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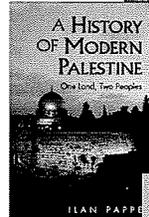
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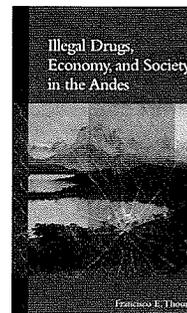
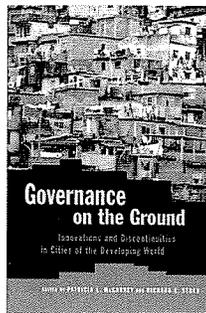
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Editor's Comment

Of all the modern presidents, Woodrow Wilson left perhaps the most contradictory legacy. Long an inspiration to America's liberal internationalists, he has lately become something of a touchstone for "unilateralist" conservatives who seek to spread democracy around the world. Though he was America's only scholar-president—a former professor and university president—Wilson has often suffered at the hands of his fellow scholars, especially in recent years. In her magnificent account of the Versailles Peace Conference, *Paris 1919*, for example, historian Margaret MacMillan gives Wilson his due but also depicts him as inflexible, aloof, and frequently ill informed. He is said to combine "vast self-righteousness with huge ambition." Others have faulted him for injecting the combustible notion of national self-determination into global politics without quite understanding the consequences of what he was doing.

In this issue, we are privileged to present an extended essay by the late Kenneth S. Lynn that adds a new dimension to the evolving portrait of the 28th president. Professor Lynn, the author of 13 books, including penetrating biographies of Ernest Hemingway and Charlie Chaplin, and countless articles and essays, was one of his generation's leading historians and biographers. The essay on Wilson is drawn from a book Lynn left incomplete at the time of his death last year and was brought to us by his one-time student, Wilfred M. McClay, a former Wilson Center fellow. With keen moral and psychological insight, Lynn focuses on how Wilson's lifelong physical ailments affected his character and behavior. We are shown a man who must be faulted for concealing his infirmities from the public and yet admired for striving so hard to overcome them. Lynn's Wilson is a classically tragic figure, a man whose deep religiosity and devotion to high ideals and abstractions cost him much that he held dear, a man who was undone even more by his virtues than by his vices.

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Considering International Law

In the wake of Robert Kagan's seminal essay *Of Paradise and Power*, defenses of American unilateralism are in vogue these days. Jed Rubenfeld has supplied a novel one in his essay "The Two World Orders" [WQ, Autumn '03].

Like Kagan, Rubenfeld believes that America and Europe are Mars and Venus—not friends going through a rough patch but opposites with fundamentally different "constitutions," in all senses of the word. But Kagan and Rubenfeld part company over what they see as the source of the difference. Kagan attributes the transatlantic polarity to a growing post-World War II, post-Cold War "power gap," and describes with compelling illustrations how power and weakness are the factors that make today's Americans "cowboys" and today's Europeans postmodern wimps. Rubenfeld eschews power and weaponry and offers instead a more intrinsic explanation for the differences between America and Europe: our different conceptions of "constitutionalism."

According to Rubenfeld, Europe's "international constitutionalism" asserts "universal" and "uniform" principles (especially those devoted to human rights) that have their origin outside national democratic processes. Because the World War II fascist leaders came into power through elections, Rubenfeld argues, Europeans have a congenital need to constrain national self-government (and its potential for democratic excess). In turn, this has produced an elitist approach toward constitutions, one that is disdainful of the participatory process and judicial review. For Rubenfeld, European constitutionalism stands, above all, for "world government" whose aim is to impose "international law" (as opposed to democracy)—uniformly, universally.

In contrast, says Rubenfeld, America's "national constitutionalism" champions democratic values. Our constitutional authority, he argues, is "self-given" ("We the people" versus the French "universal rights of man").

Because American constitutional authority derives from within our national democratic process, the American approach is inherently more "democratic." Our constitution remains answerable to the courts, the political process, and, ultimately, the people—not to the "world government" of the United Nations. Rubenfeld would have us believe that our constitutional make-up and democratic nature, not our power, propel us into unilateral action.

Rubenfeld's proposition that the European and American approaches toward constitutional democracy are not only different, but irreconcilably so, is dubious at best. He cites the phrase "We the people" from the preamble to the U.S. Constitution as proof that our roots are in popular sovereignty (while Europe's are in universal rights). But he ignores the equally formative sentence from the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these *Truths* to be *self-evident*, that *all Men* are *created equal*, that they are *endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights*, that among these are *Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness*." Even without the added emphasis, it's clear from Jefferson's eloquence that our roots also lie in the universal values of the Enlightenment. This cornerstone sentence of our cornerstone document is perhaps the most enduring expression of what we are about, and what we aspire to be, as a people.

As for the U.S. Constitution, Rubenfeld forgets that it was the end-product of a bitter struggle over existential issues such as government, citizenship, and, above all, the question of whether our fundamental value is individual liberty or national liberation. The charged debate in Philadelphia elicited a compromise document, even a contradictory one, whose very divisions are what define us. Rather than establishing our credentials as dyed-in-the-wool popular democrats, the phrase "we the people" was, as Joseph J. Ellis explains in *Founding Brothers*, an "artfully contrived ambiguity," meant to paper over the divisive question of whether sovereignty resided with the

federal government or the individual states. Ellis adds that the ideological debate conducted by the Founding Fathers is essentially the same one that academicians ever since have been fighting over and over again. Rubinfeld is entitled to join either side of the debate, but surely he cannot assume it away in an effort to simplify his argument.

Rubinfeld also fails to compare our constitutional convention with the current exercise of writing a European constitution, an inexplicable omission for a piece whose thesis is that Americans and Europeans have two fundamentally different approaches to constitutions. As between the two, it is, ironically, the European process that evinces far more “democratic” values. The draft European constitution was produced by parliamentary and governmental representatives of all 28 present *and* candidate states (including even Turkey) of the European Union, and the European parliament meeting in opens session. Former French president Valéry Giscard d’Estaing and his coterie of advisers played the role of “expert elite,” but they were a small minority of the participants.

By contrast, for all our vaunted “participatory” nature, it was “a propertied elite hardly representative of the population as a whole” who drafted the U.S. Constitution in sessions “conducted in utter secrecy,” as Ellis writes. The Philadelphia convention itself, he adds, was “extralegal,” in that its true mandate was merely to revise the Articles of Confederation, not replace them.

If the foundation of “The Two World Orders” crumbles under examination, so, too, does the edifice constructed on it. Most of the examples that Rubinfeld supplies do not survive even mild scrutiny. His Exhibit A is the exclusion of Kosovars from a Council of Europe commission (on which he sat as an observer) working on a constitution for the UN-administered province of Kosovo. Never mind the exclusive, elitist origin of our own constitution, which makes the Council of Europe look transparent and inclusive by comparison. Never mind that Kosovo’s “constitutional framework” was actually prepared by a UN working group, in which Kosovar Albanians played an active role. (The Kosovar Serbs opted out of the working group, making it difficult to depend on the input of only one

party.) And never mind that the Kosovo constitution includes one of Rubinfeld’s hallmarks of democratic legitimacy—judicial review of the constitution. These matters are of small significance compared with the wholesale distortion of the relative European, UN, and American roles in writing constitutions implied in “The Two World Orders.”

The allegedly “undemocratic” UN is today conducting a democratic constitution review process in Afghanistan, in which the draft constitution is being openly debated by 20,000 people before culminating in a national *loya jirga* (grand council). The UN-assisted Afghanistan constitution process stands in stark contrast to the Dayton-drawn constitution that was, by necessity, foisted on Bosnia-Herzegovina by U.S. diplomats, with a modicum of input from Bosnia’s Croat, Serb, and Muslim leaders, let alone from “the people.” Likewise, American overseers in Japan wholly imposed a constitution on that country without consultation. As Ambassador Jim Dobbins writes in *America’s Role in Nation-Building*, MacArthur “urged extreme haste and secrecy,” unilaterally reordering Japanese institutions and relegating the emperor to a mere symbol. MacArthur’s handiwork has survived for nearly half a century as a fully legitimate success, despite the fact that its origin was “undemocratic.”

Rubinfeld’s Exhibit B is the 1999 air campaign in Kosovo, which he cites as proof of the sweeping assertion that the United States does not recognize the UN Charter or the UN system as law (while Europeans, by implication, do). He overlooks the fact that not a single European ally objected to the Kosovo bombing; indeed, the North Atlantic Council of NATO (including those pesky French) approved the bombing, and many (again, including the French) participated in the air campaign. The fact that the United States—and its NATO allies—acted *without* UN imprimatur says as much about attitudes toward the UN as does the fact that the United States led the first Persian Gulf war *with* UN approval. The simple truth about Kosovo was that neither Washington nor Brussels was going to permit Milosevic to continue to destabilize the Balkans because of a Russian Security Council veto.

Another distortion by Rubinfeld concerns the war in Afghanistan. He says that “European nations contributed almost nothing, and

FROM THE CENTER

The Wilson Center was honored this past September to play host to former president Jimmy Carter at an event marking the 25th anniversary of the historic Camp David Accords. During the negotiations at the presidential retreat, Carter recalled, Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat were “totally incompatible, shouting, banging on the table, stalking out of the rooms.” But after nearly two weeks, Begin and Sadat signed the agreement, ending decades of conflict between Israel and Egypt. At the Wilson Center, Carter saluted the two men for showing “that when leaders are willing to take enormous risks, peace is possible.” (For a report on the event, see the Center’s website, www.wilsoncenter.org.)

A willingness to take risks is an essential element of statesmanship.

So is the somewhat contradictory quality of patience. It took years of patient effort to get Israeli and Egyptian leaders to negotiate seriously. And still more patience is required today, for while there is no longer open conflict between the two countries, neither is there much of the ordinary sort of exchange—of goods, people, or ideas—that is so essential to real peace. That will take much longer.

The importance of risk and the need for patience are surely pertinent lessons for the current U.S. situation in the Middle East. Whatever one’s view of the Bush administration’s decision to pursue war against Iraq, it is clear that a sea change in U.S. policy toward the Middle East was inevitable. During the Cold War, realpolitik dictated that the United States should accept the status quo in this vitally important strategic region so long as our Soviet adversaries were not strengthened. But with the end of the Cold War, one of the fundamental rationales for turning a blind eye to undemocratic and repressive regimes no longer existed. Then 9/11 occurred, crystallizing the new threat to the United States posed by Islamic radicalism. It also made clear that many of the region’s existing regimes were not only threatened by the same radical Islamic forces but had helped give birth to them. In some cases, they may even have directly aided

those forces. More commonly, the radicals benefited from the regimes’ flaws—the economic stagnation and corruption that breed deep popular discontent, the political repression that helps channel followers to the religious radicals.

The U.S. and coalition commitment to Iraq, though not yet a year old, already shows signs of promoting the kinds of changes that are needed in the region. Some of the signs are ironic but still important. Syria’s president, Bashar al-Assad, who presides over a police state next door to Iraq, recently declared that the Iraqis must be allowed to write their own constitution and elect their own leaders. “In those remarks,” observed *The New York Times*, “the Syrian president joined

the unusual chorus of Arab leaders calling for measures in Iraq that often do not exist in their own countries.” Statements such as theirs, however, do have a way of mattering.

Other portents of change are more concrete. In Saudi Arabia, the government has set a timetable for beginning local elections, and there are signs that those Saudis who recognize the need for change in the closed kingdom are gaining strength. In Iran, too, advocates of change seem to have been strengthened by the visible sign of U.S. commitment across the border in Iraq, and even the entrenched Teheran regime has consented to international inspections of its suspect nuclear program.

The United States cannot transform the Middle East, but it can support those throughout the region who seek change. The evidence suggests that their numbers are much greater than many imagined. The fabled “Arab street,” which was expected to erupt in anger over the U.S. occupation of Iraq, has remained relatively quiet. Ordinary people in the Middle East are watching, like much of the world, to see if the United States has the fortitude and patience to stick to its commitments and high purposes. Only by staying the course can we lead the way toward positive change.

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instead issued repeated warnings that the war might be illegal." In fact, in October 2001, the EU Council of Ministers declared "its full solidarity with the U.S. and its wholehearted support for the action." Indeed, these same European governments invoked NATO's Article 5 for the first time in history, offering the alliance's full arsenal to Washington. Article 5 expressly compels "assistance" by European members to an attack on the United States and acknowledges that the use of force in self-defense is wholly legitimate under the UN Charter. The fact that the Europeans contributed nothing militarily in Afghanistan is because Washington snubbed the offer.

With his stretched-to-the-bone argument, Rubinfeld has performed a disservice, confusing the issues at hand and creating a false dichotomy. If we accept "The Two World Orders," it would make little sense to pursue anything other than unilateralism, because Americans and Europeans have different constitutional codes indelibly stamped on their genes. The most unfortunate aspect of Rubinfeld's essay is not that its foundation is weak and its examples inaccurate but that it distracts us from more compelling questions. The question of the moment is not whether or how we're different from the Europeans. The question, rather, is whether it serves our interests to operate without them. And there are other questions, too: not whether to choose between democracy and international law, but how to build democracies that respect international law; not how to introduce politics to judiciaries in fledgling democracies, but how to insulate them from politics.

It's now time for the pendulum to swing back from exaggerated depictions of the divisions between Europe and America to an eyes-open awareness of our differences, our similarities, and, most important, our shared interests.

*Edward Joseph
Research Scholar
Woodrow Wilson Center
Washington, D.C.*

Jed Rubinfeld replies: Vituperation aside, Edward Joseph makes six points. Five are simply mistakes. One is important.

First, he quotes the great natural-law sentences from the Declaration of Independence to argue that U.S. constitutionalism is the same as international constitutionalism. I'm afraid Joseph has misunderstood the basic issue. Of course many Americans have believed in universal, Enlightenment values. I believe in them myself. But if such values are to be made into law, real human beings have to do it. International constitutionalism holds that the legislators, interpreters and enforcers of our fundamental law should be *international* organizations, councils, courts, etc., on the theory that the really fundamental law is supra-political—binding on all nations, even nations that never adopted it. U.S. constitutionalism stands for the idea that it is up to the people of a given nation to decide for themselves, through democratic constitution-making processes, what values they take to be fundamental—with the constitution thereafter interpreted by national courts, subject to national amendment. That is the simple but crucial difference.

Second, Joseph notes that the U.S. Constitution was a compromise between partisans of national and state sovereignty. Obviously. But both groups were arguing for the right of “the people” to decide their own fundamental law. All would have adamantly objected to undemocratic governance by European powers. Do I need to remind Joseph that they had just fought a war to avoid that result?

Third, Joseph insists that the U.S. Constitutional Convention was undemocratic. He forgets the extraordinary process of debate and ratification that followed. America's constitution-making processes were hardly ideal, but they were by far the most democratic constitution-making processes ever attempted, at that time, by any large state in the modern world.

Fourth, Joseph cites current efforts toward a European Constitution. These efforts support my argument. Over the last decades, the vesting of enormous powers in centralized, international, relatively unaccountable bodies occurred in Europe despite a “democratic deficit” that would have been totally unacceptable for a constitutional transformation of such magnitude in America. Europeans today recognize this; one of the goals of the European Constitution

is to “fill” this deficit. I hope they achieve this goal, but if they do, it would not follow that America should be more receptive to international law. Whatever the fate of Europe, international law remains diplomatic, bureaucratic, technocratic—not democratic.

Fifth, Joseph objects to my discussion of Kosovo. The 1999 Kosovo bombing, he asserts, says nothing about U.S. attitudes toward the UN or international law, because NATO supported it. This is unintelligible to me. The Security Council's refusal to authorize made the Kosovo bombing illegal, but we went ahead with it anyway. This was, whatever Joseph might like to think, very much a statement that the United States would not always comply with international law or the UN Charter. Joseph also notes that Kosovo's constitutional framework was ultimately prepared not by the Council of Europe but by a “UN working group in which Kosovar Albanians played an active role.” In my essay, to illustrate European constitutional attitudes, I described how the Council of Europe sought, without Kosovar participation, to draft a constitution for Kosovo. My illustration stands, but I would say that Joseph's notion that democracy is in action when a constitution is “prepared by a UN working group” is symptomatic of the problem I'm describing.

Finally, Joseph says that our undemocratic imposition of a constitution in Japan was very successful, that state-building is necessary in other countries today, and that cooperating with other nations will be critical for the United States in the future. All this is important. I want to stress what I said at the end of my essay. I am not condemning the use and ambitions of international law everywhere. For failed or failing states, the imposition of a constitution by international forces may be the best and only hope. Moreover, America must find ways to keep and build international coalitions. But the fact remains: America has good reason to be skeptical about submitting to international law and international governance.

If Jed Rubinfeld is right (and I have no doubt that he is) that “international law is a threat to democracy and to the hopes of democratic politics all over the world,” then why is international law “necessary”?

It depends upon what one means by “international law.” Rubinfeld reminds us that con-

temporary international law has undergone drastic changes in the past few decades. Traditional international law is “international” in that it concerns interactions among nation-states. There is nothing problematic about this. Contemporary international law, however, is not “international,” but transnational or supranational. And, as Anne-Marie Slaughter notes in her *WQ* article, “Leading Through Law,” future international legal regimes will be built upon a “new foundation, allowing them to penetrate the shell of state sovereignty.” The aim is not to regulate the affairs of sovereign states but to transcend the authority and legitimacy of modern nation-states (including, explicitly, constitutional democracies). It is, in practice, post-democratic.

Law professor Kenneth Anderson has written eloquently about how the demand for the expansion of supranational law emanates from a new class of self-interested transnational elites. He describes the culture of this new class as one of “indifference” and “disdain to majoritarian processes” and to the rough-and-tumble of democratic self-government. The power and influence of its adherents would substantially increase if national democratic sovereignty were lessened and post-democratic international laws and institutions were strengthened. Anderson notes that the “international” is not coterminous with the “universal,” since international-law advocates often represent narrow ideological agendas.

The regimes targeted by transnational elites are not thug ones, such as Burma and the Sudan (they are simply easy first targets), but liberal democracies like the United States and Israel. In the end, it is democratic sovereignty—what we know as “government by consent of the governed”—that is at stake.

John Fonte
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The Hudson Institute
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The Blair Referendum

Steven Kramer’s “The Blair Moment” [*WQ*, Autumn ’03] discusses the British prime minister’s failure to bring his country into a central role in a united Europe, but the situation is even worse than the essay describes.

A successful referendum on British partici-

pation in the single European currency mechanism would have been the ideal means for reuniting Britain and Europe. But Blair’s disastrous involvement in the Iraq War, coupled with the political fallout from the Hutton inquiry on the British government’s role in the suicide of the country’s leading expert on biological and chemical weapons, now makes it nearly impossible to pass such a referendum.

Such a loss would expose the vulnerability of Blair’s government in the next parliamentary election, still several years off. For his own political survival, the prime minister must put off the euro vote, even if that means losing further influence in Europe.

The only solution for the Labor government would be Blair’s retirement to the House of Lords and the succession of Gordon Brown as prime minister. Assuming Brown is honest in his appraisal of the euro criteria for Britain, and assuming those criteria are met next spring, Britain could rejoin Europe under a new prime minister who remained untainted by Britain’s dubious role in the Iraq War.

Clifford P. Hackett
Author of *Cautious Revolution: The European Union Arrives*
Berkeley Springs, W. Va.

Better Humans?

Carl Elliott [“Humanity 2.0,” *WQ*, Autumn ’03] suggests that, for women with small breasts and/or large noses, instead of surgery, “a better solution would be . . . fixing the social structures that make so many people ashamed of these aspects of their identities.” Obviously, this means we would have to make sure such women got as many dates as women with large breasts and small noses. As men would be unlikely to cooperate with this plan voluntarily, some form of coercion would have to be used. I propose a new form of national service, a “Civilian Dating Corps.” If young men are given the choice between digging ditches for two years and joining the CDC, at least a few will opt for the latter.

The logical next step is to make sure these women receive as many marriage proposals as their large-breasted/small-nosed sisters. I await Mr. Elliott’s proposals in this area.

Taras Wolansky
Kerhonkson, N.Y.

Findings

American Expansionism

The occasion went unmarked at the time—no headlines, no speeches, certainly no fruit baskets—but one day, probably in the early 1980s, somebody gained a few pounds and unwittingly made overweight the American norm.

Surveys of the late 1970s found that 47 percent of American adults between 20 and 74 were overweight, defined as having a body mass index of at least 25. (The BMI is a formula based on height and weight.) Nowadays, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), a bountiful 65 percent of us are overweight. And the overweight category's obesity subset—those with a BMI of at least 30—has supersized, growing from 15 percent of the adult population in the late 1970s to 31 percent now. Women outnumber men in the healthy-weight category and, oddly, in the obese category; it seems that men cluster in the middle and women at the extremes.

Dieting, or rather the way most people diet, is partly to blame for the nation's corpulence. Dieters can end up consuming more calories than nondieters, according to University of Toronto psychologists C. Peter Herman and Janet Polivy, whose paper, "Dieting as an Exercise in Behavioral Economics," is published in the book *Time and Decision* (Russell Sage). Whereas nondieters tend to lose their appetites under stress, troubled dieters self-medicate with food. Yet joy

likewise drives dieters to excess: "The happy dieter no longer has as much motive to diet," Herman and Polivy write. "Because dieting itself is basically just a way to improve one's life, if one is already feeling good, then why bother dieting?"

What's equally flaky, a dieter who overeats at one meal often declares the day a total loss and binges. "From a strictly caloric standpoint," Herman and Polivy observe, "whether the dieter who fails to adhere to her 1,700-calorie diet for the day ends up consuming 1,800 calories or 3,800 calories makes all the difference in the world; but dieters don't see it that way. A blown diet is an excuse for effectively unlimited indulgence, accompanied by assurances to self and others that tomorrow will be different." In the authors' view, "dieting is on balance a bad idea."

Disastrous diets and expanding waistlines notwithstanding, HHS

does report a bit of good news: Americans' life expectancy has reached an all-time high of 77.2 years, up nearly two years since 1990. We're livin' large yet livin' long.



Fadspeak

Language watcher Richard Lederer wants to banish fadspeak, those "vogue phrases"—such as *livin' large*—"that suddenly appear on everybody's tongues." In *A Man of My Words* (St. Martin's), Lederer illustrates even as he denounces: "I have zero tolerance for anything that lowers the bar for what makes world-class writing. Work with me on

Findings

this. I've been around the block, and I know a thing or two. I know that I wear many hats, but I'm not talking trash here. I'm not the 800-pound gorilla out to bust your chops. I feel your pain, and I'm your new best friend." For three pages, Lederer manages to sustain this litany of phrases to be avoided (like the plague?).

Reeducation, American Style

The Special Projects Division, a secret U.S. Army program during World War II, sought to teach German prisoners of war the virtues of democracy. In *The Enemy among Us* (Missouri Historical Society), David Fiedler reports that the division sponsored newsletters written by anti-Nazi prisoners, vetted camp libraries and entertainment for ideological correctness (no more gangster movies), and, in Fiedler's words, considered "ways to incorporate positive democratic propaganda through every possible avenue."

In three respects, it was a delicate operation. First, the Geneva Convention prohibited efforts to indoctrinate POWs. Second, American officials feared that if word of the program got out, Germany might try to reeducate American POWs about fascism. Finally, the German prisoners weren't supposed to get *too* enthusiastic about their temporary home: They were to be sent back "as favorably inclined to the United States as may be possible," wrote historian Arthur Krammer, but "not to be so encouraged as to try to remain in the United States, or to return to the United States as immigrants."

Melodious Cooking

Your cell phone can play music to alert you (and to vex those around you). Northwestern University computer scientist Donald A. Norman thinks your microwave ought to be tuneful too.

"When I work in my kitchen, the pleasurable activities of cutting and chopping, breading and sautéing, are continually disrupted by the dinging and beeping of timers, keypads, and other ill-conceived devices," Norman writes in *Emotional*

Design (Basic). Kitchen electronics haven't yet evolved from the early days, he explains: "In the beginning was the beep. Engineers wanted to signal that some operation had been done, so, being engineers, they played a short tone. The result is that all of our equipment beeps at us." If Norman has his way, microwave beeps soon will seem as antiquated as the clatter of typewriters.

Uneasy Alliance

Conventional wisdom holds that longstanding harmony between America and Europe reached an abrupt end with the dispute over Iraq. *Interviews with John Kenneth Galbraith* (University Press of Mississippi) reminds us that folks were pondering the decline of the alliance nearly four decades ago. Back in 1966, economist Galbraith—who, as it happens, coined the fadspeak phrase *conventional wisdom*—had this to say:

"There's always been some impression in the State Department that we had influence in Europe because we were loved or because of our superior political system or because of our superior national character. In fact, we had influence in Europe when our help was needed and when Europe was subject to the cohesive influence of fear of the Soviets. And as Europe has ceased to need our help and as the fear of the Soviets has receded, our influence has diminished."

Discards

The *Name of the Rose* by any other name? André Bernard's *Madame Bovary, C'est Moi* (Norton) cites the working titles of several famous novels. In draft, *Anna Karenina* was *Two Couples*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was *Too Late, Beloved!*, *Dracula* was *The Un-Dead*, and *The Great Gatsby* was *Trimalchio in West Egg*. Novelists fine-tune characters' names, too. In an alternate universe, Sheridan Hope tracks Professor Moriarty, Pansy O'Hara succumbs to Rhett Butler, and a nymphet named Juanita haunts Humbert Humbert.

Warhol the Stalker

In the early 1950s, before the soup cans, silk-screens, and shooting, Andy Warhol stalked one of his contemporaries: Truman Capote, 23, celebrated at the time for his novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms*.

“Warhol pursued his new obsession with chilling industry, writing Capote fan letters nearly every day, trying to get into Capote’s home, and stalking Capote outside the Stork Club,” Steven Watson recounts in *Factory Made: Warhol and the Sixties* (Pantheon). “He even devoted his first art gallery show, in 1952 at the Bodley Gallery, to works inspired by Capote’s writings. Warhol’s drive eventually led to an intense phone relationship that ended only when Capote’s alcoholic mother yelled at Andy to stop bothering her son.”

Capote didn’t foresee even 15 minutes of fame for the young artist. “He seemed one of those hopeless people that you just know *nothing’s* ever going to happen to,” Capote said. “Just a hopeless, born loser.”



Andy Warhol in 1950

Lost World

W eighed down by current affairs? Now you can ruminate on the concerns of the 19th century instead. Cornell University has digitized and posted on line thousands of articles from 19th-century periodicals (<http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/moa/>).

From the 1840s, for instance, you can read a review mangling the name of a not-yet-famous novelist, “Sherman Melville”; a declaration that the Oregon Territory isn’t worth fighting over, for most of it “is absolutely uninhabitable by civilized men”; and, in *Scientific American*, an admonition against “too hastily interring the apparently dead” lest they suffer “all the horrors of death by starvation in the tomb.”

And from the author of “The Premature Burial,” you’ll find a meditation on the sort of unflinching prose that makes readers flinch. “The defenders of this pitiable stuff uphold it on the ground of its truthfulness,” writes Edgar Allan Poe. “Taking the thesis into question, this truthfulness is the one overwhelming defect. . . . Here are critics absolutely commending the truthfulness with which only the disagreeable is conveyed! In my view, if an artist must paint decayed cheeses, his merit will lie in their looking as little like decayed cheeses as possible.”

The Collector

At a September 2003 event sponsored by Washington’s Corcoran Gallery, comedian Steve Martin discussed his extraordinary art collection—works by Georges Seurat, Edward Hopper, Willem de Kooning, and Roy Lichtenstein, not to mention Martin Mull—with art critic Deborah Solomon of *The New York Times*.

The audience seemed a variant of C. P. Snow’s two cultures. The gallerygoers in the crowd listened raptly to Solomon, who tended to discern desolation, claustrophobia, and other forbidding subtexts in the paintings, sometimes to Martin’s bewilderment. The comedy clubbers, by contrast, wanted less sober Solomon and more manic Martin, as when he explained his admiration for a painting of nudes: “Oh my God, their asses are *fantastic!*”

During Q&A, the first questioner gushed that *Housesitter* was her all-time favorite movie, and, from the other culture, the final questioner wondered whether Martin felt entitled to trust his own critical judgment, because, after all, “you’re not Hilton Kramer.” Art lovers, like art, can be cruel.

How to Build a Nation

Nearly 60 years ago, Americans marched into a small, ravaged country thousands of miles distant, determined to transform it into a modern nation. They could not have imagined how successful they would be—or how long the transformation would take.

by David Ekbladh

It was a grim autumn. The United States was trapped in an increasingly unpopular conflict, with much of the nation's military strength committed to a grinding, seemingly endless struggle. America was confronted by a dangerous new enemy in the world, but critics on both sides of the political spectrum argued that the current battleground was far from the best theater in which to confront it. At the United Nations, the Security Council was in gridlock as other powers stymied U.S. initiatives. America's allies, including the British, whose troops were fighting beside the Americans, were growing more and more uncomfortable with Washington's bellicose rhetoric, worrying that the Americans' loud talk would inflame the entire region. The United States could reassure itself with the thought that it headed an international coalition, but this was cold comfort when the U.S. Treasury was paying most of the bills for the foreign troops and local forces. There was no easy way out. Americans realized that military action had committed them inescapably to a prolonged effort to reconstruct and modernize a distant land. To abandon a country shattered by war and decades of authoritarian rule would be a poor advertisement for the type of political and economic system the United States wanted to promote.

But the situation in South Korea would improve the following year. Events in 1953 would diminish, to some extent, the anxieties that had marked the end of 1952. Exhaustion on both sides of the conflict brought a tenuous truce. Joseph Stalin's death in March prompt-

ed changes in Soviet strategy. In Washington, Dwight D. Eisenhower took office, bringing with him a fresh approach to the Korean conflict, and in New York a new UN secretary general, Dag Hammarskjöld, began to revive the organization's reputation, which had declined under his predecessor, Trygve Lie. But even as the military side of the conflict lurched to a conclusion with the signing of an armistice in July 1953, and a degree of equilibrium returned to international politics, the United States was forced to confront once again its seemingly open-ended commitment to building a modern nation-state in South Korea.

That commitment had begun suddenly—almost accidentally—in 1945. We've forgotten today just how deep it has been and how much it has cost in blood and treasure. By 1980, the Republic of Korea had received \$6 billion in nonmilitary aid from the United States, much of it during 20 years of intensive effort in South Korea between 1945 and 1965. But the development programs weren't about dollars only. America aimed to remake many aspects of South Korean life in order to lay the foundation for a modern society on a Western model. It was a process subject to constant alteration, negotiation, and opposition.

American involvement in Korea began in the backwash of World War II, but it took on increasing significance as the global Cold War evolved. Success in Korea would allow the United States to prove to the world the superiority of its approach to development.



Supervising two trainees at a South Korean power plant, this U.S. welding instructor, a contract employee, helped address South Korea's desperate shortages of electrical power and technicians.

After Japan's defeat in World War II, American and Soviet troops rushed into the power vacuum that had been created in northeastern Asia. Korea was abruptly freed from the colonial rule to which it had been subject since annexation by Japan in 1910. A hasty decision in August 1945 split the peninsula into a Soviet sphere of influence in the North and an American zone in the South. In a late-night meeting at the State Department, Americans suggested the 38th parallel as the boundary between the two—and were surprised when the

Soviets accepted. They should not have been. The demarcation resembled an agreement made some 50 years earlier between Japan and tsarist Russia when both were vying for dominance in Korea.

For the Americans, stability in the South was essential to counter a communist-controlled North and to carry out the larger U.S. strategy in East Asia at a time of uncertainty and peril in the region. In the view of Secretary of the Army William Draper, a stable Korea could provide an indispensable, even “natural”

Nation-building

market and source of raw materials for Japan, the region's economic powerhouse. Though that had been Korea's erstwhile role in the Japanese Empire, influential policymakers such as Secretary of State Dean Acheson thought it necessary still, and all the more important after the Communist victory in China in 1949 denied Japan another traditional outlet for trade. Acheson and his boss, President Harry S. Truman, were convinced that the United States could not afford to let one of its proxies founder, especially one that abutted a Communist competitor. So the need to mold South Korea into a viable state—preferably but not necessarily democratic—with a modern economy insinuated itself into wider American policy goals in the late 1940s.

At first, the agent of modernization in Korea was the U.S. Army. The occupation rested on an assumption that had been articulated at the Cairo Conference in 1943. The wartime Allies took for granted that, after liberation from Japanese rule, Koreans would require a period of trusteeship, and that they would be granted independence “in due course.” With this predisposition toward tutelage, the army saw South Korea as a developmental problem. Near the top of the army's list of concerns was the impact of the country's sudden division at the 38th parallel. Breaking Korea in two left the bulk of the heavy industry—chemicals, steel, mining, and electricity production—in the North. The South, with an economy dominated by textiles and agriculture, seemed ill suited to standing on its own.

But the geographical division often took second place as a source of anxiety to the effects of Korea's colonial history. Yes, the Japanese had rapidly expanded Korea's industrial capacity, but the Americans believed that the colonial government had purposely stunted Korean society. Koreans had been allowed to attend primary schools, but there were rigid limits on more advanced education, especially in the technical arts. Postcolonial Korea was bereft of the cadre of engineers, managers, and administrators essential to the functioning of a modern industrial state.

Looking at Korean society as a whole, the Americans saw a land mired in traditional and

hopelessly backward values. “Something of the corrupt medieval monarchy of old Korea, flavored with a dash of the Chinese warlord tradition, still survives,” said a 1947 army report saturated with the biases of the day. “Although the Koreans have been called the ‘Irish of the Orient,’ being sociable, fond of fun and drinking, of talking and fighting—they differ from the Irish by being afflicted with what appears to be a deeply rooted inferiority complex, doubtless engendered from the systematic and prolonged humiliation at the hands of the Japanese. The results—evident in political life—are extreme sensitivity (‘face’), instability verging on irresponsibility, proneness to mob psychology, and occasional bursts of unreasoning anti-foreign feeling.”

For a viable and stable state to emerge, the Americans concluded, Koreans needed to develop a future-oriented worldview that put its faith in material progress and modern institutions. That view drew the Americans far beyond relief into nation-building, or “modernization,” as it was called at the time. They launched programs of land reform and industrial and agricultural development. In the countryside, the stultifying grip of the *yangban* (local landlords) was gradually loosened. The Japanese-designed school system was subjected to wholesale revision, bringing not just new textbooks but a new philosophy. From elementary school onward, curricula that produced loyal imperial subjects were replaced by curricula that instilled a faith in progress and technological accomplishment. The occupation authorities established technical training programs to create a new generation of skilled workers, and the first Korean students, soon to become a stream of thousands, were sent to American colleges and universities to learn the latest techniques in medicine, agriculture, and engineering.

During the first few years after World War II, the effort in South Korea was overshadowed by events in China, where the United States was struggling to buttress Chiang Kai-shek's sagging Nationalist regime against its Communist challengers. The American aid program there was overseen by the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA), which

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In the mid-1950s, South Korean children get a lesson in the political facts of life.

had been created to implement the Marshall Plan in Europe and, in 1948, had its mission extended to underdeveloped areas of the globe. Eventually, the ECA's ideas would play an important role in South Korea.

The ECA's top officials recognized that the lessons of European recovery weren't very relevant to Asia. Although ravaged by war, Western Europe in the 1940s possessed a mature infrastructure—a skeletal network of roads, electrical grids, and factories—and ranks of experienced engineers, managers, and bureaucrats. These specialists provided the critical sinew that held industrial society together. Perhaps most important, European societies were forward looking and shared an essential modern faith in technology.

In 1948, Paul Nitze and others in the State Department formulated an “Asian Recovery Program,” which, though never fully implemented, embodied the conventional development thinking of the day: Poorer and less developed parts of the globe required their own specialized approaches; they lacked the essentials of an industrial economy and were weighed down by “backward” cultural and political beliefs.

Advocates of this course believed that the United States had a singular capacity to catalyze

development through its mastery of high technology and its ability to promote social change. As proof, they often cited the United States' own legacy of internal economic development, in particular the Depression-era Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), launched in 1933. Along with dam building and the generation of electricity, the TVA sponsored technical training programs, adult and civic education, libraries, and extension services that brought the latest agricultural methods to farmers. By the 1940s, it could claim to have sparked remarkable economic and social change in a poor and “backward” segment of the American South. Journalist John Gunther asserted in 1947 that the TVA “proves that the idea of unified development works”; its possible application was “almost boundless . . . its horizon could be illimitable.”

But the Americans were not parochial. The Truman administration also took considerable pains to install developmental capacities in the UN's specialized agencies and various economic and regional councils. And U.S. aid programs borrowed from a collection of reform concepts that had been germinating internationally before World War II. To meet its own agenda, the ECA retooled ideas from the 1930s' “rural reconstruction” movement in

Nation-building

China, which shared the principle that agricultural practices had to change along with many other aspects of daily life. Education, local institutions, and even local languages had to be made to fit the demands of the modern world.

With the collapse of the Nationalist government on the Chinese mainland in 1949, the effort to create a viable anti-communist state in South Korea became all the more urgent. In 1948, Washington had officially ended the military occupation, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) was established under a pro-American nationalist, Syngman Rhee. That provided an opportunity for the U.S. Army, never entirely comfortable with its role, to withdraw. (The Soviets, meanwhile, began pulling their own troops out of North Korea.) The ECA, facing the total collapse of Nationalist China, stepped eagerly into the breach.

The initiative in Korea would become the ECA's largest mission, and veterans of the China experience were confident that lessons learned in China could be effectively grafted onto programs in South Korea. Paul Hoffman, chief of the agency, told his staff in Korea that "we have the proof and here is the proving ground."

But the agency's tenure in Korea would be rocky and short-lived. Tensions on the peninsula were mounting, and, in the South, power struggles between the Left and Right fed open revolt on several occasions in the late 1940s. In the spring of 1948, the North cut all electric power supplies to the South. Power rationing was instituted, and industrial production was sharply curtailed, which, in turn, cut into the fertilizer output that was indispensable to the South's primary economic sector, agriculture. At ECA headquarters, staff members were warned to limit their own use of electricity at night because it looked bad to have the lights burning in mission offices at a time when most Koreans were without power. As it happened, power shortages would hamper development efforts in the Republic of Korea for many years.

The ECA struggled on until the North Korean invasion in June 1950 pushed it from mainland Asia for a second time. With a mandate from the UN to wage a military campaign against the Communists, the United States

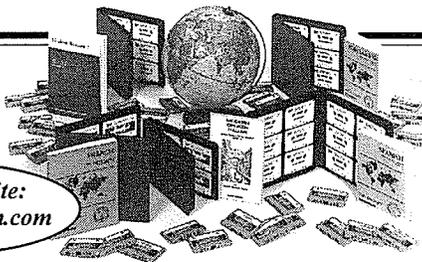
recast the development program to make the UN a significant factor in Korean reconstruction. Early in the conflict, the Truman administration organized the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA) to assume responsibility for the development of Korea. From its inception, UNKRA had goals far larger than simply repairing damage from the war then raging on the peninsula. "A vast opportunity awaits us to bring, by such means as the United Nations has been developing, new hope to millions," Secretary of State Acheson declared in a speech to the UN General Assembly. "These efforts, and this experience, if concentrated on areas of particular need, can have a combined impact of exciting proportions. The place to begin, I submit to the Assembly, is Korea."

As if to emphasize a connection to mainstream thinking on development, the sitting director of the TVA was among the first individuals considered to head the new UN agency. For all the talk of international action, the United States intended to keep a firm grasp on control of Korean development. The individual eventually chosen to run UNKRA, J. Donald Kingsley, was American, as were many of the staff, and more than half the agency's budget came from Washington.

Officially established in December 1950, UNKRA found little immediate latitude for action. The military situation did not stabilize until mid-1951, and even then the UN military command (controlled by American officers) jealously guarded the rights it had assumed with respect to war relief. UNKRA, in partnership with various U.S. and UN agencies, was left to engage in the not unimportant activity of long-term development planning. The war may have changed the tenor of South Korean development, but it did not alter many of the formulations that drove it. The development plans hatched in the 1950s were strikingly similar to the assumptions of the army and ECA. Again, the fundamental challenges to the Republic of Korea were its lack of infrastructure and its deficient technical capabilities, characteristics it shared with most underdeveloped nations. As a 1954 report by the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization asserted, Korean society remained in "the grip of history," having not yet escaped the legacy of its colonial confine-

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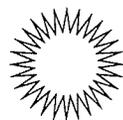
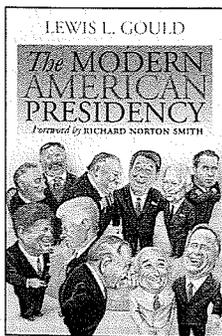
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Kim Dae Jung campaigns for the South Korean presidency in 1987. The military only gradually loosened its grip on the nation's politics and elections; Kim won the presidency 10 years later.

ment. Planners asserted, however, that the legacy could rapidly be undone with a healthy dose of foreign aid and expertise. One of UNKRA's basic assumptions was that a sustainable economy, driven by modern, progress-minded Koreans, could be in place within five years of the conclusion of the conflict.

As UNKRA and other agencies finished their studies, Dwight Eisenhower assumed the presidency. His administration reversed some important stances toward South Korea. Although the Republic of Korea would be exempted from the "trade not aid" policy that Republicans had hoisted as the new standard for foreign economic policy, the administration had strong reservations about the UN and doubted the international organization's ability to fulfill American goals. There were worries as well that the Soviets had too much leverage over some UN programs and, with this, the potential to cause mischief. UNKRA was summarily demoted to a subordinate position in an aid framework in which bilateral American aid would predominate. Still, the plans authored by UNKRA, grounded as they were in mainstream development thinking of the

time, served as benchmarks for much aid activity in South Korea well into the 1960s.

The end of the Korean War in July 1953 left the United States inextricably lodged on the peninsula as the major protector and patron of the ROK. South Korea was now a highly visible test case of the American idea in Asia. The scale of the development effort dramatically increased. Aid poured in, at a rate of more than \$200 million per year (with a high of \$382 million in 1957). When military aid and the cost of maintaining the U.S. garrison were included, the United States was spending, by the late 1950s, up to \$1 billion annually (in 1950s dollars) on South Korea—at a time when the entire federal budget was under \$70 billion.

A swarm of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) also joined the effort in South Korea. They had been operating there since 1945, but the war and its aftermath increased the scale of their activity. Tens of millions of dollars were brought to Korea every year by NGOs as disparate as the Boy Scouts and the Ford Foundation; many of the NGOs were coordinated and financially supported by the United States and the UN. Large engineering and

consulting firms, such as Bechtel and TAMS, with their experience in economic development projects in the United States and abroad, were brought in to train South Korean technicians and to build the highways, railroads, and power plants.

By the mid-1950s, the quest for a viable South Korea was the largest development program in the world. But sheer size did not guarantee that American plans would unfold as planned. The ambitious agendas laid out by UNKRA and the Eisenhower administration predicted a viable South Korean economy before the end of the decade, but the prostrate condition of Korean society soon made clear to many that the goal was unobtainable.

The destruction wrought during the Korean War was a major hurdle. As many as three million Koreans, in the North and South, had been killed, and millions more had been made refugees. Most struggled at the margins of destitution in the years following the war. A common greeting among Koreans into the 1960s was “Have you eaten today?” The chronic shortage of electricity in the South crippled efforts to boost industrial and agricultural production. The scale of physical destruction was enormous: Perhaps 600,000 homes had been destroyed in the South alone, and Seoul, twice overrun by enemy forces, was a ruin.

To the chagrin of the Americans, North Korea, aided by the “fraternal socialism” of other communist states, appeared to be making faster headway than the south. It was never far from anybody’s mind that the effort in Asia was not just about the future of South Korea but about which side in the Cold War could claim to be the wave of the future in the developing world.

While the Americans were not uncritical of their own actions or unaware of the challenges facing South Korea, they didn’t hesitate to lay the blame for the shortcomings of their grand plans at the feet of the South Koreans. In Washington, some called South Korea a “basket case” or “rat hole.” State Department officials cited in an internal document commented that “the skills and knowledge of the ROK officials and population were not equal to this Herculean task.” The Americans were also irritated by Rhee’s refusal to acquiesce in what they assumed was South

Korea’s natural position in East Asia: handmaiden to Japan. The rampant corruption and cronyism of the Rhee government made it increasingly unpopular not just with the Americans but with the South Korean people.

Though elected by the National Assembly in his first term, Rhee forged an increasingly authoritarian regime. Throughout the first decades after 1945, the country’s domestic politics were faction ridden, tumultuous, and sometimes violent, but also marked by the persistence of pro-democratic forces. In the spring of 1960, when Rhee claimed victory in a rigged election, protesters took to the streets and forced him to step down. The Eisenhower administration supported Chang Myŏn, the earnest democrat who took his place, but soon came to see that Chang’s government was rudderless and, perhaps worse, incapable of pushing modernization forward. The next year, when General Park Chung Hee seized power in a military coup, the Americans quickly warmed to him. Park showed himself to be a nationalist who was willing to follow a developmental path in line with American plans. Samuel Berger, the U.S. ambassador in Seoul, reported enthusiastically in late 1961 that Park was responsible for “a genuine revolution from the top breathlessly implementing the much-talked-about reforms of the past.” A pleased Washington was willing to overlook the junta’s authoritarian character.

Over the next few years, Park normalized relations with Japan and laid the foundations of an export-oriented economy, beginning with textiles and light industry. He was determined to forge an independent economy with its basis in heavy industry (steel, automobiles, shipbuilding, and chemicals), and he found willing partners in South Korea’s business class. Loans and kickbacks greased the economic and political gears, and a wave of foreign investment, particularly from Japan, sparked impressive economic growth. But the success would not have been possible without immense effort by the South Korean people themselves. Their talents and fierce work ethic were the glue that held everything together.

By the mid-1960s, South Korea appeared to be turning the corner economically. U.S. economic aid declined as the country’s industrial

Nation-building

and export economy began to expand. But for all of the South Koreans' efforts, it's unclear how successful they would have been if fortune hadn't intervened in the form of U.S. military involvement in yet another Asian nation, South Vietnam. Park committed two divisions of troops to the struggle at a time when the United States was desperate for allies to share the burden in Vietnam, and in return he received generous rewards from President Lyndon Johnson. There was aid, of course, but also military contracts. Just as it had boosted the economy of Japan with purchases during the Korean War, the United States now lifted the South Korean economy with a deluge of war-related orders. The war effort swallowed 94 percent of South Korean steel exports, as well as significant amounts of machinery, chemicals, and other goods. Hyundai, Hanjin, and many of the other chaebol (corporate conglomerates) that now dominate the South Korean economic landscape got their first solid footing with big Vietnam-era contracts from the U.S. government.

By the late 1960s, South Korea's economic improvement had allowed it to "graduate" (the term at the time) from the "school" of American foreign aid. William Bundy, assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern affairs from 1964 to 1969, would later recall that perceptions of South Korea shifted to the belief that, "given enough patience, and of course enough material support, but above all enough time for methods to sink in, 'it could be done.'" South Korea would continue to receive U.S. economic favors in the form of loans and guarantees, but it ceased to be dependent on massive grants and direct assistance. No longer a "basket case" of developmental failure, South Korea by the 1970s was billed as a triumph and a model to be emulated—and all the more important as such because of the failure of American-sponsored development in South Vietnam and Iran. The world marveled at the "East Asian economic miracle," and those looking for lessons and inspiration were referred to South Korea and its fellow "dragons."

But economic success did not automatically translate into political progress. Delighted by the economic "takeoff" of its Asian charge and mindful of the enemy looming north of the

38th parallel, Washington was never eager to press Park and his military successors for democratic reforms, even as the regime grew more and more authoritarian and violent during the 1970s. Park himself was murdered by his own intelligence chief in 1979, only to be succeeded by leaders who were even more bloody-minded. In 1980, the regime's brutal suppression of a protest in Kwangju, which led to wider violence and hundreds of deaths, elicited only a muted response from Jimmy Carter's White House. Still, the South Korean pro-democracy movement gathered momentum and managed, through large strikes and protests, to force the military gradually to retreat from politics in the early 1990s. In 1997, when Kim Dae Jung, a prodemocracy activist who had been sentenced to death by the military in the 1970s, was elected president, the success story was complete.

It had taken 52 years.

The Republic of Korea today displays all the trappings of a member in good standing of the exclusive club of highly industrialized, affluent democracies. Seoul, a shattered city of 900,000 in the aftermath of the Korean War, is now a world-class metropolis of more than 10 million. South Korean steel, automobiles, and electronics flood the world's marketplaces. The role of the United States in this story was not always something to be proud of. Nonetheless, Americans should take some genuine satisfaction in having helped create a modern South Korea.

The book is by no means closed on U.S. involvement in South Korea. Nearly 60 years after the first American troops came ashore in South Korea, some 37,000 are still stationed there, facing a hostile North Korean regime that stubbornly endures. Virtually nobody foresaw the scale of commitment that would be necessary to create a model nation-state in South Korea. Americans assumed that their know-how would rapidly bring change. But the easy assumptions of a half-century ago yielded to a painful reality. American aid was part of a complex mixture of contingent factors—including the extraordinary perseverance and initiative of the South Korean people—that led to the elusive goals of prosperity and freedom only after immense and protracted effort. □

SHOPPING AND THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE

In America, shopping is a national pastime, and consumer spending the engine of prosperity. But consumerism is also the source of deep ambivalence. One moment, Americans decry the country's rampant materialism; the next, they hop in their cars and speed off to the mall, on a mission as consumers to save the nation from recession. Indeed, it's American consumers' seemingly insatiable taste for *more* that has kept America's economy—and the world's—afloat the past few years. Is our consumer society sustainable? Is it defensible?



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Shop 'til We Drop?

by Robert J. Samuelson

We shop, therefore we are. This is not exactly the American credo, but it comes close to being the American pastime. Even infants and toddlers quickly absorb the consumer spirit through television and trips to the supermarket (“I want *that*” is a common refrain). As we age, consumption becomes an engine of envy, because in America the idea is that everyone should have everything—which means that hardly anyone ever has enough. The notion that wants and needs have reached a limit of material and environmental absurdity, though preached fervently by some social activists and intellectuals, barely influences ordinary Americans. They continue to flock to shopping malls, automobile dealers, cruise ships, and health clubs. There are always, it seems, new wants and needs to be satisfied.

Although consumerism now defines all wealthy societies, it's still practiced most religiously in its country of origin. Indeed, Americans have rarely so indulged the urge to splurge as in the past decade. Look at the numbers. In 2002, consumer spending accounted for 70 percent of U.S. national income (gross domestic product), which is a modern American record, and a much higher figure than in any other advanced nation. In Japan and France, consumer spending in 2002 was only 55 percent of GDP; in Italy and Spain, it was 60 percent. These rates are typical elsewhere. Even in the United States, consumer spending was only 67 percent of GDP as recently as 1994. Three added percentage points of GDP may seem trivial, but in today's dollars they amount to an extra \$325 billion annually.

This spending spree has, in some ways, been a godsend. Without it, the U.S. and world economies would recently have fared much worse. During the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis, the irrepressible buying of American consumers cushioned the shock to countries that, suddenly unable to borrow abroad, had to curb their domestic spending. Roughly half of U.S. imports consist of consumer goods, automobiles, and food (oil, other raw materials, and industrial goods make up the balance). By selling Americans more shoes, toys, clothes, and electronic gadgets, Asian countries partially contained higher unemployment. U.S. trade deficits exploded. From 1996 to 2000, the deficit of the current account (a broad measure of trade) grew from \$177 billion to \$411 billion.





No wonder she's tired: U.S. consumers spend some \$8 trillion on goods and services annually.

Later, the buying binge sustained the U.S. economy despite an onslaught of bad news that, by all logic, should have been devastating: the popping of the stock market “bubble” of the 1990s; rising unemployment (as dot-com firms went bankrupt and business investment—led by telecommunications spending—declined); 9/11; and a string of corporate scandals (Enron, WorldCom, Tyco). But American consumers barely paused, and responded to falling interest rates by prolonging their binge. Car and light-truck sales of 17.1 million units in 2001 gave the automobile industry its second-best year ever, after 2000. The fourth- and fifth-best years were 2002 (16.8 million units) and 2003 (an estimated 16.6 million units). Strong home sales buoyed appliance, furniture, and carpet production.

To some extent, the consumption boom is old hat. Acquisitiveness is deeply embedded in American culture. Describing the United States in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville marveled over the widespread “taste for physical gratification.” Still, the ferocity of the latest consumption outburst poses some interesting questions: Why do Americans spend so much more of their incomes than other peoples? How can we afford to do that? After all, economic theory holds that societies become wealthier only by sacrificing some present consumption to invest in the future. And

if we aren't saving enough, can the consumer boom continue?

Let's start with why Americans spend so much. One reason is that our political and cultural traditions differ from those of other nations. We do some things in the private market that other societies do through government. Health care, education, and social welfare are good examples. Most middle-class Americans under 65 pay for their own health care, either directly or through employer-provided health insurance (which reduces their take-home pay). That counts as private consumption. In countries with government-run health care systems, similar medical costs are classified as government spending. The same thing is true of education. Although U.S. public schools involve government spending, college tuition (or tuition for private school or pre-school) counts as personal consumption. Abroad, governments often pay more of total educational costs.

It's also true that the United States saves and invests less than other nations — investment here meaning money that, though initially channeled into stocks, bonds, or bank deposits, ultimately goes into new factories, machinery, computers, and office buildings. Low U.S. saving and investment rates have often inspired alarm about America's future. In 1990, for

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instance, Japan's national savings rate was 34 percent of GDP, more than double the U.S. rate of 16 percent. By out-investing us, Japan (it was said) would become the world's wealthiest nation. That hasn't happened, in part because what matters is not only how

much countries invest but how well they invest it. And Americans generally are better investors than others.

Of course, there's waste. The hundreds of billions of dollars invested in unneeded dot-com and telecom networks in the late 1990s are simply the latest reminder of that. But the American business system corrects its blunders fairly quickly. If projects don't show signs of becoming profitable, they usually don't get more capital. Wall Street's obsession with profits — though sometimes deplored as discouraging long-term investment — compels companies to cut costs and improve productivity. If bankrupt firms (Kmart and United Airlines are recent examples) can't improve efficiency, their assets (stores, planes) are sold to others who hope to do better. American banks, unlike Japanese banks, don't rescue floundering companies; neither (usually) does the government, unlike governments in Europe. Getting more bang from our investment buck, we can afford to invest less and consume more.

Our privileged position in the world economy reinforces the effect. Since the 1970s, we've run trade deficits that have allowed us to have our cake and

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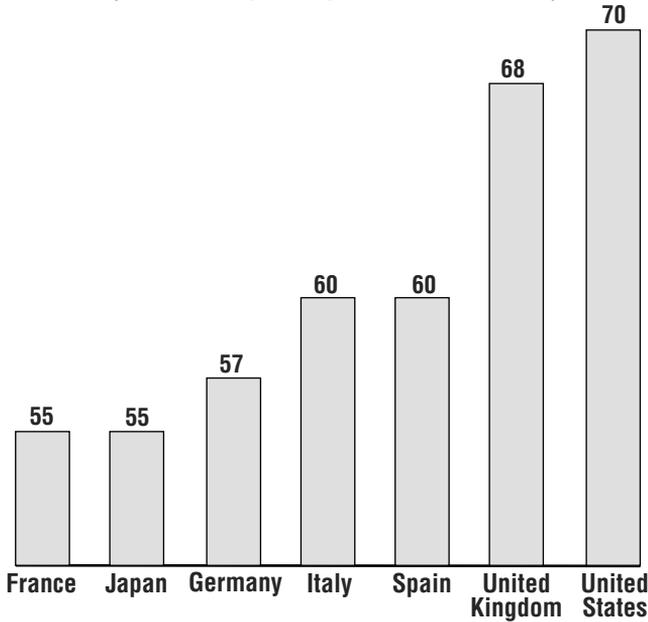
By repeating its formula in some 3,000 stores, Wal-Mart has become the world's largest corporation. Its \$245 billion in 2002 sales dwarfed total U.S. online retail sales of \$43 billion.

eat it too: All those imports permit adequate investment rates without crimping consumption. We send others dollars; they send us cars, clothes, and computer chips. It's a good deal as long as we're near full employment (when we're not, high imports add to unemployment). The trade gap—now about five percent of GDP—persists in part because the dollar serves as the major global currency. Foreigners—companies and individuals—want dollars so they can conduct trade and make international investments. Some governments hoard dollars because they'd rather export than import. The strong demand for dollars props up the exchange rate, making our imports less expensive and our exports more expensive. Continuous trade deficits result.

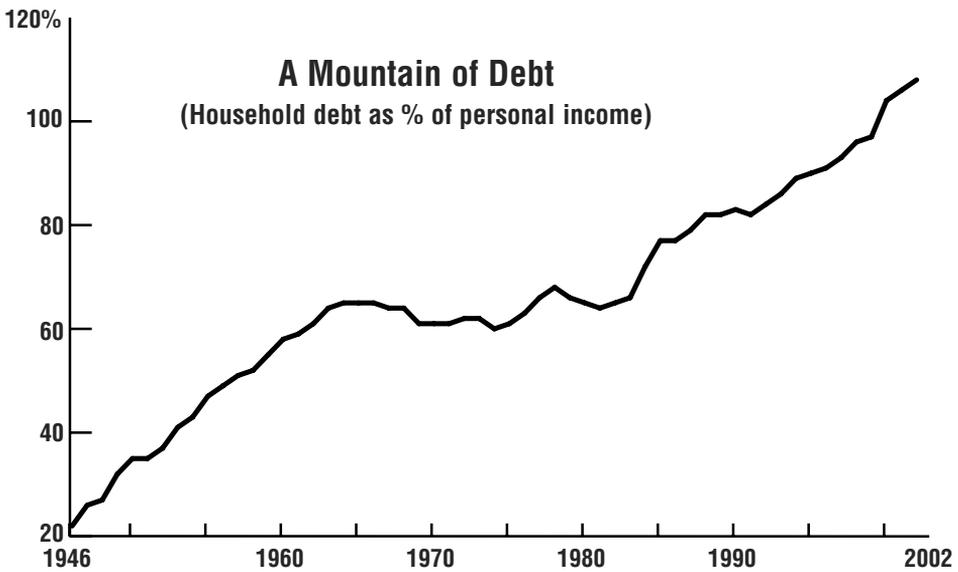
THE STRONG DEMAND FOR DOLLARS PROPS UP THE EXCHANGE RATE, MAKING OUR IMPORTS LESS EXPENSIVE AND OUR EXPORTS MORE EXPENSIVE.

All this suggests that the consumer boom could go on forever, because Americans always feel the need to outdo the Joneses—or at least to stay even with them. No level of consumption ever suffices, because the social competition is constant. The surge in prosperity after World War II briefly fostered the illusion that the competition was ebbing because so many things that had once been restricted (homes, cars, televisions) became so widely available. “If everyone could enjoy the good things of life—as defined by mass merchan-

Big Spenders (Consumer spending as % of GDP, 2002)



Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development



Source: Federal Reserve Board (data for 4th quarter of each year)

In 2002, Americans held nearly \$9 trillion in household debt: \$6 trillion in home mortgages; \$2 trillion in consumer debt (e.g., credit card and car loans); and \$1 trillion in other debt.

disers—the meanness of class distinctions would disappear,” Vance Packard wrote in his 1959 classic *The Status Seekers*. Instead, he found, Americans had developed new distinctions, including bigger homes and flashier clothes.

Four decades later, little has changed. Americans constantly pursue new markers of success and status. In 2002, the median size of a new home

Where the Consumer Dollar Goes		
	1959	2000
Durable Goods	13.4%	12.1%
Motor Vehicles	5.9%	5.0%
Furniture & household equipment (incl. computers)	5.7%	4.6%
Other (incl. books, sporting equipment)	1.8%	2.5%
Non-Durable Goods	46.7%	29.7%
Food	25.4%	14.1%
Clothing & shoes	8.3%	4.9%
Energy (incl. gasoline)	4.8%	2.7%
Other (incl. drugs, tobacco products, toys)	8.2%	8.1%
Services	39.9%	58.1%
Housing	14.2%	14.2%
Household operation (utilities & maintenance)	5.9%	5.7%
Transportation (incl. car maintenance & repair, mass transit, airlines)	3.3%	4.0%
Health Care	5.2%	14.8%
Recreation (incl. sports events, movies, cable TV, Internet services, video rentals)	2.0%	3.9%
Other (incl. financial services, personal care, higher education & private schools, legal services)	9.3%	15.6%

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce

was 20 percent larger than in 1987, even though families had gotten smaller. Luxury car sales have soared. According to the marketing research firm of J.D. Power and Associates, in 1980 luxury brands—mainly Cadillacs and Lincolns, along with some Mercedes—accounted for only 4.5 percent of new-vehicle sales. By 2003, luxury brands—a category that now includes Lexus, Infinity, and Acura, along with Hummers and more BMWs and Mercedes—exceeded 10 percent of sales. Second homes are another way that people separate themselves from the crowd. Perhaps 100,000 to 125,000 such homes are built annually, says economist Gopal Ahluwalia of the National Association of Homebuilders. In the 1990s, comparable figures were between 75,000 and 100,000

To critics, this “consumption treadmill” is self-defeating, as Cornell University economist Robert H. Frank put it in his 1999 book *Luxury Fever: Money and Happiness in an Era of Excess*. People compete to demonstrate their superiority, but most are frustrated because others continually catch up. Meanwhile, over-consumption—homes that are too big, cars that are too glitzy—actually detracts from people’s happiness and society’s well-being, Frank argued. Striving to maximize their incomes, workers sacrifice time with family and friends—time that, according to surveys, they would prize highly. And

society's reluctance to take money out of consumers' pockets through taxation means too little is spent to solve collective problems such as poverty and pollution.

As a cure, Frank proposed a progressive consumption tax. People would be taxed only on what they spent, at rates rising to 70 percent above \$500,000. Savings (put, for example, into stocks, bonds, and bank deposits) would be exempt. The tax would deter extravagant spending and encourage saving, Frank contended. Total consumption spending would be lower, government spending could be higher, and the competition for status would simply occur at lower levels of foolishness. The "erstwhile Ferrari driver . . . might turn instead to [a] Porsche," he wrote. Whatever their merits, proposals such as this lack political support. Indeed, they do not differ dramatically—except for high tax rates—from the present income tax, which allows generous deductions for savings, through vehicles such as 401(k) plans and individual retirement accounts.

Still, America's consumption boom could falter, because it faces three powerful threats: debt, demographics, and the dollar.

Over six decades, we've gone from being a society uneasy with credit to a society that rejoices in it. In 1946, household debt was 22 percent of personal disposable income. Now, it's roughly 110 percent. Both business and government have promoted more debt. In 1950, Diners Club introduced the modern credit card, which could be used at multiple restaurants and stores. (Some department stores and oil companies were already offering cards restricted to their outlets.) New laws—the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974—prohibited discriminatory lending. One result was the invention of credit-scoring formulas that evaluate potential borrowers on their past payment of bills, thereby reducing

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bias against women, the poor, and minorities. Similarly, the federal government encourages home mortgages through Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, government-created companies that buy mortgages.

This "democratization of credit" has enabled consumer spending to grow slightly faster than consumer income. People simply borrow more. Economist Thomas Durkin of the Federal Reserve notes the following: In 1951, 20 percent of U.S. households had a mortgage, compared with 44 percent in 2001; in 1970, only 16 percent of households had a bank credit card, compared with 73 percent in 2001. The trouble is that this accumulation of debt can't continue forever. Sooner or later, Americans will decide that they've got as much as they can handle. Or lenders will discover that they've exhausted good and even

mediocre credit risks. No one knows when that will happen, but once it occurs, consumer spending may rise only as fast as consumer income—and slower still if borrowers collectively repay debts.

What could hasten the turning point is the baby boom. We're now on the edge of a momentous generational shift. The oldest baby boomers (born in 1946) will be 58 in 2004; the youngest (born in 1964) will be 40. For most Americans, peak spending occurs between the ages of 35 and 54, when household consumption is about 20 percent above average, according to

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Susan Sterne, an economist with Economic Analysis Associates. Then it gradually declines. People don't buy new sofas or refrigerators. They pay off debts. For 15 years or so, the economy has benefited from baby boomers' feverish buying. It may soon begin to suffer from their decreased spending.

Finally, there's the dollar. Should foreign demand for U.S. investments wane—or should American politicians, worried about jobs, press other countries to stop accumulating U.S. Treasury securities—the dollar would decline on foreign exchange markets. There would simply be less demand, as foreigners sold dollars for other currencies. Then our imports could become more expensive while our exports could become cheaper. Domestic supplies might tighten. Price pressures on consumer goods—cars, electronics, clothes—could intensify. This might cause Americans to buy a little less. But if they continued buying as before, the long-heralded collision between consumption and investment might materialize. (As this article goes to press, the dollar has dropped from its recent highs. The ultimate effects remain to be seen.)

Little is preordained. Sterne thinks retired baby boomers may defy history and become spendthrifts. "They don't care about leaving anything to their kids," she says. "There's no reluctance to go into debt." Their chosen instrument would be the "reverse mortgage," which unlocks home equity. (Under a reverse mortgage, a homeowner receives a payment from the lender up to some percentage of the home's value; upon the owner's death, the loan is repaid, usually through sale of the house.) Maybe. But maybe the post-World War II consumption boom has reached its peak. If the retreat occurs gently, the consequences, at least on paper, should be painless and imperceptible. We'll spend a little less of our incomes and save a little more. We'll import a little less and export a little more. These modest changes shouldn't hurt, but they might. The U.S. and world economies have grown so accustomed to being stimulated by the ravenous appetite of ordinary Americans that you can't help but wonder what will happen if that appetite disappears. □

Inside the Machine

by *Paco Underhill*

I am called a retail anthropologist, which makes me uncomfortable, especially around my colleagues in academia who have many more degrees than I do. For whatever combination of reasons, I've spent my adult life studying people while they shop. I watch how they move through stores and other commercial environments—restaurants, banks, fast-food joints, movie theaters, car dealerships, post offices, concert halls, malls.

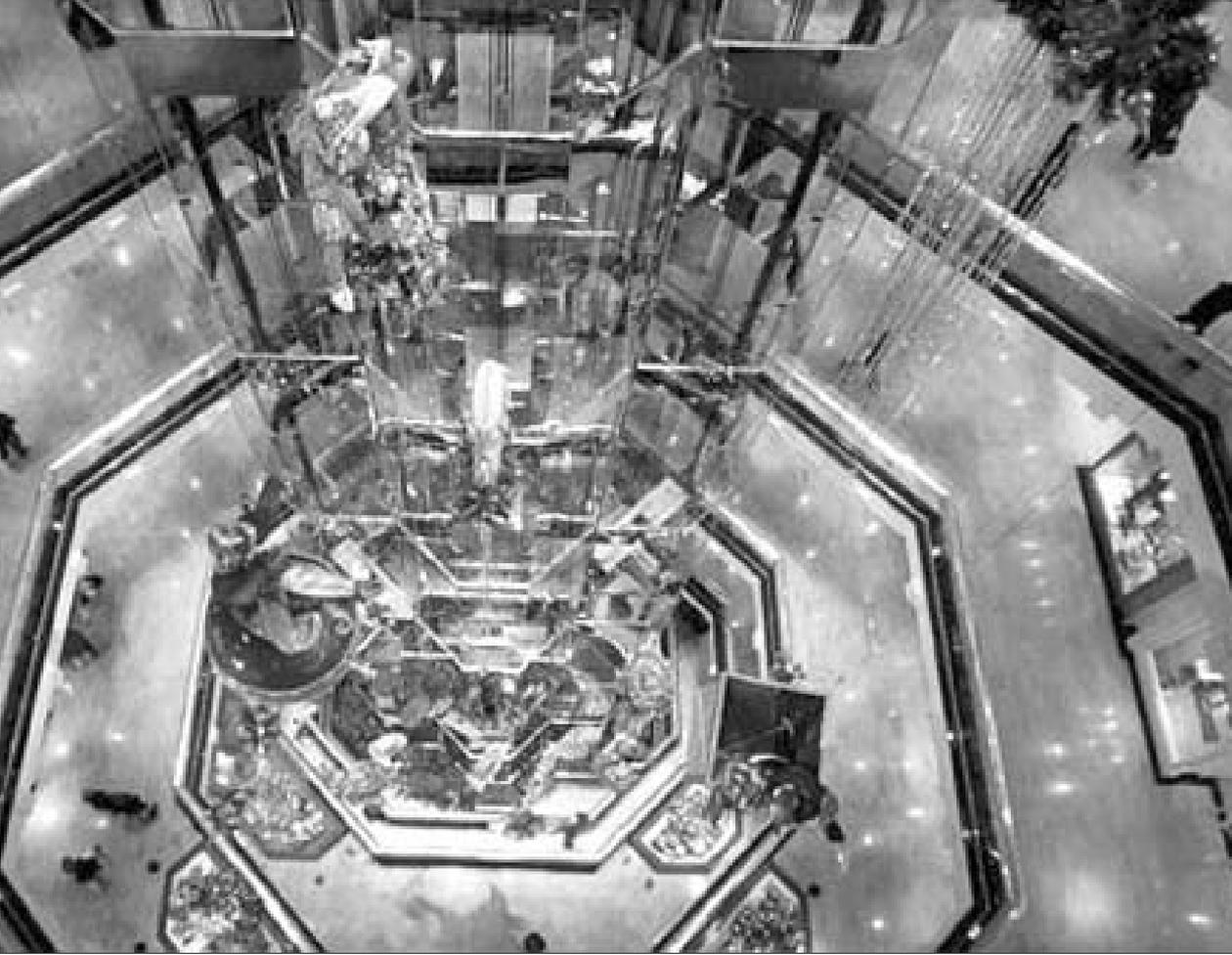
In fact, you can observe a lot of a community's life in its mall. Families especially tend not to be on display in many public spaces nowadays. You can find them in places of worship, but they're on their best behavior, and mostly just standing or sitting. Increasingly, cities are becoming the province of the rich, the childless, or the poor; I love cities, but America hasn't lived in them for a long time. The retail arena is the best place I know to learn what people wear and eat and how they interact with their parents, friends, lovers, and kids.

We tend to think of the mall as a recent, primarily American phenomenon, and a rather banal one at that. But the mall has always been with us, in different guises and under other names. Since virtually the dawn of civilization, we've organized our world in part around the function of shopping. Even the simplest agrarian societies needed places where they might assemble to exchange goods, and from that basic impulse came everything else—marketplaces, villages, towns, cities.

Many otherwise fair-minded, intelligent people scorn and despise malls. Some still end up shopping in them on a regular basis. But they're not proud of it. They may not be swayed by arguments about how the mall is a contemporary version of the souks, bazaars, arcades, bourses, and markets of old. It's true that malls can harm vulnerable downtowns by drawing shoppers away, and that they could be much better places—more imaginative, more alive with the human quest for art and beauty—than they are. But by studying the shopping mall and what goes on there, we can learn quite a bit about ourselves from a variety of perspectives: economic, aesthetic, geographic, spiritual, emotional, psychological, sartorial. Just step inside.

You might think, for example, that retailers would fight to be near the entrances. But take a look at what's just inside the doorway of this mall: a hair





Walk toward the light: Atria and other features are meant to draw shoppers to a mall's interior.

salon on one side and a store that sells exercise equipment on the other. The beauty parlor is nearly full, although you can bet these are regular customers, not mall shoppers who have decided on impulse to get a cut and some color. The exercise store is empty, which makes sense—how many treadmills does the average consumer buy? If the shop sells one, it's a good day. You'll sometimes find banks, another low-profile tenant, in these entrance locations. Post offices. Video game arcades. Why do the least attractive tenants get these prominent high-traffic positions?

Call this entrance space the mall's decompression zone. When you enter any building, you need a series of steps just to make the adjustment between "out there" and "in here." You need to slow your walk a little, allow your eyes to adjust to the change in lighting, give your senses a chance to detect changes in temperature. Walk through any door, and your brain has to take in a load of new information and process it so that you'll feel oriented. You're really not ready to make any buying decisions for the first 10 or 15 feet of a mall. The existence of this transition stage is one of the most critical things I've learned in two decades of studying how shoppers move through retail environments. Nothing too close to the door really registers. If there's a sign, you probably won't read it. If there's a display of merchandise, you'll barely notice it.

Because of the transition zone, the best stores in the mall are never near the entrance. The reason is simple: The mall owner charges every tenant a flat rent based on space plus a percentage of sales. So it's in the mall's own interest to have

the hottest stores in the prime locations. Because the doorway through which I've entered the mall feels like a secondary entrance, only a small portion of all shoppers will even see these shops. Fewer eyeballs equal fewer bucks. That equation is the basis for all mall math. And it's why underachievers go nearest the door. When you enter a mall, your eye is immediately drawn to what's up ahead, to the heart of the place. That's where you want to be. Like everybody else, you speed past the ladies under the hair dryers.

THE RETAILER HAS TO
FILL THE SHOPPER'S
EMPTY MOMENTS IN A
POTENTIALLY PRODUCTIVE
FASHION WITH
SOMETHING TO BROWSE.

My friend Carol understands a thing or two about shopping and malls. She's a fortyish woman who has spent plenty of her own time in stores. But she's also an executive with a major corporation that specializes in selling things to women shoppers. Carol's expertise is visual merchandising, meaning she's

responsible for everything her company puts on the floor of a store—the product, the displays, the signs, the whole package, from sea to shining sea. She knows her stuff. She's also fun to shop with.

Carol had requested that I meet her near a little-used doorway in one of the mall's department stores. It's a smart move for at least one reason—the parking lot right outside is never crowded.

"This is the entrance for somebody who really knows the mall," says Carol as she breezes through the door.

"Good call," I say.

This entrance takes us into Filene's, the famous Boston-based retailer, but not to the heart of the store. It takes us into men's underwear.

Men's underwear is the bottom of the barrel for Filene's, no doubt about it. This stuff moves twice a year, when it goes on sale. No men ever come here to buy underwear. Their wives and girlfriends shop for them. Otherwise, it's the dead zone, the decompression space.

"Being a single woman, I don't need to pay any attention to men's stuff," Carol says. "But this door gets me quickly to cosmetics. And there's something else that makes this a great entrance."

"Which is?"

"The bathrooms are right over there."

"And the elevators and escalators."

"It's interesting," Carol says, "how this out-of-the-way entrance leads to cosmetics and ladies' shoes, two of the most heavily trafficked areas of the store. People in the company probably thought it was crazy to put shoes and cosmetics across the aisle from each other because they couldn't see the connection. All they saw

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was why take two successful departments and put them close together? Whereas, in reality, being together like this makes each department even stronger.”

“Because?”

“Because think about it: You’re standing in the shoe department, you’ve told the salesperson which styles you want to see in your size, and now you’re waiting for her to get back. You’re not going to keep looking at shoes, because you’ve already done that—you did it before you sent the clerk away to get your size. Most logical thing in the world. So now where do you look? You look across the aisle at the cosmetics counters. You see all these things you want to try—especially if you don’t find anything to buy in the shoe department.”

“How did the executives miss that connection?”

“Because the connection is all in the heads of the women shoppers, and it was probably men making the decisions about what would go where. What do shoes and lipstick have in common? Nothing. But because men don’t shop for shoes the way women do, they don’t know what it’s like to be a woman standing around for five minutes waiting for your size to arrive.”

“Wait a sec—sure they do.”

“Then maybe men just don’t behave like women. Women want to look at something while they wait. They want to shop. I bet some woman had to point out to the store planning executives that placing shoes and cosmetics close together was a good idea.”

Any time a shopper is standing or sitting around with nothing to do, the retailer has to deal with it. Problem or opportunity? The matter can go either way. If a woman is bored waiting for the clerk to return with her shoes, the wait feels longer than it really is. The problem becomes an opportunity when the retailer fills the empty moments in a potentially productive fashion with something for the shopper to browse—some other category of goods, such as bags, or something totally unrelated, like laptop computers, or a sign explaining the store’s made-to-measure suits. A good, long sign with lots of words might make sense—you’ve got a captive audience for at least two minutes.

Or you could do as Filene’s has done and put cosmetics adjacent to shoes. It’s a smart move. The makeup counters and shelves are big enough and graphic enough to be seen from the shoe department. Makeovers are also an activity—and one of the reasons we go to the mall is to get some action. Smart cosmetics companies vie to be near shoe departments in stores such as this. Of course, only one side of the cosmetics section can face the shoe department, so really smart cosmetics companies insist on being on that side, instead of, say, the side facing the handbag department. Smart stores have learned to treat anything that faces ladies’ shoes as prime real estate.

“But there’s a potential downside to this,” I point out.

“Which is?”

MAKEOVERS ARE AN
ACTIVITY—AND ONE OF
THE REASONS WE GO TO THE
MALL IS TO GET SOME ACTION.

“Shallow loop.”

“Oh, right.”

Let’s say there’s a woman out there who needs shoes and cosmetics—two staples of malls and women’s lives. A smart shopper, one who really knows this mall, can park in our little-used lot, run in, get the shoes, get the cosmetics, and run back out to continue her busy day. That’s a good thing, right? Maybe that woman would get her shoes and cosmetics elsewhere if she didn’t know how easy Filene’s makes it for her. The juxtaposition of the two departments here creates a third department—the shoe/mascara section—and drives sales.

THE BIG THEORY OF
STORES ONCE HELD THAT
WOMEN SPENT TIME IN
THEM SO THEY COULD
INTERACT WITH THE
WIDER WORLD.

But I could just as easily argue that putting two strong departments together like this squanders the power of each, individually, to attract shoppers. Why put two magnets side by side when you can separate them and have each one draw women to its respective part of the store? It’s an old dilemma in retailing. Supermarket layouts always used to put

the dairy case in the rearmost corner of the store, on the theory that everybody had to buy milk and would have to traipse through the rest of the store to get it. A sound practice, except that it gave rise to the convenience store as the supermarket’s prime competitor. Instead of making it hard to buy milk, the C-store made it easy—you park, run inside, grab the milk (which is probably within 30 feet of the door), pay, and are on your way. In response, some supermarkets created little C-stores just inside their entrances. If all you really needed was milk, you could get it easily and leave. That’s the shallow loop: Instead of going from the front door to the rear and back to the front again, you barely penetrate the store.

Which layout makes more sense? Each approach sacrifices something. The old-fashioned strategy for luring shoppers through the store works, but once shoppers caught on to it, they began to feel manipulated. Which is not a good thing.

“If you know this mall well, you know you can get in and out in 20 minutes. Today, speed is everything for most women,” Carol says. “This is good for the shopper.”

“Though it could be bad for the retailer,” I add.

“I guess the retailer is going to have to figure something out.”

Shopping with Carol is always productive for me because we tend to focus on what the process is like for women, and women are the primary actors in the world of shopping. Especially mall shopping.

The big theory of stores once held that women liked spending time in them because it was their main way of interacting with the wider world of business and finance and money. They were home all day with the kids, and then home all night, too. They hungered for adult concerns and activities. The midcentury shift to the suburbs only increased female isolation. Now there was no such thing as a stroll down the street to the cleaners or the appli-

ance store or the dress shop, because none of them could be reached easily by walking. And in suburbia, even if you did walk, you didn't enjoy any of the happenstance meetings a city stroll afforded. Step outside your city door, and there was a world full of activity, purpose, and hustle. Step outside your suburban door, and there was . . . another homemaker, stepping outside her door, looking back at you.

You can understand why shopping at the mall became an appealing activity. True, it wasn't everything a woman might wish for, but it was better than anything else available.

The mall was a response to suburban existence, but it came along—the first enclosed mall was built in 1956—on the cusp of yet another major demographic shift, one that would throw shopping centers for a loop. By the 1980s, a great many suburban homemakers had begun working outside the home, either full- or part-time. Today, roughly two-thirds of adult American women work outside the home. Their infusion into the world of work is what made the past two decades of middle-class life so materially splendid, even extravagant. But it left women with a lot less time for the mall. Their lives were crunched, and the world of retailing—stores and restaurants and banks—had to respond. Women became the most avid users of ATMs, for instance, contrary to what the banking gurus expected. Women weren't scared off by the new technology; in fact, in the workplace, they were the ones required to master innovations in hardware and software. They were also the ones hardest pressed by competing responsibilities at work and at home.

The restaurant and retail food industries have been utterly transformed by the needs of women who work. "Meal replacement" has become the hottest growth area in the food industry. Supermarkets are forever increasing the space devoted to making and selling prepared foods; you can hardly find a market today that doesn't include a bakery, charcuterie, soup station, salad bar, sushi chef. And what the supermarket doesn't do, the fast-food and family restaurant chains do. We can complain all we like about the quality and nutritional value of the food these businesses provide (and about a possible connection between the boom in prepared meals and the obesity epidemic), but we must give them their due when it comes to identifying and meeting a need.

How have the malls done in that regard? If women are at work, they're not at shopping centers. The very nature of the relationship between the woman shopper and the mall has been

jeopardized. She no longer has hours to spend there, moving from shop to shop at a leisurely pace. She may now have to run in, grab what's necessary, then run out. Unless, of course, the mall can respond to the changes in her life with changes of its own.

KEEPING THE RESULTS OF
GENETIC TESTS SECRET
MAY THREATEN THE VERY
LOGIC OF PRIVATE HEALTH
INSURANCE MARKETS.

The Father of the Mall

Soon after he arrived in America in 1938, part of the flood of talented refugees fleeing Nazi Europe, the Vienna-trained architect Victor Gruen (1903–80) made a name for himself as the designer of eye-catching city stores that combined European modernism with a flamboyant American futurism. When Americans moved to the suburbs after World War II, Gruen became a designer of shopping centers and, increasingly, a widely quoted prophet on the suburban future.

While Gruen reveled in America's exuberance and freedom, according to M. Jeffrey Hardwick's new biography, *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream*, he retained a taste for European-style urbanism. The planned shopping center, carefully isolated from the vulgar shopping strips that lined suburban roads, would "fill the vacuum created by the absence of social, cultural, and civic crystallization points in our vast suburban areas," Gruen said. His design for the nation's first enclosed shopping mall, Southdale, in the Minneapolis suburb of Edina, called for adjacent houses, apartments, and schools, along with a park and medical center. When the mall opened in October 1956, *Time* hailed it as a "pleasure-dome-with-parking," but Gruen's larger plan for the site was never realized.



Victor Gruen in 1957

After many more commercial successes, Gruen moved back to his beloved Vienna in 1968. By then, he was among the harshest critics of the American suburb. The shopping mall, he complained, had been stripped of all its social promise in developers' ruthless quest for profits. As for his own creations, he said, "I refuse to pay alimony for those bastard developments."

Last year, the trade magazine *Retail Traffic* devoted an entire issue to the future of the shopping mall. In 2013, the magazine predicted, the American shopping center will function like "an old-fashioned Main Street." "Consumers will be able to visit a grocery or a post office, keep appointments with doctors and dentists, relax with a workout or a facial, take in a movie, enjoy a gourmet meal, or hang out with neighbors at an outdoor concert. If this vision of the future seems familiar, that's because architect Victor Gruen, the father of the enclosed mall, painted it 50 years ago."

Which brings me to cosmetics. The beauty business is hardball, and yet, just as you might expect, it's full of voodoo. There are many labels, each with its own niche and devotees, but for the most part the firms all buy their products from the same small group of factories. The cost of a lipstick and its packaging is around a dollar or so. The rest of the price represents marketing, distribution, and a whole lot of profit.

The world of beauty used to be divided into two classes—the stuff sold at mass-market retailers (drugstores, supermarkets, discounters), and the stuff sold at fancy

cosmetics salons in department stores. Think Revlon, Cover Girl, and Maybelline at the former, and Lancôme and Estée Lauder at the latter. It was a tidy little world—until competition came along and opened some exciting new channels. Suddenly there were boutique brands sold directly through their own stores, such as Bobbi Brown, MAC, and Aveda, and in 1998 the French retailer Sephora brought its sophisticated European stores to America. The world of beauty retailing became a lot more interesting, at least for the customers.

Let's look at just one product—hair color. When a girl is 16, hair color is a fashion accessory. My goddaughter spent her teenage years changing the color of her hair every 10 minutes. It was fun and easy. By 23, she had made peace with the color God gave her, which didn't stop her from changing it for special events or to annoy her mother. But hair color was still a fashion statement. For most women, coloring their hair becomes serious business at around age 35. The search for the proper hue gets narrower, and the range of experimentation becomes focused and purposeful. By a woman's mid-40s, hair coloring is a staple, renewed on a fixed schedule at the salon or at home.

Cosmetics move in the same arc, from play to necessity, from fun to a serious aspect of how a woman presents herself to the world. For the young customer, cosmetics are dress-up—entertainment—and the range of options is governed by price and brand appeal. Most middle-class, middle-aged American women first bought cosmetics at the drugstore, whereas Gen-X and Gen-Y began at Kmart, Target, Wal-Mart, or, as the distribution of cosmetics fanned out, the supermarket. Historically, the department store sold to well-off, middle-aged women. The price difference between a drugstore lipstick at \$6 and a fancy department store brand at \$22 is huge, though the difference in quality is slight.

The distinction between “mass” and “class” (the industry terms for, on the one hand, a drugstore, Kmart, or Wal-Mart and, on the other, a Filene's, Bloomingdale's, or Burdines) used to be clear. About 10 years ago, the lines started to blur. Women whose economic situations improved no longer reliably traded up from L'Oréal to Lancôme. They didn't like the way goods were being sold to them, and especially resented the peculiar industry practice of not putting price tags on the goods. Many women were too intimidated to demand to know how much they were spending, and walked away from the department store counter having shelled out a lot more than they expected to pay.

Sephora created a new world by introducing “open sell.” Traditionally, the cosmetics salesperson at the department store was an indispensable go-between linking the shopper to the manufacturer. The goods were arranged behind a counter, and the customer needed a salesperson to see them. Open sell, by putting the products out front and letting women examine and try them, changed the nature of the relationship. It put the customer in charge and turned the sales associate into her makeup pal.

THE LINE BETWEEN
“MASS” AND “CLASS”
HAS BLURRED.

Though department stores' hold on the high-end cosmetics market has weakened, makeup counters still occupy the prime real estate. That's due as much to the universal appeal of makeup as to the fact that the products belong to a high-margin category. It costs very little to make a lipstick that sells for more than \$10.

"Stores are willing to make less profit on apparel," Carol explains, "so long as they can make more on mascara. A mascara dollar is worth more than a dress dollar."

We stop walking and look at the spectacle around us. There's something Fellini-esque about a department store cosmetics section. You stand here on a Saturday morning, dressed in the standard mall-casual suburban wardrobe, and gaze at a chamber glittering with chandeliers, populated by saleswomen wearing makeup and hair dramatic enough for opening night at La Scala. Their faces are masks of pale, poreless skin, ruby-red lips, smoldering eye treatments—positively Kabuki-like, and almost intimidating.

The purchase of cosmetics is as public as a private art form gets. It isn't quite a massage, but it's an intimate act between two consenting adults. The beauty adviser will perform a makeover and offer advice, at the end of which you may simply walk away without making a purchase. So a good beauty adviser needs to build a following among her customers. Some cosmetic lines, such as Trish McEvoy, drive their business by staging mass makeover events, at which teams of "expert stylists," including Trish herself, run marathon sessions. They're quite a show, sell a lot of cosmetics, and build a devoted following.

THE COST OF A LIPSTICK
AND ITS PACKAGING IS
AROUND A DOLLAR OR SO.
THE REST OF THE PRICE
REPRESENTS MARKETING,
DISTRIBUTION, AND A
WHOLE LOT OF PROFIT.

I've always been fascinated by the resemblance between selling cosmetics and fishing. The sales associate needs to get involved, but she can't rush things. If she offers help too soon, the shopper may demur and walk away. (In fact, we've learned that if the clerk approaches the shopper within the first 30 seconds, she scares her away.) The trick is to let the customer browse unaided

but to watch her carefully all the while—until she raises her head, even for a second. The movement means she's found something she might want but needs a little information. It's the equivalent of a jerk on a fishing line, and it marks the moment when the sales associate needs to start reeling her in.

Cosmetics seem to be everywhere in this mall. In addition to department stores, the place contains at least three or four cosmetics boutiques—specialty shops such as MAC and Sephora. Some of the stores that sell women's clothing also sell cosmetics (Victoria's Secret now does an entire companion store for cosmetics and bath products), and there's a drugstore, if not actually in the mall, then very close by.

Women will shop for cosmetics just about anywhere. If a store can get a woman to look into a mirror, it can sell her lipstick or blusher. One hot new line of cosmetics is sold only through plastic surgeons' offices. The thing that male researchers misunderstand is how most women buy cosmetics. Overwhelmingly, they purchase on impulse—a woman approaches the counter, looks into the mirror, realizes that her lips could stand some color. She begins to shop to meet that immediate need. She may also buy because she's low on mascara or has lost her favorite eyebrow pencil. But usually she buys for right now.

HERE'S ANOTHER BIT OF
VOODOO FROM THE WORLD OF
HIGH-END COSMETICS: THE
PRODUCTS NEVER GO ON SALE.

Here's another bit of voodoo from the world of high-end cosmetics. The products never go on sale. Women will not buy discounted cosmetics, though they'll buy anything else marked down as low as possible. The other day I came upon a huddle of sophisticated young Manhattan women shivering outdoors on the coldest day of the year while waiting in line at the Manolo Blahnik sale. A woman will risk hypothermia to save money on stiletto heels, but if she bought cut-rate cosmetics, she'd feel as if she were putting something ratty on her face.

So instead of sales, the cosmetics manufacturers offer something known as gift-with-purchase: "Spend this much today, and you get this free gift package containing blah, blah, and blah—a \$25 value!" The idea is to give shoppers the sensation of having saved \$25—without discounting the cosmetics; in addition, the gifts introduce them to new products. This gift-with-purchase system has been in place for some 30 years now. But the industry has found that if a gift contains three free items, the customer will use perhaps two of them, and return to buy just one. Cosmetics executives rue the day the gift-with-purchase policy began, but it's now a habit neither they nor their customers can break.

"There's a final issue playing out in cosmetics," I say.

"Which is?"

"The level of importance of anything women put on either nose or toes."

For most women, the extremes—the face and hair and feet—are the areas that matter most. When choosing a jacket or skirt, there's some leeway for color, style, and fit, as there is even with underwear. Most women do not expect perfection. But with makeup or shoes, the standards suddenly go way up. No woman is going to settle.

"And women always shop those two departments, don't they?" I ask.

"Yes," says Carol. "It's something I've noticed when I shop with my sister or my friends. No matter what else we look at, we always go through cosmetics and shoes. Doesn't matter whether we're in a high-end store or a discounter. It's like you can't not go."

"I want you to give me a little guided tour of the counters here."



American dreamland: This successful Las Vegas mall draws more than 20 million people annually.

“Okay. Well, the first thing you may have noticed is that there’s almost no real selling space. Look at this counter.”

It’s a typical cosmetics counter.

“Here you have your visual—the sign that announces they’re giving away a free gift. Next to it is your tester unit, with a small sign giving some price information. But where do you do your selling? Where’s a little bit of empty counter where you and the shopper can talk and put a few possible purchases?

“Over here you’ve got a major tester unit showing all the different shades of lipstick, then you’ve got a smaller color thing, and now, finally, maybe six inches of horizontal space. And a mirror, too, at last. So there are four or five feet of solid merchandise without a single mirror. I don’t care where you go or which cosmetics counter you visit, nobody understands the mirror, which should be the simplest thing here. It’s what cosmetics counters should be built around. How can you buy cosmetics without a mirror?”

Mirrors are a major problem in the cosmetics department. Not only are there too few of them, but they’re too small, not well positioned, and not properly illuminated.

And this is so despite the fact that the mirror is the one thing every woman shopping here wants to see—or rather, she wants to see what’s *in* the mirror. But you can quickly scan the department and figure out which furnishings the retailers think critical. The graphics—the big, expensive posters, replicas of the big, expensive ads that ran in *Vanity Fair* and

Vogue—are beautifully realized, prominently displayed, and advantageously illuminated. Someone believes in those ads. The merchandise comes second.

You might expect, for example, that after all this time someone would have solved the problem of cosmetic tester units. But that hasn't happened. The challenge is to devise a display that shows all the various shades of lipstick or powder or eye shadow and allows the woman to try a few. Each tester unit starts life looking attractive and inviting, brimming with shades and textures. Then it hits the store, and all hell breaks loose. Women start using it! And the illusion begins to disintegrate. To touch one pot of lip-gloss, you can't help dragging your cuff through three others. Pick up one pencil, and all the rest go rolling onto the floor.

"They're struggling with pencils, too," Carol says. "Everybody has a problem with pencils. And the lipstick presentation leaves a lot to be desired. Cleanliness is the number-one problem. Cleanliness is critical. Your lips are a very personal area."

"Don't you think the mirrors should be magnified?" I ask. "As we get older, our eyes get worse. And the older shoppers are the ones who really need make-up, more than the kids do."

"Absolutely. But the companies don't design these departments to make the shopper the star. To them, the star of this counter is the supermodel or the celebrity who's in the ad campaign. After all, they paid her a ton of money—she must be the star."

"And the lights here are horrible."

That was from neither Carol nor me, but from the sales associate, a pleasant-seeming lady who has been eavesdropping and now has her own two cents to contribute. "They really are, aren't they?" Carol sympathizes. "Fluorescent lights give everything a yellow cast and make it hard to know what a color will really look like."

"That's why I tell customers to go over to that full-length mirror near the window."

"That's what a good salesperson does," Carol says. "How long have you been here?"

"Two years in November. Are you people with the main office?" the saleslady asks. "Because if you are, we have no product here on the floor. The shelves are empty. I have nothing to offer. I am absolutely down on everything."

"I can see that," Carol says.

"And I won't sell my customers something that's wrong for them."

"That's great," Carol says.

"Because then they'll never come back to me. I don't make customers, I make friends."

"As it should be."

"Well, have a lovely day. It's a shame you have to spend it in here like I do."

"Oh, no," Carol says. "We're shopping. This is fun." □

Buyer's Remorse

by Daniel Akst

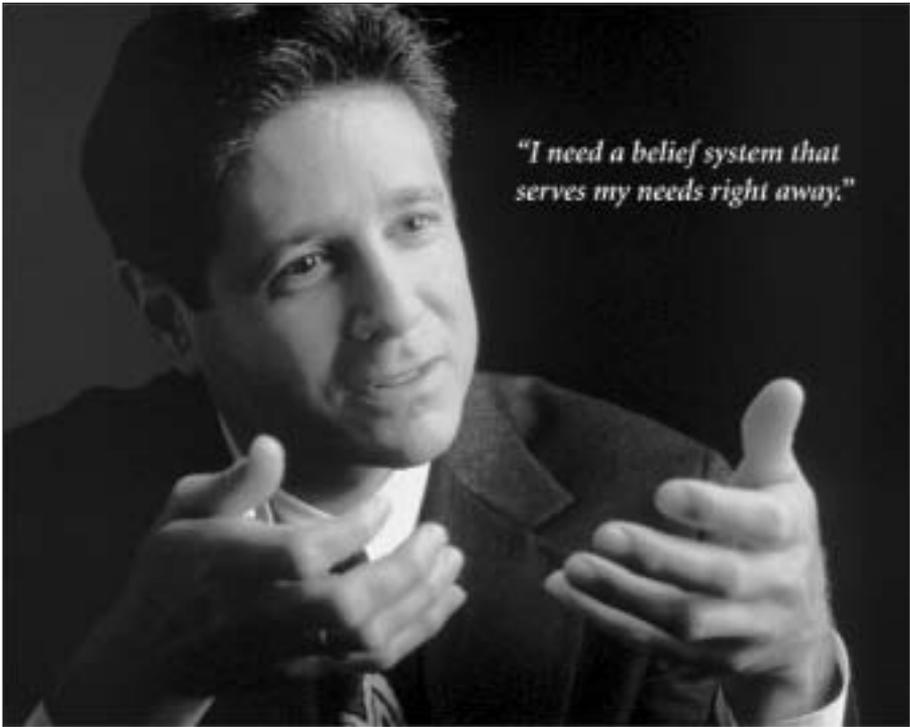
There are two things at which Americans have always excelled: One is generating almost unimaginable material wealth, and the other is feeling bad about it. If guilt and materialism are two sides of a single very American coin, it's a coin that has achieved new currency in recent years, as hand-wringing and McMansions vie for our souls like the angels and devils who perch on the shoulders of cartoon characters, urging them to be good or bad.

When Princeton University researchers asked working Americans about these matters a decade ago, 89 percent of those surveyed agreed that “our society is much too materialistic,” and 74 percent said that materialism is a serious social problem. Since then, a good deal has been written about materialism, and magazines such as *Real Simple* (filled with advertising) have sprung up to combat it. But few of us would argue that we've become any less consumed with consuming; the latest magazine sensation, after all, is *Lucky*, which dispenses with all the editorial folderol and devotes itself entirely to offering readers things they can buy.

The real question is, *Why* should we worry? Why be of two minds about what we buy and how well we live? Most of us have earned what we possess; we're not members of some hereditary landed gentry. Our material success isn't to blame for anyone else's poverty—and, on the contrary, might even ameliorate it (even Third World sweatshops have this effect, much as we might lament them). So how come we're so sheepish about possessions? Why do we need a class of professional worrywarts—a.k.a. the intelligentsia—to warn us, from the stern pulpits of Cambridge, Berkeley, and other bastions of higher education (and even higher real estate prices) about the perils of consumerism run amok?

There are good reasons, to be sure. If we saved more, we could probably achieve faster economic growth. If we taxed ourselves more, we might reduce income inequality. If we consumed less, our restraint might help the environment (although the environment mostly has grown cleaner as spending has increased). Then, too, there's a personal price to be paid for affluence: Because we're so busy pursuing our individual fortunes, we endure a dizzying rate of change and weakened community and family ties.

There is merit in all these arguments, but while I know lots of people who are ambivalent about their own consumerism, hardly any seem to worry that their getting and spending is undermining the economy or



"I need a belief system that serves my needs right away."

Don Siebe has a mortgage, a family and an extremely demanding job. What he doesn't need is a religion that complicates his life with unreasonable ethical demands.

Spiritual providers in the past have required a huge amount of commitment: single duty choices, compulsory goodness, and a litany of crystallizing mantras-jambes. It's no wonder people are switching to Mammom.

Mammom isn't the biggest player in the spiritual race. But our ability to deliver on our promises is unique. And our moral flexibility unmatched.

MAMMON

Desire you deserve to enjoy life - guilt free.

Americans seem to embrace withering critiques of the consumerist ethos such as this barb in Adbusters magazine, but they're not deterred by them from heading out to the mall.

pulling people off family farms. No, the real reason for our unease about possessions is that many of us, just like the makers of Hebrew National franks, still seem to answer to a higher power. We may not articulate it, but what really has us worried is how we think God wants us to behave.

And on that score, materialism was making people nervous long before there was an America. In the Bible, the love of money is said to be the root of all evil, and the rich man has as much of a shot at heaven as a camel has of passing through the eye of a needle. On the other hand, biblical characters who enjoy God's blessings have an awful lot of livestock, and other neat stuff as well. Though Job loses everything while God is testing him, he gets it all back when he passes the test. Perhaps even God is of two minds about materialism. Here on earth, however, tra-

ditional authorities have always insisted that materialism is a challenge not just to the social order but to the perfection of God's world. James B. Twitchell, a student of advertising and a cheerful iconoclast on materialism, has observed that sumptuary laws were once enforced by ecclesiastical courts "because luxury was defined as living above one's station, a form of insubordination against the concept of *copia*—the idea that God's world is already full and complete."

America represents the antithesis of that idea. Many of the earliest European settlers were motivated by religion, yet by their efforts they transformed the new land—God's country?—into a nation of insubordinates, determined not so much to live above their station as to refuse to acknowledge they even had one. Surely this is the place Joseph Schumpeter had in mind when he wrote of "creative destruction." America was soon enough a nation where money could buy social status, and American financial institutions pioneered such weapons of mass consumption as the credit card. Today, no other nation produces material wealth on quite the scale we do—and citizens of few other affluent countries are allowed to keep as much of their earnings. In America, I daresay, individuals have direct control of more spending per capita than in just about any other nation.

If affluence is a sign of grace, is it any wonder that Americans are more religious than most other modern peoples? Twitchell is right in observing

that the roots of our ambivalence about materialism are essentially religious in nature. They can be traced all the way back to Yahweh's injunction against graven images, which might distract us from God or suggest by their insignificant dimensions some limits to his grandeur. Over the centuries

the holiest among us, at least putatively, have been those who shunned material possessions and kept their eyes on some higher prize. From that elevated perspective, material goods, which are essentially transient, seem emblems of human vanity and gaudy memento mori. Unless you happen to be a pharaoh, you can't take it with you; there's a much better chance that your kids will have to get rid of it at a garage sale. Ultimately, our love-hate relationship with materialism reflects the tension between our age-old concern with the afterlife and our inevitable desire for pleasure and comfort in this one.

The Puritans wrestled this contradiction with characteristic intelligence and verve, but our guilt about materialism is probably their legacy. They understood that there was nothing inherently evil in financial success, and much

BIBLICAL CHARACTERS
WHO ENJOY GOD'S
BLESSINGS HAVE AN AWFUL
LOT OF LIVESTOCK AND
OTHER NEAT STUFF.

>DANIEL AKST is a novelist and essayist living in New York's Hudson Valley.

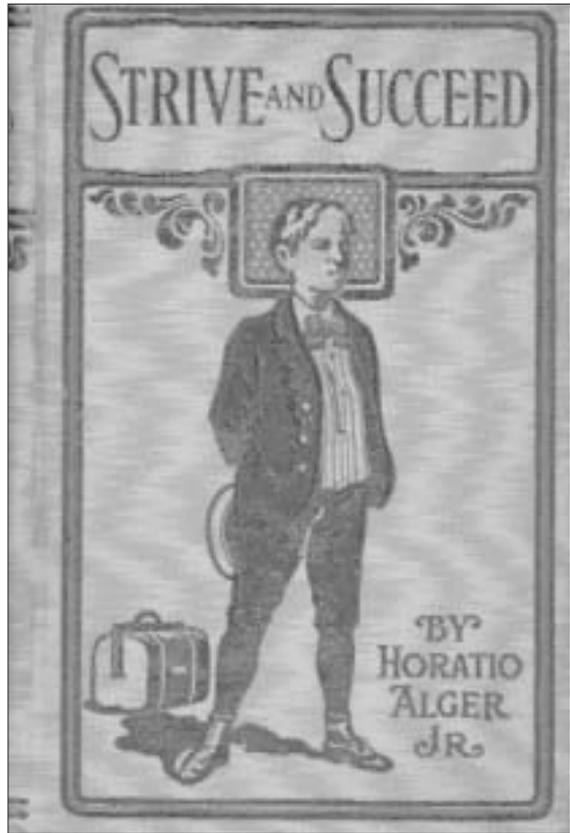
potential good, given how the money might be used. The same work ethic, Protestant or otherwise, powers the economy today. Americans take less time off than Europeans, for instance, and there is no tradition here of the idle rich. But the Puritans also believed that poverty made it easier to get close to God. Worldly goods “are veils set betwixt God and us,” wrote the English Puritan Thomas Watson, who added: “How ready is [man] to terminate his happiness in externals.”

Leland Ryken, a biblical scholar and professor of English at Wheaton College who has written extensively about Christian attitudes toward work and leisure, shrewdly

observes that the Puritans regarded money as a social good rather than a mere private possession: “The Puritan outlook stemmed from a firm belief that people are stewards of what God has entrusted to them. Money is ultimately God’s, not ours. In the words of the influential Puritan book *A Godly Form of Household Government*, money is ‘that which God hath lent thee.’” So who are you to go buying a Jaguar with that bonus check?

As if to dramatize Puritan ambivalence about wealth, New England later produced a pair of influential nonconformists, Horatio Alger, Jr. (1832–99) and Henry David Thoreau (1817–62), whose work embodies sharply contrasting visions of material wealth; for better or worse, we’ve learned from both of them. Alger’s many novels and stories offered an ethical template for upward mobility, even as they gave him a sanitized outlet for his dangerous fantasies about young boys. Thoreau, meanwhile, came to personify the strong disdain for materialism—what might be called the sexual plumage of capitalism—that would later be expressed by commentators such as Thorstein Veblen and Juliet Schor.

Alger and Thoreau had much in common. Both were from Massachusetts, went to Harvard, and lived, in various ways, as outsiders. Their lives overlapped for 30 years. Both struggled at times financially, and both apparently were homosexual.



In a series of books that sold more than 100 million copies, Horatio Alger, Jr., popularized the ideal of the self-made man.

The popular image of Thoreau is of the lone eccentric contemplating nature at Walden Pond. In fact, he spent only two years and two months there, and while he always preferred to be thinking and writing, he spent much of his life improving his father's pencil business, surveying land, and otherwise earning money. Of course, Thoreau scorned business as anything more than a means to an end. His literary output, mostly ignored in his lifetime, won a wide audience over the years, in part, perhaps, because of the triumph of the materialism he so reviled. Thoreau's instinctive disdain for money-making, his natural asceticism and implicit environmentalism, his embrace of civil disobedience, and his opposition to slavery all fit him well for the role of patron saint of American intellectuals.

Alger's work, by contrast, is read by hardly anyone these days, and his life was not as saintly as Thoreau's. When accusations of "unnatural" acts with teenage boys—acts he did not deny—forced him from his pulpit in Brewster, Massachusetts, the erstwhile Unitarian minister decamped for New York City,

ONCE A STAPLE OF
AMERICAN LIFE AND
LITERATURE, THE
SELF-MADE MAN IS
NOW A SOMEWHAT
DISCREDITED FIGURE.

where he became a professional writer. It was in venal New York that he made his name with the kind of stories we associate with him to this day: tales of unschooled but goodhearted lads whose spunk, industry, and yes, good looks, win them material success, with the help of a little luck and their older male mentors. Alger's hackneyed parables are tales of the American dream, itself an accumulation of

hopes that has always had a strongly materialistic component. The books themselves are now ignored, but their central fable has become part of our heritage. "Alger is to America," wrote the novelist Nathanael West, "what Homer was to the Greeks."

If Thoreau won the lofty battle of ideology, Alger won the war on the ground. This tension is most clearly visible among our "opinion leaders," who identify far more easily with Thoreau than with, say, Ragged Dick. One reason may be that few writers and scholars seem to have Alger stories of their own. I rarely meet journalists or academics from poor or even working-class families, and even the movie business, built by hardscrabble immigrants from icy Eastern Europe, is run today by the children of Southern California sunshine and prosperity.

Hollywood aside, journalists, academics, and intellectuals have already self-selected for anti-materialist bias by choosing a path away from money, which may account for why they're so down on consumerism (unless it involves Volvo station wagons). In this they're true to their ecclesiastical origins; monasteries, after all, were once havens of learning, and intellectuals often operated in a churchly context. Worse yet, some intellectuals, abetted by tenure and textbook sales, are doing very

well indeed, and they in turn can feel guilty about all those itinerant teaching fellows and underpaid junior faculty whose lives suggest a comment by Robert Musil in his novel *The Man without Qualities*: “In every profession that is followed not for the sake of money but for love,” wrote Musil, “there comes a moment when the advancing years seem to be leading into the void.”

There are no such feelings in the self-made man (or woman). Once a staple of American life and literature, the self-made man is now a somewhat discredited figure. Like the Puritans, knowing moderns doubt that anyone really can be self-made (except maybe immigrants), though they’re certainly not willing to assign to God the credit for success. Besides, more of us now are *born* comfortable, even if we work as hard as if we weren’t, and this change may account for the persistence of minimalism as a style of home décor among the fashionable. The perversely Veblenesque costliness of minimalist design—all that glossy concrete, and no cheap clamshell moldings to slap over the ragged seams where the doorways casually meet the drywall—attests to its ascetic snob appeal. So does the general democratization of materialism. Once *everybody* has possessions, fashion can fulfill its role, which is to reinforce the primacy of wealth and give those in the know a way of distinguishing themselves, only by shunning possessions altogether.

“Materialism,” in this context, refers to somebody else’s wanting what you already have. When my teenage nephew, in school, read Leo Tolstoy’s “How Much Land Does a Man Need?”—a parable about greed whose grim answer is: six feet for a burial plot—nobody told the students that Tolstoy himself owned a 4,000-acre estate (inherited, of course). We have plenty of such well-heeled hypocrites closer to home. John Lennon, for example, who lugubriously sang “imagine no possessions,” made a bundle with the Beatles and lived at the Dakota, an unusually prestigious and expensive apartment building even by New York City standards. And before moving into a \$1.7 million house in New York’s northern suburbs, Hillary Rodham Clinton told the World Economic Forum in Davos that without a strong civil society, we risk succumbing to unbridled materialism. “We are creating a consumer-driven culture that promotes values and ethics that undermine both capitalism and democracy,” she warned. But Mrs. Clinton soon suspended her concerns about capitalism and democracy to accept a controversial avalanche of costly china and other furnishings for the new house.

Heck, Thoreau could never have spent all that time at Walden if his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson hadn’t bought the land. It’s fitting that getting and spending—by somebody—gave us our most famous anti-materialist work of literature. Getting and spending by everyone else continues to make the intellectual life possible, which is why universities are named for the likes of Carnegie, Rockefeller, Stanford, and Duke. Every church has a collection plate, after all, even if the priests like to bite the hands that feed them. □

Darwin's Worms

“The subject may appear an insignificant one,” Charles Darwin conceded, “but we shall see that it possesses some interest.” Earthworms were the subject, and Darwin’s life-long fascination with them revealed as much about the unique qualities of his mind as it did about the surprising effects of the creatures’ subterranean labors.

by Amy Stewart

When I stand on a patch of earth and wonder about the activity occurring underfoot, I’m not alone. Gardeners are inquisitive by nature; we’re explorers; we like to turn over a log or pull up a plant by the roots to see what’s there. Most of the gardeners I know are, like me, quite interested in earthworms, in the work they do churning the earth and making new dirt. We hold soil in our hands, squeeze it and smell it as if we’re checking a ripe melon, and sift it to see what inhabits it. Ask a gardener about the earthworm population in her garden, and I guarantee she’ll have something to say on the subject.

It seems strange, then, that most scientists before Charles Darwin (1809–82) didn’t consider worms worthy of study. In fact, very little was known about them in the 19th century, when Darwin emerged as a sort of champion of worms, devoting his last book to painstakingly detailed research on their physiology and behavior. *The Formation of Vegetable Mould, Through the Action of Worms, With Observations on Their Habits* was published in 1881. Darwin was an old man when he wrote the book, but the subject had interested him for decades. How could so insignificant a creature as the worm capture the attention of so distinguished a scientist? Darwin knew from an early age that earthworms were capable of far more than most scientists gave them credit for. He recognized, in a way no scientist had before him, that they possessed an ability to bring about gradual geological changes over decades, even centuries. And this notion that the smallest changes could result in enormous outcomes fit perfectly with Darwin’s work on evolution and the origin of species.

The story of Charles Darwin and his worms begins in 1837, when the scientist was not yet 30 years old. He’d just returned from a trip around the world on a British sailing ship called the *Beagle*. He had been offered passage because the captain, Robert FitzRoy, wanted a gentleman on board to share his table. The ship was to travel to the coast of South America, where Darwin would have ample opportunity to do the work of a naturalist, collecting specimens and recording his observations. Young Darwin could not resist the opportunity. He’d been try-



A sly Punch cartoonist in 1881 was quick to fit earthworms into Darwin's evolutionary scheme.

ing to find a way out of the career path his father had laid down for him: parson in a country parish, where he would have plenty of time to chase butterflies and beetles between his duties to the parishioners. It was not the ideal career for the man who would come to be known as the father of evolution; as one biographer put it, "There was, needless to say, the small matter of his faith." A journey around the world would defer the choice of a career for a while, and his father agreed to the expedition. But once on board the *Beagle*, Darwin realized that the experience would not be the idyllic adventure he had hoped for. The crew encountered more than its share of dangerous weather, the captain suffered some sort of breakdown midway through the voyage, and Darwin himself was often sick and discouraged. Still, he worked steadily, collecting artifacts and taking notes.

He was away from England five years, longer than he could ever have predicted, and he returned with a greater number of new discoveries than he could ever have imagined. He arrived in port with more than 2,000 journal pages, 1,500 preserved specimens, and nearly 4,000 skins, bones, and dried specimens. It would take years for him to organize the lot of them,

and even longer for him to realize the full impact of what he'd collected. In this great array of fossils, insects, and bird skeletons he would begin to see the patterns that would suggest to him a theory of evolution. With the vision of a quiet country parsonage long forgotten, Darwin chose for himself the life of a scientist.

But this was no easy path, and there was no steady employment even for a man of his talents. He arrived home from the voyage exhausted, overwhelmed by the work that lay ahead of him, and uncertain of his future once the work was done. At first he labored furiously on his collection of notes and field journals, but soon his health was so compromised that friends persuaded him to spend a few weeks in the country. He traveled to Shrewsbury to recuperate at the home of his uncle, Josiah Wedgwood. Upon arriving, he scarcely had time to set down his hat before Wedgwood had him out in the pastures, where he pointed to cinders and pieces of brick that had been spread on the ground years before and had since become buried some inches beneath. Wedgwood was convinced that the objects had been buried by the actions of earthworms, a feat that would have required far greater strength and single-minded purpose than had previously been attributed to the lowly creatures.

Despite all he had seen on his voyage around the world, Darwin was impressed with the discovery his uncle had made in his own backyard, and he

WHERE DOES DIRT COME
FROM? WHY DOES DUST
FALL ON SHIPS AT SEA?

made a presentation on the subject to the Geological Society of London later that year. Scientists of the day were asking such seemingly simple questions as Where does dirt come from? and Why does dust fall on ships at

sea? (Darwin addressed the latter question in a paper he called, in his typically straightforward way, "An Account of the Fine Dust Which Often Falls on Vessels in the Atlantic Ocean.") After the visit to his uncle's home, he began to believe that earthworms, and earthworms alone, were responsible for the rich uppermost layer of soil, which was referred to at the time as vegetable mould.

Darwin made some revisions to his paper on earthworms, and the altered version was published in the Geological Society's journal a few years later. But by then he was focused on publishing his account of the *Beagle* voyage, and he'd already begun a number of other projects, including the manuscript that would become *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Over the next few decades, he published books on the habits of climbing plants, the expression of emotions in humans, the fertilization of orchids by insects, and the variations among domesticated animals, and he continued to revise his best-known works, *The Descent of Man* (1871) and *On the Origin of Species*. If earthworms occupied his thoughts during those

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years, they did not make much of an appearance in his published writings.

When Darwin returned to earthworms in his old age, the book he wrote about them, *The Formation of Vegetable Mould*, proved surprisingly popular. Despite what he had thought before publication (“As far as I can judge, it will be a curious little book. The subject has been to me a hobby-horse, and I have perhaps treated it in foolish detail.”), nonscientific readers were drawn to his clear and vigorous prose—and his surprising conclusions.

Darwin described the volume of soil that earthworms swallow and eject as castings, or earthworm manure, and he reported that an acre of garden soil could contain more than 50,000 earthworms and yield 18 tons of castings per year. He studied earthworms’ ability to bury objects of every sort—from handfuls of chalk scattered on the ground to Roman ruins that had, he believed, been preserved for archaeologists by an industrious earthworm population. Most of all, though, he credited worms with the transformation of the soil itself: “Their chief work is to sift the finer from the coarser particles, to mingle the whole with vegetable debris, and to saturate it with their intestinal secretions . . . no one who considers the facts . . . will hereafter, as I believe, doubt that worms play an important part in nature.”

At the time, people thought Darwin’s estimates grossly inflated and his claims exaggerated. No scientist before him had taken such an interest in the creatures living underfoot. Earthworms were still considered largely a garden pest that damaged plant roots and spoiled clean green lawns with their castings. At best, they were thought to provide some small service by perforating the earth and allowing water to penetrate. At least one reviewer of Darwin’s early papers insisted that worms were too small and weak to carry out the massive movements of soil to which Darwin assigned them. Another critic dryly observed, “In the eyes of most men . . . the earthworm is a mere blind, dumb, senseless, and unpleasantly slimy annelid. Mr. Darwin undertakes to rehabilitate his character, and the earthworm steps forth at once as an intelligent and beneficent personage, a worker of vast geological changes, a planer down of mountainsides . . . a friend of man.”

Darwin wasn’t deterred by the criticism. “The subject may appear an insignificant one,” he admitted, “but we shall see that it possesses some interest.” He could hardly restrain himself before laying out his central thesis—and remarkable conviction—that “all the vegetable mould over the whole country has passed many times through, and will again pass many times through, the intestinal canals of worms.” It’s a stupendous achievement for a blind and deaf creature with no spine, no teeth, and a length of only two or three inches. Scientists of the day could scarcely credit the idea, and they were quick to express their skepticism. Darwin had heard the criticisms before, in response to the paper he had presented to the Geographical Society, and he did not waste the opportunity to both refute his critics and remind them whom they were up against. After all, he’d fought most of his life to win acceptance for his theory of evolution, and he saw parallels between his work on evolution and his work with worms.

A scientist looking back over Darwin’s work wrote that “the key to his genius

was the ability to stretch his imagination to encompass geological time—thousands of years, thousands of centuries.” Darwin understood that tiny, incremental changes in the environment could bring about the evolution of a species. This same approach led him to understand that, over time, soil could be transformed through the efforts of earthworms.

“Here we have an instance,” Darwin wrote of his detractors, “of that inability to sum up the effects of a continually recurrent cause, which has often retarded the progress of science, as formerly in the case of geology, and more recently in that of the principle of evolution.” A French scientist who disagreed with his conclusions about the abilities of earthworms was dispatched with the calm statement that the Frenchman “must have thus argued from inner consciousness and not from observation,” for Darwin’s own observations bore out the truth. The power of earthworms came not from their individual but from their collective strength. It’s a surprisingly egalitarian conclusion to reach about the worms, and it could come only from a man who had both great vision and great affection for the creatures themselves.

Among today’s earthworm scientists, Darwin is a kind of touchstone, a muse. He looked below ground with real interest and treated the dark earth as the mysterious, unexplored territory that it is. He lived at an exciting time for scientists: In every corner of the world, exotic plants and birds and fossils awaited discovery. But he chose to seek out the earthworm. We know now that Darwin merely glimpsed the potential power of worms. For example, his estimate that more than 50,000 worms could inhabit an acre of soil was in fact quite low; scientists have shown the figure to be one million. Earthworms in the Nile River valley can deposit up to 1,000 tons of castings per acre, which helps to explain the astonishing fertility of Egypt’s agricultural land. As Darwin had only begun to suspect, earthworms pass the top few inches of soil through their guts every year. This makes them beings to be reckoned with, a force for change in more ways than even he could have guessed.

Over the past 100 years, earthworm scientists (called oligochaetologists, after *Oligochaeta*, the taxonomic class in which earthworms fall) have come to quantify what farmers have always known: that worms, through their actions, substantially change the earth. They alter its composition, increase its capacity to absorb and hold water, and bring about an increase in nutrients and microorganisms. In short, they prepare the soil for farming. They work with humans to extract a life from the land. They move the earth. What a remarkable accomplishment for a creature weighing only a fraction of an ounce.



An earthworm travels through the soil, pushing some particles aside and ingesting others. Although its food choices may look alike to the casual observer, the worm is actually sorting through the soil in search of tiny bits of decaying organic matter, which it will swallow along with some clay or sand particles. It builds a permanent burrow as it goes. At night it rises to the surface of its burrow, ejecting a small mound of castings around the entrance. It searches for food,

tugging leaves, pine needles, and other detritus into its burrow. This simple routine is enough to endear it to the farmer or gardener. On its nightly forage for food, it acts like a small, very efficient plough.

The body of an earthworm is perfectly designed for life underground. Sight is unnecessary in the subterranean world; a sensitivity to light is all the worm needs to avoid straying out of its habitat. Lungs are not much use in the tight confines of a burrow; instead, the earthworm breathes through its skin, taking in oxygen and expelling carbon dioxide, relying on damp conditions to help it absorb the oxygen in the same way that the damp interior of a mammal's lungs facilitates the passage of air into its body. The earthworm's shape allows it to be an extraordinary vessel for soil—the perfect container for holding, transporting, and transforming earth.

“The plough is one of the most ancient and most valuable of man's inventions; but long before he existed the land was in fact regularly ploughed, and still continues to be thus ploughed by earth-worms,” wrote Darwin. Although he studied many aspects of the earthworm's biology and behavior, the august scientist was especially intrigued by its ability to sift the earth. He watched worms emerge from their burrows at night and draw in twigs and leaves or even drag small stones over a gravel walk until they formed a pile at the mouth of the burrow. He crept on the ground and unplugged enough of these burrows to know that the worms rested just inside, their heads readily visible just below the surface. Were they hiding from predators? Trying to keep rainwater out?

AMONG TODAY'S EARTHWORM SCIENTISTS, DARWIN IS A KIND OF TOUCHSTONE, A MUSE.

Perhaps they were just protecting themselves from the cold night air. Whatever the reason, this nightly gathering of materials and systematic drawing in of leaves and plugging of burrows was certain proof of their unlikely physical strength and engineering abilities.

If a person were to pull leaves or twigs into a hole, Darwin reasoned, he would grab the object by its narrowest end and pull it in. If the object was long and skinny like the hole itself—say, a twig or stem—he would probably pull the thickest, heaviest end in first. Surely, instinct alone could not account for the manner in which a worm selected material for its burrow. Intelligence, Darwin declared, had to be the guiding factor. When the worms reached for fallen leaves and twigs around their burrows, they selected the best material available. They evaluated, they experimented, they made decisions. Let me say that again: They made decisions—actual decisions—after trying several alternatives and choosing the one that seemed best for the situation. This is perhaps the most surprising revelation in Darwin's book. Although earthworms had undoubtedly been making such decisions for centuries, they found a new and unlikely advocate in Charles Darwin, who had the time, the resources, and the scientific

methodology to prove that what earthworms did was more than mere chance.



I thought of Darwin and his worms when I was out in the garden digging a new vegetable bed for three dozen asparagus crowns. The earth was damp but not muddy, just right for planting. I pushed a pitchfork into the soil and leaned back on the handle just enough to raise the tines of the fork and disturb the ground. My days of double digging—of scooping out the top layer of earth and the one beneath it, filling in the trench with compost, and placing a mixture of soil and compost on top—are over. The soil is an intact system, a community of microorganisms that lives and breathes, and it will function best if I don't disturb it too much.

Once the ground was loosened, I spread a layer of compost on top. The microbes—the bacteria, the protozoa, the fungi—could work their way into the earth gradually, and the earthworms would rise to the surface and take the compost back down with them. I pulled apart the soil with a hand spade and created a narrow trench down the center of the bed to bury the asparagus crowns. A layer of compost went in the bottom, and then I pulled

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the crowns out of the box, and spread the roots so they straddled the compost. I knocked enough dirt back into the trench to cover the crowns, but a shallow depression remained. I planned to fill it in slowly over the next few months as the first asparagus shoots appeared. The extra soil around the newly formed shoots would make them pale

and tender, and at the same time provide enough nutrients to encourage them to grow tall and robust.

There were easily a few dozen earthworms inhabiting the newly dug asparagus bed. Each worm holds less than a teaspoon of earth in its body as it moves through the soil. In a day, it will eat about a third of its body weight in soil, maybe more. This doesn't sound like much, but even Darwin's conservative estimates showed that over the course of a year, a healthy earthworm population can move almost 20 tons of soil per acre.

I leaned against my shovel, calculating that I had spread about 30 pounds of compost over my asparagus bed. Over the next year, I could expect earthworms to add another 30 pounds of castings around the roots of the plants. If conditions are right, they'll supply another 30 pounds—maybe more—the following year, and the year after that. These asparagus crowns will produce for more than 20 years. In that time, if the earthworms flourish, they'll contribute about 600 pounds of nutrient-rich



“Archaeologists,” wrote Darwin, in The Formation of Vegetable Mould, “are probably not aware how much they owe to worms for the preservation of many ancient objects.”

castings to this small space, taking care of my vegetable bed far more efficiently than I ever could.

Darwin is responsible for putting these kinds of thoughts in my head. My gardening chores take significantly longer now that I slow down to count worms, now that I sit in the garden path, chin in hand, calculating the volume of castings. I have slowed down, it seems, to Darwinian time. He had that luxury in his later days; he could spend hours out in the fields around his house, watching earthworms, collecting their castings, guessing how they spent their time once they vanished from sight.

He also had the good fortune to know scientists around the world, and these colleagues regularly sent him specimens and castings in the mail. He carefully weighed and cataloged them, made a note about the area where they were collected, and organized the results into tables. Thanks to Darwin's meticulous approach, the data in his work remain, even today, some of the best ever gathered about earthworm activity. He wrote this in his autobiography: "I think that I am superior to the common run of men in noticing things which easily escape attention, and in observing them carefully."

There's no doubt that he took pleasure in his work. He had a genuine fondness for the worms and seemed to enjoy the painstaking effort that his research required. I like to think that his study of their habits was a daily delight in his old age. One biographer wrote that Darwin "became in the end what he had always been in his heart, almost a part of nature himself, a man with time to lean on a spade and think, a gardener." I imagine him as a dabbler, a homebody, a man who explored his most intimate surroundings with both deliberation and wonder. In the waning years of his life he was sometimes weak and infirm, but that merely turned the attention of his scientific mind away from the wider world and toward his home, his garden, and the earth.

The approaches he used to evaluate earthworms were, by then, classic Darwinian methods. Throughout his career, he took an ingenious, almost playful approach to experimentation. Like most naturalists he was a tinkerer, interested as much in nature's minutiae as in its grandeur. He liked the inner workings, the tiny springs and gears of the natural world.

OLD AGE MERELY TURNED
THE ATTENTION OF HIS
SCIENTIFIC MIND TOWARD
HIS HOME, HIS GARDEN,
AND THE EARTH.

Perhaps he felt that nature's true power rested there, in the movement of pebbles and seeds, and in the commerce of ants and worms.

Think of him in his laboratory, with his notebooks and specimens. One day he becomes interested in the mechanism that allows climbing vines to climb, and he ties small weights to the tendrils of plants to see how they respond.

The weights hang on the vines like miniature Christmas-tree ornaments, forcing the plants to reveal their tricks. He marvels at plants whose leaves roll tightly shut after dark. How could a plant act so deliberately, with such intent? He forces the leaves open so that they cannot close at night, hoping to lay bare the plants' secrets.

And when the old man turns his attention to worms, picture him stealing outside on wet mornings to pull leaves out of burrows and observe how they had probably been tugged inside. He gathers a handful of pine needles and scatters them around the burrows to see how the

worms will handle them. Eventually, his curiosity about the worms' mental capacity leads him to cut out irregularly shaped paper triangles, set them among active burrows, and then chart the number of times the triangles are drawn in by the apex, the middle, or the base.

Darwin was enormously thorough about his research. Since this was to be his last book, he seemed determined that it document every element of earthworm life correctly. He did not pull a *few* leaves out of burrows, he pulled 227—and reported that 181 of them, or 80 percent, had been drawn in

by their tips. The others had been drawn in by their bases or seized in the middle, causing them to crumple once inside the burrow. The image of the elderly scientist pulling 227 leaves out of burrows and cataloging them to prove the intelligence of earthworms in his backyard is amusing, even surprising, but he did not stop with the leaves. He went on to reconstruct pine needles by breaking them apart and rejoining the pieces at the base using glue or thread. He intended to prove that worms knew to drag the needles into their burrows by the base, where the pieces had been rejoined, rather than by one end, which would surely result in a needle's getting stuck midway. He wanted to demonstrate that the worms were not acting simply out of instinct, because of a pine needle's particular taste or feel. He created 271 of these artificial pine needles, observed that 85 percent of them were drawn in by their bases, and noted that worms were slightly more likely to draw pine needles in by the base if they were held together with thread rather than with glue, which might have smelled or tasted unpleasant to the worms. He wondered whether the worms naturally avoided the sharp points of pine needle ends and chose the base because it was rounder. To test this, he carefully trimmed off the sharp ends and found that worms drew the needles in by the base regardless.

ONE OF DARWIN'S MOST
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For the paper triangle experiment, he did not simply cut a few triangles and leave them lying around. He cut 303 triangles of various sizes, coated them with fat to keep them from going limp in the night dew, and established some baseline data by drawing triangles into small tubes using tweezers to determine the most efficient method that he would employ if he, rather than the worms, were given this task. He chose the apex of a triangle, as opposed to the middle or the base. Even working with this unfamiliar material, the worms drew the paper triangles in by their apexes 62 percent of the time. Darwin went on to observe that the triangles pulled by their apexes had been drawn in cleanly, with very little evidence of fumbling around or trial-and-error effort first. "We may therefore infer," he wrote, "—improbable as is the inference—that worms are able by some means to judge which is the best end by which to draw triangles of paper into their burrows."

One of Darwin's most extraordinary qualities was his ability to recognize when a scientific question could not be answered because of the limitations of the science of his day. He knew, for instance, that during his lifetime, no significant progress would be made on the question of how life began. Near the end of his days he wrote to a colleague, "You expressed quite correctly my views where you said that I had intentionally left the question of the Origin of Life uncanvassed as being altogether ultra vires [beyond the powers] in the present state of knowledge." The same could be said of Darwin's insight into the role of earthworms in the soil. The technology that would allow scientists to understand the complex relationships among soil microbes, plants, and earthworms would not be advanced for several more decades.

When *The Formation of Vegetable Mould* was published, the idea that an earthworm might possess enough intelligence to judge how best to pull objects into its burrow was novel indeed. No scientist had paid as much attention to this seemingly trivial matter as Darwin did, or devoted so many pages of published work to it. But even he could not grasp the importance of the earthworm's impact on the soil ecosystem. The relationship between the microscopic world of soil and the macroscopic ecology—between the earthworms and other visible creatures that inhabit the earth—was still largely a mystery.



At the beginning of the fourth chapter of *The Formation of Vegetable Mould*, Darwin wrote this: "Archaeologists are probably not aware how much they owe to worms for the preservation of many ancient objects. Coins, gold ornaments, stone implements, &c, if dropped on the surface of the ground, will infallibly be buried by the castings of worms in a few years, and will thus be safely preserved, until the land at some future time is turned up." He went on to describe the excursions he or his son William took to excavation sites around England, including a farm in Surrey where Roman ruins were found, an abbey in Hampshire destroyed by Henry VIII, and the ruins of a Roman villa in Gloucestershire. He reported that worms had burrowed into the old stone walls, undermined foundations, and generally deposited a layer of castings that permitted grass and other plants to grow. After examining the sites of several ancient ruins, he concluded that the actions of earthworms "would ultimately conceal the whole beneath fine earth."

In some ways, Darwin thought of worms as historians, covering the remains of one civilization and preparing the earth for the next. But earthworms can hardly be considered sneaky in their concealment; anyone who has ever watched a worm knows that it goes about its work in the most matter-of-fact manner. It's only carrying out the natural order of things, folding the ruins of a farm, a city, or a society into the lower strata of the earth. When our civilizations end, and when we as individuals die, we don't ascend, not physically. We descend. And the earth rises up to meet us. □

THE HIDDEN AGONY OF WOODROW WILSON

To the remarkable list of modern American presidents whose characters were molded by a struggle against illness—Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and, to an extent only recently revealed, John F. Kennedy—scholars have added the name of Woodrow Wilson. The famous Wilsonian obstinacy and tendency to impatient judgment were symptoms of a cerebrovascular disease that he carefully concealed from public view for decades before the stroke that felled him during the epic battle over the League of Nations in 1919. As the late historian Kenneth S. Lynn shows in this excerpt from his unfinished book on presidential health cover-ups, Wilson’s struggle with physical affliction may have been admirable, but its secret nature compromised Wilson’s own values—and raises the question of how different history might have been had the American public been told the truth.

BY KENNETH S. LYNN



On the presidential campaign trail in 1912, Wilson spoke at a state fair in Syracuse, New York.

In a letter of 1911 to his special lady friend, Mary Peck, Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924) confessed that in his childhood he had “lived a dream life (almost too exclusively, perhaps).” Both his father and his mother had helped to enrich that life by regularly reading aloud to him from the works of Charles Dickens and Walter Scott, the collected essays of Charles Lamb, and James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*. The boy adored those books, yet he was unable to identify all the letters of the alphabet until he was nine years old, and he was 12 before he learned to read. Aside from buying him a pair of eyeglasses, which proved to be unnecessary, the senior Wilsons could think of no way to help their son—and no wonder. During the years of mounting concern about their son’s laggard literacy, they lived in a quiet southern town far removed from the nation’s centers of medical activity. They did not know that pioneer observers had recently discerned a surprising pattern: In certain cases of stroke, the victim was unable to read but retained the ability to talk.

The strokes of Wilson’s later years compel us to ask whether his helplessness as a young reader stemmed from unrecorded occurrences of the same trauma. In any case, his struggle with the disability was agonizing, and when it ended happily, he immediately discovered that he had other problems. The pace at which he was able to read, and to write accurately as well, proved to be unsatisfactorily slow. The young Wilson sought to compensate for his slowness as a reader by focusing with such intensity on whatever text lay before him that he eventually developed an almost photographic memory. At 15, he attacked his writing problem by mastering an intricate system of shorthand. A decade later, he purchased a typewriter, on which he learned to type at a furious speed despite the primitiveness of the newfangled machine. His most extraordinary exercise of self-discipline was to teach himself, during his student days at the College of New Jersey (as Princeton University was then formally known), to compose entire essays in his mind before committing them to paper.

At Princeton, too, he kept a diary, in shorthand, in which every entry concluded with the prayerful exclamation, “Thank God for health and strength.” But his health was troubled. During the year he spent at Davidson College in North Carolina before transferring to Princeton, he had come down with a bad cold that would not go away. “My darling Boy,” his alarmed mother wrote him in the spring of 1874, “I am so anxious about that cold of yours. . . . Surely you have not laid aside your winter clothing? . . . You seem depressed—but that is because you are not well.” Severe headaches bothered him at Princeton, as did worries about their meaning. At the end of his junior year, the worries crept into a brilliant essay he wrote on the British politician William Pitt (1708–78), who was known as Pitt the Elder. Wilson at 21 had already decided to have a political career someday, and in Pitt he recognized a godlike model. Energized by self-referential dreams, the essayist’s salute to the great statesman soared: “His devotion to his country’s service was as intense as it was entire; and the intellect whose every power he brought to bear upon the direction of her affairs composed its duty with a vigor commensurate with its colossal proportions. . . . [His] will was unswerving, his convictions were uncompromising, his imagination was powerful enough to invest all plans of national policy with a poetic charm.” Unfortunately, the “enormous strain” of the Seven Years’ War created circumstances that finally compelled Pitt to leave the cabinet, whereupon he was “restricken by [a] disease which . . . sapped the strength of his imperial intellect,” and “a noble statesman” collapsed into “a noble ruin.”

In the powerfully felt final sentences of a richly symbolic portrayal, a headache-wracked Princeton student came eerily close to envisioning the denouement of his own career: “Under the deepening shadow of a gathering storm we obtain a last glimpse of [him], as he stands, himself a wreck, holding up before a blind Ministry a picture of the dark ruin which was awaiting them. With some of his old haughtiness the austere old man rises to answer one who had dared to reply to him, and falls, never to rise again.”

Wilson entered law school at the University of Virginia in October 1879, and from the outset he was unhappy. His courses were “terribly boring,” and he was further discouraged by a persistent cold and recurrent digestive upsets. By the following spring, both his parents were urging him to quit the school and pursue his studies at home. Nine months later, he finally gave in to their entreaties, after having been warned by a Charlottesville doctor that if he did not receive systematic treatment for his stomach problems, he might become a chronic dyspeptic.

In the opening pages of *Little Strokes* (1960), Dr. Walter Alvarez explains why he, a gastroenterologist with 30 years’ experience in the field, was moved to write a book about neurological matters. Most of the patients he saw during his career at the Mayo Clinic had been referred to him because of their complaints about digestive or abdominal trouble. But a good many of those patients turned out to be suffering from the effects of a little stroke. Close questioning of them led Alvarez

>KENNETH S. LYNN, a professor emeritus of history at Johns Hopkins University and a noted literary biographer, died in 2001 at the age of 78. His books include *Hemingway: The Life and the Work* (1987), *Charlie Chaplin and His Times* (1997), and *The Air-Line to Seattle: Studies in Literary and Historical Writing about America* (1983).

to realize that “the patient with a little stroke that has produced ‘a constant misery’ in his abdomen rarely thinks to tell his physician about the *sudden onset* of his trouble, with perhaps a woozy spell or a fall to the floor. . . . Left to himself, he will talk only of his stomach-ache.”

With a like single-mindedness, Woodrow Wilson spoke about his digestive distresses, but never about the circumstances in which they had begun.

After enrolling in graduate school at Johns Hopkins University in the early 1880s, Wilson again complained about gastric discomfort, headaches, and colds, as well as feelings of depression and “a haunting dread” of appendicitis. His fiancée, Ellen Axson, sympathetically remarked in a letter she wrote him two months before their wedding in June 1885 that “my poor darling’s health is not *poor* exactly,” but is definitely “not very strong.” Yet if he never failed to describe his latest woe to Ellen, he insisted that the larger truth about his health was that it

“MY LIFE WOULD NOT BE WORTH LIVING,” WILSON TOLD A FRIEND IN 1915, “IF IT WAS NOT FOR THE DRIVING POWER OF RELIGION.”

was excellent: “You mustn’t take it so much to heart when I am sick, my little sweetheart. I’ve never been seriously ill in my life. . . . Whenever I write to you that I am unwell, I am inclined to reproach myself afterwards for having told you anything about it; and yet I tell you such things *on principle*.”

Behind all Wilson’s protestations of good health lay an unquestioning acceptance of the faith of his Presbyterian forebears, who had regarded themselves as members of a chosen people. Though God had bestowed this status upon them without reservation, the elect were required to justify it again and again, through the ceaseless performance of good works. It was a moral imperative to shrug off illnesses, first by proclaiming that they were not really serious, and then by resolutely buckling down to the task at hand. “My life would not be worth living,” Wilson told a friend in 1915, “if it was not for the driving power of religion.”

In earlier years, that power had driven him to work prodigiously hard to stock his mind and hone its edge, and the results were awesome. As a first-year graduate student at Johns Hopkins, for instance, he dominated the discussions in J. Franklin Jameson’s course in English constitutional history by dint of, as Jameson wrote in his diary, “the greatest logical skill and ability.” During the midyear exam period, moreover, Wilson astounded his fellow first-year students by beginning work on a book about the current distribution of power in the federal establishment. Nine months later, the completed manuscript of *Congressional Government* (1885) reached the desk of an editor at Houghton Mifflin.

Wilson was a popular figure from the time he arrived on the Princeton campus in the fall of 1890 as the new occupant of the chair of jurisprudence and political economy, and year after year he finished first in undergraduate rankings of favorite professors. But those ballotings left something unsaid. As a former Wilson student emphasized, “We felt we had been in the presence of a great man.” The guest lectures Wilson gave at Johns Hopkins every year likewise attracted unusually large and enthusiastic audiences, and in talks to Princeton alumni and

commencement addresses at various colleges, he added even more luster to his reputation as a riveting speaker.

Between early October 1895 and mid-January 1896, Wilson's outside obligations were exceptionally heavy. Toward the end of October, a punishing attack of gripe put him in bed for days. Three months later, at Hopkins, stomach pains and fever forced the postponement of a couple of his lectures. An old friend and teacher, Theodore Whitefield Hunt, became concerned about him. "Can we not persuade you to lessen your work?" Hunt asked in a letter. "It is clear, Professor, that you are unduly taxing your strength." The next troubling sign was the development of a nervous tic in his left upper facial muscles. "I am afraid Woodrow is going to die," his father exclaimed.

On or about May 27, 1896, Wilson felt pain in his right arm and numbness in the fingers of his right hand. These were the symptoms of a cerebrovascular accident, which apparently had been caused by an occlusion of a central branch of the left middle cerebral artery. He was 39 years old. Although the pain was acute, Wilson made only minimizing references to it. He also acquired with amazing quickness a facility in writing left-handed, and then went off, alone, on a therapeutic bicycle trip around England and Scotland, during which he averaged 33 miles a day. From Glasgow, he reported to his wife that "my arm suffers scarcely a twinge, and is a most promising patient." But this was a stretch beyond the facts. An entire year passed before he was able to write normally (and in 1904 he would again

experience sensations of weakness in his right arm).

On returning home from Britain, he was a prominent participant in the three-day celebration, in blazing October weather, of the 150th birthday of the College of New Jersey. An ovation greeted Wilson's eloquent opening-day speech, "Princeton in the Nation's Service," which contained hidden

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expressions of his optimism about himself. In the most audacious of them, Presbyterian spirit served as a cover for his defiance of the disabling power of strokes: "Your thorough Presbyterian is not subject to the ordinary laws of life, is of too stubborn a fiber, too unrelaxing a purpose, to suffer mere inconvenience to bring defeat." On the final day of the celebration, it was announced that the college was to become a university and that Princeton would be its official name.

Wilson assumed the presidency of Princeton in 1902 and enjoyed notable success for the next four years. In moves that would be widely copied, he overhauled the curriculum and organized the departments of the faculty into new disciplinary divisions. Other departures included plans for several new professional schools, steps to strengthen the science departments, the appointment of a Jew



Governor Wilson and his first wife, Ellen, in 1912.

to the faculty, and the recruitment of 40 bright young “preceptors,” as Wilson called them, to guide student reading in each department. Recognizing that most of his innovations needed financial backing from the sons of Old Nassau, he assiduously sought their generosity, in addresses to groups as far away as the Dakota frontier. The all-around brilliance of his performance attracted the attention of Colonel George Harvey of *Harper’s Weekly*, who served as a spokesman for the moneyed interests in the Democratic Party. At a dinner in Wilson’s honor at the Lotos Club in New York, Harvey rose to his feet, gazed across the roomful of fat cats before him, and asked them to consider supporting the honoree of the evening for president of the United States.

In sum, all of Wilson's ambitions were working out beautifully in these years. Then he awoke one morning in May 1906 to discover that he was blind in his left eye and that, for the third time, his right arm felt weak.

A friend accompanied Wilson to Philadelphia, where he was seen by the distinguished ophthalmologist George de Schweinitz and by the internist Alfred Stengel. Their diagnoses emphasized that Wilson's blood pressure was dangerously elevated, and Schweinitz bluntly advised the patient to give up active work. Wilson's youngest daughter, Eleanor, recalled her father's return home. All

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three daughters were in despair, but Wilson himself seemed "calm, even gay." He had been assured, after all, by Dr. Stengel that "a rest of three months will restore you completely. . . . You have doubtless done too much in the last few years." Nevertheless, it's likely that, beneath the brave front Wilson presented to his family, the cumulative weight of all his medical troubles, climaxing

in the horror of a retinal hemorrhage, had engendered a fear in him that he might not have long to live.

His wife wavered between hope that the illness had been caught in time and an overriding gloom. "I know now more exactly what is threatening Woodrow," Ellen wrote a favorite cousin. "It is hardening of the arteries, due to prolonged pressure on brain and nerves. He has lived too tensely. It is, of course, the thing that killed his father [in 1903]; as a rule it is the result of old age. . . . It is an awful thing—a dying by inches, and incurable."

In compliance with Stengel's advice that he should rest for three months, Wilson took his family off to England, where they settled for the summer in a cottage in the Lake District. To his great relief, an ophthalmologist in Edinburgh informed him in August that although his eye had been permanently damaged, he would still be able to read with it, and a general practitioner concluded after taking his blood pressure that it would be better for him to "go back to (moderate) work than not to go." Upon resuming his responsibilities at Princeton, he streamlined his appointment schedule, acquired new secretarial help, and vowed to rest in the afternoons and take periodic vacations.

But despite the gestures he made toward reducing his level of stress, he could not control the irritability, impatience, and surges of ruthlessness that were the temporary legacies of his latest illness, as they would be of other maladies in years to come. In the fall of 1906 he set out, with fierce determination, to impose new plans upon Princeton, against certain opposition. He did not realize that his opponents would include himself.

Andrew West, the dean of the embryonic graduate school, wanted its buildings located on a beautiful piece of property outside town, rather than in the heart of the university, where Wilson passionately believed the school belonged. While this disagreement was simmering, open warfare broke out between the

two in spring 1907 with the public disclosure of Wilson's so-called quad plan. Wilson regarded the socially selective eating clubs for upperclassmen as no less divisive in their effect than fraternities were on other campuses, and he was intent on abolishing them. Without any of the careful preparatory talks with key members of the faculty and prominent alumni that had prefaced his major reform efforts in the past, he went directly to the board of trustees in December 1906 and proposed an immediate redesign of the entire social structure of undergraduate life, through the erection of residential quadrangles for the students, each with its own dining hall. Although some members of the board had misgivings about the expense of such a grand project, the prevailing reaction was favorable. Wilson was named the chairman of a committee to examine the quad plan in detail and report back to the board with a recommendation.

In the succeeding weeks, Wilson's family found him out of sorts, despite Ellen's efforts to keep her husband calm by agreeing with him about everything. Even when he announced his intention to take a Bermuda vacation by himself, she did not object. One of the letters he sent her from the island was an apology. He had become so absorbed in his career, he said, that he had taken her for granted as a part of his own individuality: "I cannot in any other way account for the suffering I cause you." With that statement he foreshadowed the hypocrisy of his political years, for if he had been forthright with Ellen, he would have spoken of the state of his health, which she feared he was endangering with his implacable ambitions.

Within days of mailing the letter, he gave Ellen cause for a different sort of suffering. He had made a new acquaintance, Mary Allen Hulbert Peck, a sophisticated, musically talented, unhappily married woman six years his junior who had rented, as was her annual practice, one of Bermuda's most historic houses. Almost immediately, her talks with Wilson assumed a confidential tone. She told him about her unhappy marriage, he comforted her, and she, unlike the anxious Ellen, showed enthusiasm for his political aspirations. After returning to Princeton, he sent her several letters in quick succession, along with a collection of his essays. She wrote back, although apparently she did not read the essays. But that hardly mattered. The important thing was the undercurrent of hope in their correspondence that they would see each other again.

In spring 1907, Wilson's committee submitted a predictably favorable report on the quad plan to the Princeton trustees, and the board duly adopted it. An announcement of the action appeared shortly afterward in the *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, and there was an immediate outcry on all sides. Students who loved the luxurious amenities of the eating clubs were irate. Professor Henry van Dyke of the English Department feared that the costs involved in building the quads would prevent the construction of the graduate school. Moved by the same fear, Dean West informed Wilson in an acid letter that "if the spirit of Princeton is to be killed, I have little interest in the details

“THE TRUTH IS
NO INVALID!”
WILSON BURST OUT.

of the funeral,” and he at once began to fan the anger of other dissenters.

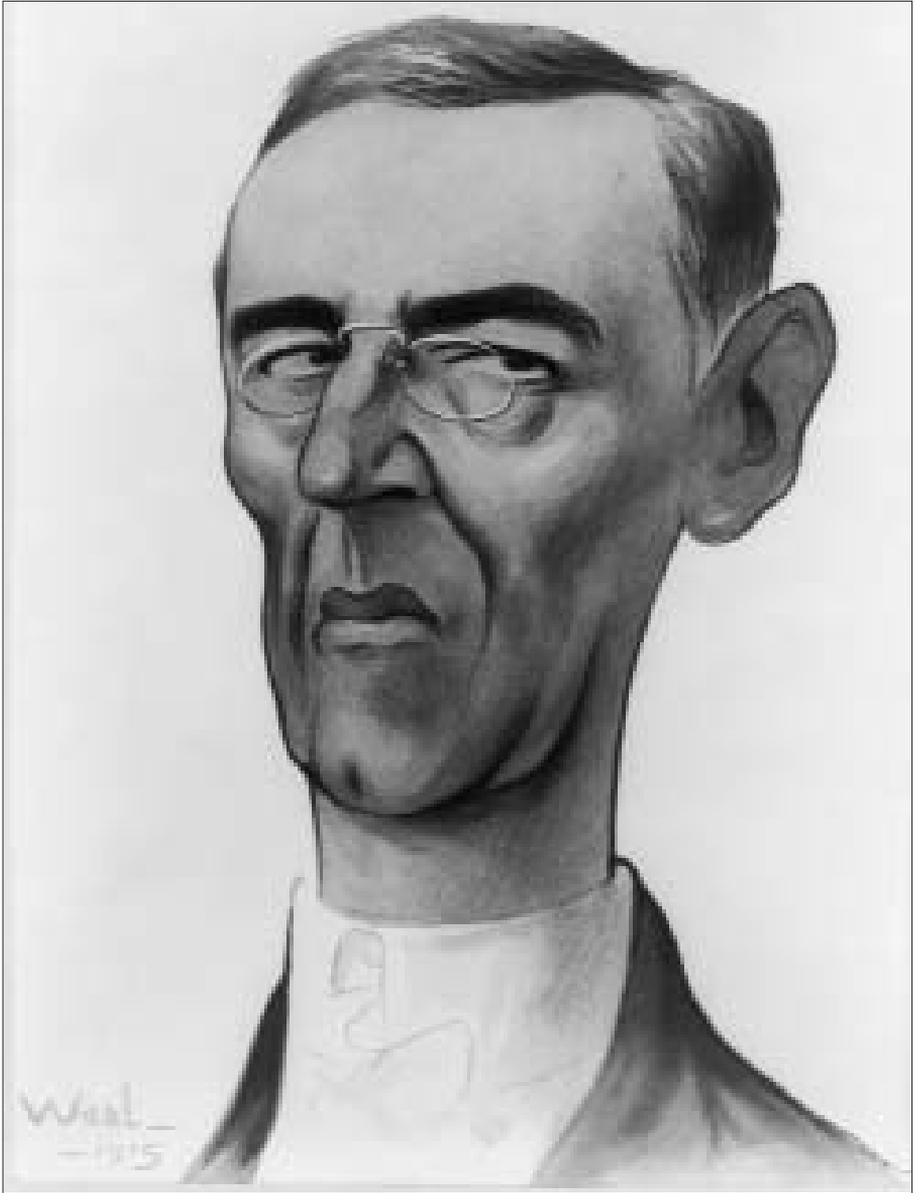
According to Ellen Wilson, the hostility directed at her husband “disheartened” him, but when friends suggested that he meet his critics’ objections halfway, his bristling rejection of their advice came close to discourtesy. “The Truth is no invalid!” he burst out, a curious phrase rooted perhaps in apprehension of the sickly fate that someday might be his. Yet at a meeting of the faculty the following September, he made a spectacularly persuasive speech that carried the day for the quad plan by a vote of 80 to 23. The opposition of the alumni did not abate, however, and, in the face of it, the board withdrew its approval of the plan on October 17.

To sweeten the pill for Wilson, who felt betrayed and was threatening to resign, the board gave him permission to keep on speaking about the controversy. Wilson seized on this palliative as an opportunity to take his case directly to the country—just as he would in his battle with the Senate over the League of Nations in 1919. Had Wilson mounted a campaign to elicit suggestions from alumni and students as to how the eating clubs might be reformed rather than eliminated, he would have damped down the discontent of both groups, healed the split in the faculty, and regained the support of the board. But ruthlessness ruled his mind and precluded any possibility of compromise. That, too, was prophetic of 1919, as was the stroke he suffered in November 1907 that wrote *finis* to his dreams of a come-from-behind win.

The fingers on his right hand became numb, his right arm was weak, and once again he could not write normally. That he felt well enough by December to show up for work was a measure of the stroke’s limited significance—and of the power of his will. Still and all, he had received a sobering reminder of his neurological vulnerability, and it was imperative, he and Ellen agreed, that he take another extended vacation by himself.

The first weeks of 1908 found the convalescent in Bermuda in pursuit of Mary Peck. With utter disregard for rumormongers in the island’s high society, he accompanied her to tea dances and dinner parties and on long walks à deux along the splendid beaches, during which they occasionally paused so that he could read her his favorite poems in the *Oxford Book of English Verse*. By the first of February, he was referring to her as “My precious one, my beloved Mary.” But the lift she gave his spirits did not last. Six months later, two attacks of neuritis, as he insisted on labeling them, reawakened the ache in his right arm. Through the rest of the year and into 1909, he felt exhausted and defeated. He had lost friends on the faculty, his relations with board members had deteriorated, and his appearances before alumni groups left him aware all too often of their withheld sympathy. In a letter to Peck, he expressed a gathering resentment of “restless, rich, empty-headed people.” “They and their kind,” he said bitterly, “are the worst enemies of Princeton, and create for me the tasks which are likely to wear my life out.”

On May 10, 1909, he received the bad news that Andrew West had wangled a gift of \$500,000 from the soap company tycoon William O. Procter for the construction of a graduate school, and had further persuaded him to specify that the school’s location be off campus. These Machiavellian maneuvers by the dean



A 1915 caricature suggests that Wilson's reputation for stubborn self-righteousness preceded him in the bitter struggle over American membership in the League of Nations.

made the president of the university look inept, and Wilson rushed to protect his reputation by denouncing West as a dilettante who placed country club values above the integrity of the university. For an entire year, the battle between the two men raged, tearing apart the faculty and driving Procter to the point of withdrawing his gift. "I dream of endless debates and slanders, sessions of hostile trustees, of futile anger and distressing misunderstandings," Wilson wrote Mary Peck in February 1910. Such was his demoralization that he sought out his married confidant in her New York apartment. "In the contemptible error and madness of a few months," they descended into a "folly" that left him "stained and unworthy" of honorable love, as Wilson would later confess to Edith Bolling Galt, who became his wife after Ellen's death.

On May 18, 1910, a date Wilson would never forget, Isaac C. Wyman of Massachusetts died, leaving his entire estate—of \$8 million, it was estimated—to Princeton, and naming West as executor. The wily dean had won. He would get the graduate school he wanted and in the place he wanted it. Wilson had no choice but to resign.

Yet in the very process of losing, he came across as a man with a future in politics.

THE MORALLY
COMPROMISED WILSON
AROUSSED CROWDS
WITH IMAGES OF A
PURIFIED AMERICA.

During a much-talked-about address to Princeton alumni in April at Pittsburgh's Schenley Hotel, he had punctuated thunderous criticisms of his academic foes with bolts of political lightning. Inside the colleges, he had argued, a cadre of conspicuous men with "cruel hands" was defending the class privileges of the wealthy. But if the United States

was to avoid "the throes of revolution," its institutions, including its colleges, would have to become "saturated in the same sympathies as the common people." The conservative crowd at the Schenley was unimpressed, but the speech gained the attention of Jim Smith, a former U.S. senator from New Jersey and the dominant figure in a coalition of Democratic bosses in the northern part of the state. Smith's assessment of Wilson was that he was a national figure, and a marvelous speaker to boot, and that his potent appeal could carry him, via the governor's mansion in Trenton, all the way to the White House. Thanks to Smith's swift machinations, Wilson was able to tell a friend in June that "the question of my nomination for the governorship [in September] is the mere preliminary of a plan to nominate me in 1912 for the presidency."

Neither in his steppingstone campaign for governor in 1910 nor in his race for the presidency against William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt two years later did Wilson allude to the illnesses he had suffered, and newspapermen failed to expose them. At one point, a bad cold forced him to suspend his campaigning for a day or two, and the *Jersey City Journal* published a rumor that he had had a nervous breakdown. But that was as close as any paper came to the truth about his health. The voters had a right to know that he was "dying by inches," and by refusing to be candid with them, he betrayed his belief in George Washington's declaration that virtue or morality was the "necessary spring" of popular government. Ironically, these betrayals of principle through silence quite possibly stimulated Wilson's presentation in his speeches of an astonishingly exalted vision. The morally compromised Wilson aroused crowds with images of a purified America, in which progressive leaders were the trailblazers of mankind's moral redemption. Though admitting that political corruption had, in the past, traduced both major political parties, he insisted—on October 3, 1910, in Trenton—that most of the Democratic Party as currently constituted had been "purified by the very air that vibrates the country itself," and a month later he concluded his gubernatorial bid with the most sustained outburst of

moral rapture he had ever voiced:

Don't look forward too much. Don't look at the road ahead of you in dismay. Look at the road behind you. Don't you see how far up the hill we have come? Don't you see what those low and damp miasmatic levels were from which we have slowly led the way? Don't you see the rows of men come, not upon the lower level, but upon the upper like the rays of the rising sun?

Don't you see the light starting, and don't you see the light illumining all nations? Don't you know that you are coming more and more into the beauty of its radiance? Don't you know that the past is forever behind us, that we have passed many kinds of evils that are no longer possible, that we have achieved great ends and have almost seen the fruition of free America? Don't forget the road you have trod, but remembering it and looking back for reassurance, look forward with confidence and charity to your fellow men, one at a time as you pass them along the road, and see those who are willing to lead you and say "We do not believe you know the whole road. We know that you are no prophet; we know that you are no seer, but that you can see the end of the road from the beginning, and we believe that you know the direction and are leading us in that direction, though it costs you your life, provided it does not cost you your honor.

Though it costs you your life, provided it does not cost you your honor. There, in a nutshell, was the pathos of Wilson's situation. The cover-up of his health problems—as governor, as president—to protect his political viability cost him his honor.

In April 1913, barely a month after his inauguration, the 56-year-old president described graphically to Mary Hulbert (the former Mary Peck, now divorced from her first husband) his latest physical calamity, but he did not call it a stroke: "I have been lying in bed all day, not only because it was Sunday and I was tired and could rest, but because for the last 48 hours there has been a threat in my left shoulder of my old enemy, *neuritis*, as nasty a beast as ever attacked poor human flesh—and a mean coward, besides, for the sneak comes only when a fellow is worn out and there is no fight left in him." In Dr. Edwin A. Weinstein's *Woodrow Wilson: A Medical and Psychological Biography* (1981), the point is made that the "threat" to the left shoulder was a particularly bad sign:

This meant that the cerebral circulation [had] been impaired on the right, previously unaffected, side of the brain. This evidence of bilaterality of involvement not only increased the risk of further strokes, but also created the possibility that enduring changes in behavior, based upon insufficient blood supply and impaired oxygenation of the brain, might eventually occur.

Wilson's cousin, Helen Woodrow Bones, whom Ellen Wilson had hired as her private secretary, steered clear of saying he had suffered a stroke. But in a grim letter to her sister, she reported that his "neuritis" had left him "tired and haggard," which "frightens everybody interested in him, for nothing will cure it but rest and rest is something he can't have until Congress adjourns." A month later, lingering traces of the illness finally prompted his close adviser Colonel Edward

M. House to speak to him about conserving his strength. In a diary entry that evening, House recorded Wilson's response: "He said it looked as if the people were trying to kill him, and he spoke of the loneliness of his position, in a way that was saddening."

The newly named White House physician, Cary T. Grayson, a naval officer from Culpeper, Virginia, whose affability and fund of anecdotes endeared him to the entire Wilson family, had received a quickie medical degree from the University of the South after one year of study,

and was not all that bright in the bargain. When Wilson attributed the first illness of his presidency to neuritis, Grayson did not dispute the diagnosis. Almost a year would elapse before he realized that untreated malignant hypertension was his patient's abiding problem. What he grasped right away, however, was that the president did not handle stress very well. With the goodhearted doctor's encouragement, Wilson began to take the better part of every afternoon off. Some years before, he had discovered that he liked golf, and from mid-May to Christmas 1913 he played almost every day, weather permitting.

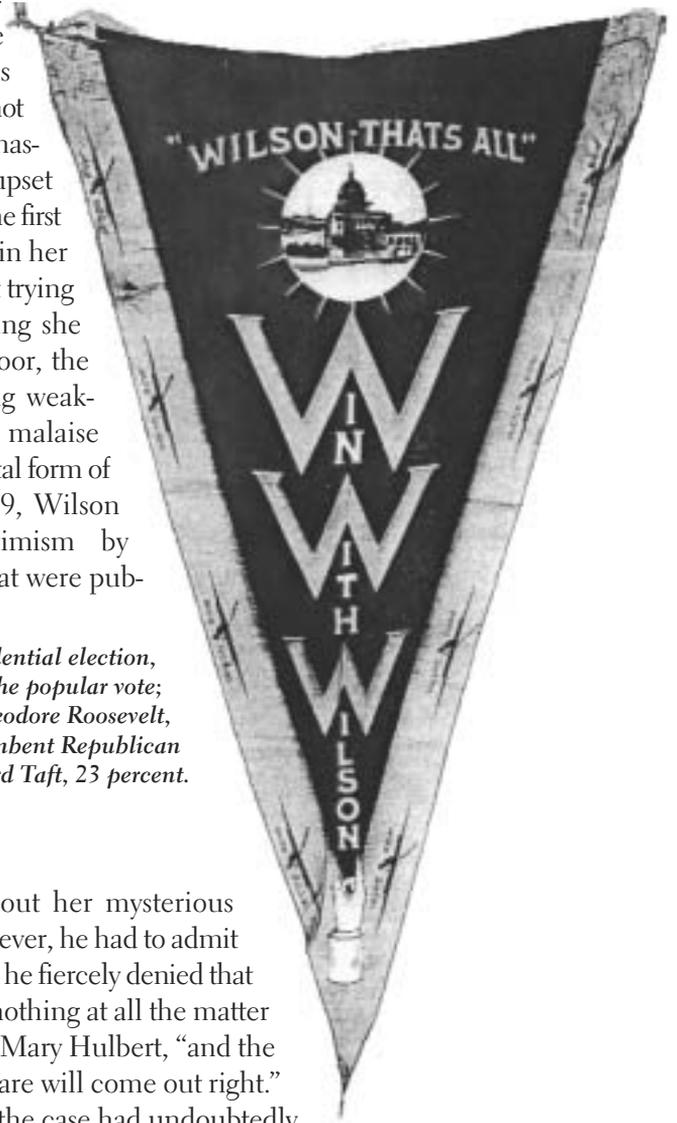
With his vigor restored and the tonic of power coursing in his veins, he again became the resplendent hero his daughter Eleanor remembered from his very first week in the White House. "Father looked extremely well and vital. . . . When I saw him come out of his study and stride down the hall toward us, I noticed that his walk had acquired more than its usual buoyancy.

His eyes were strikingly clear and bright, and there was a sort of chiseled keenness in his face. He was finer looking in those days than ever before in his life." Month after month, as 1913 wore on, his exceptionally powerful intellect and his unrelenting will made him the all but absolute master of the Washington scene. The climactic moment of his first year in office occurred on December 23, when, in an elaborate East Room ceremony, he signed into law the Federal Reserve Act.



George de Schweinitz, the doctor who had advised Wilson in 1906 to give up work, had continued to schedule appointments with him from time to time. After an examination of Wilson's eyes in March 1914, Schweinitz informed Dr. Grayson that he had found definite signs of hardening of the retinal arteries. Grayson was shaken by the news but decided not to share it with the president, inasmuch as Wilson was already upset about the first lady's health. On the first of the month, Ellen had fallen in her bedroom. Though Wilson kept trying to dissipate his anxiety by saying she had slipped on the polished floor, the grim fact was that her growing weakness, fatigue, and feelings of malaise were symptomatic of an often fatal form of kidney ailment. On March 19, Wilson went public with his optimism by denouncing the newspapers that were pub-

In the hard-fought 1912 presidential election, Wilson won 42 percent of the popular vote; Progressive Party candidate Theodore Roosevelt, 28 percent; and the incumbent Republican president, William Howard Taft, 23 percent.



lishing speculative reports about her mysterious decline. Two months later, however, he had to admit that she was very weak, although he fiercely denied that she was mortally ill. "There is nothing at all the matter with her organically," he wrote Mary Hulbert, "and the doctors assure us that all with care will come out right." But the specialists called in on the case had undoubtedly been admonished by Grayson not to alarm the president. In July, Ellen entered the terminal stages of renal failure. Mercifully, death claimed her on August 6, two days after swift-moving armies of the German Empire invaded Belgium and Britain responded by declaring war on Germany. As Wilson looked out a window of the deathbed room across the South Lawn of the White House, he exclaimed desolately, "Oh, my God, what am I to do?"

He had betrayed Ellen sexually, yet he had always been extremely dependent upon her intelligence and devotion. In a heart-broken letter to their daughter Jessie, he affirmed that Ellen "was beyond comparison the deepest, truest, noblest lover I ever knew." That his political career, which she had feared might kill him, had led to her

demise, not his, stirred other emotions he had to reckon with. To Grayson he confessed, “I sometimes feel that the Presidency has had to be paid for with Ellen’s life; that she would be living today if we had continued in the old simple life at Princeton.” In those words was the ache of a guilty conscience. During the “simple” Princeton years, Ellen had been prone to fits of depression and self-doubt, to the point that she found it difficult to fulfill her social obligations as the wife of the university’s president. Wilson could not have helped but know that the role of first lady would make her even more insecure and unhappy.

A TALL, LIVELY, STYLISHLY
DRESSED WOMAN WITH
AN EYE-CATCHING FIGURE
AND A BEAUTIFUL SMILE,
EDITH GALT ENTRANCED
THE PRESIDENT.

Months passed, and still he was inconsolable. His face was gray, Colonel House said of him on November 6, and he looked “positively sick.” Twelve days later, the diarist set down an even more dramatic account of the president’s state of mind. The two men had taken a long, night-

time walk through midtown Manhattan. “When we reached home he began to tell me how lonely and sad his life was since Mrs. Wilson’s death, and he could not help wishing when we were out tonight that someone would kill him. . . . His eyes were moist when he spoke of not wanting to live any longer, and of not being fit to do the work he had in hand. He said he had himself so disciplined that he knew perfectly well that unless someone killed him, he would go on to the end doing the best he could.”

Recognizing Wilson’s desperate if unstated need to find another mate, Grayson and Helen Woodrow Bones conspired in the late winter of 1915 to introduce the president to Edith Bolling Galt, a 42-year-old widow with a comfortable income from a Washington jewelry shop left her by her late husband. A tall, lively, stylishly dressed woman with an eye-catching figure and a beautiful smile, she belonged to a distinguished Virginia family whose plantation demesne had been ruined in the Civil War. Within days of an “accidental” encounter with Wilson arranged by Bones, it became apparent that Galt had entranced him. He quickly moved from inviting her to dine at the White House and daily automobile excursions chaperoned by Bones to ever more ardent letters, a proposal of marriage on a moonlit evening in May, a formal announcement of their engagement on October 6, and a wedding in her Dupont Circle home on December 18. Colonel House and Secretary of the Treasury William G. McAdoo, who was Wilson’s son-in-law, had urged them to postpone the wedding until after the 1916 election, out of concern that voters might be offended by the haste with which the bereaved president had become a bridegroom. (Wilson defeated his chief opponent, Charles E. Hughes, with just over 49 percent of the vote.) As both men should have known it would, the recommendation merely earned them Edith’s enmity. Indeed, she had conceived a dislike for House months before, viewing his intimacy with Wilson as a threat to her own prerogatives. She also looked down her nose at what she regarded as the coarseness of the president’s private secretary, Joseph

Tumulty, a warmly humorous Irish Catholic out of Jersey City who knew all there was to know about urban politics. Edith Galt Wilson had no use for compromise—a trait that would eventually have serious consequences for the history of the nation.



Of Wilson's role in the American entry into the Great War in April 1917, Winston Churchill wrote in *The World Crisis* (1923): "It seems no exaggeration to pronounce that the action of the United States with its repercussions on the history of the world depended, during the awful period of Armageddon, upon the workings of this man's mind and spirit to the exclusion of almost every other factor; and that he played a part in the fate of nations incomparably more direct and personal than any other man." Precisely because the decision to intervene was clearly Wilson's, it took many of his countrymen—friends and foes alike—by surprise. How could it be that this president whom they were accustomed to thinking of as a surpassingly eloquent apostle of neutrality, who had proclaimed that the nation was "too proud to fight," who had depicted himself as the mediator who could bring the conflict to an equitable close, had suddenly become an advocate of American involvement in the awful bloodletting? The choice he made in favor of war seemed out of character.

But in an important sense, Wilson was still the man nobody knew, for the public was unaware of his high blood pressure, hypertensive vascular changes, and arteriosclerosis. Nor did the White House acknowledge the disabling headaches to which he had been subject ever since the spring of 1915, when German torpedoes sank the *Lusitania* and killed 1,198 men, women, and children, 124 of whom were American citizens. The furor that ensued caused Wilson great stress. What's remarkable is that he performed effectively for as long as he did.

In August 1914, his success in transcending the despair he felt in the wake of Ellen's death lent an extra intensity to his public appeals for calmness about the outbreak of war in Europe. His pulpit message was "impartiality and fairness and friendliness to all concerned." At the emotional peak of his most self-referential exhortation, he urged the American people to demonstrate "the fine poise of undisturbed judgment" and "the dignity of self-control" in order "to do what is necessary and disinterested and truly serviceable to the peace of the world." The outcome that Wilson desired was "a deadlock in Europe." As he told a journalist in the first Christmas season of the war, the prospects "of a just and equitable peace, and the only peace that will be lasting, will be happiest if no nation gets the decision by arms." Conversely, "the danger of an unjust peace, one that will invite further calamities, will be if some one nation or group of nations succeeds in enforcing its will upon the others."

In this same vein, on January 22, 1917, he delivered before the Senate one of the most extraordinary speeches, at once unrealistic and prescient, of the modern American presidency. The peace to be made, he declared, had to be "a peace without victory." This, he insisted, was simply hard reality. For "victory would mean peace forced upon the loser, a victor's terms imposed upon the vanquished. It would be accepted in humiliation, under duress, at an intolerable sacrifice, and

would leave a sting, a resentment, a bitter memory upon which terms of peace would rest, not permanently, but only as upon quicksand. Only a peace between equals can last, only a peace the very principle of which is equality and a common participation in a common benefit.”

The speech was immediately attacked by the bellicose Theodore Roosevelt, who had long regarded Wilson as “yellow,” and, in the Senate, by TR’s friend

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Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts and the isolationist William E. Borah of Idaho, both of whom would be in the vanguard of the president’s opponents on the League of Nations issue two years later. Virtually all of the influential editors and publishers in both England and France, their hearts hardened by

the terrible price their nations had paid in the effort to bring Germany to its knees, were bitterly opposed as well to the idea of “peace without victory.” Though some of their counterparts in Germany spoke well of Wilson’s speech, the government revealed what it thought by resuming unrestricted submarine warfare on February 1. The last of these blows hit Wilson the hardest, of course. To Colonel House he described his eerie feeling that the sun, “after going from east to west . . . had begun to go from west to east and that he could not get his balance.”

After working far into the night on the wording of his message, he broke relations with Germany on February 3. Nevertheless, he was still looking for ways to avoid war without sacrificing American rights, and in the idea of arming American merchantmen as a means of countering the U-boat threat he found one. But a strange dilatoriness (did it reflect nervous exhaustion?) kept him from sending a memorandum on the subject to Capitol Hill until February 27, only one week before the 64th Congress was to adjourn. The House passed the armed-ship bill in nothing flat, but in the Senate, a group of isolationist progressives, who feared that shooting matches on the seas would inevitably lead to full-scale war, vowed to filibuster it to death. The previous December, Wilson had already shown the impolitic anger that constant strain induced in him, when he refused to attend a church function to which Senator Lodge had also been invited and let it be known that he found the very sight of the senator offensive. When the filibusterers triumphed, Wilson’s anger escalated into foaming rage, which he funneled into a public statement on March 4: “A little group of willful men, representing no opinion but their own, have rendered the great Government of the United States helpless and contemptible.” It would not cure the situation to call the 65th Congress into extraordinary session, Wilson ranted, for in the absence of consent to limit debate, the “paralysis of the Senate would remain” and the majority that favored the bill would continue to be “powerless, helpless.”

Edwin Weinstein was the first to point out that words such as “powerless,” “helpless,” and “paralysis” suggest how worn down the president was. His loss of emotional balance can be measured by his disgraceful innuendo about the un-Americanism of the filibusterers, two of whom, George Norris of Nebraska and

Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin, were towering figures in the political life of the nation. That he was already feeling ill at the time of this diatribe is altogether likely, though it was not until March 7 that Dr. Grayson announced he had ordered him to bed. The president, he said, had a cold, which the press thereupon assumed he had caught during the ceremonies of his second inaugural two days earlier, while outside in the wind.

Wilson's confinement lasted nine days. When advised on March 9 that he did not need congressional authorization to arm American ships and place naval officers in command of the guns, he issued an order from his bedroom that set in motion the time-consuming mobilization. He exchanged written communications about the war with the journalist Walter Lippmann, but did not agree to see him. A cabinet meeting scheduled for March 13 was scrubbed. On March 16, a labor crisis finally brought him back into view—prematurely, the worried Grayson said. Two days later, Wilson was horrified to learn that German submarines had just sunk three American ships. Even so, his desire to avoid all-out war did not waver. As he told Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels on March 19, he had been urged to ask Congress for a declaration of war but still hoped it would not be necessary.

Literally overnight, it would seem, he abandoned this strategy. On March 20, he polled the members of his cabinet and found every one of them to be in favor of entering the war. Armed with this vote, he announced the following morning that he was calling the new Congress into extraordinary session on April 2 for the purpose of receiving “a communication concerning grave matters of national policy.” Perhaps he was swayed by the arrival of authoritative information from abroad that unless the United States threw itself full force into the fray, the armies of the Allies were probably doomed to defeat. Perhaps the abdication on March 15 of Czar Nicholas II of Russia, at the insistence of the revolutionary Duma, made it easier for Wilson to identify the Allied cause with human freedom, now that a despotism had been removed from the partnership. Or perhaps a hidden health crisis bred a hair-trigger response to those developments.

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In the absence of descriptive data about his condition during the nine-day confinement, it cannot be shown that he had suffered a stroke. Colonel House's reference to a presidential headache in his diary on March 27 is a detail worth pondering, as is the reported statement four days later by the White House head usher, Ike Hoover, that “I never knew him to be more peevish. He's out of sorts, doesn't feel well, and has a headache.” These details suggest that his blood pressure throughout this tumultuous month may have been sky-high, but they cannot be construed as stroke related. Only one thing makes it reasonable to suspect that he spent more than a week in bed recovering from a cerebral vascular lesion: the resemblance between the shattering suddenness with which he switched his position about American involvement in the war and the startling emergence

of man-in-a-hurry impatience and intransigence in the post-stroke Wilson of 1906. Having made a strong commitment to the concept of armed ships as an alternative to full-fledged belligerency, he abruptly rejected it, without giving naval gunners a chance to demonstrate what their firepower could accomplish, and against a backdrop of deeply divided public opinion, as Wilson's premier biographer, Arthur S. Link, has made clear. Even in the face of the German marauders' destruction of those three American ships, national pro-war sentiment, says Link, was far from overwhelming.

Scheduling an address to Congress for the first week in April was another telling indication of Wilson's headlong temper. The brevity of the intervening period meant that he did not have time to win agreement on the country's objectives in the war, or to exact from the Allies desirable terms of participation, or to secure pledges about the shape of the peace to come. On the spring evening when he stepped into a car for the drive to Capitol Hill, all he had with him in the transcript of his speech were some finely tuned phrases. These were his words as he rounded into his peroration:

It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to hang in the balance. But the right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts—for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free. To such a task we can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other.

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That the final sentence was a corruption of the conclusion of Martin Luther's defiant declaration before the Diet of Worms that he would recant nothing he had said in the past (“Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me.”) was the most ironic touch of all.

After a visit to the White House in March 1918, Wilson's daughter Jessie wrote to say how comforting it had been for her to find that “his wonderful spirit” and “the power of God” were keeping him “physically fit, as well as so marvelously fit every other way.”

Once war was declared, on April 6, Wilson lightened his burden somewhat by delegating important duties to certain members of his cabinet, of whom the ablest were William McAdoo at Treasury and Secretary of War Newton P. Baker. He also relied on the administrative dynamos he had personally recruit-

ed from beyond the realm of politics, most notably Herbert Hoover, whose success in expanding American agriculture enabled the United States to meet the food needs of the Allies as well as its own, and Bernard Baruch, who turned the lackluster War Industries Board into an effective means of converting factories to essential work for the military and eliminating production bottlenecks. Every week, Wilson invited Hoover, Baruch, and the heads of all the other war agencies to the White House for a planning session, over which he presided with cheerful but relentless efficiency. In such moments, he seemed exhilarated by the cares of his office.

On the other hand, when an English diplomat called on him one day, “he looked tired, and his voice was decidedly weak,” and Edith Wilson was upset by how often he was completely done in by pain. At a time when every nerve was tense with anxiety because of the war, she remembered, and the burdens on her husband’s shoulders were “enough to crush the vitality of a giant, there would come days when he was incapacitated by blinding headaches that no medicine could relieve. He would have to give up everything, and the only cure seemed to be sleep. We would make the room cool and dark, and when at last the merciful sleep would come, he would lie for hours in this way, apparently not even breathing. Many a time I [stole] in and leaned over him to listen—to see if he were really alive.”

The sufferer also made dreadful mistakes, in which a missionary grimness or a self-damaging egotism was dismally apparent. He appalled civil libertarians, for example, by endorsing the Espionage Act, which permitted the Post Office Department and the Justice Department to close the mails to socialist and Christian publications opposed to the war; the Trading-with-the-Enemy Act, which granted the postmaster general virtually dictatorial authority over the foreign-language press; and the Sedition Act, which empowered the federal government to punish expressions of opinion about the American form of government (or the flag or military uniforms) that were deemed to be disloyal, whether or not harmful consequences could be demonstrated.

His egotism and the damage it caused him were especially evident toward the end of October 1918, when he called on the voters of the United States to return Democratic majorities to the Congress in the upcoming election, identified “my leadership” with the imminently triumphant outcome of the war, and raised doubts about the patriotism of Republican politicians. When his embittered opponents went on to win control of both houses of Congress, the most alarming of the dark prospects he had to face was that Henry Cabot Lodge would head the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.



On the morning of December 4, 1918, when Wilson boarded the troopship *George Washington* to attend the Peace Conference in Paris, he was exhausted from the preparations for the journey and contending as well with a heavy head cold and sore throat. Yet again, Cary



Grayson had reason to warn the 61-year-old president about the perils of overdoing. But there was little chance that Grayson's warning would be heeded. In another instance of his self-damaging egotism, Wilson had refused to invite along in an advisory capacity former secretary of state Elihu Root, former president William Howard Taft, or any other Republican statesman with a first-rate mind. His advisers were a generally undistinguished lot, though they included House, on whose wide-ranging intelligence Wilson had long relied, but with whom he would soon quarrel because of House's weakness of will as a negotiator. In representing the United States, Wilson would run what amounted to a one-man show. At times he even did his own typing.

The Peace Conference got down to business in mid-January 1919. Wilson's agenda rested on the Fourteen Points address and several other speeches he had



Promising to end war and guarantee national self-determination, Wilson arrived in Paris in 1919 to near universal acclaim and adulation.

given in 1918 in which he had spelled out his vision of a just peace. He believed that open diplomacy, freedom of the seas, the reduction of armaments, free trade, and self-determination as the governing principle in resolving territorial disputes were absolutely essential to the avoidance of future wars, as, above all, was the establishment of the League of Nations, an international organization that would be dedicated to the territorial integrity of nations great and small.

The four other major figures in the so-called Council of Ten (of the victorious allies) were Georges Clemenceau of France, David Lloyd George of Great Britain, Vittorio Orlando of Italy, and Baron Makino of Japan. All were shrewd

bargainers, and all represented their respective countrymen's wishes to a much greater degree than Wilson did his. That they were bound by treaties to support one another's claims further strengthened their bargaining positions, as did the brute fact that their armies occupied the territories that were in dispute. Clemenceau and Lloyd George, in particular, were formidable opponents. Clemenceau's quasi-Carthaginian objective was to maul Germany so severely that it would be unable for many decades to launch a revanchist assault on France. Lloyd George had liberal instincts and a highly intuitive intelligence but was best known for his shiftiness.

Clemenceau and Lloyd George were dazzling debaters. Even so, Wilson prevailed in the early going by dint of his courage, facility of expression, and tenacity of purpose. In the face of the British, French, and Japanese contention that all of Germany's former colonies should be given over to the powers that had conquered them, Wilson succeeded in having the colonies placed under a mandate system sponsored by a League of Nations that was still no more than a concept. He also won approval, on January 25, of a resolution making the constitutional formation of the League the Council's next order of business, despite Clemenceau's preference for the forging of a military alliance against Germany.

By common consent, Wilson took charge of the often-quarrelsome multinational commission that drafted the League's charter, which, in his Presbyterian fashion, he called the Covenant. His own ideas about constitution making were ingenious, and he was open to imaginative proposals from others. The result was that the commission voted unanimously in favor of the Covenant. From his Princeton days onward, Wilson had racked up many achievements of first-order importance. But the creation of the first globally encompassing international organization in history was by all odds the most impressive of them.

In March, things got rough. In a series of sophisticatedly argued speeches, Clemenceau demanded that two new states, Poland and Czechoslovakia, be strengthened by dismembering eastern Germany, that a Rhenish buffer state be

torn out of the flank of western Germany, and that, along with Alsace-Lorraine, the iron- and coal-rich Saar Basin be ceded to France. But the true masterpiece of the sophist's art, as John Maynard Keynes called it, was the joint British-French idea that the expenditures of the Allied governments on pensions and

separation allowances could fairly be added to the already astronomical cost of civilian damages that Germany was expected to pay in reparations. To counter these recommendations, all of which horrified him, Wilson had to do much more than claim that they violated the spirit of the Fourteen Points. Ten-hour sessions of disputation in the Council became commonplace, as did presidential evenings, extending into the small hours of the morning, spent in solitary study of maps and charts and statistics.

With every passing day, Clemenceau was becoming more openly con-

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temptuous of Wilson's pleas to treat France's fearsome enemy with leniency. In retrospect, the explosion that finally occurred seemed inevitable. Clemenceau called Wilson pro-German and stalked out of the room. The president responded on March 29 with an ineffectual confession of worry that the Peace Conference might not be able to survive much longer. Five days later, vomiting and diarrhea overcame him after lunch. "I am feeling terribly bad," he said to

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Grayson. Somehow he managed to get through the afternoon session of the Council, although there were moments when he felt he could not, owing to intense pain in his head, back, and stomach. That night, he was shaken by “asthmatic coughing,” Grayson recalled, “which broke the sleep that had always been his sheet anchor.” In addition, he found it difficult to breathe while lying flat, and his temperature rose to 103 degrees. Reading these symptoms, Grayson advised Wilson that the pandemic flu virus of 1918–19 was the cause of his misery. But to the press, predictably, the doctor explained that the president had a cold.

Lloyd George's belief that the president had also suffered a stroke is supported by the sea change that took place in Wilson's political department. On April 6, he astonished the world by announcing that he was ordering the *George Washington* to be held in readiness to take him home. In the United States, Democrats and Republicans alike criticized this display of ruthless petulance. But at the Peace Conference, the fear that Wilson might indeed depart, and that the United States might deal with Germany on its own, impelled a rethinking of Clemenceau's punitive designs. This process was not slowed by Wilson's cancellation of his order to the *George Washington*. The peace treaty that was ultimately fashioned was harsh, but without Wilson it would have been far harsher. Only with respect to reparations did he fail to struggle against extremist terms. His surrender on that issue made him seem weak, but it was, in fact, another expression of his ruthlessness: Amid the dark realities of postwar Europe, the Covenant of the League of Nations represented a glowing promise, and to sustain it Wilson was prepared to do whatever was required.

In his final two and a half months in Paris, heart problems and paranoia were new tortures for Wilson. The former he was able to conceal; the latter he could not. It became apparent from his strange behavior in the presence of the waiters, porters, and cleaning women who served him and his wife that he believed them to be secret agents who understood English perfectly, although they pretended not to, and were conveying the contents of overheard conversations and surreptitiously perused letters to spymasters in the French government. Visibly alarmed by a further suspicion that American embassy personnel were making use of official limousines for their private convenience, he issued a stern order to halt this (nonexistent) practice. His mistaken notion that some of the chairs and tables in the palace where he and Edith were living had been spirited away and sold illicitly was soon reflected in an order to members of his staff to undertake an

inventory of all the palace's furnishings. "Coming from the President," Ike Hoover later commented, "these were funny things, and we could not but surmise that something queer was happening in his mind."

The pale, depleted president who addressed the Senate of the United States on July 10, 1919, did not come to seek approval of the Treaty of Peace and its attendant Covenant, which he had signed the previous month in the glittering Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. He was there to make Senate ratification seem a foregone conclusion. Although marred by a stumbling delivery, his presentation smacked of a divinely sanctioned instruction. "The stage is set, the destiny disclosed," he sonorously affirmed at the close. "It has come about by no plan of our conceiving, but by the hand of God who led us into this way. We cannot turn back. We can only go forward, with lifted eyes and fresh spirit, to follow the vision. It was of this that we dreamed at our birth. America shall in truth show the way. The light streams upon the path ahead, and nowhere else."

But compromise was a necessity if the United States was to join the League of Nations. Of the 49 Republican senators, 14 were irreconcilably opposed to American membership; 23 were prepared to accept the idea if strong reservations formulated by Senator Lodge were incorporated into the Covenant, and the remaining 12 wanted nothing much more than moderate revisions in the wording of certain passages. Of the 47 Democrats, 43 were solidly pro-League. The arithmetic was inescapable. Even if Wilson made a sufficient number of concessions to the "mild reservationists" to win them over, he would still fall short of the two-thirds vote needed for ratification. Senator James Watson of Indiana, a Republican, did not beat around the bush with Wilson: "Mr. President, you are licked. There is only one way you can take the United States into the League of Nations." "Which way is that?" "Accept it with the Lodge reservations." The president's eyes blazed. "Lodge reservations? Never! I'll never consent to any policy with which that impossible name is so prominently identified."

There was nothing about Lodge that the Wilson of mid-1919 did not detest with a maniacal intensity. For his part, Lodge thought Wilson untrustworthy, regarded his rejection of balance-of-power internationalism as naive, and feared that, if success as an architect of peace were added to his wartime accomplishments, he might run for a third term in 1920—and win. Humiliation of the president was Lodge's goal, and to that end he loaded the Foreign Relations Committee with die-hard opponents of the League. At a White House meeting between the president and the committee, Lodge saw to it that searching questions were asked, and he could not have been more delighted when the ineffectual answers revealed that his quarry was suffering from cognitive loss and memory impairment. For these two antagonists, an amicable settlement of their differences about the League was simply not in the cards.

So Wilson sought an alternative course. He declared his intention to "appeal to the country." Face to face with the electorate, he would fire up an enthusiasm that would carry the cause of righteousness to victory—even though, as a Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee sardonically reminded him, the people could not vote on the issue before the Senate did. What's

more, going over the heads of prerogative-conscious senators was apt to prove counterproductive.

In the privacy of the White House residential quarters, Wilson had talked about his plans for some weeks before they were formally announced, and Edith was profoundly distressed by them. “The increasing toll on my husband’s body and brain” had already stirred fears in her that she shuddered to specify. His energy level moved between brief highs and longer lows; his headaches were ghastly, his heart was no longer sound, and occasionally he experienced double vision. Grayson, too, was upset by the president’s expansive descriptions of his itinerary and had several serious talks with him about the heat, discomfort, and stress of a month-long train trip up, down, and across the country. But not even the small stroke he suffered during a weekend cruise down the Potomac on the presidential yacht could deter Wilson.

The travel-wise journalist H. H. Kohlsaet took in how weak and unwell Wilson seemed and warned that “you are too ill to take that long trip. The heat will be intense in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Nebraska. You will break down before you reach the Rockies.” The president’s hands were trembling as he replied, “I don’t care if I die the next minute after the treaty is signed.” With time running out, Grayson came to see him again to make a final appeal for prudence, but Wilson cut him off. “You must remember that I, as Commander in Chief, was responsible for sending our soldiers to Europe. In the crucial test of the trenches, they did not turn back—and I cannot turn back now. I cannot put my personal safety, my health, in the balance against my duty. I must go.”

Only his weakening grasp of reality kept the president from realizing how many other duties he *had* shirked. In the face of the bloody race riots and lynchings that shamed the land in that first summer of peace, for instance, he not only failed to remind white America that a third of a million black men had served their country in the war but clung to his deplorable policy of reducing the employment of blacks in government positions in Washington simply because of their skin color.

Had he died in action somewhere in the West, he would have redeemed his fraying reputation as president, enveloped the League in the glow of his martyrdom, and fulfilled his ardent wish to be identified with the heroes he had sent to their deaths in France. But the departure of the presidential train from Union Station in Washington on the evening of September 2, 1919, marked the beginning of a quite different scenario.

To the reporters who accompanied him, the president seemed to be enjoying himself, and they continued to think so for some time. Despite a daily schedule that called for at least one major speech and close to a dozen rear-platform appearances—waving and smiling at the crowds and shaking uncountable numbers of hands—he appeared each morning looking refreshed and vigorous, in seeming proof of the impression Grayson was creating about him in his daily bulletins. But in fact he was slowly falling apart, and Grayson and Edith knew it. At night, asthmatic coughing and difficulty in breathing forced him to sleep—or try to sleep—propped up with pillows in a chair. On the long haul through



Wilson's political nemesis, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, blocked ratification of the Treaty of Versailles when Wilson barred modifications, keeping America out of the League of Nations.

stifling heat between Minneapolis-St. Paul and the Pacific Northwest, he suffered cardiac failure and splitting headaches. By the time the train reached Seattle, Grayson noted in his diary, "his exertions were sapping his vitality very fast." Industrial Workers of the World leader Jack Kipps, a member of a small delegation that met with Wilson in private to argue for the release of imprisoned radicals, offered a more vividly detailed judgment: The president's head seemed heavy on his neck, "and he looked old—just old." Furthermore, one of his hands shook so badly that he had to grip the lapel of his coat to steady it, and for a few moments he closed his eyes as though he had a terrible headache.

Inspired by the huge crowds and the ovations that greeted him in California, Wilson gave some memorable speeches. Unfortunately, he was running on empty. On the return leg of the journey, in Pueblo, Colorado, on the evening of September 25, a blood clot formed in an artery of his brain but did not rupture. The pain, he gaspingly confessed to his wife, was unbearable. Through the night, he sat upright in a chair, while his wife and his doctor kept a vigil beside him. Around five in the morning, he fell asleep. "As I sat there watching," Edith Wilson would relate, "I felt that something had broken inside me; and from that hour on I would wear a mask—not only to the public but to the one I loved best in the world; for he must never know how ill he was, and I must carry on."

Although Edith did not care for Joe Tumulty, he was a true-blue Wilson loyalist, and she had no compunction about enlisting him as an enabler of the cover-up that she and her co-conspirator, Grayson, were already mounting. When the train reached its next scheduled stop, in Wichita, Kansas, on the morning of September 26, Tumulty appeared on the station platform and read a brief statement: “The President has . . . so spent himself without reserve on this trip that it has brought a nervous reaction in his digestive organs. Dr. Grayson, therefore, insists upon the cancellation of his remaining appointments and his immediate return to Washington.”

In the 1870s, Wilson the gifted Princeton undergraduate had depicted his political model, Pitt the Elder, rising to answer a foe and then falling, never to rise again. On Thursday, October 2, 1919, four days after the Wilsons’ return to the White House, Edith went to her husband’s bedroom and found him unconscious on the floor of the adjacent bathroom, next to the toilet. Bloody cuts on his temple and nose indicated that he had fallen off the toilet and hit his

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head on the bathtub. With Grayson’s help, Edith carried him to his bed (where he would lie immobilized for four weeks). Grayson immediately examined him. Ten minutes later, he emerged from the bedroom and announced that the president’s left side was paralyzed. Further observations revealed that he had lost vision in the left-half fields of both eyes, that his breathing was labored, and that his voice had lost its timbre. Only gradually would it become apparent that his judgment, which may already have been somewhat impaired, had also sustained serious damage.

On the morning of October 3, *The Washington Post* asserted in a naively unquestioning story that the president’s sudden illness had been diagnosed as “nervous exhaustion.” But in the White House that morning the atmosphere was grim, and in the Cabinet Room, where Tumulty was meeting with Secretary of State Robert Lansing, it was also frosty. In expressionless tones, Lansing read the president’s secretary a passage from Article II, Section 1, of the Constitution: “In Case of the Removal of the President from Office, or of his Death, Resignation, or Inability to discharge the Powers and Duties of the said Office, the same shall devolve on the Vice President.” Tumulty challengingly asked who should certify that the president was disabled. Lansing told him that the president’s physician possessed the power to do so, as did Tumulty himself. “You may rest assured,” Tumulty coldly replied, “that while Woodrow Wilson is lying in the White House on the broad of his back I will not be a party to ousting him. He has been too wonderful to me to receive such treatment at my hands.”

On seeing that Grayson had entered the room, Tumulty turned to him for reinforcement of his defiance. “And I am sure that Dr. Grayson will never certify his disability. Will you, Grayson?” The physician affirmed that indeed

he would not. Whereupon Tumulty added that, if anybody outside the White House circle were to submit such a certification, he and Grayson would repudiate it. Over the weekend, upbeat stories, patently inspired by Grayson, appeared in the press. Nevertheless, Lansing convoked a meeting of the cabinet on Monday morning to discuss the means by which the vice president, Thomas R. Marshall, might temporarily assume executive authority. But Grayson, whom one of the cabinet members had invited to be present, thwarted Lansing's intentions by announcing that the president's health had "showed decided improvement and seemed to indicate a speedy recovery." Choking back his frustration, Lansing then asked Grayson to convey to the president "our felicitations and best wishes."

On October 11, newspapers nationwide carried prominent stories about a letter that Senator George Moses, a New Hampshire Republican, had sent to his constituents, one of whom had seen fit to share it with the wire services. "Of course he may get well—that is, he may live," Moses had said of the president, "but if he does he will not be any material force or factor in anything." By this time, too, news and editorial writers were asking questions about the unexplained comings and goings of medical specialists at the White House and about the absence of a statement from the president about anything. Rumors spread from coast to coast that Wilson was insane or suffering from syphilis, and a joke that portrayed him as running naked through the White House was only one of many humorous putdowns of this proud man.

Edith insisted that the cover-up must continue, and her word was law. When a urinary blockage, accompanied by high fever and the possibility of urinary poisoning, further endangered her husband's life, the doctors she called in recommended prostate surgery. But she would not hear of it, and finally the blockage eased of its own accord. In a further demonstration of her authority, she turned down the requests of influential congressional Democrats that they be allowed to visit their stricken leader, and whenever a cabinet member or congressman sent him a letter about a pressing problem, she alone decided whether he should be burdened by its contents. "The decision that was mine," she later affirmed, "was what was important and what was not."

Somehow, Tumulty persuaded Edith that Vice President Marshall should be made aware of the president's condition and that the facts should be conveyed to him unofficially by someone not on the White House staff. J. Fred Essary, a *Baltimore Sun* reporter, was selected. In a meeting in Marshall's office, Essary informed the vice president that the president was in dire straits and that he should be prepared to take over at any moment. Marshall was a genial little man, a self-styled Hoosier philosopher, who dearly loved earning fees on the lecture circuit, was best known for saying that "what this country needs is a really good five-cent cigar," and confessed that he liked being vice president because the position had no responsibilities. He was evidently appalled and frightened by Essary's message, and he did not say a word when the newspaperman finished speaking and stood up to go. At the door, Essary looked back, but Marshall, as if in a trance, was staring fixedly at his hands.



A gaunt-looking President Wilson rode through Washington with his second wife, Edith, in 1920.

Well into early November, bills became law without Wilson's signature. A message vetoing the Volstead Act, with its stipulations of procedures for enforcing Prohibition, had to be put together by Tumulty. The bedridden president then signed it with such an unsteady hand as to convince some of the senators who closely examined his scrawl that it was a forgery. The worst example of Wilson's suspended animation was his lack of resistance to the plans of the Justice Department. Riding high on the frenzy of the Red Scare, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer carried out, on November 7, the first of the notorious raids that by the end of the year would have his men rounding up alleged communist aliens by the thousands to institute deportation procedures against them.

In all likelihood, Wilson was not informed of the grisly details of these events, and would not have cared about them in any case. What counted, supremely, in his monomaniacal mind was the ratification of the peace treaty. In a speech on the Senate floor, Lodge presented a resolution that incorporated his reservations about the Covenant. Though he had enough votes to get the

resolution approved, he lacked the two-thirds majority that approval of the treaty required. The Democratic leader, Senator Gilbert Hitchcock, felt that the time had come for a surrender to Lodge on his reservations in order to gain the larger prize of American membership in the League. In a letter to Wilson, he asked

TO HIS AMAZEMENT, THE
SENATOR FOUND “AN
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whether this deal was agreeable to him. No answer was forthcoming, so he sent a second letter, to which Edith Wilson replied. The president, she said, could not accept ratification with the Lodge amendments attached. On November 17, the still-hopeful Hitchcock was allowed to make an appeal to Wilson in person. To his amazement, the senator found “an emaciated old man with a thin white beard” sit-

ting in a wheelchair. On hearing that the treaty could not be ratified without reservations, the president “fairly groaned.” “Is it possible? Is it possible?” he croaked in a strange voice.

At Wilson’s direction, Hitchcock prepared a letter to the Senate Democrats, declaring that the Lodge reservations constituted a “nullification” of the treaty. Once the letter was typed up, the president’s name, in purple ink, was affixed to it with a rubber stamp. Not long thereafter, the Lodge resolutions, opposed by Democrats loyal to Wilson and by isolationist irreconcilables, lost by a vote of 39 to 55. A subsequent motion to approve the treaty without any reservations was opposed by the Lodge Republicans and the irreconcilables and went down to defeat 38 to 53. Thanks to a sick old man, doubly cut off from reality by his damaged judgment and his wife’s determination to shield him from hard facts, the Senate had rejected the treaty.

As one of the irreconcilables, Senator Albert B. Fall of New Mexico was delighted with the outcome of the League battle. Even so, this future figure in the scandals that would beset the administration of President Warren Harding could not stand the thought that the United States now had what he called a petticoat government. Putting an end to this intolerable situation became his *idée fixe*. He and Senator Hitchcock sought a meeting with Wilson, ostensibly to discuss a political crisis in Mexico, and Edith granted the senators access. She was confident that by rehearsing the scene with the president and by carefully arranging the lights and the furniture in his bedroom, she could make Fall’s investigatory zeal look foolish. At 2:30 P.M. on December 4, the senators entered the room, where low lights cast a soft glow. The president was propped up in bed, and blankets concealed his paralyzed left arm. On a table close to his right hand—his good hand—lay a report on the Mexican situation from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Dr. Grayson and the first lady were standing by. Because she was holding, as planned, a pad of paper and a pencil, she avoided having to shake hands with Fall. But Wilson himself, to Fall’s astonishment, gave him a vigorous handshake, and wisecracked, “Well,

Senator, how are your Mexican investments getting along?”

Edith began writing down everything that was said, along with her impressions of Fall. In her jaundiced view, he looked like a regular Uriah Heep, “washing his hands with invisible soap in imperceptible water.” Fall noticed how furiously she was writing. “You seem very much engaged, madam,” he remarked. “I thought it wise to record this interview so there may be no misunderstandings,” she explained. Fall asked the president whether he had had a chance to read the report of the Foreign Relations Committee. “I have a copy right here,” he answered, reaching over and picking it up from the table. In a stern voice, Fall launched into a lengthy monologue about an American consular agent imprisoned in Mexico. As he was speaking, Grayson, who had left the room several minutes earlier, returned. With a consciously dramatic flair, he announced that word of the consular agent’s release from jail had just been received. Recognizing the defeat of his malign intentions, Fall got up to go and took Wilson’s hand: “Well, Mr. President, we have all been praying for you.” The reply was merciless: “Which way, Senator?”

Outside the White House, a hundred reporters awaited Fall’s impressions. “The president was sitting up in bed,” he began, “wearing a dark brown sweater. His color was good. He was clean-shaven. I understand he now shaves himself. He seemed to me to be in excellent trim, both mentally and physically.” *The New York Times* reported the following morning that this judgment was thought by all who heard it to silence for good “the many wild and often unfriendly rumors of presidential disability.”

Two weeks later, Wilson concocted a scheme to bring the League issue before the voters. With Tumulty’s help, he drafted an open letter to the American people that challenged approximately two dozen senators opposed to the League to resign their seats at once and run for them again in specially called elections. If the majority won reelection, he and the vice president would resign. But if the majority did not survive, he would consider the outcome “a great and solemn referendum,” in which an unmodified conception of American membership in the League had been endorsed. Fortunately, this cockeyed letter was never released.

But elements of it were included in the letter Wilson dispatched to Jackson Day dinners of the Democratic faithful in January 1920. Although it was clear that most voters who were for the League preferred the version with the Lodge reservations, Wilson asserted that the vast majority favored his version. And proof of this, he further insisted, could be obtained by turning the presidential election of 1920 into a great and solemn referendum on the question. Thus did he attempt to bind his party to a losing proposition. Incredibly enough, he even hinted that the party could make victory in November doubly certain by placing him at the head of the ticket. He was walking now, with the aid of a cane.

“MR. PRESIDENT, WE HAVE
ALL BEEN PRAYING FOR YOU.”
THE REPLY WAS MERCILESS:
“WHICH WAY, SENATOR?”

Why should he not run for president?

His crazy comeback dreams were a comfort to him, but his paranoid suspicions, uncontrollable anger, and periods of depression put him through an emotional wringer and created problems for others. The British and French governments were stunned by his insultingly hostile reaction to their proposed alterations of the peace treaty's unfavorable settlement of Italy's claims to Fiume. The distinguished British ambassador, Lord Grey, was, in effect, declared *persona non grata* at the White House after he refused to send home a member of his staff who had reportedly made slighting remarks about Mrs. Wilson. Egged on by Edith's enduring indignation, Wilson wrote Secretary Lansing a letter demanding to know whether he had held cabinet meetings on his own initiative the previous fall. Upon receiving Lansing's admission that of course he had, Wilson forced him to submit his resignation. At which point *The Los Angeles Times* published insinuations of mental illness in the Oval Office.

What Wilson did to his beloved League of Nations raised the most disturbing questions of all about his sanity. After a series of arduous conferences, the League's subtlest advocates in the Senate worked out a compromise that they believed would be acceptable to two-thirds of their colleagues. Wilson, alas, informed his most dutiful senatorial supporters that the compromise was offensive to him, and, on March 19, 1920, 23 of them cast their votes accordingly. These expressions of blind devotion to the president, in combination with the votes of 12 irreconcilables, sufficed to prevent the treaty's adoption, and Senator Lodge gloatingly proclaimed that the League was "as dead as Marley's ghost." The defection of only seven Wilson loyalists would have put the United States in the League, but never again would the Senate vote on the issue.

When the Democratic candidate, James M. Cox, lost the presidential election that fall to Republican Warren G. Harding, Wilson reacted with surprising tranquility. He felt no resentment, he told associates. Some days later, an announcement that the League of Nations would soon hold its first meeting in Geneva put the taste of bile back in his mouth. So bitter was he about the "other great powers . . . now mismanaging the world" that he ruled against sending an American observer to the meeting. The times were sickeningly out of joint, and in his disease-ravaged judgment there was no use pretending otherwise.

On Armistice Day 1923, less than three months before his death, he appeared in the doorway of his house on S Street in Washington to address the hundreds of well-wishers who had come to pay tribute to him. His voice was so weak that it was difficult to catch his words, and at a couple of points he broke down and wept. At the last moment, though, after he had seemingly completed his remarks and was starting to turn away, he suddenly spoke again. "Just one word more," he said, in a semblance of the commanding tones of years gone by. "I cannot refrain from saying it. I am not one of those who have the least anxiety about the triumph of the principles I have stood for. I have seen fools resist Providence before, and I have seen their destruction, as will come upon them again, utter destruction and contempt. That we shall prevail is as sure as that God reigns." □

THE PERIODICAL OBSERVER

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

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Imagining the Iraqi Future

A Survey of Recent Articles

It would be nice if the United States and its coalition partners in Iraq could believe that subduing the last of Saddam Hussein's holdouts would guarantee a better future for the country, but everybody knows better. Observers looking down the road warn of significant new dangers ahead.

"In eliminating the Baath regime and eliminating constraints on Iraqi Islamism," writes Juan Cole, a professor of modern Middle Eastern and South Asian history at the University of Michigan, in *Boston Review* (Oct.–Nov. 2003), "the United States has unleashed a new political force in the Gulf: not the upsurge of civic organization and democratic sentiment fantasized by American neoconservatives, but the aspirations of Iraqi Shiites to build an Islamic republic."

Iraq's 14 million Shiites (who make up about 60 percent of the country's population) were "radicalized and brutalized" over the decades, Cole notes, first by "the Baath crack-down on Shiite political activity in the late 1970s and 1980s, [then by] the crushing of the 1991 uprising and subsequent persecution of and even genocide against Shiites in the South." (The United States encouraged the uprising against Saddam in the wake of the Gulf War, then held back when it happened, causing the Shiites to feel betrayed.)

Saddam's terror against them enhanced the appeal of the ideas of Iran's Ayatollah Ruholla

Khomeini, who advocated Islamic theocracy. Iraq's al-Da'wa Party, the Tehran-based Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, and the Sadr movement, now led by youthful militant Muqtada al-Sadr, all favor an Islamic republic, and the latter two groups endorse the idea of clerical rule.

"The religious groups constitute only one section of the Shiite population, perhaps a third or more, but they are well organized and armed," Cole observes in another article, which appears in *The Middle East Journal* (Autumn 2003).

Iraq's Shiites occupy "a number of distinct social niches," according to Cole. More than two million live in the slums of East Baghdad, the former "Saddam City," now called "Sadr City," after Muqtada's father, who was assassinated in 1999 by Saddam's agents. Shiites also predominate in Iraq's second largest city, Basra, which has a population of 1.3 million. The Shiites there are said to be "more cosmopolitan and secular" than elsewhere, but hard-liners pressed even Christian women in Basra to wear the veil outdoors last summer.

Another 4.5 million people, mostly Shiites, many of them merchants and shopkeepers, live in medium-sized towns in the south, including the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala. "The clerics of Najaf in particular enjoy great prestige in Iraq and throughout the Shiite world," says Cole.

Finally, a large minority of Iraqi Shiites live in the countryside, where they practice a “folk Shiism at variance with the more scholastic and bookish Shiism of the seminary cities.”

U.S. policymakers had known of the great moral authority of Najaf’s senior Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, a quietist who generally stayed out of politics and rejected the idea of clerical rule. But the Americans, according to Cole, were “ignorant of the Sadr movement, the main indigenous Shiite force.” When the Baathist regime fell, “Shiite militias seemed suddenly to emerge and take control of many urban areas in the south of the country.” Made up mainly of impoverished urban youths, the Sadr movement is “highly puritanical and xenophobic.” Its leader, Muqtada, has taken “a rejectionist but nonviolent stance” toward the U.S. occupation.

It’s unclear how powerful such leaders may become. Yitzhak Nakash, a professor of Middle Eastern history at Brandeis University, argues in *Foreign Affairs* (July–Aug. 2003) that they will be limited by the diversity among Iraqi Shiites, most of whom “probably have no desire to mimic the Islamic Republic of Iran.” Even if they did, there is the fact that Iraq itself, with its Sunnis, Kurds, Chaldeans, and Turkmen, has a social and political culture very different from Iran’s.

The Shiites “might like a united Iraq if they controlled it—which they could if those elections Mr. Bush keeps promising ever occur,” observes Leslie H. Gelb, a former *New York Times* columnist and president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations, in a *Times* op-ed (Nov. 25, 2003). “But the Kurds and Sunnis are unlikely to accept Shiite control, no matter how democratically achieved.”

Making a unified Iraq out of the three distinct ethnic and sectarian communities “has been possible in the past only by the application of overwhelming and brutal force,” Gelb notes. The Sunnis—who make up 17 percent of the Iraqi population and are concentrated in central Iraq, which has little oil—have a much larger interest in a united Iraq than either the Kurds or the Shiites. They have been the dominant group in modern Iraq.

Gelb proposes breaking up Iraq and moving in stages toward “a three-state solution: Kurds in the north, Sunnis in the center, and Shiites in

the south.” Initially establishing the three areas as self-governing regions would allow the United States to focus its resources on the Kurds and Shiites, and to pull most of its forces out of the troubled “Sunni Triangle,” near Baghdad. “American officials could then wait for the troublesome and domineering Sunnis, without oil or oil revenues, to moderate their ambitions or suffer the consequences.”

Nakash doubts that the Shiites would embrace such a plan, which would likely cost them, among other things, Baghdad and two significant shrine cities. Historically, he points out, the Shiites have embraced Iraqi nationalism, while the minority Sunni Iraqis have pursued the Baath Party vision of pan-Arab unity. Partition would force the Shiites to give up “their dream of controlling a large and prosperous state, a dream nourished since their failed 1920 revolt against the British.” (Nakash adds that the real challenge to the United States in the Middle East arises from Wahhabi-style *Sunni* radicalism, which makes it urgent that the Americans build better relations with the rival Shiites in Iraq and elsewhere.)

In any event, Washington has given no sign of adopting a partition strategy. The Bush administration in November drastically accelerated its timetable for transferring power to an Iraqi provisional government; the handoff is to be completed by this summer.

“There is no reason to think that turning things over to divided Iraqi politicians and inexperienced troops will lead to a better outcome,” argues George Packer, editor of *The Fight Is for Democracy* (2003), in *The New Yorker* (Nov. 24, 2003). “If the administration hastily adopts policies in order to claim success in Iraq, it will have returned to the wishful thinking that helped make the occupation a continuous crisis.”

How to tell if the U.S. intervention is truly a success? Drew Erdmann, who served under the Coalition Provisional Authority as acting minister of higher education in Iraq, offers Packer a simple test: “If in five or ten years [Iraqis] can look back on this period and believe that they’re better off, then things will be O.K. We’ll be able to move beyond this period to where things are normal between the United States and Iraq. In a way, success will be if the Iraqis don’t hate us.”

A Path to Greatness?

“Presidential Greatness as an Attribute of Warmaking” by David Gray Adler, in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (Sept. 2003), Center for the Study of the Presidency, 1020 19th St., N.W., Ste. 250, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Theodore Roosevelt always lamented that World War I started after he had left office, believing that he'd been robbed of a president's only opportunity for greatness, a war. “If Lincoln had lived in times of peace, no one would know his name now,” he declared in 1910. Of course, Roosevelt went down as one of the greats anyway, showing that presidents don't need a war (or perfect judgment) to win a place in history, writes Adler, a political scientist at Idaho State University.

Others, notably John F. Kennedy, have shared TR's view. The Founding Fathers feared that dreams of glory might prompt the chief executive to wage war, which is why they vested the war-making power in Congress. As James Madison wrote, “The strongest passions and most dangerous weaknesses of the human breast, ambition, avarice, vanity, the honorable or venial love of fame, are all in conspiracy against the desire and duty of peace.”

Seven presidents of the dozen often rated by

historians as “great” or “near-great” held office while the nation was at war, according to Adler. But four of these—John Adams, James Polk, Harry Truman, and Lyndon Johnson—did not owe their standing to their actions as commander in chief. Indeed, Truman and Johnson achieved greatness *despite* their wartime leadership. Adams was “a consistent voice for moderation” and let Congress make “crucial decisions” during the quasi-war with France in 1798. Polk owes his standing not to his “manipulation of the Mexican-American War, for which he was widely criticized and properly censured by the House of Representatives,” says Adler, but more likely to “his aggressive policy of ‘Manifest Destiny’ and his territorial expansion of the United States.” Of the top wartime presidents, says Adler, only Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt “may be justly characterized as great by virtue of their leadership in war.”



Battlefield heroics help a presidential reputation, but making war as president is another story.

As for presidents who simply deploy troops hither and yon, as many chief executives have done, they seem as likely to wind up with the dirty dozen presidents at the bottom (Warren Harding et al.) as with the admired dozen at the top.

Truman's claim of "a unilateral executive privilege to wage war" has left "a deeply trou-

bling legacy," in Adler's view. But if the parchment barrier the Framers erected against chief executives seeking greatness through martial glory no longer appears adequate, he concludes, history provides presidents with another one, if only they will heed it: the lesson that war is seldom the path to presidential greatness.

Jefferson and his Slaves

"Jefferson, Morality, and the Problem of Slavery" by Ari Helo and Peter Onuf, in *William and Mary Quarterly* (July 2003), Box 8781, Williamsburg, Va. 23187-8781.

It's a perennial puzzle: How could the author of the Declaration of Independence, with its soaring proclamation of human equality, justify in his own mind remaining a slave owner?

Thomas Jefferson "never thought that slavery was morally justifiable," write historians Helo and Onuf, of the University of Helsinki and the University of Virginia, respectively. But neither did he think that he had violated "the natural rights of man" by having been born into a slaveholding family.

Jefferson's thinking was grounded in a complicated but coherent "historical conception of morality." Slavery was as old as Western civilization, and even the great liberal philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) had argued that victors in a just war were morally justified in enslaving (rather than killing) their captives. No longer, Jefferson insisted. The "moral sense" had shown a further "remarkable instance of improvement."

But that was not to say slavery needed to end immediately. Long before the American Revolution, white Virginians, in Jefferson's view, "had developed institutions of government and made laws for themselves and so had emerged as a distinct people with a civic and

moral identity." Until the enslaved blacks did the same, they had no rights.

Jefferson's "primary goal was not to free black people," observe Helo and Onuf, "but to free white people from the moral evil of being slaveholders." (In his draft of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson accused Britain of having imposed the institution of slavery on the colonies, but the congressional editors of the draft excised the charge.) The challenge "was to find a practical solution to the slavery problem that would enable Virginians collectively to extricate themselves from the institution, reversing the process of historical development that had deprived Africans of their freedom, but doing so in a way that would not jeopardize the free institutions that were themselves the products of history."

"Jefferson's solution to the slavery problem was to institute a program of gradual emancipation, separate slave children from their parents in order to prepare them for freedom," and create a new state in Africa. Jefferson didn't do much to advance the cause, and he emancipated only a few of his own slaves, but he believed that Virginia's slaves would one day be free.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

The Decline of War

"Policing the Remnants of War" by John Mueller, in *Journal of Peace Research* (Sept. 2003), Sage Publications, 2455 Teller Rd., Thousand Oaks, Calif. 91320.

Will the world ever war no more? In certain important respects, the ancient institution of war is already on the way out,

asserts Mueller, a political scientist at Ohio State University. Major war among developed countries is now rare and un-



The new face of war in Liberia: Much of what we now call war is simply banditry.

likely, and, despite appearances, conventional war in the wider world also is in decline. Much that now passes for war—“ethnic conflict” or outbreaks of the “clash of civilizations”—is actually something else: “opportunistic predation waged by packs, often remarkably small ones, of criminals, bandits, and thugs.”

Most of the three dozen or so wars fought since the end of the Cold War have been civil wars in poor countries. Many, if not most, of the combatants have been either mercenaries recruited by weak states (as in the former Yugoslavia) or warlord gangs that developed within weak or failed states (as in Liberia). The ranks of the Serbian (or Yugoslavian) army were filled by emptying out the jails and promising loot to the new recruits; Bosnia and Croatia turned at first to street gangs for their fighting men. In 1990, writes Mueller, Liberia’s weakened regime “was toppled by an armed group initially of 100 or so led by an accused embezzler and jailbreak artist, Charles Taylor, and by a somewhat larger group led by a psychopathic, hymn-singing drunk.”

Since 9/11, it has been tempting to see the world as a Hobbesian nightmare, teeming with violence-prone fanatics and true believers nursing ethnic, religious, or cultural grievances. In fact, says Mueller, the people drawn to violence are relatively few, and most of them are not fanatics or true believers, but criminals and thugs.

Often drunk or drugged, lacking organization and strong motivation or commitment, the thugs may be “the biggest bullies on the block,” he says, but they are no match for “a sufficiently large, impressively armed, and well-disciplined policing force.” That has been demonstrated in recent years in Panama, Haiti, East Timor, Sierra Leone, Croatia, Bosnia, and even Somalia (though the peacekeepers there found the costs too high, given the low stakes).

“Experience suggests that the essential, and long-term, solution to the problems of civil warfare,” Mueller says, “lies not in ministrations by the international community—so often half-hearted, half-vast, and half-coherent—but rather in the es-

establishment of competent domestic governments in the many places that do not now have them.” He sees grounds for optimism in the elevation of “effective” leaders in almost all of Latin America and in

some countries in Asia in recent decades. What people around the world need and want, Mueller says, is what Canada’s modest national slogan promises: “Peace, Order and Good Government.”

Au Revoir, Arms Control

“The Rise and Fall of Arms Control” by Avis Bohlen, in *Survival* (Autumn 2003), International Institute for Strategic Studies, Arundel House, 13-15 Arundel St., Temple Place, London WC2R 3DX, England.

From the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963 to the astonishing summit at Reykjavik in 1986, arms control treaties and talks gave the Cold War some of its most dramatic moments. But the era of strategic arms control ended in late 2001 with a whimper, not a bang, when President George W. Bush announced the U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty—and, despite a host of dire predictions, nothing happened.

Signed 18 years after the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the 1963 treaty

banning atmospheric nuclear tests was the first East-West nuclear agreement. “It put nuclear issues and arms control squarely on the U.S.-Soviet political agenda,” observes Bohlen, a retired Foreign Service officer and former assistant secretary of state for arms control (1999–2002), though it did little to stop the growth of nuclear arsenals or even limit testing (which went underground).

During the administration of Richard Nixon, Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) culminated in 1972 in the ABM treaty, which limited each side to two

EXCERPT

The First Freedom

The encouragement of free trade and free elections—which is to say, of the American model in commerce and politics—has long been unabashed American policy. But American international policy has included no comparably unabashed encouragement of freedom of religion. I am prepared to take as a premise that worldwide freedom of religion is even more an American national interest than free trade. The ideologues of Al Qaeda regard freedom of religion—that is, the separation of political from religious power—as the mother of all sins, the vice that enables all other vices. Accordingly, militant Islam, acting as it supposes in the defense of Islam and of virtue, has been prepared to take violent action to prevent the spread of this freedom, crushing Muslim diversity no less than religious diversity beyond Islam. The U.S., even as it addresses such other legitimate Muslim grievances as injure the cause of peace, should make freedom of religion the first item on its diplomatic agenda—not a dream endlessly deferred but the most urgent and practical first order of business.

If worldwide freedom of religion is the goal, it matters greatly that the Muslim world at this point in time may be almost as exhausted from internecine warfare as the West was just after the Thirty Years’ War; and that grim and blood-drenched moment in Western history was, paradoxically, the moment when a great cultural liberation was accomplished. Western freedom of religion may have been rationalized by the brilliance of the Enlightenment, but the necessary condition for it was the misery of the West’s Wars of Religion and the mood of revulsion and surfeit that these wars created.

—Jack Miles, author of *God: A Biography*, in *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Fall 2003)

ground-based anti-ballistic missile sites (later reduced to one). The treaty was not the joint commitment to “mutual assured destruction” that critics imagined, Bohlen argues, but a recognition that invulnerability was impossible.

SALT II negotiations soon commenced, and President Jimmy Carter signed an agreement in 1979. But the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan later that year made ratification impossible. The demise of SALT II marked the end of “serious arms-control negotiations for many years,” Bohlen writes. Yet there were “modest gains in transparency and predictability,” and regular dialogue “served to reinforce the reality of deterrence.”

President Ronald Reagan, at heart, “found the whole idea of mutual deterrence morally repugnant,” Bohlen says. At Reykjavik in October 1986, “the nuclear disarmament in Reagan was swept along” by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev—until, at the summit’s eleventh hour, their “breathhtaking” arms reduction proposals fell apart because Reagan would not surrender his Strategic Defense

Initiative, the plan for a global shield against nuclear weapons.

The START (Strategic Arms Reduction Talks) treaties of the early 1990s achieved arms control goals the United States had been pursuing for almost two decades, but by then, “the threat to which these goals responded was ceasing to exist,” Bohlen notes. Even so, the treaties were “indispensable instruments” for managing the end of the Cold War in an orderly fashion. (The U.S. strategic nuclear arsenal now contains 2,200 warheads.)

Today, when the top priority is keeping weapons of mass destruction out of the hands of rogue states and terrorists, arms control is no longer at center stage. Yet it still has a modest but important role, rooted in multilateral pacts such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (1968). Bohlen concludes: “Defining rules about what is broadly acceptable to the international community remains essential to defining the kind of international order we wish to maintain.”

How the UN Can Recover

“Agora: The Future Implications of the Iraq Conflict,” with articles by Todd F. Buchwald and others, in *American Journal of International Law* (July 2003), American Society of International Law, 2223 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Is the United Nations Charter a dead letter thanks to the U.S.-led war in Iraq and the new U.S. doctrine of preventive war?

That, in a nutshell, is the question that the editors of *American Journal of International Law* put to a dozen symposium contributors. The nine closely argued legal articles that resulted follow different paths, but all lead to some version of a negative answer.

John Yoo, former U.S. deputy assistant attorney general (1991–93), is one of several contributors who argue that the Bush administration acted in accord with international law in taking up arms against Iraq. But he says that Iraq was a “unique case,” because UN Security Council resolutions dating back to the 1991 Gulf War provided a legal basis for action. In the new world of terrorists, rogue states, and weapons of mass destruction, the luxury of time is absent, and

new rules will be needed.

Richard A. Falk, a professor of law and international organization at Columbia University, rejects such arguments. There’s a conflict, he says, and it’s not the UN Charter system that needs to be fixed, but rather U.S. foreign policy. Miriam Shapiro, a National Security Council official during the Clinton years, argues that the new U.S. doctrine of preventive war enunciated in September 2002 is a challenge to existing international law, and she thinks the Bush administration could and should quietly narrow its scope.

Jane E. Stromseth, a professor of law at Georgetown University Law Center, argues that the United States and other nations must work to adapt the UN Charter to the new threat of terrorism. The charter’s “core,” which proscribes wars of territorial expansion and conquest, remains sound, she says. And like

the U.S. Constitution, the charter has proved “a living document” that can adjust to new circumstances, as happened when the Security Council pointedly refused to condemn NATO’s 1999 “humanitarian” war in Kosovo, though it had been waged without explicit UN authorization.

To address the potential threat of terrorists armed with weapons of mass destruction, the Security Council will need to update the concept of “anticipatory self-defense,” Stromseth argues. But the new U.S. doctrine of preventive war goes too far and “has the potential to be destabilizing.”

The United States, she writes, “has a stake in

maintaining rules governing the use of force that can both protect American security and help to mobilize allies against those who challenge the agreed rules.”

The “harder issue,” in Stromseth’s view, will be how to enable the Security Council to enforce its own mandates. For several years before the war, “the council lacked collective spine on Iraq.” One way to begin revitalizing the body, she suggests, would be to appoint longer-term temporary members on the basis of the substantive contributions they would make to UN efforts, including peacekeeping and other enforcement mechanisms, as well as protection of human rights.

JFK’s Secret Formula for Vietnam

“Exit Strategy” by James K. Galbraith, in *Boston Review* (Oct.–Nov. 2003), E53-407, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

“Let us continue,” President Lyndon B. Johnson urged after the assassination of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. Most historians have agreed that in gradually escalating U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, Johnson did what Kennedy would have done. They dismiss the contrary view as wishful hindsight by JFK admirers. But Galbraith, who holds a chair in government and business relations at the University of Texas’s Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, believes that the tide of scholarly opinion may be shifting in response to documentary evidence that Kennedy had secretly committed the United States to a phased withdrawal from South Vietnam.

The documents are not new, and neither is the debate. In *Kennedy’s Wars* (2000), historian Lawrence Freedman maintains that JFK’s plan for a withdrawal from Vietnam after the 1964 presidential election was “less of a definite decision than a working assumption, based on a hope for stability rather than an expectation of chaos.” Kennedy, in short, was keeping his options open. But Galbraith (whose father, John Kenneth Galbraith, was a JFK adviser) makes the case afresh for the other side.

On October 2, 1963, JFK received a report from Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), urging withdrawal of 1,000 of the 17,000 mili-

tary advisers then in Vietnam by the end of the year, and completion of a phased withdrawal of the rest by the end of 1965.

Kennedy had the recommendation publicly announced, and three days later secretly decided to withdraw the 1,000 advisers by December, but to have it done in a routine way, not raising the matter formally with South Vietnamese president Ngo Dinh Diem. That shows that the decision “was not a ruse or pressure tactic to win reforms from Diem” as some historians have claimed, according to Galbraith. Then, on October 11, the White House issued National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 263, secretly ordering implementation of the October 2 recommendations, including full withdrawal by the end of 1965.

JCS documents released in 1998 show “that Kennedy was well aware of the evidence that South Vietnam was, in fact, losing the war,” says Galbraith. But the withdrawal he’d decided on “was unconditional, and did not depend on military progress or lack of it.”

On November 1, Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, were killed in a coup that Kennedy had quietly encouraged, not expecting Diem’s death. Galbraith says the affair was symptomatic of a Kennedy White House that was “fractious, disorganized, preoccupied with American politics, ignorant of the forces it

faced in Vietnam.”

Four days after Kennedy’s death, U.S. policy changed: In NASM 273, Johnson authorized covert commando raids against North Vietnam by CIA-supported South Vietnamese forces, which would lead, notes Galbraith, to the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident “and eventually to the wider war.”

Like Kennedy, Johnson “knew that Vietnam was a trap,” Galbraith says. But the public knew nothing of Kennedy’s plan. “To maintain our commitment, therefore, was to maintain the illusion of continuity, and this—in the moment of trauma that followed the assassination—was Johnson’s paramount political objective.”

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

The Depression’s Bright Side

“The Most Technologically Progressive Decade of the Century” by Alexander J. Field, in *The American Economic Review* (Sept. 2003), 2014 Broadway, Ste. 305, Nashville, Tenn. 37203.

Maybe the Great Depression was not so bad after all. In fact, it was a lot better than that. It was “*the most technologically progressive of any comparable period in U.S. economic history,*” Field emphatically declares.

In the conventional telling, America owes its post-World War II prosperity to huge increases in productivity and government spending during the war. But the real war effort occupied only three years, and data from

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Substantial innovations and investment in aviation were among the many underappreciated technological advances that grew out of the Great Depression.

that period reveal as many subpar as stellar productivity performances in various sectors of the economy.

The real story, says Field, an economist at Santa Clara University, is that the postwar economy rode on a wave of advances from the 1929–41 period. Plexiglass, Teflon, and nylon were all Depression-era innovations. So were organizational techniques pioneered by makers of cars, vacuum cleaners, and radios. All of these new processes and technologies, and more, enabled the nation to churn out tanks, ships, and airplanes in the 1940s. The Depression brought the launch of the workhorse DC-3 airplane and major government investment in municipal airports that paved the way for a postwar boom. One of the biggest areas of progress was structural engineering, which saw new “techniques for utilizing concrete in conjunction with steel in bridge, tunnel, dam, and highway design.” New Deal agencies and other government entities increased

the nation’s stock of roads and highways by two-thirds.

What do the numbers say? Data on labor and capital productivity are notoriously difficult to get and interpret. A sample of Field’s arguments: In railroads, which still accounted for more than a quarter of America’s fixed nonresidential assets during the Depression, labor productivity rose “much more dramatically” in the 1930s than it had in the 1920s. The telephone and electric utility industries also recorded big increases. Economist Claudia Goldin found that overall U.S. labor productivity growth was faster during the Depression than before, in part because massive unemployment drove less educated people out of the work force.

Field doesn’t argue that depressions are good for the economy, and many of the advances of the 1930s would have come along without a depression. But it’s important to recognize that good times aren’t the only sources of economic growth.

EXCERPT

Wired Money

What is the most reliable source of foreign money going to poor countries? What is the principal source of foreign capital for small family businesses throughout the developing world? How do most people in collapsed states like Afghanistan, Haiti, Liberia, and Somalia manage to survive? What is the common factor that has financed internal conflict in settings as diverse as Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, and Rwanda?

The answer to these wide-ranging and complex questions is remittances—money that migrants earn while working abroad and then send back to their families living in their home country. “Mother’s milk for poor nations,” is how one Asian newspaper described the phenomenon. That statement is no exaggeration. As nations increasingly opened their border to foreign workers in the last two decades, remittances to developing countries have soared from \$17.7 billion in 1980 to \$30.6 billion in 1990 and nearly \$80 billion in 2002. Remittances have emerged as an important source of foreign exchange for poor countries. In 2001, they were double the amount of foreign aid and 10 times higher than net capital private transfers.

At the simplest level, remittances are about helping individual families. A couple of hundred dollars sent home every month can make the difference between abject poverty and food on the table. At another level, these small transactions, repeated thousands of times every day across the world, are quietly binding the fates of nations.

—Devesh Kapur, a Harvard political scientist, and John McHale, an associate professor at the Queen’s School of Business in Canada, in *Foreign Policy* (Nov.–Dec. 2003).

The Fed in Handcuffs

“Trends” by George Feiger, in *The Milken Institute Review* (Third Quarter, 2003), 1250 Fourth St., 2nd fl., Santa Monica, Calif. 90401-1353.

You’ve just retired, and you think you’re sitting pretty with a cool million in the bank. Then you look around at today’s interest rates on certificates of deposit and medium-term bonds and realize that your stash is only going to yield between \$10,000 and \$30,000 in annual income. Then you get mad.

That’s going to happen more and more often in the years ahead, and it’s going to have serious effects on U.S. economic policy, predicts Feiger, a senior adviser at Monitor Group, a financial services and consulting firm. The historically low interest rates of the past three years have kept the economy afloat, but they’ve been “an unmitigated disaster” for many re-

tirees, especially the more affluent ones.

Feiger foresees several future effects of low interest rates. Americans will need to save more, so government will find ways to mandate more saving by individuals, and both Washington and the private employers who oversee 401(k) and other private savings plans will channel savers into low-risk and low-cost investments. The high-flying wealth management industry will shrink. As savings rise, consumption will fall, at least for a time.

More significantly, says Feiger, “baby boom retirees won’t take anemic returns lying down.” In years ahead, they will make it politically difficult for the Federal Reserve to pursue the low-interest policy that prevails today.

Reviving Labor

“What Are Scholars Telling the U.S. Labor Movement to Do?” by Bruce Nissen, in *Labor History* (May 2003), Taylor & Francis Ltd., Rankine Rd., Basingstoke RG24 8PR, United Kingdom; “An Immodest Proposal: Remodeling the House of Labor” by Stephen Lerner, in *New Labor Forum* (Summer 2003), 25 W. 43rd St., 19th fl., New York, N.Y. 10036.

To get back on its feet after decades of decline, should organized labor: (a) adopt “value-added unionism” or (b) embrace “social movement unionism”? Answer: “b,” says Nissen, director of research at the Center for Labor Research and Studies, Florida International University. Lerner, director of building services for the Service Employees International Union, doesn’t disagree, but offers yet another prescription: Labor should (c) start thinking big and restructure itself.

Advocates of value-added unionism urge unions to stop being their old adversarial selves and actively work to help employers meet their business goals, exerting influence *within* corporate management. The partnership between Harley-Davidson and its two main unions is an oft-cited example of the win-win situation that can result. But value-added unionism has “limited applicability,” says Nissen, because few corporations are willing to give unions a role in management.

Nissen sees more promise in social move-

ment unionism, in which unions make their cause part of a larger struggle for social justice and against corporate domination and greed, seeking allies and inspiration in civil rights, feminism, environmentalism, and other movements. The approach works best with low-wage labor forces, particularly those with mainly nonwhite or female workers. His own union’s “Justice for Janitors” campaigns and its successful drive to organize 10,000 home health-care workers in California are good models. It may be hard to sustain the militancy and channel it into stable collective-bargaining relationships with employers, Nissen observes, but labor’s chief need today is simply to grow.

Labor has the resources to grow, but its balkanized structure is an obstacle, says Lerner. The AFL-CIO, which operates by consensus, is divided into 66 amalgamated international unions with multiple overlapping jurisdictions. And most of the unions have powerful autonomous locals in each state and

city. All told, the AFL-CIO includes some 13 million workers. For labor—which now represents a mere 9 percent of the private work force—to get larger and stronger, says Lerner, the organizational structure must be changed, so that there are only 10 to 15 unions, all fo-

cused on dominating particular industries, labor markets, and sectors of the economy.

“By focusing workers on changing conditions in an industry, not just fighting their individual employer, unions start to create the conditions that allow unions to win.”

SOCIETY

Faith-Based Facts

“Debunking Charitable Choice: The Evidence Doesn’t Support the Political Left or Right” by Mark Chaves, in *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Summer 2003), Stanford Graduate School of Business, 518 Memorial Way, Stanford, Calif. 94305–5015.

The Bush administration has championed “faith-based initiatives” to increase the flow of government dollars to grassroots religious organizations that help the needy, arguing that their charitable efforts are more intense and more effective than government programs. Yet, these advocates say, faith-based nonprofits often get short shrift when public funds are given out.

The reality is very different, argues Chaves, a sociologist at the University of Arizona and principal investigator in a study of national religious congregations. There’s very little discrimination against religious groups in the competition for government grants and contracts. “In a few cases, overzealous bureaucrats have demanded that Catholic hospitals remove crucifixes or the Salvation Army refrain from using the word ‘salvation,’” according to Chaves. But over the decades, thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of grants and contracts have gone to religious organizations, large and small. Catholic Charities gets about 60 percent of its funds from government sources, and the Salvation Army about 20 percent.

Nor is the typical religious congregation deeply involved in aiding the downtrodden,

Chaves points out. “Only six percent of congregations have a staff person devoting at least quarter time to social service projects.” Clergy, according to time-use studies, spend minimal hours on community activities of any sort. And in 80 percent of the congregations making an effort, no more than 30 volunteers are involved over the course of a year.

Advocates of faith-based initiatives claim that, in President George W. Bush’s words, “faith can move people in ways that government can’t”—and opponents fear that that might happen with government support. But “transformed souls and religious conversions” are hardly likely, says Chaves, when even churches, synagogues, and mosques heavily involved in providing social services seldom integrate their “clients” into their congregations.

Usually, congregations simply address individuals’ immediate needs—for food (33 percent of congregations have food-related projects), housing (18 percent), or clothing (11 percent). And when congregations and other religious groups seek to do more than that, they often must turn to government agencies and secular nonprofits. They are not an alternative to that world, Chaves says. They are part of it.

Help for the Mentally Ill

“Leaving the Mentally Ill Out in the Cold” by E. Fuller Torrey, in *City Journal* (Autumn 2003), Manhattan Institute, 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

When President George W. Bush’s Commission on Mental Health issued its report this past July, hardly anybody seemed to notice. Maybe that was because of the endless

platitudes that filled the report, suggests Torrey, a physician and coauthor of *The Invisible Plague: The Rise of Mental Illness from 1750 to the Present* (2002). Or maybe the report’s po-

litical correctness put people off. But the study was at least partly redeemed by offering “a hint” of how to make progress.

The Bush commission’s “aversion to unpleasant truths,” Torrey says, was frequently on display. While calling for a campaign to “reduce the stigma” of mental illness, the commission made no mention of that stigma’s chief cause: “untreated mentally ill individuals committing acts of violence,” including 1,000 homicides annually, or more than four percent of the national total. Some 35 percent of the nation’s homeless people and 16 percent of the inmates in prisons and jails are mentally ill.

The commission likewise emphasized the need for mental health “consumers” to choose their own treatments, ignoring the fact that 50 percent of all schizophrenics and manic depressives aren’t even aware that they are sick. The commission also ignored the “proven effectiveness” of mandatory-treatment laws. Arrests of mentally ill individuals in New York state have declined by 85 percent since such legislation was enacted in 1999.

The nation’s mental health system is “frag-

mented, disconnected and often inadequate,” the commission noted, much as the first presidential commission on mental illness did in 1961. Yet in 1997 alone, the nation spent \$71 billion on treatment, about two-thirds of it through the federal Medicare and Medicaid programs whose administrators, according to Torrey, lack adequate knowledge of which local programs work well enough to deserve funding.

But almost in passing, the commission pointed the way forward, says Torrey, in urging that Washington give the states more flexibility in spending federal aid money for people with mental illness while seeking improved accountability and results. Yes, the states performed abysmally in this field in the past, but that was because federal programs beginning in the 1960s unwittingly created massive incentives to “deinstitutionalize” the mentally ill. Experimental programs in a half-dozen states could serve as a first step. That approach set the stage for welfare reform, Torrey says, and it would do the same for repair of the mental health care system.

That Enlightenment Buzz

“Caffeine and the Coming of the Enlightenment” by Roger Schmidt, in *Raritan* (Summer 2003), Rutgers University, 31 Mine St., New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

“Short, O short then be thy reign/ And give us to the world again!” That’s the great Samuel Johnson, flinging his defiance at sleep during one of his famous nocturnal excursions, in 1753. The storied man of letters is nearly as famous for his vast capacity for late-night reading and carousing as for his literary genius. In Johnson and others of his day, those capacities owed more than a little to the arrival on the scene of a chemical substance: caffeine. And not just their capacities. Schmidt, a professor of English at Idaho State University, thinks the arrival of coffee and tea in Europe around 1650 had something to do with the birth of the Enlightenment.

Sleep in the pre-caffeine era was different in quantity and character. In 1630, a sermonizing John Donne told the king of England that sleep was “shaking hands with God,” reflecting the general view that slumber opened the door to contact with

the divine. Schmidt says that in the days before caffeine—and advances in lighting and mechanical clocks, which also came along in the mid-17th century—people slept for eight hours, often punctuated by a waking interval of an hour or so that established a more intimate connection to the world of spirits.

By Johnson’s time, however, sleep seemed almost a sin. In 1728, clergyman John Law denounced it as “the poorest, dullest refreshment of the body,” one that produced either “insensibility” or “the folly of dreams.” He excoriated the Christian who chose to “enlarge the slothful indulgence of sleep, rather than be early at his devotions to God.” A few years later, Benjamin Franklin famously reminded slugabeds that time is money. In 1798, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, advised his followers that six

hours of sleep a night was sufficient. He also commissioned an oversized teapot from Josiah Wedgwood.

Coffee and tea permeate the Enlightenment's intellectual scene. Many of the era's leading figures can be seen reading and writing far into the night, feverishly chipping away at the old order's verities. Johnson himself was known to polish off 24 cups of tea at a sitting. Alexander Pope complained that he could not sleep ("Fools rush into my Head, and so I write"), and William Hogarth's prints are littered with sleep-deprived characters dozing at work and play. It was in 1758, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, that the word *insomnia* entered the English language.



Coffeehouses, which first appeared in London around 1650, quickly proliferated and became a center of British intellectual and political life.

What, asks Schmidt, did the new regime of caffeine, clocks, and clerics promote? Rationalism, work, productivity—and the decline of dreaming.

Goodbye to the Grind!

"The Opt-Out Revolution" by Lisa Belkin, in *The New York Times Magazine* (Oct. 26, 2003), 229 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

"I don't want to be on the fast track leading to a partnership at a prestigious law firm," says Katherine Brokaw, who left that track in order to stay home with her three children. "Some people define that as success. I don't."

She is not alone. Before they ever bump up against a "glass ceiling," more and more highly educated, high-powered professional women are rejecting the workplace and the grim climb upward in favor of stay-at-home motherhood, reports Belkin, a former *New York Times* reporter who now works from home as a freelance writer and biweekly *Times* columnist.

Surveys of professional women show that, depending on the profession, between one-

fourth and one-third are out of the work force. A canvass of women from the Harvard Business School classes of 1981, 1985, and 1991 found only 38 percent working fulltime. *Fortune* magazine checked on 108 women who'd made its list of "most powerful" women over the years and found that at least 20 had left their jobs (most of them voluntarily) for a less high-powered existence.

In less than a decade, "the number of children being cared for by stay-at-home moms has increased nearly 13 percent," Belkin says, quoting census data. And in just two years, the percentage of new mothers returning to work fell by four percentage points, to 55 percent in 2000. Two-thirds of the mothers who work in

“the crucial career-building years (25–44)” do so only part-time. And many women gain more control over their work schedule by striking out on their own: Since 1997, the number of businesses owned or co-owned by women has jumped 11 percent.

None of this is what feminists in the 1970s envisioned, Belkin says, but it could be the start of a different revolution. Because so many women have exercised the option to downshift, more men are now doing so, too. “Sanity, balance and a new definition of success, it seems, just might be contagious.”

PRESS & MEDIA

License to Hunt

“Judging Reputation: Realism and Common Law in Justice White’s Defamation Jurisprudence”
by John C.P. Goldberg, in *University of Colorado Law Review* (Fall 2003), 290 Fleming Law Bldg.,
401 UCB, Boulder, Colo. 80309–0401.

After the First Amendment, there’s no more sacred text in journalism than the Supreme Court’s unanimous 1964 decision in *New York Times v. Sullivan*. By requiring plaintiffs in certain cases to prove that a defamatory statement had been made with “actual malice”—that is, with knowledge or reckless disregard of its falsity—the Court freed news organizations from having to worry much about libel or slander suits by the public officials they cover.

As Goldberg, a law professor at Vanderbilt University, explains, the Court’s seemingly unstoppable expansion of that privilege in later years led one of *Sullivan*’s authors, Justice Byron White, to conclude that the ruling ought to be scrapped. White, who served on the Court from 1962 to 1993, joined the *Sullivan* majority and was one of a bare majority of five justices that three years later extended the *Sullivan* principle from public officials to “public figures” more generally. That made it harder for movie actors, professional athletes, and other celebrities to sue successfully for libel or slander. But White argued against a fur-

ther expansion of *Sullivan* in a 1971 case, and he angrily dissented in a 1974 case in which the Court ruled 5–4 that even *private* figures had to prove negligence to collect any damages, and actual malice to be eligible for punitive damages. Press freedom, he said, “does not carry with it an unrestricted hunting license to prey on the ordinary citizen.”

White saw *Sullivan* as granting a limited privilege to foster democratic debate, and he objected to reading into the ruling any broad “free speech” principles, as some justices, leading constitutional scholars, and the press were all inclined to do. Before *Sullivan*, defamation law had been almost entirely left to state courts and legislatures. White didn’t want the federal government to completely displace state tort law.

He was unimpressed by arguments from Justice Hugo Black and others that freedom of the press required complete immunity from liability for defamation. News reporting, in White’s view, was not so different from other skilled occupations, and ought

EXCERPT

Bigger than the Bomb

Typos have an uncanny ability to survive reading and re-reading. If there is anything that could survive a nuclear attack, it is probably typographical errors.

—Thomas Sowell, columnist and economist, quoted in *National Review* (Nov. 10, 2003)

not be privileged just because it dealt with public issues. Just like bus drivers and judges, reporters should be held to the standard of their craft—and suffer the consequences when they fall short. But White’s

views remained distinctly in the minority. When he disavowed the *Sullivan* principle altogether in a 1984 case, only Chief Justice Warren Burger seemed ready to line up behind him.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Camus’ Dynamite

“Sisyphus and the Meaning of Life” by Russell Blackford, in *Quadrant* (Oct. 2003), 437 Darling St., Balmain NSW 2041, Australia.

Why go on? It’s perhaps the essential philosophical question, and one that has drawn philosophers like a magnet to the Greek myth of Sisyphus, whom the gods condemned to spend eternity rolling a boulder up a hill, only to have it tumble back down each time. Most famously, the myth drew the attention of the French novelist Albert Camus, who wrote about it in a classic existentialist essay, “The Myth of Sisyphus” (1942).

Camus saw in Sisyphus “a metaphor for our absurd condition in a universe that does not care for us and cannot guide us,” writes Blackford, a lawyer and writer in Melbourne, Australia. Camus wrote of humanity’s “incalculable feeling” of “divorce” from the universe and the painful sense that there is “no profound reason for living.” He did not rule out the possibility that a rational person would commit suicide.

Two later thinkers who grappled with Sisyphus and Camus’ poetically opaque reading of him took different paths. In his 1971 essay, “The Absurd,” philosopher Thomas Nagel inquired into the sources of the modern sense of absurdity. It’s not our awareness of the inevitability of death or the vastness of the universe that leads us to absurdity, Nagel writes. Such arguments are really only ways of expressing the deeper anxiety bred by “the collision between the seriousness with which we take our lives”—our activities, projects, and beliefs—and our deep sense that it’s impossible to find any ultimate foundation for the “values and commitments” we cite to justify them.

Camus probably would have disagreed. The source of absurdity is the “psychological disturbance” that occurs when we dis-

cover that the universe is not intelligible, in Blackford’s interpretation. Any “lucid consideration” of the human condition would inevitably yield the conclusion that it is “bleak and frightening.”

In *Good and Evil* (1970), philosopher Richard Taylor found in Sisyphus a “paradigm of meaninglessness” akin to human life, “essentially a cycle of reproduction from which nothing more ever comes.” Still, Taylor thought it possible that Sisyphus somehow enjoyed what he was doing, that all of us, just by “doing,” may create meaning for ourselves. The process may not be rational, Taylor said, but it can work.

Camus would have had none of that, says Blackford. Sisyphus could not have found any purpose or enjoyment in his pointless labor, only alienation and anger at his punishment. Yet it is that very alienation, in Camus’ view, that provides the liberating mechanism for humanity. “An impersonal universe sets no limits on our values, and Camus describes this as ‘the reason for my inner freedom.’” Without guidance—without a divine presence in the universe—we are left “free to live in accordance with our own values and create a life that has personal meaning,” Blackford writes, and he says Camus portrays this inner revolt in heroic terms: “Being aware of one’s life, one’s revolt, one’s freedom to the maximum, is living to the maximum.”

There’s something attractive about Camus’ vision, Blackford concedes, but perhaps more for the intellectual engaged in creative work than for, say, a tax attorney or a farmer or even a postman on his perpetual rounds. Indeed, whether or not one ac-

cepts the existential view may define one of the great divides in contemporary society. The existentialism of Camus and Jean Paul Sartre is often dismissed as “old hat,” says

Blackford, but it’s still “philosophical dynamite.” Those who uphold more traditional views of humanity’s place in the universe have yet to find a response that defuses it.

EXCERPT

Revolution in Rome

*Liberal Catholics in the U.S. and Europe fault John Paul II for being out of touch with his Church; but they’re the ones, alas, who are out of touch. Their Church’s future, whether they like it or not, is in the hands of their Third World coreligionists, who share the current Pope’s lack of affection for democracy, pluralism, and church-state separation. And the Pope knows this—as do the like-minded cronies with whom he’s packed the College of Cardinals, and who will choose his successor. “In the traditionalist view,” explains Philip Jenkins, in *The Next Christendom* (2002), “adapting to become relevant or sensitive to the needs of Western elites would be suicidal for the long-term prospects of the Church. It is the so-called traditionalists, rather than the liberals, who are playing the political game of the new century.” . . .*

Yet the changes ahead may not all be to the traditionalists’ liking. While Catholic clergy in Africa, for example, love the idea of an all-male hierarchy, celibacy holds little appeal for them. . . . Furthermore, Third World Christians (whether Protestant or Catholic) tend to be syncretists, mixing Christian beliefs and practices with elements derived from ancient native religions—ancestor worship, animal sacrifices, spiritual healing, polygamy. “The newer churches,” observes Jenkins, “can read the Bible in a way that makes [Third World] Christianity look like a wholly different religion from the faith of prosperous advanced societies of Europe or North America.” So wildly unorthodox is their theological thinking, indeed, that they may inadvertently end up succeeding in the task that liberal American and European Catholics have failed at: namely, breaking the back of the Church’s dogmatic rigidity. A century from now, then, Catholicism may be a more formidable force than ever—but it may also differ from today’s religion in ways no one can now imagine or predict.

—Bruce Bawer, author of *Stealing Jesus: How Fundamentalism Betrays Christianity*,
in *The Hudson Review* (Fall 2003)

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

The End Is Here!

“We’re All Gonna Die!” by Gregg Easterbrook, in *Wired* (July 2003), P.O. Box 37706, Boone, Iowa 50037-0706.

Nowadays, just reading the daily newspaper can give you the willies. The bad news: We’re all going to die. The worse news: There’s no limit to the things that can kill us. Where we go wrong, writes Easterbrook, a senior editor with *The New Republic*, is in separating the real, imminent threats from perils that are just too remote to worry about.

Consider the smallpox scare, for instance. “Weaponized smallpox escaped from a Soviet laboratory in Aralsk, Kazakhstan, in 1971,” reports the author. “Three people died, no epidemic followed.” A similar incident killed 68 people outside Sverdlovsk (now Ekaterinaberg) in 1979. Again, no epidemic. Although it’s possible



Never mind weaponized smallpox and other much-discussed dangers; it's asteroids and other threats from nature that we are helpless to combat.

that “some aspiring Dr. Evil will invent a bug that bypasses the immune system,” the fact remains that, even including the Black Death, “no superplague has ever come close to wiping out humanity before.”

The potential threat from chemical weapons seems similarly overplayed. While movies and the news media focus on “noxious clouds of death” floating across cities, in reality “a severe chemical attack likely would be confined to a few city blocks.”

Are there doomsday scenarios we *should* worry about? You bet, chief among them the eruption of supervolcanoes and collisions with large asteroids. The U.S. Geological Survey has identified a supervolcano ripe to explode beneath the smoking geysers in Yellowstone National Park, a

cataclysm that could make the 1980 Mount St. Helens eruption pale by comparison. Such eruptions in the past have sometimes triggered global climatic changes and, perhaps, mass extinctions. That’s what may have done in the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. But other evidence points to the impact of a huge asteroid striking near Mexico. Such mega-asteroids strike the Earth with alarming frequency. In 1908, an asteroid “250 feet across hit Tunguska, Siberia, flattening trees for 1,000 square miles and detonating with a force estimated at 10 megatons, or 700 times the power of the Hiroshima blast.” Scientists estimate that there are 500,000 similar sized asteroids wandering through Earth’s orbit. None are known to be on a collision course with our planet, but many have yet to be charted. But why

worry? Can’t we just send up a crack team of oil drillers, à la *Armageddon*, to blast that hunk of rock to smithereens? Well, no. NASA, says Easterbrook, “has no technology that could be used against them and no plan to build such technology.” This may be a mistake. As former Microsoft technologist Nathan Myhrvold has written, “Most estimates of the mortality risk posed by asteroid impacts put it at about the same risk as flying on a commercial airliner. However, you have to remember that this is like the entire human race riding the plane.”

Easterbrook breezily dispenses with a few other technorisks. Some scientists, for example, worry that some of the newest generation of supercolliders might inadvertently open a black hole, sucking the universe out through some graduate stu-

dent's science experiment. Or that a naturally occurring black hole might wander into the neighborhood (bad news, since we wouldn't be able to do a thing about it). But Easterbrook reminds us that while the White House was fretting about the kind of supergerm threat depicted in a re-

cent thriller, *The Cobra Event*, real terrorists were in the final stages of plotting the attack on the World Trade Center with old-fashioned jetliners. Yes, Easterbrook concedes, the world *could* end tomorrow. But "it makes far more sense to focus on mundane troubles that are all too real."

The Ultimate Pain Killer

"The Secret Killer" by David Stipp in *Fortune* (Oct. 27, 2003),
1271 Sixth Ave., 16th fl., New York, N.Y. 10020.

Recent medical studies suggest that anti-aging pills—the miracle drugs we've all been waiting for—may be as close as our own medicine cabinets. According to Stipp, a senior writer at *Fortune*, aspirin, ibuprofen, and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID) could be the "rough draft" of drugs that will extend life spans and stem the alarming increase in age-related diseases, from Alzheimer's to cancer.

Over the past decade medical researchers have focused on "smoldering, low-level in-

flammation in places like arterial walls and the brain" as the root of many ailments of old age. Claudio Franceschi, scientific director at the Italian National Research Center on Aging, says, "Inflammation is probably the background and driving force behind all major age-related diseases." But that opinion is hardly unanimous in the medical community.

Franceschi began formulating his "inflammaging" theory a decade ago, when his research revealed that as people age, vital immune cells become more prone to in-

EXCERPT

Eek!

A few years ago, the U.S. Congress gave a scientific commission the task of developing a symbolic language that would make clear the danger posed by the U.S. storage site for atomic waste. The problem to be solved was the following: How should the concepts and symbols be constituted in order to communicate to those living 10,000 years from now?

The commission was made up of physicists, anthropologists, linguists, brain researchers, psychologists, molecular biologists, gerontologists, artists, etc. The commission looked for examples from the oldest symbols of humanity, studied the ruins of Stonehenge (1500 B.C.) and the pyramids, researched the reception of Homer and the Bible, and heard explanations of the life cycle of documents. These, however, only reached a few thousand, not 10,000, years into the past. The anthropologists recommended the symbol of the skull and crossbones. A historian, however, remembered that the skull and crossbones meant resurrection to the alchemist, and a psychologist carried out experiments with three-year-olds: If the skull and crossbones is stuck on a bottle, they cry in fear, "poison"; if it is stuck on a wall, they enthusiastically call out, "pirates!"



—Ulrich Beck, professor of sociology at the University of Munich,
in *Security Dialogue* (Sept. 2003)

flammation. The male centenarians he and his colleagues have studied appear to possess gene variants that lessened this “pro-inflammatory effect of aging.” Another “strong producer of pro-inflammatory molecules,” Stipp adds, is body fat, which has been linked to a host of diseases.

Franceschi is not the only scientist to study the relationship between inflammation and disease. A 2001 study by a Dutch team discovered that regular NSAID users had an 80 percent lower risk of Alzheimer’s disease, and another recent study found that long-term aspirin users had 32 percent less risk of heart attacks. Other studies suggest that NSAIDs may substantially cut the risk of colon, lung, prostate (in men), and breast (in women) cancer. That’s not all. A second class of drugs, called statins, usually prescribed to lower cholesterol levels also reduce inflammation, and like NSAIDs they seem to have significant disease-reducing effects.

Familiar statins include Lipitor and Crestor.

Many medical experts remain skeptical, pointing out that there are few, if any, studies conclusively proving that inflammation causes certain diseases. They believe that “low-level inflammation may be a symptom, rather than an inducer, of inner decay,” Stipp says. He explains that since NSAIDs aren’t patented high-revenue drugs, pharmaceutical companies haven’t had much incentive to study them. However, better-targeted drugs free of NSAID side effects such as gastrointestinal bleeding could be very lucrative, and studies likely to produce more conclusive findings are now under way. Yet it could be years before scientists learn if, or exactly how, NSAIDs affect specific age-related diseases, and “we may never know for sure whether [they] work as broad preventatives.” In the meantime, Stipp concludes, losing weight and taking an aspirin every day or two (with a doctor’s okay) couldn’t hurt.

What Scientist Shortage?

“Do We Need More Scientists?” by Michael S. Teitelbaum, in *The Public Interest* (Fall 2003), 1112 16th St., N.W., Ste. 140, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Since the mid-1980s, university administrators, corporate employers, and government agencies have been warning of a dire shortage of native-born scientists and engineers. Last year, the National Science Board warned that the shortfall could “seriously threaten our long-term prosperity, national security, and quality of life.” Isn’t it strange, then, asks Teitelbaum, program director of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, to read newspaper reports about big layoffs of scientists and engineers in the computer, telecommunications, and aerospace industries, and stories about newly minted science and engineering Ph.D.’s who can’t find stable jobs?

What all the highly publicized warnings of impending crisis lack, says Teitelbaum, is solid evidence. There is no “strong upward pressure on real wages” for the nation’s 3.5 million scientists and engineers, and unemployment in science and engineering is as high as it is in other education-intensive professions. (It averaged

more than 4 percent in engineering in the first half of 2003, and more than 5 percent in the computer and mathematical occupations. Overall unemployment in the nation ran about 6 percent.)

What about forecasts of future shortages? A 2000 National Research Council panel found that earlier dire predictions had not panned out. The truth is, Teitelbaum says, “no one can know what the U.S. economy and its science and technology sectors will look like in 2010.”

He sees naked self-interest behind the doomsayers’ warnings: Universities want students; employers want to keep the wages of scientists and engineers down; and government agencies want to restrain the costs of research.

If the alarms prompt Washington to encourage more foreign students to fill the supposed gap, Teitelbaum points out, the result could be a surplus of scientists and engineers, depressing wages. That would make science and engineering *less* attractive to young Americans—just what the critics say they don’t want.

ARTS & LETTERS

The Michelangelo of Suburbia

“Erich Fischl: Fallen” by James Romaine, in *Image: A Journal of the Arts & Religion* (Summer 2003), 3307 Third Ave. West, Seattle, Wash. 98119.

Erich Fischl is one of a handful of artists who emerged during the 1980s “spearheading a return to figurative representation after the dominance of abstraction and conceptual art in previous decades,” says Romaine, an art historian. Yet it was not just a return. Many viewers find Fischl’s depictions of “the leisured suburban existence of the American middle class in all its physical and spiritual nakedness” unsettling. But this edginess, Romaine suggests, comes both from “a theme which appears in many of Fischl’s works: the public exposure of the private,” and the longing of his painted characters to return to “an Eden they cannot recreate.”

Born in New York City in 1948, Fischl grew up in the Long Island suburbs with a salesman father and an alcoholic mother. “The permeating message of his childhood,” says Romaine, was that “what happened in-

side the home, family, and individual was to be concealed from the world outside.” This tension plays out in many of Fischl’s paintings through figures that are literally naked—stripped, as Romaine puts it, “of the pretensions of society,” but also suggesting, in the artist’s own words, “the vulnerability of the human condition.” But his juxtaposition of clothed and naked figures can sometimes explore uncomfortable areas of sexuality. In one of Fischl’s more troubling works, *Bad Boy* (1981), a self-absorbed woman lies naked on a bed. Watching her, his back to the viewer, is the clothed young “bad boy” of the title. “But his transgression is unclear,” says Romaine. Is it his presence? That behind his back we can also see his busy fingers rifling through her purse? Or something else? As is the case with many of Fischl’s paintings, we get “only a fleeting glimpse of a larger, more complicated



Strange Place to Park (second version, 1992), by Eric Fischl

narrative.” Indeed, Romaine suggests, “the mind we come closer to understanding is our own. The viewer is the central character of *Bad Boy*.”

This kind of psychological subtext feels very distant from the Old Master figurative tradition, yet Fischl has expressed in interviews his affinity with such painters as Giotto, Fra Angelico, and Michelangelo, not so much for the doctrines of faith they depicted as for the spiritual drama they conveyed. He views himself as a “post-Fall Garden painter”—suburbia being only the latest effort to recreate Eden. His pictures are disturbing because the loss they portray reminds us of our own.

In *Tumbling Woman*, Fischl confronted America’s greatest crisis in modern times. Inspired by the television images of people leaping from the World Trade Center, the nearly life-size sculpture was erected in Rockefeller Center around the time of 9/11’s

first anniversary. Within days, recounts Romaine, outcry over the work had reached such a fever pitch “that the sculpture had to be covered with a sheet and removed.” The outrage was not universal; many viewers found the work profoundly moving. The conservative *New York Sun* defended Fischl.

Romaine believes that the sculpture embodies the ambivalence that has made Fischl such an important figure in the post-abstract art world. “*Tumbling Woman* confronts us not only with the disturbing and brutal facts of the fate of some on September 11, but it also challenges us to confront the collective spiritual cancer that lay behind that awful day. Her fall is a consequence of the Fall.” Like all of Fischl’s work, says Romaine, it “conveys a powerful visual manifestation of our fallen condition,” and “holds a mirror up to the hidden self that many of us would rather hide under a sheet.”

The Subterranean File-Sharing Blues

“Notes from the Underground” by Nicholas Thompson, in *The Washington Monthly* (Sept. 2003), 733 15th St., N.W., Ste. 520, Washington, D.C. 20005.

It’s no secret that the music industry has been ailing lately: Revenues from sales of recorded music were down by 15 percent over the last three years. The industry blames young people who download copyrighted music for free from file-sharing networks, and is doing its best to stop them. But instead of fighting technological change, says Thompson, industry bigwigs should take a few pointers from him, a successful young subway musician.

Since releasing his new album in January 2003, he’s sold about 500 CDs in the New York subways. Playing his Taylor acoustic guitar underground every few weeks, he’s made more money per hour than he does as a journalist. To succeed, though, he’s had to study his environment.

“When I first started playing in the subways, I experimented with different prices for my albums. The sweet spot seemed to be a price of \$5.” His conclusion: That’s what people will pay for a CD with music they like by a musician they never heard of. “So why does the average CD sell for more than \$17?” It’s not the manufacturing cost: Thompson’s latest album cost

only \$1.10 per disk. *Lesson 1* for the industry: For albums by artists other than the Rolling Stones or U2, which aren’t going to sell millions of copies, stop paying so much to marketers and other middlemen, and cut prices.

Lesson 2: Get beyond the set formats (alt-music, hip-hop, modern country), and “micromarket heterogeneous bands to scattered audiences.” In the subway, Thompson learned where to place himself to make sales. The hallways—where passersby hear the music only for a few seconds—are good for playing Beatles tunes or other familiar music. But his kind of instrumental guitar music does better on the subway platforms—which hold fewer people for a longer period of time.

Lesson 3: Embrace file sharing and figure out how to make a profit from the Internet, just as the movie industry did with videocassette recorders. Big artists lose with file sharing, which is why the industry is fighting it so hard. But it’s a losing fight—and that won’t be a bad thing for most bands or fans, Thompson says. “The Internet allows a wide audience to inexpensively sample a huge array of music. File-

sharing networks like Kazaa, and artists who allow free downloads off their web pages, are roughly like playing in the subway. I profit tremendously when people download my songs." It makes them more likely to go to his

concerts and ask radio stations to play his songs—"which could one day be a source of album sales and my ultimate transition from a *Washington Monthly* contributing editor into a major music icon."

What's In a Fake?

"Talking about Fakes: The War between Aesthetic and Extra-Aesthetic Considerations" by Rochelle Gurstein in *Salmagundi* (Summer-Fall 2003), Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, N.Y. 12866.

Hanging in New York City's Frick Museum is a wonderful painting called *The Polish Rider*. It bears the signature of Rembrandt, but some art experts say it's a fraud. If they're proved right, the painting will be virtually worthless in the art market. Yet for many art lovers, it will still be a wonderful picture.

Would the reaction be the same if the artwork were one of Andy Warhol's famous reproductions of a Brillo box?

That question sends Gurstein, author of *The Repeal of Reticence* (1996), on an inquiry into the history of aesthetics and the debate over the differences between art and imitation. She begins with philosopher Immanuel Kant's distinction in *Critique of Judgment* (1790) between aesthetic judgment and taste. Aesthetic judgment involves the appreciation of objects that are inherently beautiful, while taste involves the appreciation of objects in relation to ourselves. A cookie, for example, has no inherent beauty, but we can appreciate the delightful encounter of ingredients and taste buds.

The explication of taste led art historians and others to the question of forgeries. Hans Tietze, for example, argued in 1936 that a painting is more than its physical attributes: It is also "the expression of a personality, of an epoch, of a nation, and of a race." A forgery might appear beautiful to the untrained eye, but the connoisseur will detect its defects.

In *Languages of Art* (1968), Nelson Goodman took a more radical tack. He argued that there is no such thing as the disinterested appreciation of beauty. What happens if we are confronted with both a Rembrandt and a perfect copy of it, Goodman asked? Just knowing that one is a forgery shapes our perception of it. What we know always shapes what we see.

That argument was quickly "pushed to its further extreme," says Gurstein. While Goodman held that prior knowledge *shapes* how we perceive a work of art, "in today's art world, prior knowledge is everything; it determines whether an object qualifies as art or not." How do we know that Warhol's Brillo boxes are art? Because he (and the art cognoscenti) said so. Today, museums are full of such works—Marcel Duchamp's famous *Fountain* (1917) is a urinal, Damien Hirst's more recently controversial *This Little Piggy Went to the Market, This Little Piggy Stayed Home* (1996) is a bisected pig floating in formaldehyde.

There's a paradox in all of this, Gurstein notes: "In the quarrel over forgeries, those who love beauty for its own sake are sophisticated aesthetes and those who care more for the work's pedigree than its aesthetic qualities are philistines." But in today's culture wars over sensational contemporary art such as Hirst's, "those who expect to find beauty are now dismissed as philistine, while those who appreciate objects without aesthetic attributes and for reasons that have nothing to do with beauty turn out to be sophisticated, art-world insiders."

The decline of beauty as an ideal has many other causes besides the changes in aesthetic theory, Gurstein allows. Yet the "longing for aesthetic experience" has not declined, as the crowds jamming exhibits of Vermeer, Matisse, and other old and new masters show. The question, says Gurstein, is whether today's artists will arouse the same ardor a hundred years from now or whether their objects will, "with the passage of time, drift back into the realm of the commonplace from which they are momentarily lifted."

OTHER NATIONS

The End of Israel?

"Israel: The Alternative" by Tony Judt and "An Alternative Future: An Exchange," in *The New York Review of Books* (Oct. 23 and Nov. 24, 2003), 1755 Broadway, 5th fl., New York, N.Y. 10019-3780.

"The very idea of a 'Jewish state'—a state in which Jews and the Jewish religion have exclusive privileges and from which non-Jewish citizens are forever excluded—is rooted in another time and place. Israel, in short, is an anachronism."

With that argument, Judt, who is director of the Remarque Institute at New York University, has touched off a furor. Israel is the product of what he regards as an antiquated 19th-century notion, the nation-state based on "ethnoreligious self-definition." And its existence as a nation-state is complicated by demographic realities. Within five to eight years, Arabs will outnumber Jews inside the borders of the "Greater Israel" formed by lands Israel has occupied since the 1967 war. That leaves Israel with three choices, Judt argues. It can pull back to the 1967 borders and retain its Jewish majority and its democratic character. It can expel the Arabs from the occupied territories, with dire consequences. Or it can retain the territories and surrender its Jewish character.

Judt thinks it's too late for Israel to pull back. "There are too many settlements, too many Jewish settlers [more than a quarter-million], and too many Palestinians, and they all live together, albeit separated by barbed wire and pass laws." The two-state so-

lution that has been the goal of all peace negotiations is therefore, in Judt's view, "probably already doomed."

The only palatable alternative he sees is "a single, integrated, binational state of Jews and Arabs," their security "guaranteed by international force." Judt concedes that this is "an unpromising mix of realism and utopia" but insists that it's the best course available.

His critics, however, call his argument fantasy or worse. If the nation-state is an "anachronism," retorts Michael Walzer of the Institute for Advanced Study, then why begin its abolition with Israel? Why not France, or Sweden, or Japan? And Walzer is not the only critic to point out that Judt's binational state wouldn't be binational for long. A Palestinian majority would make a Palestinian nation-state. The only question is how much blood would be shed in the process. Brown University's Omer Bartov notes that Hamas and Islamic Jihad would never share sovereignty with Jews.

Yes, says Walzer, the road to a two-state solution is difficult. But an Israeli pullback is possible, and polls show that majorities of both Palestinians and Israelis favor two states. It's their current leaders who stand in the way. Over the longer term, it ought to be obvious that "two anachronistic states are better than one."

King Coup

"African Military Coups d'État, 1956-2001: Frequency, Trends and Distribution" by Patrick J. McGowan, in *The Journal of Modern African Studies* (Sept. 2003), Cambridge Univ. Press, 100 Brook Hill Dr., West Nyack, N.Y. 10994-2133.

Military coups seem pretty much a thing of the past in most of the world. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia, only a few coups have succeeded (notably, in Haiti and Pakistan) since the mid-1980s. But sub-Saharan Africa is another story altogether: Between 1985 and 2001, it experienced 21

successful coups and 41 failed attempts, reports McGowan, a political scientist at Arizona State University.

Coups d'état began to become frequent and widespread in sub-Saharan Africa during the 1960s, he says. Between 1956 and 2001, the 48 independent African states experienced 80 coups, 108 failed attempts, and

139 coup plots. Eighteen countries suffered more than one coup, and Nigeria, Benin, and Burkina Faso had six apiece. West Africa, with one-third of the states but 45 percent of the coup attempts, is the most coup-prone region.

Only six African countries have been completely free of coup plots and attempts, but three of those (Namibia, Eritrea, and South Africa) became independent or majority ruled only in the 1990s. "Only the multiparty democracies of Botswana, Cape Verde, and Mauritius," McGowan observes, "have been both independent for more than 25 years and entirely free of the coup virus."

Despite the trend toward democratization in the 1990s, the African propensity for coups hardly changed, though their success

rate diminished. In the dozen years before 1990, there were 54 attempted coups, 26 of them successful; in the next dozen years, there were 50 attempts, 13 successful. "New, weakly institutionalized democratic governments are as apt to suffer from the coup virus as are weak one-party and military regimes," McGowan points out.

But since 1990, a slim majority (27) of the African states have had no coup attempts. The reasons vary, says McGowan. In some countries, "the military has been bought off by sharing in the spoils of the regime"; in others, civil wars are in progress. And a dozen of the coup-free states have "functioning multiparty democratic political systems." Democracy, even when well-established, does not eliminate the risk of a coup, he observes, but it helps.

Europe à la Carte

"Europe Divided? Elites vs. Public Opinion on European Integration" by Liesbet Hooghe, in *European Union Politics* (Sept. 2003), Sage Publications, 2455 Teller Rd., Thousand Oaks, Calif. 91320.

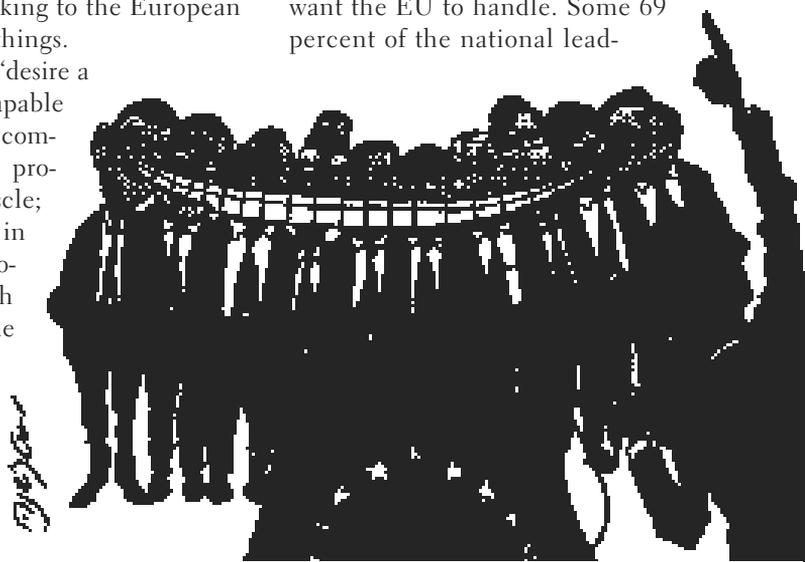
When it comes to an integrated Europe, leaders and led appear far apart, with the former enthusiastic and the latter not very. But that common perception is something of an illusion, contends Hooghe, a political scientist at the University of North Carolina. In reality, the elites and the citizenry are looking to the European Union for different things.

"Elites," she says, "desire a European Union capable of governing a large, competitive market and projecting political muscle; citizens are more in favor of a caring European Union, which protects them from the vagaries of capitalist markets."

Recent surveys seem at first to confirm the oft-sighted huge gap between national leaders, 93 per-

cent of whom regard EU membership as, on balance, a good thing, and the public, of whom only 53 percent agree. But when the questioning gets to specific policy areas, the gap narrows or disappears.

The real elite-public difference, Hooghe argues, is in the sorts of issues the two groups want the EU to handle. Some 69 percent of the national lead-



Europe's leaders attempt to put the best face on European unity.

ers, on average, want the EU to be responsible for matters of “high politics,” such as foreign policy, defense, and currency. Only 55 percent of the public, on average, agrees.

When it comes to policies to aid disadvantaged people or regions, more than 60 percent of the public says yes to the EU, compared with 41 percent or less of the national leaders. Strong majorities in both groups want the EU to stay out of areas such as education and health, where ex-

pensive but popular national programs are well established. Both groups overwhelmingly favor putting more environmental regulation in the EU’s hands.

Europe’s elites seem to follow a “functional” logic, aiming for an EU that will capitalize on economies of scale (as with defense) or overcome member nations’ lack of incentives to act in the common interest in key areas. Ordinary Europeans, however, prefer to design the new Europe à la carte.

Staying Cool in Pakistan

“The Jihadist Threat to Pakistan” by Stephen Philip Cohen, in *The Washington Quarterly* (Summer 2003), Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1800 K St., N.W., Ste. 400, Washington, D.C. 20006.

It’s a scary scenario that’s sure to figure in a minor motion picture someday: Islamic radicals take over nuclear-armed Pakistan and terrorize the world—or worse. But film is as far as that scenario is likely to get during the next few years in this “deeply Islamic yet still moderate country,” writes Cohen, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. The Pakistani army stands in the way.

Though Pakistan (population: 151 million) was founded by secularists after the 1947 partition of India, and is dominated by a secular oligarchy, the state since 1970 has sporadically used Islamic terror squads to murder and intimidate opponents of the regime. “Pakistani terrorist groups supported or tolerated by the state operate within their own country, in Indian-administered parts of Kashmir, and in India itself,” Cohen says. Despite a pledge to Washington, President Pervez Musharraf hasn’t reined in these groups.

Pakistan’s Islamic organizations range from militant to moderate. Most influential is the relatively centrist Jama’at-i-Islami (JI). Beginning with President Zia ul-Haq (1977–88), political leaders have developed ties to the JI and other religious political parties as a counterweight to more influential secular parties. The JI favors a return to civilian rule (Musharraf came to power in a military coup in 1999) and a strict parliamentary system, and while sup-

porting the Kashmiri “freedom fighters,” has eschewed the sectarian violence that has plagued the country for two decades.

“Support for groups such as Al Qaeda has thus far been limited,” Cohen writes, “but recent reports indicate that JI functionaries provided several fugitive Al Qaeda leaders with safe houses and, of course, the more radical Islamic parties were allied with Al Qaeda in their support of the Taliban in Afghanistan.”

Religion historically has not been a dominant issue in Pakistani politics. “Most middle-class and urban Pakistanis” favor “a modern but Islamic state, with the Islamic part confined to just a few spheres of public life,” says Cohen. An alliance of the JI and five other Islamic parties won 11 percent of the national vote in a 2002 election, gaining 53 seats in the National Assembly and control of the Northwest Frontier Province. Cohen doubts that the religious parties can muster enough national support to win power. And there’s no sign that the army is seething with Islamic radicalism.

Still, Cohen isn’t betting on anything after the next five years: “Pakistan’s educational and demographic trends, its enfeebled institutions, and its near-flat economy could produce a situation where even the army would be unable to stem the growth of radical Islamic groups and might even be captured by them.”

CURRENT BOOKS

Reviews of new and noteworthy nonfiction

Whitewashing Reds

IN DENIAL:

Historians, Communism and Espionage.

By John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr. Encounter. 316 pp. \$25.95

Reviewed by David J. Garrow

In three impressive scholarly books published during the past decade, John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr detailed how intimately the American Communist Party was tied to the Kremlin from the birth of the party in 1919 right up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991: *The Secret World of American Communism*, written with Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov (1995); *The Soviet World of American Communism*, written with Kyrill M. Anderson (1998); and *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (1999). Using newly available Soviet files and decoded American intercepts of Soviet cable traffic, the authors revealed that dozens of American Communists, including Alger Hiss and Julius Rosenberg, were guilty beyond any reasonable doubt of aiding Soviet espionage against the United States.

Newspapers and magazines paid widespread attention to these revelations, but in scholarly circles, the reaction was often grudging and sometimes hostile. Now Haynes, a historian at the Library of Congress, and Klehr, a professor of politics and history

at Emory University, have written an energetic and outspoken rejoinder to their critics.

In Denial pulls no punches. "Far too much academic writing about communism, anti-communism and espionage is marked by dishonesty, evasion, special pleading and moral squalor. Like Holocaust deniers, some historians of American communism have evaded and avoided facing a preeminent evil"—namely, the Stalinist dictatorship that for decades ruled the Soviet Union, murdered millions of its own citizens, and treated foreign Communist parties



Alger Hiss testifying before a federal grand jury in 1948.

as mere minions of Moscow.

There's no denying Haynes and Klehr's contention that "a significant number of American academics still have soft spots in their hearts for the CPUSA," the American Communist Party. The history of American communism has been a highly active and productive field for three decades now, in significant part because many scholars who are themselves veterans of the New Left of the 1960s and early 1970s have been, in Haynes and Klehr's words, "searching for a past that would justify their radical commitments and offer lessons for continuing the struggle."

The Communist Party was a significant presence in American politics from the mid-1930s until the late 1940s, with a peak membership approaching 100,000, but it was in decline and on the defensive by 1950 as a result of the onset of the Cold War and the federal prosecution of party leaders for conspiring to advocate the overthrow of the government. After Nikita Khrushchev acknowledged some of Joseph Stalin's crimes against humanity in 1956, the American party shrank further, to just 3,000 members by 1958. It still exists today, though its last notable pronouncement was an endorsement of the unsuccessful coup Soviet hard-liners mounted against Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991, just before the final collapse of the Soviet Union.

Haynes and Klehr quip that "never have so many written so much about so few," but the crucial question about the historiography of American Communists is whether scholars bring a sufficiently critical and open-minded attitude to their work. *In Denial* denounces much of that scholarship as "bad history in the service of bad politics" and a stark illustration of how "an alienated and politicized academic culture misunderstands and distorts America's past." Thanks to American historians' "unbalanced tilt to the left," Haynes and Klehr complain, "the nostalgic afterlife of communism in the United States has outlived most of the real Communist regimes around the world."

The most powerful aspect of Haynes and Klehr's earlier work concerns Project Venona, the American effort to decipher Soviet intelligence cables from the mid-1940s, which were subject to encryption errors that the Soviets later corrected. In general, as

Haynes and Klehr recount here, the intercepts demonstrated that "the American Communist Party closely cooperated with Soviet spies and intelligence officers." More specifically, the Venona messages resolved historical debates over the guilt of many suspected spies, including both well-known names and less heralded figures who had wielded significant influence in the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt. "The evidence of the cooperation of Alger Hiss, Julius Rosenberg, Lauchlin Currie, and Harry Dexter White with Soviet espionage is not ambiguous," Haynes and Klehr write, "it is convincing and substantial."

Yet numerous scholarly publications ignore the Venona evidence or deny its importance. Perhaps the most egregious example Haynes and Klehr cite is a 1999 entry in the *American National Biography*, a highly regarded reference work that is available in many libraries. The editors assigned the profile of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg to Norman Markowitz, a Rutgers University historian and, as Haynes and Klehr note, "a member of the CPUSA who even edits its theoretical/ideological journal, *Political Affairs*." Given the affiliations of their chosen author, the *American National Biography* editors might have reviewed the contribution with a careful and critical eye, but the published result shows they didn't: Markowitz simply dismisses the Venona documents as "discredited." Haynes and Klehr write that Markowitz's "deceptive" profile will "distort the historical understanding of students for several generations to come."

Haynes and Klehr find similar and more widespread problems in the 1998 revision of *The Encyclopedia of the American Left*, published by Oxford University Press. "Entries filled with misstatements and errors" could result just from sloppy scholarship, they note, but the *Encyclopedia* manifests "a pattern of ignoring, minimizing or obfuscating facts that might put American communism in a poor light." Haynes and Klehr contend that only an intellectual culture in which too many scholars regard "historical questions as matters of ideology, not matters of fact," can explain why a leading academic press could publish a volume of "fake history where unpleasant facts are airbrushed away."

Greater nuance and complexity mark the work of more-senior, well-respected histori-

ans of American communism, and Haynes and Klehr find less cause for complaint here, though they rightly upbraid David Oshinsky of the University of Texas for complaining that revisionist historians such as themselves are, in his words, “too zealous in setting the record straight.”

Yet Haynes and Klehr fail to acknowledge the full impact of their work on some of the most accomplished left-liberal scholars. In *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (1998), Ellen Schrecker wrote that American Communists merely “did not subscribe to traditional forms of patriotism,” and she questioned whether their espionage activity represented “such a serious threat to the nation’s security that it required the development of a politically repressive internal security system.” In a new preface to a 1999 edition of her book, however, Schrecker wrote, “I would acknowledge more conclusively than I did [in the original] that American Communists spied for the former Soviet Union.” A year later she went even further, volunteering that “there is now just too much evidence from too many different sources to make it possible for anyone but the most die-hard loyalists to argue convincingly for the innocence of Hiss, Rosenberg, and the others.”

Similarly, Maurice Isserman, one of the most widely respected historians of American communism, acknowledged in the *Foreign Service Journal* in 2000 that the CPUSA’s “few dozen American spies of the 1930s grew to scores, perhaps hundreds,” during World War II. Haynes and Klehr commend Isserman, but their resolute search for every academic who

remains in denial may partially blind them to just how much the scholarly conversation about American communism has changed.

Of course, real differences, both interpretive and political, still exist between Haynes and Klehr on the one hand and left-liberal historians such as Schrecker and Isserman on the other. Haynes and Klehr deem postwar anticommunism “a rational and understandable response to a real danger to American democracy,” hardly a sentiment the Left would endorse. Yet Haynes and Klehr are no apologists for Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose impact on American public life they characterize as “overwhelmingly negative.”

The authors conclude that “despite all the new archival evidence . . . distortions and lies about Soviet espionage go unchallenged” in scholarly volumes such as *American National Biography*, an indictment that is both indisputably correct and undeniably overstated. Thanks in large part to their own work, the historical consensus on the relationship between the CPUSA and Moscow has undergone a dramatic change since the Soviet Union’s collapse. As *In Denial* details, some loyalists still refuse to see that the documentary record has been revolutionized. But Haynes and Klehr’s valid complaints about these unyielding historians ought to be coupled with an acknowledgment of victory in behalf of those whose pursuit of historical truth has been conclusively vindicated.

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Haunted Hawthorne

HAWTHORNE:
A Life.

By Brenda Wineapple. Knopf. 509 pp. \$30

Reviewed by Judith Farr

In Hester Prynne, the passionately honest woman whose scarlet letter “A” marks her as both adulteress and angel, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–64) created one of the

most admirable heroines of American fiction. Forced to exhibit herself for hours on a scaffold with both emblems of her sin at her breast—the infant Pearl and the letter “A”

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she herself gorgeously embroidered—Hester serves as the light that ultimately rescues her lover’s soul from damnation. This elegant allegory presents its heroine with a grave empathy bordering on tenderness. It may therefore startle some readers of Brenda Wineapple’s revelatory biography to learn that Hawthorne’s vision of strong women, and indeed of women in general, was severely marred by what she calls “a deadly ambivalence.”

The bookish youth who wished he had been “born a girl so that I might have been pinned all my life to my mother’s apron,” the sensuous husband who played Adam to Sophia Peabody’s Eve on their idyllic honeymoon in Concord’s Old Manse, and the creator of such vital heroines as Hester of *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and Zenobia of *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), was the same man who fulminated that “I wish [women authors] were forbidden to write, on [pain of] having their faces deeply scarified with an oyster-shell.” Envious of Harriet Beecher Stowe because some 300,000 copies of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* were in circulation the year it was printed, while *The Scarlet Letter* sold fewer than 7,000; afraid that sentimental fiction by female writers would weaken the infant American literature; and certain that too much intellectual engagement robbed women of their natural tranquility and grace, Hawthorne was a devoted father, but he chose not to teach his children to read until they reached the age of seven; and later he forbade his daughter Rose to write stories. He thought that her moral nature, finer than a man’s, might be defiled by such activity. Rose’s brilliant older sister Una was taught reading, horseback riding, French, and geography “in small doses,” but came to “despair of her own ignorance.” This well-meaning deprivation must have contributed to the

girl’s anxiety and neurosis: To Hawthorne’s anguish, Una received primitive shock therapy at 14.

Like his other failures of human sympathy—his confessed “repugnance” toward Jews; his indifference to the misery of slaves and lack of compassion for youths who died to preserve the Union, a cause in which he did not believe—Hawthorne’s apparent misogyny is already well known. (Indeed, it would be hard not to perceive evidence of it in the tortured sexuality and twisted attitudes of such characters as Miles Coverdale, covering up his lust in various hiding places from which he peers at forbidden girls, and Hester’s dim-spirited lover, Arthur Dimmesdale.) Yet one of the strengths of Wineapple’s vivid biography is that she encourages us to understand the complexity of Hawthorne’s misogyny. None of his emotions—or prejudices—were simple. He objected to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* out of primitive envy, yes, but also because he believed that politics (Stowe’s abolitionism)



Emanuel Leutze’s 1862 portrait of Nathaniel Hawthorne

should be kept out of art. He was averse to women’s higher education, true, but treated a female Shakespeare scholar most graciously when she asked “literary counsel” of him. When he lost a position that might have bettered the family’s desperate fortunes, he observed that his wife, Sophia, would bear the great disappointment “like a woman—that is to say, better than a man.”

Wineapple, the author of *Genêt: A Biography of Janet Flanner* (1989) and *Sister Brother: Gertrude and Leo Stein* (1996), paints a rounded portrait of Hawthorne that invites both respect and pity. The reader comes to understand the inner demons of anxiety and self-doubt that made the development and exercise of his artistic

genius not merely difficult but heroic. Melancholy tortured him all his life. His pessimistic yet often luminous fiction was the work of one who feared and was ashamed of both his own genetic inheritance (he was the grandchild of a Puritan “hanging judge”) and his writing gift. The latter seemed to him frivolous, and indulging it, a wicked waste. “In the depths of every heart,” he once declared, “there is a tomb and a dungeon.” He often felt he inhabited both. His fame arrived at last, not at first. He destroyed copies of *Fanshawe* (1828) in despair, and although *The Scarlet Letter* was a success, it did not bring sufficient remuneration to enable his family to live in any kind of comfort.

One cannot help but admire Hawthorne’s energetic if emotionally vexed efforts to alleviate his family’s dismal poverty. The transcendentalist writer Ellery Channing recalled that a handyman’s cottage the Hawthornes rented (though they failed to pay the rent) was one of the poorest shanties in Lenox, Massachusetts, “with uneven floors, and so ill-built that the wind could not be kept out.”

When, for the sake of a steady salary, Hawthorne became a U.S. consul in Liverpool, his writing suffered. He hated the job and loathed yet was attracted to England. Realizing finally that Sophia and the children were miserable in that “rancid” city—Wineapple’s adjectives can be venture-some—he left England for Italy, where he and Una caught “Roman fever” (malaria) and nearly died. Dejected, discouraged, half-sick, they all returned to the United States and the bone-piercing cold of Concord.

It was 1860, and John Brown’s raid at Harpers Ferry had occurred the year before. Unmoved by the nationalist fervor that warmed the New England heart, the aristocratic Hawthorne of excellent ancestry was reviled as a “Copperhead,” a Northern sympathizer with the South in the war. He maintained that slavery would (and should) die out if left alone, whereas emancipation would provoke years of tumult.

Though famous for habitually avoiding company, Hawthorne reached out to a few friends and represented himself honestly to them. Herman Melville loved him, perhaps was slightly *in love* with him. Franklin

Pierce, for whose presidential campaign Hawthorne worked, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, a classmate at Bowdoin College, perceived the essential nobility and even sweetness of his nature.

To the end, in whatever unfertile circumstance, Hawthorne wrote. For “writing,” as Wineapple tells us, “meant everything to Hawthorne and yet cost everything. It was his heart of darkness . . . a source of shame as well as pleasure and a necessity he could neither forgo nor entirely approve.”

Especially praiseworthy in this biography are the literary-critical passages. We live in a time when sociopolitically minded critics attack Emily Dickinson for writing no poems about the execution of 38 Santee Sioux in Minnesota in 1862 or the problems of Irish miners in Pennsylvania, so we should rejoice that Wineapple never denigrates Hawthorne’s artistry on the grounds of his personal predilections or politics. Instead, she follows Henry James’s advice and grants the writer his *donnée*: his personal vision and characteristic genius. A sensitive reader of the various fictions, she is especially perceptive about the decidedly autobiographical *Blithedale Romance*, which draws upon Hawthorne’s recollection of the utopian community of Brook Farm in Roxbury, Massachusetts; with its quirks of insight and characterization, that novel can be difficult to treat.

Wineapple occasionally resorts to awkward, quasi-poetical stylistic shortcuts: Zenobia is described as having “indignant hair”; the month of May is “nonchalant.” But she draws us into her narrative with élan. Her first chapter discloses the sad history of Hawthorne’s son Julian, imprisoned at 60 for selling worthless mine shares and exploiting his father’s name. Sorrow and imprisonment, the terrible influence of family history and names, the past with its mysterious power over the present: These are Hawthorne’s major themes, and in Wineapple’s biography, even the shape of the text gives them their proper authority.

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SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

**EVERYTHING AND MORE:
A Compact History of ∞ .**

By David Foster Wallace. Norton.
319 pp. \$23.95

The weirdest thing about infinity is that there's anybody who understands it. Mathematicians have defined it, analyzed it, and stuck it, wriggling, on a pin. Yet infinity is not just a specimen in a dusty museum of mathematical oddities; it still has mind-blowing power and baffles those who are not trained to comprehend it.

Humanity has come a long way, philosophically and logically, from the first systematic struggles with the infinite in ancient Greece. In the late 19th century, the German Georg Cantor became the first mathematician to tame infinity. Though his definition is surprisingly simple—a set is infinite if it can remain the same size even after someone removes parts of it—the mathematics of infinity quickly make things confusing. Cantor realized that there are different degrees of infinity and even an infinite number of infinities. In the years that followed, mathematicians learned to manipulate infinities by adding and dividing and multiplying them, which yielded such creatures as the cube root of infinity and infinity to the infinity power. This is the realm of the transfinite, the infinitesimal, and the surreal.

Covering two and a half millennia of history, mathematics, and philosophy in 300 pages is a tough job, but David Foster Wallace, the celebrated novelist and essayist, makes an admirable attempt. It's fascinating to watch him grapple with his audience, his craft, and himself as he tries to bring infinity to heel.

In some respects, Wallace is in top form. His prose sparkles with blunt and funny phrases that bring his erudition into greater relief. He describes the classical philosopher Zeno of Elea, for example, as “the most fiendishly clever and upsetting Greek philosopher ever (who can be seen actually kicking Socrates' ass, argumentatively speaking, in Plato's *Parmenides*).” Such passages will come as no surprise to Wallace fans; nei-

ther will his innumerable footnotes and playful abbreviations. Like his other works, *Everything and More* thrums with neurotic energy.

Unfortunately, the subject matter gradually makes mincemeat of the idiosyncratic style. As the material gets denser and more difficult, Wallace breaks out of his narrative with interpolations and “emergency glossaries.” His abbreviations begin to consume his prose; one section is named, semijokingly, “End Q.F.-V.-T.I. Return to §7c at the ¶ on p. 256 w/ Asterisk at End.” He can't decide whether he's writing for mathematicians or mathphobes as he whirls dizzily from minute detail to fuzzy abstraction and back again. As the story progresses, he seems to get more and more frustrated with himself and his readers. At the end, the prose squeezes and strains, as if his “compact history” has run out of room.

Though Wallace's wicked turns of phrase and his delight in the rich history of infinity are almost enough to carry *Everything and More*, the book finally degenerates into a gibbering wreck of stylistic tics. Like Cantor, Wallace set out to tame infinity. This time, infinity won.

—CHARLES SEIFE

**LIGHTNING MAN:
The Accursed Life of
Samuel F. B. Morse.**

By Kenneth Silverman. Knopf. 503 pp.
\$35

In 1844, Samuel F. B. Morse demonstrated his new telegraph in the Supreme Court chamber of the U.S. Capitol. From Odd Fellows Hall in Baltimore, Morse's aide Alfred Vail sent word that the Democratic Party had just nominated dark horse James K. Polk for president. With everyone in the court electrified over both the news and the means of its arrival, Morse and Vail ended their session with a 19th-century instant message:

V: Have you had your dinner

M: yes have you

V: yes what had you

M: mutton chop and strawberries

Small talk has always had its place beside great events in long-distance communication.

Kenneth Silverman, the author of a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Cotton Mather, tells the life of Morse (1791–1872) through many such precise and contrasting details. The inventor was born outside Boston to a stout, no-nonsense mother and a father who preferred mapmaking to his work as a minister. As a young man, Morse, too, divided his time between two pursuits, tinkering with inventions and painting portraits.

His results in both were mixed. A prototype fire engine failed in a public demonstration, prompting one spectator to write: “Mr Morse better stick to his brush, *he will do well enough then* but as to Engines he’d better let them alone.” Morse did become a prosperous artist, but when his most ambitious, meticulously detailed works failed to establish him as a serious painter, he decided to concentrate on the inventions, including an idea for a long-distance communications device. One way or another, he felt sure, greatness was his destiny.

In 1837, Morse read a newspaper article about two French inventors working on a concept that he had thought existed solely in his notes. Alarmed, he retraced his steps, even going so far as to write to fellow passengers on a transatlantic crossing he had made in 1832, some of whom responded that, yes, they recalled his having talked of his telegraph notion. Along with establishing his primacy, he was struggling to figure out



Samuel F. B. Morse and his family, c. 1809

where the idea might have slid from his fingers—an example of what might be Morse’s real curse, a personality given to obsessing over both detail and reputation. He spent the rest of his life locked in a grudge match with other inventors over telegraph patents, funding, and fame.

Through Silverman’s curatorial eye, Morse’s story shifts from sweetness (the feckless young painter) to tragedy (his artistic projects fail, his young wife dies, his paternity claim to his greatest invention is called spurious), and finally to irony (xenophobic Morse promotes the idea of a transatlantic cable). Along the way, the biographer capably explores such topics as intellectual property rules, early-19th-century tastes in art, government funding of commercial projects, and the vagaries of electric communication. The book is a triumph for Silverman and his readers, as well as, belatedly, for Morse.

—ALEXANDER CHEE

HISTORY

TOMMY THE CORK:
Washington’s Ultimate Insider,
from Roosevelt to Reagan.

By David McKean. Steerforth. 347 pp.
\$25

It’s likely that every great capital city, at least every one with some form of representative government, attracts legions of ambi-

tious, well-motivated, politically adept young people eager to play parts on the political stage. Some of them succeed, to the lasting benefit of their nation. Unfortunately, the mixture of money, power, and malleable laws that is characteristic of capitals also draws fixers—clever operators who ignore many of the ethical rules that governments

and the legal profession adopt in the interest of fair play.

Lawyer Thomas Corcoran (1900–81) exemplified both types of capital citizen. “Tommy the Cork,” as Franklin Roosevelt called him (just as the two George Bushes surely would have), was arguably one of the half-dozen most significant architects of the New Deal, a dynamo of energy, intellectual versatility, and personal magnetism who found roles for hundreds of other bright young lawyers and economists in the proliferating federal agencies around Washington. “[Felix] Frankfurter sent me to Corcoran, which was the classic way to get a job in the New Deal,” wrote one such recruit.

But installing his fellow Harvard Law graduates in federal jobs was peripheral to Corcoran’s main interest: drafting and lobbying through Congress some of the seminal legislation of the 1930s. He and his brilliant friend Benjamin Cohen wrote the Securities and Exchange Act and the Public Utilities Holding Company Act—monumental New Deal efforts to bring order to the stock markets and the electric power industry.

Corcoran did everything from lobbying FDR’s doomed court-packing plan to writing the famous sentence “This generation has a rendezvous with destiny” in a Roosevelt speech. Once, seeking to help his admirer Sam Rayburn, he made use of his friendships in the Coast Guard to race out to an ocean liner approaching New York harbor so that he might tell the returning Democratic national chairman, Jim Farley, that Rayburn was the president’s choice for Speaker of the House. Thus Corcoran bested New York’s Democratic bosses, who were waiting at the pier to lobby Farley on behalf of a Rayburn rival.

These remarkable adventures are



President Franklin D. Roosevelt presents a pen to Thomas Corcoran after signing the Public Utility Holding Company Act in 1935.

detailed in David McKean’s superb biography, *Tommy the Cork*. McKean is chief of staff for Senator John Kerry and the coauthor of *Friends in High Places* (1995), the tale of another master manipulator, Clark Clifford. His material here is drawn not only from written sources but from many interviews with those who watched Corcoran charm and out-think several generations of people who had business in Washington.

Inevitably Corcoran made enemies, and, perhaps also inevitably, he began working his magic not for noble public purposes but for an array of private law clients, including several rather questionable interests, after he left government and became a lobbyist in 1941. With a growing family, he wished to make money; perhaps more important, he savored his own adroitness and relished using the network he had fashioned in his New Deal days. Winning the game was what mattered. What uniform he was wearing became increasingly unimportant.

In this, Corcoran seems somewhat like the great courtroom lawyer Edward Bennett Williams. In his long career, Williams represented a regiment of rogues, including Joe McCarthy, Jimmy Hoffa, Frank Costello, and Bobby Baker. The more con-

ventionally odious his client, the more zestful Williams's enthusiasm seemed. Watch me spring this guy, he seemed to be saying—this is going to take brains and bravado.

One difference between Williams and Corcoran lay in the arenas in which they worked. As a trial lawyer, Williams was a combatant whose foe was there to watch his every move. Corcoran operated *ex parte*, even to the point of approaching Supreme Court justices—some of whom may be said to have owed him their positions—in their chambers, urging them to reconsider a motion. That this could have earned him disbarment seems not to have seriously concerned him. He was in the game, and this was a play that might win it.

The life and adventures of Tommy the Cork, from serving as a clerk to Oliver Wendell Holmes to helping United Fruit find ways to overthrow the government of Guatemala, make for one of the most intriguing Washington books in years. Readers with a taste for the politically picaresque will seize upon it with delight.

—HARRY MCPHERSON

**THE NORMAN PODHORETZ
READER:**

***A Selection of His Writings from the
1950s through the 1990s.***

Edited by Thomas L. Jeffers. Free Press.
478 pp. \$35

Described by Paul Johnson in the introduction to this collection as “the archetype of the New York intellectual,” Norman Podhoretz has enjoyed a career as varied as it has been long and distinguished. In addition to his 35 years as editor of *Commentary*, he has achieved prominence (or notoriety) as a literary critic and prolific memoirist. As a young man, he courted fame and flirted with radicalism; in old age, he reinvented himself as an exegete, recently publishing a book on the Hebrew prophets. Throughout, Podhoretz has remained a patriot, a fierce anticommunist, and, since the 1960s, a relentless combatant in the culture wars.

This hefty tome, a five-decade sampler

of Podhoretz's writings, provides a useful opportunity to take stock of his career and achievements. The book touches on all of the abiding preoccupations of Podhoretz's life: literature, totalitarianism, anti-Semitism, the well-being of Israel, the frequent dishonesty and fecklessness of his fellow intellectuals, and the dangers of anything suggesting appeasement, isolationism, or pusillanimity in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy.

Because Podhoretz is above all a sophisticated polemicist, the result makes for consistently lively reading. There is much here of lasting value. Yet the collection as a whole lacks balance and ultimately disappoints.

As an avowed enemy of the New Left and all its works, Podhoretz wielded his greatest influence in the years after the Vietnam War, when American politics and culture were still acutely afflicted with the fevers of the 1960s. Somewhat surprisingly, the book slights that phase of his career, offering only two essays from the 1970s. By contrast, the 1990s, a decade when ideological fevers had largely subsided (or perhaps migrated to the Right), are accorded 10 pieces, six from 1999 alone. Instead of inviting an evaluation of the man in full, *The Norman Podhoretz Reader* offers a somewhat skewed version of his intellectual legacy.

This is unfortunate. However insightful his reflections on Mark Twain, Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, and Norman Mailer (all included here), Podhoretz matters because of his contribution to the reshaping of American politics after Vietnam. One of neoconservatism's most influential exponents, he helped create the conditions that elevated Ronald Reagan to the White House, revived American power, and eventually ended the Cold War on terms favorable to the United States.

Though this book includes Podhoretz's “eulogy” for his movement, neoconservatism did not expire with the Cold War. Instead, it today provides the impetus and intellectual justification for policies—the war in Iraq not least among them—that much of the world and more than a few Americans have come to view with dis-

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may. The neoconservative persuasion deserves a more searching examination than it gets here.

—ANDREW J. BACEVICH

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF IRELAND.

Edited by Brian Lalor. Yale Univ. Press. 1218 pp. \$65

The reference book sector of the publishing world has been hit especially hard by the advent of the electronic age. Encyclopedias, once available through a variety of channels, including the storied door-to-door salesmen, now struggle against cheaper, less bulky sources of information—everything from inexpensive CD-ROMs to Google searches.

But encyclopedias have hung on, and some, such as Yale University Press's monumental *Encyclopedia of the City of New York* (1995), have met with acclaim and success. Many readers, it seems, mistrust the newer platforms and still look to print for authoritative information. In size, shape, and feel, not to mention Yale's imprint (on the U.S. edition), *The Encyclopedia of Ireland* evokes its New York predecessor.

Befitting a book on the Emerald Isle, this volume includes much lavish color, set within a superbly designed grid of type and illustrations. Brian Lalor, the author of several books about Ireland, has recruited a first-rate cast of writers and scholars to, as he puts it, "open a door into the Irish version of [the] collective unattainable past" and "celebrate the gift to the culture of the world of a vibrant and irrepressible people." Established authorities such as Harry White, Fintan Vallely, George O'Brien, Eamonn Wall, and William H. A. Williams are among "almost a thousand people" who helped create the book. (Several important voices, particularly on Irish-American matters, are, however, noticeably absent, including Charles Fanning, Kerby Miller, and Timothy Meagher.) The book's 5,000 or so entries include a host of excellent miniessays, but none are so engaging as those by the Dublin traditional singer Frank Harte, who

reveals himself to be a master of short, vivid narratives. His entries on the Invincibles and the "Rebellion of 1798 in song," among others, are gems.

The book has an agenda, or perhaps I should call it an editorial slant, which isn't surprising in such a potentially influential project. The subcutaneous message seems to be: "We are a modern nation with a rich tradition." The sensibility behind the encyclopedia proposes an Ireland not of "40 shades of green" and nostalgic romanticism, but of the European Union and the "Celtic Tiger." The most striking instance of this occurs alongside the entry on "development aid," where a half-page is devoted to a photograph of three African beneficiaries of a community development project in Zimbabwe partly funded by the Irish government. Including this in a book on Ireland seems an extravagance.

Indeed, the criteria for inclusion aren't always clear. There is no entry on Kevin Barry, a famous early-20th-century boy rebel, for example, or on Nuala O'Faolain, a contemporary feminist novelist and journalist; yet "Australian politician" Peter Lalor (an ancestor of the editor?) is included. The book seems to stick to native-born Irish people for the most part, but not always: Guglielmo Marconi makes it in on slim pretenses (near Dublin, he transmitted "the first live wireless report on a sports event"). The 700 or so illustrations are often wonderful, yet few are given so much as an approximate date. Of the thousands of beautiful tunes and songs in the Irish tradition, why single out "The Mason's Apron" and "My Lagan Love" for entries? Why is the great traditional singer, known throughout the Irish diaspora as Joe Heaney, listed under the Irish spelling of his name only (Seosamh Ó hÉanaí)? Errors of fact, perilous in a reference book, crop up here and there, as in William Butler Yeats's death year being off by a decade.

Any book of this magnitude will have its quirks and flaws, and readers should be forgiving. In the end, *The Encyclopedia of Ireland* offers a great bounty of entertaining information and knowledge.

—TERENCE WINCH

ARTS & LETTERS

EVERYTHING WAS POSSIBLE: The Birth of the Musical Follies.

By Ted Chapin. Knopf. 331 pp. \$30

A show on the scale of the original 1971 production of *Follies*—with a cast of 50, plus 27 musicians (and no computers) in the orchestra pit, a monumental set, and 140 costumes—would have little chance of making it to Broadway today. The financial risk would be too great. Of course, *Follies* was too grand for 1971 as well: It closed after 522 performances (not a bad run under ordinary circumstances) without recouping a penny for investors. The show did win seven Tony awards—for its score (Stephen Sondheim), direction (Harold Prince and Michael Bennett), choreography (Bennett again), set (Boris Aronson), costumes (Florence Klotz), and lighting (Tharon Musser) and for one of its female stars (Alexis Smith)—though not the Tony for best musical, which went to *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Hum anything from that lately? Once *Follies* was gone, it became the stuff of legend.

Ted Chapin, president of the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization, has written a

wonderfully detailed book about the progress of *Follies* from its prelegendary beginnings to opening night. During the three months of rehearsals and previews, he was the company's unpaid gofer (elevated to "production assistant" in the *Playbill* credits), and he took notes. A Connecticut College undergraduate at the time, he got course credit for his *Follies* experience.

What's *Follies* about? Mortality, unhappiness, delusion, resentment, the doomed, irresistible promises we make to one another ("Love will see us through till something better comes along"), and, oh yes, the dazzling distractions of the American musical theater. The time is the present (1971), the setting a Broadway theater that's being torn down to make way for a parking lot. Between the two world wars, the theater was home to extravagant follies shows, and a group of individuals who once appeared in them, and who haven't seen one another since, gather on the stage of the partially demolished theater for a farewell party. The characters' younger selves walk among them, like ghosts, and sing and dance far more nimbly than the



Al Hirschfeld captures *Follies*' opening night on Broadway, in April 1971.

Current Books

older folk. Two unhappily married couples who are the focus of the show suffer a kind of collective nervous breakdown in a concluding production number of Ziegfeld-like splendor. At the end, the whole cast faces the dawn through the shattered back wall of the theater.

What a lot of mopey, rainy-day stuff, and thanks largely to Sondheim's virtuoso score, how exhilarating.

In telling the story of this one show so precisely, Chapin writes a shadow history of every Broadway show that ever had a difficult birth and pulled itself together. What seems now all of a piece was once just a lot of pieces, and he lets you watch as they're put together, first one way and then another—songs added and dropped, lyrics altered, dances adjusted, dialogue introduced one day and excised the next, costumes sewn, fitted, and shredded. He records the actors' daily bouts of generosity, jealousy, insecurity, and fear. He notices when they blow a line, flub a lyric, or miss a dance step, all of which happen surprisingly often. As the matter-of-fact details accumulate, you're reminded just how *live* live theater is, and how subject to human frailty: a crapshoot behind a velvet curtain.

Follies may be the smartest Broadway musical ever—not the fleetest or wittiest or funniest, surely, or the most moving, if only because there's *Carousel*, but the one in which the layers of emotional resonance are built with so much intelligence. If the show had an epigraph, it would be from A. E. Housman: "With rue my heart is laden." But *Follies* is shrewd enough to wear its rue with a difference: sequins.

—JAMES M. MORRIS

TILT:

A Skewed History of the Tower of Pisa.

By Nicholas Shrady. Simon & Schuster. 161 pp. \$21.95

Pisa's problematic bell tower, the final component of a complex of religious buildings undertaken to celebrate the triumph of Christianity over Islam in general and the victory of Pisan forces over the Saracens in particular, began leaning soon after construction

began in 1172. Six years later, when the tower was three stories high, work on it halted—nobody knows exactly why—and didn't restart for a century. Between 1272 and 1278, the uppermost four stories were added, after which construction was once again suspended. In 1370, the tower was finally completed with the addition of the belfry.

Once the tower reached its intended height of 180 feet, the political fortunes of Pisa began to head in the opposite direction. After a century of sieges, the city surrendered to Florentine forces in 1509. It would have been symbolically logical for the tower to collapse then, but this was not to be. Instead, it went on to become the ideal setting for young professor Galileo Galilei's experiments with falling objects, a story as appealing as it is unfounded.

In the 19th century, clever but desperate marketers concocted a different fiction about the tower in order to invert potential embarrassment. They maintained that the lean was intentional. The tower-de-force, so to speak, standing firmly on the brink of disaster, was meant to reflect Pisan survival and past glory.

In his enjoyable account of the creation and survival of the tower, Nicholas Shrady, the author of *Sacred Roads: Adventures from the Pilgrimage Trail* (1999), rescues one of the world's most familiar architectural oddities from the bin of one-liners. He reconnects the tower with the curious collection of people and events caught in the pull of its off-kilter orbit. His pleasant, clear, and often amusing tale is weakened, however, by somewhat stingy illustrations and by all-too-gimmicky packaging. Instead of the usual rectangle, the book has a slanted parallelogram shape intended to evoke the tower—as if the publisher lost faith in the content and felt the need to jazz it up.

—DAVID MACAULAY

PUSHKIN:

A Biography.

By T. J. Binyon. Knopf. 727 pp. \$35

In the view of his friend Nikolai Gogol, the poet Aleksandr Sergeyevich Pushkin (1799–1837) was "an extraordinary and perhaps unique manifestation of the Russian spirit." And not only that: Gogol believed

that Pushkin was “the Russian man in his ultimate development, as he, perhaps, will be in 200 years.” This isn’t necessarily a fate to be wished upon anyone, though, for as T. J. Binyon’s magnificent biography makes plain, the apparently manic-depressive, womanizing, jealous, attention-deficient Pushkin chose, or had forced upon him, the perfection of his work over the perfection of his life. The familiar story—youthful rebelliousness, exile, negotiations with tsarist power, marriage to Russia’s greatest beauty, growing financial and emotional pressures, and the fatal duel with a young man who had tried to woo his wife—is presented here with such verve and careful interlacing of the narrative strands that we seem to be hearing it for the first time.

Binyon, a writer and critic of crime novels as well as a Slavic scholar, uses his investigative skills to sift and synthesize a huge amount of material. The result is a glorious and entertaining tour through the history and culture of Russia’s golden age, a balanced and detailed description of Pushkin and his times, a reliable Who’s Who of his friends and foes, and a psychologically convincing portrayal of the man himself. In all these respects, this is the best biography of the poet yet published in any language.

Unfortunately, though, it neglects the poetry. Setting out “to free the complex and interesting figure of Pushkin the man from the heroic simplicity of Pushkin the myth,” Binyon largely avoids literary analysis, which he deems the business of critics rather than biographers. This decision seems a mistake. The art could illuminate some of the dark corners of the life, given Pushkin’s habit of encoding or masking his own experiences in his works. And simply on their own terms, those works, especially the verse novel *Eugene Onegin* (1823–31)—which one critic has termed an “encyclopedia of Russia”—deserve more detailed analysis than they receive here.

Pushkin himself cautioned against letting the artist’s life eclipse the art. In a letter to a friend and fellow poet in 1825, he wrote: “Why do you regret the loss of Byron’s notes? Thank God they are lost. . . . We know Byron well enough. We have

seen him on the throne of glory; we have seen him in the torments of his great soul. . . . Why should you want to see him on a chamber pot? The crowd greedily reads confessions, memoirs, etc., because in its baseness it rejoices at the abasement of the high, at the weaknesses of the strong. It is in rapture at the disclosure of anything loathsome. ‘He is small like us; he is loathsome like us!’ You are lying, you scoundrels: He’s small and he’s loathsome, but not the way you are—differently.”

Despite its shortcomings, this thickly descriptive and beautifully written book is one of the outstanding literary biographies of recent years. It comes trailing clouds of glorious reviews from Britain, where it won the Samuel Johnson Whitbread Award for the best nonfiction book of 2002. And—perhaps the greatest praise one can offer—it richly deserves to be translated into Russian.

—ANDREW REYNOLDS

AN OPEN BOOK:

Coming of Age in the Heartland.

By Michael Dirda. Norton. 335 pp.
\$24.95

**SO MANY BOOKS,
SO LITTLE TIME:**

A Year of Passionate Reading.

By Sara Nelson. Putnam.
242 pp. \$22.95

One person’s obsessive-compulsive disorder is another’s badge of honor. The pleasures of list making surely account in part for the perennial “best of” magazine features: best movies, books, restaurants, and, in an effort to jazz up the phenomenon, more obscure categories such as best public place to have sex and best use of tripe. These lists are popular, perhaps because they require no engagement—they’re meant to be skimmed. So what to make of books that build narratives around lists?

In *An Open Book*, Michael Dirda, Pulitzer Prize-winning critic of *The Washington Post*, remembers the books of his childhood in Lorain, Ohio, in the 1950s and ’60s. We follow him from his primary-school readers to *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *The*

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Secret of Skeleton Island, Henry Huggins, *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *Candy*. The last, a racy 1960s take on *Candide*, he hid in a bathroom vent.

Dirda's subtitle, *Coming of Age in the Heartland*, suggests that his experience is, at least in part, representative of the Midwest of that era. His father works at a steel mill, his mother is a homemaker, and he bikes around a town where the different races have little interaction. The one anomaly is young Dirda's reading, which seems to feed his out-sized adolescent ego as much as his intellect. An appendix lists some 50 of "the more ambitious works" he read by age 16, ranging from *The Iliad* to *The Catcher in the Rye*. The list, he admits, "does seem at least a little pretentious."

In *So Many Books, So Little Time*, Sara Nelson, a book reviewer and columnist for *The New York Observer*, sets out to read a book a week during 2002 while keeping a diary about the experience. Most of her

choices have some immediate connection to her own life and family. She mines Katharine Graham's *Personal History* for insights into her mother's generation, ponders *Anna Karenina* from the vantage point of a stable marriage, and seeks solace for her son's disastrous Little League record in *The Way Home*, Henry Dunow's account of coaching his son's ball team. Nelson concludes with three lists: what she planned to read during the year, what she did read, and what she now intends to read.

Why would readers want to consult lists of the sort Nelson and Dirda provide? Knowing what Charles Dickens read between installments of his serials or what William Faulkner read as a boy might tell us something, but book reviewers' tastes are, by definition, revealed in their reviews. The effect of Dirda's and Nelson's commentaries may simply be to encourage people to reflect on their own reading histories. The trouble with that, of course, is the likelihood of more list books.

—ANGELA STARITA

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

BLACK EARTH: *A Journey through Russia after the Fall.*

By Andrew Meier. Norton.
511 pp. \$28.95

"Can a country survive without a conscience?" asks the father of a Russian conscript killed in Chechnya after corrupt Russian commanders let Chechen rebels pass through their lines. That question drives journalist Andrew Meier's dark travelogue through post-Soviet Russia. Like some latter-day Diogenes transplanted to the steppes, Meier journeys through Russia and finds little cause for hope. "In Moscow I was afraid every day," he writes. St. Petersburg was awash in crime, drug addiction, and HIV/AIDS. Vladivostok was "the corrupt heart of the far eastern frontier." Norilsk was "one of Russia's most contaminated cities." And in northern Sakhalin, "life was not only more remote but darkened, as if the clouds had blocked the sun, by the pall of decay and uncertainty."

At the heart of this search for Russia's conscience is an examination of Moscow's brutal, decade-long effort to crush resistance in the breakaway republic of Chechnya. Meier focuses in harrowing detail on a massacre in the village of Aldy on February 5, 2000, when Russian soldiers murdered 60 civilians, and then tracks the failure to punish the killers despite ample evidence. Try as he might to come up with a reason for the killings, Meier admits that "a year later no answer seemed more credible than any other." But his obstinate reporting still serves a larger purpose. Though many observers—not least the U.S. government—now prefer to see Russia's harsh measures in Chechnya through the prism of the war on terror, Meier reminds us of the barbarism and its corrosive impact even on Russians far from the carnage.

Vivid prose snapshots of Russians are the greatest strength of *Black Earth*. Among the most notorious figures Meier encounters are Norilsk's mineral magnate (whose aggressive

philanthropy recently won him an appointment to the board of New York's Guggenheim Museum), the chamomile-tea drinking leader of St. Petersburg's biggest crime syndicate, and the cosmonaut who was sitting at the controls of the *Mir* space station when a docking accident almost caused it to blow up. More telling, perhaps, are those figures who otherwise would remain anonymous: the military doctor who helped Russian families identify soldiers killed in Chechnya, the "gentle cop with a passion for history" in Sakhalin, the former labor camp prisoners and workers at Norilsk's giant metals complex who refuse to leave a dying city and landscape. For all the sadness of some of the stories, Meier's fresh prose, his eye for history, and his obvious affection for the country keep the reader from sinking into a slough of despond.

Where Meier falls down is in his attempt to answer the plaintive question about a nation without a conscience. Russians gained remarkable freedoms during the 1990s, but the collapse of the state also meant that they became largely "free" of such public goods as law, order, regulation, and basic civic services. Into the vacuum stepped corrupt politicians, criminals, would-be oligarchs, foreign carpetbaggers, and homegrown hucksters. Why were they able to ride roughshod over a people liberated at last from totalitarianism? Meier's answer: because contemporary Russia has yet to develop any sense of accountability. "In Russia," he writes, "no attempt on a social scale has been made to examine the totalitarian past, to learn not simply how the Soviet state functioned but how Russians themselves formed that state, to concede the crimes of the past."

But Meier never really explains why no such attempt has been made, other than to comment that a nation "economically, socially, and ideologically adrift" has other priorities. This circular reasoning—Russia is adrift because it lacks accountability, and it lacks accountability because it is adrift—might appeal to a people with such a strong fatalistic streak. But it does little to explain when and how Russians may finally be delivered from their suffering.

—JAMES GIBNEY

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Suzanne Napper,
Business Director

**IN THE GHOST COUNTRY:
*A Lifetime Spent on the Edge.***

By Peter Hillary and John E. Elder. Free Press. 341 pp. \$26

In 1998, Peter Hillary and two fellow adventurers set out to duplicate Robert Falcon Scott's legendary attempt to travel on foot from McMurdo Sound to the South Pole and back again. Scott reached the pole (only to discover that Roald Amundsen had beaten him to it) but died on the way back. Hillary and his team didn't manage the Antarctic roundtrip either, though instead of death on the ice, their expedition ended with an airlift from the pole and blizzards of recriminations.

Part travel account and part memoir, *In the Ghost Country* offers a fascinating look at the life of a modern-day adventurer who has done everything from exploring both poles to boating up the Ganges. Yet times have changed since Hillary's famous father and his Sherpa companion became the first men to scale Everest. With a satellite phone company cosponsoring the Antarctic expedition, the three men make frequent calls home and submit to endless media interviews from the ice.

Hillary's account of the expedition is a case study of group dynamics gone horribly

wrong. Even before the team leaves for Antarctica, they're having enough problems to make them consider seeing a counselor. Their decision to go ahead with the trip, Hillary writes, is akin to a couple's decision to have a baby in hopes of bolstering a shaky marriage. It proves disastrous. In Hillary's telling, the expedition's motto shifts from Alfred Tennyson's "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" to Jean Paul Sartre's "Hell is other people."

Back home in New Zealand, relations turn even icier. Team member Eric Philips's *IceTrek: The Bitter Journey to the South Pole* (2000) depicts Hillary as mentally and physically unfit and blames him for the expedition's failure. In this counterattack, Hillary is the noble aristocrat, Philips the power-mad monster, and Jon Muir the caveman-type fond of throw rugs made from feral cats. Hillary goes out of his way to criticize his companions' failings—inadequate training, a last-minute decision to jettison 10 days' worth of food, a refusal to dress warmly enough to avoid frostbite—while offering excuses for his own.

After his companions stop talking to him, Hillary passes the time with ghosts. As he trudges through the whiteness, he chats with friends who died on climbing expeditions and with his mother, killed along with his sister in



An ice shelf on the Antarctic coast.

a Himalayan plane crash. The prose style—the book alternates between Australian journalist John Elder’s narrative and bold-faced interjections from Hillary, sometimes as brief as a word or two—mirrors the trip’s hallucinatory qualities. Elder’s writing is especially florid: Being inside the tent during a storm is invariably, and inexplicably, compared to being in

the belly of a rabid dog.

Toward the end of what he calls the loneliest trip of his life, Hillary asks his companions if he might occasionally walk alongside them. They say no, and he bursts into tears. It’s as if Antarctica were nothing more than junior high on ice.

—REBECCA A. CLAY

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Andrew J. Bacevich is a professor of international relations at Boston University and the author of *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (2002). **Alexander Chee**, the author of the novel *Edinburgh* (2001), teaches creative writing at Wesleyan University. **Rebecca A. Clay**, a writer in Washington, D.C., has traveled to each of the seven continents. **James Gibney** is executive editor of *Foreign Policy*. **David Macaulay**, the author of *Cathedral: The Story of Its Construction* (1973), *The Way Things Work* (1988), *Building Big* (2000), and the newly published *Mosque*, is writing a book about the building of the human body. **Harry McPherson**, the author of *A Political Education* (1972), is a lawyer practicing in Washington, D.C. **James M. Morris** is a senior editor of *The Wilson Quarterly*. **Andrew Reynolds**, a professor of Slavic languages at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has translated the contemporary Russian writer Victor Erofeev’s story collection *Life with an Idiot*, which will be published later this year. **Charles Seife**, the author of *Zero: The Biography of a Dangerous Idea* (1999) and the newly published *Alpha and Omega: The Search for the Beginning and End of the Universe*, writes for *Science* magazine. **Angela Starita**, a freelance writer who lives in Brooklyn, has written for *The Village Voice*, *The New York Times*, and *The Believer*. **Terence Winch**, the son of Irish immigrants, is the author of a book of short stories, three books of poems, and a book of nonfiction stories, *That Special Place: New World Irish Stories*, which will be published shortly.

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PORTRAIT: George F. Kennan



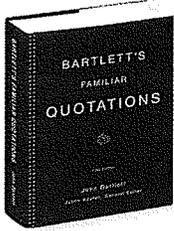
George F. Kennan, historian, diplomat, and father of the Cold War policy of containment, marks his 100th birthday in February. Speaking several years ago at the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, which he cofounded at the Wilson Center (and named for a forebear who explored Russia), Ambassador Kennan said this: “The Russians are very impressed when somebody abroad shows a knowledge of their culture. Real scholarship has almost a religious quality to it. It’s a dedication. You have to love it, and you have to put other things aside when you do it. If the scholar does his job, does it honestly, imaginatively, but recognizing that his dedication is to the truth—the truth not just in the factual dimension but also in the intuitive and analytical dimension—if he does this, he is going to be useful to people beyond himself and beyond his colleagues. If he loses that scholarly integrity, he is going to lose that usefulness.”

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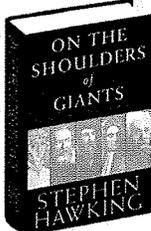
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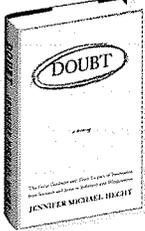
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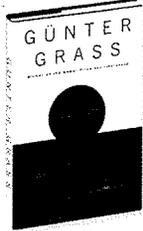
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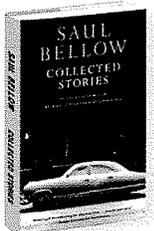
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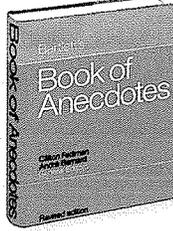
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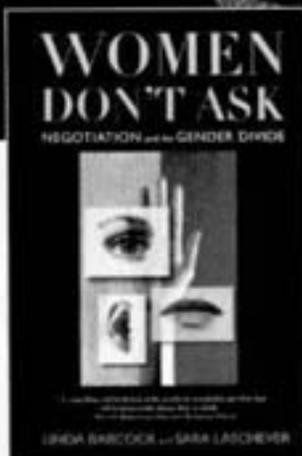
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Open for Thought

Photo by Meghan Barry



Women Don't Ask

Negotiation and the Gender Divide

Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever

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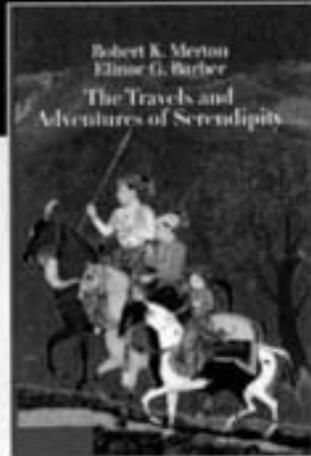
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