchies: Toward a New Synthesis of American Business History” by Naomi R. Lamoreaux, Daniel M.G. Raff, and Peter Temin, in *American Historical Review* (Apr. 2003), 914 Atwater, Bloomington, Ind. 47401.

In *The Visible Hand* (1977) and other influential works, Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., established what has been for a quarter-century the dominant approach to American business history. Chandler argued that America’s economic success in the 20th century was due to the rise of huge, vertically integrated, hierarchically managed enterprises in steel, automaking, and other important industries. Instead of relying on the market to obtain raw materials and to sell their products, the Ford Motor Company and other large firms took on the supply and marketing functions themselves—and management’s “visible hand” proved more efficient than the market’s invisible one.

Chandler’s view prevailed even as the behemoth firms he celebrated were running into grave difficulties in the late 20th century. Now, Lamoreaux, Raff, and Temin, economic historians affiliated with the National Bureau of Economic Research, offer an updated view of business history.

Chandler “provided a compelling alternative to the [then-common] robber-baron view of big business,” say the authors. But by the 1980s, “classic Chandlerian firms frequently were being outperformed, even in their core businesses, by more specialized, vertically disintegrated rivals,” such as Toyota. Detroit automakers found it hard to adapt, but firms in other U.S. manufacturing industries, particularly new ones such as computers, were at home in the new environment. Refusing to limit themselves, à la Chandler, to a simple choice between hierarchy and the market, these firms opted for an intermediate form of “coordination mechanism”: close, long-term relationships with independent parties. In the changed circumstances, this proved more effective than an approach that was either pure market or pure hierarchy.

The spread of railroads and the telegraph during the second half of the 19th century encouraged firms to take advantage of



Henry Ford created the coal-mining town of Twin Branch, West Virginia, to supply his steel mills, which in turn supported his automaking plants. Such hierarchical enterprises are a thing of the past.

economies of scale and rely on hierarchical management to control their far-flung operations. The firms' mass production of standardized goods at low cost put those goods within the reach of most consumers. By the late 20th century, however, affluence was encouraging consumers to demand a better quality of goods and more choice. Specialized firms, relying on "long-term re-

lationships" with suppliers and distributors, had the flexibility to satisfy consumers' new wants; the hierarchical behemoths did not.

That recent development doesn't signal the end of business history, the authors caution, for the "coordination mechanisms" that work well in one period "may not operate as effectively when economic conditions or institutional environments change."

SOCIETY

For Better and for Worse

"Reexamining Adaptation and the Set Point Model of Happiness: Reactions to Changes in Marital Status" by Richard E. Lucas, Andrew E. Clark, Yannis Georgellis, and Ed Diener, in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Mar. 2003), American Psychological Association, 750 First St., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002-4242.

In America's continuing culture wars, even happiness has become a political football. Defenders of the traditional family have taken to making the case for marriage by arguing that married people are healthier, wealthier, and, yes, happier than unmarried folks. (Hold the Henny Youngman jokes!) And it turns out that researchers have been beaver-ing away for years trying to understand what makes people happy.

Research does show that married folks are happier than others, but that may be because happier people are more likely to marry. That recognition got scholars digging deeper. One leading school of thought holds that life is really just one long "hedonic treadmill." According to this view, the propensity toward happiness is pretty much established by genetic predispositions and personality. A walk down the aisle—or any other uplifting event—may lead some people to a spell of bliss, but before long they're their old selves again. In other words, people have a happiness "set point." (Actually, researchers don't often use the word *happiness*; they speak instead of "subjective well-being," or SWB.)

It's a good theory, but it misses a lot, contend Lucas, a psychologist at Michigan State University, and his colleagues. They analyzed data from a 15-year study of more than 24,000 individuals living in Germany during the 1980s and 1990s. The subjects were regularly asked to indicate how satisfied they

were with their lives, using a scale from 0 (totally unhappy) to 10 (totally happy),

For the 1,761 participants who married during the study and stayed married, wedlock, *on average*, provided only a very small long-term boost, a tenth of a point uptick on the authors' 11-point scale. After an early lift, the bloom came off the rose in about five years. That average result seems to lend support to the treadmill theory, but, the authors say, it masks great variations. Many people ended up much happier over the long run than they were before they were married—and many ended up a lot less happy.

In general, say the authors, "people who were less happy to begin with got a bigger boost from marriage," and the boost lasted.

On the other hand, the death of a spouse has a lasting and marked effect. It took eight years, on average, for widows and widowers who did not remarry to approximate the level of well-being they felt while married.

The authors conclude that a sort of "hedonic leveling" takes place with the married and widowed states. Those most satisfied with their lives before marriage don't get as much of a lift from being married as the lonely and somewhat dissatisfied. And the most satisfied husbands and wives lose the most when their spouses die. As those widows and widowers know all too well, much more than just good genes and an upbeat personality are needed for happiness.

Not Keeping Up with the Joneses

“Issues in Economics” by Katharine Bradbury and Jane Katz, in *Regional Review* (2002: Qtr. 4), Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, 600 Atlantic Ave., Boston, Mass. 02106.

Call it the deal behind the American dream: Americans have tacitly agreed to accept more income inequality than Europeans do in return for a freer economy and more opportunities for individual upward mobility. In other words, the gap between rich and poor might be wider than in Europe, but Americans believe they have a better chance of jumping it.

Now, however, it appears that the deal may be in jeopardy. It’s widely accepted that income inequality has grown during the past few decades, note Bradbury and Katz, both of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. But new evidence suggests that, at the same time, the indispensable tonic of economic mobility has lost some of its potency.

During the 1970s (actually, 1969–79) for example, only 49.4 percent of the working-age households that began the decade in the bottom 20 percent of earners were still in the bottom quintile at the end of the decade [see chart]. During the 1990s, however, 53.3 percent of the families that started off in the lowest quintile were still there 10 years later. (At the same time, *downward* mobility among the rich seemed to lessen: 49.1 percent

1969–79		WHERE FAMILIES ENDED UP IN 1979, BY QUINTILE				
WHERE FAMILIES STARTED IN 1969, BY QUINTILE	POOREST	SECOND	THIRD	FOURTH	RICHEST	
Poorest	49.4	24.5	13.8	9.1	3.3	
Second	23.2	27.8	25.2	16.2	7.7	
Third	10.2	23.4	24.8	23.0	18.7	
Fourth	9.9	15.0	24.1	27.4	23.7	
Richest	5.0	9.0	13.2	23.7	49.1	

1988–98		WHERE FAMILIES ENDED UP IN 1998, BY QUINTILE				
WHERE FAMILIES STARTED IN 1988, BY QUINTILE	POOREST	SECOND	THIRD	FOURTH	RICHEST	
Poorest	53.3	23.6	12.4	6.4	4.3	
Second	25.7	36.3	22.6	11.0	4.3	
Third	10.9	20.7	28.3	27.5	12.6	
Fourth	6.5	12.9	23.7	31.1	25.8	
Richest	3.0	5.7	14.9	23.2	53.2	

of the most affluent Americans stayed in the top income quintile during the 1970s, but 53.2 percent survived during the 1990s.)

Because “most people judge their well-being relative to others,” the authors warn, the lack of upward mobility makes the growing inequality of incomes something to worry about.

Breeding a Better America

“Race Cleansing in America” by Peter Quinn, in *American Heritage* (Feb.–Mar. 2003), 28 W. 23rd St., New York, N.Y. 10010.

“Three generations of imbeciles are enough,” declared Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, writing for the 8 to 1 majority of the Supreme Court in 1927. The ruling affirmed the right of the state of Virginia to sterilize a young woman named Carrie Buck against her will. The daughter of a “feeble-minded” woman, Buck had been institutionalized three years before, at age 17. She was already the mother of a child born out of wedlock.

The Court’s decision was a landmark victory for the eugenics movement in America, notes historical novelist Quinn, who is working on a book about the movement. Within five

years, 28 states had compulsory sterilization laws. The annual average number of forced sterilizations increased tenfold, to almost 2,300, and by the 1970s, when the practice had largely ceased, more than 60,000 Americans had been sterilized.

Eugenics (both the theory and the word) originated with British biologist Francis Galton (1822–1911), who saw a clear link between achievement and heredity, and thought enlightened governments should encourage “the more suitable races or strains of blood” to propagate, lest they be overwhelmed by their fast-multiplying inferiors.

Emerging in America in the late 19th century, the eugenics movement gathered strength as immigrants from southern and eastern Europe flooded into the country. In 1903, with the strong backing of President Theodore Roosevelt, Congress barred the entry of anyone with a history of epilepsy or insanity. Four years later, the unwanted list was expanded to include “imbeciles,” the “feeble-minded,” and those with tuberculosis. Meanwhile, doctors took up the cause of compulsory sterilization, and Indiana became the first state to authorize its use on the “unimprovable” in state-run institutions.

In 1910, Charles Davenport, a Harvard-trained biologist, founded the Eugenics Record Office (ERO), in Cold Spring Harbor, New York, to press for eugenics legislation. The lobby received generous support from wealthy individuals such as Mary Williamson Harriman, the widow of railroad magnate E. H. Harriman, and John D. Rockefeller, and from foundations

such as the Carnegie Institute and the Rockefeller Foundation. An ERO model statute provided much of the basis for the 1924 Virginia law under which Carrie Buck was sterilized.

Before long, however, scientific and medical advances began to cast serious doubt on the theory of eugenics, says Quinn. “Hereditary feeble-mindedness was shown in many instances to be the incidental result of birth trauma, inadequate nutrition, untreated learning disabilities, infant neglect, or abuse, often enough the consequences of poverty rather than the cause.” The ERO closed its doors in 1939.

Four decades later, the director of the hospital in which Carrie Buck had been sterilized sought her out. “It was transparently clear,” Quinn writes, “that neither Buck nor her sister [who had also been sterilized] was feeble-minded or imbecilic. Further investigation showed that the baby Carrie Buck had given birth to—Justice Holmes’s third-generation imbecile—had been a child of normal intelligence.”

How to Get Lucky

“The Luck Factor” by Richard Wiseman, in *Skeptical Inquirer* (May–June 2003),
P.O. Box 703, Amherst, N.Y. 14226-9973.

Some people seem to be born lucky, while others never catch a break. Ten years ago, Wiseman, a psychologist at the University of Hertfordshire, England, decided to investigate whether that’s so. His finding: People largely make their own luck, good or bad.

He rounded up 400 volunteers, people who considered themselves either exceptionally favored by fortune or exceptionally not. Then he poked and prodded, subjecting them to interviews, personality quizzes, intelligence tests, and various experiments. “My research revealed that lucky people generate their own good fortune via four basic principles. They are skilled at creating and noticing chance opportunities, make lucky decisions by listening to their intuition, create self-fulfilling prophecies via positive expectations, and adopt a resilient attitude that transforms bad luck into good.”



Consider those “chance opportunities.” In one experiment, Wiseman asked his subjects to count the number of photos in a newspaper. Some finished the job in seconds, but others took, on average, about two minutes. Why the difference? Page two of the newspaper bore a message in large type: “Stop counting—There are 43 photographs in this newspaper.” The lucky ones noticed. The unlucky ones, generally tense and anxious sorts, were so intent on counting that they tended to miss the message.

Into every life, of course, some rain must fall. But the lucky and the unlucky generally react differently when it does. In one experiment, Wiseman asked his subjects to imagine how each of them would feel if he or she were shot in the arm by a robber while waiting in line at a bank. The unlucky bemoaned their fate: “It’s

just my bad luck to have been in the bank then." The lucky had a different reaction: "Things could have been a lot worse; I might have been shot in the head." That sort of positive attitude among the lucky, says Wiseman, "helps keep their expectations about the future high," and makes a continued lucky life more likely.

But the ill-starred need not fear that all is lost.

Wiseman explained "the four main principles of luck" to a group of volunteers who then went off for a month to put the principles into practice. On their return, he says, 80 percent reported that they "were now happier, more satisfied with their lives, and, perhaps most important of all, luckier." A fortunate outcome, indeed! (Knock on wood.)

The Bright Side of Prison

"Women in Prison: A Comparative Assessment" by Heather Heitfield and Rita J. Simon, in *Gender Issues* (Winter 2002), Transaction Periodicals Consortium, Rutgers University, 35 Berrue Circle, Piscataway, N.J. 08854-8042.

Globalization has been a good thing for most women around the world, and one piece of evidence for that proposition, oddly enough, is that more of them are in jail than ever before.

It makes sense, say Heitfield and Simon, a graduate student and professor, respectively, at American University. Globalization produces economic and social progress, which allows more women to "assume the positions of authority and power that have traditionally been held by men." That also means "increased exposure to opportunities to commit workplace and property crimes such as larceny, fraud, embezzlement and forgery." Apparently, women have been seizing those opportunities.

In their survey of 26 countries, Heitfield and Simon find that Thailand tops the list of dubious honor. Women make up 18 percent of the prison population there. Next come Argentina, the Netherlands, and the United States, all at

levels slightly above eight percent. (There were just under one million women behind bars in the United States in 1998.) At the bottom of the scale are Israel, Pakistan, and Nigeria, where women constitute two percent or less of the prison population.

Feeding these and other data into a computer, the authors looked for correlations. They found that incarceration rates were pretty closely linked with levels of female education and literacy. More education generally means more women in prison. So does a higher rate of economic growth. Yet, surprisingly, the authors uncovered no meaningful connection between jail time and women's participation in the work force or other labor-related indicators. They say their findings point to a need for new prisons and for new policies for dealing with inmates who, among other things, bear and raise children.

PRESS & MEDIA

The Media's Iraq War

A Survey of Recent Articles

"During seven weeks spent with half a dozen [U.S. Army] units," recalls David Zucchini, a reporter for *The Los Angeles Times* (May 3, 2003), "I slept in fighting holes and armored vehicles, on a rooftop, a garage floor and in lumbering troop trucks. . . . I ate with the troops. . . . I complained with them about the choking dust, the lack of water, our foul-smelling bodies, and our scaly, rotting feet."

Like the 600 other journalists "embedded" in U.S. military units during the 43-day war in

Iraq, Zucchini was dependent on his hosts for sustenance, transportation, protection—and access. This last enabled him to write vividly detailed stories about the battle for Baghdad and the performance of American soldiers in combat. But the officially sanctioned access also limited him. "I could not interview survivors of Iraqi civilians killed by U.S. soldiers. . . . I had no idea what ordinary Iraqis were experiencing."

Despite its drawbacks, the extensive embedding experiment (which had been tried on

a limited basis during the 2001–02 war in Afghanistan) was deemed a success by both the military and the media.

Major newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times*, also dispatched many reporters and photographers who were not lodged with U.S. troops. Those colleagues, says Zucchini, “covered what we could not—the Iraq government, civilian casualties, humanitarian crises, military strategy, political fallout, and everything else beyond our cloistered existence.” “The war has been reported superbly by newspapers,” says Stephen Hess, who scrutinizes the media from his scholarly perch at the Brookings Institution in Washington. “The stories have been rich in variety, coming at this from so many different angles.”

But only a minority of Americans (30 percent, in one poll) relied on newspapers for news about the war. Advanced technology and access to the battlefield allowed both cable and broadcast TV to relay powerful images of fire-fights and bombs exploding over Baghdad.

Yet graphic footage of the death and suffering seldom made it on the air, at least in the United States. A study of more than 40 hours of coverage on the broadcast and cable networks early in the war “found that about half the reports from embedded journalists showed combat action, but not a single story depicted people hit by weapons,” writes Jacqueline E. Sharkey, head of the Department of Journalism at the University of Arizona, in *American Journalism Review* (May

2003). “As the war continued, the networks did show casualties, usually from afar. The footage was much less graphic than still photographs shown in newspapers and magazines.”

Fox News, the most-watched cable news channel, and MSNBC, which drew on the journalistic resources of NBC News, took an “overtly patriotic approach” in their coverage, Sharkey notes, and reaped huge ratings increases. That’s not to say there was no media criticism of the war, observes contributing writer Rachel Smolkin in a subsequent issue (June 2003) of *American Journalism Review*—especially when the march on Baghdad seemed bogged down. She reports that journalists are still debating whether they overreacted to Washington’s cues—pumping up the promised “shock and awe” campaign, then complaining when a quick victory seemed out of reach, for example—and to the demands of a round-the-clock news cycle.

Michael Massing, a contributing editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review* who was in Qatar during the war, found MSNBC’s “mawkishness and breathless boosterism” repellent. “Its anchors mostly recounted tales of American bravery and derring-do,” he writes in *The New York Review of Books* (May 29, 2003).

Far more impressive, in Massing’s judgment, was the coverage by the BBC. “With 200 reporters, producers, and technicians in the field, its largest deployment ever, the network offered no-nonsense anchors, tenacious correspondents, perceptive features, and a host of commentators steeped in knowledge of the Middle East, in contrast to the retired gener-

EXCERPT

Missing the Beat

Bright writing now brings the most and quickest rewards inside news organizations—rather than the solid but often less spectacular beat reporting of the best of journalists, like [The New York Times’] Linda Greenhouse, a worthy Pulitzer winner at the Supreme Court after years of quiet hard work. Young reporters are quick to learn this new reality, and ride the trend. They also know that their news organizations manage or even manipulate coverage to position favored reporters on the fast track for prizes and promotions. There is much temptation to put more emphasis on “writing” rather than reporting. The [Jayson] Blair case is but the most grotesque and damaging manifestation of this trend.

—Barbara Crossette, a former *New York Times* correspondent and bureau chief, on the Romenesko page at www.poynter.org

als and colonels we saw on American TV. Reporters were not afraid to challenge the coalition's claims."

The coverage CNN offered to the world at large was, despite "plenty of overlap," different from the coverage it gave American

viewers, according to Massing. CNN International "was far more serious and informed" — more like the BBC. "For the most part," he says, "U.S. news organizations gave Americans the war they thought Americans wanted to see."

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The Birth of Religious Toleration

"Diplomacy and Domestic Devotion: Embassy Chapels and the Toleration of Religious Dissent in Early Modern Europe" by Benjamin J. Kaplan, in *Journal of Early Modern History* (2002: No. 4), Univ. of Minnesota, 614 Social Sciences, 267-19th Ave. S., Minneapolis, Minn. 55455; and "Fictions of Privacy: House Chapels and the Spatial Accommodation of Religious Dissent in Early Modern Europe" by Benjamin J. Kaplan, in *American Historical Review* (Oct. 2002), 400 A St., S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003.

In the aftermath of the Reformation, the religious division in European states caused a special problem for diplomats: Where was a Protestant ambassador to worship in a Catholic capital such as Paris, Vienna, Brussels, or Madrid? And where was a Catholic diplomat to worship in a Protestant capital such as London, Stockholm, Copenhagen, or The Hague? To deal with the diplomatic issue, and, more broadly, to keep domestic religious divisions from tearing countries apart, European states hit upon a distinction that allowed the furtive practice of religious tolerance.

The distinction they made, explains Kaplan, a historian at University College, London, was between *public* worship, in accordance with a community's official faith, and *private* worship. Beginning in the 17th century, ambassadors were allowed increasingly to establish chapels inside their residences where they could practice their forbidden faith in private—as long as they did not visibly flout the sacral community of the host nation.

Parallel practices evolved outside the rarefied realm of high diplomacy with the gradual acceptance of what the Dutch called the *schuilkerk*, or clandestine church. Most *schuilkerken* were created in-



When the Catholic chapel in the French embassy in London collapsed in 1623 on the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot, killing 90, Protestants saw it as an act of divine retribution.

side homes, though some were inside warehouses or barns. But they shared a key characteristic, as did the embassy chapels: None looked like a place of worship from the street. In Amsterdam, Catholics maintained 20 such churches in 1700, while the Mennonites had six and other groups four. The Dutch *schuilkerken*, Kaplan points out, had thousands of counterparts elsewhere in Europe, with various names, including house churches, prayer houses, meeting houses, mass houses, house chapels, oratories, and assembly places.

The embassy chapels stirred a new issue: Could native religious dissidents attend services in an embassy? “For an entire century,” writes Kaplan, “from the 1560s through the 1650s, this issue provoked clashes in London, some of them violent, between authorities and citizens, on the one hand, and the personnel of the Spanish, French, and Venetian embassies on the other.” The 1583 “Throckmorton plot”—which involved the Spanish ambassador

and an Englishman who aimed to restore Catholicism in England—seemed to confirm English suspicions about the foreign embassies of Catholic powers.

But despite frequent tensions and occasional violence, Kaplan says, most embassy chapels in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries effectively served “significant congregations that included native dissidents.” And out of that practice developed the modern legal doctrine of extraterritoriality: the pretense that an ambassador and his embassy were on the soil of his homeland. Thus, embassy chapels did not violate the religious laws of a host country, and native dissidents who attended chapel services did not violate local laws. It was all part of a larger fiction, says Kaplan, “that enabled Europeans to accommodate dissent without confronting it directly, to tolerate knowingly what they could not bring themselves to accept fully . . . to go on living as if civic and sacral community were still one and the same.”

Is Good Luck Unfair?

“What is Egalitarianism?” by Samuel Scheffler, in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (Winter 2003), and “Equality, Luck and Hierarchy” by Ronald Dworkin, in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (Spring 2003), 41 Williams St., Princeton, N.J. 08540.

“Life is unfair,” President John F. Kennedy once famously observed. A school of philosophers has arisen in recent decades with a (theoretical) solution: Redistribute economic resources to compensate for advantages conferred by luck, and let advantages stemming from individuals’ own choices stand. But this “luck egalitarianism,” as it’s been dubbed, misconstrues the ideal of equality, contends Scheffler, a professor of philosophy and law at the University of California, Berkeley.

According to Scheffler, “luck egalitarians” such as Ronald Dworkin, Will Kymlicka, and John Roemer deny “that a person’s natural talent, creativity, intelligence, innovative skill, or entrepreneurial ability can be the basis for legitimate inequalities.” On the other hand, earning more money than others by choosing to work more hours than they do is fine—and

so, luck egalitarians argue, the extra money shouldn’t be taxed.

But the ideal of equality, as commonly understood, Scheffler says, “is opposed not to luck but to oppression, to heritable hierarchies of social status, to ideas of caste, to class privilege and the rigid stratification of classes, and to the undemocratic distribution of power.” As a moral ideal, equality asserts the equal worth of human beings; as a political ideal, the equal rights of citizens. Questions about the distribution of economic resources are important but secondary considerations.

Dworkin, a professor of philosophy and law at New York University and the author of *Sovereign Virtue* (2000), tries “to anchor luck-egalitarian principles in a more general ideal of equality,” Scheffler says. But his ideal “is perfectly compatible with social hierarchy.” For example, “an auto-

cratic government might impose an economic system that treated individuals as equals in Dworkin's sense, but that would not transform the society into an egalitarian political community."

Dworkin rejects Scheffler's characterization of his views on taxation and other

subjects, as well as the "luck egalitarian" label. But he insists that political or social equality should not be regarded as "more fundamental" than economic equality: "A genuine society of equals must aim at equal stake as well as equal voice and equal status for its citizens."

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

Double Helix Double Cross?

A Survey of Recent Articles

The observance this year of the 50th anniversary of the momentous discovery of the double helix structure of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) has been marked by reflections on an alleged scientific injustice almost as much as by celebration of the great scientific achievement.

Was Rosalind Franklin (1920–58), the British scientist whose x-ray data on DNA played a crucial role in the discovery, denied proper credit for her contribution by codiscoverers James Watson and Francis Crick? A *Nova* television documentary, "Secret of Photo 51," broadcast on PBS on April 22 (see www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/photo51), was the most recent account to suggest as much. But the truth of the matter may be more complicated.

Though feminists have turned her into "an icon for the oppression of women scien-

tists," observes Nicholas Wade, a science writer for *The New York Times*, there's no evidence that Franklin herself—no shrinking violet, and known to object vigorously to unfair treatment—felt that she had been robbed by Watson and Crick. "She became friends with both men afterwards," Wade writes in *The Scientist* (Apr. 7, 2003; see also www.the-scientist.com), "and spent her last convalescence in Crick's house before her death, at age 37, from ovarian cancer."

In their 1953 article in *Nature* announcing the discovery—which was accompanied by an article by Franklin telling what she knew about DNA—Watson and Crick, of the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge, England, said merely that they had been "stimulated by a knowledge of the general nature of the unpublished experimental results and ideas of Dr. M. F. Wilkins,

Dr. R. E. Franklin, and their co-workers at King's College, London." When they accepted the 1962 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine (which they shared with Maurice Wilkins, the deputy director of King's College and Franklin's colleague and rival there), Watson and Crick made no mention of Franklin. And in his best-selling book *The Double Helix* (1968), Watson portrayed her in condescending terms. Watson also noted that Wilkins, in highhanded fashion, had shown him Franklin's x-ray photograph 51, without Franklin's knowledge. Crick, meanwhile, obtained a King's College report containing Franklin's data. Watson and Crick's model of the double helix soon followed.



How much did James Watson and Francis Crick rely on Rosalind Franklin's 1953 x-ray photographs to fashion their model of DNA's double helix structure?

“Given her temper, it is likely that Franklin would have been very angry if she had known the extent to which Watson and Crick used her data,” maintains Lynne Osman Elkin, a professor of biological sciences at California State University, Hayward, writing in *Physics Today* (March 2003).

But did Franklin not know? In an article published a year after the famous 1953 article, Crick stated that “without [Franklin’s] data, the formulation of our structure would have been most unlikely, if not impossible.” Though they became friends, he and Franklin, according to Crick, never discussed the subject during the five years between the 1953 article and her death. Writes Wade: “It was probably obvious to Franklin, as Crick believes, that the structure rested on her data because no one else was producing any experimental results. And both knew that Crick had understood what Franklin’s data meant before she did.”

Franklin and the Watson-Crick team represented two contrasting approaches to

doing science, observes Harvard University biologist R. C. Lewontin, writing in *The New York Review of Books* (May 1, 2003). “For Franklin, whom Watson characterizes as ‘obsessively professional,’ the evidence would finally speak for itself. . . . For Watson and Crick . . . data were useless without a prior concept. The facts could serve only to suggest a range of models and as a check against errors. They garnered their facts where they could.”

“We’re very famous because DNA is very famous,” Watson tells *Scientific American* (April 2003), referring to Crick and himself. “If Rosalind had talked to Francis starting in 1951, shared her data with him, she would have solved that structure. And then she would have been the famous one.” But 50 years after the discovery, with two biographies of her published and another in the works, Rosalind Franklin is now almost as famous as the Nobel laureates. In their great collective accomplishment, observes Lynne Osman Elkin, there’s “enough glory” to go around.

Brave New Brains

“The Battle for Your Brain” by Ronald Bailey, in *Reason* (Feb. 2003), Reason Foundation, 3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Ste. 400, Los Angeles, Calif. 90034-6064.

If drugs were available not only to repair defective brains but to “enhance” normal ones, would humans lose sight of what it means to be human? Bailey, science correspondent for *Reason*, sees no cause for alarm, so long as decisions are left to the individuals whose brains would be upgraded.

Francis Fukuyama, author of *Our Post-human Future* (2002), has called for close regulation of biotechnology. He would direct research toward therapy while putting severe restrictions on cognitive enhancement: “For us to flourish as human beings, we have to live according to our nature, satisfying the deepest longings that we as natural beings have.”

But personality is not an unchanging quality, Bailey argues: “Fukuyama has a shriveled, stunted vision of human nature, leading him and others to stand athwart neuroscientific advances that will make it possible for more people to take fuller advantage

of their reasoning and learning capabilities.”

The common objections to the prospect of using pills to improve mood, memory, and intelligence are unconvincing, Bailey maintains. Instead of making people less “authentic,” drugs can make them *more* authentic, as happened with the Prozac user who said it was “as if I had been in a drugged state all those years [before], and now I’m clearheaded.” Nor will neurological enhancements undermine personal responsibility or good character, says Bailey. Aren’t people with attention deficit disorder who take Ritalin to change their behavior acting responsibly? Even if taking brain-enhancing drugs were made easy, there would still be plenty of challenges in life to aid in the formation of character.

Why, Bailey asks, should it be considered better to induce a behavior change by altering a child’s environment than by giving the child a brain-altering drug for the same pur-

pose? If Ritalin and the Kaplan SAT review each “can boost SAT scores by, say, 120 points,” observes Michael Gazzaniga, a neuroscientist at Dartmouth College, “I think it’s immaterial which way it’s done.”

“Fukuyama and other critics,” concludes Bailey, “have not made a strong case for why

individuals, in consultation with their doctors, should not be allowed to take advantage of new neuroscientific breakthroughs to enhance the functioning of their brains. And it is those individuals that the critics will have to convince if they seriously expect to restrict this research.”

Cardiology in Crisis

“When Doctors Slam the Door” by Sandeep Jauhar, M.D., in *The New York Times Magazine* (Mar. 16, 2003), 229 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

It must have seemed an obviously good thing to do more than a decade ago when the federal Health Care Financing Administration and several states began monitoring the performance of heart surgeons and other medical professionals. In the early 1990s, New York and Pennsylvania began publishing “report cards” for public consumption. The idea behind all these efforts, notes Jauhar, a New York City cardiology fellow, was “to improve the quality of cardiac surgery by pointing out deficiencies in hospitals and surgeons,” channeling patients toward the good ones and forcing the deficient others to heal themselves. The worst surgeons might lose their hospital operating privileges.

At first, there seemed to be amazing improvements. In New York State, for example, “mortality rates for coronary bypass surgery declined a whopping 41 percent.” (Nationwide, surgeons perform some 500,000 bypasses annually.) But skeptics feared that surgeons intent on boosting their scores might be declining to treat their sickest patients. “In a survey a few years ago,” Jauhar reports, “63 percent of cardiac surgeons in New York State said that because of report cards, they were accepting only relatively healthy patients for coronary bypass surgery.” Now there’s hard evidence, too. Researchers at Northwestern and Stanford

Universities who compared 1990–93 data from New York and Pennsylvania with data from states with no such report cards found something striking: Patient health-care expenditures over the year *before* coronary bypass surgery dropped by seven percent in the two states while staying about the same elsewhere. That’s evidence that healthier patients were being “cherry picked” for surgery. The decline in expenditures in New York and Pennsylvania “was matched by a drop in the number of operations for sicker patients. They experienced ‘dramatically worsened health outcomes’ as a result, including more congestive heart failure and recurrent heart attacks,” notes Jauhar.

He sees “a kind of spiritual crisis in the field of cardiac surgery. Heart surgeons, among the most highly trained and fearless of specialists, are shrinking from taking on the toughest cases because of statistics.”

The pity of it is that they’re the wrong statistics. Some 98,000 Americans die every year because of medical errors, but seldom is an individual surgeon—or nurse, or technician, or anesthesiologist—solely responsible. “Health care is too complex; outcomes depend on many variables,” Jauhar believes. To ensure real accountability, we must focus not on individuals but on the systems that deliver our health care.

The Hottest Century?

“Reconstructing Climatic and Environmental Changes of the Past 1,000 Years: A Reappraisal” by Willie Soon et al., in *Energy & Environment* (Mar. 2003), 5 Wates Way, Brentwood Essex CM15 9TB, United Kingdom.

The world has just put a long, hot century behind it, and now the question of where the era stands in the history of the

world’s climate has become an item in the debate over global warming. One influential recent study of global temperature

changes over the past millennium found that, for the Northern Hemisphere at least, the 20th century was the warmest century, the 1990s the warmest decade, and 1998 the warmest year. These conclusions lend more weight to the argument that anthropogenic (human-generated) greenhouse gases have produced anomalously high temperatures. (Many other, though narrower, studies point toward this reading of climate history.) Soon, a physicist at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and his colleagues, taking a different approach, have concluded that the 20th century was probably “not the warmest” of the millennium.

In the earlier study, Michael E. Mann, an environmental scientist at the University of Virginia, and his colleagues attempted an ambitious mathematical reconstruction of

global temperature changes over the past thousand years based on various “proxy” data, such as ice core samples. Besides selecting winners (or losers) in the “warmest” category, they dismissed the conventional wisdom among climatologists that there were two previous periods of great divergence from the climate norm: the so-called Little Ice Age (1300–1900) and the Medieval Warm Period (800–1300). The elimination of those two epochs would cast the 20th century as even more of an anomaly.

Soon and his coauthors, taking “a non-quantitative and very ‘low-tech’” approach to the problem, examined a multitude of research results obtained from local and regional climate indicators, such as coral and tree ring growth, lake fossils, ice cores, glaciers, and seafloor sediments. The results cannot be combined into a simple

EXCERPT

The Case Against Caution

If you debate the new genetics in Europe and America these days you get asked the same question in two different ways. The average European says, with dread: “How do we stop people doing x?” The average American says with excitement: “When will I be able to do x?” For x, read “test myself for future dementia risk,” “change my unborn children’s genes,” or even “fill my blood vessels with nano-robots to enable me to live to 150.”

To the jaded European palate, the American attitude seems silly and irresponsible. Caution should be the watchword for all new technology. I beg to differ. I think the American optimism is necessary and responsible. It is the European pessimists who are in danger of causing real harm. Caution has risks, too.

My techno-optimism is deeply unfashionable in Europe, where Jeremiah is treated as a serious, cautious, and—let’s face it—cool guy, but Pollyanna is a silly twit.

We discuss the potential drawbacks of genetic testing or genetic modification of crops. We do not discuss the suffering and environmental damage that will be caused by holding back innovation.

I am not arguing that all new technologies are risk free. Reproductive cloning, for example, carries a 30 percent risk of producing a bodily deformity, 15 times the normal rate. To use this technology on human beings is wrong precisely because it is unsafe.

I am arguing that the debate is unbalanced here because it is complacent about the imperfect present. As James Watson, an unabashed proponent of more genetic testing, has said: “If there is a paramount ethical issue attending the vast new genetic knowledge created by the Human Genome Project, in my view it is the slow pace at which what we know now is being deployed to diminish human suffering.”

—Matt Ridley, author of *Nature via Nurture: Genes, Experience and What Makes Us Human* (2003) and other books, in Britain’s *Guardian* (Apr. 3, 2003)

hemispheric or global numerical composite, the authors say, but still are revealing. “The picture emerges from many localities” that the Little Ice Age and the Medieval Warm Period were indeed “widespread” phenomena, even if not “precisely timed or synchronous.”

As for the rising thermometer readings of the 20th century, say Soon and his colleagues, they appear in historical perspective “neither unusual nor unprecedented.”

Tree ring chronologies in one study “show that the Medieval Warm Period [was] as warm as, or possibly even warmer than, the 20th century,” at least for a region of the Northern Hemisphere.

The authors agree that human activity has had a significant impact on some local environments, but just how big a role humans have played in heating the atmosphere in recent decades remains up in the air.

ARTS & LETTERS

A Cinderella Story

“For Whom the Shoe Fits: Cinderella in the Hands of Victorian Illustrators and Writers” by Bonnie Cullen, in *The Lion and the Unicorn* (Jan. 2003), Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, Journals Division, 2715 N. Charles St., Baltimore, Md. 21218-4363.

As if Cinderella didn’t have enough hardships in her storied life, it now appears that she’s also been a combatant in a centuries-long culture war. The Cinderella we know from the 1950 Disney movie and kindred print versions of the tale is not at all the girl she once was, writes Cullen, an art historian studying at the University of London.

Over the centuries, more than 300 Cinderella-type stories—with “an abused child, rescue through some reincarnation of the dead mother [such as a fairy godmother], recognition, and marriage”—appeared in Europe and Asia, Cullen notes. The earliest known version is from ninth-century China.



Cinderella stands submissively to the side in a classic 1882 depiction of the tale by Thomas Seccombe.

The Cinderella story that won out and became the basis for the now standard account in English was a French story about “Cendrillon,” which first appeared in English translation in 1729. Charles Perrault’s witty tale, which included “barbs at female sexuality and matriarchal figures,” was intended mainly for sophisticated adults, Cullen says, but by the late 18th century, “it had been watered down.” The trials and triumphs of Perrault’s long-suffering Cendrillon, a noble exemplar of grace in adversity, came to be enjoyed by both children and adults.

Yet Cinderella was still not ready for prime time. First she had to beat out two rivals, the Grimm brothers’ rustic heroine “Aschenputtel” and “Finette Cendron,” the more spirited Cinderella of a feminist French author, the Countess d’Aulnoy. Feisty Finette “engineers daring escapes” for her sisters and herself after they are abandoned by their parents, notes

Cullen, and later “refuses to marry the prince” until her parents’ lost kingdom is restored. But she was apparently no match for the bland Cendrillon.

Generous, charming, and good-humored in even the most difficult circumstances, Cendrillon was “the ideal bride, from the gentleman’s perspective,” Cullen maintains. And as 19th-century (male) illustrators and writers made her into a “vehicle for Victorian notions of femininity,” Cinderella became even more of an ideal. No longer did she make joking suggestions to her fairy godmother, and she averted her eyes when she took the prince’s hand. As a midcentury edition explicitly said, Cinderella “made a most excellent wife.” Instead of nobility, her youthful beauty became her chief asset, and her stepsisters—never ugly in Perrault’s original treatment—turned into repellent hags. Cinderella was finally ready for Disney.

Bright Lights, Broken Dreams

“An Empirical Study of Factors Relating to the Success of Broadway Shows” by Jeffrey S. Simonoff and Lan Ma, in *The Journal of Business* (Jan. 2003), Graduate School of Business, Univ. of Chicago, 1101 E. 58th St., Chicago, Ill. 60637.

The business of Broadway is as dramatic as anything that appears on the stage. In 1999, theatergoers bought more than 11 million tickets to the Great White Way’s dramas, comedies, and musicals, yielding gross revenues of more than \$550 million. Yet all too often failure waits in the wings: More than half of the 91 Broadway shows that opened in the three seasons from 1996–97 to 1998–99 closed after 10 or fewer performances. Only six shows, all of them musicals, ran for more than 800 performances: *Cabaret*, *Chicago*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Ragtime*, *The Lion King*, and *Titanic*. Such winners can rake in profits of \$50,000 per performance, but investors in a loser can see their entire investment—as much as \$10 million for a musical—go right down the drain.

The rise of the musical is familiar to anybody who follows theater, but there’s another, less familiar story: the declining clout of the drama critic from *The New York Times*, that august personage who once held an almost absolute power of life and death on Broadway. After studying three Broadway seasons in the late 1990s, Simonoff, a professor of statis-

tics at New York University’s Stern School of Business, and Ma, a professor at Rider University, in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, found that many of the shows “got poor reviews in the *Times* but were very successful. [And] several shows getting very positive reviews closed very quickly.” Overall, the authors conclude, reviews in the *Times* had no impact at all on a show’s longevity.

That contrasts with favorable reviews in the tabloid *Daily News*, which were statistically associated with “a significantly more successful show,” report Simon and Ma. Of course, that may only mean that the *Daily News* is more in step with popular tastes, not that it is wielding *Times*-like influence.

Winning major Tony Awards can work wonders at the box office, Simonoff and Ma found. But winning a Tony nomination and then losing the award apparently hurts, as the producers and cast of *The Wild Party* learned during the 1999–2000 season. Nominated for four major Tony Awards, the musical won none. A week after the awards were announced, the show went dark.

The Suicide of Literary Theory

These are uncertain times for literary scholars. The era of big theory is over. The grand paradigms that swept through humanities departments in the 20th century—psychoanalysis, structuralism, Marxism, deconstruction, postcolonialism—have lost favor or been abandoned. Money is tight. And the leftist politics with which literary theorists have traditionally been associated have taken a beating.

In the latest sign of mounting crisis, on April 11 the editors of Critical Inquiry, academe's most prestigious theory journal, convened the scholarly equivalent of an Afghan-style loya jirga. They invited more than two dozen of America's professorial elite, including Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Homi Bhabha, Stanley Fish, and Fredric Jameson, to the University of Chicago for what they called "an unprecedented meeting of the minds," an unusual two-hour public symposium on the future of theory.

When John Comaroff, a professor of anthropology and sociology at Chicago who was serving as the event's moderator, turned the floor over to the panelists, for several moments no one said a word.

Then a student in the audience spoke up. What good is criticism and theory, he asked, if "we concede in fact how much more important the actions of Noam Chomsky are in the world than all the writings of critical theorists combined?"

After all, he said, Mr. Fish had recently published an essay in Critical Inquiry arguing that philosophy didn't matter at all.

Behind a table at the front of the room, Mr. Fish shook his head. "I think I'll let someone else answer the question," he said.

So Sander L. Gilman, a professor of liberal arts and sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago, replied instead. "I would make the argument that most criticism—and I would include Noam Chomsky in this—is a poison pill," he said. "I think one must be careful in assuming that intellectuals have some kind of insight. In fact, if the track record of intellectuals is any indication, not only have intellectuals been wrong almost all of the time, but they have been wrong in corrosive and destructive ways."

Mr. Fish nodded approvingly. "I like what that man said," he said. "I wish to deny the effectiveness of intellectual work. And especially, I always wish to counsel people against the decision to go into the academy because they hope to be effective beyond it."

Finally, a young man with dreadlocks who said he was a graduate student from Jamaica asked, "So is theory simply just a nice, simple intellectual exercise, or something that should be transformative?"

Several speakers weighed in before Mr. Gates stood up. As far as he could tell, he said, theory had never directly liberated anyone. "Maybe I'm too young," he said. "I really didn't see it: the liberation of people of color because of deconstruction or poststructuralism."

—Reporter Emily Eakin, in *The New York Times* (Apr. 19, 2003)

Eliot's Dangerous Art

"Burbank with a Baedeker, Eliot with a Cigar: American Intellectuals, Anti-Semitism, and the Idea of Culture" by Ronald Schuchard, with responses by David Bromwich and others, in *Modernism/Modernity* (Jan. 2003), The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2715 N. Charles St., Baltimore, Md., 21218-4363.

Was T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) an anti-Semite? The modernist poet and critic, author of "The Waste Land" (1922) and other seminal

works, has been attacked for employing seemingly anti-Semitic language, especially in a group of poems written during the period im-

mediately following World War I. Consider these lines from “Burbank with a Baedeker” (1920): “The rats are underneath the piles./ The jew is underneath the lot.” The debate over Eliot has recently heated up again, and some academics now even refuse to teach his work in their courses.

Schuchard, an English professor at Emory University, argues that the poet’s own complex views regarding religion help to explain the controversial passages. A recently uncovered 33-year correspondence with American intellectual and Zionist Horace Kallen reinforces the view that Eliot was no bigot. In the “sustained and cordial dialogue between Eliot the conservative, believing Christian and Kallen the liberal, free-thinking Jew,” Kallen often asked Eliot to intercede on behalf of certain European Jews who were fleeing Nazi persecution. In every case the poet responded vigorously, using his influence to secure a position for economist Adolph Löwe at the New School for Social Research in New York City, for instance, and also befriending sociologist Karl Mannheim and introducing him to other academics in London. Eliot counted many Jews among his friends, including such luminaries as Supreme Court justice Benjamin Cardozo, and, unlikely as it seems, the comedian Groucho Marx. Eliot’s detractors point to his friendships with known anti-Semites—Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound, among others.

Schuchard says that during the time that Eliot was writing the troubling poems he was also preparing to join the Church of England, converting from the Unitarianism of his youth, which he detested because of its humanistic separation from traditional Christianity. In fact, says Schuchard, Eliot *admired* the Hebrew faith for its grounding in ancient tradition. Deeply affected by the horrors of the Great War and immersed in the difficult creative

process that would lead to “The Waste Land,” with its vision of the disintegration of Western culture and society, Eliot frequently employed Jewish characters in his poems, according to Schuchard, as a metaphorical device, to represent the decay of tradition. That was effective, but it made for dangerous art, and Eliot’s critics recoil at some of the imagery he used. In “Gerontion” (1920), for instance, a Jew “squats on the window sill,” his skin “patched and peeled” by a loathsome disease.

Equally damning, in the critics’ view, is a published remark from 1933, when Eliot declared that “reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable.” Schuchard counters that, to the archconservative Eliot, freethinking intellectuals of *any* stripe were anathema. Eliot later retracted the word *race*. (He also claimed ignorance of the persecutions that were already under way in Nazi Germany, and Schuchard, relying on several recent studies of newspaper accounts of the time, says that is completely plausible.)

The invited commentators mostly remain unconvinced by Schuchard’s arguments. The milder voices, such as University of Rochester English professor James Longenbach, allow that “Eliot’s poems are powerful because their language invites us to call him a bigot.” But Anthony Julius, author of *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* (1995), says that “critics who excuse Eliot’s anti-Semitism, or worse, pretend that it does not exist, merely carry on his own work of contempt toward Jews.” The *Modernism/Modernity* debate concludes on a wistful note, with Schuchard’s hope that future discoveries on the scale of the Eliot-Kallen correspondence might shed new light on Eliot’s personal views. Until then, the truth about his beliefs may remain as elusive as the meaning of some of his poetry.

OTHER NATIONS

Muslim Europe

“Europe’s Muslim Street” by Omer Taspinar, in *Foreign Policy* (Mar.–Apr. 2003), 1779 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Europe’s reluctance to join the U.S.-led war against Iraq reflected more than a different orientation toward power. Europe has a much

stronger Muslim constituency than the United States, observes Taspinar, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution’s Saban Center for

Middle East Policy: “The 15 million Muslims of the European Union—up to three times as many as live in the United States—are becoming a more powerful political force than the fabled Arab street.” That France and Germany alone have nearly 10 million Muslims and only 700,000 Jews helps to explain Europe’s different perspective on the Middle East.

Muslims in Europe have seen their clout increase with their growing enfranchisement. Nearly half of the five to seven million Muslims in France (population: 61.4 million) are already citizens. Germany, which began granting citizenship on the basis of birth rather than ancestry in 2000, counts a half-million Muslims among its 82 million citizens, and is adding 160,000 a year. Newly enfranchised “German Turks” gave the incumbent Social Democrat-

Green coalition vital support in last September’s close election.

Turks, Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians, and Pakistanis came to Europe as invited “guest workers” during the 1950s and 1960s, when European countries wanted to ease their post-war labor shortage. But when recession hit in the 1970s, the workers stayed, often joined by their families. Today, Taspinar notes, the Muslim birth rate is three times the non-Muslim rate. By 2015, if current trends continue, the Muslim population in Europe is expected to double, while the non-Muslim population is projected to shrink by 3.5 percent.

“Whether Brussels, Berlin, Paris, or Washington likes it or not,” concludes Taspinar, “Europe’s Muslim constituencies are likely to become an even more vocal foreign-policy lobby.”

Where Politics Is All Too Local

“Decentralization and Political Parties” by Christopher Sabatini, in *Journal of Democracy* (Apr. 2003), 1101 15th St., N.W., Ste. 800, Washington, D.C. 20005.

Political power has shifted massively to the local level in Latin America in recent decades. New local political parties and leaders have sprung up, neglected wants and needs are being addressed, and many more citizens now feel part of the political process. There’s just one problem: Decentralization has been undermining the established *national* political parties that are critical to the long-term prospects of these countries.

That wasn’t supposed to happen, says Sabatini, senior program officer for Latin America at the National Endowment for Democracy in Washington. Take the Andean countries—Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Peru. When they adopted decentralization in the 1980s and 1990s, providing for the transfer of money and responsibilities from the national governments and for the direct election of mayors and governors, “most decision makers and foreign donors [such as the World Bank and U.S. Agency for International Development] expected to see a reinvigoration of party systems as national parties sought to respond to local constituents, issues, and leaders. In practice, however, national parties have often floundered.”

Latin America’s national political parties

have never been particularly strong. Economic woes and austerity measures after 1986 cost many parties public confidence and many of the patronage jobs they had used to sustain their power. Venezuela’s two major parties, Acción Democrática and COPEI, embraced state decentralization after riots shook Caracas in 1989. In Colombia, leaders hoped that direct election of mayors and governors “would re-legitimize a political system battered by years of civil war.”

But “decentralization struck squarely at long-favored means of maintaining party discipline and cohesion,” Sabatini notes. Local leaders no longer need the help of party higher-ups in the capital to satisfy their constituents or run for higher office. And the creation of thousands of locally elected positions has brought many new politicians, movements, and parties to the fore.

But “the lack of coherent links to national-level issues, institutions, and candidates,” says Sabatini, has made it harder for the national governments to govern and to be held accountable. His remedy: decentralize the national parties themselves, making them better able to meet local demands and establish the missing “links.”

The Celtic Tiger

“Why Ireland Boomed” by James B. Burnham, in *The Independent Review* (Spring 2003), Independent Institute, 100 Swan Way, Oakland, Calif. 94621-1428.

How did Ireland’s economy become the powerful green tiger of the 1990s? It was more than just chance but less than a Reaganesque revolution, argues Burnham, a business professor at Duquesne University.

The transformation was undeniably dramatic. In the Ireland of the mid-1980s, he notes, “the unemployment rate reached 17 percent, emigration soared, [and] the government’s finances were a shambles.” But then came more than a decade of uninterrupted economic growth, accelerating in the late 1990s to a rate of nearly 10 percent a year. Inflation and joblessness declined, the government enjoyed a budget surplus, and young people who had left the country returned and found work.

There were no dramatic changes in government policy; the long-dominant party Fianna Fáil retained its grip on power, with only one interruption in the mid-1990s. In part, says Burnham, the success depended on demographics. When jobs were not available, high birthrates made for high unemployment and spurred emigration. But when the economy improved, those same birthrates “provided a large potential reservoir of young workers to support rapid, sustained growth.” Attitude was another favorable factor: The Irish welcomed foreign investment, particularly from the United States.

Foreign and domestic investors were reassured in 1987 when the government cut planned spending, abolished some agencies,

and, with tax evasion widespread, offered amnesty to delinquent taxpayers—thereby reaping a \$750 million windfall and effectively broadening the tax base. That set the stage for crucial “supply side” steps in the 1990s: reductions in marginal tax rates for both individuals and corporations.

The government-run telecommunications system—“perhaps the worst in western Europe” says Burnham—was turned over in 1980 to what four years later became a self-financing state enterprise, with a leading businessman in charge. By the end of the ‘80s, Telecom Eireann, still a state-owned monopoly (it would not be privatized until 2000), was a recognized leader in European telecommunications, “especially with respect to international services and charges.”

During the 1980s the government also expanded state-funded higher education, and re-oriented it to emphasize electrical engineering and information technology.

When technological advances in telecommunications and computers began to eliminate distance as a cost in the movement of anything that could be digitized, Ireland was well prepared to take advantage of the development.

It may have been “a scared, not a visionary, government” that took the first step, says Burnham, but pragmatic decisions—and a bit of Irish luck—eventually gave birth to the Celtic tiger.



The International Financial Services Center in Dublin is a powerful symbol of the “Celtic Tiger” economy.

CURRENT BOOKS

Reviews of new and noteworthy nonfiction

Darkness Remembered

GULAG:

A History.

By Anne Applebaum. Doubleday. 677 pp. \$35

STALIN'S LOYAL EXECUTIONER:

People's Commissar Nikolai Ezhov, 1895–1940.

By Marc Jansen and Nikita Petrov. Hoover Institution Press. 274 pp. \$25

THE DIARY OF GEORGI DIMITROV, 1933–1940.

Edited by Ivo Banac. Yale Univ. Press. 495 pp. \$39.95

Reviewed by Andrew Meier

Moscow in the decade that followed the Soviet collapse could be an unsettling place, a city of brutish and often lethal politics, where the newly rich and the old poor competed, with predictable results and considerable indelicacy, for the spoils of the ancient regime. Amid the turmoil, I learned to seek solace in a small, dimly lit apartment, its shelves filled with manuscripts. I would take the metro to the city's northern edge and visit Semyon Vilensky, not only for relief, but in search of an answer to the unspoken question that haunted the capital and the country surrounding it: the question of remembrance.

Vilensky is not a historian, a political scientist, or even a scholar, but he is as good an expert on matters of historical memory as any Russian I know. For more than four decades, he collected the works—memoirs, short stories, poems, plays, novels, and diaries—of the *zeks*, the prisoners who suffered in the Soviet labor camps. *Zek* was camp slang, a word that grew out of the Gulag architects' bureaucratic shorthand:

z/k stood for *zaklyuchennyi*, prisoner. Vilensky himself, as *zek* I-1620, spent more than six years in Kolyma, site of the dreaded gold-fields at the Soviet Union's frozen north-eastern edge.

It is a miracle that the manuscripts, more than a thousand in all, survived. Vilensky, now in his seventies, is a stocky man with a white, curly mane and anarchic, bushy eyebrows that dance when he talks. With a grin, he likes to share his secret: "The *babushki*." The grandmothers. For a quarter of a century, from Nikita Khrushchev to Mikhail Gorbachev, he traveled the country for six months each year, stashing manuscripts with the *babushki* in villages far from Moscow. Slowly, quietly, he saved the literary heritage of the camps.

In the late 1980s, once *glasnost* began to free Moscow's printing presses, Vilensky started to reel the manuscripts in. In 1989, he founded a group known as *Vozvrashchenie* (The Return), and began to publish them. With a full-time staff of one, he published more than 50 volumes by the time the new

century opened. But he was not ready to rest. Boris Yeltsin had gone, Vladimir Putin had come, and the euphoria accompanying the Soviet fall had long since faded. Yet there had been no reckoning, no attempt at historical understanding. “We barely had enough time to ask the right questions,” Vilensky said, “let alone try to answer them.”



When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, many anticipated that the sins of the Soviet state would be revealed in all their detail. But the return of history did not live up to expectations. The archives opened only briefly—long enough for a few sensations to emerge, but not for the “white spots,” as Russians call the gaping holes in their historical knowledge, to be filled in.

In recent years, however, several volumes have enhanced our understanding of the Soviets’ greatest legacy, the vast and ornate system of political repression known simply as the Gulag (*Gulag* is an abbreviation of *Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei*, Main Camp Administration). Even after the publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipelago* in the 1970s, many in the West held a number of false ideas about the camps: that they were Stalin’s creation; that they reached their capacity during 1937–38, the years known as the Great Terror; that they were the Soviet version of Hitler’s concentration camps; that they were dismantled entirely after Stalin’s death. Amazingly, Anne Applebaum’s *Gulag* is the first complete history of the Soviet camps to appear in English.

Any attempt at a history of the Soviet penal system will inevitably be measured against *The Gulag Archipelago*. Solzhenitsyn, however, has been rightly criticized for his wooden prose—*dokumental’naya proza*, “documentary prose,” Russian writers say, noses upturned. Thankfully, Applebaum, a journalist who has long contributed to British publications and recently joined *The Washington Post*’s editorial page, makes no effort to varnish her history with rhetorical flourishes. Instead, she offers a comprehensive examination of the penal system that littered the Soviet Union with camps and *spetsposelki* (the “special settlements” to which undesirables were exiled). In a lucid and well-crafted narrative, she lays out the evolution of

Labor Camp Near Rostov-on-Don, by Leonid Lamm

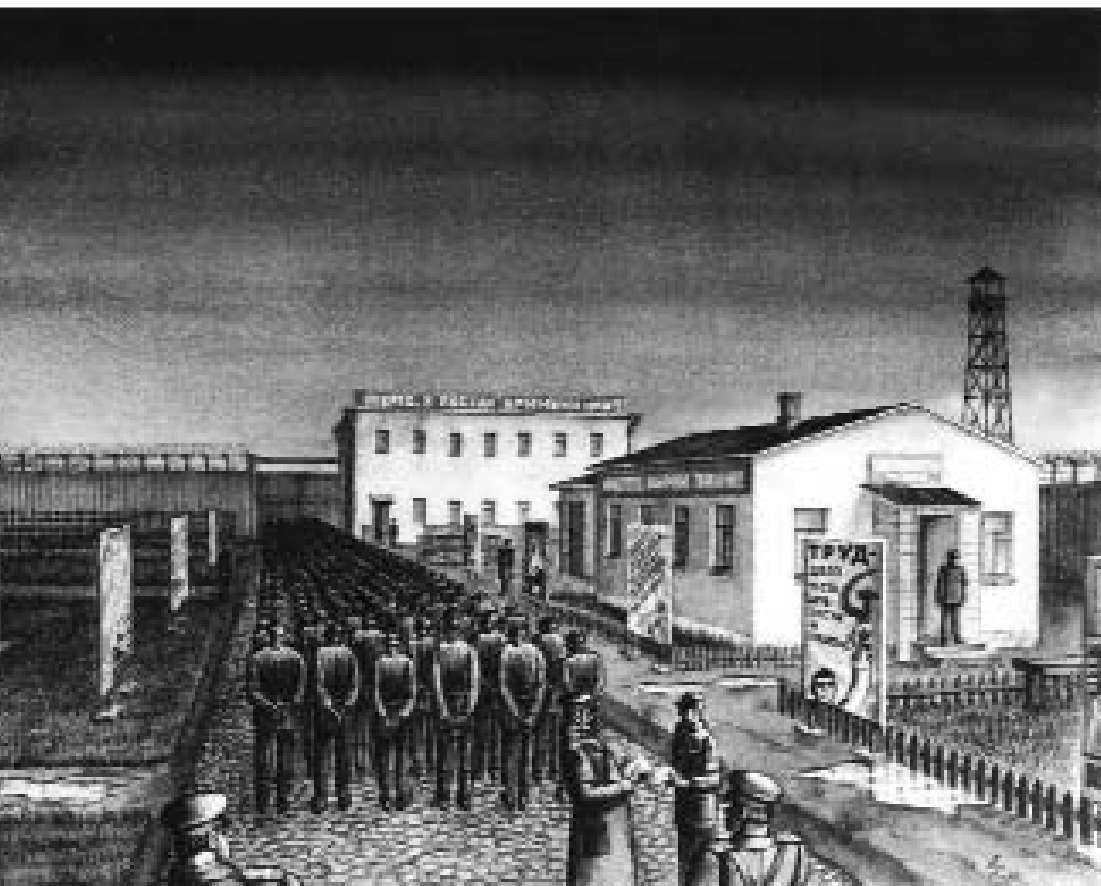
the system, from its tsarist origins (many of the Bolsheviks had known it firsthand), to the first camps (her chapter on the Solovki camp, a former monastery on an island in the Solovetsky archipelago in the White Sea, is one of her best), to the rise of the camps under Lenin (by 1921, she reports, there were 84 camps in 43 provinces), to the Great Terror, to the post-World War II growth of the Gulag when Stalin’s paranoia and megalomania filled the camps with more than two million prisoners, all the way through the Khrushchev thaw to the rise of Gorbachev—the grandson of *zeks*—and the end of systematic political repression in the Soviet Union.

Applebaum judiciously marshals her material to recreate the Gulag in all its minutiae, both macabre and mundane. She is careful to depict both sides of camp life, the prisoners’ and the guards’. She aptly represents the linguistic divide, telling in its details, between the slang of the *zeks* and the anesthetized bureaucratic code of the Gulag administrators. She is unafraid to confront the paradoxes that abounded—*zeks* who became guards, guards who fraternized with *zeks*, female prisoners who married guards.

Above all, Applebaum takes care to denote the line between Hitler’s camps and Stalin’s: The Soviet camps were not designed as extermination centers. Countless men and women died, of course, but Stalin and the architects of the Gulag had seen early on the virtues of prison labor. The *zeks* would be fed in accordance with their *trudosposobnost’* (work capacity), and they in turn would feed the Soviet military-industrial complex.

If there is a fault to *Gulag*, it’s the book’s reliance on documents over the voices of survivors. Despite its masterly sweep, the book seems oddly drained of the Gulag’s sweat and blood. Applebaum apparently elected not to





do extensive interviews of *zeks* (only some two dozen are listed in the notes), though she did make excellent and wide-ranging use of memoirs by survivors.



Applebaum and others (myself included) stand in the debt of a small corps of Russian historians, archivists, and Gulag veterans who have dedicated themselves to excavating the Soviet past. Vilensky's *Vozvrashchenie* is not alone. The Andrei Sakharov Foundation houses an extensive library and research center in Moscow, and the Memorial Society, founded in the Gorbachev era to unearth and preserve the memory of the victims of Soviet repression, has grown, against all odds, to national scale, with branches across the country. The Memorial Society and the Demokratiya Foundation, run by Aleksandr Yakovlev, Gorbachev's former ideologist, have produced volumes of archival documents that are a boon to scholars and deserve to be translated into English. (Applebaum has made

good use of these Russian texts.) The historians Aleksandr Kokurin, Oleg Khlevniuk, and Nikita Petrov—men who were educated in Soviet schools but came of age professionally after the Soviet fall—continue to set a heady pace, contributing either to the Memorial Society series or to pioneering journals such as *Istoricheskii arkhiv* (Historical Archive). Khlevniuk, author of several acclaimed volumes on the mechanics of Stalinism, has recently completed a history of the economics of the Gulag that awaits publication in Moscow. His *History of the Gulag, 1930–1941* will be published next spring as part of Yale University Press's Annals of Communism series.

Petrov, a cochair of the Memorial Society, and the Dutch historian Marc Jansen have written a new study of Nikolai Ezhov, the man Stalin trusted to orchestrate the Great Terror. *Stalin's Loyal Executioner* has received scant notice outside academic circles. But this slim volume, written, alas, in uneven English, is a revelation: Using previously unpublished documents from the holy of holies, the so-called Presi-

dential Archive, Jansen and Petrov attempt a biography of the alcoholic near-dwarf of self-professed uncertain sexual orientation who, at Stalin's behest, with less than a primary school education, ran the daunting operation that sent more than half a million to their deaths in 1937 and 1938.

Jansen and Petrov lay bare the Soviet lies about Ezhov: first, those the Bolsheviks spread to depict him as a fervent proletarian, and later, when he had become an enemy of the state, the ones the Stalinists used to bury their former comrade as a "dwarf-pederast." Detailing his role in the show trial of 1936, Jansen and Petrov reveal how Ezhov climbed the Soviet echelons. They retrace the purge of the Old Bolsheviks, killed by the thousands in the terror, and quote Nikolai Krylenko, the commissar of justice, who at the height of the terror told a friend, "Nowadays Leninists like me are not wanted; the fashionable ones are the Ezhovs . . . parvenus with a lost conscience." Krylenko was soon arrested, and within a year, shot.

Ezhov got his turn not long thereafter. In 1939 he was charged with spying "on behalf of Poland, Germany, England, and Japan; directing a conspiracy within the NKVD [the Soviet internal security agency]; preparing a coup d'état; organizing a number of murders; having sexual intercourse with men." Under torture, Stalin's loyal executioner signed every confession put before him.



Both *Gulag* and *Stalin's Loyal Executioner* avoid the feverish debate that consumed scholars in the wake of the Soviet collapse: the search for a precise tally of the victims of Bolshevik repression. Still, the revisionists, some of whom claim that only thousands were arrested in the Great Terror, will not be pleased. *Gulag* documents indicate that from 1929 until 1953, the year of Stalin's death, 18 million passed through the camps. Another six million were packed off to exile settlements in the Siberian taiga or the Central Asian steppes. Jansen and Petrov restrict themselves to the arrest and execution lists of 1937–39. "In the course of some 15 months," they write, "approximately 1.5 million people were arrested; almost half of

them were executed." Suffice it to say, as Applebaum does, that "statistics can never fully describe what happened."

Perhaps Georgi Dimitrov, the Bulgarian head of the Comintern, offers the best summation. Bits of his diary, kept from 1933 until his death in 1949, have appeared before, but now the entire text has been published in English. In its pages, Dimitrov offers a wealth of insight into the workings of the Comintern and Stalin's Politburo. An entry on November 7, 1937—Revolution Day—provides what may be the clearest prophecy of the madness to come. Dimitrov recounts the parade in Red Square, the feast that followed at Marshal Kliment Voroshilov's, and a toast by Stalin that is remarkable in its honesty and chilling in its blood lust.

"I would like to say a few words, perhaps not festive ones," Stalin said. "The Russian tsars did a great deal that was bad. They robbed and enslaved the people. They waged wars and seized territories in the interests of landowners. But they did one thing that was good—they amassed an enormous state. . . . We have united the state in such a way that if any part were isolated from the common socialist state, it would not only inflict harm on the latter but would be unable to exist independently and would inevitably fall under foreign subjugation. Therefore, whoever attempts to destroy that unity of the socialist state . . . is an enemy, a sworn enemy of the state and of the peoples of the USSR. And we will destroy each and every such enemy, even if he is an Old Bolshevik; we will destroy all his kin, his family. We will mercilessly destroy anyone who, by his deeds or his thoughts—yes, his thoughts—threatens the unity of this socialist state. To the complete destruction of all enemies, themselves and their kin!"

The toast, Dimitrov notes, was seconded by "approving exclamations: To the great Stalin!"



In Vladimir Putin's Moscow—and despite the grip of the oil and gas barons, it is very much his city these days—the remnants of the Soviet intelligentsia like to talk about

expiating guilt. The forlorn and graying dissidents say that the villains of Soviet power should face a Nuremberg. They know, of course, that there never will be one. Russians have not embraced any attempt at a *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the German term for the process of coming to terms with the past. It is said to be cathartic, offering a kind of deliverance. Russian has no such word.

In Germany, the past has been opened wide—in part by the Allies, but far more significantly by social demand and law. In German society, after World War II and again after the fall of the Berlin Wall, excavating the past and telling its secrets became national obsessions. As early as 1946, the philosopher Karl Jaspers began the process of delineating guilt. For all the failings of denazification, Buchenwald and Dachau were not allowed to disappear; they became museums. Among West Germans, with the rise of the generation of 1968, the urge for self-examination only gained strength. Then 1989 brought the craving to the East. The Stasi headquarters were not only stormed but opened. The state established the right and the means for citizens to gain access to their secret-police files. Most significant, the line between perpetrator and victim was not allowed to fade away. To be exposed as a Stasi officer, agent, or informer is to wear the stigma of the offender. Germans, whether confronted by the Allies or by their own sons and daughters, faced the issue of moral complicity and continue to bear its weight.

Nothing could be further from the case in Russia. In 1991, in the last days of the Soviet Union, Boris Yeltsin did push through the “Law on the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression.” The legislation was a critical step, but a far cry from the “truth and reconciliation” endeavors attempted elsewhere. By now, a presidential commission, established by Yeltsin and chaired by Yakovlev, has officially “rehabilitated” more than four million victims of Stalinism, but, for more than a decade, they have had to carry on an unseemly struggle for compensation. And as the new century opened, a former secret policeman rose to rule the Kremlin.

Russian historians warn, however, against comparing the German experience with the Russian. Germany, after all, started to examine its past only after an economic miracle, one of history’s greatest. Russia, more than a decade after the end of the Soviet Union, still awaits its recovery. In a nation economically, socially, and ideologically adrift, reopening old wounds is not a priority.

This past March, on the 50th anniversary of Stalin’s death, a Moscow pollster asked Russians their opinion of the former leader. Of the respondents, 53 percent said Stalin played “a positive role in the life of the country”; 33 percent disagreed; 14 percent were uncertain whether he had been good or bad.

Still, all is not lost. Historians continue to unearth documents and sift through the layers of Soviet realia and surrealia to assemble accounts of the dark past. The surviving *zeks*, even in the new age when so many Russians have mistaken liberty for license, refuse to let their memories fade.

Vilensky continues his publishing marathon. He struggles, as ever, for funds, but he recently produced his “life’s achievement”: a children’s anthology of 20th-century Russian writers, the celebrated and the unknown, including Vladimir Nabokov and Solzhenitsyn (who allowed Vilensky to reprint *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*), all of whom suffered the rise of Soviet power. Much to Vilensky’s surprise, the project has been a success. The Ministry of Education, while stopping short of publishing it, gave the primer its blessing. Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov, not one inclined to air the Soviet past, has consented to its use in the schools, as have the administrators in the Magadan Region, once the headquarters of the Kolyma camps.

The first printing was small—20,000 for the entire country—but Vilensky was overjoyed. “At least it’s out there,” he said, when I visited him earlier this year. “Otherwise our children are facing a white wall. Just ask a 13-year-old in Smolensk what he knows of the Gulag.”

>ANDREW MEIER, Moscow correspondent for *Time* from 1996 to 2001, is the author of the forthcoming book *Black Earth: A Journey through Russia after the Fall*, which he completed as a Wilson Center fellow in 2002.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

*THE LIFE YOU SAVE
MAY BE YOUR OWN:
An American Pilgrimage.*

By Paul Elie. Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
555 pp. \$27

Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Walker Percy, and Flannery O'Connor were arguably the most influential Catholic figures in 20th-century American culture. As Paul Elie shows in this astonishing and thoroughly accomplished book, all four were spiritual searchers whose lives and work endowed post-immigrant American Catholicism with unsuspected energy, urgency, and coherence. Elie rightly calls them pilgrims: Day, Merton, and Percy were converts to Catholicism, but even the cradle Catholic O'Connor found—like the other three—that Catholicism was the beginning, not the end, of her personal and artistic pilgrimage.

All four came to writing through reading. It was an era, beginning in the 1940s, when books and art and ideas mattered in ways they no longer do, and for these four, the problem of God was paramount. Since there was no body of American Catholic literature to attract the serious spiritual searcher, each initially looked elsewhere for the kind of mediating literary figures whose work spoke Rainer Maria Rilke's famous line, "You must change your life." Day, who is best known as the cofounder and embodied spirit of the Catholic Worker movement, came to Catholicism by way of Russian writers, chiefly Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. (The hardest aspect of her life as a Catholic Worker, Day once told me, was her decision to keep her books, including autographed first editions, on open shelves where anyone could steal them—which visitors sometimes did.)

Percy was deeply influenced by Dostoyevsky, Thomas Mann, and that most Protestant of 19th-century thinkers, Søren Kierkegaard. O'Connor found a kindred spirit in Franz Kafka. Merton read almost everyone, even after he became a Trappist monk, but his literary imagination fastened onto James Joyce. The relationship of art to life vexed all of them, and eventually they

found clarity of vision and purpose in medieval Catholic thought and art as reinterpreted by the neo-Thomist philosophers Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson.

Elie is at once an engaging biographer and a discerning critic. The genius of his book lies in the way he interweaves these four writers' wayfaring lives, showing the turning points at which they found their separate paths to a Christian understanding of their individual callings. What's new here is not the biographical material as such but the way Elie allows the trajectory of each life to illuminate the others.

Although the four had little personal interaction, apart from Day and Merton, who maintained a vigorous correspondence, they were linked through a web of enabling Catholic friendships, which included editors such as Robert Giroux—the *éminence grise* at Farrar, Straus & Giroux, where Elie is himself an editor—and major poets such as Robert Fitzgerald, Allen Tate, and Robert Lowell. For example, in her twenties and fresh out of the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa, O'Connor briefly fell in love with Lowell during one of his manic, messianic Catholic phases. At one point, Tate's writer-wife, Caroline Gordon, another convert to Catholicism, was handling the manuscripts of first novels by Percy and O'Connor.

As Elie shrewdly observes, the French-born Merton found in the monastery the architecture of a "perfect world" that replicated the village he had loved as a boy—though he eventually moved to a simple hermitage to be alone to write and to be with God. Elie also notices that Day surrounded herself with weak men, including those she loved in her preconversion bohemian days in Greenwich Village. Wisely, he explores Percy and O'Connor, the most accomplished fiction writers in the bunch, by examining the ways in which they came to terms with life through solving the problems of their craft. Together, these four provided American letters with a Catholic moment that seems all the richer for Elie's telling.

—KENNETH L. WOODWARD

FAITH IN POLITICS.

By A. James Reichley. Brookings Institution Press. 429 pp. \$52.95 cloth, \$20.95 paper

Much of A. James Reichley's latest book reads like a backgrounder for Beltway insiders who don't know much about religion in American politics but who think that it's back, big time, and need to get up to speed. While liberals will find bones to pick with the author's center-right interpretation of history—and the constitutional jurisprudence that goes with it—they will be hard pressed to deny that he has served up a good deal of solid information in easily digestible form.

But the useful summary comes wrapped in a larger argument, and this makes the book at once more interesting and more problematic. The issue Reichley poses is whether “a free society depends ultimately on religious values for coherence and vindication of human rights.” He believes that it does. Is he correct?

According to *Faith in Politics*, the four values on which democracy rests are “personal freedom, distributive justice, citizen participation in social decisionmaking, and social discipline.” In *The Values Connection* (2001), in which he addresses the same issue at greater length and without the American political history, Reichley lists 10 “crucial moral foundations for a functioning free society,” including “tolerance of differences in behavior and belief” and “a sense of personal and social honor.”

Whatever their precise number and nature, do democratic values in fact come from religion, and if so, from what religion in particular? That's an empirical inquiry Reichley chooses not to bother with. Indeed, he grants that democratic values can be derived equally well from secular humanism (which he prefers to call civil humanism) as from “Transcendent Idealism,” a generic theistic outlook that, he says, balances “individual rights against social authority by rooting both in God's transcendental purpose.”

What makes Transcendent Idealism the superior outlook, in Reichley's opinion, for a free society is that it convinces citizens that their values come from on high. Civil humanism, by rooting those values merely in self and society, fails to provide democracy with sufficient “moral support.” As Thomas Jefferson, in one of Reichley's favorite quotes, asked rhetorically in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781), “Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God?”

That popular religious belief is required to create a strong and well-ordered society is an idea dating back to classical antiquity, and one that Western political thinkers such as Machiavelli and Rousseau, whom Reichley puts in the civil humanist camp, devoutly embraced. But ever since Augustine assailed Roman “civil theology” in *The City of God*, the Western Chris-



A Transcendent Idealist? President George W. Bush marks Martin Luther King Day in January.

tian tradition has been ambivalent about making the case for religion on the grounds of its social utility, and Reichley often seems reluctant to admit that he is doing just that.

He makes it clear that America's Founding Fathers from time to time expressed the view that religion, though not a nationally established church, should be an important prop to their new republic. He establishes that Americans today are pretty religious, or say they are. And he shows that a lot of religion has washed through American public life over the past 200

Current Books

years. But none of this proves that the citizens of the United States and every other successful democracy need to subscribe to Transcendent Idealism. The Bush administration will be happy to think they should. The citizens of the free societies of old Europe will say, "*Pas du tout.*"

—MARK SILK

THE NEW ANTI-CATHOLICISM: *The Last Acceptable Prejudice.*

By Philip Jenkins. Oxford Univ. Press.
258 pp. \$27

What might the United States look like without the Catholic Church to kick around? If not for parochial schools and the Papacy's dogmatic rejection of artificial contraception to rail against, public schools and abortion on demand likely wouldn't exist in their current forms. Were it not for the Catholic Church, perhaps, Americans would still be British subjects; Britain's reluctant decision to recognize the Catholic religion in Quebec helped sow seeds of unrest among the colonists, unrest that led to the Revolutionary War.

According to Philip Jenkins, a professor of history and religion at Pennsylvania State University, anti-Catholicism is nearly as American as apple pie. *The New Anti-Catholicism* grew out of his response to the crisis over pedophilic priests, which has figured so prominently in recent headlines. The author of *Pedophiles and Priests* (1996), Jenkins watched with a sort of bemused horror as much of the media coverage in 2002 "slid" beyond the current scandals "into much more dubious attacks on the Church as a whole."

Most of the familiar anti-Catholic tropes were trotted out: priests as sexually frustrated perverts who prey upon the young, bishops as calculating Machiavels, lay Catholics as subservient sheep, too timid to raise a fuss until

The Boston Globe began exposing some of the most horrific offenders. Newspaper cartoonists and late-night talk shows adopted the basic formula Priest = Child Molester. Some priests reportedly stopped wearing their religious garb in public to avoid the glares and spittle.

Jenkins argues that the reaction was hysterical. According to the available evidence, "sexual misconduct [by clergy] appears to be spread fairly evenly across denominations," its incidence rate hovering somewhere between two and three percent among the cleric population. Further, many of the cases that have been labeled pedophilia were actually relationships between priests and young people well above the age of consent. But anti-Catholic attitudes are too ingrained to be displaced by facts. "Of course bishops hate women and gays, priests molest children, and the Church supported the Holocaust: everybody knows that," Jenkins writes. These prejudices are so pervasive "that they are scarcely even recognized as prejudices."

The book's survey of anti-Catholicism in America is brief but convincing. From the Know-Nothing movement of the 19th century to the iconoclastic gay rights protests of the 1980s and '90s, critics of the Catholic Church have demonstrated a remarkable ability to overlook any truth, any scrap of goodness, that the church might offer. In the last chapter, Jenkins urges reporters, entertainers, and professors to give the Catholic Church a fair shake, but he doesn't expect the call to be heeded. Even if a hypothetical Vatican III were to edge Rome closer to modern liberal Protestantism, he writes, the "indestructible" prejudice would simply mutate: "Its strength lies in its flexibility, its capacity to adapt to almost any circumstances." Quite a depressing thought.

—JEREMY LOTT

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

NO END TO WAR: *Terrorism in the 21st Century.*

By Walter Laqueur. Continuum.
288 pp. \$24.95

The first great merit of Walter Laqueur's

characteristically judicious book on the new terrorism is its comprehensiveness. For cool and clear-eyed analysis of the differences between the narcoterrorists of Colombia and traditional national terrorists such as the

Irish Republican Army (IRA), and of the gap between them and the fanatics of Al Qaeda, there is no better guide.

Laqueur, one of the leading and most experienced academic experts on terrorism, keeps his sense of perspective and proportion. In a brisk review of the last 150 years of terrorism, he stresses that “its political effects in contrast to the publicity it received were small.” In some circumstances, terrorists succeeded in highlighting authentic injustices, as with America’s own John Brown in the pre-Civil War years, but usually they provoked police or political reactions that defeated them. “The more successful terrorism was in destabilizing society, the more effective the mobilization of the antiterrorist forces which led to the downfall of the militants.”

Turning to the new jihad-based terrorism of Al Qaeda, Laqueur provides an excellent study of the roots of contemporary Islamic terrorism, although some with knowledge of the religious currents within the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale might question his stress on its Egyptian origins. But he makes the useful point that, unlike the old Communist International, the new Islamic terror network can make use of spaces like mosques that in democratic societies are outside the supervision of the security services.

It is refreshing, amid so much overheated prose about the menace of Islam and clashes of civilizations, to see the phenomenon analyzed by a penetrating and informed intelligence. Yet there is no squeamishness about his controversial conclusion, which is that the civilized world has to recognize that not all terrorists are rational actors who can be bought off by negotiation or appeasement. Some are stark, staring mad.

Since 1945, the world has grown grimly accustomed to terrorists with a clearly defined and negotiable aim—an independent Vietnam or Algeria, a united Ireland, a Palestinian state. But there is a new cleavage between those terrorists, such as Yasir Arafat and the IRA’s Gerry Adams, who have sought to bomb their way to the peace table, or at least to a negotiated political solution, and the new implacables, such as the suicide bombers of 9/11, who want to blow up the

peace table along with everything else.

Moreover, the new terrorism has the apocalyptic prospect of obtaining weapons of mass destruction. Laqueur assumes that at some point their use is almost inevitable, however good our security. Costly public-health precautions are going to become increasingly familiar, along with regular training and exercise drills, public awareness programs, and surveillance measures that will test our civil liberties.

A system of global security cooperation will be required to monitor and block the movements, finances, and communications of the terrorists. There is simply no alternative to such a strategy, which will require the United States to seek allies and partners and international legitimacy. Recent talk to the contrary is so much hollow bluster.

—MARTIN WALKER

DEMOCRACY AND THE NEWS.

By Herbert J. Gans. Oxford Univ. Press. 168 pp. \$26

American newspapers, much as we love to complain about them, are thicker, richer, and more conscientiously factual than their counterparts elsewhere. Most of the largest European dailies would kill for a newsroom the size of, say, *The San Francisco Chronicle’s*, and few could even imagine a world of 21 percent profit margins—the U.S. industry average, even during the recessionary doldrums of 2002.

Despite these achievements, Columbia University sociologist Herbert Gans worries that American newspapers have degenerated to the point that they may require taxpayer subsidies. The author of *Deciding What’s News* (1979) and other works, Gans believes that the American dream has foundered, and that journalism is at or near the root of the problem. His critique of democracy is essentially Naderite: Corporations and other nonhuman entities exercise disproportionate power, alienating half of the voting-age population and separating rich from poor.

Gans pins his extended essay on what he calls “Journalism’s Theory of Democracy,” a four-part doctrine: “(1) The journalist’s role

is to inform citizens; (2) citizens are assumed to be informed if they regularly attend to the local, national, and international news journalists supply them; (3) the more informed citizens are, the more likely they are to participate politically, especially in the democratic debate that journalists consider central to participation in democracy; (4) the more that informed citizens participate, the more democratic America is likely to be.”

Most reporters I know would balk at the notion that *any* unifying theory underpins our work, but Gans maintains that this one is “widely accepted”—as well as fundamentally flawed. It’s “unrealistic,” “wishful thinking,” even “a substitute for thinking about democracy.” In his view, this self-mythology obfuscates the news media’s fundamental shortcoming: their failure to ignite a democratic fire under the citizenry.

Gans wants journalists to promote “citizens’ democracy,” which, in newsroom practice, turns out to entail one grim top-down directive after another. There’s little

room here for the underrated job of telling interesting stories in a compelling manner. Instead, reporters should borrow tactics from schoolteachers. The “first priority” of every news organization should be “to eliminate the continuing racial and class biases in the news.” Satirists should be given “protection against censorship and job loss.” And everyone, heaven knows, should spend more money: “If the news is as central to democracy as journalists argue, then more needs to be spent so that its impact is maximized.”

Gans yearns for media that connect with citizens, but, like a shocking number of media critics, he seems vaguely hostile toward weblogs and other online publications that do just that. A. J. Liebling famously observed that “freedom of the press belongs to those who own one.” In an era when just about anybody can own one, perhaps things aren’t nearly as dire as Gans thinks.

—MATT WELCH

HISTORY

**PEEKING THROUGH
THE KEYHOLE:
*The Evolution of North
American Homes.***

By Avi Friedman and David Krawitz.
McGill-Queens Univ. Press. 212 pp.
\$24.95

Fifty years after a new kind of house and community began to dominate the landscape, a private home in suburbia—albeit a third larger than the average tract house of the Eisenhower era—remains the American dream. According to this short, smart book, however, what our mobile, mutable society needs are fewer McMansions and more homes that are various in form and flexible in function.

The midcentury modern home represented a triumph of newfangled technology over old-fashioned aesthetics. Tired of Colonials and Victorians and of both urban and rural life, postwar Americans flocked to brand-new houses and suburbs created not by architects and planners but by develop-

ers. The mass-produced homes—less crafted than their predecessors but more efficient to construct and run—were mostly occupied by wage-earning fathers, stay-at-home mothers, and their children.

This typical household no longer prevails, yet we’re stuck with its typical home, according to Avi Friedman and David Krawitz, respectively a professor and an administrator at McGill University’s architecture school. Our households are older, less traditional in makeup—many more occupants are unmarried—and smaller, averaging 2.5 members. Moreover, activities that once belonged to “the world,” from work to entertainment, increasingly go on at home. Nevertheless, what the Canadian authors call our “North American home” adheres to the midcentury template, inflated by the notion that “big is good, bigger is better, huge is best.”

One reason our homes and suburbs sprawl as our households contract is capitulation to the car. As James Kunstler observed in *The Geography of Nowhere* (1993), our

driving addiction, combined with single-use zoning, which separates homes from public spaces and services that are crucial to real neighborhoods, has created the barren “bedroom community,” designed not around human needs but around three-car garages, wide streets, and highway access to shopping malls.

Another factor driving our residential excess is an orgy of consumerism. We simply need more space for all our stuff. Friedman and Krawitz remind us, for example, that a “wired” home once meant a black telephone in the hallway and a TV in the parlor. They warn that the abundance of new electronic devices that supposedly connect us with the world in fact diminish face-to-face contact in the home, which risks becoming a mere “container for communication devices.”

Peeking through the Keyhole suggests that “labor-saving” gizmos actually *decrease* our leisure. Computers bring the workplace into the home, where new cooking and cleaning equipment raises housekeeping standards to four-star levels. Between the machines indoors and the wasteland outdoors, suburban life becomes, in developmental psychologist James Gabarino’s phrase, “technology intensive and often socially deficient.”

Friedman and Krawitz struggle with the academic temptation to let substance—particularly statistics—swamp style. Nevertheless, their book is full of fun facts. For instance, home equity of \$4 trillion accounts for more than half of Americans’ personal net worth. Ditching four appliances equipped with transformers—those blocky plugs on cordless phones and the like—yields the same annual energy savings as getting an energy-efficient refrigerator. The authors maintain that family life now revolves around the microwave oven, which has changed not only what we eat but also how we shop, cook, dine, and clean up.

Friedman and Krawitz argue that as a society, we must revamp old ideas about

home in light of new realities. In this anxious time of global political unrest, domestic economic uncertainty, and rapid social and technological change, readers may want to ponder whether their own homes are the adaptable sort that can, as the authors put it, “roll with life’s punches.”

—WINIFRED GALLAGHER

GREENBACK:
*The Almighty Dollar and the
Invention of America.*

By Jason Goodwin. Holt. 320 pp. \$26

In reading the historian Jason Goodwin, you get the facts, plenty of facts, because he’s a joyful researcher—but the facts are selected and arranged for his own special effects, above all his delicate sense of the absurd. The *mélange* will be familiar to fans of *Lords of the Horizons* (1999), his history of the Ottomans, those quaint people in fezzes and soft slippers who ruled a vast section of civilization for 500 years but about whom we know as little as if they were a mythic race of visiting aliens. A delight to read, *Lords of the Horizons* succeeds in sketching a lost world, so one pauses to plug it, emphatically.

In *Greenback*, Goodwin turns his attention to the dollar bill, and he makes a persuasive case that paper money is a specifically American innovation, one that has helped to establish the nation’s global caliphate. “In 1691,” he writes, “three years before the founding of the Bank of England and the earliest five-pound note, faraway Massachusetts became the first state since medieval China to issue its own paper currency.” The New World’s radicals and inno-



Some 8,000 different forms of state and private currency circulated during the latter half of the 19th century. Many of them sported extravagant designs, such as this two-dollar bill from New York’s Saint Nicholas Bank.

vators and ignoramus were rearranging all metaphysics to suit themselves and their pragmatism—Ben Franklin adjusted Time Itself, urging people to move their clocks forward in summertime for a brighter workday—and it does seem characteristically American to remove the superstition of value from barbaric yellow metal and print value instead on worthless paper.

“This knack for substitution came as second nature to men dealing with novelties every day,” writes Goodwin, “but the concept of ‘lawful money’ was a smoking fuse laid against the ancient right of kings to regulate the currency, a small but ultimately significant declaration of colonial America’s aims and purposes.” Once the game was in motion, control over the symbol was sovereignty itself. Thomas Jefferson tended to be afraid of money, both in principle and in practice at home on his farm. Franklin printed it up in bales to pay the soldiers. (To foil counterfeiters, he stepped out the back door of his press room and picked up a leaf to slip into the press’s platen; the print of its veins could never be duplicated.) Quickly the shell game of banking grew up, in which notes were backed by only a 20 percent gold reserve. During the 19th century, tiny regional banks flourished everywhere in the business of, virtually, counterfeiting. Nicholas Biddle tried to enshrine a federal note in a central bank, which Andrew Jackson tried to destroy, seeing everything but gold as phony.

But then, it’s all counterfeit in a sense. Maybe if we paused at the cash register and reflected on the situation, all our dollars would turn back to leaves, all our coaches to pumpkins. The design of the bill, its lacy, grimy tattoo and rune, is supposed to back our unexamined faith, and Goodwin gives free rein to the numismatic fetish of the paper idol itself, the art, the wonderful peculiarities of the dollar’s engraving.

This isn’t a comprehensive history. Poor Jefferson may seem a little dotty in these pages, and the colonists are characterized somewhat strictly as slaves of religiosity. But Goodwin is an Englishman whose view of this country is mostly fond. The tawdriness of the American project is an easy thing for Europeans to smirk about. Goodwin, kindly, persists in discerning something intrepid.

—LOUIS B. JONES

NOBODY’S PERFECT:

A New Whig Interpretation of History.

By Annabel Patterson. Yale Univ. Press. 288 pp. \$27.50

The reformist Whigs dominated British politics from the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to the early 1830s, and their political success inspired a historical school. The “Whig historians” believed, in general, that history endlessly repeats the contest between the Whig Party and its opponents, with the forces of progress—the Whig side—invariably prevailing in the long run. The Whig approach predominated until Herbert Butterfield, in *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), faulted Whig historians for imposing “a certain form upon the whole historical story,” a form that matched their political agenda. Butterfield’s spirited monograph led generations of historians to dismiss the Whig interpretation as a mere mask for political or moral judgments.

Annabel Patterson, a professor of English at Yale University, seeks to refurbish the tarnished reputation of the Whig approach. *Nobody’s Perfect* draws from several disciplines, and the prose is lively and relatively free of academic jargon. But after some early jabs, Patterson does not so much refute Butterfield as ignore him. Like earlier Whig historians, moreover, she uses such terms as “left” and “center right” as if they retained a constant meaning through the centuries, which leads her to group contemporary figures such as Bill Clinton with Whigs such as John Milton and the English radical John Wilkes.

Patterson’s treatment of Edmund Burke is revealing. His early support for American independence, she contends, required that he support the French Revolution, and his failure to do so represents a “slide” into “conservatism,” the abandonment of principle for self-advancement. She barely considers the possibility that he held fast to a conception of progress or democracy that differs from her own, and she offers no argument to the many Burke scholars who see his views as consistent.

We can learn from the Whigs and their rich tradition of political argument. Indeed,

the United States, seeing itself as a “city on a hill,” may be the last Whig nation. But—and this was Butterfield’s point—we must not view the Whigs’ times as mere prelude to

our own. *Nobody’s Perfect* fails to explain how the “new Whig” interpretation of history improves on the old.

—GERALD J. RUSSELLO

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

By Richard Pierre Claude. Univ. of Pennsylvania Press. 267 pp. \$42.50

In this wide-ranging survey, Richard Pierre Claude argues that fighting for human rights falls within the bailiwick of scientists and physicians. A professor emeritus of government at the University of Maryland, Claude also shows how scientific abuses of the past have engendered reforms. The grotesque “experiments” of Nazi scientists, for example, led to adoption of the Nuremberg Code and internationally accepted ethical guidelines. The Holocaust’s lessons also inform what Claude terms “the moral backbone of international human rights law,” the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose adoption in the late 1940s, amid early Cold War tensions, represented a near-miraculous accomplishment.

Scientific tools have done much to reveal violations of the Declaration and other human rights codes. Genetic markers have been used to identify massacre victims from Argentina to Bosnia, and statistical analysis helped establish the pattern of abuses against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and against Filipinos under Ferdinand Marcos. Claude calls for human rights groups to undertake more such studies, rather than rely mainly on the weaker evidence of case reports of human rights violations.

Most books on human rights, even highly acclaimed ones, focus single-mindedly on declarations, conventions, codes, and power-brokers. To his credit, Claude also considers non-governmental organizations, which, as he writes, “provide much of the driving force in the global human rights movement.” He discusses, among others, the Southern Center for Human Rights, which forced Georgia’s largest jail to provide treatment to HIV-positive inmates, and the Nobel Prize-winning International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

Claude largely credits the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the fact that “sectarian definitions of science are widely eschewed, and racist and sexist attempts to slant the work of science are subject to unfettered criticism.” But he faults scientific organizations for not sufficiently educating their members and the broader public: “To use their human rights, people need to know about them.” It’s a cause to which this book will most certainly contribute.

—SHERI FINK

THE TROUBLE WITH NATURE: Sex and Science in Popular Culture.

By Roger N. Lancaster. Univ. of California Press. 442 pp. \$55 cloth, \$21.95 paper

Men are from Mars, women are from Venus. Aggression is an evolutionary survival strategy. Homosexuals are born, not made. Jealousy is nature’s way of promoting pair bonding, which gives offspring a better shot at success. These and other snippets of pseudo-scientific wisdom are dispatched by Roger Lancaster, an anthropology and cultural studies professor at George Mason University, with vigor and appropriate sarcasm.

His target, broadly speaking, is a concoction of sociobiology and “selfish-gene” theorizing that seeks to reduce all human behavior and psychology to brain functions controlled by genes. The eugenics movement of the early 20th century gave this kind of thing a bad name, and by the 1960s right-thinking (i.e., left-thinking) intellectuals embraced a loosely Marxist view in which human behavior was all about “cultural constructs” and had nothing to do with biology. But the Human Genome Project, Lancaster warns, signals the return of that never-vanquished bogeyman, scientific reductionism.

He dissects numerous press accounts of claims for genes that make people heterosexu-

al or homosexual, or daring or timid. He lays into suggestions from evolutionary psychology that male assertiveness and female coyness (not to mention everybody's sweet tooth) are genetically hard-wired. Much of his argument is that the things the sociobiologists say they are explaining do not exist in the first place. Male and female roles are not the same in every society; there are no universal standards of female attractiveness or male desirability; even the human sweet tooth is not universal (Nigerians don't like candy, or so he says a friend told him).

This is a polemic, in other words, but a polemic against what, exactly? In his attacks on oversimplified misconceptions, Lancaster will find many allies among scientists. When it comes to assessing the science itself, he is less authoritative. For example, he makes much of the alleged "gay gene," announced in the 1990s, and explains at some length why the idea of a single gene determining sexual orientation won't fly. Fair enough, but he seems unaware that few scientists took the idea or the evidence all that seriously in the first place.

In fact, I think it would be difficult to find many reputable scientists who are unreconstructed reductionists of the type Lancaster

finds so irritating. He convincingly demolishes a number of simplistic arguments from evolutionary psychology, but seems to think he has thereby undermined the whole enterprise. And he hews to an extremism of his own, embracing the social constructionist's creed that "there is no such thing as human nature independent of human culture." He never provides any justification for this ideology, apart from rounding up declarations from the usual suspects: Karl Marx, Clifford Geertz, and the like.

Still, for all his vehemence, Lancaster is a fluent, often funny, and (dare I say it?) good-natured writer. He divests constructivist theory and gender studies of their usual obtuse jargon and acknowledges the silliness of some ideological critiques of science.

In the end, though, he seems to wish that genes, insofar as they have anything to do with brain function and psychology, would just go away. In the old nature-versus-nurture argument, the correct but murky position, it seems to me, is that both are important, and in ways that cannot be fully disentangled. Some people are happy inhabiting this gray, ambiguous middle ground; others hanker for black or white. Must be one of those genetic things.

—DAVID LINDLEY

ARTS & LETTERS

THE EDEN EXPRESS:

A Memoir of Insanity.

By Mark Vonnegut. Seven Stories.

301 pp. \$13.95 paper

First it was the constant crying. Then the trees were angry at him. Out of nowhere came the wrinkled, iridescent face. When he threw a cue ball at a window, his hippie friends called his famous novelist father, who got him to a mental institution. Mark Vonnegut had two more breakdowns, but after Thorazine shots and electroshock therapy, he was cured, never to be schizophrenic again.

When this account of Vonnegut's illness first appeared, in 1975, it was a rarity. At the time, the only other memoir of schizophrenia was *Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl* (1951), by an author who, with pre-Jerry Springer delicacy, had given only her first

name, Renée. Since Vonnegut's book, the schizophrenic memoir subcategory has blossomed: Jane Rittmayer's *Lifetime* (1979), Lori Schiller's *The Quiet Room* (1994), Ken Steele's *The Day the Voices Stopped* (2001), and even Philadelphia Eagles cheerleader Christina Alexandra's *Five Lost Years* (2000).

Vonnegut's book differs from all of them. He intends *Eden Express* to be something of an apologia for the 1960s—"We were not the spaced-out, flaky, self-absorbed, wimpy, whiny flower children depicted in movies and TV shows. . . . Things eventually went bad, but before they went bad hippies did a lot of good. Brave, honest, and true, they paid a price." The majority of the book describes the commune Vonnegut and other 1969 graduates of Swarthmore College set up on an old farm in remote British Columbia. They raise goats, repair a house, live off

the land (sort of but not really), eat (mostly) macrobiotic vegetarian food, take mescaline and LSD, and, of course, smoke buckets of marijuana.

The Eden Express's biggest difference from the rest of the madhouse memoirs is that the author's father is a counterculture giant, one whose best novels are animated by dark absurdity. Father and son share affinities and contradictions, but this book leaves them untouched. It seems only to say, "Look what happens when you have a dad who's a hippie icon in an era when anything goes—you go crazy! But not so fast. Hippiedom was harmless. Look, I got better and wrote a book about it. We were right all along!"

The confessional and harrowing particularity of the current memoir craze would have helped *Eden Express*. This book about intense feelings lacks feeling. Vonnegut never comes to life. He advances a cockamamie theory that multivitamins cured him of schizophrenia, though he disavows it in an afterword written for this edition—he did, after all, go on to Harvard Medical School and become a pediatrician—and admits that he wasn't really schizophrenic, but manic depressive.

In the end, there is a pervasive sense of falseness here, a maddening skimming of surfaces while purporting to get to the deepest interiors. Not very brave, not completely honest, Mark Vonnegut never paid much of a price for the 1960s. For brave honesty, read "Letter from Birmingham Jail," not this pseudopsychiatric memoir full of wimpy, whiny flower children.

—LORRAINE ADAMS

MIDNIGHT LIGHTNING:
Jimi Hendrix and the Black Experience.

By Greg Tate. Lawrence Hill Books.
157 pp. \$18.95

In few fields has the label *genius* been applied more recklessly than in rock 'n' roll. One of the few rock stars truly deserving the label is Jimi Hendrix, who was not only a vir-



Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock in 1969.

tuoso guitarist and consummate showman but a musical visionary and writer of enduring songs. His career as a headliner was meteoric, from the release of his jaw-dropping debut album *Are You Experienced?* in 1967 to his drug-related death in 1970 at age 27. The Hendrix industry has thrived in the years since, cranking out countless records, movies, books, tributes, and imitators, as well as endless speculation about what might have been.

Midnight Lightning is the latest and, in many respects, the strangest of the books. Greg Tate, a staff writer at *The Village Voice*, provides a remarkably astute examination of Hendrix's protean talents. The effortless precision with which he positions Hendrix in the context of subsequent guitarists is music criticism at its best. But Tate has loftier goals than mere biography or technical appreciation. He seeks to place Hendrix—a black man who was largely ignored by the black community—in a racial context.

Himself African-American, Tate announces up front that "this is a Jimi Hen-

drix book with *A Racial Agenda*.” Readers who can get past the rhetoric will be rewarded with provocative insights into black America and white America and Hendrix’s singular position at the intersection of the two. But there’s also a bunch of oddball material, including a fabricated review of a movie Hendrix never made and a bizarre synopsis of a novel Hendrix never wrote. Through it all, Tate writes with an engaging, highly stylized voice, which on occasion even manages to evoke Hendrix’s own loopy lyricism.

Despite all the pyrotechnics, though, the book seems not so much searing Hendrix solo as Eddie Van Halen guitar extravaganza, full of impressive licks and memorable riffs but leading nowhere. Tate thoroughly documents Hendrix’s African-American roots, both social and musical, but this knowledge does nothing to explain his incomprehensible leap from sideman on the black “Chitlin Circuit” to white rock ’n’ roll icon. Then again, geniuses by definition are beyond the understanding of mere mortals.

—PRESTON LERNER

READING LOLITA IN TEHRAN:

A Memoir in Books.

By Azar Nafisi. Random House.

347 pp. \$23.95

In 1979, having spent 17 years abroad as a student, Azar Nafisi returned to Iran and found her homeland transformed. Gone was the café where she and her brother, as children during the Shah’s reign, had watched incoming planes through French windows. With signs proclaiming “Death to America!” and posters of Ayatollah Khomeini, the new reality was hell-bent on asserting its dominion over the imagination of the Iranian people. Yet beneath this totalitarian blanket, Nafisi resisted and flourished. She sets out here to “thank the Islamic Republic for all the things it had taught me—to love Austen and James and ice cream and freedom.”

As the youngest faculty member in the English department at the University of Tehran, Nafisi was well situated to chart the Islamic Revolution: The university “was the navel, the immovable center to which all

political and social activities were tied.” She bore witness to the censorious climate that subsumed everything—culture, dress, and social interaction—beneath ideology. “There were only two forces in the world, the army of God and that of Satan. Thus every event, every social gesture, also embodied a symbolic allegiance.” She quit her job in 1981 after refusing to don the veil, and went on to teach at two other Iranian universities, where she repeatedly crossed lances with those who would politicize literature. Finally, she left academia.

“After resigning from my last academic post, I decided to indulge myself and fulfill a dream,” Nafisi writes. From 1995 to 1997, she hosted a seminar at her home in Tehran. On Thursdays, seven of her former female students, chosen for their literary acumen, would discuss the intersection of reality and literature. (The husband of one student would meet with Nafisi in private, for teaching “a mixed class . . . was too risky.”) Their discussions ranged across such topics as a woman’s right to choose her destiny (*Pride and Prejudice*), the sustaining power of the imagination in the presence of death (*A Thousand and One Nights*), and what it means to be the object of a megalomaniac’s obsession (*Lolita*).

These books, Nafisi convincingly argues, pose an even greater threat to a despotic orthodoxy than any open display of political rebellion. They’re especially dangerous because they are *not* overtly political. By addressing the private rather than the public sphere, they do not speak in the hangman’s language, which depends upon what can be observed, and thus regulated.

Though the narrative’s path toward magnanimity is never really in doubt—Nafisi is too detached, too much the aesthete, to be unhinged by deprivations, and she knows that during times of unrest, the servants of beauty are most needed—the content of the book overcomes the conventionality of its form. What could have devolved into a misty-eyed hymn to literature is saved by its singular locale. In a nation afflicted with “intense sensory deprivation,” where even open displays of affection are proscribed, literature becomes a matter of urgency. By thinking through books rather than about

them, Nafisi has produced a deeply literary and novelistic memoir, displaying penchants for both understatement—exemplified by a stunning account of the void felt throughout Iranian society in the wake of Khomeini’s death—and complexity.

Writing of communist Eastern Europe, Philip Roth once noted, “Over there noth-

ing goes and everything matters; over here everything goes and nothing matters. When everything is free and nothing is at risk, when all is blandly equal, who cares?” Nafisi shows us a stifling regime where nothing goes, and the inner life that surmounts the odds and manages to thrive.

—CHRISTOPHER BYRD

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PORTRAIT: George Orwell



There is a photograph, taken around 1946 in Islington, of Orwell with his adopted son, Richard Horatio Blair. The little boy, who would have been around two at the time, is beaming, with unguarded delight. Orwell is holding him gently with both hands, smiling too, pleased, but not smugly so—it is more complex than that, as if he has discovered something that might be worth even more than anger—his head tilted a bit, his eyes with a careful look that might remind filmgoers of a Robert Duvall character with a backstory in which he has seen more than one perhaps would have preferred to.

Winston Smith “believed that he had been born in 1944 or 1945. . .” Richard Blair was born May 14, 1944. It is not difficult to guess that Orwell, in 1984, was imagining a future for his son’s generation, a world he was not so much wishing upon them as warning against. He was impatient with predictions of the inevitable, he remained confident in the ability of ordinary people to change anything, if they would. It is the boy’s smile, in any case, that we return to, direct and radiant, proceeding out of an unhesitating faith that the world, at the end of the day, is good and that human decency, like parental love, can always be taken for granted—a faith so honorable that we can almost imagine Orwell, and perhaps even ourselves, for a moment anyway, swearing to do whatever must be done to keep it from ever being betrayed.

—Thomas Pynchon, in the Foreword to a new Penguin edition of 1984

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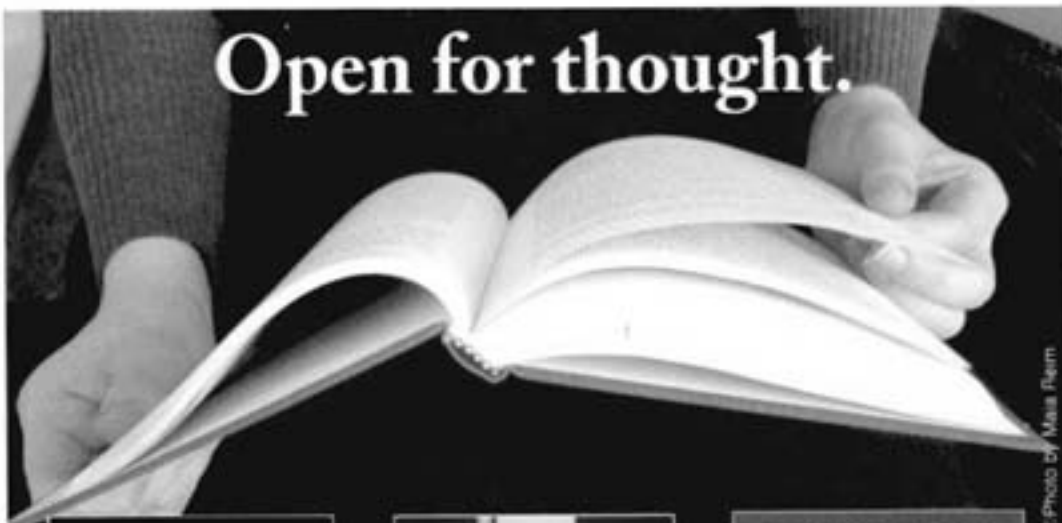
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A Way Out

America's Ghettos and the
Legacy of Racism
Owen Fiss

*Edited by Joshua Cohen,
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