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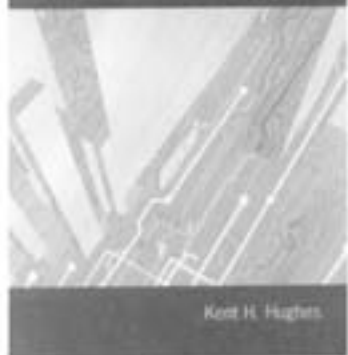
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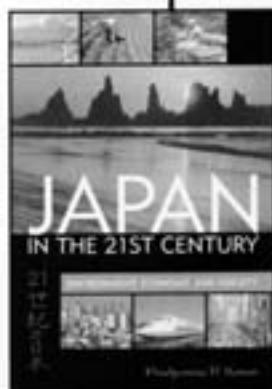
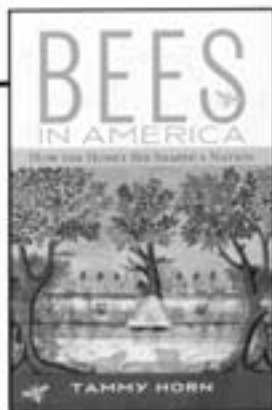
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Editor's Comment

Big media are on our cover, but small media are on my mind, and in particular a little magazine called *The Public Interest*, which recently announced that it is ceasing publication after 40 years. It's not just that I owe a great debt to its longtime editors, Irving Kristol and Nathan Glazer, for having once offered a job to an unemployed college graduate who, out of idle curiosity, wandered into the magazine's office and asked to buy a copy. A larger reason for thinking of the magazine has to do with what it represented.

The Public Interest will go down in history as the small journal (it never had more than 10,000 subscribers) that incubated much of the important neoconservative thinking on domestic affairs. But neoconservative—an epithet to many—never struck me as a satisfactory description of the magazine's character. Fundamentally, *The Public Interest* embodied the liberal idea. In pursuing ideas that were the opposite of fashionable, it upheld the traditions of liberal skepticism and curiosity. In an atmosphere thick with polemics and ad hominem attacks, the magazine was free of both. And in a world where combatants of all persuasions readily accepted passion as a substitute for reason, Kristol and Glazer did not. They insisted on intellectual rigor, clarity, high seriousness, and, above all, civility.

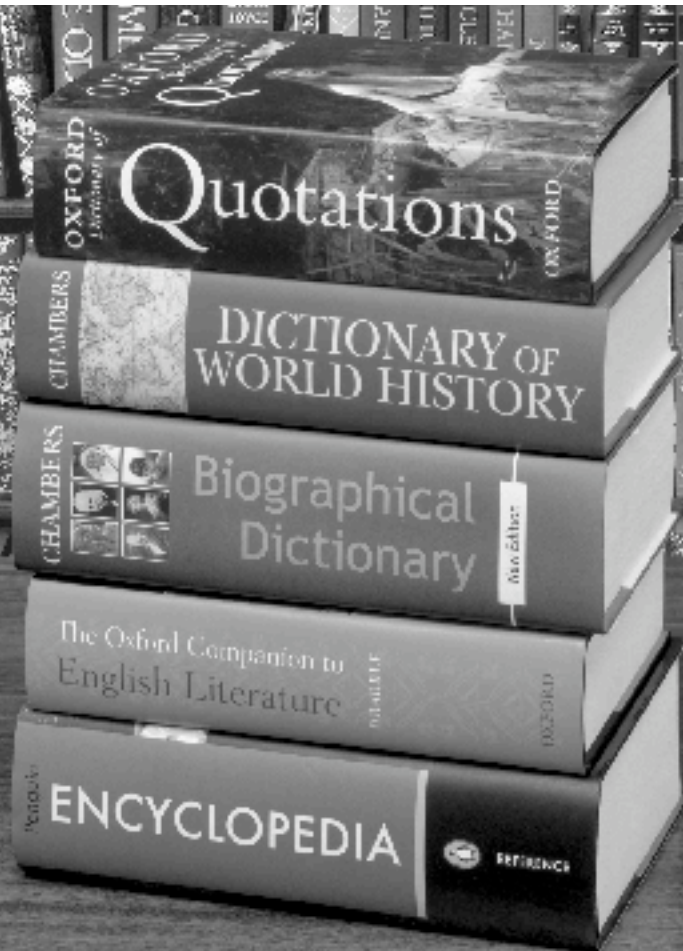
Those are the principles we strive to uphold today at the *WQ* in embracing all sides of debate, a commitment that's most obvious in our Periodical Observer section, with its survey of articles from smaller magazines, including those on the left, on the right, or simply "out there." Though the major news media are indispensable to sustaining America's national conversation about the issues of the day, it's the small media that have nurtured the unconventional—or merely unpopular—ideas that ultimately give that conversation its variety and vigor. The Web, for all its marvels, hasn't yet provided a home for the kind of focused and sustained dialogue that smaller magazines create. Theirs is a great tradition that deserves our salute and needs our support.

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Divided on World War IV

Anyone seeking a quarrel with Andrew Bacevich's very readable brief history ["The Real World War IV," *WQ*, Winter '05] of America's inconsistent, often incoherent foreign policy since 1980, especially in the greater Middle East, will find it tough going. If there are any factual errors in his narrative, they were not apparent to me. It will be almost as difficult to dispute the assertions he makes regarding those facts and the conclusions he draws from them.

His central assertion is that the United States has by and large indulged an obsession with military power and has tended to rely on it to solve problems as a first rather than a last resort. This preoccupation with military force, Bacevich says, has consistently blinded us to the nuances of the Middle East—its complex history, cultures, and politics, and its heated mixture of religion and oil—and has caused us to neglect the use of economic, political, or diplomatic powers when they might have yielded better results.

Bacevich's thesis directly confronts the trendy neoconservative argument that 9/11 signaled the beginning of World War IV, thus justifying, yet again, a one-dimensional military solution to the problems presented by a multi-dimensional world. "Few in power," Bacevich writes, "have openly considered whether valuing military power for its own sake or cultivating permanent global military superiority might be at odds with American principles." As an advocate for the view that America's constitutional principles represent our "fourth power," I could not have put it better myself.

Though Bacevich does not say so directly, I believe he would agree that a time will come when those who wish to turn the American republic into an imperial power will possibly do serious, even irreparable, damage to our nation.

Gary Hart
Kittredge, Colo.

I experienced a feeling of futility reading Andrew Bacevich's essay. His criticism of neoconservatives' fatuous strategizing and far-fetched historical analogies was refreshing. But he's into the paleocon thing, including its generous borrowings from leftist self-hatred and academic moralizing. Most Persian Gulf oil has never been shipped to the United States. After lecturing Americans on the evils of oil, is he prepared to shake a finger at Europeans, Japanese, Indians, and Chinese?

This is not really our war at all. Jihadism is a civil war within the Arab and Muslim worlds. Modernity, in a perverted form, was introduced in the Middle East as an unexpected and unwelcome consequence of the explosion of oil revenue in the 1960s and '70s. Without major changes, traditional Islam, especially in its tribal form, is a fragile plant that cannot survive a prolonged encounter with the dynamism and materialism of modern society. Arabs and Muslims know this, and jihadism is the violent fringe of this reaction. The jihadists' main targets are local: corrupt governments; religious laxity; uppity non-Muslim, non-Sunni, and non-Arab minorities; and foreign influence. The United States is a target because it supports or is identified with these local targets.

Americans get into serious trouble in the Arab/Muslim world only when they take sides in intra-Arab/intra-Muslim conflicts, or are perceived to do so. Everything else—oil, Israel, fighting the Cold War—is irrelevant. The Beirut episode—U.S. Marines sent to rescue Palestinians from Phalangists and Israelis—illustrates this reality. The Mogadishu episode exemplifies it even better, in perfect miniature, without complications from oil or Israel.

The expectation that the United States could solve the Middle East's problems while preserving the region's political structure is the

real source of our agony, twisting, as it does, our original commitment to protect the region from *external* (German, then Soviet) aggression. The United States should retreat to the periphery of the Arab world, where it was in the 1950s and '60s, or pull back even farther. When Arabs can take a less prejudiced look at modernity, they will probably opt for it. But it has to be a real choice, like Turkey's 84 years ago, not the unwanted stepchild of a modern, oily Midas.

Dallas C. Kennedy
Natick, Mass.

Andrew Bacevich accurately characterizes the present conflict between the United States and the extreme wing of Islamist fundamentalism as worldwide in scope. However, he then suggests that the U.S. government uses that label as an excuse for a militaristic foreign policy, building his case on a number of premises open to dispute. Furthermore, while the historical facts he provides are accurate, he slants his argument through omissions. His conclusion seems to be that,

starting with President Jimmy Carter's declaration that we would prevent monopolistic local control of Middle Eastern oil, the United States has been entirely responsible for stimulating the current conflict in which it now finds itself.

The first premise is that there was an alternative path to the future well-being of our population without continuous striving to improve the standard of living. But our population continues to grow: When Carter declared his doctrine, it was just under 227 million; by 2020, it is projected to reach more than 320 million. How could we deal with persistent social ills such as poverty and inadequate medical care without striving to increase the general standard of living?

Second, Bacevich implies that our drive to maintain the flow of Middle Eastern oil is solely for our own benefit. That is true only if one includes in our benefit the well-being of our allies and other friendly nations. In 1980, we did depend heavily on imported oil, but most of it was not from the Middle East.

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FROM THE CENTER

How do you measure an institution's impact? In talking to outside audiences about the Wilson Center, I often find myself dwelling on the events that take place within our walls. But if one is to get at the broader value of our institution, this perspective must be turned inside out. Just as the WQ's impact is multiplied as its pages are read, reflected upon, debated, and responded to, so too is the Wilson Center's impact magnified by the influence our scholars, programs, and publications have on the dialogue beyond our walls.

Publications are an easy starting point. The Center's visiting fellows and staff have worked on more than 1,500 books. Just a little over a year ago, three of those volumes turned up among *The Economist's* "books of the year"—Andrew Meier's *Black Earth: A Journey through Russia after the Fall*; Hermann Gilio-mee's *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*; and William Taubman's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*. Each book successfully shifted perceptions of three very different, and controversial, subjects. Taken together, they are a small yet telling sample of the diverse research welcomed by the Wilson Center, and a demonstration of how projects can take flight when authors are afforded time and academic freedom.

Much of the work done at the Center takes forms that go beyond the confines of a book. An example is our Latin American Program's Transitions from Authoritarian Rule project, started 25 years ago to look at shifts toward democracy in Eastern Europe and Latin America. It was, in the words of Abraham Lowenthal, one of the project's cofounders, "thoughtful wishing": At the time, none of the countries within the project's mandate were full democracies, but the scholars both presupposed and influenced the emerging democracy movements and how those movements were understood. One of the books produced by the project became the most cited work of social science in English for a number of years, and project cofounder Fernando Henrique Cardoso went on to become president of Brazil.

Many of our scholars move on to high gov-

ernment service. For instance, our Kennan Institute—initiated by the late, great George F. Kennan—has hosted many Russians who later rose to prominent positions, including Boris Yeltsin's national security adviser, his adviser on nationalities issues, and Russian ambassadors to the United States and the United Kingdom. At the Center, we give such international figures the opportunity to become acquainted with people from around the world and from many disciplines, while they also learn about Washington and the United States.

The Center's influence can be seen as well in the work being done with Iraqi women by our Middle East Program and Conflict Prevention Project. For the last two years,

these Center units have hosted or co-hosted numerous meetings and workshops—in locations from Washington to Amman to

Beirut—seeking to highlight the role of women in Iraq, while helping women participate in the political process.

The results have been tangible. Of the six women who served as cabinet ministers in the first post-Saddam Iraqi government, four participated in these workshops; four other participants were recently elected to parliament. These small steps forward are essential elements in the pursuit of more democratic and equitable societies—by Iraqis and other peoples around the globe. In Iraq, as in other conflict zones, the focus is often on top policymakers and large trends; but it is the work of many individuals and organizations, often out of sight, that can build a foundation for progress.

There is no way to measure how the Center influences everyone who visits our website, stops by our meetings, watches or listens to a *dialogue* program, takes a class with one of our former scholars, or subscribes to the WQ. What we can do is welcome all opinions, encourage diverse research, foster open discussion, and push ideas into the public realm. From that point, new ideas can take flight and enhance dialogue—whether in a university, or a parliament, or even your dining room.

Lee H. Hamilton
Director



**Woodrow Wilson
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Continued from page 5

Western Europe and Japan depended much more heavily on those supplies.

Third, Bacevich implicitly suggests that a militaristic foreign policy is somehow inappropriate. He knows, of course, that diplomacy without the potential for military action can have no force. The issue, then, is not militarism per se, but when to use military force.

He devotes almost no attention to the appropriateness of our response to the direct attack on the United States in September 2001. If the Clinton administration had done in Afghanistan, in response to the African embassy bombings, what was done after 9/11, then 9/11 likely would not have happened. Unfortunately, our country would probably not have supported such a response without an event as dramatic as 9/11. Our venture into Iraq may well prove to be an error driven in part by hubris, but it will be hard to tell the majority of Iraqis now that they would have been better off under Saddam Hussein, and the final chapter on our intervention remains to be written.

Finally, while U.S. support of Israel is indeed a strong irritant in relations with the Arab countries, it is inappropriate to let that observation stand alone, without pointing out that the United Nations created the state of Israel, and that Arab nations' failure to accept that UN action is a key cause of the conflict.

While it may look to many in the Islamic world as if the United States is trying to initiate a new colonial age there, our actions can also be viewed as an embodiment of the advice that the best defense of our vital interests and those of our allies requires a good offense, and that, unpopular as any single action may be, the sum of the actions benefits the entire Western world. A better-balanced article would have examined both interpretations of the complex events in the evolution of the current conflict.

*S. J. Deitchman
Chevy Chase, Md.*

Andrew Bacevich writes, "A Middle East pacified, brought into compliance with American ideological norms, and policed by American soldiers could be counted on to produce plentiful supplies of oil and to accept the presence of a Jewish state in its midst. In trans-

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forming Iraq,' one senior Bush administration official confidently predicted, 'we will take a significant step in the direction of the longer-term need to transform the region as a whole.'"

In the age of Google, it's harder to get away with using quotes out of context. The excerpt above comes from an October 2002 lecture by presidential special assistant Zalmay Khalilzad. In context, it's clear that those "American ideological norms" to which Bacevich dismissively refers are democracy and human rights. The lecture says nothing about oil or Israel.

Will a democratic Iraq toe the American line? Probably about as well as those other democracies established by the American military: France and Germany.

*Taras Wolansky
Kerhonkson, N.Y.*

Undeniably, the United States made tactical and strategic errors in the Middle East over many administrations as we supported corrupt regimes and gluttonously consumed imported oil. But it is as easy to detail these errors retrospectively as it is to determine at autopsy what treatments *might* have optimized the care of a patient. What if President Jimmy Carter had decided not to support the mujahideen in Afghanistan? Soviet success there might have postponed indefinitely the freedom now enjoyed in Eastern Europe by delaying the collapse of the Soviet economy. And what if the United States had failed to restore Kuwaiti sovereignty in 1991? And what price would have been paid, in terms of blood, treasure, and credibility, if the first Bush administration had reneged on its promise to the Arab world and invaded Baghdad?

There is a list of justifiable reasons for the invasion of Iraq: ending decades of tyranny and genocide, removing a threat to regional stability, completing a continually thwarted search for weapons of mass destruction, propping up the credibility of United

Nations resolutions, and promoting democracy in the region. But instead of acknowledging them, many who oppose the Iraq War view the conflict through the lens of self-interest. Veto-wielding members of the UN Security Council, such as France and Russia, had nefarious political and financial ties to Saddam Hussein for decades. Now they stand with arms folded in hope that Iraq will prove a quagmire that vindicates their inaction. But what would the conflict look like today had Europe fully supported the freeing of Iraq? Conversely, what would the long-term price have been of leaving Saddam Hussein in power indefinitely, with a probable succession by his sinister heirs, Uday and Qusay?

*Stephen Futterer
Chicago, Ill.*

Contrary to the underlying contention of Andrew Bacevich's essay, the United States has never been dependent on Middle Eastern oil. During World War II, domestic oil production was sufficient for both military and domestic needs. After 1946, the technology existed to generate electric power in sufficient quantities to ensure that home electricity would not need to be metered and aluminum could replace steel and plastics; oil would be necessary only for making pantyhose and lubricating ball bearings. A more reasonable argument would be that American lives and money are being deployed not to defend sources of cheap Arab oil, but to defend the philosophy of those who oppose fast atomic breeder reactors.

*John D. Griffith
Houston, Texas*

Two Cents on the Dollar

In "The Dollar's Day of Reckoning" [WQ, Winter '05], Robert Z. Aliber makes the important point that the trade deficit and the capital surplus are one and the same. Capital flows determine trade flows as much as the converse. When one views trade from the perspective of capital flows, several generally accepted conclusions are turned upside down. The United States, far from being a profligate overspender running up trade deficits (an idea popularized by investors Warren Buffet and Pete Peterson), is actually a country with capital lined up on its borders trying to get in. Growth countries, like

growth companies, don't lend money; they borrow it.

The Japanese case is crystal clear. With the Nikkei falling from 38,900 in December 1989 to today's level of 11,300, the Japanese have experienced a compound nominal rate of return of *minus* eight percent per year for 15 years. Over that same period, the United States has had a positive rate of return of some eight percent per year. Japan also has had huge trade surpluses as capital has escaped from the country. A machine in Japan with a negative yield would, if shipped to the United States, have a positive yield. Due to capital flows, shipping the machine to the United States from Japan is a Japanese export/trade surplus and a U.S. import/trade deficit. It's elementary. Aliber's got this one right.

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But then he goes on to make the United States' change in status from creditor to debtor a shift worthy of panic. Who cares if the United States now owes foreign creditors nearly \$3 trillion? What's the difference if I am in debt to a Nisei or Sansei living in San Francisco or to an ethnic Japanese from Hokkaido?

In addition, the money isn't owed by "the United States" but by private entities. Why the government needs to get involved is not at all clear. Of the total of U.S.-owned assets abroad—\$7.2 trillion as of the end of 2003—our government owns between \$0.2 and \$0.3 trillion. Of foreign-owned assets in the United States—\$9.6 trillion—foreign official assets are about \$1.5 trillion. Big deal!

Aliber's data are also far from definitive. America's net foreign debt should not be compared with gross domestic product but with total U.S. assets, if a comparison is made at all. As a share of total assets, the numbers aren't all that impressive. From 1986, when the United States crossed the line from creditor to debtor, the numbers show an increase in net debt of \$2.4 trillion along with an increase in total assets for U.S. households and nonprofit organizations of \$26.8 trillion. Not so scary now, is it? And that's just the increase. The net debt to foreigners of \$2.4 trillion corresponds to total household net assets of \$42.4 trillion.

But there are problems with the data themselves. The net foreign debt data Aliber uses are "at cost," not at current values. Capital losses, such as the Japanese experienced in their American real estate investments in the early 1990s, are not included in the totals. Nor are capital gains. Putting it all on a "market value" basis wouldn't change the conclusion much. In fact, America's net foreign debt data are far from simple additions of our balances on current account. That trade deficits, then, are viewed as the sole culprit in enlarging America's foreign debt is somewhat surprising. These data are not very probative, to say the least.

If foreigners (and Americans) don't like where their assets are, then they can try to move them. If everyone wanted to exit the United States, then all those years of U.S. trade deficits/capital surpluses would turn into years of trade surpluses. That doesn't seem so terrifying.

But the solution I like most of all is as old as our country. If we owe too much to foreigners,

all we need to do is relax immigration restrictions for those foreigners who own assets in the United States, and then we won't owe that money to foreigners anymore.

Remember that the United States effectively ran trade deficits until 1870. We built our country with foreign capital. What's tragic is that more countries aren't taking advantage of the resources available from the world capital markets. Aliber's focus on the dark side of the global economy is unwarranted, even if our imperfect world does stumble from time to time.

*Arthur B. Laffer
San Diego, Calif.*

Despite Robert Aliber's compelling case as to why the dollar needs to fall further, we can't delude ourselves into thinking that a weaker U.S. currency is the cure-all for a global economy beset with record imbalances. The world needs to come to grips with the unprecedented disparity between those nations with current account deficits (mainly the United States) and those with surpluses (mainly in Asia and, to a lesser extent, Europe).

To be sure, such a lopsided world economy certainly needs a shift in relative prices in order to establish a new and more balanced equilibrium. Currencies are best seen as "relative prices," essentially comparing the fundamentals of one economy with another. With the dollar the dominant relative price in the world today, a depreciation of the greenback is necessary for global rebalancing.

But here's the rub: U.S. imports are currently 52 percent larger than exports. It is inconceivable that America could export its way out of this unprecedented trade gap, especially since the sensitivity of U.S. exports and imports to currency fluctuations has diminished. After all, the dollar fell sharply in the mid-1990s—and the trade deficit only grew.

If a weaker dollar can't do the trick, what can? The answer, in my view, is real interest rates. Given the excesses of domestic demand that lie at the heart of the import explosion, and given the asset-dependent character of U.S. consumption growth, interest rates become all the more critical as an instrument of rebalancing. Higher real interest rates will not only curtail the

Continued on page 12



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Correspondence

Continued from page 10

pace of asset appreciation but will also raise the cost of debt service—thereby exerting twin pressures on the asset-driven portion of domestic demand. Needless to say, the savings-short, overly indebted, and asset-dependent American consumer will feel the impacts of such an adjustment most acutely. But that will put personal saving back on an upward path—precisely what aging American consumers need.

In looking at the history of real U.S. interest rates, there's nothing but upside from current levels. So far, interest rates haven't budged nearly enough to instigate a meaningful rebalancing of a lopsided world. I suspect that the Federal Reserve is about to lead the way in changing that. If the Fed steps up to the plate, and if Asian central banks finally start to diversify their foreign-exchange reserve holdings, then real interest rates across the maturity spec-

trum should move considerably higher.

And that returns us to the issue at hand: global rebalancing. A weaker dollar has not been enough to spark this major readjustment in the world economy. It will take a combination of a weaker dollar *and* higher real interest rates to restore balance to a lopsided world and put the global economy on a more sustainable path. The odds, in my view, are finally tipping in that direction.

*Stephen S. Roach
Chief Economist
Morgan Stanley
New York, N.Y.*

Correction

In the picture on page 117 of the Winter 2005 *WQ*, we misidentified Lord Wodehouse as the novelist P. G. Wodehouse. We regret the error.

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Findings

Fallout

The first atomic bomb exploded over the New Mexico desert 60 years ago, on July 16, 1945. “A few people laughed, a few people cried,” J. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Los Alamos bomb project, later recounted. “Most people were silent. I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad-Gita. . . . ‘Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.’” The young physicist Richard Feynman, however, recalled a cheerier scene. “We jumped up and down, we screamed, we ran around slapping each other on the back, shaking hands, congratulating each other,” Feynman wrote his mother; the letter appears in a collection of his correspondence, *Perfectly Reasonable Deviations from the Beaten Track* (Basic). As for the Bhagavad-Gita line, a new Oppenheimer biography, *American Prometheus* (Knopf), by Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin, provides grounds for a bit of skepticism: “One of Robert’s friends, Abraham Pais, once suggested that the quote sounded like one of Oppie’s ‘priestly exaggerations.’”

For their part, some German scientists initially refused to believe that they’d lost the race to the A-bomb. The Allies were holding 10 German physicists at a country estate in England and secretly taping their conversations. When the BBC announced the Hiroshima bombing, one of the 10, Werner Heisenberg, “decided that it must not actually be a uranium bomb, since he could not come to grips with the possibility that the Americans might have succeeded

where he had failed,” Gerard J. DeGroot writes in *The Bomb: A Life* (Harvard Univ. Press). After the truth sank in, Heisenberg adopted a different argument. “If we had all wanted Germany to win the war,” he said, “we could have succeeded.” Another physicist, Karl Wirtz, suggested that the outcome actually demonstrated German superiority: “I think it characteristic that the Germans made the discovery and didn’t use it, whereas the Americans have used it.”

Since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of course, nuclear weapons haven’t been detonated in war, but there have been some close calls. Frank V. Ortiz provided new details of one of them in his memoir, *Ambassador Ortiz: Lessons from a Life of Service* (Univ. of New Mexico Press), published shortly before his death earlier this year.

On the staff of the American embassy in Mexico City, Ortiz read an urgent cable from President John F. Kennedy to the president of Mexico, Adolfo López Mateos, during the Cuban Missile Crisis. “I don’t believe



Mexicans welcomed JFK in 1962—but would hordes of American refugees get the same recepción?

Findings

the contents of that message have ever been revealed,” Ortiz wrote. “The essence of the message was that within hours there could be a nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States. . . . [Kennedy] said that the U.S. government would have no way of stopping a mass exodus of American refugees into Mexico and that, to ensure that they would not become an undue burden on the Mexican government’s resources, a transfer would be made of U.S. assets to Mexico. Kennedy went on to request an immediate guarantee that the U.S. would have access to Mexican military facilities if they were needed.”

Ortiz later learned that the leaders of several other countries had gotten similar requests to use military bases. “I’ve come to wonder if the messages might have been a ruse—that Kennedy intended that the Russian embassies quickly learn of them and believe that the U.S. was really ready for war.”

Study Aid?

When a boozy evening is remembered only hazily, the sober afternoon that preceded it may be recalled with extra precision. Alcohol (like Xanax, Valium, and certain other drugs) has a dual effect on memory, psychologist John T. Wixted explains in *Current Directions in Psychological Science* (February 2005): It impedes the formation of memories while one is under the influence (“temporary anterograde amnesia”) while safeguarding memories formed just before drinking (“retrograde facilitation”). People who drink to forget may want to reassess.

Vidal Signs

Gore Vidal turns 80 in October, and he believes that his decline parallels the decline of the novel in American culture. “My category has vanished,” he says in an interview included in *Conversations with Gore Vidal* (Univ. Press of Mississippi). “Saying you’re a very famous novelist is like saying you’re a famous ceramicist—maybe a good ceramicist or a successful ceramicist, but famous? That was lost on our watch.”

Part of the fault, he thinks, lies with universities: “English courses are what have killed literature for the public. Books are made a duty. Imagine teaching novels! Novels used to be written simply to be read.” He also thinks that the quality of writing has declined: “I don’t see much of anything that I find terribly interesting. Like everybody else, I’d rather see a movie usually.”

Vidal has written several screenplays, including *Suddenly*, *Last Summer* and *Caligula*. “I love movies, and I think a lot about movies,” he told an interviewer in 1974. “Recently I thought I would like to direct. More recently, I have decided it’s too late. I am like the Walter Lippmanns. I saw them a few years ago. They were euphoric. Why? ‘Because,’ she said, ‘we have decided that we shall never go to Japan. Such a relief!’”

Strangelet but True

Perhaps a particular calamity won’t become remotely probable for millennia, but that’s no reason to ignore it. So contends Richard A. Posner, a federal appeals court judge and prolific author. He discussed his latest book, *Catastrophe: Risk and Response* (Oxford Univ. Press), before a convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington, D.C., in February.

As an example, Posner cited a type of particle accelerator, such as the one at Brookhaven National Laboratory in Long Island. There’s a minuscule possibility that the accelerator could create a “strangelet”—a form of matter that, in the words of the British astronomer Sir Martin Rees, “could transform the entire planet Earth into an inert hyperdense sphere about 100 meters across.” The risk won’t become remotely significant until an accelerator has been in operation for centuries, so it’s commonly dismissed as unworthy of consideration.

Judge Posner asked the audience to suppose that the ancient Romans developed a particle accelerator, and, like today’s scientists, shrugged off a tiny annual risk of creating a strangelet because it wouldn’t rise to

significance for a couple of millennia. “They’d be paying no attention to us,” he said.

If we can avoid making the same mistake, Earthlings of A.D. 4000 will thank us.

Buried Secret

In the best-selling novel *The Collector* (1963), an amateur lepidopterist kidnaps a young woman, imprisons her in his cellar, and tries to make her fall in love with him. John Fowles, at the time an English professor at St. Godric’s College in London, wrote the novel. Now, in his *Journals: 1949–1965* (Knopf), Fowles reveals part of the inspiration behind it: “my lifelong fantasy of imprisoning a girl underground.” As a teenager, he fantasized about kidnapping Princess Margaret or a movie star. “But for many years it has had to be someone I know—students.”

Royalties from *The Collector* enabled Fowles to quit his teaching job and write *The Magus* (1966) and *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969), among other works. In this instance, literature’s gain may have been academia’s gain as well.

Just Visiting

Critics have long denounced Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Walter Duranty of *The New York Times* as a Soviet apologist. “There is no famine or actual starvation, nor is there likely to be,” he wrote during the 1932 famine in Ukraine; in fact, more than five million people died. In 2003, the Pulitzer board considered revoking Duranty’s prize but, lacking “clear and convincing evidence of deliberate deception,” decided against it.

In *Reporting from Washington* (Oxford Univ. Press), historian Donald A. Ritchie offers a new tidbit: When in Washington, Duranty often worked out of the National Press Building headquarters of TASS, the Soviet news agency. According to Ritchie, Duranty “felt more comfortable writing at the TASS office than at the *Times*’ bureau, under the frosty gaze of bureau chief Arthur Krock.”

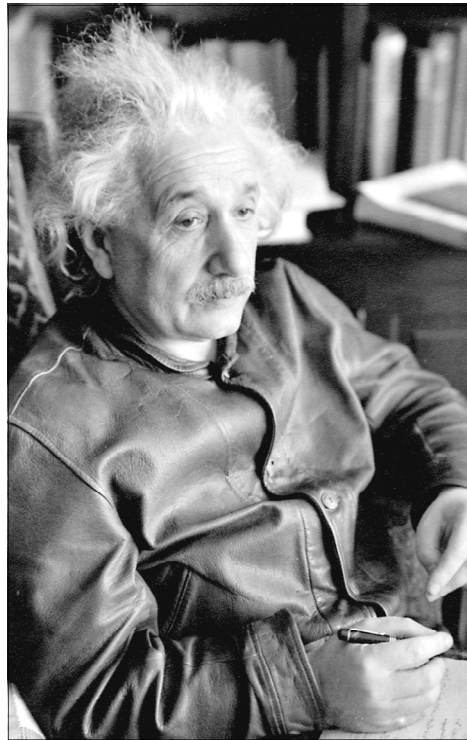
Einstein’s Bafflement

In 1905, 26-year-old Swiss patent clerk Albert Einstein published a series of papers that changed the world. Over the decades that followed, $E=mc^2$ transmuted Einstein himself into a new form of energy, the superstar scientist. But fame often perplexed him, as he indicated in a poem addressed to a friend in 1927; it appears in Peter A. Bucky’s *The Private Albert Einstein* (1992):

Wherever I go and wherever I stay,
There’s always a picture of me on display.
On top of the desk, or out in the hall,
Tied round a neck, or hung on the wall.

Women and men, they play a strange game,
Asking, beseeching: “Please sign your name.”
For the erudite fellow they brook not a quibble,
But firmly insist on a piece of his scribble.

Sometimes, surrounded by all this good cheer,
I’m puzzled by some of the things that I hear,
And wonder, my mind for a moment not hazy,
If I and not they could really be crazy.



Why me?

WILL GREAT CITIES SURVIVE?

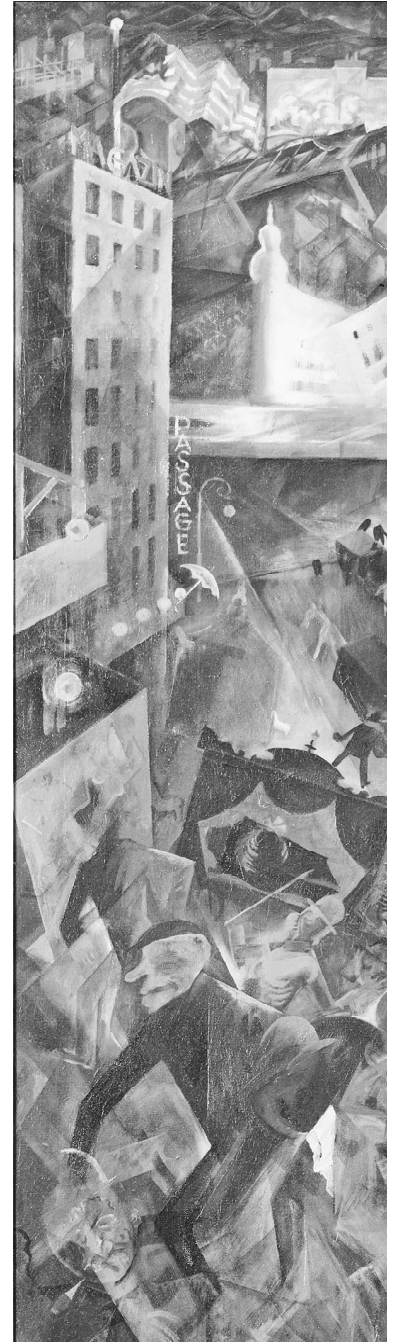
For the first time in human history, a majority of the earth's population lives in cities. But though great cities have been among humanity's supreme achievements down through the ages, they now face an uncertain future, threatened by forces that could undermine the very things that have made them great.

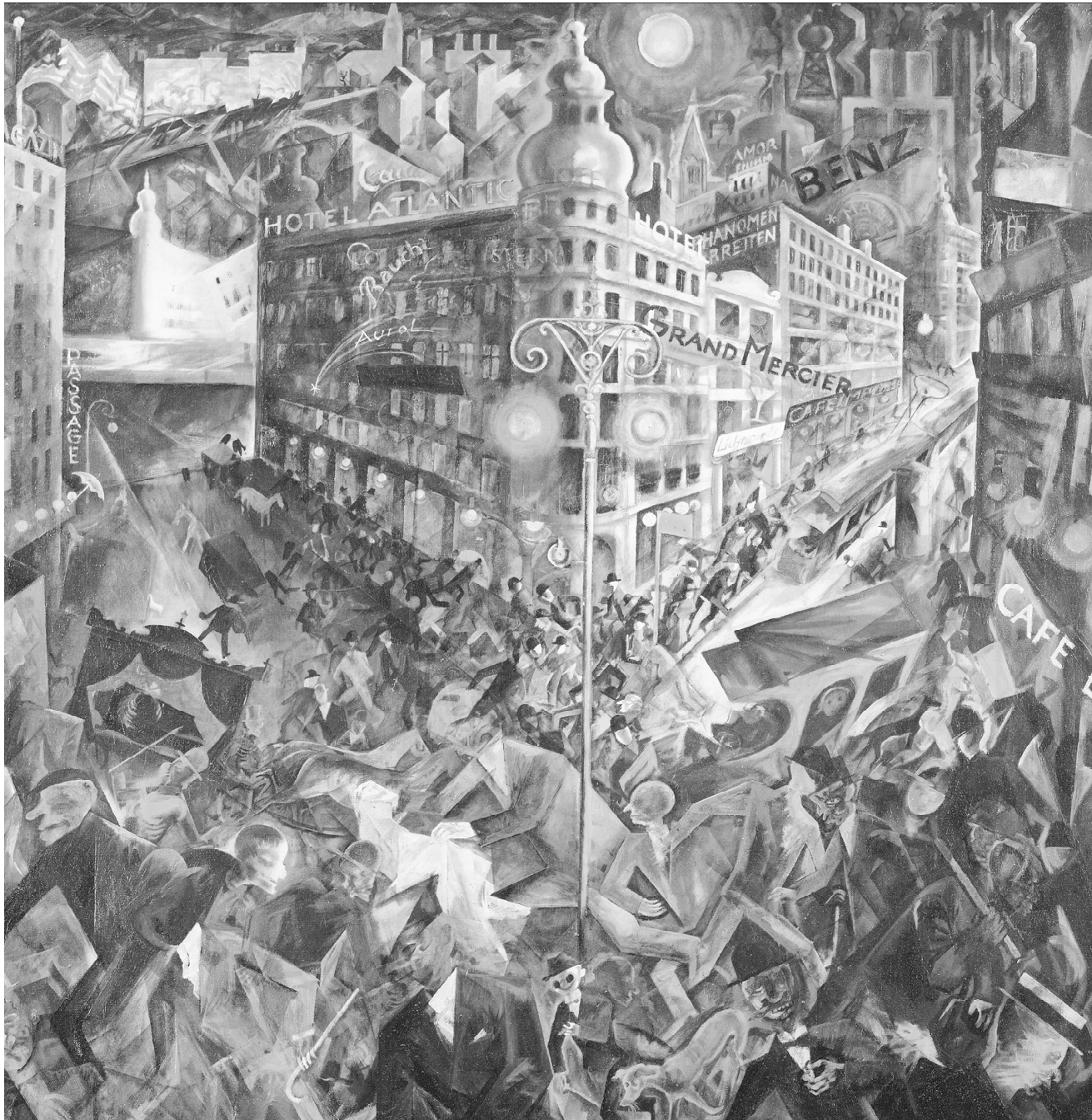
by Joel Kotkin

On November 8, 1519, Bernal Díaz del Castillo saw a sight that would stay with him forever. Serving under Hernando Cortés, the 27-year-old Spanish soldier had already encountered signs of urban civilization that multiplied as he and his comrades marched from the humid lowlands of Mexico up into the volcanic highlands. (In a hint of what was to come, he noted "piles of human skulls" arranged in neat rows atop the provincial temples.) Then, suddenly, a city of almost unimaginable scale appeared, built high in the mountains on a lake crowned by a circle of volcanic peaks. Díaz beheld broad causeways filled with canoes, avenues where every kind of produce, fowl, and utensil was being sold, elaborate flower-decked homes, large palaces, and temples rising bright in the Mexican sun:

Gazing on such wonderful sights, we did not know what to do or say, or whether what appeared before us was real, for on one side, on the land, were great cities; and in the lake ever so many more, and the lake itself was crowded with canoes, and in the Causeway were many bridges at intervals, and in front of us stood the great City of Mexico.

The sights Díaz saw that November day were such as have always inspired human beings encountering great cities. His was the reaction of a Semitic nomad in the presence of the walls and pyramids of Sumer 5,000 years earlier, or a Chinese provincial official entering Loyang in the seventh century B.C., or a Muslim pilgrim arriving by caravan at the gates of ninth-century Baghdad, or an Italian immigrant in the early 20th century spying the awesome towers of New York from the deck of a steamer.





The Western city—in all its glory and corruption—reached its apogee in the early 20th century, a moment captured by George Grosz in his 1916–17 painting of Berlin, Die Grosstadt (The Metropolis).

Cities are humanity's greatest creation. They represent the ultimate handiwork of our imagination as a species and testify to our ability to reshape the natural environment in profound and lasting ways. Cities compress and unleash the creative urges of humanity. They are the places that, over the course of five to seven millennia, have generated most of our art, religion, culture, commerce, and technology.

Some cities started as little more than clusters of villages, which over time grew together and developed mass. Others have reflected the vision of a high priest, ruler, or business elite following a general plan to fulfill some great divine, political, or economic purpose. Cities have been built in virtually every part of the world, from the highlands of Peru to the tip of southern Africa and the coasts of Australia. The oldest permanent ur-

Cities

ban footprints are believed to be in Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The founding experiences of the Western urban heritage occurred there and in a plethora of subsequent metropolises—including Ur, Agade, Babylon, Nineveh, Memphis, Knossos, and Tyre. Many other cities sprang up independently of these early Mesopotamian and Mediterranean settlements, and some of them, such as Mohenjo Daro and Harappa in Pakistan, and Chang’an in China, achieved a scale and complexity equal to that of any of their Western contemporaries. Indeed, for many centuries after the fall of Rome, these “Oriental” capitals were among the most advanced and complex urban systems on the planet. Urbanism must be approached not as a largely Western phenomenon but as one that has worn many different guises reflective of some greater universal human aspiration.

The primary locus of world-shaping cities in each region of the globe has shifted over and over again, and the often rapid rise and fall of great cities was already familiar to the Greek historian Herodotus in the fifth century B.C.:

For most of those which were great once are small today. And those that used to be small were great in my own time. Knowing, therefore, that human prosperity never abides long in the same place, I shall pay attention to both alike.

By Herodotus’s time, some of the greatest and most populous cities of the past (Ur, Nineveh) had declined to insignificance, leaving little more than the dried bones of what had once been thriving urban organisms. Babylon, Athens, and Syracuse were then in their glorious prime; within a few centuries, they would be supplanted by

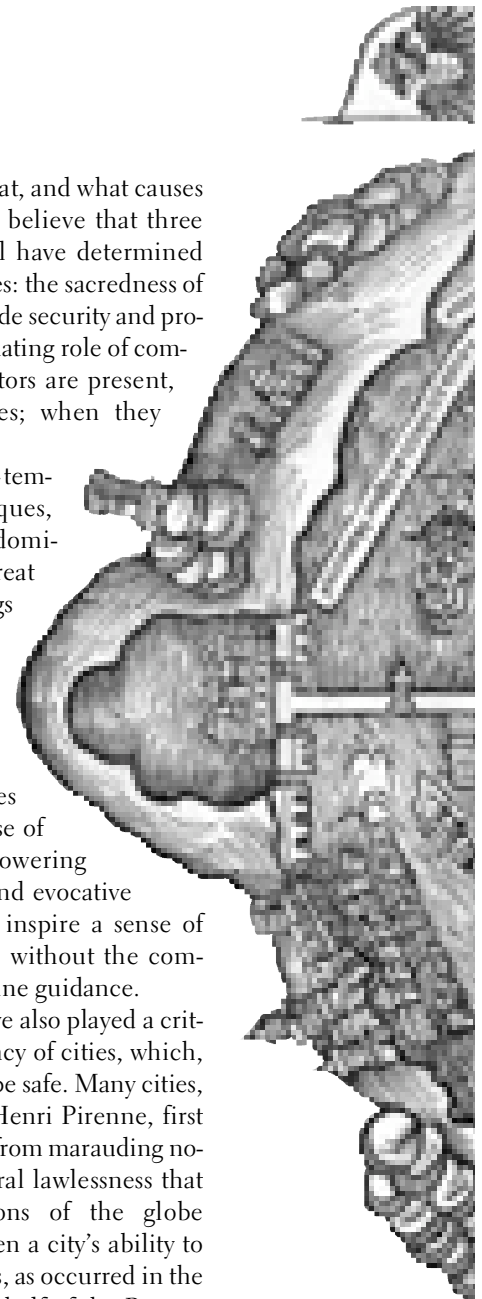
Rome and Alexandria.

What makes cities great, and what causes their gradual demise? I believe that three critical factors above all have determined the overall health of cities: the sacredness of place, the ability to provide security and project power, and the animating role of commerce. When these factors are present, urban culture flourishes; when they weaken, cities decline.

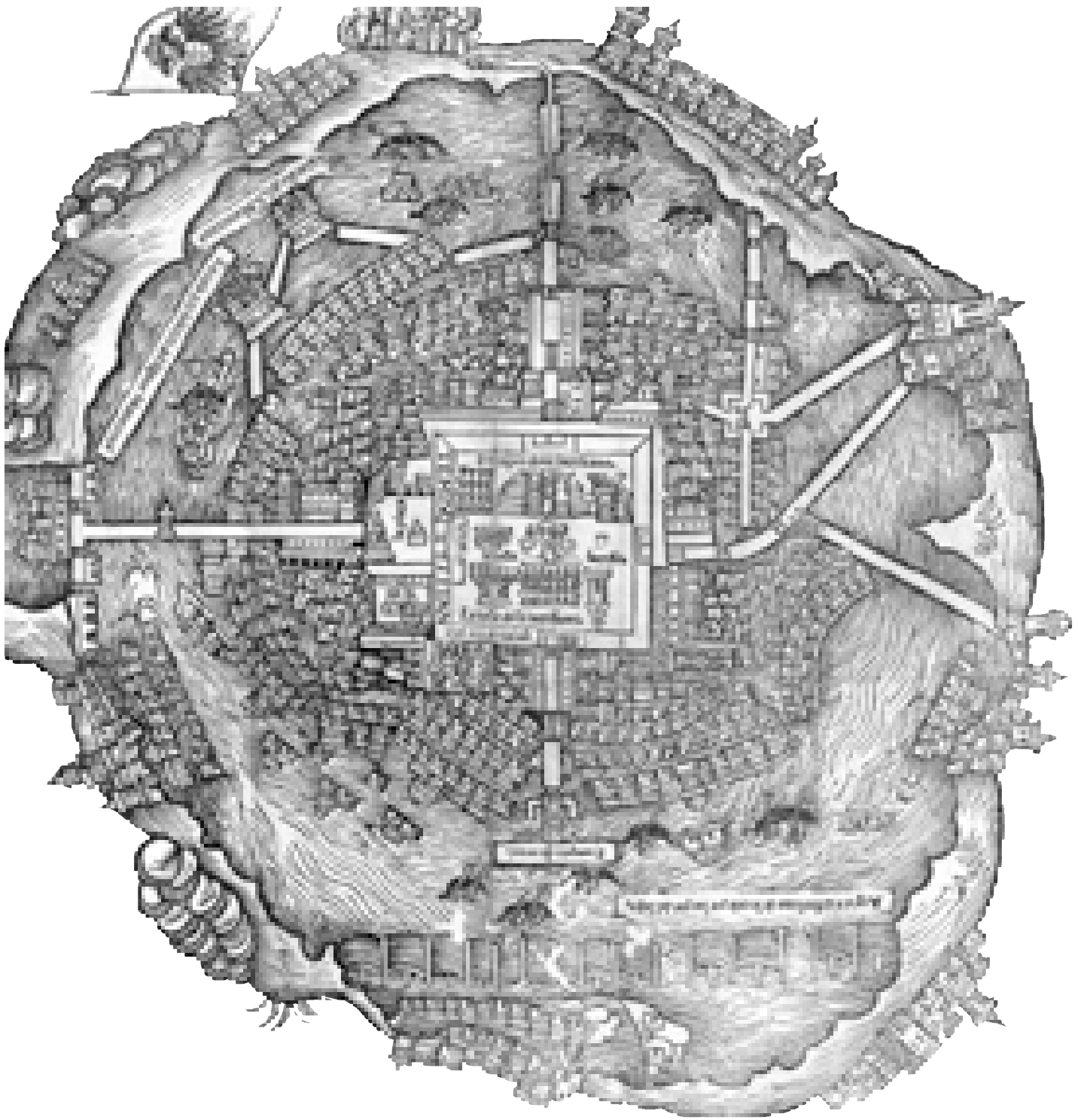
Religious structures—temples, cathedrals, mosques, pyramids—have long dominated the landscape of great cities. These buildings once marked the city as a sacred place, connected directly to divine forces controlling the world. In our secularly oriented times, cities seek to recreate the sense of sacred place through towering commercial buildings and evocative cultural structures that inspire a sense of civic patriotism or awe, without the comforting suggestion of divine guidance.

Defensive systems have also played a critical role in the ascendancy of cities, which, first and foremost, must be safe. Many cities, observed the historian Henri Pirenne, first arose as places of refuge from marauding nomads, or from the general lawlessness that has beset large portions of the globe throughout history. When a city’s ability to guarantee safety declines, as occurred in the last years of the western half of the Roman Empire, or during the crime-infested last decades of the 20th century, urbanites migrate to a safer urban bastion—or retreat to the hinterlands.

Yet sanctity and safety alone cannot create great cities. Priests, soldiers, and bureaucrats may provide the prerequisites for urban success, but they themselves cannot produce enough wealth to sustain a large population for a long peri-



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In 1519, Spanish explorer Hernando Cortés and his men were astonished when, in the Mexican highlands, they came upon Tenochtitlán, not so different in its essentials from the cities of Spain. Five years later, Cortés penned this diagram, the oldest known map of modern-day Mexico City.

od of time. That requires an active economy of artisans, merchants, working people, and, sadly, in many places throughout history, slaves. Since the advent of capitalism, these disparate groups, necessarily the vast majority of urbanites, have emerged as the primary creators of the city.



To be successful today, urban areas must resonate with the ancient fundamentals—they must be sacred, safe, and busy. What was true 5,000 years ago, when cities housed a tiny portion of humanity, is

still true in this century, the first in which a majority of the earth's population are urban dwellers. The world's urban population was only 750 million in 1960, grew to three billion by 2002, and is expected to surpass five billion in 2030. These swelling ranks face a vastly changed environment, in which the most powerful urban area must compete not only with other large places, but also with an ever wider array of smaller cities, suburbs, and towns.

In the past, size allowed cities to dominate the economies of their hinterlands. Today, the very girth of the most populous megacities—Mexico City, Cairo, Lagos, Mumbai, Kolkata, São Paulo, Jakarta, Manila—is often more a burden than an advantage. In some places, these urban giants have been losing out to smaller, better-managed, less socially beleaguered settlements. In East Asia, for example, the critical nursery of 21st-century urbanism, Singapore, has integrated itself into the global economy more successfully than the far more populous Bangkok, Jakarta, and Manila.

In the Middle East, megacities like Cairo and Tehran have suffered trying to keep pace with their exploding populations, while smaller, more compact centers such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi have flourished. Dubai, a dusty settlement of 25,000 in 1948, saw its population approach one million by the end of the century, yet it has avoided the economic stagnation that afflicts most of the Arab world. Cosmopolitan attitudes, such as those in Dubai, continue to have a major impact in determining the success of cities. In the past, openness to varied cultures and the clever employment of talent helped relatively small cities such as Tyre, Florence, and Amsterdam play outsize roles. Similarly, in the 21st century, a small cosmopolitan city such as Luxembourg, Singapore, or Tel Aviv often wields more economic influence than a sprawling megacity.

As the 20th century drew to a close, megacities in the advanced countries seemed to be enjoying brighter economic prospects. There was a statistically small but notable increase in residential development in some long-abandoned

downtowns. Many observers asserted that the most cosmopolitan “world cities”—London, New York, Chicago, Tokyo, and San Francisco—had indeed irrevocably “turned the corner.” “Neither Western civilization nor Western cities,” remarked the historian Peter Hall, “show any sign of decay.” This new optimism rested largely on the impact of global integration and the worldwide shift from a manufacturing-based to an information-based economy.

But the upbeat assessment may be replacing the excessive pessimism of the 1960s with a magnified sense of optimism. Even the most evolved “global cities” now find the advantages of scale diminished by the rise of new technologies that, in the words of the anthropologist Robert McC. Adams, have accomplished “an awesome technological destruction of distance.” The ability to process and transmit information globally, and across great expanses, undermines many traditional advantages enjoyed by established urban centers. Throughout the last third of the 20th century, secular trends, particularly in the United States, pointed to a continued shift of corporate headquarters to the suburbs and smaller cities. In 1969, only 11 percent of America's largest companies were headquartered in the suburbs; a quarter-century later, roughly half had migrated to the city periphery.

In fact, high-end services, the supposed linchpin of “global city” economies, have continued to disperse toward the periphery or to smaller cities. This trend is even more marked among firms in the largest generator of new growth, the entrepreneurial sector. Improvements in telecommunications promise to further flatten economic space in the future, with choice jobs able to migrate to exurbs and small cities. One result has been a shift in the very landscape of growth, with suburban office parks widely favored over gleaming high-rise towers. The global securities industry, once overwhelmingly concentrated in the financial districts of London and New York, has gradually transferred an ever larger share of its operations to the cities' respective suburban rings, to other smaller cities, and overseas. The company



No, it's not America. The exodus of commerce and industry from old urban centers is a worldwide phenomenon. This outlet "village" is in the Piedmonte region of Italy.

headquarters may remain in a midtown high-rise, but more and more of the jobs are located elsewhere.

These decentralizing trends have taken an unmistakable toll on the overall economic relevance of New York, still the most important of the advanced world's megacities. In the last three decades of the 20th century—a period of explosive job growth across the United States—the city's private sector created virtually no new net employment. A powerful service economy remained, but as the historian Fred Siegel pointed out, the long-term trends showed the city slipping further behind the nation "with each new turn of the cycle."

And in a country as highly centralized as Japan, software companies and other technology-centered enterprises have begun to move away from the great centers of Osaka

and Tokyo to outlying prefectures. Hong Kong, too, has hemorrhaged both high-tech manufacturing and engineering positions to surrounding parts of mainland China. The rise of "telecities" around the world suggests the emergence of new high-end industrial pockets, such as those in the less urbanized sections of France, Belgium, and South Korea. And the increase in telecommuting threatens to reduce still further the roles once played exclusively by urban regions.

Even the best-positioned urban areas, then, will have to deal with severe demographic and economic challenges. Many of the young people lured to these cities in their twenties often depart when they start families and businesses; upwardly mobile immigrants, critical contributors to the urban resurgence, increasingly join the exo-

dus. European, Japanese, and other East Asian urban centers confront a yet more extreme demographic crisis: Low birth-rates are reducing the ranks of young people, the group most attracted to large cities, and choking off the traditional pool of immigrants from the countryside.



With economic growth shifting elsewhere, many leading cities in the advanced world are resting their hopes for the future on their role as centers of culture and entertainment. These cities may be fulfilling the prediction H. G. Wells made a century ago, when he said that the city would move from a commanding position at the center of economic life toward a more ephemeral role as a “bazaar, a great gallery of shops and [place] of concourse and rendezvous.” Cities have played this staging role since their origins. Central squares, the areas around temples, cathedrals, and mosques, long provided ideal places for merchants to sell their wares. Being natural theaters, cities offered the overwhelmingly rural populations around them a host of novel experiences unavailable in the hinterlands. Rome, the first megacity, developed these functions to an unprecedented level. It boasted both the first giant shopping mall, the multistory *Mercatus Traiani*, and the Colosseum, a place where urban entertainment grew monstrous in its size and nature.

In the industrial era, observed the French philosopher Jacques Ellul, “the techniques of amusement” became “more indispensable to make urban suffering bearable.” By the 20th century, industrialized mass entertainment—publishing, motion pictures, radio, and television—was exerting an ever stronger hold on the life of urban dwellers. Media-related businesses also accounted for a growing part of the economy in such key image-producing cities as Los Angeles, New York, Paris, London, Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Mumbai. By the early 21st century, the focus on cultural industries began to inform economic policy in many urban areas. Instead of working to retain middle-class families

and factory jobs or to engage in economic competition with the periphery, urban regions embraced such fleeting qualities as fashionability, hipness, trendiness, and style as the keys to their survival.

In Rome, Paris, San Francisco, Miami, Montreal, and New York, tourism now ranks among the largest and most promising industries. The economies of some of the fastest-growing centers, such as Las Vegas and Orlando, rely heavily on the staging of “experiences,” complete with eye-catching architecture and round-the-clock live entertainment. Indeed, in such unlikely places as Manchester, Montreal, and Detroit, political and business leaders hope that by creating “cool cities” they may lure gays, bohemians, and young “creatives” to their towns. In some places, the accoutrements of this kind of growth—loft developments, good restaurants, clubs, unique shops, museums, galleries, and sizable gay and single populations—have succeeded in reviving once-desolate town centers. But they have not succeeded in restoring anything remotely reminiscent of these cities’ past economic dynamism.

In the 21st century, some cities or parts of cities may survive, and perhaps thrive, on a transitory foundation, and, with the support of their still-dominant media industries, they may successfully market to the world the notion that they represent the future. The brief but widely acclaimed rise of urban technology districts—such as New York’s Silicon Alley and San Francisco’s Multimedia Gulch—during the dot-com boom of the late 1990s led some to identify hipness and urban edginess as the primary catalysts for information-age growth. Both districts ultimately shriveled as the Internet industry contracted and then matured, yet the market for new housing continued to grow. This demand came partly from younger professionals, but also from a growing population of older affluent individuals, including those hoping to experience a more “pluralistic” way of life. These modern-day nomads often reside part-time in cities, either to participate in their cultural life or to transact critical business. In some cities—Paris, for exam-

ple—they constitute, by one estimate, 10 percent of the population.

The rush in many “global cities” to convert old warehouses, factories, and office buildings into elegant residences suggests the gradual transformation of former urban economic centers into residential resorts. The declining old financial district of lower Manhattan, the architectural historian Robert Bruegmann has noted, seems likely to revive not as a technology hub but as a full- or part-time home for “wealthy cosmopolites wishing to enjoy urban amenities in the elegantly recycled shell of a former business center.”

Over time, however, this culturally based growth may not be self-sustaining. In the past, achievement in the arts flourished in the wake of economic or political dynamism. Athens first emerged as a bustling mercantile center and military power before it astonished the world in other fields. The extraordinary cultural production of other great cities, from Alexandria and Kaifeng to Venice, Amsterdam, London, and, in the 20th century, New York, rested upon a similar nexus between the aesthetic and the mundane.

Broad demographic trends do not bode well for cities basing their futures on cultural growth. The decline in the urban middle-class family—a pattern previously seen in both the late Roman Empire and 18th-century Venice—deprives urban areas of a critical source of economic and social vitality. In Japan and Europe, the number of young workers is already dropping. Superannuated Japanese cities face increasing difficulties competing with their Chinese counterparts, which are being enriched by the migration of ambitious young families from China’s vast agricultural hinterlands. It is hard to imagine the continued preeminence of Japan in Asian popular culture if its population of young people keeps shrinking. Over time, the economically ascendant cities of the world—Houston, Dallas, Phoenix, Shanghai, Beijing, Mumbai, and Bangalore—seem certain to generate their own aesthetically based industries.

Finally, the “ephemeral” city seems likely to encounter profound social conflicts. An economy oriented to entertainment,

tourism, and “creative” functions is ill suited to provide upward mobility for more than a small slice of a city’s population. Focused largely on boosting culture and constructing spectacular buildings, urban governments may tend to neglect more mundane industries, basic education, and infrastructure. Following such a course, urban areas are likely to evolve into “dual cities,” made up of a cosmopolitan elite and a large class of those who, usually for low wages, serve the elite’s needs.

To avoid these pitfalls, cities must emphasize those basic elements long critical to the making of vital commercial places. A busy city must be more than a construct of diversions for essentially nomadic populations. It requires an engaged and committed citizenry with a long-term financial and familial stake in the metropolis. A successful city must be home not only to museums, restaurants, and edgy clubs but to specialized industries, small businesses, schools, and neighborhoods capable of renewing themselves for the next generation.



Successful cities flourish under law and order, and maintaining a strong security regime can do much to revive an urban area. One critical element in the late-20th-century revival in some American cities, most notably New York, was a significant drop in crime, accomplished by the adoption of new policing methods and a widespread determination to make public safety the number one priority of government. Indeed, the 1990s represented arguably the greatest epoch of crime reduction in American history, providing a critical precondition for the growth of tourism and a modest demographic rebound in some major cities. Even Los Angeles, after the devastating riots of 1992, managed to curtail crime and stage an economic and demographic recovery.

But as security in American cities improved, new threats to the urban future surfaced in the developing world. By the end of the 20th century, crime in megacities such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo had devolved into what one law enforcement



official called “urban guerrilla war.” Drug trafficking, gangs, and general lawlessness also infest many parts of Mexico City, Tijuana, and San Salvador. Inevitably, the erosion of basic security undermines city life. Capricious authority and fear of crime can divert the movement of foreign capital as well, toward safer locations in the suburban periphery.

Insidious, too, are the effects of pollution and growing health-related problems in many cities of the developing world. At least 600 million city residents worldwide lack access to basic sanitation and medical care. These populations become natural breeding grounds for deadly infectious dis-

eases, against which neither affluence nor foreign nationality necessarily provides immunity. Such threats drive both indigenous professionals and foreign investors to more healthful environments abroad, or to secure suburbs.



The Islamic Middle East, where the familiar woes of developing countries have been exacerbated by enormous social and political dislocations, poses the most immediate danger to the security of cities globally. In trying to adopt Western models of city building during the 20th



At the dawn of the 21st century, the developing world's megacities—such as São Paulo, Brazil, with a population of 18 million—face an uncertain future as they struggle with high crime, pollution, and other urban woes.

ures but also by repeated humiliations on the battlefield.

To a large extent, Islamic societies have also failed to adjust to the cosmopolitan standards necessary to compete in the global economy. Beirut, the Arab city best positioned for cosmopolitan success, foundered because of incessant civil strife, and did not make any serious efforts to rebuild itself until the late 1990s. Other potentially successful Islamic cities, such as Tehran and Cairo, still lack the social stability and transparent legal systems that are critical to attracting overseas investors. Even the best-run of the Islamic countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, still suffer from political and legal systems far more arbitrary than those in the West, or in the Asian states that are home to great cities such as Singapore, Taipei, Seoul, and Tokyo.

From the difficult milieu of the Middle East has emerged perhaps the greatest menace to the future of modern cities—Islamist terrorism. Islamist terrorists regard the West, particularly its great cities, as intrinsically evil, exploitative, and un-Islamic. One Arab scholar has labeled the leaders of the Islamist movement “angry sons of a failed generation,” who saw the secularist dream of Arab unity dissolve into corruption, poverty, and social chaos. For the most part, their anger was incubated not in the deserts or small villages but in such major Islamic cities as Cairo, Jeddah, Beirut, and Kuwait. Some were longtime residents of New York, London, or Hamburg, and that experience abroad seems only to have deepened their anger toward the West and its cities. As early as 1990, one terrorist, an Egyptian living in New York, spoke of “destroying the pillars such as their touristic infrastructure which they are proud of and their high world buildings that they are

century, many Islamic cities weakened traditional bonds of community and neighborhood but failed to replace them with modern and socially sustainable alternatives. This transformation, according to the historian Stefano Bianca, “sapped the shaping forces of cultural identity,” leaving behind a population alienated from its increasingly Westernized environment. The alienation has been deepened by political conflicts, the most important of which is the struggle with an economically and militarily advanced Israel. The aspirations of Islamic, and particularly Arab, cities are continually thwarted not only by economic, social, and environmental fail-

proud of.” Eleven years later, that anger shook the urban world to its very foundation. In addition to the economic and social afflictions that beset them, cities now have to contend with the prospect of physical obliteration.



The current threat to the prosperity and survival of cities presented by loosely affiliated marauders instead of states has its historical analogues. Some of the worst damage done to cities in the past was inflicted by nomadic peoples and small bands of brigands. But despite setbacks, the urban ideal has demonstrated a remarkable resilience. Fear rarely is enough to stop the determined builders of cities. For all the cities that have been ruined permanently by war, pestilence, or natural disaster, many others have been rebuilt, often more than once. Indeed, amid mounting terrorist threats, officials and developers in cities such as New York, London, Tokyo, and Shanghai continue to plan new office towers and other striking edifices.

But far more important than the construction of new buildings to the future of cities will be the value people place on the urban experience. Buildings and physical advantages (proximity to oceans, rivers, trade routes, or freeway interchanges) can help start a great city and aid its growth, but they cannot sustain its success. In the end, a great city relies on those things that engender for its citizens a peculiar and strong attachment that distinguishes one specific place from all others. Urban areas must coalesce around a consciousness that unites their residents in a shared identity. “The city is a state of mind,” the great sociologist Robert Ezra Park observed, “a body of customs, and of unorganized attitudes and sentiments.”

Whether in the traditional urban core or in the expanding periphery, issues of identity and community still largely determine which places will succeed. In this, contemporary city dwellers throughout the world struggle with many of the same issues that were faced by the originators of urbanity. Progenitors of a new kind of hu-

manity, those earliest city dwellers found themselves confronting vastly different problems from those of prehistoric nomadic communities and agricultural villages. Urbanites had to learn how to coexist and interact with strangers from outside their clan or tribe. This required them to develop new ways to codify behavior and determine what was commonly acceptable in family life, commerce, and social discourse. In earliest times, the priesthood instructed on these matters. Deriving their authority from divinity, priests were able to set the rules for the varied residents of a specific urban center. In addition, rulers gained stature by claiming their cities to be the special residences of particular gods. The sanctity of a city was tied to its role as a center of worship.

Almost everywhere, the great classical city was suffused with religion and instructed by it. “Cities did not ask if the institutions which they adopted were useful,” noted the classical historian Fustel de Coulanges. “These institutions were adopted because religion had wished it thus.” In contemporary discussions of the urban condition, this sacred role has too often been ignored. Indeed, it barely appears in many contemporary books about cities or in public discussions of their plight. That would have seemed odd to residents of the ancient, classical, medieval, or even Victorian city. Today’s “new urbanist” architects, planners, and developers often speak of the need for city green space, historical preservation, and environmental stewardship, yet they rarely refer to the need for a powerful moral vision to hold cities together. Their failure to do so is a natural reflection of today’s urban environment, with its emphasis on faddishness, stylistic issues, and the celebration of the individual over the family or stable community. The postmodernist perspective on cities, dominant in much of the academic literature, even more adamantly dismisses shared moral values as little more than illusory aspects of what one German professor labeled “the Christian-bourgeois microcosmos.”

Nihilistic attitudes of this sort, if widely adopted, could prove as dangerous to the

future of cities as the terrorist menace. Without a widely shared belief system, it would be exceedingly difficult to envision a viable urban future. Even in a postindustrial era, notes sociologist Daniel Bell, the fate of cities continues to revolve around “a conception of public virtue” and the “classical questions of the polis.” Cities in the modern West, Bell understands, have depended on a broad adherence to classical and Enlightenment ideals—due process, freedom of belief, the basic rights of property—to incorporate diverse cultures and meet new economic challenges. Shattering these essential principles, whether in the name of the marketplace, multicultural separatism, or religious dogma, would render the contemporary city in the West helpless before the grave challenges of the future.

This is not to suggest that the West offers the only reasonable model for achieving an urban order. History abounds with models developed under explicit pagan, Muslim, Confucian, Buddhist, and Hindu auspices, and the cosmopolitan city well predates the Enlightenment. In our time, perhaps the most notable success in city building has occurred under neo-Confucianist belief systems, mixed with scientific rationalism imported from the West. This convergence, an amalgam of tradition and modernity, eventually overcame Maoism, which was intent on destroying all vestiges of China’s cultural past.

We must hope that the Islamic world, having found Western values wanting, may find in its own glorious past—replete with cosmopolitan values and belief in scientific progress—the means to salvage its troubled urban civilization. The ancient metropolis of Istanbul, with more than nine million residents, has demonstrated at least the possibility of reconciling a fundamentally Muslim society with what one Turkish planner calls “a culturally globalized face.” The continued success of this cosmopolitan model, amid the assault from intolerant brands of Islam, could do a great deal to preserve urban progress around the world in the new century.

In an age of intense globalization, cities

must learn to meld their moral orders with the ability to accommodate differing populations. In a successful city, even those who embrace other faiths must expect basic justice from authorities, as *dhimmi* (non-Muslims) did during the Islamic golden ages. If that expectation cannot be met, commerce inevitably declines, the pace of cultural and technological development slows, and cities devolve from dynamism to stagnation and ultimate ruin.

I believe that the urban experience is universal, despite differences in race, climate, location, and time. As the French historian Fernand Braudel once observed, “A town is always a town, wherever it is located, in time as well as space.” Bernal Díaz, the soldier of Cortés with whom this essay began, encountered a totally alien urbanity—the great city of Tenochtitlán—that nonetheless exhibited characteristics found in European cities such as Seville, Antwerp, and Constantinople. Tenochtitlán was anchored by a great religious center, boasted large, vibrant marketplaces, and lay in a secure location that allowed for a dynamic city life.

To be successful today, urban areas must still fulfill these three essential functions: create sacred space, provide basic security, and favor commerce. In the sprawling cities of the developing world, the lack of a healthy economy and the absence of a stable political order loom as the most pressing problems. The critical problems facing urban regions in the West, and in developed parts of East and South Asia as well, are of a different nature. Though safe and prosperous, these cities seem to lack a shared sense of sacred place, civic identity, or moral order. And the study of urban history suggests that affluent cities without moral cohesion or a sense of civic identity are doomed to decadence and decline.

It is my hope that contemporary cities—wherever they are located—will find ways to perform their historic functions and make this century, the first in which a majority of us live in cities, an urban century not merely in demographic terms but in its recognition of transcendent values. □



Music's Missing Magic

We expect nothing less from music than that it give meaning to our lives. And for centuries, Western classical music did just that. But in the 20th century many composers turned in a new and less satisfying direction, and it's unclear whether music will ever regain what was lost.

BY MILES HOFFMAN



In 1817, Franz Schubert set these words of the poet Franz von Schober to music in his song “An die Musik”:

O gracious Art, in how many gray hours
When life’s fierce orbit encompassed me,
Hast thou kindled my heart to warm love,
Hast charmed me into a better world.
Oft has a sigh, issuing from thy harp,
A sweet, blest chord of thine,
Thrown open the heaven of better times;
O gracious Art, for that I thank thee!

Schubert’s song may well be the most beautiful thank-you note anyone has ever written, but it’s also something else. It’s a credo, a statement of faith in the wondrous powers of music, and by its very nature an affirmation of those powers. We may view it as a statement of expectations as well. The poet thanks Music for what it has done for him, but there is nothing in his words that

would make us think that Music’s powers are exhausted, and indeed the noble, exalted character of Schubert’s music would lead us to believe that Music’s powers are, if anything, eternal, and eternally dependable.

But just how does our gracious Art exercise these powers? How does it comfort us, charm us, kindle our hearts? We might start our search for answers by positing two fundamentals: a fundamental pain and a fundamental quest. A fundamental pain of our human condition is loneliness. No surprise here: We’re born alone, we’re alone in our consciousness, we die alone, and, when loved ones die, we’re left alone. And pain itself, including physical pain, isolates us and makes us feel still more alone, completing a vicious circle. Our fundamental quest—by no means unrelated to our aloneness and our loneliness—is the quest for meaning, the quest to make sense of our time on earth, to make sense of time itself.

Music's Missing Magic

Where does music come in? Music is both a balm for loneliness and a powerful, renewable source of meaning—meaning *in* time and meaning *for* time. The first thing music does is banish silence. Silence is at once a metaphor for loneliness and the thing itself: It's a loneliness of the senses. Music overcomes silence, replaces it. It provides us with a companion by occupying our senses—and, through our senses, our minds, our thoughts. It has, quite literally, a presence. We know that sound and touch are the only sensual stimuli that literally move us, that make parts of us move: Sound waves make the tiny hairs in our inner ears vibrate, and, if sound waves are strong enough, they can make our whole bodies vibrate. We might even say, therefore, that sound is a *form* of touch, and that in its own way music is able to reach out and put an arm around us.

One way we are comforted when we're lonely is to feel that at least someone understands us, knows what we're going through. When we feel the sympathy of others, and especially when we feel *empathy*, we experience companionship—we no longer feel entirely alone. And strangely enough, music can provide empathy. The structure of music, its essential nature—with many simultaneous, complex, overlapping, and interweaving elements, events, components, associations, references to the past, intimations of the future—is an exact mirror of the psyche, of the complex and interwoven structure of our emotions. This makes it a perfect template onto which we can project our personal complexes of emotions. And when we make that projection, we hear in music our own emotions—or images and memories of our emotions—reflected back. And because the reflection is so accurate, we feel understood. We recognize, and we feel recognized. It's a kind of illusion, but it's a beautiful one, and very comforting. And, in fact, it's not entirely an illusion, because even though the specifics may differ, we all share the same *kinds* of emotions. We all know love and loss and longing, and in different measure we all know joy and despair. We're linked with the composer of the music by our common humanity. And if a com-

poser has found a compelling way to express his or her own emotions, then to a certain extent that composer can't really avoid expressing, and touching, ours as well.

Not to be forgotten among these psychological considerations is what Joseph Conrad called “the inexhaustible joy that lives in beauty.” The sheer beauty of music lifts us up and gives us hope, reminding us in our darkest moments, in our “gray hours,” that life itself can still hold wonders and beauties. Furthermore, the very “movement” of music, its rhythmic movement through time, carries inevitable associations with life, with positive forces and feelings. Life is movement and movement is life, and joyous music can literally get us moving again when we've been stunned or stilled by sadness.

Did I say “movement through time”? Ah, time. It passes in music. But not without purpose, not without reasons, not without . . . meaning. And that's just the point: Music gives meaning to time. If all those overlapping and interweaving elements and events in a piece of music indeed mean something, if they remind, reflect, comfort, inspire, or excite—then by definition the time it takes for them to do all that means something too. When I played in the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C., years ago, I used to have a regular little joke. Before we began a lengthy symphony, I'd turn to my colleague on stage and say, “See you in 45 minutes.” A piece of music *must* take a certain amount of time; there's no way around it. And though it may be just a self-contained fragment of time, a little world of its own, within that fragment time is used, arranged, and manipulated so that the passage of time makes sense.



I have a friend who's fond of saying that it took a thousand years to invent the C major chord. The system of writing music in clearly defined major and minor keys is called *tonality*, or “tonal harmony,” and music written in that system is called “tonal music.” We can only guess at how the music of the ancients sounded (and my friend exaggerates),

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but we know that from the beginnings of Gregorian chant, somewhere around A.D. 600, it did indeed take about a thousand years for tonality to evolve, and to find general acceptance. By 1700, it had reached a position of unchallenged primacy in Western music.

What does it mean for a piece to be “in a key”? Well, when a piece of music is in the key of C major, for example, it means that the harmony of C major functions as the home base, the harmonic center of gravity of the piece. A piece in C major will establish the C major harmony at the beginning (using the notes of a C major chord) and return to it in no uncertain terms at the end. In technical terms the home harmony is called the “tonic,” and the gravitational force of the tonic—built into the system and cleverly exploited by the composer even if we’re not always aware of it—is inexorable. Between its beginning and end, however, a piece will inevitably traverse any number of other harmonies, major and minor. The various harmonies don’t follow each other randomly: They’re ordered in progressions, one harmony leading to the next, sometimes in predictable ways, sometimes in unusual or surprising ways. And the most important aspect of these progressions—indeed, the defining aspect of all tonal music—is that *dissonant* chords, chords that contain jarring or unsettling sounds, always eventually lead to *consonant* chords, chords that “please the ear.”

Let me emphasize immediately that the pleasing qualities of consonant chords and intervals, and the power of tonal relationships in general, are not arbitrary constructs. They were determined empirically, over the course of centuries. And they are firmly rooted in the laws of acoustical physics, with frequency ratios and a natural phenomenon called the harmonic series (or *overtone* series) playing vital roles. This is why Leonard Bernstein, in his 1973 Norton Lectures at Harvard University (published in book form as *The Unanswered Question*), devoted considerable time to a discussion of the harmonic series, and why he said, “I believe that from . . . Earth emerges a musical poetry, which is by the nature of its sources tonal.” Or to put it another way, the origins of tonality lie not in a set of inventions and decisions but in the fundamental nature of sound.

To be clear: Tonal music contains *lots* of dissonance. If you were to string together all the dissonant chords in a piece by Bach (or Schubert or Tchaikovsky or any other composer of tonal music) with no other chords between, the effect would loosen your fillings. But the dissonances in tonal music are never strung together that way, because the specific function of dissonance in tonal music is to provide tension, and that tension, in whatever degree it is established, is always resolved by a return to consonance. Indeed, the true genius of the tonal system is that in any given piece it enables a composer to combine the power and momentum of harmonic progressions with the simultaneous manipulation of melodic material, in ways that create the impression of a *narrative*, a dramatic structure complete with characters, rhetoric, direction, conflict, tension, uncertainty, and ultimate resolution.

So, pleasing sounds, striking contrasts, coherent dramatic structures based on expressive musical elements that form clear (if sometimes complex) relationships and patterns—for more than 200 years this remarkable system served as the unquestioned foundation of Western music, the foundation on which the works of the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic periods were all built. From Vivaldi to Mahler, Bach to Verdi, Mozart to Mussorgsky, Beethoven to Fauré, countless composers of every conceivable individual and national style shared the basic framework of tonality; they spoke what was essentially a common musical language. Is the enduring popularity of these composers’ works unrelated to that musical language? Is the still-central role of these works in our musical life an accident, a matter of chance or good public relations? No, and no. Is it fair to say that the powerful and perennial emotional appeal of tonal music reflects its extraordinary capacity to meet our oh-so-human musical expectations, to satisfy our longings for beauty, comfort, and meaning? Yes, indeed.



Add two centuries and a little bit to 1700, and you arrive somewhere in the early 20th century. The basic framework of tonality was still in place, but by this point

list, and by no means a complete one. These composers are among the greatest, most revered musical figures of the 20th century, and they simply don't fit the theory. If tonality was on its last legs, somebody must have forgotten to tell them.

Another composer made quite an impact in the early part of the 20th century, however, and his name was Arnold Schönberg. Born in Vienna in 1874, Schönberg was at first an exponent of the expansionist, superheated style of late-19th-century Romanticism. (His string sextet of 1899, *Verklaerte Nacht*, "Transfigured Night," remains a brilliant and much-loved example of that style.) But by the end of the first decade of the 20th century, he was on his way to a dramatic renunciation of tonality—a renunciation that included a rejection of the importance of consonant harmonies and a happy embrace of dissonance. And by the early 1920s, he had introduced a novel method of composition that came to be known as the "12-tone" method. In 12-tone music, the composer orders the 12 tones of the chromatic scale (the scale that on the piano includes all the keys, black and white, in any one octave) in a series of his choosing called a "tone row," and that row—in place of traditional scales, harmonies, and harmonic progressions—functions in complex ways as the basis for all the musical elements of the piece. Twelve-tone music (also called "serial" music) is by definition "atonal": It's not in a key, and it doesn't depend on consonant harmonies to provide stability or resolve tension. In theory, the point in 12-tone music is not that dissonance is good and consonance is bad, but rather that they're both irrelevant. In practice, however, Schönberg's 12-tone works, especially his early ones, were strikingly dissonant.

Schönberg claimed to have "liberated" dissonance—liberated it, that is, from its status as a way station for consonance, from being tonality's tool. And his strict avoidance of consonance in his early 12-tone works was a means of avoiding even the slightest whiff of tonality. This was necessary, he felt, in order to establish the 12-tone system on its own solid footing. There are some, however, who would say that, far from leading to a "libera-

tion" of dissonance—a liberation whose necessity was by no means generally acknowledged, I hasten to add—Schönberg's system led, rather, to a tyranny of dissonance.

Not that it led there right away, or that Schönberg himself even did the leading. In his later years, in fact, he actually retreated, moving back toward tonality. To strip certain complicated lines of development down to the bare bones, however, it's accurate to say that the serial music of Schönberg became enormously influential, to an extent way beyond anything having to do with its general acceptance or popularity. This influence came about through Schönberg's own tireless efforts as a teacher and musical zealot, through the proselytizing and philosophizing efforts of various musicians, writers, and critics, and through a strange and complicated confluence of aesthetic and political influences, especially after World War II. The works themselves were controversial from the beginning, to put it mildly. They were often critically reviled, and to this day they have never found more than a very narrow public. But Schönberg's serialism led directly, especially through his student Anton Webern, to a post-war European avant-garde or "modernist" movement spearheaded by such composers as Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and György Ligeti. It led to a simultaneous modernist movement in the United States whose seminal figure was John Cage and whose later exponents included such composers as Milton Babbitt, Elliott Carter, Charles Wuorinen, and many of their students and imitators. And it led ultimately to a 50-year modernist reign in the world of Western classical music, a reign in which to have any hope of being taken seriously by the critical and academic communities, composers were obligated, regardless of their specific styles and techniques, to avoid traditional tonal procedures and the comforts of consonance and to accept that dissonance was king.

Now, it's true that we often add salt and hot spices to our food to enhance its flavor and heighten contrasts, and it's important to remember that some people like their food much hotter and spicier than others. I should emphasize here—and I can't emphasize strongly enough—that there are many contemporary composers, along with

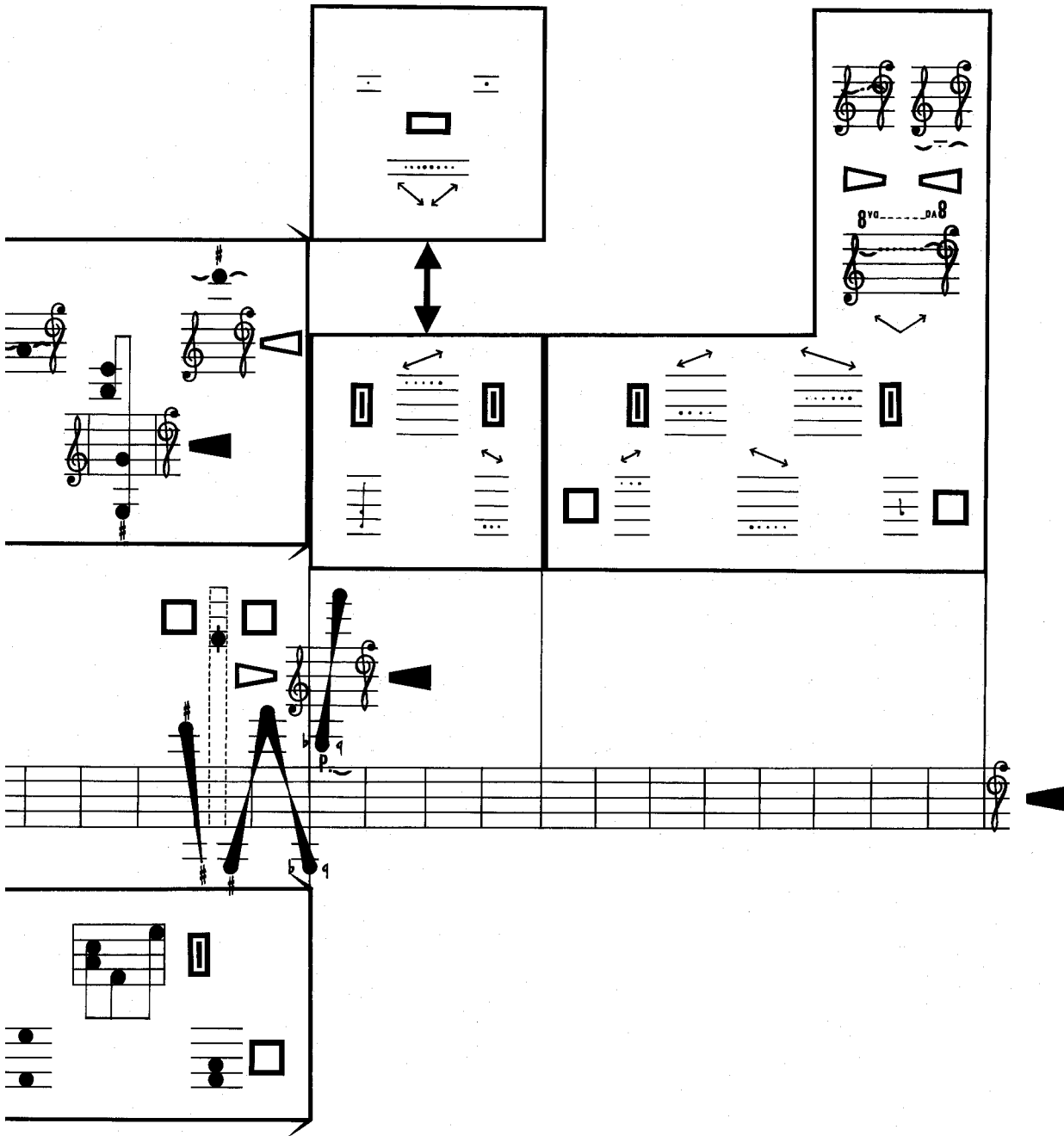
Music's Missing Magic

Many of the more experimental modern compositions, such as this percussion piece, Nr. 9 Zyklus, provide listeners and performers with experiences more intellectual than aesthetic. Helpfully, the German composer, Karlheinz Stockhausen (b. 1928), allows his score to be played as shown or, if turned up-side-down, in the opposite direction.

a host of not-so-contemporary composers, who have in varying degrees made use of 12-tone techniques and atonal procedures to write richly expressive and, indeed, powerfully moving and beautiful works. The extraordinary Alban Berg, an early Schönberg disciple, comes immediately to mind, as do some of the names on my earlier list of primarily tonal—but occasionally atonal!—20th-century composers.

It's true as well that harsh elements can be a tool of great visual art, and that much great literature makes use of disturbing images or harrowing episodes, or both. But is

there a chef on the planet who suggests swallowing a tablespoon of salt for an appetizer and following it with a bowl of Tabasco for an entrée before washing it all down with a cup of vinegar? We know from listening to tonal music that dissonance can be wonderfully useful when it's employed imaginatively. It can enhance and even create meaning. But in and of itself, dissonance is something that people fundamentally *don't like*—that's its very definition. When composers nonetheless demand that their listeners endure dissonance at great length and without let-



up, it's hard not to see that demand as something spiteful, as evidence of a musical philosophy that is stubbornly aggressive, even hostile. And it's easy to understand why that philosophy has never proved terribly popular with the concert-going public.



The primary proposition in defense of avant-garde music of the relentlessly dissonant and persistently unpopular variety has always been that, through exposure and familiarity, we often come to appreciate, and

even love, things that initially confuse or displease us. Here what we might call "the Beethoven Myth" comes into play. "Beethoven was misunderstood in his time," the argument goes, "but now the whole world recognizes his genius. I am misunderstood in my time, therefore I am like Beethoven." This reasoning, unfortunately, has been the refuge of countless second- and third-rate talents. Beethoven ate fish, too. If you eat fish, are you like Beethoven? But there's a much graver flaw in the argument: Beethoven was *not* misunderstood in his time. Beethoven was without doubt the most fa-

mous composer in the world in his time, and the most admired. And if there were those who didn't "get" his late string quartets, for example, there were plenty of others who did, and who rapidly accepted the quartets as masterpieces. In fact, the notion that great geniuses in the history of music went unrecognized during their lifetimes is almost entirely false. It's difficult to find an example of a piece we now consider a masterpiece that was not appreciated as such either while its composer was alive or within a relatively short period after his death. "But there was a riot at the premiere of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring!*" Yes, that was at the premiere, in Paris in May 1913. But the *Rite* was performed again almost immediately, without riots, in Paris and London, and quickly acquired its stature as perhaps the most celebrated and influential piece of the 20th century. It has since been performed and recorded more times than anyone could possibly count.

Still, tastes do evolve, and we're reminded that people who as children eat and drink only Velveeta and soda pop often later develop a taste for Camembert and cognac. That's fine, even if it may be a little on the generous side to use "Camembert and cognac" as analogues for unpleasant sounds. But I'm afraid the "lesson" has usually been taken considerably further, and reinforced with large doses of intellectual condescension and intimidation. While much of the public would be perfectly willing to acknowledge that Camembert and cognac can be wonderful elements of a diet, what we've heard from the avant-garde establishment for years has been something like this: "Yes, we know from centuries of experience that most people find a steady diet of nothing but Camembert and cognac unappealing, and there is no reason to believe that that will ever change. Nonetheless, starting now we are going to feed you . . . a steady diet of nothing but Camembert and cognac. We don't *care* that you find it unappealing, because we've decided that this dietary change is necessary; it represents Progress. And if you can't accept this Progress, it's only because you're not knowledgeable or sophisticated enough to understand and appreciate it."



If the joys and comforts of beautiful sounds were all we sought in music, the dominance of dissonance would be the only problem of avant-garde music that we'd need to consider. But we're also burdened by our fundamental quest for meaning, our need for music to make sense.

"Before we can process and store the input our senses receive," writes psychiatrist Anthony Reading in his book *Hope and Despair*, "we first have to be able to perceive the *information* that it contains, to distinguish meaningful *signals* from meaningless *noise*. Information detection involves perceiving recurrent patterns in data, deviations from apparent randomness." Reading emphasizes that "information is contained in the way objects are arranged within a system, not in the objects themselves," and just as Bach and Beethoven would wholeheartedly agree, so would Schönberg and his musical descendants. The musical objects—notes, chords, rhythms—in the works of many modernist composers (Babbitt and Carter are excellent examples) are in fact arranged with extraordinary care, and sometimes with dazzling intellectual complexity. The catch is that for the arrangements to convey "information," to be meaningful, they have to be perceivable: Unrecognizable or imperceptible patterns are the same as no patterns at all. And without patterns—familiar ones or newly established ones—we lose our bearings. We're not sure where we are or where we've been, and therefore we have little interest in wherever it is we may be going. This is where Schönberg himself so often failed, and where Babbitt and Carter et al. have most grievously failed. They have either grossly overestimated or willfully ignored the limits of the auditory perceptual abilities of most human beings, and somewhere along the way they have either forgotten or willfully ignored the reasons most people listen to music in the first place. They, or their boosters, may write detailed, not to say impenetrably turgid, analyses of the structural underpinnings of their works and the strict mathematical relationships inherent therein, but to the extent that

those relationships remain completely unapparent to the human ear—as they so often do—they’re meaningless, and what we actually hear is . . . noise.

Or we could just call it bad music. Why not? Molière said, “Anyone can be an honorable man, and yet write verse badly.” No one would dispute that there have been many honorable, sincere, dedicated, and very nice men and women writing music over the past 80 years. But if there are such things as “good music” or “good pieces” or “great pieces,” then there must also be such things as bad pieces. There must be pieces that don’t work very well or don’t work at all, pieces that to most ears don’t make sense, and that therefore cannot do what honorable, sincere, and open-minded music lovers look for music to do. Do we agree that Bach and Handel were the greatest composers of the Baroque era? Then the other Baroque composers were . . . less great. And some were not very good at all. What’s interesting is that we have little difficulty in agreeing on many of these distinctions when the people in question are long dead. Why not make distinctions while people are still alive, when making these distinctions might actually be useful? Despite what we’ve been told so often to think, why not go by what we hear? Why not say this: If a piece has had 30 or 50—or 80—years to be “understood” by the public but still isn’t, the chances are extremely good that it’s not ever going to be. And that’s far more likely the fault of the piece, and the composer, than of audiences. Why not come out and say, without fear and without apology for our supposed shortcomings, that the emperor has been naked, and that too much of the music written over the past five decades has been just plain bad?

Am I being too harsh? Have I exaggerated the intensity of the distaste that so much modernist music has aroused? No, sad to say, not if we keep certain factors in mind. One is the strength of the needs, the intensity of the desires, that we fulfill with music. Our expectations of music—expectations of the type nurtured, reinforced, and *satisfied* for generation upon generation—are enormous, and enormously important to

us, and when those expectations are disappointed, we take it very badly indeed. Music is a loved one, after all, a family member. It should be no surprise that we’re troubled much more by its bad behavior than by that of strangers. Another crucial factor is time. One of the more obvious reasons we appreciate music’s giving meaning to time is that our supply of time is so limited. But this is also why we so strongly resent having our time wasted! If you see a painting hanging on the wall and don’t like it, you simply turn your gaze elsewhere, and hardly any time has been squandered. But if you go to a concert and the program includes music you find ugly or unpleasant, precious minutes of your life tick away, lost. You could have done something else with that little part of your life, *anything* else, but you’re stuck four seats from the aisle, and time is passing. From resentment to hatred is but a small step.

And, of course, not many people enjoy being insulted, either, or falsely accused. In a 1964 speech at the Colorado campus of the Aspen Institute, the English composer Benjamin Britten said, “It is insulting to address anyone in a language which they do not understand.” And if what’s said—or played—seems so often to be couched intentionally in a language that virtually *nobody* could understand, and yet one finds oneself blamed over and over again for not understanding. . . .



Let me repeat: People have written, and are still writing, very good and very moving pieces in styles that have little or nothing to do with tonality. Good composers find a way to write good music, and it’s just as great a mistake to equate “atonal” with “ugly” as to assume that “tonal” always means “beautiful.” Heaven knows the history of music is littered with mediocre tonal compositions! But while tonal music benefits, as we’ve seen, from a built-in logic established by centuries of development, any primarily atonal idiom requires the composer to create his or her own logic, and that can be very difficult. When it’s done well, the logic makes itself understood, even on first

Music's Missing Magic

hearing. Notes, harmonies, and rhythms follow one another in patterns that make sense, and the musical language, though perhaps unfamiliar, unusual, or highly spiced with dissonance, is comprehensible and convincing. Narrative, drama, and emotional impact are all possible.

Inevitably, however, we return to the fact that there's something basic to human nature in the perception of "pleasing sounds," and in the strength of the tonal structures that begin and end with those sounds. Blue has remained blue to us over the centuries, and yellow yellow, and salt has never started tasting like sugar. With or without physics, consonances are consonances because to most people they sound good, and we abandon them at great risk. History will say—history says now—that the 12-tone movement was ultimately a dead end, and that the long modernist movement that followed it was a failure. Deeply flawed at their musical and philosophical roots, unloving and oblivious to human limits and human needs, these movements left us with far too many works that are at best unloved, at worst detested. They led modern classical music to crisis, confusion, and, in many quarters, despair, to a sense that we've wasted decades, and to a conviction that our only hope for whatever lies ahead starts with first making sure we abandon the path we've been on.



From a distance of centuries, knowledgeable observers can usually discern when specific cultural developments within societies or civilizations reached their peaks. The experts may argue over precise dates and details, but the existence of the peaks themselves is rarely in question. In the case of Western music, we don't have to wait centuries for a verdict. We can say with confidence that the system of tonal harmony that flowered from the 1600s to the mid-1900s represents the broad summit of human accomplishment, and that our subsequent attempts to find successors or substitutes for that system are efforts—more or less noble—along a downhill slope.

What lies ahead? Nobody can say, of

course. But with the peak behind us, there's no clear cause for optimism—no rational cause, anyway, to believe that another Beethoven (or Berlioz or Brahms or Bartók) is on the way. And even if he *were* on the way, in what musical language would he write when he got here? The present is totally free but totally uncertain, the immediate past offers little, and the more distant past is . . . past. And yet, irrational creatures that we are, we keep hoping for the best, and it's right that we do. We owe it to Music. The good news is that there are many composers today who, despite the uncertain footing, are striving valiantly, and successfully, to write works that are worthy of our admiration and affection. They write in a variety of styles, but the ones who are most successful are those who are finding ways—often by assimilating ethnic idioms and national popular traditions—to invest their music with both rhythmic vitality and lyricism. They're finding ways to reconnect music to its eternal roots in dance and song.

They're also rediscovering, in many cases, the potential of tonal harmonies, and this seems like a positive step. Still, I can't help wondering: Will anybody ever find ways, *new* ways, that are so striking, so wonderful, that our entire musical landscape will be transformed as if by magic? Well, magic itself may actually turn out to be our only hope for such a transformation. The mathematician Mark Kac, in attempting to describe the extraordinary genius of physicist Richard Feynman, came up with the following formulation: "There are two kinds of geniuses, the 'ordinary' and the 'magicians.' An ordinary genius is a fellow that you and I would be just as good as, if we were only many times better. There is no mystery as to how his mind works. . . . It is different with the magicians . . . the working of their minds is for all intents and purposes incomprehensible." If we're very lucky, a musical magician may come along one day who will perform miracles in ways that are completely unforeseeable to us now. Others will learn from his or her work and contribute new riches. The term "modern music" will take on a wonderfully positive ring, and the heaven of better times will be thrown open to us.

O gracious Art, let's hope we get lucky. □

THE COLLAPSE OF BIG MEDIA

Collapse is not too strong a word to describe what has happened to America's major news media. Stripped of their old economic and technological advantages, befuddled by the changing character of their audiences, and beset by new competitors, they are reeling from the blows recent scandals have dealt to their credibility and prestige. Their old authority is gone, and with it, perhaps, their ability to define for Americans a shared realm of information, ideas, and debate.



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Starting Over

by Terry Eastland

It's premature to write an obituary, but there's no question that America's news media—the newspapers, newsmagazines, and television networks that people once turned to for all their news—are experiencing what psychologists might call a major life passage. They've seen their audiences shrink, they've had to worry about vigorous new competitors, and they've suffered more than a few self-inflicted wounds—scandals of their own making. They know that more and more people have lost confidence in what they do. To many Americans, today's newspaper is irrelevant, and network news is as compelling as whatever is being offered over on the Home Shopping Network. Maybe less.

The First Amendment protects against government abridgment of the freedom of the press. But it doesn't guarantee that today's news media—some would already say yesterday's—will be tomorrow's. Though most existing news organizations will probably survive, few if any are likely to enjoy the prestige and clout they once did. So it's time to write, if not an obituary, then an account of their rise and decline and delicate prospects amid the “new media” of cable television, talk radio, and the blogosphere.

The “new media” carry the adjective because they began to emerge only in the 1980s, when the media of newspapers, newsmagazines, and network and local television news had long been firmly in place. Most newspapers had been around since the first decades of the 20th century, and though rising costs and competition caused some to be shuttered in the decades after World War II, there were still more than 1,700 papers published daily in the 1970s. *Time* and *Newsweek* were established, respectively, in 1923 and 1933. Network television newscasts were reaching most parts of the country by the 1950s, and local stations eventually provided their own news programs at various points in the day.

The most important old news organizations were the outlets that covered stories in the nation's capital and abroad. They included *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*; *Time* and *Newsweek*; NBC News, CBS News, and ABC News; National Public Radio and public television's various iterations of what is now called *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*. When people talked about the “mainstream” or “establishment” media, these were the organizations they had in mind. They were leaders among the media generally, and shaped how regional and local outlets practiced journalism.

They were also part of America's first sizable national elite, which emerged after World War II in response to the needs of a nation whose central government was larger and more invasive, costly, and ambitious than ever before. Political leaders, lawyers, academics, businesspeople, and certain practitioners of that once-disreputable trade, journalism, populated this elite. As in the other elites, mem-



“No one can eliminate prejudices—just recognize them,” declared CBS’s Edward R. Murrow, one of the founding fathers of TV news, shown here on the set of his 1950s show, See It Now.

bers of the media elite held degrees from many of the same (elite) universities. They believed that they had a responsibility to improve society, and they thought of themselves—as no ink-stained wretch had before—as professionals.

The most influential journalists understood that news is rarely news in the sense of being undisputed facts about people or policy, but news in the sense that it’s a product made by reporters, editors, and producers. They knew that news is about facts, but that it fundamentally reflects editorial judgments about whether particular facts are “news,” and if they are, what the news means and what its consequences may be. They knew, too, that those who define and present the news have a certain power, since news can set a public agenda. And they weren’t shy about exercising this power. That’s what made them dominant—an establishment, in fact.

At their best, the elite media pursued stories of public importance and reported them thoroughly, accurately, and in reasonably fair and balanced fashion. And they did that a great deal of the time. They were never the relentlessly vigilant “watchdogs” they congratulated themselves on being, but they did sometimes do valuable work policing the abuses and failures of government and other institutions.

And they influenced the nation, most dramatically during the 1960s and 1970s. They probably tipped the close 1960 election between Richard Nixon and John Kennedy, when, as Theodore H. White reported in *The Making of the President, 1960* (1961), the coverage clearly favored Kennedy. They early and

correctly judged that the civil rights movement was news, and they turned news with datelines in the South into a national story of profound significance. They also affected the 1968 election—through what historian Paul Johnson called their “tendentious presentation” of news about the Vietnam War, which came to a head with the Tet offensive in January 1968, a major American military victory that the media cast as a defeat. Some described this portrayal as flawed reporting—notably the founding editor of this journal, Peter Braestrup, in *Big Story* (1977)—while others saw it as a product of bias. But the effect of the treatment of Tet was to help shift elite opinion decisively against the war. In March 1968, after nearly losing the New Hampshire primary, President Lyndon Johnson decided not to run for reelection.

And then there was the presidency of Richard Nixon. Nixon was never liked by the news media, to put it mildly, and he returned the favor, calling the press “the enemy.” When the judicial process exposed a “third-rate burglary” at the Watergate complex in Washington, *The Washington Post* pursued the story, with other outlets later joining in. Nixon became the only president in American history to resign the office.

The media establishment emerged at a time when Americans generally respected those in authority. But when, beginning in the 1960s, authority took a severe beating, the media establishment was the one authority that actually gained in strength. Crusading reporters and editors became cultural heroes—the rebels and nonconformists who refused to kowtow to anybody. The Watergate scandal in particular confirmed in the media the sense they had of themselves as independent guardians of the public good and the very conscience of the nation in times of crisis. Over the years, judicial decisions also went their way, securing greater protection for the exercise of media power. For the establishment media, life was very good.

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Since the 1980s, however, more and more Americans have stopped relying on the traditional media for news. Some have quit the news habit entirely. Newspaper circulation has been declining, and network ratings are sharply down. Mainstream outlets no longer have a monopoly on the news, their journalism is subjected to sometimes withering scrutiny, and they are ignored when they are not criticized. Life is no longer so good.

There are many explanations for why Americans have been turning away from their old news providers, including adjustments in how people now live and work (fewer have time to watch the evening news) and the lack of interest in news evident among younger generations whose tastes often carry them to MTV. But the media can also blame themselves for the change.

Here it bears noting that though journalists aspired to the status of pro-

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professionals, they never acquired the self-regulatory mechanisms found in law, medicine, or even business. The nation's journalism schools, which taught—and still teach—a craft better learned on the job, never really filled the void. Those schools often tended to hire former journalists lacking both the intellectual capability and the inclination to undertake serious analysis of the institutions whence they came. Critical scholarship by those outside the guild tended to be summarily dismissed, and the field was always thin on professional journals examining its practices and guiding ideas. Most of those that were tried—for example, I edited *Forbes Media Critic* from 1993 through 1996—found no footing. Media criticism, such as it was, leaned mostly to polemics and insider chatter (news people are happy to talk endlessly about themselves, evidently on the assumption that others are eager to listen).

NEGATIVITY IN THE
NEWS CAUSED MANY
TO TUNE OUT.

Of course, the media did have critics who didn't publish articles—ordinary Americans. Too often they'd turn on the evening news and hear about conflict and controversy. It was as though news, if it were to be real, had to be boiled down to some negative essence, some clod of dirt that the subjects of a story flung at each other. Or they'd see an interview in which a correspondent would ask a non-question question designed to put the hapless interviewee in his or her place. Thus in 1995 did a *CBS Good Morning* host “ask” then-senator Phil Gramm of Texas, “If you really want to reduce the deficit, are you going to have to cut entitlements? But I'm sure you don't want to talk about that.” Or the public would read news stories in which the writers took gratuitous shots at their subjects. Thus did Maureen Dowd, before her elevation from reporter to columnist at *The New York Times*, lead her front-page story on President Bill Clinton's 1994 visit to Oxford with a sentence stating that he was making “a sentimental journey to the university where he didn't inhale, didn't get drafted, and didn't get a degree.”

The negativity in the news may have resulted from the more personalized or interpretative journalism that began appearing in the 1960s. It represented a break from the old norm of objectivity by which reporters were obliged to keep their own views out of articles, and it was thought to help in uncovering the “real story” beyond any official statements and scheduled events. Perhaps the urgent need to compete for smaller pools of viewers and readers also played a role in the rise of negative news. But to judge by opinion polls, the public wasn't impressed. The negativity, not to mention the arrogance with which it was often served up, caused many to tune out.

The public had another problem with media figures: their political and social views. Surveys taken over several decades demonstrated that most national journalists voted Democratic and were politically and socially liberal. In 1962, *The Columbia Journalism Review* published a survey of 273 Washington journalists in which 57 percent called themselves liberal and 28 percent conservative, with the rest choosing “middle of the road” or declining any label. The conservative contingent was down to 17 percent when sociologist S. Robert Lichter and Smith College political scientist Stanley Rothman conducted another survey in 1980. Most respondents said they were “lifestyle liberals,” meaning that

they favored abortion rights and affirmative action and rejected the notion that homosexuality was wrong. Eighty-six percent said they seldom or never attended religious services. Eighty-one percent had voted for George McGovern in 1972. In 1992, another survey of 139 Washington-based bureau chiefs and congressional correspondents found that 89 percent planned to vote for the Democrat, Bill Clinton, in the approaching presidential election.

The surveys certainly said something about the media. But they did not say that the news the media provided was biased; that required its own demonstration. Members of the elite media often asserted that the public could count on their professionalism to ensure against bias. Yet they seldom admitted bias, even in stories in which it was all too obvious.

Nor would they concede that they might be missing news because they were disposed to look for it only in the kinds of places people of their mindset and values thought potentially newsworthy. The news they found in those

TODAY, NOBODY DENIES
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places might indeed be legitimate news. But other sorts of news, to be found in places people of a different mindset and other values might think to explore, were often neglected. A case in point was the media's failure, in the run-up to the historic 1994 congressional elections, to examine seriously the substance

of the GOP's campaign manifesto, the "Contract with America." Only after the elections did the media take a much-belated look.

Whatever bias the media did not concede, and whatever places they skipped past where news might have been sought, there remained this essential fact: Most journalists were liberal in their political views and voting preferences. Today, no one really disputes that fact, nor have mainstream journalists changed much in this regard, for every new survey only confirms what all the previous ones reported. But when the mainstream media began their decline in the 1980s, they were reluctant to concede the point. In so many words, they often seemed to say, "If our liberalism is a fact—and we don't really know that it is—it's irrelevant."

The media bravely (perilously?) held that position even as the country continued a rightward movement that has now culminated, for the first time in a half century, in Republican control of both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue. An increasingly conservative public was being asked to continue getting its news from people who, by and large, held liberal views. That was a tough sell, and it got even tougher because the new media made possible by emerging technologies offered alternatives.

The Cable News Network, founded in 1980, was arguably the first new media entity, its distinguishing characteristic that it offered news 24/7. Other round-the-clock cable news providers followed, including, in 1996, the Fox News Channel. Meanwhile, national talk radio captured large audiences, with none

The Shrinking News Audience

Daily U.S. newspaper circulation

1990:	62,327,962
2003:	55,185,351

Number of daily U.S. newspapers

1990:	1,611
2003:	1,456

By age group, percentage of American adults who read a newspaper “yesterday”

18–29:	23
30–49:	39
50–64:	52
60+:	60

Circulation of *The New York Times*

1990:	1,108,447
2004:	1,121,057

Circulation of *The Washington Post*

1990:	780,582
2004:	746,724

Circulation of *The Wall Street Journal*

1990:	1,857,131
2004:	2,106,774

Circulation of *The Los Angeles Times*

1990:	1,196,323
2004:	902,164

Time spent per day by 8-to-18-year-olds with all media: 6 hrs. 21 mins.

Time spent per day with print media: 43 mins.

Combined viewership of network evening news

1980:	52 million
2004:	28.8 million

Viewership of network evening news, by program

<i>NBC Nightly News</i>	11.2 million
<i>ABC World News Tonight</i>	9.9 million
<i>CBS Nightly News</i>	7.7 million
<i>PBS NewsHour</i>	2.7 million

Median age of network evening news viewers: 60

Percentage of people who believe “all or most” of what’s on

Network news	24
CNN	32
Fox News	25
C-Span	27
<i>PBS NewsHour</i>	23

Percentage of radio audience listening to news/talk: 16

Percentage of news/talk listeners ages 12–34: 15

Percentage of news/talk listeners age 50 or older: 65

Number of active blogs (updated in last two months): 6.8 million

Number of abandoned blogs: 13.1 million

Percentage of bloggers under age 30: 48

Percentage of Internet users who have read a blog: 27

Percentage of Internet users who don’t know what a blog is: 62

Sources: Newspaper Association of America, Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, World Almanac and Book of Facts 1992, Audit Bureau of Circulation, Project for Excellence in Journalism, Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Perseus Development Corporation, Pew Internet and American Life Project.

Big Media

bigger than that for Rush Limbaugh, who debuted in 1988. In 1999, the first weblog appeared on the Internet. Today the number of blogs—they make up the “blogosphere”—is growing every day.

The new media tended to be more hospitable to conservative views. And it was through the new media that a public growing more conservative in its politics began to find satisfaction. Which is not to say that the new media produced better news stories. They didn't, and still don't, because, cable news networks excepted, they don't do much in the way of original reporting. They analyze and opine on the basis of news reported not only by cable television but by the traditional media, which they daily criticize.

Yet the new media also do something else. To the traditional media, the new media have always looked awfully incomplete, as being more about politics and ideology than about news. Still, from their inception the new media have been landing blows on the old media precisely where it matters most. Remember that news is a thing made, a product, and that media with certain beliefs and values once made the news and then presented it in authoritative terms, as though beyond criticism. Thus did Walter Cronkite famously end his newscasts, “And that's the way it is.” That way, period.

But the question the new media have asked is precisely, “Which way was it?” And, in answering it, they have allowed people with beliefs and values different from those dominating the old media to have their say. Though cable and radio talk shows have been derided as shoutfests, they've enabled people to think differently about the news. Historian Christopher Lasch once observed that only in the course of argument do “we come to understand what we know and what we still need to learn.” The new media's chief accomplishment may well turn out to be that they opened for argument questions to which the old media alone used to provide answers.

A notable characteristic of the new media is speed (some would say haste). Their speed is another reason for the old media's travail. Consider what happened when Dan Rather reported that infamous story on CBS News's *60 Minutes Wednesday* suggesting that George W. Bush had shirked his duties while serving as a pilot in the Texas Air National Guard. The story was broadcast on September 8, 2004, and by the following morning bloggers were tearing apart documents essential to the story, revealing them to be painfully obvious fakes. Traditional media soon began picking at the CBS story, but it's not evident that, absent the blogosphere, the piece would have been deconstructed. Nor that a formal investigation by CBS itself would have ensued, which resulted in scathing criticism of the broadcast, the firing of the story's producer, the resignation of three other executives, and the earlier-than-anticipated retirement of Rather himself as anchor of the evening news.

The deeper point about the quick breakdown of the Bush National Guard story was that it revealed a media establishment without its old power and influence. CBS News and other establishment outlets wanted to determine what the news should be in the obviously important context of a presidential campaign. They had grown anxious about campaign coverage that seemed to them too influenced by “outsiders” and the new media. In early August, a group of Vietnam veterans opposed to John Kerry began running an ad that challenged his

account of his Vietnam service. The establishment media ignored their claims, but the blogosphere didn't. Nor did cable and radio talk shows, on which the Swift Boat Veterans, as they were called, made frequent appearances. Once Kerry formally responded to the Swifties, the big networks and newspapers had little choice but to cover the story, despite their dislike for it.

Some establishment journalists argued that the media now had an obligation to turn the spotlight on Bush. Syndicated columnist E. J. Dionne, Jr., a former reporter for both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, wrote, "Now that John Kerry's life during his twenties has been put at the heart of this campaign just over two months from Election Day, the media owe the country a comparable review of what Bush was doing at the same time and the same age. If all the stories about what Kerry did in Vietnam are not balanced by serious scrutiny of Bush in the Vietnam years, the media will be capitulating to a right-wing smear campaign. Surely our nation's editors and producers don't want to send a signal that all you have to do to set the media's agenda is to spend a half-million bucks on television ads."

Not just CBS News but several other establishment outlets were trying to reset that agenda by pursuing the National Guard story, a quest that would carry them to the door of the same man who passed the bogus documents to CBS and was described by the panel that investigated the fiasco as a "partisan with an anti-Bush agenda." CBS acted first, with fateful results, but none of the other media ever produced any authentic documents either. The story simply wasn't there.

In 1995, Jonathan Alter wrote a *Newsweek* column recognizing that the "old media order" was "in decline." The decline has only continued. Even so, it's hard to imagine an America without the news organizations that make up the old media, if only because they're still the main sources of independent reporting, and such reporting is essential in a country whose self-governing people need information to make all kinds of decisions. Yet for the old media to become newly credible, to regain respect and audience, in a country more populous and less enamored of elites than it once was, and more red than blue, they're going to have to dial down their imperial arrogance. They're going to have to learn from the best of what the new media offer, and perhaps even recruit bloggers to help with news judgment and fact-checking. And they're definitely going to have to look for news in places they formerly did not.

Occasionally you see evidence that an old media outlet is beginning to get it. Beginning, I say. Consider *The New York Times*, like CBS News a charter member of the establishment media, and, like CBS News, an institution burdened by a recent scandal (Jayson Blair's plagiarism and fabrications) which eventually cost top journalists their jobs. In January 2004 the *Times* effectively conceded the need to enlarge the field in which it looks for news when it deployed a reporter to cover, as the *Times'* press release put it, "conservative forces in religion, politics, law, business, and the media." It was as if the *Times* had decided that it should now cover some far-off, exotic country that had suddenly become a world power — and yet it was dispatching only a single correspondent to do the job! But at least that was a start. Finally, there was change. So the *Times* was right to put out a press release: This really was news. □

The Young and the Restless

by David T. Z. Mindich

When news executives look at the decline over the past few decades in the number of people who read or watch the news, they're scared silly. But then they reassure themselves that the kids will come around. Conventional wisdom runs that as young men and women gain the trappings of adulthood—a job, a spouse, children, and a house—they tend to pick up the news habit, too. As CBS News president Andrew Heyward declared in 2002, “Time is on our side in that as you get older, you tend to get more interested in the world around you.” Unfortunately for Heyward and other news executives, the evidence suggests that young people are not picking up the news habit—not in their teens, not in their twenties, not even in their thirties.

When they aren't reassuring themselves, editors and publishers are lying awake at night thinking about the dismaying trends of recent decades. In 1972, nearly half of 18-to-22-year-olds read a newspaper every day, according to research conducted by Wolfram Peiser, a scholar who studies newspaper readership. Today, less than a quarter do. That younger people are less likely to read than their elders is of grave concern, but perhaps not surprising. In fact, the baby boomers who came of age in the 1970s are less avid news consumers than their parents were. More ominous for the future of the news media, however, is Peiser's research showing that a particular age cohort's reading habits do not change much with time; in other words, as people age, they continue the news habits of their younger days. Thus, the real danger, Peiser says, is that cohort replacement builds in a general decline in newspaper reading. The deleterious effects of this phenomenon are clearly evident: In 1972, nearly three-quarters of the 34-to-37 age group read a paper daily. Those thirtysomethings have been replaced by successive crops of thirtysomethings, each reading less than its predecessor. Today, only about a third of this group reads a newspaper every day. This means that fewer parents are bringing home a newspaper or discussing current events over dinner. And fewer kids are growing up in households in which newspapers matter.

A similar decline is evident in television news viewership. In the past decade, the median age of network television news viewers has crept up from about 50 to about 60. Tune in to any network news show or CNN, and note the products hawked in the commercials: The pitches for Viagra, Metamucil,



The young are increasingly immersed in various media, but they consume less and less news.

Depends, and Fixodent are not aimed at teenyboppers. Compounding the problem of a graying news audience is the proliferation of televisions within the typical household, which diminishes adult influence over what's watched. In 1970, six percent of all sixth graders had TVs in their bedrooms; today that number is an astonishing 77 percent. If you are in sixth grade and sitting alone in your room, you're probably not watching Peter Jennings.

One of the clearest signs of the sea change in news viewing habits was the uproar following the appearance last fall by Jon Stewart, host of *The Daily Show*, a parody of a news program, on CNN's *Crossfire*, a real one. With a median age of 34, *The Daily Show*'s audience is the envy of CNN, so when Stewart told *Crossfire*'s hosts that their show's predictable left/right approach to debates of current issues was "hurting America," one could have guessed that CNN bigwigs would pay attention. But who could have foreseen that CNN president Jonathan Klein would cancel *Crossfire*? "I agree wholeheartedly with Jon Stewart's overall premise," he told *The New York Times*. News executives are so desperate to get to consumers before the AARP does that they're willing to heed the advice of a comedian.

If the young (and not so young) are not reading newspapers or watching network television news, many assume that they are getting news online. Not so. Only 18 percent of Americans listed the Internet as a "primary news source" in a survey released earlier this year by the Pew Internet and American Life Project and the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. And the

theory that younger people are more reliant on the Internet for news than their elders doesn't hold up. Certainly an engaged minority of young people use the Net to get a lot of news, but studies show that most use it primarily

IF THE YOUTH AUDIENCE
IS TUNING OUT
NEWSPAPER, TELEVISION,
AND INTERNET NEWS,
WHAT IS IT TUNING IN?

for e-mailing, instant messaging, games, and other diversions. You only need to wander into a computer lab at your local college or high school and see what the students have on their screens for the dismal confirmation of these choices.

If the youth audience is tuned out of newspaper, television,

and Internet news, what, exactly, is it tuning in to? To answer this question, I traveled the country in 2002 speaking with groups of young people about their news habits. My research confirmed what many people already suspect: that most young people tune in to situation comedies and "reality" TV to the exclusion of news. I was surprised, though, by the scope of the trend: Most of the young people I interviewed had almost no measurable interest in political news. At Brandeis University in Massachusetts, one student explained that watching the situation comedy *Friends* creates a "sense of emotional investment" and "instant gratification." This engagement contrasts with the "detachment" young people feel from public issues such as campaign finance reform and news sources such as CNN and Peter Jennings. And when the news and its purveyors are seen simply as alternative forms of entertainment, they can't compete with the likes of *CSI*, *Las Vegas*, *American Idol*, and *Fear Factor*.

The entertainment options competing with the news for the attention of the youth audience have multiplied exponentially. In the 1960s, there were only a handful of television stations in any given market. When Walter Cronkite shook the nation by declaring in a February 1968 report on the Vietnam War that the United States was "mired in stalemate," he spoke to a captive audience. New York City, for example, had only seven broadcast stations. At 10:30 p. m. on the night of Cronkite's remarks, channels 4 and 11 ran movies, channels 5 and 9 had discussion shows, and channel 7 was showing *NYPD*, a cop show. In this media universe of limited competition, nearly 80 percent of all television viewers watched the nightly news, and from the late 1960s on, Cronkite won the lion's share of the total news audience. Today, young people can choose from hundreds of stations, less than a tenth of which are devoted to news. And that's not to mention the many competing diversions that weren't available in 1968, from video games to iPods. Amid this entertainment cornucopia, the combined network news viewership has shrunk significantly—from some 50 million nightly in the 1960s to about 25

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million today. (In comparison, CNN's audience is minuscule, typically no more than a million or so viewers, while public television's *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* generally reaches fewer than three million viewers.)

The effects of this diet are evident in how little Americans know about current events. True, Americans have been extremely uninformed for a long time. Most follow public affairs only in a vague way, and many don't bother to engage at all. In the 1950s and 1960s, at the height of the Cold War, a poll revealed that only 55 percent of Americans knew that East Germany was a communist country, and less than half knew that the Soviet Union was not part of NATO, report political scientists Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter in *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters* (1996). In short, there was never a golden age of informed citizenry. But in recent decades, Americans' ignorance has reached truly stupefying levels, particularly among young adults. A series of reports published over the past two decades by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (and its predecessor, the Times Mirror Center) suggest that young adults

were once *nearly* as informed as their elders on a range of political issues. From 1944 to 1968, the interest of younger people in the news as reported in opinion surveys was less than five percent below that of the population at large. Political debates and elections in the 1940s, the Army-McCarthy hearings of the 1950s, and the Vietnam War in the 1960s generated as much interest among the young as among older people. But

Watergate in the 1970s was the last in this series of defining events to draw general public attention. (Decades later, in 2001, the bombing of the World Trade Center towers revived general public engagement, at least for a few weeks.) Soon after Watergate, surveys began to show flagging interest in current affairs among younger people.

There is no single explanation for this sudden break. Many of the young people I spoke with in doing my research were disaffected with the political process and believed that it was completely insulated from public pressure. Why, in that case, keep up with public affairs? The blurring line between entertainment and journalism, along with corporate consolidation of big media companies, has also bred in some minds a deep skepticism about the news media's offerings. At bottom, however, the sense of community has declined as Americans are able to live increasingly isolated lives, spending long hours



As they feed the appetite for voyeuristic fare, the news media also promote cynicism about its source.

commuting to work and holing up in suburban homes cocooned from the rest of the world.

The extent of this withdrawal from civic involvement is evident in a poll conducted during the height of the 2004 Democratic presidential primaries. In response to the question, “Do you happen to know which of the presidential candidates served as an army general?” about 42 percent of the over-50 crowd could name Wesley Clark. Only 13 percent of those under 30 could. While these results reveal a general lack of political knowledge *across* ages, they also underscore the growing gap *between* ages.

The shrinking audience for news is undermining the health of many major news media outlets. The most recent symptom was the revelation last year that a number of major newspapers, notably *The Chicago Sun-Times* and New York’s *Newsday*, had cooked their books, inflating circulation figures in order to mask declines and keep advertising revenues from falling. More insidious—and less widely decried—is the industry-wide practice of bolstering profits by reducing news content. In newspapers, this is done by cutting back on the number of reporters covering state government, Washington, and foreign affairs, and by shrinking the space in the paper devoted to news. The news media are, in a very real sense, making our world smaller. On the broadcast networks, this shrinkage is easily measurable: In 1981, a 30-minute nightly newscast on CBS, minus commercials, was 23 minutes and 20 seconds, according to Leonard Downie, Jr., and Robert G. Kaiser’s *The News about the News: American Journalism in Peril* (2002). In 2000, the same newscast was down to 18 minutes and 20 seconds. That’s a lot of missing news.

The failing health of the nation’s news media is not only a symptom of Americans’ low levels of engagement in political life. It is a threat to political life itself. “The role of the press,” writes news media critic James W. Carey, “is simply to make sure that in the short run we don’t get screwed.” Independent, fair, and accurate reporting is what gives “We the People” our

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check on power. Reporters dig up corruption and confront power; they focus the public’s attention on government policies and actions that are unwise, unjust, or simply ineffective. It was the news media that exposed the Watergate

burglary and cover-up engineered by Richard Nixon, sparked the investigation of the Iran-contra affair during the watch of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, ferreted out Bill Clinton’s Whitewater dealings, and turned a searchlight on George W. Bush’s extrajudicial arrests of American citizens suspected of terrorism.

A shrinking audience impairs the news media’s ability to carry out their watchdog role. It also permits the powers that be to undermine journalism’s legitimate functions. Where was the public outrage when it was revealed that the current Bush administration had secretly paid journalists

to carry its water, or when the White House denied a press pass to a real journalist, Maureen Dowd of *The New York Times*, and gave one to a political hack who wrote for purely partisan outlets using a fake identity? The whole notion of the news media as the public's watchdog, once an unquestioned article of the American civic faith, is now in jeopardy. A recent study commissioned by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation showed that more than a third of high school students feel that newspaper articles should be vetted by the federal government before publication.

If we are entering a post-journalism age—in which the majority of Americans, young and old, have little interaction with mainstream news media—the most valuable thing we are losing is the marketplace of ideas that newspapers and news broadcasts uniquely provide, that place where views clash and the full range of democratic choices is debated. You usually don't get that on a blog. You don't get that in the left-leaning *Nation* or on right-wing talk shows. But any newspaper worth its salt, and there are plenty, presents a variety of views, including ones antithetical to its editorial page positions. These papers are hardly immune from criticism—they sometimes err, get sloppy, or succumb to partisan or ideological bias—but they do strive to be accurate and independent sources of fact and opinion, and more often than not they fulfill that indispensable public function.

America's newspapers and television news divisions aren't going to save themselves by competing with reality shows and soap operas. The appetite for news, and for engagement with civic life itself, must be nurtured and promoted, and it's very much in the public interest to undertake the task. It's not the impossible assignment it may seem. During the course of my research, I met a group of boys in New Orleans who were very unlikely consumers of news: They were saturated with television programs and video games, they were poor, and they were in eighth grade. Yet they were all reading *The New York Times* online. Why? Because one of their teachers had assigned the newspaper to them to read when they were in sixth grade, and the habit stuck. There's no reason why print and broadcast news shouldn't be a bigger part of the school curriculum, or why there shouldn't be a short civics/current affairs section on the SAT for college-bound students, or why all high school seniors shouldn't have to take a nonbinding version of the civics test given to immigrants who want to become U.S. citizens. And why shouldn't broadcasters be required to produce a certain amount of children's news programming in return for their access to the public airwaves? These are only the most obvious possibilities.

Reporters, editors, producers, and media business executives will all need to make their own adjustments to meet the demands of new times and new audiences, but only by reaching a collective judgment about the value and necessity of vigorous news media in American democracy can we hope to keep our public watchdogs on guard and in good health. □

Seven Steps to Salvation

by William Powers

Let's assume that the news media, collectively, have a soul—that somewhere beneath their tawdry, moronic surface dwells a kind of pure being whose intentions are good. Let's further posit that this soul is, at present, a lost soul. Once, long ago, it had high principles and a clear sense of purpose. Now it's at sea, buffeted by one scandal after another—plagiarism, payola, bias, and garden-variety sloppy work. These troubles, for which it is often abused by fierce bloggers attacking from every side, have shaken the soul's sense of purpose, and now the poor, addled thing is questioning its very reason for being.

But if the news trade's self-image is bad, its public image is worse. Every year, Gallup conducts a poll on the ethics and perceived honesty of various professions. In the most recent survey, journalists ranked below auto mechanics and nursing home operators. They came out ahead of car salesmen, but one wonders how long they'll hold even that position. Various studies show that young people, the audience of the future, are not patronizing traditional news outlets (i.e., newspapers and TV networks) as previous generations did—in part because they don't trust those outlets and view the news as another highly packaged product pushed by big corporations.

Just 30 years ago, establishment newspaper reporters were authentic popular heroes, thanks to the Watergate story and the book and movie *All the President's Men*. Last winter, when a scandal-scarred Dan Rather announced that he would step down from his position as anchor of the *CBS Evening News*, there was semiserious talk in haute media circles that perhaps the job should go to Jon Stewart, the comedian who, on his popular program *The Daily Show*, mocks both politicians and the journalists who cover them. Anyone trying to identify the moment when the news business really hit bottom need look no further.

Is there anything the old media can do to redeem themselves, to restore their public standing and sense of self-worth? Maybe. I would prescribe the following recovery program:

1. **Relax.** All this hyperventilating isn't getting you anywhere, and it's unattractive. Nobody likes a whiner, particularly one who doesn't know how lucky he is. You've been around for centuries, and you're more powerful now than ever before. Your words make great leaders quake. And you're certainly not going out of business anytime soon, not as long as your core product, information,



It seemed funny when Dan Rather gave GQ's "Voice of Reason" award to Jon Stewart of The Daily Show in 2003, but less so when the comedian was mentioned as Rather's replacement.

is the driving force of civilization. Stop obsessing about your troubles. Calm down and get back to work.

2. Enjoy yourselves. Apple Computer's wildly successful iPod comes wrapped in an elegant black box, and the directions inside are sealed with a sticker bearing a single word: "Enjoy." Almost any iPod user can testify to how easy it is to follow this instruction. The ingeniously crafted device is so satisfying merely to hold that it's easy to imagine the pleasure Apple's engineers and designers experienced as they created it. And their pleasure begets ours.

If only your news products were put together in the same spirit of exuberant creativity. Sadly, traditional news outlets have become joyless things. Most American broadsheet newspapers are dull, fearful creatures. There's little effort to be different or original, whether with Washington news or the latest tawdry true-crime trial. Pack journalism rules, because it's safe. Even political cartoons, once a font of delightful wickedness, have grown timid and conformist. It's not unusual to hear that a newspaper killed a cartoon or a comic strip installment that was deemed a bit too controversial. Starting controversies used to be the point of newspapers. Now they all want to please.

Television news errs in the opposite direction, with a cynical reliance on sensation that's become automatic and, in its own way, moribund. The networks are stuck in ratings-driven formulas — addicted to celebrity, serial killers, and once-over-lightly coverage of politics. Local TV news is so idiotic and tabloid-like that one doesn't mention it in polite company.

In contrast, blogs and other online news sources often possess an attractive, intelligent vibrancy, a sense that all news—including the most serious of news—is thrilling because it connects us to the great throng of humanity. One reason *The Drudge Report* gets so much online traffic is that it seems alive to the world, darting here and there with an infectious brio and an appetite for

ENOUGH ALREADY WITH
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the truly novel. Google News offers an assortment of items gathered from thousands of unusual sources around the world. Though the selection is performed by machine (or, as Google puts it, “solely by computer algorithms without human

intervention”), the constantly updating site has more vitality than many old-media products put together by live hominids.

3. *Be natural.* Enough already with your pretensions to objectivity and neutrality. Everyone has leanings, passions, and, yes, biases. By claiming to be superhuman—bias free—you come off as weirdly subhuman. In all honesty, sometimes you have the public personality of an android. Striving for perfect fairness is a fine goal. Just don’t act as though you achieve it on a regular basis.

Individuals have opinions. We’re all drawn, often unconsciously, to those who share our own sensibilities, political and otherwise. That’s how news organizations from CNN to Fox News to *The New York Times* acquire their particular ideological tinctures. The process is not evil, it’s organic. Listen to those in your audience who complain about it, and when they have a point, acknowledge it forthrightly. Tell them: “We’re people, and we have points of view, and sometimes they really do shape our work. We’ll try to do better next time.” Candor is the better part of bias.

4. *Don’t patronize.* One reason young people say they avoid newspapers and other traditional news media is that what’s offered by those outlets has no apparent connection to the world they live in. To them, the news doesn’t look or sound like life but rather like some false approximation of it. Sadly, sitcoms and other TV shows that couldn’t be more packaged or synthetic often strike the young as more “real.” This is partly their own fault—some of them really are twits—but it’s also yours for not reaching more of them.

I know what you’re going to say: You’ve tried to speak to them in their own language. *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Washington Post*, and other big newspapers have launched free youth-audience tabloids designed to draw in young readers. Cable and network news programs put younger journalists on the air, who report and comment on topics supposedly of interest to their generation. During the 2004 presidential campaign, it

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In a bow to the rising influence of new media, bloggers were given some of the highly prized seats in the press section at the Democratic National Convention in Boston last July.

wasn't unusual to turn on the TV and encounter a twentysomething chirpily reporting what was happening out in the très hip blogosphere.

Alas, such efforts almost always have an affected quality. When fiftysomething editors and producers hire twentysomething writers to juice the product with trendy pop inflections, they're not being journalists, they're being marketers. As Brian Orloff, a young reporter for the newspaper industry trade journal *Editor & Publisher*, wrote recently of those giveaway tabloids, "What appears to be an earnest attempt at tailoring the news to multitasking readers often comes across as pandering. Young readers have hectic lives. But we don't need to be bombarded with painfully hip references, or silly euphemisms masking as section headlines (such as 'Hot Topics' instead of 'News' in the St. Pete *Times'* free weekly tabloid)."

Herding young viewers and readers into little media ghettos will not win them over. Young people recognize demographic targeting—they grew up with it. Rather than patronize them with endless "youth" sections and segments, why not include young reporters and commentators throughout your pages and broadcasts? In particular, the opinion columns of America's great newspapers are the Sun Cities of journalism, where older journalists go to live out their golden years. They need fresher perspectives. Meanwhile, because the nightly network newscasts tend to draw an older audience, the networks skew the content toward the interests of the elderly—that's why we see all those "Your Health" segments about new cures for wrinkles and arthritis, high blood pressure and low libido. Such tactics are driving the young away from everything you do.

Swear off demographics. Hire journalists of all ages, and deploy them in unexpected ways. In journalism, there's no such thing as generationally correct work. Have an octogenarian cover blogs. When David Broder retires

from *The Washington Post*, give his column to the sharpest 27-year-old you know. The results could be strange and wonderful.

5. *Make trouble.* It's a fact: Nobody respects a suck-up. The more you try to please readers and viewers by pseudoscientifically studying and catering to their tastes and habits, the less they'll want you in their lives. Over the past few decades, you've become a prisoner to focus groups. Zoned editions and "viewer-friendly" segments don't win you any friends. So stop making nice, and start making mischief. Media consumers have always been drawn, first and foremost, to troublemakers—people who report whatever ugly facts they dug up yesterday,

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM, THE REALLY DANGEROUS STUFF, IS TOO RARE THESE DAYS.

or who say whatever is on their minds, public opinion be damned. Investigative journalism, the really dangerous stuff, is too rare these days. After a brief period of renegade glamour in the 1980s, it got institutionalized in *60 Minutes*, *Dateline*

NBC, and all those multipart newspaper series journalists sometimes call "Pulitzer bait." When you institutionalize troublemakers, you enervate them. Why did it take the surprise attack of 9/11, and a war launched partly on the basis of bad intelligence, for you to wake up to the problems in the U.S. intelligence agencies? That story was an investigative journalist's dream, and you missed it. You were probably in a strategy meeting about how to regain all those eyeballs no longer trained on you.

6. *Only disconnect.* There's a widespread sense in the news business that contemporary audiences want their news delivered strictly in quick hits: Nothing too thoughtful or lengthy, thank you very much; who has the time? This may be true at the moment, as consumers try to adjust to the proliferation of news sources. But content that can be downloaded on a cell phone and digested in a moment isn't very nourishing, and a day will arrive when the public hungers for more. Though this diet of news niblets is initially appetizing, people will inevitably realize that they'd do better to push away from the buzzy grid and seek more substantial nourishment elsewhere. The baby boomers are about to start retiring, and they're going to have a lot of time on their hands. Tiny news bites won't fill the hours or satisfy their need.

Remember how surprised Hollywood was in the 1990s when intelligent, artsy movies began to draw huge audiences, knocking out the mindless big-studio productions? Something like that is going to happen in your business. Just as the "slow food" movement grew out of general discontent with the quality of what's come to pass for meals, news consumers will crave a respite from the madness, a sense of distance and calm disconnection—a sort of spa version of the news. The surging audience numbers that National Public Radio has notched in the past decade are a leading indicator of this trend, and it's only a matter of time before new

little magazines of ideas and brainy Charlie Rose-ish chat shows become all the rage. You old-media types can wait for someone else to make this happen — bloggers? the BBC on cable? — and then do your usual head-slapping shtick about this “surprising new trend” in the culture. Or you can get out ahead of the curve right now.

7. *Don't give up hope.* When television started to take off after World War II, radio seemed doomed, and nearsighted futurists confidently wrote the medium's obituary. Fifty years later, here we are, still listening. Indeed, thanks to rapidly growing satellite radio companies, we have more to listen to than ever.

Many observers have linked the woes of the mainstream media to the general retreat of Americans from the public square. Just as voting dropped off sharply in the final decades of the 20th century, so too did patronage of the mass print and TV outlets that encouraged public discourse and democratic participation. But there are some countertrends. Last year's presidential campaign debates drew surprisingly large television audiences, and the voter turnout in November was the largest in several decades. If great numbers of Americans watched serious political debates and then went out to vote, can all hope really be lost?

It's worth noting, too, that as audiences exit certain outlets, such as the TV networks, they're gathering in others where real news and issues are still the order of the day. Fox News and NPR have their critics, but neither could be confused with a reality show.

As for those young citizens who are not consuming serious news the way their parents did, let's not forget that we're living through a revolution in life expectancy. In the second half of the 20th century alone, the average lifespan worldwide grew by about 20 years. Many Americans who are in their twenties today can confidently expect to live into their eighties, and perhaps beyond. Marriage and childbearing now come later in life, and, for many, youth itself has been extended into the thirties. Could it be that young people are not reading newspapers because many of them are not yet at a stage in their lives when they see the point of doing so?

REGULAR NEWS CONSUMPTION
MAY EMERGE AS A COOL
DIVIDEND OF MIDLIFE, A TOKEN
OF ACQUIRED WISDOM.

There's a chance that you traditional media will get another shot at this supposedly lost generation of news consumers. If you play your cards right, you might even turn “serious” newspapers and news broadcasts into badges of maturity and arrival. Just as the joys of parenthood, good wine, and old jazz are best appreciated by a grownup sensibility, so too regular news consumption may emerge as a cool dividend of midlife, a token of acquired wisdom.

But there's one way you can guarantee that this will never happen: Continue dumbing down your product. That's a sure dead end. Instead, defy the mavens of media marketing. Live dangerously. Be bright and sophisticated. And people may surprise you. □

SIFTING DRESDEN'S ASHES

Sixty years after the Allies' bombing of Dresden enveloped the city in flames, controversy persists over whether the attack was militarily justified or morally indefensible. But another question, no less crucial, is seldom asked: Did wartime conditions allow military leaders to look away as they violated their own principles?

by Tami Davis Biddle

In early 1945, the German city of Dresden lay directly in the path of a great swell of refugees fleeing the advance of the Red Army along the eastern front. German authorities, their resources strained to the breaking point in World War II's final months, struggled to keep this river of wretched humanity moving so that it would not impair the mobility of the Wehrmacht. But before the city's 100,000 refugees could be moved, Dresden was attacked by waves of British and American heavy bombers over the course of nearly two days, igniting a firestorm that swept the heart of the city.

Most of the refugees and remaining inhabitants were women, children, and old people. As the bombs fell, tens of thousands crammed into shelters and basements, while others fled to the lower levels of public buildings, including the overcrowded main train station. Many of them found no safety. The firestorm sucked oxygen out of shelters and replaced it with carbon monoxide, causing mass suffocation. Crowds rushing to escape the fires faced smoke, noxious fumes, collapsing buildings, thickets of downed electrical wires, showers of burning embers, and lethal walls of superheated air surging ahead of the flames. The firestorm's powerful winds pulled roof tiles, sheet metal, and even entire trees from their moorings, propelling them through the air with hurricane-like force. Molten tar in the streets stripped away people's shoes, exposing their bare feet to burns. One young survivor would later recall a scene on the Chemnitzerstrasse: "There were people there who in their desperate need had clawed themselves onto the metal fence. They were burnt and charred; and they were not only adults, there were children of dif-



In this famous photograph taken from the Rathausturm (town hall tower), August Schreitmueller's sculpture "Goodness" surveys Dresden after a firestorm started by Allied bombers in 1945.

ferent ages hanging there." Even the city's great reservoir offered no protection. The air became so hot and unbreathable that those who had sought refuge in the water were forced to flee, and many died trying in vain to climb the reservoir's smooth cement walls.

Despite the heavy use of incendiary bombs during World War II, firestorms were relatively rare events. These uncontrollable fires required just the right combination of weather, weight of attack, ordnance mix, timing,

and architecture. During the attacks on Dresden, all those elements were in place—and the civilians and depleted ranks of firefighters who remained in the city were ill equipped to battle the flames. The worst of the firestorm occurred in the early-morning hours of February 14, but the city smoldered for weeks. In the city center only the fragile, lacework remnants of some buildings remained standing.

The death toll at Dresden has been, over the years, a matter of extensive and emotional debate. The number of refugees in the city and the confusion following the devastating raids have added to the difficulty of establishing a final figure. The claim of up to 250,000 casualties made by British historian David Irving—who later gained notoriety as a Holocaust denier—after the 1963 publication of his book *The Destruction of Dresden* was shown to rely on a report doctored during the war by the German propaganda ministry. And in considering the stories of eyewitnesses who recalled seeing the center of Dresden covered with bodies, one must bear

‘DRESDEN’ IS INVOKED
ALONG WITH ‘HIROSHIMA’
IN MODERN DEBATES OVER
AERIAL BOMBING IN WAR.

in mind that the city center is a relatively compact area of no more than eight square miles; even 10,000 bodies in such a space would have been an appalling sight. Based on the most reliable numbers available, it is reasonable to conclude

that the final death toll was in the vicinity of 25,000. Tens of thousands of others were wounded or made homeless.

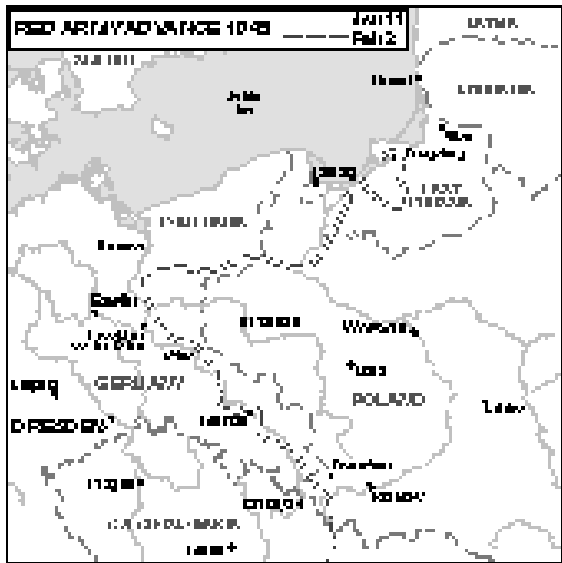
The Dresden raid has insinuated itself powerfully into the public memory of World War II. Filled with beautiful churches, elegant Baroque apartment blocks, a magnificent opera house, and lovely garden walks, Dresden had been a center of art and culture and a showcase for striking architecture since the beginning of the 18th century, which only increased the regret felt over its destruction. The presence of large numbers of war refugees, and the fact that they were set upon by a fiery maelstrom, also made the Dresden raid seem disturbingly different from others conducted in the same air campaign. The name “Dresden” is often invoked alongside “Hiroshima,” and it is still frequently one of the first words spoken when debates occur over aerial bombing in contemporary wars, as they did during the bombing of Baghdad at the onset of the Iraq War in 2003. Today, Dresden is generally portrayed as a wholly atypical episode, a moral anomaly—a kind of one-off event wherein the Allies employed new and unusual bombing tactics to create a firestorm.

In its execution, however, the attack on Dresden was similar to other air attacks the Americans and the British carried out in January and February 1945. Dresden contained military targets, and it met the fate that had befallen other

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German cities, such as Cologne in 1942 and Darmstadt in 1944—and that would befall still more, including Pforzheim and Wuerzburg, before the war ended. In terms of lives lost and damage done, the Dresden raid was less destructive than the now largely forgotten American air attack on Tokyo on the night of March 9–10, 1945, which killed 100,000 Japanese. And it did less damage than the devastating firestorm Britain’s Bomber Command visited on Hamburg in late July 1943. But what does set Dresden apart is rarely explored in analyses of the motives for the raid and the events surrounding it: that an erosion of moral sensibilities had cleared the way for attacks on a city the Americans and the British knew was swollen with refugees. The history of the Dresden raid deserves to be told clearly because it speaks directly to the brutalizing and corrosive effects of war, even upon those who are fighting for a righteous cause and believe themselves to be fighting honorably.

In the late summer of 1944, five months before Dresden, the Normandy breakout and the rout of the Germans at the Falaise Gap had the Allies heady with optimism about a swift end to the war. But this sense of imminent victory flagged in the autumn as German defenders inflicted punishing losses on the Allies at Arnhem and other points in their advance. The recent appearance of impressive new German weapons—including V-2 rockets, snorkel submarines, and Messerschmitt 262 jet fighters—provided disturbing evidence that the Third Reich’s war machine was still operating effectively and that British and American optimism had been premature. Meanwhile, poor weather hindered Allied air attacks on the German army’s oil



Less than two weeks before the 1945 bombing of Dresden, Soviet troops were within 125 miles of the city.

supplies. And in December 1944, Hitler counterattacked in the west, launching the Battle of the Bulge—an astonishing feat that left the Allies in a scramble of embarrassment and eroded confidence. Allied casualties soared; the U.S. Army alone suffered 74,788 casualties on the western front in December, and another 61,692 the following month.

Intelligence estimates reflected the air of crisis. Britain’s Joint Intelligence Committee reported on January 16, 1945, that the “probable worst case scenario” was that the Soviet winter offensive and the coming Allied spring offensive in the west might achieve “no decisive success.” On January 21, the U.S. Strategic Air Forces Intelligence Office concluded that British and Amer-



Lieutenant General Carl A. Spaatz, commander of the U.S. Strategic Air Forces, in the center, engages in teatime chat with his British counterpart, Sir Arthur Harris, at right, in 1942. General Ira Clarence Eaker, head of the U.S. Eighth Air Force at the time, is also pictured.

ican armies had lost the initiative in the west, and that the Luftwaffe had rebounded “to a degree not considered possible by Allied intelligence some eight months ago.” A subsequent report of the Joint Intelligence Committee urged a review of the utilization of the strategic bomber forces and stated, significantly, that “a heavy flow of refugees from Berlin in the depth of winter coinciding with the trekking westwards of a population fleeing from Eastern Germany would be bound to create great confusion, interfere with the orderly movement of troops to the front, and hamper the German military and administrative machine.”

In a discussion of strategy held the same day the report appeared, Sir Arthur Harris, commander in chief of Britain’s Bomber Command, suggested to his superiors that Leipzig, Chemnitz, and Dresden might be good targets along with Berlin in order to aid the Soviet advance. From above, Prime Minister Winston Churchill aggressively pushed for a wider campaign, inquiring what plans the Royal Air Force had for “basting the Germans in their retreat from Breslau.” Churchill was anxious that the war effort not be allowed to stall. But on the eve of the Yalta Conference in early February, when he was to meet with President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Premier Joseph Stalin, he also wanted to reinforce his old argument to the Soviets that the Anglo-American bomber offensive had served as a second front. Air attacks on cities in eastern Germany would not only aid the advance of the Red Army but would re-emphasize the contribution of strategic bombing to Allied victory, perhaps helping to impress upon the Soviets the might of Anglo-American airpower.

Harris was promptly told that his superior, Chief of Air Staff Sir Charles Portal, was amenable to attacks on the four cities and any others “where a severe blitz will not only cause confusion in the evacuation from the East but will also hamper the movement of troops from the West.” Before departing for the island of Malta, where Anglo-American talks on war strategy would be held in preparation for the Yalta Conference, Portal discussed the plan with Lieutenant General Carl A. Spaatz, commander of the U.S. Strategic Air Forces, the American analogue to Bomber Command. The American conferred with his British counterparts, and, on January 31, Portal was informed that an agreement had been worked out with Spaatz to “meet the present situation.”

The next day, Spaatz articulated the same plan in Paris at a meeting of Allied air commanders at General Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces. Attacks on synthetic oil

plants would remain the first priority, but a new priority was inserted ahead of the standard strikes against “communications” targets: assaults on Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, “and associated cities where heavy attack will cause great confusion in civilian evacuation from the East and hamper movement of reinforcements from other fronts.”

The way in which Spaatz understood this new guidance is important. He had heard the specific language of the plan—had even read it aloud to his fellow commanders—and agreed to it without requesting a change. Raids in the new second-priority category had a particular purpose: to aid the Soviet advance by causing disruption and confusion behind German lines. Spaatz would not have thought of these simply as further attacks on communications targets since “communications” was a third, and distinct, category listed in the guidance. While Spaatz did not intend to change his long-range bombers’ tactics of operation, he nonetheless would have understood that his agreement with the British created a separate category with a specific rationale: to hinder the German army’s ability to fight a war of maneuver by causing chaos behind its lines.

These decisions were rendered in unemotional, bureaucratic tones; there appears to have been little debate over them. But they signaled a stripping away of the last boundaries restricting the use of strategic bombers. Enjoining bombers to “cause great confusion” and “hamper movement of reinforcements” allowed planners to elide the actual meaning—in human terms—of those phrases, creating a space in which moral dilemmas could be avoided. What the language really meant was that the Allies were prepared to use the large number of refugees on the eastern front to create a “human wall” that would impede the Wehrmacht and drain away food, fuel, and medical attention from the German war effort.

The absence of debate reflected the degree to which the years of war had

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Dresden

Incendiary and explosive bombs fall from the belly of a B-17 toward Dresden on February 14, 1945. This U.S. Eighth Air Force attack followed Royal Air Force runs the previous night that started fires visible 200 miles away.

hardened attitudes. In September 1939, Roosevelt had issued an appeal for every government engaged in war to affirm publicly that it would not be the first to bomb civilians or “unfortified cities.” In response, the French and British jointly declared that they would spare civilian populations and government property. The Germans said that they welcomed the president’s appeal and would bomb only military targets, but their attacks on Warsaw and Rotterdam quickly rendered these claims hollow. By 1945, the last tatters of the pledges of 1939 to protect noncombatants were removed.

The willingness to overturn previous constraints also revealed the urgency and anxiety that colored British and American deliberations at that moment in the war. On December 30, 1944, General Henry “Hap” Arnold, the Washington-based commander in chief of the U.S. Army Air Forces, told Spaatz that he was concerned about the Germans’ reviving their fighter plane production. “I want to impress upon all of your people that we will accept with satisfaction any increase in tonnage, no matter how small, provided you will drop it where it will hurt,” Arnold wrote. At the same time, Robert Lovett, the U.S. assistant secretary of war for air, drew up a detailed memorandum arguing for an expanded air effort—in particular, for spreading the attacks to Germany’s smaller cities and towns. Arnold forwarded the memorandum to Spaatz, with a cover note declaring that the Soviets’ operations on the eastern front would have a decided effect on what happened on the western front.

Spaatz’s deputy for operations, Major General F. L. Anderson, reported to his boss that the principal architect of the army’s war plans, General George C. Marshall, had discussed at Malta the desirability of bombing Berlin and other cities: “He certainly was all for it,” Anderson said of Marshall. On the British side, estimates by the Joint Intelligence Committee reflected the same sense of urgency. Churchill was suggesting that Berlin and other large cities in eastern Germany be “considered especially attractive targets.”

The Dresden attack came in perhaps the darkest period of the most violent and deadly year of the 20th century. In the United States, Secretary of War Henry Stimson announced the latest American casualty figures on February 8: They had climbed by 27,242 in the space of one week. On February 22, the previous week’s casualties were reported: another 18,982. That same day, Eisenhower told Stimson that German resistance remained stiff along the entire western front.

In the Pacific, meanwhile, American troops were about to embark on a





costly battle for Iwo Jima. The Americans were preparing to begin trials with low-level, nighttime incendiary raids against Japanese cities. This signaled the beginning of a dramatic departure from their attempts to hit specific factories and military installations in Japan in daylight attacks. In its March 5 issue, *Time* magazine listed U.S. casualties on all fronts for the month of February: 49,689 killed, 153,076 wounded, 31,101 missing, 3,403 taken prisoner.

Yet the British and Americans followed different paths to Dresden. Early in the war, the strength of German air defenses had forced the British to fly their bombing raids at night, when the only targets that crews could find reliably were the largest ones: cities. Bomber Command crews worked to improve their accuracy under all conditions, and by 1944 they had made dramatic strides and were able to hit specific targets (such as railway marshaling yards or synthetic oil plants) with enough precision to contribute signally to the aerial bombardment that preceded the D-Day invasion. Still, Bomber Command remained principally a night bomb-



ing force, and northern European weather conditions ensured that opportunities for striking specific military targets were the exception. To maximize the impact of imprecise strikes, the British dropped a mix of high-explosive and incendiary bombs. The high explosives blasted structures into bits, and the accompanying incendiaries ignited the ruins and spread the destruction. In February 1945, incendiary bombs typically constituted 40 to 60 percent of total bomb load.

That winter, Bomber Command leader Harris and his superior, Portal, engaged in a lengthy and vigorous exchange over targeting choices. But they were debating only the close calls, when cloud cover broke up enough to allow for a difference of opinion on precision capabilities. Otherwise, the British bombed freely. Portal believed that Harris was too cautious, and thus missed

These photographs show the same area of Dresden in 1934 (left) and 1947 (below). Known as the “Florence of the Elbe” before the war, Dresden was renowned as a cultural center and showcase of ornate Baroque architecture. The domed Frauenkirche, or Church of Our Lady, was the work of German master architect Georg Bähr. It dominated the heart of the city for more than 200 years and endured two days of bombing, but not the firestorm that resulted.



chances to go to specific oil targets when weather allowed. Harris always wanted to go to cities—and to aim for the dense, built-up areas of worker housing. He believed passionately that relentless attacks on German cities would prove too much for the Reich to bear. Though he sent his crews to other targets when directed, he regarded his city campaign—designed to devastate more than 60 of Germany’s principal urban areas—as the heart of the strategic bomber offensive. Raising fires in German cities did not trouble him; he was convinced that the alternative would be a vast increase in casualties for Allied armies, and a likely repetition of the terrible prolonged battles of World War I. No doubt Harris and other British commanders felt less than apologetic about their bombing strategy because Britain’s own cities had endured many attacks by German bombers and, in recent months, missiles.

Harris drove his Bomber Command crews to perfect the techniques of nighttime incendiary bombing. They learned to mount “feint” raids to confuse German defenses, and dropped “window”—short aluminum-coated strips—to disorient defensive radar. They refined their target acquisition methods as well. Crews in Lancaster marker aircraft would fly over the target first, using bright white flares to define the parameters of the area to be bombed. Then Mosquito marker aircraft would descend to drop bombs containing brilliant red flares that produced a giant “bull’s eye” of red light at one or more points in the city for the heavy Lancaster bombers that would follow.

Every time Harris sent his bombers to a city, his goal was to inflict precisely the devastation that could be caused by mixing high-explosive and incendiary bombs in built-up urban areas. Incendiary bombs, in particular, spread tremendous collateral damage and, if conditions were right, could trigger the physical and psychological devastation of a firestorm, as the residents of Hamburg experienced in late July 1943. A year and a half after the Hamburg raid, the British had more keenly honed their methods and had introduced the use of a “master bomber,” who would remain in the raid area and direct incoming crews to specific targets by radio. The much-reduced effectiveness of German defenses made it possible for bomber crews to put these skills to even more devastating use.

The Americans had entered the war in 1941 convinced that they would bomb specific industrial targets visible by day from high-altitude bombers flying in self-defending groups, without fighter escorts. But, like the British, the Americans found themselves making significant wartime modifications to their doctrine. Cloudy weather often nullified the advantages of the much-touted Norden bombsight, preventing the Americans from delivering the kind of “precision” strikes they had counted on. At a conference on bombing accuracy in March 1945, researchers

MANY AMERICAN
BOMBS FELL MORE
THAN FIVE MILES FROM
THEIR TARGETS.

revealed that when the U.S. Eighth Air Force bombed through heavy cloud that winter, 42 percent of its bombs fell more than five miles from their targets. In order to maintain a reasonable operating tempo, the Americans had taken to mounting frequent attacks on railway marshaling yards—large, visible targets either within or on the outskirts of major cities. Though such raids were designated and recorded as attacks on “communications” or “transportation” targets, they were often—in their effects—hard to distinguish from less discriminate “area” raids. The Americans typically included incendiary bombs, which were not particularly efficient against marshaling yards but could cause widespread collateral damage. When targets were shrouded in cloud and precision was impossible, incendiaries raised the likelihood of broad disruption and destruction. The target category “marshaling yards” received more of the Eighth’s bomb tonnage than any other.

Though the Americans strongly preferred to strike specific industrial sites when weather permitted, the bulk of their raids through clouds were, in essence, area raids. But to distinguish their efforts from those of the British, the Americans continued to define these attacks in the language of precision bombing. The insistence on this language reflected American sensitivity to the ethical questions raised by strategic bombing. But their frustration as the war dragged on eventually made the Americans more amenable to waging air attacks that were designed, at least in part, for their psychological effect on the enemy. On February 3, 1945, they launched a massive attack on the center of Berlin to aid the Soviet advance and hasten Germany's surrender.

The seventh-largest city in Germany, Dresden lay in the middle of important east-west and north-south traffic routes, and was at the junction of three trunk routes of the Reich's railway system. On October 7, 1944, months before the Dresden firestorm, the Eighth Air Force had conducted a small raid against the city's "industrial area," and on January 16, 1945, had hit its marshaling yards. But Dresden had not suffered the kind of devastating damage that Harris and Bomber Command could inflict on cities. Its reputation as one of the jewels of Europe — Germany's Florence — had fed rumors that the city would be exempted from a major air attack.

Late on the night of February 13–14, Lancaster and Mosquito marker aircraft began dropping target indicator bombs across Dresden to guide the incoming bombers to their aim points. In Dresden, the bull's eye for the Mosquito crews was the main sports stadium. The target marking was so effective that the Lancaster bombers of Bomber Command's No. 5 Group could readily locate the glow of the red flares. When the 244 bombers arrived, they met with little German resistance. By that point in the war the Luftwaffe was no longer much of a menace, and Germany's heavy guns had been divided between anti-aircraft duty and antitank duty against the Soviet army. The British pilots were able to fly low and make careful, concentrated runs. Though the first wave of bombers stayed over the city only briefly, their precise work seeded intense fires that were fanned by steady westerly winds.

Just as the first target markers began to fall over Dresden, a second group of 550 British heavy bombers was taking off from Britain. When they arrived, crews mostly bombed blind through the fire and smoke, extending the area of the fire in all directions. Just before 2 A.M. the last of the bombers departed, leaving behind fires visible from 100 miles away.

Shortly after noon that day, American B-17 bombers of the Eighth Air Force's First Air Division approached. This raid on Dresden, originally scheduled to precede the British attack, had been postponed because of bad weather. It was one of three American air attacks in the region that day; targets in Magdeburg and Chemnitz were also hit. Nine of the division's 12 groups reached Dresden; the other three bombed Prague, 70 miles to the southeast, by mistake. Some crews were able to drop their payloads on the Dresden railway marshaling yards; most of the others, inhibited by smoke, bombed on instrument, and thus scattered their bombs widely across the city. All told, 311 B-17s of the First Air Division dropped 771 tons of bombs, including 294 tons of incendiaries.



A day later, 210 B-17 bombers that had failed to reach their designated target—a synthetic oil plant—bombed Dresden as a “secondary” option. They dropped another 461 tons of bombs. *The New York Times* reported the raids the following day under the headline “8,000 Planes Batter Nazis Close to 2 Fronts; Dresden Hit Thrice as Russians Move on It.” The story said that American bombers had come in on the heels of a devastating British attack: “Smoke surged up three miles in the sky and flames were seen by returning flyers 200 miles away.”

In an editorial on February 16, 1945, *The New York Times* acknowledged without regret the terrible damage to Dresden and other cities caught in the air campaign. Under the title “Doom over Germany,” the editorial pointed out, “The Allied triumph is being achieved with the very weapon [airpower] that was to win the world for Hitler.” It concluded by observing that the Allied armies and air forces were bringing home to the German people “that they are merely making the cost of their defeat heavier to themselves by continuing a hopeless resistance. If in that resistance more land-



A year after the Allied raid, Dresdeners negotiate the rubble that remains to board a tram. Much of the city lay in ruins for years after the bombing, which destroyed several square miles at its center.

marks of European culture and Germany's own better past must be wiped out, the Germans may, as they were drilled to do, thank their Fuehrer for the result."

But more controversy was to come. Even as *The New York Times* published its editorial, British Air Commodore C. M. Grierson of the Allied Supreme Headquarters Air Staff Section held a press conference in Paris in which he tried to explain how attacks on cities created logistical and administrative difficulties for the Germans and impaired their war economy. Asked about attacks on Dresden and "other points ahead of the Russian front," Grierson explained that "they are centers of communications through which traffic is moving across to the Russian Front, and from the Western Front to the East, and they are sufficiently close to the Russian Front for the Russians to continue the successful prosecution of their battle." Grierson must have realized by this point that he had gotten himself onto difficult ground. Asked if the "principal aim of such bombing of Dresden would be to cause confusion among the refugees or to blast communications carrying military supplies," he replied, "Primarily communications to prevent them [the Germans] moving military supplies. To stop movement in all directions if possible—movement of everything."

An Associated Press war correspondent named Howard Cowan soon filed a dispatch (which inexplicably cleared the censors) stating that "the Allied air commanders have made the long-awaited decision to adopt deliberate terror bombing of German population centers as a ruthless expedient to hastening Hitler's doom." The report was widely circulated in the United States, to awkward effect. Among other things, Cowan's phrase "the Allied air chiefs" linked the British and the Americans in ways that the Americans found uncongenial.

On February 18, Cowan's story appeared in newspapers across the United States. In addition to declaring that the Allies had adopted a deliberate terror bombing policy, Cowan noted, "The all-out air war in Germany became obvious with the unprecedented daylight assault on the refugee-crowded capital two weeks ago and subsequent attacks on other cities jammed with civilians fleeing from the Russian advance in the east." He added, "The decision may revive protests from some allied quarters against 'uncivilized warfare,' but they are likely to be balanced by satisfaction in those sections of Europe where the German Air Force and the Nazi V-weapons have been responsible for the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians by tens of thousands."

The Cowan story did not adequately link the attacks on eastern German

cities to the objective of aiding the advance of Soviet forces. And the assertion that the “Allied air chiefs” had, of their own accord, decided to launch an entirely new kind of campaign was, at the very least, misleading. Nonetheless, the story captured something essential. Allied planners had, for a variety of reasons, managed to sidestep the real human consequences of their decisions. Grierson had wandered into the very territory they had avoided entering. His comments triggered a series of official inquiries and “clarifications” that revealed how Allied leaders, weary and alarmed, had conceived a plan for intensifying the war but had not wrestled with the plan’s likely human toll.

Allied Supreme Headquarters had already denied reports that the Allied air chiefs had adopted a policy of deliberate terror bombing. *The Times* of

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London reported that Headquarters claimed there had been no change in policy—that German towns were bombed according to the dictates of “military expediency,” and that those towns recently attacked were “principally communica-

tion or oil centers.” Headquarters spokesmen argued that the Dresden raid was designed to “cripple communications and prevent the shuttling of troops between the eastern and western fronts.” The article’s final sentence read, “The fact that the city was crowded with refugees at the time of the attack was a coincidence.” But the refugees’ presence was, of course, no coincidence.

The day after the Cowan story broke, a *Washington Star* editorial grappled with its troubling implications. Cowan, the editorial noted, had not specified the precise meaning of the phrase “terror bombing”: “Does the dispatch from Paris mean that the Allies, now that our own day of victory is in sight, have taken up where the Germans left off?” The newspaper asserted that if this was indeed the case, then “we cannot complain if history indicts us as co-defendants with the Luftwaffe commanders who broke the ground for this dismaying product of 20th-century civilization.” But the *Star* rejected this interpretation and discovered a “more humanitarian meaning” in Cowan’s claim, suggesting that the primary purpose of the bombings was to “hamper German transport and to force the diversion of the enemy’s scarce supplies from the battle fronts to the civilian centers.” This, the *Star* concluded, was a “harsh but legitimate objective of war.”

In the meantime, General Arnold nervously called Spaatz to account, asking him to transmit the text of the U.S. Strategic Air Forces’ current operating directive, and to add any commentary he wished. In a memo that went out to Spaatz at roughly the same time, Colonel Rex Smith warned of the public-relations problems posed by the Cowan dispatch: “This story will certainly bring an avalanche of queries because it contradicts all of our announced policies and purposes of precision bombing.” Spaatz’s deputy, Anderson, answered, defending the existing bombing directive and the decisions of the

field commander, and arguing that it made great strategic sense to support the Soviet advance, subject to the first priority of continued attacks on oil plants. He insisted that “there has been no change in the American Policy of precision bombing directed at Military objectives.”

At the same time, Anderson worked with reporters, public-relations officers, and the European manager of the United Press to contain and manage the debate. He also met with Eisenhower to discuss a statement reiterating that there had been no change in policy. Acknowledging that air attacks would always endanger civilian lives, air force spokesmen emphasized that American bombers would continue to refine their technique and to direct the maximum concentration of bombs on military targets. Secretary of War Stimson took up this line in a further effort to reassure the public. In a February 24 editorial, *The Washington Star* readily embraced Stimson’s explanation that the Cowan story had been “an excusable but incorrect” interpretation of some presumably ambiguous remarks made by a briefing officer. The *Star’s* editors seemed immensely relieved to accept this 1940s version of spin control: “It is reassuring to have Secretary Stimson’s word for it that our air forces have not adopted a policy of deliberate terror bombing against German civilians.”

In early March, however, Stimson, perturbed by some of the claims in the news, asked for an investigation of the Dresden raid. Angry about the second-guessing, Arnold scrawled on a message about Stimson’s request, “We must not get soft. War must be destructive and to a certain extent inhuman and ruthless.” His staff’s report to Stimson pointed out that the Royal Air Force had caused most of the damage, and argued that Dresden had been bombed because it was an important communications center. The aging Stimson, who was usually two or three steps behind when it came to modern air warfare, let the matter drop.

In one sense, the Americans were right to claim that there had been no change in policy, and that their attack on Dresden—a coda to the much larger Bomber Command attack—had not differed tactically from other U.S. raids. The American air attack was aimed at the marshaling yards and was thus considered a raid on a military target. Such attacks had indeed been waged extensively in support of the western front. Despite increased interest in targeting for psychological effect, the Americans still believed that specific military aim points were the most efficient targets—and they struck such targets whenever weather permitted.

In another sense, however, the Americans had been engaged in a kind of cognitive self-defense that linked intention and outcome in sometimes problematic ways: The *actual* effect of the late-war, large-scale raids on marshaling yards, especially when sizable percentages of incendiaries were used, was devastating and often indiscriminate. And Spaatz, in agreeing to attack eastern German cities, had agreed as well to participate in a campaign designed, in part, to complicate and exacerbate the refugee problem the Germans faced on the eastern front. Even if the Allies did not conceive of this phase of the air war as “terror bombing,” it did not require a large leap of the imagination to envision

the horrific impact these raids would have.

Certainly it is true that Britain's Bomber Command was responsible for the great bulk of the damage done to Dresden, and it is true, too, that the American raids were meant to be more discriminate. Nonetheless, the Americans had followed on Harris's heels in two separate raids that were intended to disrupt transport, cause confusion, and burden relief efforts in a city

swollen with desperate and displaced civilians.

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The Americans' reluctance to deviate from their original plans and principles had been considerably eroded by years of war. At the time of the Dresden raid, American bombers in the Pacific theater were already in the process of switching from bombing aimed at industrial targets to low-level, nighttime incendiary bombing of Japanese cities. Allied

air commanders were also debating a plan to fly remote-controlled, "war-weary" B-17s laden with bombs into German industrial areas. And, in the immediate wake of the Dresden attack, the Americans took the lead in Operation Clarion, which was designed to use all available Anglo-American airpower against a wide range of transportation targets in Germany, including grade crossings, stations, barges, docks, signals, tracks, bridges, and marshaling yards, most of which were located in small towns that had never been bombed before and were not well defended.

The drift away from any attempt to distinguish rigorously between combatants and noncombatants had taken place incrementally over time in response to the technological constraints of the day and the spiral of prolonged warfare. As the war progressed, the issue of noncombatant immunity was never re-evaluated in a serious institutional way by either the Americans or the British. This meant that every subsequent step away from the ideal seemed relatively short and was justified in terms that had been applied to each of the previous steps. The piecemeal and iterative progression tended to mask the distances crossed, and, in the end, decisions that ought to have raised ethical red flags were perceived as variants on, or continuations of, decisions that had already been implemented and explained in the language of military necessity.

Nevertheless, the raids were a clear departure from the moral doctrine of the "double effect." That doctrine, as philosopher Michael Walzer points out, was formulated as part of "just war" theory by Catholic casuists in the Middle Ages in order to reconcile "the absolute prohibition against attacking noncombatants with the legitimate conduct of military activity." Its requirements, as Walzer explains, include the following: "The inten-



A cupola adorned with a gilded orb and cross is hoisted atop Dresden's Frauenkirche in 2004 as part of a restoration financed by charities from several countries, including Great Britain and the United States. The crowning ornaments were crafted by a team of British silversmiths, among them one whose father participated in the World War II raid that destroyed the church.

tion of the actor is good, that is, he aims narrowly at the acceptable effect; the evil effect is not one of his ends, nor is it a means to his ends, and, aware of the evil involved, he seeks to minimize it, accepting costs to himself." Although their use of vague language shielded them from coming fully to terms with it, the British and Americans violated this moral principle. They used the presence of vulnerable civilians to hasten a military outcome.

Apart from the newspaper editorials, the Dresden story did not generate great public interest in the United States. Headlines in those weeks tended to concentrate on the great battles being waged in the Pacific, the Yalta Conference, and the advance of ground armies fighting hard in Germany and the Philippines. Convinced, perhaps, that strategic bombing was the best possible substitute for costly ground battles of attrition, Americans were not inclined to demand more rigorous and searching analysis from their war correspondents and other reporters. Indeed, those who tried to criticize either strategic decisions or the use of particular weapons risked being branded disloyal or unpatriotic.

In Britain, where the war in Europe was closer to home, the debate was muted to some degree by the fact that the Cowan dispatch was suppressed. But stories of the Dresden raid made their way into Britain via press reports from neutral countries such as Switzerland and Sweden. In general, most Britons were not eager to question Allied bombing policy. However, a few determined critics—including Anglican bishop George Bell, the

Marquess of Salisbury, and influential writer Vera Brittain—had kept a debate over bombing in the public view.

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Bomber Command had come under repeated scrutiny in Britain, especially in the early years of the war when it was a weak instrument that seemed ill equipped for the enormous task

it faced. And though the fortunes of the force had largely reversed, arguments lingered about the wisdom of relying heavily on a mode of warfare so hard to control that it dealt substantial civilian casualties even under the best of conditions. On March 6, 1945, Richard Stokes, a longtime parliamentary critic of Bomber Command, raised questions about the Dresden raid in the House of Commons. A deputy of the secretary of state for air delivered the reply: “We are not wasting bombers or time on purely terror tactics. It does not do the Hon. Member justice to come here to this House and suggest that there are a lot of Air Marshals or pilots or anyone else sitting in a room trying to think how many German women and children they can kill.” The exchange drew attention to the Cowan story, causing headaches for the Air Staff and for the British high command more generally.

At this point, Prime Minister Churchill interposed himself, once again, into the history of the Dresden raid. By March 1945 the crisis atmosphere surrounding the war effort had passed, and the fate of Hitler’s Reich was well and truly sealed. With Yalta behind him as well, Churchill now had troubled second thoughts. These surfaced in a minute he wrote on March 28 to Portal and General Sir Hastings Ismay (for the Chiefs of Staff Committee). “It seems to me,” Churchill began, “that the moment has come when the question of bombing of German cities simply for the sake of increasing the

terror, though under other pretexts, should be reviewed.” After stating that “the destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing,” he insisted there was a need for “more precise concentration on military objectives, such as oil and communications behind the immediate battle zone, rather than on mere acts of terror and wanton destruction, however impressive.”

To the Air Staff, the final sentence seemed particularly galling; no one in Bomber Command was prepared to accept that the air campaign had been, in any sense, “wanton.” Harris was outraged, and Portal was, not surprisingly, taken aback by what seemed to him a baffling and sanctimonious display by the prime minister. Believing that Churchill’s stance might have been influenced by “haste or tiredness,” Portal nonetheless could not let the minute stand. He insisted that it be withdrawn and replaced by a version he himself drafted, which concluded, “We must see to it that our attacks do not do more harm to ourselves in the long run than they do to the enemy’s immediate war effort.”

Because Churchill personally had done a great deal to instigate the Dresden raid, his actions in this instance seem curious. But they are not particularly out of character if one considers his ambivalent attitude toward strategic bombing throughout the course of the war. A longtime airpower enthusiast and a proponent of aerial bombing since World War I, Churchill had used arguments about the prospect of bombing Germany to win the day in earlier debates over British wartime strategy. Subsequently, though, he had grown despondent over the limited impact and inherent inaccuracy of strategic bombing. Though Portal had convinced him to stay the course, he had never parted company with deep-seated concerns about its effectiveness.

His worries and ruminations caused him to be erratic in his attitudes, and would prompt him, ultimately, to erect roadblocks to a substantial British postwar survey of aerial bombing and to remain remarkably quiet on the topic of bombing in his six-volume history of the war. His March 28 minute may have been—at least in part—an attempt to transfer to others some of the personal responsibility he felt, consciously or unconsciously, for the Dresden raid, and to note for the record and for posterity his own position on its outcome.

It took time, particularly in the United States, for the name “Dresden” to provoke the moral uneasiness that it does today. Whatever qualms American policymakers may have felt about Dresden were not reflected in the Far Eastern theater. The Americans firebombed Japanese cities until the Pacific war ended with two mushroom clouds in August 1945. And five years after Dresden, the Americans did not hesitate to firebomb North Korean cities after the Chinese overran General Douglas MacArthur’s United Nations forces.

During the Cold War, when the city was part of East Germany, historians behind the Iron Curtain often asserted that the Dresden raid was much less an effort to aid the Red Army advance than a cynical and bloody demonstration designed to intimidate the Soviets on the eve of the postwar European political settlement. In the United States, as anti-Soviet fever peaked in the early 1950s, a government historian was assigned to prepare an offi-

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cial review of the raid in response to congressional pressure, including allegations by one congressman that “as dupes of the Communists the Americans murdered 250,000 innocent persons—mainly women and children—in a city that had no military value.” The historian’s final report put the maximum death toll at 25,000, and concluded that if the Americans had not carried out the bombing, which was indeed intended to assist the Soviet advance, the country would have failed in its military duty.

David Irving’s *The Destruction of Dresden* brought the air raid back into Western consciousness in a dramatic way when it was published in 1963. “Apocalypse at Dresden: The Long Suppressed Story of the Worst Massacre in the History of the World” was the headline on one typical review. The book, which has continued to stir reaction and controversy in the decades since, helped lay the foundation for a number of myths and misinterpretations that remain in the literature to this day. The exaggerated casualty figures Irving assigned to Dresden—he estimated the deaths at 135,000 in his book, but later promoted estimates as high as 250,000—contributed to the raid’s overshadowing other World War II air attacks in which the death toll was higher than the actual count in Dresden.

Dresden’s symbolic status was raised again by Kurt Vonnegut’s novel *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969), which became a classic in the modern American literary canon. Vonnegut had witnessed the attack on Dresden while being held in the city as a prisoner of war, and, without specifically indicting the attackers, he put the event at the heart of the novel. Published the year after the Tet offensive in Vietnam, *Slaughterhouse Five* was more a general attack on the horror and stupidity of war, but it etched the raid into the consciousness of a new and highly skeptical generation of Americans.

Dresden continues to be a source of discomfort for Britons and Americans. But though the horrific firestorm that consumed the city and the tragic deaths that resulted are what claim a hold on the Western mind, they are not what distinguishes this episode from many others in the war. The most troubling aspect of the Dresden raid has not been emphasized often enough by historians: The raid—like others waged along with it—was envisioned in part as a way to cause disruptions behind German lines by exploiting the presence of refugees. Yet many of those responsible did not allow themselves to recognize what they were doing. In their compulsion to explain, to shape interpretations, or simply to distance themselves from the story and its implications, Allied military and political leaders displayed a collective conscience that was not unburdened by Dresden’s fate. Only by appreciating the fears, dashed hopes, and weariness of Allied leaders in the winter of 1945 can we fully understand how they came to embrace plans that, in essence, made refugees pawns in a fearsome drive to end the Wehrmacht’s ability to wage war. But the very existence of those plans ought to give pause to us all, and stir wider and more thoughtful debate about human behavior in wartime. Dresden is a stark reminder of how hard it is to control the human capacity for destruction, once the forces of war have set it loose. □

THE PERIODICAL OBSERVER

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Social Security and Beyond

A Survey of Recent Articles

In his State of the Union speech in February, President George W. Bush (1) warned that if nothing is done, Social Security will be “bankrupt” by 2042, and (2) urged that some Social Security funds be diverted into voluntary personal retirement accounts. Bush’s sketchy proposal has been severely criticized, but it has also touched off a wide-ranging debate about everything from income inequality to the nature of retirement itself in the 21st century.

Although Bush’s two ideas became virtually inseparable in much of the subsequent public discussion, many critics were quick to point out that personal retirement accounts would not prevent insolvency. In fact, they would make the crisis (if there really is one) worse, at least in the short term.

“Currently, Social Security is running a hefty surplus; the payroll tax brings in more dollars than what goes out in benefits,” notes Roger Lowenstein, a contributing writer to *The New York Times Magazine* (Jan. 16, 2005). “By law, Social Security invests that surplus in Treasury securities, which it deposits into a reserve known as a trust fund, which now holds more than one and a half trillion dollars. But by 2018, as baby boomers retire en masse, the system will go into deficit. At that point, in order to pay benefits, it will begin to draw on the assets in the trust fund.” The Social Security Administration has since slightly revised its estimates: The deficit will arrive in 2017, and the

trust fund will be exhausted by 2041. “At that point, as payroll taxes continue to roll in, [the system] would be able to pay just over 70 percent of scheduled benefits.”

That isn’t necessarily “bankruptcy,” but it is a shortfall—which could be avoided by some combination of payroll-tax increases and cuts in benefits. The payroll tax is currently 12.4 percent, levied on the first \$90,000 of annual wages. Half is paid directly by the employee, half by the employer. As do many others, Bush opposes the 1.5 percentage point increase in the payroll-tax rate that would eliminate the specter of 2041, but he hasn’t ruled out a different way of meeting the challenge: raising the \$90,000 annual cap.

Trimming benefits would also avert insolvency. Currently, Social Security benefits are adjusted every year to keep pace with inflation. But the *initial* benefit levels of new retirees are set according to a formula that takes into account their past earnings and an index of wage growth. If initial benefits were indexed instead to changes in the cost of living—as they were before 1977—that alone would assure the system’s solvency, notes Irwin M. Stelzer, director of economic policy studies at the Hudson Institute, in an article in *The Weekly Standard* (Jan. 17, 2005). Reasonable arguments can be made for either of those “escalators,” Stelzer adds. “Escalate with wages, and you retain the standard of living of

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retirees *relative* to those of active workers. Escalate with inflation, and you retain the *absolute* standard of living of retirees.” But a switch to the inflation index would amount to a reduction of promised benefits, since wage growth outpaces inflation over time.

In *The Wall Street Journal* (March 15, 2005), financial executive Robert C. Pozen, a Democratic member of a federal panel on Social Security reform during Bush’s first term, proposes a hybrid solution that would buttress the system’s redistributive character: Index the benefits of the poor to wages and those of the affluent to inflation, with the benefits of those in the middle (i.e., with incomes of \$25,000 to \$113,000) linked to a mix of the two indexes. By allowing workers to establish modest private accounts under the Social Security umbrella, Pozen’s plan would probably avert any loss of benefits. The federal government would still need to borrow to cover the transition costs, but much less than under other plans.

Another way of cutting benefits would be to raise the retirement age. In 1983, Congress hiked it from 65 to 67, a change that is very slowly being phased in. A further increase would be justified, argues William Saletan, chief political correspondent for *Slate* (Feb. 22, 2005). In 1935, the committee that designed Social Security noted that “men who reach 65 still have on the average 11 or 12 years of life before them; women, 15 years.” Today, life expectancy at 65 is about five years longer than that, so providing benefits for the same span of retirement would mean raising the retirement age to between 70 and 75.

In proposing private accounts financed by funds diverted from payroll taxes, the president has encountered resistance, in part because Washington would need to borrow vast sums to replace the diverted funds. And some economists say the assumptions about returns from stocks and bonds are too optimistic. Yet there is widespread support for encouraging Americans to save more for retirement. The puzzle is how to achieve that goal. C. Eugene Steuerle, a senior fellow at the Urban Institute, and two colleagues report in *Tax Notes* (Dec. 20, 2004) that the government now forgoes more revenue for the

sake of retirement tax breaks (\$112 billion in 2004) than Americans save for all purposes (an estimated \$101 billion).

Half of all American households whose heads are nearing retirement age have only \$10,000 or less in a 401(k) plan or individual retirement account, according to a study by William G. Gale, J. Mark Iwry, and Peter R. Orszag, all affiliated with the Brookings Institution (www.brookings.edu/views/papers/20050228_401k.htm). Only about 75 percent of eligible workers participate in a 401(k) plan, and only five percent of plan participants contribute the maximum allowable amount.

Paul O’Neill, Bush’s first Treasury secretary, has advanced a novel longer-term proposal: Have the federal government deposit \$2,000 annually in accounts for Americans aged one to 18. With no additional contributions, and assuming a relatively conservative six percent average annual rate of return, “those savings would grow to \$1,013,326 at age 65,” he writes in *The Los Angeles Times* (Feb. 15, 2005). Problem solved.

What’s seldom mentioned in the current debate, however, is that there may not be a problem at all. The Social Security Administration makes three different 75-year projections of the system’s health based on different economic and demographic scenarios, and today’s debate revolves around the “intermediate” forecast. “If its more optimistic projection turns out to be correct,” observes Lowenstein in his *New York Times Magazine* article, “then there will be no need for any benefit cuts or payroll-tax increases over the full 75 years.” Over a recent 10-year span, the “optimistic” estimates actually proved very accurate. Stelzer, in his *Weekly Standard* piece, says “a case can be made” for doing nothing. “But we should never discourage politicians bent on prudence.” His suggestion: Scrap the Social Security payroll tax, which is regressive and also discourages employers from hiring new workers, and replace it with another source of revenue.

David M. Walker, the U.S. Comptroller General, argues in a useful overview of the issues (<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05397t.pdf>) that Social Security must be considered in a larger context: “Compared to addressing our long-term health care financing problem, reforming Social Security ought to be easy lifting.”

Bush v. Gore and More

“The Constitutionalization of Democratic Politics” by Richard H. Pildes, in *Harvard Law Review* (Nov. 2004), Gannett House, 1511 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Marching at the head of a trend seen in judiciaries throughout the democratic world, the U.S. Supreme Court has increasingly intervened in the design and operation of elections, political parties, and other basic democratic institutions. *Bush v. Gore* is only the most famous example of a trend that Pildes, a professor of constitutional law at New York University, sees as terribly misguided.

One reason is that constitutional law isn't up to the complex job of designing a political system, Pildes says. It tends to put issues into intellectual cubbyholes: This is a free-speech case, that's an equal-protection case. As a result, the Court has done too much in some areas and not enough in others.

It's done too much “by inappropriately extending rights doctrines into the design of democratic institutions.” Liberals aren't the only ones who seek such extensions. Conservatives have, among other things, pushed the Court to strike down campaign finance laws on First Amendment grounds.

Reshaping the political system according to abstract doctrines can have perverse effects. In *California Democratic Party v. Jones* (2000), for example, the Supreme Court, citing political parties' autonomy, ruled unconstitutional California's “blanket primary,” which allowed voters to participate in different party primaries for different offices. Proponents of the blanket primary, adopted by Californians in an initia-

tive four years earlier, had argued that it would produce more centrist candidates. To the Court, this smacked of “impermissible viewpoint discrimination,” says Pildes. But making such choices is exactly what democratic politics is about. Any kind of primary will promote certain kinds of outcomes. In the end, the *Jones* ruling may prompt California and other states to adopt purely nonpartisan primaries, further weakening political parties, which is contrary to the Court's intent.

Pildes thinks that the Court is falling down on the job in the one area where it ought to be doing more: promoting political competition by aggressively scrutinizing laws that let officeholders and political parties entrench themselves in power. In *Timmons v. Twin Cities Area New Party* (1997), for example, it refused to overturn laws banning fusion candidacies (in which candidates appear on both major and minor-party lines on the ballot). As a result, the New Party, founded in 1992 to exert leftward pressure on the Democratic Party by offering a second ballot line to candidates it supported, disbanded its national organization.

“Constitutional law must play a role in constraining partisan or incumbent self-entrenchment that inappropriately manipulates the ground rules of democracy,” Pildes argues. Otherwise, the Court should stand aside and let competition determine the shape of the American political system.

The People's Conservative

“The Inventor of Modern Conservatism” by David Gelernter, in *The Weekly Standard* (Feb. 7, 2005), 1150 17th St., N.W., Ste. 505, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Historians usually name Edmund Burke, the 18th-century British philosopher and statesman, the founding father of modern conservatism. Gelernter, a professor of computer science at Yale University, casts his vote for Benjamin Disraeli (1804–81), the British prime minister who reinvented con-

servatism as “a mass movement.”

“Dark, handsome, exotic-looking,” a quick-witted ladies' man (but a devoted husband) and prolific novelist, born a Jew but baptized a Christian at 13, Disraeli entered politics in 1832 as an independent with radical tendencies. After four defeats, he finally won a seat in Par-

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liament as a Conservative in 1837. At the time, Sir Robert Peel was struggling to reconstitute the Conservative Party from the wreckage created by the Whigs' Reform Act of 1832, which extended the franchise to most middle-class men and thus undercut the power of the landowning elite, represented by the Tories. Peel's solution, according to Gelernter, was "a pale pastel Toryism, a watered-down Whiggism that attracted some Whigs but inspired no one."

Disraeli was a man of many contradictions, and one of them was an ability to harbor deep convictions while simultaneously playing the master political operator. When Peel decided in 1846 to bid for Whig votes by repealing the Corn Laws, the tariffs on imported grain that benefited landowners at the expense of city dwellers, Disraeli led the opposition, split the party, and brought Peel's government down. The very next year, he came out *against* such protectionist laws.

While the Conservatives would later form new governments, it would be 28 years before they again commanded a clear majority in the House of Commons. "That gave [Disraeli] the time he needed to refashion the wreckage into a new kind of party." Rather than continue with Peel's "watered-down Whiggism," he wanted to expand the party's base to include workers and others. He was an important force behind the Reform Act of 1867, which gave the vote to many city workers and small farmers.

In reshaping his party and conservatism, says Gelernter, Disraeli acted out of a belief "that the Conservative Party was the *national* party," that it must "care for the *whole nation*, for all classes," at a time when the Left was appealing to the working class to unite internationally. As Disraeli saw it, conservatives were no less progressive than liberals. But conservatives carried out change, in his words, "in deference to the manners, the customs, the laws and the traditions of a people," while liberals fol-



Benjamin Disraeli was the "master political operator" of Victorian England.

lowed "abstract principles, and arbitrary and general doctrines."

Disraeli served briefly as prime minister in 1868. Returned to office in 1874, when he was 70 years old, he pursued a strong foreign policy, bringing India and the Suez Canal under the direct authority of the Crown and restoring British prestige while helping to redraw the map of Europe at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. At home, new legislation dealing with health, housing, the environment, trade unions, and working conditions constituted, according to one biographer, "the biggest installment of social reform passed by any one government in the 19th century." In summarizing Disraeli's life, Lord Randolph Churchill wrote: "Failure, failure, failure, partial success, renewed failure, ultimate and complete triumph."

Liberalism's Last Prayer

"Faith Full" by E. J. Dionne, Jr., "Fact Finders" by Jonathan Chait, "Not Much Left" by Martin Peretz, and "Structural Flaw" by John B. Judis, in *The New Republic* (Feb. 28, 2005), 1331 H St., N.W., Ste. 700, Washington, D.C. 20005.

Liberalism today is bereft of ideas and "dying." So asserts Martin Peretz, editor in chief of *The New Republic*, the magazine

that may well have introduced the term *liberal* in its modern sense into the American political lexicon nearly 90 years ago, and

that has been a leading light of liberalism ever since. “Ask yourself: Who is a truly influential liberal mind in our culture?” writes Peretz. “Whose ideas challenge and whose ideals inspire? Whose books and articles are read and passed around? There’s no one, really.”

Once there were such giants as Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971), “the most penetrating thinker of the old liberalism.” But Niebuhr, with his pessimistic view of human nature, is largely forgotten in liberal circles these days. “However gripping his illuminations, however much they may have been validated by history,” says Peretz, “liberals have no patience for such pessimism.” Religion in general has been in bad odor with many liberals in recent years, notes Dionne, a columnist for *The Washington Post*. “How strange it is that American liberalism, nourished by faith and inspired by the scriptures from the days of abolitionism, is now defined—by its enemies but occasionally by its friends—as implacably hostile to religion.”

Liberals no longer have “a vision of the good society,” laments Peretz. For years now, “the liberal agenda has looked and sounded like little more than a bookkeeping exercise. We want to spend more, they [conservatives] less. In the end, the numbers do not clarify; they confuse. Almost no one can explain any principle behind the cost differences.”

Chait, a senior editor at the magazine, sees the absence of “a deeper set of philosophical principles” underlying liberalism as a strength. Unlike conservatives, he says, liberals do not make the size of government a matter of dogma. “Liberals only support larger government if they have some reason to believe that it will lead to material improve-

ment in people’s lives.” Its aversion to dogma makes liberalism “superior as a practical governing philosophy.”

“But there are grand matters that need to be addressed,” insists Peretz, “and the grandest one is what we owe each other as Americans.” Instead of taking on that difficult task, he says, liberals continue reflexively to defend every last liberal governmental program of the past and to seek comfort in leftover themes from the 1960s—the struggle for civil rights and the dangers posed by the exercise of U.S. power. They refuse to recognize the immense gains that blacks have made over the past three decades. And though they no longer regard revolutionaries as axiomatically virtuous, many still won’t face up to the full evil of communism—or to the present need to combat Islamic fanaticism and Arab terrorism. “Liberalism now needs to be liberated from many of its own illusions and delusions,” Peretz contends.

Yet even without its other difficulties, “liberalism still would have been undermined” by dramatic changes in the international economy since the 1960s, says Judis, a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Facing stiffer competition from abroad, U.S. manufacturers fought harder against unionization and federal regulation. And as businesses moved manufacturing jobs overseas and hired immigrants for service jobs at home, labor unions—a crucial force for liberal reform—lost much of their clout. “To revive liberalism fully—to enjoy a period not only of liberal agitation, but of substantial reform—would probably require a national upheaval similar to what happened in the 1930s and 1960s,” Judis writes. That “doesn’t appear imminent.”

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

What War on Terror?

“The ‘War on Terror’: Good Cause, Wrong Concept” by Gilles Andréani, in *Survival* (Winter 2004–05), International Institute for Strategic Studies, Arundel House, 13–15 Arundel St., Temple Pl., London WC2R 3DX, England.

The global war on terror has become such an accepted part of America’s foreign-policy thinking that the Pentagon has created an

acronym for it (GWOT), and two service medals to honor those engaged in the struggle. What began as a metaphor has evolved

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without careful thought into a strategic reality that has led America down the wrong path, asserts Andréani, head of policy planning in the French foreign ministry and adjunct professor at Paris II University.

It *did* make sense to define the campaign to root out Al Qaeda in Afghanistan after 9/11 as a war on terror. As in other efforts of this kind in Northern Ireland and Algeria, the terrorists operated inside clear territorial areas, making it possible to conduct full-blown counterinsurgency operations in a defined space. But in combating today's loosely knit global networks, with no geographic center, speaking of a "war" only exaggerates the importance of military operations in dealing with the threat.

Merging that war with the effort to contain rogue states is another source of trouble. The Bush administration worries that a rogue state will provide terrorists with weapons of mass destruction. But such states acquire such weapons, at great cost, in order to intimidate their neighbors or gain leverage against the United States, Andréani says, and they see the terrorists more clearly than Washington does: They're "not about to give their most cherished toys to madmen they do not control."

Attempting to confront these different threats with the single doctrine of "preventive war" makes no sense. And carrying the war to Iraq has "worried the United States' partners and undermined the antiterrorist coalition," while whipping up anti-Western sentiment in the Middle East.

One of the most negative consequences

of America's war against terror, according to Andréani, has been U.S. treatment of prisoners. By failing to treat its enemies as mere criminals, the United States has awarded them undue status, and by categorizing prisoners as "unlawful combatants" and depriving them of the protections of the Geneva Conventions and U.S. criminal law, America has besmirched itself. "In this 'war' without limit in time or space," the door is open to limitless abuses: "Where is the theater of operations? How will we know when the war has ended?"

Andréani hopes that as the United States devises new strategies, it "does not mistake terrorism for a new form of warfare to be met with a rigid set of military answers." Such thinking can produce blinders, as it did decades ago when Western military leaders intensively studied the challenging new tactics of guerrillas in Southeast Asia and, disastrously, missed the crucial larger point that these revolutionary movements were rooted more deeply in nationalism than in communist ideology.

Andréani acknowledges that the United States has tried to tackle the underlying causes of terrorism, especially in its campaign to spread democracy. But the war on terrorism "has detracted from the consideration of some urgent political problems that fuel Middle East terrorism, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." Most Arabs continue to view Islamic terrorists as criminals rather than liberators, and the United States should do everything that it can to reinforce that conviction.

Push It to the Max

"American Maximalism" by Stephen Sestanovich, in *The National Interest* (Spring 2005), 1615 L St., N.W., Ste. 1230, Washington, D.C. 20036.

You've seen the cartoons: President George W. Bush has a six-shooter and a 10-gallon hat, and he's off on yet another bone-headed adventure. Instead of building consensus and playing by the rules, the critics wail, Washington ignores its traditional allies, defines its struggles with its adversaries in all-or-nothing terms, and stubbornly pursues its own far-reaching goals. Yes, that's

the Bush administration's approach—but it's no dramatic departure from recent U.S. practice, says Sestanovich, a professor of international diplomacy at Columbia University and U.S. ambassador-at-large for the states of the former Soviet Union during the Clinton administration's second term. And the approach of the last few decades has consistently worked.

Sestanovich writes: “Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and Bill Clinton all repeatedly ignored the dissents (and domestic political difficulties) of allies, rejected compromise with adversaries, negotiated insincerely, changed the rules, rocked the boat, moved the goal posts and even planned inadequately to deal with the consequences if their policies went wrong.”

In the 1980s, the Reagan administration’s insistence on deploying intermediate-range missiles in Europe unless the So-



viets abandoned their own missiles disturbed many allied leaders and provoked mass demonstrations in Europe. When U.S. negotiator Paul Nitze explored a compromise with the Soviets, President Ronald Reagan refused to hear of it, and his administration didn’t even bother to inform the allies of the possibility. The outcome:

a U.S.-Soviet treaty in 1987 based on the “non-negotiable” zero option. After Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev lost power, he said that the confrontation with Reagan had been instrumental in turning Soviet foreign policy around.

Under President George H. W. Bush, the United States “placed itself in direct opposition to almost all its own allies, as well as the Soviet Union,” on the question of German reunification. “As in the early 1980s, the United States alone had real confidence that it could control the process of change—that it could stimulate an international upheaval and come out better off. . . . The United States steered the process to a positive result by exploiting its partners’ disarray, by setting a pace that kept them off balance, and even by deceiving them.”

Likewise the Clinton administration: After first bowing to European objections to strong action by NATO to halt the mass killings in the Balkans, it decided to stop listening to allied views, to do more than merely “contain” the genocide, and to use military force if necessary. The result was the breakthrough Dayton agreement in 1995 and the ambitious effort to create a single Bosnian state.

Later, the administration used the same strategy in confronting Yugoslavia’s Slobodan Milosevic over Kosovo. Despite allied calls for a bombing pause and a German threat to block any full-scale ground invasion, the administration won a peace accord, then went on to insist on “regime change.”

Finding a lot of precedents for President George W. Bush’s tough-mindedness is not the same thing as saying his policies are sound, Sestanovich observes. But the continuity makes more urgent the question of why Bush’s “maximalist” foreign policies have stirred up so much more opposition than his predecessors’ did. “It will not be much of a legacy to be the president who, after decades of success, gave maximalism a bad name.”

Privatizing War

“Outsourcing War” by P. W. Singer, in *Foreign Affairs* (Mar.–Apr. 2005),
58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

It’s become routine to read in the news about private military contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan. They provide everything from tactical combat operations to logistical support and technical assistance. These modern corporate mercenaries play a vital role in Iraq, but their extensive use there and in other hot spots around the globe is raising a host of problems. They’ve been accused, for example, of profiteering and taking part in the abuse of Iraqi prisoners.

There are more than 60 private firms, employing more than 20,000 people, carrying out military functions in Iraq. Private contractors have suffered more casualties—an estimated 175 killed and 900 wounded—than any single U.S. Army division, and more than all the United States’ coalition partners combined.

Contractors handled logistics and sup-

port during the Iraq War’s buildup; they maintained and loaded B-2 stealth bombers and other sophisticated weapons systems during the 2003 invasion; and they’ve been even more widely used in the occupation and counterinsurgency effort. Halliburton’s Kellogg, Brown & Root division, the largest military firm in Iraq, provides troop supplies and equipment maintenance under a Pentagon contract estimated at \$13 billion. Other firms are being used to help train Iraqi forces, protect important installations and individuals, and escort convoys.

But unlike military forces, private firms can abandon operations that become too dangerous or otherwise too costly, and their employees are free to walk off the job. More than once, the U.S. military has been left in the lurch.

Being “not quite soldiers” and “not quite

EXCERPT

The New Wounded

Combat deaths are seen as a measure of the magnitude and dangerousness of war, just as murder rates are seen as a measure of the magnitude and dangerousness of violence in our communities. Both, however, are weak proxies. Little recognized is how fundamentally important the medical system is—and not just the enemy’s weaponry—in determining whether or not someone dies. U.S. homicide rates, for example, have dropped in recent years to levels unseen since the mid-1960s. Yet aggravated assaults, particularly with firearms, have more than tripled during that period. The difference appears to be our trauma care system: Mortality from gun assaults has fallen from 16 percent in 1964 to five percent today.

We have seen a similar evolution in war. Though firepower has increased, lethality has decreased. In World War II, 30 percent of the Americans injured in combat died. In Vietnam, the proportion dropped to 24 percent. In the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, about 10 percent of those injured have died. At least as many U.S. soldiers have been injured in combat in this war as in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, or the first five years of the Vietnam conflict, from 1961 through 1965. This can no longer be described as a small or contained conflict. But a far larger proportion of soldiers are surviving their injuries.

—Atul Gawande, a surgeon at Brigham and Women’s Hospital and professor at Harvard Medical School, in *The New England Journal of Medicine* (Dec. 9, 2004)

civilians,” the private firms’ employees “tend to fall through the cracks of current legal codes.” The consequences for them can be dire, as three American employees of California Microwave Systems found when their plane crashed in rebel-held territory in Colombia in 2003. Unprotected by the Geneva Conventions, they’ve been held prisoner for the past two years, and both their corporate bosses and the U.S. government “seem to have washed their hands of the matter.”

Their murky legal status has also allowed private military contractors to escape prosecution for crimes in Iraq. The U.S. Army found that contractors were involved in more than a third of the incidents in the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse case, but not one of the six employees identified as participants has been indicted.

The private military firms are, in effect, competing with the government, observes

Singer, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and the author of *Corporate Warriors* (2003). “Not only do they draw their employees from the military, they do so to play military roles, thus shrinking the military’s purview. [The firms] use public funds to offer soldiers higher pay, and then charge the government at an even higher rate.” And some were not even competent.

Yet military contractors of this type are here to stay. They’ve proliferated since the end of the Cold War, and many governments make use of their services. Singer argues that outsourcing can be beneficial where it will save money or improve quality, but the process needs to be made more open and accountable. More of the contracts should be awarded on a competitive basis (only 60 percent of the Pentagon’s currently are). And military functions critical to the success or failure of an operation should be kept within the military itself.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

The Father of Free Trade

“David Ricardo: Theory of Free International Trade” by Robert L. Formaini, in *Economic Insights* (Vol. 9, No. 2), Public Affairs Dept., Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, P.O. Box 655906, Dallas, Texas 75265-6906.

Competition from foreign goods and the “outsourcing” of jobs overseas have cost many Americans their jobs—or roused fear that they might. Yet most economists, rising in defense of free trade, say that the disruption is all for the best. Where in the world did they get that notion? From a brilliant 19th-century economic theorist named David Ricardo.

Born in London in 1772, Ricardo became a prosperous stockbroker before turning to political economy. He set down “what was to become a key idea in neoclassical economics: the so-called law of diminishing returns as it applied to labor and capital,” writes Formaini, a senior economist at the Dallas Federal Reserve Bank. Farming, for example, faced diminishing returns because the quantity of land is limited: More intensive cultivation would eventually lead to lower profits. As the price of home-grown corn rose, Ricardo argued in *On the Princi-*

ples of Political Economy and Taxation (1817), Britain would benefit by importing



David Ricardo (1772–1823), whose economic theories broke the hold of protectionist thinking, did not live to see his ideas triumph.

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corn from countries able to produce it at lower cost. He was a leading opponent of England's Corn Laws of 1815, which barred food imports.

Ricardo also formulated the theory of comparative advantage, showing how two nations—each able, because of its particular natural advantages, to produce a different product at lower cost than the other—could increase their total output and lower their costs through specialization and trade. “It is this principle,” Ricardo wrote, “which determines that wine shall be made in France and Portugal, that corn shall be grown in America and Poland, and that hardware and other goods shall be manufactured in England.”

That was hardly the end of his contributions to economic thought. For exam-

ple, his doctrine of fiscal equivalence, now called Ricardian equivalence, held that the economic effects are the same whether government finances its activities through debt or taxes.

Ricardo didn't live to see his theories prevail. He died of an ear infection in 1823, leaving a fortune worth \$126 million in today's dollars. Twenty-three years after his death, the Corn Laws were repealed and his free-trade agenda was enshrined in British policy. “Britain became the ‘workshop of the world,’ importing most of its food and ‘outsourcing’ most of its agricultural employment.” As the 20th-century economist John Maynard Keynes put it, “Ricardo conquered England as completely as the Holy Inquisition conquered Spain.”

Tax Tales

“How Fair? Changes in Federal Income Taxation and the Distribution of Income, 1978 to 1998” by James Alm, Fitzroy Lee, and Sally Wallace, in *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (Winter 2005), Assn. for Public Policy Analysis and Management, P.O. Box 18766, Washington, D.C. 20036-8766.

The federal income tax has gone under the knife many times in recent decades, in some cases to promote economic growth, in others to make it fairer or more socially beneficial. The income tax that emerged from all the surgical nips and tucks between 1978 and 1998 was still progressive, but less so than it had been, report Alm, an economist at Georgia State University, and his colleagues. And that was before President George W. Bush's tax cuts in this decade.

The Suits Index measures how regressive or progressive a tax is on a scale from -1 (regressive) to +1 (progressive), with 0 repre-

senting a neutral tax. The more progressive a tax, the more redistributive its effect on income. Despite slight increases in 1995 and 1998, the index declined 16 percent over the whole 20-year period, falling from 0.273 to 0.229. It still remained in progressive territory.

Changes in the tax base have tended to make the system more progressive. These include subjecting some Social Security benefits to taxation (1983) and repealing the state and local sales tax deduction (1986). Changes in tax rates have had the opposite effect, producing a kinder and gentler tax system for those who have more.

EXCERPT

Google-opoly

In a few years you'll be driving your Google to the Google to buy some Google for your Google.

—EnsilZah, a poster on the online technology forum Slashdot.org (Jan. 31, 2005), quoted in *The New York Times*.

SOCIETY

Hothouse Parents, Shrinking Violets

“A Nation of Wimps” by Hara Estroff Marano, in *Psychology Today* (Nov.–Dec. 2004),
115 E. 23rd St., 9th fl., New York, N.Y. 10010.

“Get off my back!” was once just lip from a defiant kid. Now those huffy words have the backing of psychologists. “Hothouse parenting” is harming a generation of children, asserts *Psychology Today* editor Marano.

Today’s controlling baby-boomer parents aren’t willing to let their children deal with the mess of life without constant intervention. “With few challenges all their own, kids are unable to forge their creative adaptations to the normal vicissitudes of life,” Marano writes. “That not only makes them risk-averse, it makes them psychologically fragile, riddled with anxiety. In the process they’re robbed of identity, meaning and a sense of accomplishment, to say nothing of a shot at real happiness. Forget, too, about perseverance. . . . Whether we want to or not, we’re on our way to creating a nation of wimps.”

The result is evident in new levels of psychological distress among the young. Depression was once a malady chiefly of middle age, but during the 1990s children’s rates of depression surpassed those of people over 40. And in 1996, anxiety overtook traditional—and more developmentally appropriate—relationship issues as the most common problem among college students. Binge drinking, substance abuse, self-mutilation, anorexia, and bulimia afflict college campuses with new intensity. Marano sees the cell phone as a particular culprit: This “virtual umbilical cord” connects kids directly with Mom and Dad well into their college years, infantilizing them and keeping them in a permanent state of dependency.

The “fragility factor” is incubated at young ages. Harvard University psychologist Jerome Kagan found that about 20 percent of babies are born with a high-strung temperament, detectable even in the womb by a fast pulse. But some overexcitable kids can grow up with normal levels of anxiety—if their parents back off while they’re very young. For the vast majority of kids, who fall somewhere between invulnerable to anxiety and very fearful, overprotective parenting can be the decisive factor.

Yet a third of parents pack their young ones off to school with sanitizing gels. They pursue learning-disorder diagnoses so their kids can take tests—including the SAT—with no time limits. Play is so scripted that kids lack the know-how to conduct a neighborhood pick-up game, sans shouted instructions and coordinated uniforms. Recess has been scotched altogether at more than 40,000 U.S. schools.

Marano blames hothouse parenting on adults’ perception that the playground is as cutthroat as the boardroom. Perfectionism rules the roost, and parents can’t refrain from mother-hen behavior long enough to let kids puzzle through math homework or tie a shoe by themselves.

Without breathing room, kids are simply taking longer to grow up, tacking on their “playtime” in their twenties and waiting to achieve classic benchmarks of adulthood such as a steady job, marriage, and parenting. In other words, playtime needs to happen on the playground, even if it means the indulgence of an occasional skinned knee.

America the Ordinary

“American Exceptionalism Revisited” by Daniel T. Rodgers, in *Raritan* (Autumn 2004),
31 Mine St., New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

As the United States embarks on a campaign to promote freedom and democracy around the world, the idea of “American exceptionalism” has come back into parlance.

To many academic historians, however, it’s an idea whose time has passed.

“Anticipations of escape from ordinary history run deep in the American past,” as far

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back as the 17th-century declaration by John Winthrop, the governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, that the colonists would create a morally exemplary “city upon a hill.” But the notion that America isn’t merely different from other nations but a fortunate exception to the historical forces that rule all the others didn’t fully develop until the 1950s, notes Rodgers, a historian at Princeton University. To many Cold War intellectuals and scholars, the United States suddenly seemed “an island of stable consensus in a world of heightened class divisions, ideological polarization, and revolutionary instability.” Because America had no feudal past, these thinkers argued, Americans were more individualistic, socially egalitarian, and religious than Europeans. The fact that socialism, so strong in Europe, had made few inroads in America seemed to underscore the nation’s exceptional standing.

But these exceptionalist arguments long ago went out of vogue in the academy. There, all “grand narratives” are viewed with distrust, especially since the decline of Marxism, the grandest narrative of all, after the Cold War. And without any scheme of history unfolding over time in accordance with some general historical law, “there can be no exceptions—no exceptional nations and no exceptional histories.”

Impressed by globalization’s power, historians have embarked on “transnational” studies highlighting the continuous flow of people, goods, and ideas between nations in the past. New “diaspora” studies of African slaves, Asian workers, and others depict them as “simultaneously ‘here’ and ‘elsewhere.’” They are not fundamentally reborn in the United States, nor are they evidence of the nation’s extraordinary redemptive powers and possibilities.” And the traditional notion of the frontier as a place where a uniquely American character was forged has been challenged by new “borderlands” studies that treat places such as the Great Lakes region as “zones of cultural contact” where “peoples and spaces meet and their influences spill over into each other.”

Even America’s exceptional resistance to socialism no longer looks so special to these scholars, who note that socialism is now on the run even in Europe.

Beneath the recent revival of exceptionalist rhetoric, Rodgers detects “a deep anxiety” caused by the “historically unprecedented sense of vulnerability” among Americans, their fear that the United States “is simply a nation in a dangerous world like every other.” In his view, it would be better for them to squarely face this truth.

Game Theory

“Digital Gambling: The Coincidence of Desire and Design” by Natasha Dow Schull, in *The Annals* (Jan. 2005), The American Academy of Political and Social Science, 3814 Walnut St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19104-6197.

They’re in every casino: the glassy-eyed video poker players glued to their machines, hands tapping a steady rhythm. Every intrusion—a check-in from a cocktail waitress, even winning too big or too often—distracts players from the “zone.”

Video poker isn’t the only game in town, but it is the biggest: Poker terminals and other coin-operated machines now occupy more than three-quarters of the floor space in Nevada casinos. And the gaming industry aims to exploit that real estate for all it’s worth, using new technologies to create machines that seduce gamblers into playing faster and longer.

With microchip brains and dazzling elec-

tronic displays, coin-operated gambling machines are now, more than ever, gamblers’ private islands. Drinks, game chips, and machine mechanics are summoned at the touch of a button, the seats are ergonomic, and the cards appear on the screen so quickly that experienced gamblers play up to 900 hands an hour. Machine manufacturers know that the game—not the winning—is the important thing for most players, notes Schull, an anthropologist and postdoctoral research scholar at Columbia University. One industry executive told her that his company had to scale back the electronic bells and whistles: Players didn’t like pausing to celebrate a win.

All these careful calibrations translate into

bigger profits. And in casinos' pursuit of "productivity enhancement," Schull sees a manifestation of capitalism's tendency to seize control of time and degrade workers to the level of machines, just as Michel Foucault and Karl Marx warned.

The productivity revolution has come to casinos, and the random number generator, or RNG, is its revolutionary agent. Embedded in the digital microprocessor that runs video poker machines, the RNG speeds through number combinations until the play button is pressed, compares the selected number with a table of payout rates, and instructs the hopper to deliver a win or not.

What happens in Vegas may stay in Vegas, but it also stays in the circuits of video poker machines, which track a player's game preferences, wins and losses, number of

coins played per game, number of games played every minute, length of play, number of drinks ordered, etc. Machines also foster the illusion that players are calling the shots. "The ability to modulate play—adjust volume [and] speed of play, choose cards and bet amounts—is understood by game developers to increase psychological and financial investment," writes Schull.

But once players are far enough into the zone, even the illusion of control and skill ceases to matter. In Australia, an "AutoPlay" option allows some players to insert money, press a button, then watch as the game plays itself. AutoPlay hasn't made it to North America, but some gamblers reportedly jam the "play" button down with a toothpick to achieve the same effect. Schull doesn't say how Marx and Foucault would parse that.

The Self-Esteem Scam

"Exploding the Self-Esteem Myth" by Roy F. Baumeister, Jennifer D. Campbell, Joachim I. Krueger, and Kathleen D. Vohs, in *Scientific American* (Jan. 2005), 415 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017-1111.

Self-esteem has become the great American elixir, the cure for everything from bad grades to social ineptitude. A California state task force declared in 1989 that "many, if not most, of the major problems plaguing society have roots in the low self-esteem of many of the people who make up society." But having reviewed some 200 studies, Baumeister and his colleagues, all university-based psychologists, suggest that self-esteem belongs on the same shelf as miracle diet pills.

Take the seemingly plausible idea that higher self-esteem helps students do better in school. Researchers at the University of Iowa tested more than 23,000 10th graders in 1986, then again two years later. "They found that self-esteem in 10th grade is only weakly predictive of academic achievement in 12th grade." Other studies have produced similar results, and "some findings even suggest that artificially boosting self-esteem may lower subsequent performance."

Does low self-regard predispose teenagers to engage in more or earlier sexual activity? "If anything, those with high self-esteem are less inhibited, more willing to disregard risks and more prone to engage in sex."

Does low self-esteem encourage drink-



ing or drug use? Studies "do not consistently show" that there's even any connection. A large-scale 2000 study by New Zealand researchers found no correlation between children's self-esteem measured

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between ages nine and 13 and their drinking or drug use at age 15.

Psychologists long believed that low self-esteem was an important cause of violence. But a number of studies point to a different conclusion: "Perpetrators of aggression generally hold favorable and perhaps even inflated views of themselves."

It's important to note that Baumeister and his colleagues eliminated from consideration thousands of studies that relied on the subjects' own assessments of their self-

esteem, a notoriously unreliable gauge.

Lest champions of self-esteem lose all of it themselves, the authors report that some studies show "that people with high self-esteem are significantly happier than others." But it's not clear whether high self-esteem *causes* happiness. Both may be the product of success at work, in school, or in one's personal life. The champions can take heart from one last finding: High self-esteem does seem to promote persistence in the face of failure.

PRESS & MEDIA

Tuning Out the World

"The News Media and the 'Clash of Civilizations'" by Philip Seib, in *Parameters* (Winter 2004–05), U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Ave., Carlisle, Pa. 17013–5238.

For Americans groping to understand the world in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the non-Islamic West offers a familiar paradigm. But the news media need to think twice before stealing a ride on this ideological horse, says Seib, a journalism professor at Marquette University.

Journalists like us-vs.-them stories. With the end of the Cold War, they searched for new ways to frame international coverage, and found one in the "clash of civilizations" theory political scientist Samuel Huntington first aired in 1993. It holds that a world order is emerging based on civilizations rather than national boundaries, and that the West is increasingly in conflict with other civilizations, especially the Islamic world and China.

Caveats and alternative theories to Huntington's idea get short shrift in the news. Other thinkers point to divisions within Islam itself, the power of globalization to blur cultural divisions, and the fact that the radical Islamic groups in conflict with the United States do not represent all of Islam. These views rarely get much of a hearing in the mainstream media. "Aside from their occasional spurts of solid performance, American news organizations do a lousy job of breaking down the public's intellectual isolation," writes Seib.

One reason is that there's little space or time to provide more nuance. According to one media analyst, the big three U.S. television networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, offer mere dribbles of international news. For all of 2003, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict received a total of 284 minutes of coverage in the three networks' weeknight newscasts, an average of less than two minutes per week per network. Afghanistan received 80 minutes, the global AIDS epidemic 39 minutes, and global warming 15 minutes. Iraq earned 4,047, but only because of the U.S. invasion. Meanwhile, the number of foreign bureaus is shrinking. As of mid-2003, ABC, CBS, and NBC each maintained only six overseas bureaus with full-time correspondents, having scaled back even in major cities such as Moscow, Beijing, and Paris. But picking up a newspaper won't necessarily fill you in: Nearly two-thirds of print foreign news editors polled in a 2002 study rate the news media's foreign coverage as fair or poor, and more than half were critical of their own newspaper's reporting.

More and better international news coverage is needed, Seib insists. Journalists shouldn't embrace any theory about the world but should familiarize themselves with "the diverse array of ideas about how the world is changing."

The Mysterious Mr. Strauss

“Leo Strauss: The European” and “The Closing of the Straussian Mind” by Mark Lilla, in *The New York Review of Books* (Oct. 21 & Nov. 4, 2004), 1755 Broadway, 5th fl., New York, N.Y. 10019-3780.

Thirty years after his death, Leo Strauss (1899–1973), a German-born émigré scholar, began popping up in various political journals as the satanic thinker behind the allegedly duplicitous neocon march to war in Iraq. The charge was baseless, argues Lilla, a professor at the University of Chicago’s Committee on Social Thought. For Strauss, if not for many of his American followers, ideological partisanship was a temptation philosophers should avoid.

Politics offered no solution to what Strauss regarded as the philosopher’s basic dilemma: how to live a life of perpetual questioning when most people and societies *need* the settled answers provided by political and religious authority. Strauss found a solution to the dilemma in the “esotericism” practiced by Alfarabi, the founder of medieval Islamic philosophy, and Maimonides, his medieval Jewish counterpart. “The conventional view,” writes Lilla, “is that both tried to reconcile classical philosophy with revealed law and thereby reform their societies. When Strauss discovered Alfarabi, he became convinced that this was just his exoteric, publicly accessible doctrine, and that, if his works are read more attentively, a subtler, esoteric teaching emerges.” In short, Alfarabi’s writings gave casual readers the impression that philosophy and revelation are compatible, while attentive readers perceived that they are not.

Moving further back in time, says Lilla, Strauss developed “an idealized picture of an

‘ancient’ or ‘classical’ philosophical tradition that was also esoteric.” He then tried to show that modern Enlightenment philosophy had domesticated “the truly radical nature of Socratic questioning,” and that “the genuine freedom of philosophy as a way of life” had been lost.

Strauss was a teacher as well as a thinker, and, as a professor in the United States in the second half of his life, he acquired a considerable following in American universities. In some places, Straussians’ “habit of forming dogmatic cliques with students and hiring one another” won them an unenviable reputation. Since Strauss’s death, younger Straussians “have turned their attention increasingly to Washington” and slowly adapted Straussian doctrine “to comport with neoconservative Republicanism.” Many of them, such as Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul D. Wolfowitz, have served in high government positions, while others, such as William Kristol, editor of *The Weekly Standard*, “play central roles in the neoconservative intellectual-political-media-foundation complex.”

Most of the charges made about a malign Straussian influence in the government “are patently absurd,” Lilla says. But some political Straussians are guilty of narrowing Strauss’s thought into hardened dogmas. “It is a shame that Strauss’s rich intellectual legacy is being squandered through the shortsightedness, provincialism, and ambition of some of his self-proclaimed disciples.”

Fallen Evangelicals

“The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience” by Ronald J. Sider, in *Books & Culture* (Jan.–Feb. 2005), 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, Ill. 60188.

It’s taken for granted in secular America that evangelical Christians are different in every way. The dismaying evidence from national polls is that they aren’t. “Whether the issue is divorce, materialism, sexual promiscuity, racism, physical abuse in marriage, or neglect of a biblical worldview, the polling

data point to widespread, blatant disobedience of clear biblical moral demands on the part of people who allegedly are evangelical, born-again Christians,” writes Sider, a professor of theology, holistic ministry, and public policy at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, near Philadelphia.

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A 2001 Barna Group survey found that the divorce rate among born-again Christians was 33 percent, about the same as the rate for the population as a whole. Twenty-five percent of the born-again Christians surveyed had lived with a member of the opposite sex outside marriage, not much different from the national average of 33 percent. And a recent study of 12,000 evangelical teenagers who took the “True Love Waits” pledge to postpone intercourse until marriage found that only 12 percent kept the promise. Indeed, a quarter of the most committed, “traditional” evangelicals and nearly half of “nontraditional” evangelicals tell pollsters they find premarital sex morally acceptable.

The biblical injunction to help the poor likewise gets short shrift from many evangelicals. They gave six percent of their income to charity in 1968 and, after decades of

growing affluence, only four percent in 2001. That’s better than the three percent given by mainline Protestants, but still much less than the biblical tithe of 10 percent.

Yet there’s evidence that religious commitment does lead to better behavior—though Sider laments that so many Christians still fall short. For example, the relatively few born-again Christians who strongly adhere to a biblical worldview are indeed “different”: Half of them did more than an hour of volunteer work for an organization serving the poor in the week before one recent poll, compared with only 22 percent of other Christians. “When we can distinguish nominal Christians from deeply committed, theologically orthodox Christians,” says Sider, “it is clear that genuine Christianity does lead to better behavior, at least in some areas.”

The Vatican’s Lost Monopoly

“The Economics of the Counter-Reformation: Incumbent-Firm Reaction to Market Entry” by Robert B. Ekelund, Jr., Robert F. Hebert, and Robert D. Tollison, in *Economic Inquiry* (Oct. 2004), Texas A&M Univ., Dept. of Economics, College Station, Texas 77843-4228.

When the Protestant Reformation began in the 16th century, it was as if a new business firm were seeking to gain a share of the religious market from an established monopoly. And in the Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church responded just as monopolistic firms typically do—with a corporate reorganization plan. But the plan failed.

It’s enlightening to subject the whole episode to a business analysis, say economists Ekelund and Hebert, both of Auburn University, and Tollison, of Clemson University. The medieval Catholic Church had evolved from a vertically integrated firm into a powerful monopoly that sought returns from its properties and “sold assurances of eternal salvation and other religious services.” The church created and manipulated doctrine to increase revenues (virtually inventing purgatory, for instance, along with a system of indulgences whereby payments and other sacrifices could cut the time one posthumously had to serve in it). By the 16th century, the church had “sheared too much wool from the sheep.” Its doctrinal manipulations, complex reward and

punishment schemes, and monopoly price discrimination combined to push certain consumers to the limits of their demands for the Church’s product.” Hence the market opening for Protestantism, which made “‘all-or-none’ offers, using an uncomplicated pricing scheme.”

At the Council of Trent (1545–63), the church responded to the Reformation with public efforts “to lower the price (or increase the quality) of its services.” Among the proclaimed reforms: It limited the number of benefices (revenue-producing assets) each bishop could hold; established minimum competency requirements for the clergy; set penalties for concubinage and other abuses; prohibited bishops from selling rights and offices; eliminated charges for providing certain services; and “tried to institute quality control over the doctrine of Purgatory and the veneration of sacred relics, and to abolish ‘all evil traffic’ in indulgences.”

Such measures “permitted at least the advertised cleaning up of abuses at the retail level of Church organization,” actions that ap-



Pope Paul III convened the Council of Trent in 1545. It lasted until 1563, eliminating some of the more egregious abuses of the Catholic Church but failing to bring about the fundamental reorganization of the church's structure needed to meet the challenge of the Protestant Reformation.

parently slowed down defections.

Despite the outward appearance of reform, say the authors, the Council of Trent's measures "failed as a reorganization plan." "The [Vatican] bureaucracy, entrenched in its power for at least a century before the

Council of Trent, defied actual reform at the wholesale level of church organization." Nepotism, the sale of sacred offices, and other abuses continued behind the scenes. As a result, the powerful firm's monopoly was permanently lost.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

No Compromise

"Why Nature & Nurture Won't Go Away" by Steven Pinker, in *Daedalus* (Fall 2004), Norton's Woods, 136 Irving St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

The question of what shapes human behavior has become such a highly charged political issue that many people are eager to wish it away. Everyone now knows that heredity and environment play an intertwined role, they argue, so let's just agree that the answer to the nature-nurture question is "some of each."

Bad idea, says Pinker, a psychologist at Harvard University. It's not even true that

everyone acknowledges the role of heredity in human behavior. Some scientists cling to the theory of the mind as a blank slate, and postmodern thinkers in the humanities insist that virtually all human emotions and behavioral categories are "socially constructed." More important, it's not true that "some of each" is always the proper answer. Environmental influences provide 100 percent of the explana-

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tion for why people in different countries speak different languages, but these influences have been totally ruled out as a cause of certain psychopathologies, such as autism and schizophrenia. “Mothers don’t deserve some of the blame if their children have these disorders, as a nature-nurture compromise would imply,” Pinker notes. “They deserve none of it.”

It’s true that the expression of some genes is shaped by the environment, but that doesn’t mean, as some contend, that heredity is inconsequential. People taking this view often point to phenylketonuria (PKU), an inherited disease that causes mental retardation: Patients given a diet low in phenylalanine can avoid severe retardation. However, these advocates of the nurture perspective seldom note that “PKU children still have mean IQs in the 80s and 90s” and suffer other impairments, Pinker says. In fact, “genes specify what kinds of environmental manipulations have what kinds of effects and with what costs.”

Acknowledging and studying inborn proclivities can help us domesticate them. For

example, humans seem to have a natural sympathy for others, but it’s normally limited to their “own”: family, clan, or village. In the right environment, however, that sympathy can be expanded to “clans, tribes, races, or even species.” Understanding what those circumstances are can reveal “possible levers for humane social change.”

One of the most startling findings in behavioral genetics is the revelation through research on identical twins that family environment has “little or no effect” on individual intelligence and personality. Yet twins do nevertheless differ in important ways. So now researchers are asking new questions: What is the role of *peer* culture in the development of personality? What is the role of chance events? “These profound questions are not about nature versus nurture,” Pinker writes. “They are about nurture versus nurture: about what, precisely, are the nongenetic causes of personality and intelligence.” And they might never have been asked if researchers had thrown up their hands and ended the nature-nurture debate by agreeing to split the difference.

To Be a Bee

“The *Edge* Annual Question—2005: What Do You Believe Is True Even Though You Cannot Prove It?” in *Edge* (Jan. 4, 2005), www.edge.org.

When it comes to many-legged critters, we humans are apt to squash first and ask existential questions later—if at all. But that’s a mistake, claims Alun Anderson, editor in chief of *New Scientist*, arguing that insects possess consciousness. That isn’t to say that the common cockroach is wondering how to make the next car payment or pondering the validity of string theory, but it is to say that it is capable of suffering and even dying simply from stress.

Anderson, a former biologist who conducted extensive studies of insects, proposes this theory in answer to a question the Edge Foundation put to 120 notables in the science world: “What do you believe is true even though you cannot prove it?”

In one experiment, Anderson examined how honeybees navigated his laboratory to

find hidden sugar. Bees learned the features in the room and showed confusion if objects were moved while they were absent. They were also easily distracted—by floral scents, sudden movements, and certain patterns, particularly flowerlike ones—except when gorging on sugar.

Anderson writes: “To make sense of this ever changing behavior, with its shifting focus of attention, I always found it simplest to figure out what was happening by imagining the sensory world of the bee, with its eye extraordinarily sensitive to flicker and colors we can’t see, as a ‘visual screen’ in the same way I can sit back and ‘see’ my own visual screen of everything happening around me, with sights and sounds coming in and out of prominence. The objects in the bee’s world have significances or ‘meaning’ quite differ-

ent from our own, which is why its attention is drawn to things we would barely perceive.

“That’s what I mean by consciousness—the feeling of ‘seeing’ the world and its associations. For the bee, it is the feeling of being a bee. I don’t mean that a bee is self-conscious or spends time thinking about itself. But of course the problem of why the bee has its own ‘feeling’ is the same incomprehensible

‘hard problem’ as why the activity of our nervous system gives rise to our own ‘feelings.’”

Many scientists remain skeptical that a bee with a brain of only a million neurons is much more than a simple collection of instinctive mechanisms. But 10 years spent studying the world from a bug’s-eye view convinced Anderson that “the world is full of many overlapping alien consciousnesses.”

Who Owns Nature’s Secrets?

“Hyperownership in a Time of Biotechnological Promise: The International Conflict to Control the Building Blocks of Life” by Sabrina Safrin, in *The American Journal of International Law* (Oct. 2004), The American Society of International Law, 2223 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Can a company patent a fish gene? Not if it’s still in the fish. But if a biotech firm manages to extract and isolate a particular gene—say, the gene that enables a flounder to resist cold—many governments will now allow that company to patent its “invention.” What about as yet unimagined developments related to the original gene, or the extraction technique itself? International law has struggled to deal with such issues, but increasingly has moved toward a system that effectively blocks access to new genetic discoveries.

In the 1980s, according to Safrin, a professor at Rutgers University Law School, most biotech explorers operated largely without fetters. While that system encouraged scientific discoveries, it was, she acknowledges, “far from perfect,” and as companies started to realize—or at least predict—profits from their bio-prospecting, various restrictions began to emerge. The United States, the “world’s largest producer of bioengineered goods,” now “allows the patenting of genetic material to a greater degree than any other country.” In Safrin’s view, these patents have had a chilling ef-

fect, since the patents encumber any inventions relying on the protected material. The patents also alerted certain biotically rich nations, such as those with territory in the Amazon rain forest, that they were perched atop a potential bonanza. Under the developing doctrine of “sovereign enclosure” in



In Colombia, the farmer owns the oxen, but the government owns their DNA.

international law, some governments moved to lock up those raw genetic resources, adopting restrictions that require bioprospectors to agree to share future profits, even before they know what kinds of discoveries they might make. One curious effect of this, says Safrin, is that “while a person in Colombia might own a plant or cow, the national government owns the genetic makeup of that plant or cow.”

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Local authorities have also gotten into the act, making bio-prospecting even more daunting. In the Philippines, for example, a researcher must first navigate “multiple layers of national government review and consent,” get “informed consent from indigenous communities” and “any affected private landowner,” and undertake an extensive program of public education, to ensure that everyone who might possibly have an interest in the potential discovery learns about it in advance. During the year Safrin studied the situation there, only two of 37 proposed projects cleared all the hurdles.

We’re all familiar with the “tragedy of the commons”: Fisheries and other resources are overused when too many people have access rights to them. A tragedy of

the *anticommons* has been developing in the genetic realm: Too many people have rights to *exclusion*. Safrin calls this “hyper-ownership.”

She acknowledges that it’s not practical to return to a completely open system. But the United States could restrict patents somewhat—excluding, for example, genes that are discovered but not improved. At the same time, the doctrine of “sovereign enclosure” should be modified so that individuals or indigenous groups control access to some genetic material themselves. And there are more creative ways for nations to reap monetary benefits from their genetic resources. Such a framework would allow scientists to unlock many more secrets of nature that will benefit all of humanity.

Putting Power Downtown

“Critical Thinking about Energy: The Case for Decentralized Generation of Electricity” by Thomas R. Casten and Brennan Downes, in *Skeptical Inquirer* (Jan.–Feb. 2005), 944 Deer Dr., N.E., Albuquerque, N.M. 87122.

It wasn’t long after the world’s first commercial power plant fired up in 1879 that city dwellers made a basic discovery: Smoke-spewing power plants make bad neighbors. Before long, the young industry began shifting its operations far from America’s downtowns. It’s time to come back, argue Casten, head of a company that develops and runs decentralized energy projects, and Downes, a project engineer with the firm.

The shift to big generating plants in remote locations created economies of scale, but the need to transmit electricity over great distances and, more important, the inability to recycle waste heat for use in nearby buildings also introduced big inefficiencies. In fact, U.S. average net electric efficiency reached its peak around 1910, before the exodus began, at about 65 percent of the input energy. By 1960, efficiency had declined to 33 percent, and there it remains today.

With today’s technologies, it’s possible to convert more than 50 percent of the energy created by burning fuel (including coal) into electricity, while also emitting few pollutants. If smaller “direct generation” (or “co-generation”) plants could be located near users in urban areas, the industry could eas-

ily see a return to the “good old days” of high efficiency. That’s not just a theoretical possibility. By recycling waste heat and minimizing losses to transmission, actual plants of that sort have achieved 65 to 97 percent net efficiency.

All told today, there are 931 such plants, and they generate eight percent of the nation’s electricity. Why aren’t there more? Shielded from competition and required by government regulations to pass along any savings from efficiency gains to their customers, utility companies have had little incentive to innovate.

Global demand for electricity will double over the next three decades, the International Energy Agency predicts. The authors claim that building smaller, decentralized plants would save \$5 trillion in capital investment, consume the equivalent of 122 billion fewer barrels of oil, and halve carbon dioxide emissions, producing less global warming. But they see little likelihood of a radical overhaul of utility regulation. They propose instead adoption of a national fossil fuel efficiency standard, backed up with penalties and rewards. Do that, they say, and the other pieces will begin to fall into place.

What MoMA's Missing

"Red-Hot MoMA" by Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, in *The New York Review of Books* (Jan. 13, 2005), 1755 Broadway, 5th fl., New York, N.Y. 10019-3780.

The "grand and elegant" new home that architect Yoshio Taniguchi has created for the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan is an "extraordinary accomplishment." But there's a major shortcoming in the design: not enough space.

That didn't happen by accident. It's the unfortunate result of the curators' efforts to grapple with the many difficult questions and tradeoffs faced by all museums of modern art, write pianist Rosen and art historian Zerner, coauthors of *Romanticism and Realism* (1984). Should works of art be grouped chronologically, by national school, by artistic movement, or according to some other scheme? Should pictures be displayed in profusion, virtually frame to frame, as they were in the past, or should each reside in splendid isolation for "the ecstatic pleasure of the lone admirer"? MoMA director Glenn Lowry gave an answer to the last question in 2002 when he declared that the objective was to

have "twice the space and half the amount of art."

From its founding in 1929, MoMA has had two related aims: "to represent the history of modern art and to stay in touch with the most recent contemporary work." The two missions soon began to compete for the museum's limited space. At first, older works were sold in order to bring in money to buy new ones, but this raised some of the same practical and aesthetic questions that plague today's curators: Doesn't a museum have an obligation to keep older works that museumgoers know and love? In 1953, MoMA decided to have it both ways. It would house a comprehensive collection of modern art while continuing to respond to the new trends in art.

Even as MoMA was embracing the new, those trends were complicating its existence. Works of art had literally shrunk in the past, after the impressionists of the late 19th century reacted against the grand scale of estab-



Yoshio Taniguchi's revamped Museum of Modern Art features vast open spaces that dramatically emphasize larger works but leave no room for some of the museum's more familiar objets d'art.

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ishment painting by creating smaller canvases for private settings. By the 1950s, artists were beginning to reject what they viewed as “the domestication of avant-garde art.” They began working on a much larger scale—a scale that created new demands for museum real estate. (It also led to the development of New York’s Soho art district, where galleries could acquire big, relatively inexpensive buildings.) Taniguchi’s MoMA is partly a delayed response to that pressure for more space.

Thanks largely to founder Alfred Barr’s vision of modern art, the museum’s basic permanent collection has an unusual aesthetic coherence, revealing the complex interrelationships of, among others, cubists, futurists, German expressionists, surrealists, and abstract expressionists. This coherence gives MoMA “a personality of its own that only a few other great museums

can claim,” the authors write. Yet MoMA’s expansion “allows little, if any, more space” than before to display the collection. Important paintings have disappeared from its walls, and groupings of works that gave a full vision of an artist’s achievement have been broken up.

What is to be done? “Perhaps the museum could install somewhere a study collection, in which the finest works that are invisible in the main part of the museum are simply stacked on the walls in rows for anyone interested to come and gaze at them.” Or, more radically, the authors suggest, “perhaps MoMA should consider leaving the business of promoting new art to commercial galleries, and renounce the virtuous satisfaction of aiding the as yet unrecognized genius or the more guilty pleasure of showing it has the power to influence the future of art.”

Conrad as Prophet

“Conrad’s Latin America” by Mark Falcoff, in *The New Criterion* (Jan. 2005),
900 Broadway, Ste. 602, New York, N.Y. 10003.

Although Latin American literature is full of novels dealing with the region’s chronic political disorder, it was left to a Ukrainian-born Pole to write (in English) “the best political—the most enduring—novel ever written about Latin America.” That book, says Falcoff, a Latin American specialist and former scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, was published just over 100 years ago: Joseph Conrad’s *Nos-*

tromo: A Tale of the Seaboard (1904).

The San Tomé silver mine in the fictional country of Costaguana is “in some ways the principal character of the novel.” Both the mine and the country have languished for decades under the rule of a brutal dictator, but now, under civilian rule, Costaguana looks abroad for the money and manpower it needs to rebuild itself. Charles Gould, a high-minded

EXCERPT

Recipes for the Imagination

And surely this is part of the appeal of cookbooks—the exercise of imagination involved. For part of what it is to read a recipe, and the bits of prose before and sometimes afterward, is to conjure up mentally what the cookbook instructs for reality. This is why primary school teachers tell us reading is better for children than, say, watching television. Reading makes every child into a producer. If this is right, cookbooks transform imagination into a high-stakes game: our satisfaction depends on our success.

—Stephanie Frank, a University of Chicago graduate student, in *Topic* (6: Food)

Costaguana-born Englishman, corrals money, partners, and technology from abroad to revitalize the mine and, he hopes, the country. "The entire society can 'work' only because its key figures are not Costaguanan at all, but rather Europeans (assisted, to be sure, by a handful of locals with intimate European connections)," writes Falcoff. As San Tomé once more becomes productive, prosperity and peace return to the region.

Enter General Montero, a "backwoods fighter" who rose to minister of war after backing the winning side at just the right moment in a civil war, and his brother Pedrito. They cynically exploit the rhetoric of race, class, and anti-imperialism to incite a rebellion, with the real goal of gaining control of San Tomé's wealth. Their scheme fails only after a long series of ad-

ventures, and the book ends with the mining town's secession, ratified by the presence of a U.S. warship.

General Montero "foreshadows a whole host of counterfeit social revolutionaries in uniform," writes Falcoff, including Venezuela's current leader, Hugo Chávez. Other characters, such as Father Corbelán, the left-wing cleric with connections on both sides of the law, and Nostromo, the skilled foreign worker and compromised figure from whom the novel takes its name, also have contemporaries in modern Latin America. "With stunning prescience," Conrad saw that "whatever the sins of colonialism, what was bound to follow could conceivably be worse. *Nostromo* is a supreme work of art which is also a prophecy, one which more often than not has been amply fulfilled."

OTHER NATIONS

Africa's Accidental Borders

"The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi" by Daniel N. Posner, in *American Political Science Review* (Nov. 2004), George Washington Univ., Dept. of Political Science, 2201 G St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20052.

In 1891, officials of the British South Africa Company drew a line on a map in order to carve out two new districts in the lands under their control, heedlessly slicing through the traditional boundaries of the Chewa and Tumbuka tribes. It's the kind of story that's been repeated many times in Africa and elsewhere, with arbitrary boundaries tragically setting the stage for future tribal and ethnic conflict. But in this case, there is a difference. On one side of the border, in what is now Malawi, Chewa and Tumbuka today are at war culturally and politically, just as one would predict. In neighboring Zambia, however, the two tribes are allies and "brethren."

Why is this so? It's not that cultural differences are more pronounced in Malawi, according to Posner, a political scientist at the University of California, Los Angeles. In surveys, he found that members of the two tribes on each side of the border point to the same basic divisions: Tumbuka parents, for example, demand a large price of perhaps

seven cows when their daughters marry, while Chewa parents are happy with a single chicken. But in Malawi, people are more likely to attach negatives to their descriptions: Tumbukas call the Chewas "lazy," and Chewas return the favor by calling the Tumbukas conceited.

The explanation for the cross-border difference, Posner argues, is that in Zambia both tribes make up too small a part of the national population (less than seven percent each) to form a distinctive group or, more important, a bloc big enough for political leaders to exploit. In Malawi, however, the Chewa are 28 percent of the total, the Tumbuka 12 percent.

The coming of democracy crystallized the national differences. In 1994, when Malawians finally got a chance to vote, in the country's first election, longtime dictator Hastings Kamuzu Banda played the tribal card with a vengeance, warning his fellow Chewas of Tumbuka threats to their interests and exacerbating ethnic tensions in the

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process. In Zambia, which held its first multiparty elections in 1991, President Kenneth Kaunda appealed to Chewas and Tumbukas not as separate groups but as “Easterners” who needed to unite in order to defeat their rivals elsewhere in the country. They gave him more than three-quarters of their votes.

Posner suggests that this “natural experi-

ment” in Africa could shed light on supposedly culture-based conflicts in other parts of the world. And while it’s too late to redraw national boundaries, some of his research suggests that shrewdly drawn regional boundaries *within* nations might produce some of the results British colonialists accidentally achieved in Zambia.

Tolerance on Trial

“Holland Daze” by Christopher Caldwell, in *The Weekly Standard* (Dec. 27, 2004), 1150 17th St., N.W., Ste. 505, Washington, D.C. 20036, and “Final Cut” by Ian Buruma, in *The New Yorker* (Jan. 3, 2005), 4 Times Sq., New York, N.Y. 10036.

The death of one man—a controversial Dutch filmmaker murdered on an Amsterdam street by a second-generation Moroccan immigrant—has sent the same sort of shock through the Netherlands as the 9/11 attack did in the United States. Theo van Gogh was shot and knifed to death on November 2 by a young Muslim extremist. A letter stuck to the dead man’s stomach with a knife promised the same fate to the Somali-born member of parliament who wrote the script for *Submission*, Van Gogh’s last film, about the abuse of women in the name of Allah.

In this country of 16 million, which has long prided itself on its multiculturalism, some saw the violent act as a repudiation of Holland’s policies of tolerance and acceptance toward its roughly 1.5 million first-

generation immigrants, many of whom are Muslims. Now the stock of politicians who preach that “Holland is full” is rising—even as they are forced into hiding for fear of suffering Van Gogh’s fate. “When old lefties cry out for law and order you know something has shifted in the political climate; it is now a common perception that the integration of Muslims in Holland has failed,” writes Buruma, a writer and scholar born in the Netherlands.

The tensions in Holland emanate in part from an influx of immigrants and their interaction with a heretofore generous welfare state, writes Caldwell, a senior editor at *The Weekly Standard*: “As many as 60 percent of Moroccans and Turks above the age of 40—obviously first-generation immigrants—are unemployed.” But more

EXCERPT

Don’t Look Back

I went to dinner with a young [German] businessman, born 20 years after the end of [World War II], who told me that the forestry company for which he worked, and which had interests in Britain, had decided that it needed a mission statement. A meeting ensued, and someone suggested Holz mit Stolz (“wood with pride”), whereupon a two-hour discussion erupted among the employees of the company as to whether pride in anything was permitted to the Germans, or whether it was the beginning of the slippery slope that led to, well, everyone knew where. The businessman found this all perfectly normal, part of being a contemporary German.

Collective pride is denied the Germans because, if pride is taken in the achievements of one’s national ancestors, it follows that shame for what they have done must also be accepted.

—Theodore Dalrymple, a British writer and physician, in *City Journal* (Winter 2005)

intense friction is produced by clashing values. In other European countries with large immigrant populations, Islamic radicalism is the concern; in the Netherlands, it's becoming more common to see Islam itself as the problem.

"Pillarization" is often said to be the controlling principle of Dutch society. For many years its Protestant majority and Catholic minority coexisted peaceably within separate pillars of religiously based schools, newspapers, trade unions, etc. In the 1960s, the cultural revolutions that swept other countries targeted class or the state, but Dutch radicals took aim at church authority. The pillars remain, though largely drained of their religiosity. The Dutch thought "they could build up an 'immigrant' or a 'Muslim' pillar and then let it collapse into postmodern individualism, following the same historic route that Protestantism and Catholicism had taken," observes Caldwell. But history is not repeating itself.

A few have argued for years that pillariza-

tion and the burgeoning Muslim population are incompatible. Conservative statesman Frits Bolkestein was reviled as a racist when he wrote in 1991 that integration wouldn't work if fundamental Dutch values clashed with those of immigrants on issues like separation of church and state and gender equality. Now he's a hero. And before his assassination by an animal-rights activist in 2002, populist Pim Fortuyn won overnight popularity by arguing that the country was in immigrant overload.

But if pillarization is failing, alternatives are elusive. Populist leader Geert Wilders proposes that only non-Western foreigners should be stopped from coming to the Netherlands, but that is "morally hard to condone," says Buruma. Some Muslims, their mosques targeted for arson, point out that the type of insanity that killed Van Gogh doesn't have a religious affiliation.

Buruma concludes, "The Dutch prided themselves on having built an oasis of tolerance. Now the turbulent world has come to Holland at last, crashing into an idyll that



In Rotterdam, an ethnic Turk protects a mosque against the threat of arson. The murder last fall of filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a Muslim extremist is testing the limits of Holland's famous tolerance.

astonished the citizens of less favored nations. It's a shame that this had to happen, but naiveté is the wrong state of mind for

defending one of the oldest and most liberal democracies against those who wish to destroy it."

Brazil's Resurgent Indians

"Tribal Preservation" by John Hemming, in *Prospect* (Jan. 2005), 2 Bloomsbury Pl., London WC1A 2QA, England.

A half-century ago, Brazil's Indians appeared headed for extinction. Reduced in number to 100,000, they were fast losing their land, their culture, and their will to survive. But they have made a remarkable comeback, reports anthropologist Hemming, former director of Britain's Royal Geographical Society and author of a trilogy on the history of Brazilian Indians.

Improvements in health are part of the story. The deadly toll of measles, influenza, and other alien diseases slowed as indigenous peoples developed immunity and received vaccines. "Traditional practices that kept village numbers low—late marriage, infanticide of babies with any defect, and years of breast-feeding that inhibit new pregnancies—are now discouraged. In many villages there is now a relative baby boom." The Indian population has climbed to more than 350,000.

"The catalyst for these improvements [has been] territorial security," according to Hemming. For decades, many of the 218 tribes retreated before loggers, mining prospectors, ranchers, farmers, and other settlers, particularly along the Atlantic seaboard, in the cattle country of the south and northeast, and along the navigable parts of the Amazon River and its tributaries. It took a crusade for indigenous land rights—often led by white activists in the early days—to turn the tide.

For example, Orlando and Cláudio Villas Boas, the sons of a failed São Paulo coffee planter, worked for 30 years among the Xinguanos, the inhabitants of an area drained by a southern Amazon tributary, to persuade the various tribes to abandon ancient feuds and unite in common cause. Victory came in 1961, with the creation of the 10,000-square-mile Xingu Indigenous Park, the prototype for a score of huge protected areas in South America.

For some of these pre-Stone Age tribes, contact with modern society has brought devastation, followed by adaptation. In 1972, Hemming was among the first outsiders to make contact with the Suruí of central Brazil, a warrior tribe whose fighters went about naked, and he saw half of the tribe die of measles and other diseases in the space of a few horrifying months. But 13 years later, some young Suruí had acquired clothing, picked up Portuguese, grasped the concepts of ownership and law—and were lobbying in Brasília for legal protection of their lands.

After 21 years of military rule in Brazil (1964–85), the Indians and their allies succeeded in 1988 in getting indigenous rights written into the new democratic constitution. Legally, Indians are classified as minors. "This seems demeaning," says Hemming, "but it exempts them from legal liability for actions carried out under tribal custom, frees them from military service or taxation, and allows tribes to hold their land communally and inalienably."

Brazil's Indians—including 30 or 40 groups that remain completely isolated—continue for the most part to live as hunter-gatherers, though education, radios, and technological conveniences such as outboard motors are bringing change in some places. Most Brazilians seem to agree on the need to protect the Indians' way of life and their land. While indigenous peoples make up less than one percent of Brazil's population of 170 million, 11 percent of the country's land has been set aside for indigenous reserves, an area equal in size to France, Germany, and the Benelux countries combined. In a recent public-opinion survey, more than two-thirds of Brazilians said that was "about right" or "too little." Will the Indians, living in the midst of a vibrant modern nation, be able to maintain their traditions? Hemming is "guardedly optimistic."

CURRENT BOOKS

Reviews of new and noteworthy nonfiction

The Private Jefferson

*JEFFERSON'S SECRETS:
Death and Desire at Monticello.*

By Andrew Burstein.
Basic Books. 351 pp. \$25

Reviewed by Christopher Hitchens

It is arguably a good thing—and in no way detracts from Andrew Burstein's absorbing book—that *Jefferson's Secrets* does not quite live up to its title. Secrecy, death, and desire are the ingredients of the sensational, even of the violent, and they consort ill with the measure and scruple for which Thomas Jefferson is still renowned. It might be better to say that this study is an inquiry into the privacy and reticence of a very self-contained man, along with an educated speculation upon the motives and promptings for his defensive style.

Celebrated for many paradoxes, Jefferson was especially notable as a revolutionary who believed above all in order. Often ardent in his partisanship for rebellion in America and France (though somewhat less so when it came to slave revolts in Haiti and the Old South), he could seem airy and promiscuous with regard to violence. Indeed, he rather commended the Whiskey Rebellion as something desirable for its own sake—"like a storm in the atmosphere." Yet this expression in itself furnishes us with a clue. The outbreak of insurrection, like a storm, was necessary to restore normality by relieving unnatural pressure. The wisdom of nature had provided such outlets precisely in order to forestall, or to correct, what Jefferson was wont to

call—always pejoratively—"convulsions."

Burstein, a professor of history at the University of Tulsa, acutely makes the connection between what men of the Enlightenment considered "the body politic" and what they thought about bodily health. Here, the maxim *Mens sana in corpore sano* was taken very seriously. Excess was to be avoided, in diet and in matters sexual, but so too was undue repression or continence. A true philosophe ought



Thomas Jefferson was 78 and in seclusion on his Virginia estate when Thomas Sully painted this portrait in 1821.

Current Books

to spend as much time in exercise and labor as he did with books and papers. He should emulate the balance and symmetry of nature. He should be careful about what he put into his system, and cautious about any fluid disbursements from it.

As president, Jefferson began to suffer intermittently from diarrhea (which he at first cured by what seems the counterintuitive method of hard horseback riding), and though he was unusually hale until his 80th year, it was diarrhea and a miserable infection of the urinary tract that eventually carried him off. In one of his few profitless speculations, Burstein quotes a letter from one of Jefferson's physicians, Dr. Thomas Watkins (whose middle name was Cassaway), in which gonorrhea is mentioned as a possible cause of the persistent dysuria. It seems plain from the context that Jefferson had not contracted gonorrhea, but rather suffered from the traditional woes of an old man's prostate; Dr. Watkins was eliminating gonorrhea as a possible cause, not diagnosing it.

However, the question of Jefferson's sex life does have to be raised at some point. Here again, we find a man who was afraid in almost equal measure of too much gratification and too little. His letters from France contain many warnings of the sexual traps set by Parisian females for unwary and innocent Americans, yet it was his own time in France that saw Jefferson at his most vulnerable and impassioned. I still remember the slight shock I experienced when I read a letter he wrote in Paris to Maria Cosway, full of rather clumsy phallic jokes borrowed from Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. And it must have been in Paris that he first had carnal knowledge of Sally Hemings, who was his late wife's half-sister as well as his own personal property.

Burstein's chapter on this matter—which is, after all, a fairly open “secret”—is admirable. He doesn't waste time, as so many historians have, in making a mystery where none exists. It is obvious without any reference to DNA testing that Jefferson took Sally Hemings as his concubine and fathered several of her children. And, if we look at the books in Jefferson's library, and study the opinions he uttered on related matters, we can readily see how he would have justified the arrangement to himself.

First came the question of bodily integrity. The leading expert on sexual health at the time, the Swiss physician Samuel Tissot, took the view that intercourse of any kind was far less ignoble and life threatening than masturbation. Semen was provided for a purpose and should be neither squandered nor pent up. Knowing—and doubtless appreciating—this, Jefferson had nonetheless to protect the memory of his wife and avoid scandal in general. As he was well aware, the ancient Greek method of doing both these things, and of avoiding venereal disease in the bargain, was to establish a consistent relationship with a compliant member of the household. *Et voilà!* A small element of eugenics may have been involved too, since Jefferson also believed that it was necessary to people the earth and that too many men of position wasted their generative urges on alliances with unfit women. The children he had with Hemings were sturdy and smart, and they made very serviceable slaves on his near-bankrupt estate until he kept his promise to their mother to manumit them at adulthood.

Jefferson applied to himself the same method of analysis he employed for scrutinizing the universe and for anatomizing his beloved Virginia. Surely such symmetry and order implied a design, and therefore a designer? This deistic rationalism was as far as most thinking people could go in an epoch that just preceded the work of Charles Darwin (who was born on the same day as Abraham Lincoln). And Jefferson hit on the same analogy arrived at by the “natural philosopher” William Paley: the timepiece. Even a person who did not know what a clock was for would be able to tell that it was not a vegetable or a stone, that it had a maker.

Interestingly, Jefferson made more use of this example as he got older, referring to himself as “an old watch, with a pinion worn here, and a wheel there, until it can go no longer.” Did he think that a creator's global creation was subject to similar laws? He appears not to have asked himself. But then, this was a man who could oppose the emancipation of slaves because he feared the “ten thousand recollections” they would retain of their hated condition, while almost in the same breath saying dismissively that “their griefs are transient.”

In other words, and despite his notable

modesty and decorum, Jefferson was subject to the same solipsism that encumbered all those who lived before the conclusive analysis of the fossil record and the elements of microbiology. (He could never work out, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, how it was that seashells could be found so high up on the local mountains.) On his Monticello mountaintop he was the center of a universe of his very own, and he was never quite able to dispense with the corollary illusions. This is what makes the account of his death so impressive. He wished to make a good and dignified end, and to be properly remembered for his proudest achievements, yet he seems to have guessed (telling John Adams that he felt neither “hope” nor “fear”) that only extinction awaited him. He certainly did not request the attendance of any minister of religion.

Burstein reproduces a verse of revolting sentimentality, composed by Jefferson on his deathbed, in which he promises his surviving daughter to bear her love to the “Two Seraphs” who have gone before. The lines seem

ambivalent to me, in that Jefferson speaks not so much of crossing a boundary as of coming to an impassable one: “I go to my fathers; I welcome the shore, / which crowns all my hopes, or which buries my cares.” Anyway, a moment’s thought will remind us that a designer who causes the deaths of infant daughters to occur so long before the death of their father has lost hold of the argument from natural order, while a moment’s ordinary sympathy will excuse the dying and exhausted man this last indulgence in the lachrymose. The rest of Burstein’s book has already demonstrated the main and unsurprising point, which is that the author of the Declaration of Independence was in every respect a mammal like ourselves. The only faint cause of surprise is that this can still seem controversial.

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On Faith

SACRED AND SECULAR:
Religion and Politics Worldwide.

By Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart. Cambridge Univ. Press. 329 pp. \$24.99

Reviewed by Os Guinness

Religion is the key to history, Lord Acton wrote. In today’s intellectual circles, however, it’s more like the skunk at the garden party. To many intellectuals, religion is a private matter at best, and most appropriately considered in terms of its functions rather than the significance of its beliefs, let alone its truth claims. At worst, it’s the main source of the world’s conflicts and violence—what Gore Vidal, in his Lowell Lecture at Harvard University in 1992, called “the great unmentionable evil” at the heart of our culture.

Such grim assessments are certainly debatable. It’s a simple fact, for example, that, contrary to the current scapegoating of religion, more people were slaughtered during the 20th century under secularist regimes, led by secularist intellectuals, and in the name of secu-

larist ideologies, than in all the religious persecutions in Western history. But there is little point in bandying about charges and countercharges. If we hope to transcend the seemingly endless culture-warring over religion, we need detailed, objective data about the state of religion in today’s world, and wise, dispassionate discussion of what this evidence means for our common life.

Is religion central or peripheral? Is it disappearing, as Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, and other proponents of the strong secularization thesis have claimed? Or is religion actually resurgent, as more recent observers such as Peter Berger, David Martin, Rodney Stark, and Philip Jenkins have claimed? Is it a positive force, as some

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have argued from the evidence of the “South African miracle,” the peaceful transition from apartheid to equality? Or is it pathological, as much of the post-9/11 commentary has assumed without argument?

In their new book, political scientists Pippa Norris, of Harvard, and Ronald Inglehart, of the University of Michigan, contribute three things to the old debate: first, a summary of the present state of academic analysis of religion; second, new evidence on the state of religion in the modern world; and third, a new theoretical framework that they claim makes better sense of the evidence than previous theories.

The massive and detailed evidence of religion’s significance worldwide is unquestionably the chief benefit of the book, helpful even for those who will disagree with the authors’ conclusions. The data come from World Values Surveys, an international cooperative overseen by Inglehart, for which social scientists polled residents of more than 80 countries between 1981 and 2001. The findings cover a comprehensive sweep of topics, ranging from the personal importance of religion to the electoral strength of religious parties in national elections.

The weight of all the data, interestingly, points somewhere between the extremes of the debate. Religion is far from dead, and it certainly hasn’t disappeared—even in Europe, where the evidence for its demise is most powerful. But there is strong evidence that it has lost its decisive authority over the lives of adherents in the developed world—even in the United States, where American exceptionalism has long defied European trends toward secularization. There was certainly too much of an unacknowledged secularist bias in secularization theory, but at the same time much of the talk of the unabashed resurgence of religion is premature. For those who take faith seriously, the general trends in the modern world are sobering; the still-potent role of religion in the global south offers only false comfort, as most of the region is still premodern and has yet to go through the “fiery brook” of modernity.

Norris and Inglehart’s theoretical explanation of religion’s current condition will be more controversial: a revised version of the secularization thesis, which they base on the “ex-

istential security” offered by religion. In contrast to Weber’s view of modernization as “rationalization,” or Durkheim’s as “differentiation,” they trace the growing irrelevance of religion in the modern world to the fact that people can take security for granted. The more secure people become in the developed world, the more they loosen their hold on religion; religion, meanwhile, retains its authority among the less secure but faster-growing populations of the less developed world. “The result of these combined trends,” the authors conclude, “is that rich societies are becoming more secular but the world as a whole is becoming more religious.”

The main response to this theory will properly come from Norris and Inglehart’s fellow scholars, and is likely to focus on three aspects: the authors’ interpretation of the data they offer, their critiques of some of the currently flourishing theories, and their view of secularization as driven by the accrual of “existential security.” Their articulation of the last seems to me particularly disappointing, little more than a restatement of Lucretius’s “Fear made the gods,” and a crude explanation for the crisis of religion, which could be explained as easily by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s simple observation, “Men have forgotten God.”

What really ought to be addressed, however, are the implications of Norris and Inglehart’s findings for the Western democracies. They nowhere discuss religion as having more than a generic, functional role in assuring existential security. Such a view is inadequate for those who take the specific content of faith seriously, and who argue that faiths of a certain shape produce citizens of a certain shape, who in turn produce societies of a certain shape—in other words, that faith must be considered as a set of beliefs with particular consequences and not others. Weber’s magisterial work led the way in this direction, and Baylor University sociologist Rodney Stark’s important work on monotheism adds to it currently.

The condition of religion in the modern world is especially crucial to a society that links religion and public life in any way—and nowhere more crucial than in the United States. Religion in America has flourished not so much in spite of the separation

of church and state as because of it. Far from setting up “Christian America,” or establishing any orthodoxy, religious or secular, the Framers envisioned the relationship of faith and freedom in what might be called a golden triangle: Freedom requires virtue, virtue requires faith (of some sort), and faith requires freedom. If the Framers were right, then as faiths go, so goes freedom—and so goes the Republic.

America has yet to experience the discus-

sion of religion in 21st-century national life that “the great experiment” requires and deserves, not just from scholars but from a host of Americans—schoolteachers and political leaders alike. Norris and Inglehart provide data and arguments that will be an invaluable part of that discussion.

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Lady Day's Journey

WITH BILLIE.

By Julia Blackburn. Pantheon Books. 368 pp. \$25

Reviewed by Nat Hentoff

No other jazz singer could get inside lyrics as evocatively as Billie Holiday. “Billie must have come from another world,” trumpet player Roy Eldridge once said, “because nobody had the effect on people she had. I’ve seen her make them cry and make them happy.” Even the famously demanding Miles Davis sang her praises: “She doesn’t need any horns. She sounds like one anyway.”

Lady Day—as tenor saxophonist Lester Young nicknamed her (he often dubbed a female musician “Lady”)—has been the subject of several books and an inauthentic movie (*Lady Sings the Blues*), but the life that became the music has never been so deeply revealed as it is in *With Billie*, a collection of more than 150 interviews with musicians, junkies, lovers, narcotics agents, relatives, and a decidedly heterogeneous group of friends. Linda Kuehl conducted many of the interviews in the 1970s, for a biography she didn’t live to complete. Now, Julia Blackburn, a novelist and biographer, has assembled and edited the transcripts, producing a portrait that’s both panoramic and intimate.

I knew Lady Day somewhat, and helped arrange her appearance on the historic 1957 CBS television program *The Sound of Jazz*, which is accurately and movingly described in the concluding chapter here. But *With Billie* helps me understand something Carmen McRae, a singer nurtured by Holiday, once told me: “Singing is the only place she can express herself the way she’d like to be all the time. The only time she’s at ease and at rest with herself is when she sings.”



Jazz legend Billie Holiday performs in New York in the 1940s.

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Billie Holiday came up hard and was often hooked on drugs. And she had dreadful taste in men. “The kind of guys with big Cadillacs, big Packards or whatever, they represented something to Lady,” the comedian and tap dancer James “Stump” Cross says here. Of Lester Young, Cross notes, “He’d look at her—the look in his eyes when he played for her! He’d play his whole soul. But he wasn’t her type of man. He wasn’t manly.” Holiday fell for men who exploited her and left her alone even when she was with them. In rueful retrospect, she once remarked, “I was as strong, if not stronger, than any of them. And when it’s that way, you can’t blame anybody but yourself.”

Some of those men inhabit this book, but so do many witnesses to her resilience, her generosity, and, most important, her extraordinary musicianship. “She could find a groove wherever you put it,” says pianist Bobby Tucker, a longtime accompanist. “She could swing the hardest in *any* tempo, even if it was like a dirge. . . . Wherever it was, she could float on top of it.” Her clarinetist friend Tony Scott told me (and the quote is in the book), “When Ella [Fitzgerald] sings ‘My man he’s left me,’ you think the guy went down the street for a loaf of bread. But when Lady sings, you can *see* that guy going down the street. He’s got his bags packed and he ain’t *never* coming back.”

Offstage, Holiday could be very gentle, yet she also had a finely honed satiric wit. At the home of a mutual friend one night, I heard her precisely and saltily mimic a number of the more powerful booking agents and club owners in the business. Of the many illuminating recollections in *With Billie*, one that especially resonates with my memories is Bobby Tucker’s: “She didn’t like to see a small person being abused. She didn’t like to see their dignity squashed.”

At the end, in 1959, she was in Metropolitan Hospital in New York, suffering kidney failure and other ailments. Narcotics detectives, tipped that she had some drugs, arrested and fingerprinted her in bed. “They removed her record player, her records, the radio, and her comic books,” Blackburn writes. Denied bail, Holiday remained in the hospital. “Three police-

women kept a 24-hour guard at the door of her room.”

Lady Day died in that bed. She was 44. There was no money in her bank account, but when she left the world, she had a stack of \$100 bills wrapped around her thigh with a garter belt.

During her last years, most jazz critics lamented what they judged the decline of her singing. Her voice cracked, and there wasn’t much of the spirited buoyancy of her early work. I differed with that appraisal in my reviews of Holiday’s 1950s recordings. Now I think that Benny Green, a British musician who became an astute critic, got it exactly right: “The trappings were stripped away, but where the process would normally leave only the husk of a fine reputation, it only exposed to view, once and for all, the true core of her art, the handling of a lyric. If the last recordings are approached with that fact in mind, they are seen to be, not the insufferable croaking of a woman already half dead, but recitatives whose dramatic intensity becomes unbearable—statements as frank and tragic as anything throughout the whole range of popular art.”

With Billie reveals where that intensity came from during Billie Holiday’s 44 years, and how singing gave her the strength to transcend at least some of the dark dissonances of her life. But it’s her classic recordings, including “Strange Fruit,” “Billie’s Blues,” and “God Bless the Child,” that reveal her the way she wanted to be remembered. She’ll continue to be remembered, and appreciated, for generations to come, by listeners who know nothing of the churning obbligato of her real life.

The most comprehensive collection of early Billie Holiday sessions is Lady Day: The Complete Billie Holiday, 1933–1940 (Columbia Legacy). The best introduction to the later recordings is The Billie Holiday Set: A Midsummer Night’s Jazz at Stratford ’57 (Baldwin Street Music), which includes several interviews with her.

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CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

***WE ARE ALL THE SAME:
A Story of a Boy's Courage
and a Mother's Love.***

By Jim Wooten. Penguin Press.
243 pp. \$19.95

"Listen to me, Jim. . . . I wish that God had made me white," 10-year-old Xolani Nkosi told Jim Wooten. "The reason I wish that is because I believe that white children don't get HIV and I think black children do get HIV." As often happened when ABC senior correspondent Wooten found himself with Nkosi in South Africa, he was forced to yield in silence to the boy's perspicacity. From where they were sitting in 1999, there was devastation and death from the HIV/AIDS pandemic as far as the eye could see—and a president, Thabo Mbeki, in fervent denial that the disease existed.

The accidents of Nkosi's short life made him a unique spokesman for the tens of millions of African children orphaned by and afflicted with AIDS. He seemed to have a knack for touching the heart of everyone he met, not least Wooten, who confesses himself never so moved by a subject as he was by Nkosi. "I think," Wooten writes, "it was that grin that got me."

On the ruined landscape that once had been Zululand, Nkosi was born in 1989, an alarmingly small and sick baby. His unmarried mother, Daphne, "was not yet 20 years old, yet she was already dying—and on the very first day of his life, so was her son." Wooten sketches the hardscrabble life of a group of women and children trying to survive in the inhospitable land; that these people are condemned to suffer death by AIDS on top of every other hardship is unspeakable. Realizing that she will die soon, Daphne bravely moves to the city, takes her sick baby to a hospice for gay white AIDS sufferers in Johannesburg, and asks, "Can he

come and stay in this place?" Remarkably, the door opens, and the plagued, isolated white men embrace the black baby.

The hospice founder is Gail Johnson, a feisty, plain-speaking South African white woman who owns a small PR business. When the hospice loses its funding and the dying men are turned out, Johnson ends up with baby Nkosi. The two will change each other's lives and, Wooten argues, the world.

Nkosi spends the next few years coddled by the four-member Johnson family and enjoying the life of middle-class whites in a sunny, split-level house. He loses the languages of his



South African Xolani Nkosi lies next to his adoptive mother, Gail Johnson. Nkosi died of AIDS in 2001, at age 12.

people but proves a bright and fluent speaker of English. This transracial, cross-cultural upbringing—and the fact that good nutrition, good hygiene, and regular doctors' visits allow Nkosi to live well beyond the two or three years allotted to him as an HIV-positive black baby in a township—enables him to "speak truth to power" in the language of the powerful. His observations are those of any smart African child surveying the world's cruelty, but he wears the crisp uniform of a Johannesburg schoolboy and speaks in the quick accents of the whites.

"You haven't asked me about death," the boy says to the journalist one day. "I feel like I'm going to die pretty soon, like my mother died. . . . But at least she got to be a

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grownup. I don't think I will ever be a grownup." As usual, Nkosi is right. He dies an international celebrity in 2001, age 12, weighing 20 pounds.

Playfulness, affection, courage, and sorrow entwine in the wasted body of the boy, and in this astute and heartfelt memoir. Wooten knows it's not possible for American readers to care about five million, 10 million, 20 million orphans, but he makes us care about one, and that's a start.

—MELISSA FAY GREENE

FREE WORLD:

America, Europe, and the Surprising Future of the West.

By Timothy Garton Ash. Random House. 286 pp. \$24.95

Among specialists in international relations, the terrorist attack that toppled the World Trade Center also shattered the optimism to which the end of the Cold War had given rise. History, it turned out, had *not* ended. Globalization, the Big Idea of the 1990s, wasn't likely to provide an all-purpose remedy for the world's ills. As for the much-touted "unipolar moment," its defining feature turned out to be not peace and stability but the prospect of open-ended conflict. Contemptuous of allies and disdainful of international norms, the Bush administration seemingly went out of its way to alienate the rest of the world. In the eyes of more than a few informed observers, the United States became a rogue nation. To critics who excoriated the administration for its arrogance and warmongering, the future of the world order began to look bleak indeed.

In this upbeat and admirable if ultimately unsatisfying book, Timothy Garton Ash argues that such gloom is misplaced. The signs of the times call not for despair, he believes, but for the West to redouble its efforts to build a "Free World," making available to all the blessings of peace, liberty, and prosperity. The opportunity to create such a global order is at hand, but fleeting: Fail to seize the opportunity now and it may be lost forever.

A prolific journalist and historian who teaches at Oxford University, Garton Ash

builds his book around a series of immensely readable essays examining the predicament in which Great Britain, the United States, and continental Europe now find themselves. The result is far more nuanced than Robert Kagan's caricature of a feisty American Mars and a played-out European Venus talking past each other. It is far more interesting and persuasive as well.

According to Garton Ash, nations on both sides of the Atlantic—not least his own Britain—are internally divided, poorly led, and mired in myth, jealousy, and old resentments. As a consequence, they are unable to grasp where their true interests lie. In fact, he emphasizes, the divisions currently besetting the Atlantic community are trivial in comparison with the values that its members hold in common. Quoting Freud, he dismisses the West's intramural quarrels as the "narcissism of minor differences." Instead of squabbling about Iraq, farm subsidies, or the death penalty, Europeans and Americans ought to return to their true calling—nurturing the creation of a Free World that by all rights ought to encompass the entire globe.

Assigning to Britain the pivotal role of patching up the transatlantic divide, Garton Ash calls for a massive collaborative effort to make good on the promise of liberalism. Through free trade, greatly expanded support for international development and human rights, and efforts to forestall the impending crisis of global warming, Garton Ash believes that the West can eliminate global poverty, foster the final triumph of democracy, and ensure that the planet remains inhabitable for future generations.

But don't count on the likes of George W. Bush, Jacques Chirac, and Gerhard Schröder to take up this cause anytime soon. According to Garton Ash, "foreign policy is too important to be left to the politicians," who often as not "don't know what they're doing." Instead, he advocates a sort of transnational populism, summoning "the thousand million" inhabitants of the developed nations to unite behind a "well-informed, enlightened, strategic approach to the rest of the world"—and to do so now, before environmental damage becomes ir-

reversible, and before shifts in demography and economic clout leave the West unable to influence the rising powers of the East and South.

It's an appealing vision. Garton Ash's confidence in the essential goodwill of Western peoples—his belief that, together, we can rise above our petty concerns and act for the common good—makes it an affecting one as well. Yet embedded in it is a fundamental and typically Western flaw. Garton Ash assumes that all humanity shares his own secular liberal aspirations. In effect, Garton Ash's *Free World* offers the promise of a decent, perhaps even comfortable life devoid of transcendence. He consigns God to the margins. In reality, however, God still haunts the world. Indeed, many of those upon whom Garton Ash is most eager to confer the blessings of liberty are adamant that God remain at the center of their universe. Any strategy for enlarging the *Free World* that fails to take this uncomfortable fact into consideration is doomed to fail.

—ANDREW J. BACEVICH

**THREE NIGHTS IN AUGUST:
*Strategy, Heartbreak, and Joy Inside
the Mind of a Manager.***

By Buzz Bissinger. Houghton Mifflin.
280 pp. \$25

It's a perilous journey through the mind of a major league baseball manager, filled with potholes of depression and washouts of fear, but we want to take it. We want to know what lies behind the glowering game face of that most enigmatic baseball man, and what subplots consume him—including the individual melodramas of a busload of barely post-adolescent millionaires.

Buzz Bissinger, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Friday Night Lights* (1990), was granted unlimited access to the St. Louis Cardinals' organization by its legendary manager, Tony La Russa. The book follows a three-game series during 2003

against the Chicago Cubs and their wily skipper, Dusty Baker. It's a fresh and thoroughly enjoyable narrative—like TiVo-ing through a great matchup, with Bissinger lingering over the good parts and skipping the junk.

There's plenty of action, but Bissinger is too sensitive an observer and too complex a writer to settle for a simple play-by-play. We watch La Russa's pregame ritual of making cards showing how each of his pitchers has done against the Cubs hitters, his irritation when inexperienced young players hog the spotlight, and the flop sweat when he chooses a risky tactic based not on numbers but on intuition. When the lineup is ravaged by injuries, we're with La Russa as he ponders and frets—dining alone at Morton's, lying awake all night in the hotel. And we enter the manager's tunnel of concentration: Everything disappears except the motions of the game, as if it were played in pure silence.

La Russa's internal conflicts are nicely balanced against the stakes in the outcome of every pitch, but two events from the previous year overshadow everything. With a novelist's sense of when to expand the moment and when to roll with the action, Bissinger skillfully discloses the lingering heartbreaks: In 2002, the Cardinals' much-loved broadcaster, Jack Buck, died, and, three days later, their popular 33-year-old pitcher, Darryl Kile, suffered a fatal heart attack in his sleep.

Bissinger has finely cultivated the



Bantering with the Cubs' Dusty Baker is one of the few things that comes easily for Cardinals manager Tony La Russa.

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sportswriter's hard-bitten style, and his book is rife with memorable phrases. A fastball is "a false God." Kenny Lofton, leadoff hitter for the Cubs, taps his black bat on the plate "as if it's a divining rod in search of water—plentiful abundance around that plate if he can just find it." And my favorite: "The ball itself is sometimes cruel, not simply a benign layering of twine and rubber and leather but a little organism with a perverse love of turmoil. *Where can I go to create the most disruption? Who needs to be tested right away?*"

It takes a perverse mind to want to tangle with that. We understand how such a mind works after reading *Three Nights in August*—maybe even enough to make us retire as armchair managers and leave it to the pros. No, forget that. Second-guessing is one of the timeless pleasures of the game.

—APRIL SMITH

YOU, THE PEOPLE:
The United Nations, Transitional Administration, and State-Building.
By Simon Chesterman. Oxford Univ. Press. 296 pp. \$95

In this fine, timely, and usable study, Simon Chesterman analyzes the complicated process of transferring power from an international authority that has governed a country temporarily to a viable local regime. Before shifting power, the outside authority must build sustainable institutions and train local people for government jobs, while also laying the groundwork for democracy by building trust in government institutions and encouraging people to take part in the democratic process. But the preparations for democracy are hampered by the fact that the transitional administration itself is anything but democratic: Notwithstanding the good intentions of its creators, it's essentially a military occupation. The contrast between pragmatic means and idealistic ends is stark. As Chesterman, a senior associate at the New York-based International Peace Academy, asks at the beginning of his book, "Is it possible to establish the conditions for legitimate and sustainable national governance through a period of benevolent foreign autocracy?"

His answer is a tentative yes, but only if certain conditions are met. In chapters on the recent experiences in Kosovo, East Timor, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, Chesterman describes how transitional administrations have maintained law and order, provided humanitarian and development assistance, consulted with local populations, established the rule of law, and administered elections, all with varying degrees of efficacy. The factors that make a transitional administration more likely to succeed come as no surprise: a realistic plan tailored to the specific situation, the commitment of troops from a powerful nation or coalition, coordination between military operations and efforts to build a new government, ample time, and plenty of money.

But Chesterman also analyzes why so many efforts founder, and why the United Nations and countries that contribute troops to these efforts are often unwilling to invest sufficient resources. The UN has only recently begun to oversee transitional administrations, and it does so on a strictly ad hoc basis, without a permanent office for managing such missions. Its reluctance is unfortunate, but many within the UN believe that traditional peacekeeping is the only type of military operation appropriate for the organization, and they fear, justifiably, that if the UN were better prepared for state-building missions, it would be called upon to undertake them more often.

In Iraq, the failure of the United States to plan effectively led to a breakdown of law and order, which in turn provoked resentment and resistance from the population and required far more time, troops, and money than expected. The January elections may have seemed like a magic bullet, a chance to give the people their democracy and then get out of the way. But without peace and security, sustainable institutions, and economic stability, democracy won't necessarily take hold. As Chesterman shows, fledgling democracies can quickly devolve into autocracy or civil war. A successful transition from autocracy to democratic self-rule takes years, not months.

—HADLEY ROSS

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

PLAN B:

Further Thoughts on Faith.

By Anne Lamott. Riverhead Books.

320 pp. \$24.95.

When Anne Lamott's previous essay collection, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith*, came out in 1999, a writing student of mine—a born-again Christian—praised it to the class, noting that Lamott too is born again. I echoed the kudos but added that I wouldn't use "born again" to describe the author. "Just look at the book," the student replied. "It's all there." Theologically, she's right, but I doubt that Lamott, a Bay Area leftist, would ever use the term herself. Its connotations probably give her the willies as much as George W. Bush does (more on him later).

A recovering alcoholic who got sober not long after she found God, Lamott is the parent of a teenage boy. Issues of motherhood and midlife predominate here: how to help her son nurture his spirituality while letting him grow into the (currently church-resistant) person he wants to be, and how to sustain her own faith as the losses pile up—in her body (she's 50), in her personal life (her mother has died of Alzheimer's; her long-deceased father shadows her still), and in the world (her pain over the Iraq War informs many of these essays).

Lamott's greatest strength—besides a way with words that's equal parts preacher, comic, and thought-for-the-day aphorist—is her ability to keep spirituality within a stone's throw of daily life. When her son, Sam, decides at age seven that he wants to meet his father, with whom Lamott has lost contact, she prays for success in locating him amid anxiety over letting him back into her life. Her initial efforts fail. "I decided to practice radical hope, hope in the face of not having a clue," she writes. "I decided that God was not off doing the dishes while Sam sought help: God heard his prayers, and was working on it." Sam's dad ends up returning to their lives in a limited but mostly positive way. "Things are not perfect," she writes, "because life is not TV

and we are real people with scarred, worried hearts. But it's amazing a lot of the time."

Of her difficult mother, Lamott writes, "I know forgiveness is a component of freedom, yet I couldn't, even after she died, grant her amnesty. Forgiveness means it finally becomes unimportant that you hit back. You're done. It doesn't necessarily mean you want to have lunch with the person."

She cites non-Christian sources when appropriate: "There's a lovely Hasidic story of a rabbi who always told his people that if they studied the Torah, it would put Scripture on their hearts. One of them asked, 'Why *on* our hearts, and not *in* them?' The rabbi answered, 'Only God can put Scripture inside. But reading sacred text can put it on your hearts, and then when your hearts break, the holy words will fall inside.'"

Lamott is honest about her weaknesses: anger, self-absorption, fear. At times she whines, usually with the saving grace that she knows it. Still, the worst decision she and her editor made was to start off an otherwise wonderful book with a sniffling rant against the Bush administration. The president also makes cameo appearances in several other essays.

We *know* she can hit that target. It's so much more inspiring to see her struggle to catch the feathery traces of hope floating in the light through her living-room window.

—WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN

***JEWS AND THE
AMERICAN SOUL:
Human Nature in the
Twentieth Century.***

By Andrew R. Heinze. Princeton Univ. Press. 438 pp. \$29.95

In a brief paragraph early in this study, Andrew R. Heinze disputes scholar Peter Gay's assertion that there is little connection between Sigmund Freud's Jewishness and his "thinking as a psychiatrist." While acknowledging that Gay may be correct with respect to the link between Freud's

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faith and his psychoanalytic theory, Heinze says that “Gay misses the presence of Jewish moral values in the mind of this secular thinker.” Because Freud was, until the recent medicalization of psychiatry, the major reference point in America’s long-running romance with mental health, a Jewish connection here is critical to Heinze’s overarching thesis. That thesis, which Heinze claims has never before been illuminated, can be summarized as follows. Contrary to the popular belief that the American psyche or “soul” has been shaped overwhelmingly by Protestant values, there has been a second dominant influence: the acquired Jewish “ethical gene”—the deeply inbred tradition of Jewish rational moral values, a turning inward to family as a context for emotional fulfillment and outward to community for social action and a sense of relatedness.

Heinze, a professor of American history at the University of San Francisco, where he is also director of the Judaic Studies Program, supports his argument by elaborating on the disproportionate presence of Jews as practitioners and popularizers of psychology. Citing historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s assertion that Jews who had lost their faith sought “secular Jewish surrogates” in such movements as Zionism and socialism, he proposes “psychoanalytic moralism” as an additional surrogate. The Jewish boy who might have grown up to become a rabbi became a shrink instead; the Jewish girl reared to rule her household with a mighty hand morphed, in the worst-case scenario, into Dr. Laura. Heinze traces the careers of influential Jewish “psychological evangelists” and “public moralists”—Freudians and protégés of William James such as Hugo Münsterberg, Joseph Jastrow, Boris Sidis, and Abraham Myerson in the first half of the 20th century, and, in the second half, such humanists as Erik Erikson, Erich Fromm, and Abraham Maslow—who, “no less than their colleagues from Protestant backgrounds, . . . wanted to introduce their values into popular thought.”

Curiously, Heinze makes a great point of elevating into this pantheon two seemingly minor figures who, he argues not quite con-

vincingly, were far more influential than heretofore recognized: Boston Reform rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman, whose inspirational bestseller *Peace of Mind* (1946) endorsed self-acceptance through therapy and spirituality, and who, according to Heinze, was transformed by the media into the first postwar “iconic Jew” (the second was and remains Elie Wiesel); and \$64,000 *Question* champion Dr. Joyce Brothers, who evolved into a self-help author and advice-dispensing fixture on TV for more than three decades. Perhaps even more curious, if we accept Heinze’s thesis that Jewish values did indeed shape the American psyche, is his failure to take up rigorously the question of whether those values simply permeated the work of Jewish thinkers by virtue of who they were and where they came from, or whether the thinkers consciously applied a Jewish moral perspective. The evidence Heinze musters never proves that they were acting as Jews rather than as, say, humanists or liberals—even in cases when it might appear to have been in their interest to apply a Jewish perspective, as when they spoke out against mob violence and racial bias.

Heinze is especially struck by the relevance to psychology of the Jewish *musar* movement, with its emphasis on ethical conduct acquired through self-discipline and the social values of restraint (repression?) and of overcoming the *yetzer harah*, the evil inclination (the id?). Those educated in the *musar* tradition will remember very well the mantra “Work on yourself.” This practical approach to psychological needs had its Christian parallels, which Heinze strikingly illustrates by taking us in two directions: back to that most lovable Protestant of all, Benjamin Franklin, whose virtue-by-virtue self-improvement chart (temperance, chastity, etc.) was adapted in the early 19th century for yeshiva students in Poland by Menachem Mendel Lefin; and forward to our own time, to the Christian pragmatism of Alcoholics Anonymous’s 12-step program, a strong influence on the work of contemporary Orthodox psychiatrist Abraham Twerski. Heinze usefully delineates the points at which psychological trends in-

tersect with and resemble Jewish sensibilities, but he is less persuasive in arguing that Jewish values actually shaped either the thinking of many of the psychiatrists and psychologists he mentions or, through them, the American “soul.”

—TOVA REICH

**INVENTING SUPERSTITION:
*From the Hippocratics to the
Christians.***

By Dale B. Martin. Harvard Univ. Press. 307 pp. \$29.95

If you want to slam people’s religious beliefs, call their faith a cult, its organizer a cult leader, and its buildings of worship a cult compound. The media are utterly predictable in this regard: “Members of the Idaho-based cult, whipped into a frenzy by their charismatic cult leader, have hunkered down in an isolated compound to await the end times.”

The difference between a cult and a religion in the modern world is about a hundred years. The Mormons have made the transition; for decades, hardly anyone has called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints a cult. The Scientologists are about halfway there; the cult moniker is still commonly attached to them, although less often than a few years ago.

In the past, shaking off such pejoratives as *cult* and *superstition* took much longer. Critics talked for several centuries about the cult of Christianity, whose charismatic leader, Jesus of Nazareth, whipped his disciples into a frenzy. Early in the second century C.E., for example, Pliny the Younger characterized Christianity as a “contagious superstition.” Christian scholars responded by dismissing Greek and Roman religions as superstitions.

Dale B. Martin, a professor of religious studies at Yale University, traces eight centuries of these bitter wars of the words, from classical Greece to the Christianized Roman Empire. “‘Superstition’ was a category invented by ancient intellectuals, especially those we call philosophers,” he observes. “They came to believe that traditional notions about nature and divine beings could not be true, and they criti-

cized all sorts of beliefs and practices that their contemporaries simply assumed were legitimate.”

The critiques began long before Christianity. Around the fifth century B.C., Greek philosophers derided beliefs that gods are nothing more than extensions of their human charges, or that they harm people through disease and supernatural disasters—god as superhero or Dr. Evil. Whatever a god is, the ancient philosophers argued, it must be wholly different from us. But as Martin points out in this sound, skeptical debunking of the work of earlier historians, these critiques didn’t stem from empiricism, rationalism, or new evidence. Rather, the philosophers “took these new notions to be true because they felt that they ought to be true.”

Christianity’s response to such critiques in its own time was equally nonempirical and nonrational. Among the social, economic, and political variables that contributed to the victory of Christianity over its pagan competitors in the Roman world, Martin identifies one of particular interest: daimons (demons, in modern spelling). Whereas classical philosophy maintained that “evil daimons did not exist,” he says, Christianity “offered an antidote more powerful than the poison, a drug stronger than the disease: healing and exorcism in the name of Jesus. . . . In its demonology, Christianity tapped into an assumed reality and met a need in a way classical philosophy had failed to do.”

Gradually, Martin writes, “‘Christianity the superstition’ was replaced by ‘Christianity the only true philosophy.’” With the endorsement of the new religion by the Roman emperor Constantine early in the fourth century C.E., the contest was settled. It became “‘superstitious’ (in the increasingly dominant discourse of Christianity) to worship the ‘pagan’ gods.”

Martin’s solidly researched and clearly written history is an important contribution to our understanding of the context and meaning of superstition, particularly in its application to religious beliefs, and a useful reminder that linguistic insults between religious and philosophical camps are an ancient tradition indeed.

—MICHAEL SHERMER

ARTS & LETTERS

CAMPO SANTO.

By W. G. Sebald. Translated by Anthea Bell. Random House. 221 pp. \$24.95

The German writer W. G. Sebald died in an auto accident in England in December 2001, at the age of 57, when his powers were at their height. He was a professor of European literature at the University of East Anglia and had lived in England for more than 30 years, yet he continued to write in German. The appearance in English translation of three of his books in the 1990s, *The Emigrants*, *The Rings of Saturn*, and *Vertigo*, won him fame. By the time a fourth, *Austerlitz*, was published, in 2001, he had become the sort of writer about whom addicted readers make nuisances of themselves: "Have you read Sebald? You must!" You must indeed, but this new collection of essays and occasional pieces written over several decades is not the best place to begin. The book will be of interest to confirmed Sebaldites—who will register, for example, the author's high regard for Franz Kafka, Vladimir Nabokov, and the genre-defying British writer Bruce Chatwin—but it's not substantial enough to make converts of newcomers.

In an interview shortly before his death, Sebald said that "the moral backbone of literature" is the "whole question of memory," and added that "those who have no memory have the much greater chance to live happy lives." Sebald is a skilled anatomist of memory and memory's weight, of our haunting by history and the past—in his case, European history, small-scale and large-, and, in particular, and unavoidably for a German born in 1944, World War II and its aftermath. But the approach is oblique, the manner never sensational. Precise details accrue within the context of what feels like a reverie or dream, and, time and again, the attempt to embrace the past proves as frustrating as trying to grab hold of a ghost. Yet Sebald cannot help but look backward, for "what can we know in advance of the course of history, which unfolds according to some logically indecipherable law, impelled forward, often changing direction at the crucial

moment, by tiny, imponderable events, by a barely perceptible current of air, a leaf falling to the ground, a glance exchanged across a great crowd of people."

Though Sebald's most noted books are sometimes called novels, they rest uneasily within the boundaries of the genre, with their elements of the reflective essay, biography, autobiography, travel chronicle, and even picture book. The author places odd visual aids throughout his texts—photos, drawings, documents, maps—usually grainy and ill defined, there but barely there, as if they might do a ghostly fade right before your eyes. You expect the visual elements to bring clarity to the narratives, but they do nothing of the sort. In fact, they add yet another elusive layer.

The best portions of the new collection are four excerpts from a book on Corsica that Sebald began and put aside in the mid-1990s. (The collection takes its title from one of the four.) His Corsica is a place of wild beauty, home to—what else?—centuries of ghosts. These Corsican pieces sound the authentic Sebaldian note, curious and mournful and wry, as when the author enters "a desolate graveyard of the kind not uncommon in France, where you have the impression not so much of an antechamber to eternal life as of a place administered by the local authority and designed for the secular removal of waste matter from human society."

"In the urban societies of the late 20th century," Sebald writes elsewhere in the same essay, "where everyone is instantly replaceable and is really superfluous from birth, we have to keep throwing ballast overboard, forgetting everything that we might otherwise remember: youth, childhood, our origins, our forebears and ancestors." Forgetting is an immense wave rising continually to wash over us, and Sebald's books are a bulwark against its advance. The four major works named above are essential. This collection is not, though once you have read the rest, you may well turn to it, to hear once more, however faintly, a noble and seductive voice that was stilled much too soon.

—JAMES M. MORRIS

IMPRESSIONIST QUARTET:
*The Intimate Genius of Manet and
Morisot, Degas and Cassatt.*

By Jeffrey Meyers. Harcourt.
368 pp. \$26

These days we think of Impressionism as pretty, crowd-pleasing art, the stuff of blockbuster museum exhibits. But as Jeffrey Meyers reminds us in *Impressionist Quartet*, his tale of Impressionism as seen through four interconnected lives, audiences weren't always so receptive. At first, the brilliantly colored canvases and their subjects—from absinthe drinkers to washer women—seemed shocking.

The four painters chronicled here, Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Berthe Morisot, and Mary Cassatt, fought to break new ground in their personal lives as well. For example, Manet embarked on a secret affair with the piano teacher who lived with his bourgeois family, during which she gave birth to a child. The painter moved into an apartment with her and the baby boy, who was passed off as her brother. In all likelihood, the boy's father wasn't Manet, as was long assumed, but Manet's father.

Meyers provides wistful portraits of his two female painters, Morisot and Cassatt, who received from the two men a mix of artistic validation and personal frustration. The elegant and attractive Morisot was probably in love with Manet, but she married his brother and bore a child. Degas and Cassatt, who was born in Pennsylvania and moved to Paris at 29, both craved intimacy yet pushed others away, choosing to put their work first. The precise nature of

their relationship with each other—in some sense devoted but apparently never quite romantic—remains a mystery, as Meyers admits. And though Cassatt never married, mothers and children became the great subject of her work.

A prolific literary biographer, Meyers doesn't advance any sweeping argument rooted in art history, and his recitation of the facts sometimes takes on a dry, book-report quality. He does, however, describe his subjects' difficult personalities well, and he unearths the occasional arresting detail—such as the fact that Degas, who couldn't otherwise speak the language, found two English words fascinating and repeated them endlessly: “turkey buzzard.”

Both Manet and Degas courted controversy by depicting female nudes as dancers and prostitutes rather than as classical idols. One critic accused Manet of an “infatuation with the bizarre,” and a fellow artist said that Degas's nudes inspired “at once continence and horror.” In the end, though, the Impressionists achieved canonical acceptance, wielding enormous influence over the painters who followed them. One of Meyers's foursome eventually became reactionary: Taken to Gertrude Stein's Paris apartment to see her collection of modern art, Cassatt said, “I have never in my life seen so many dreadful paintings in one place; I have never seen so many dreadful people gathered together and I want to be taken home at once.” The woman who had worked so hard to gain the acceptance of the establishment thus dismissed the artists of the next generation who wanted the same thing.

—ALIX OHLIN

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

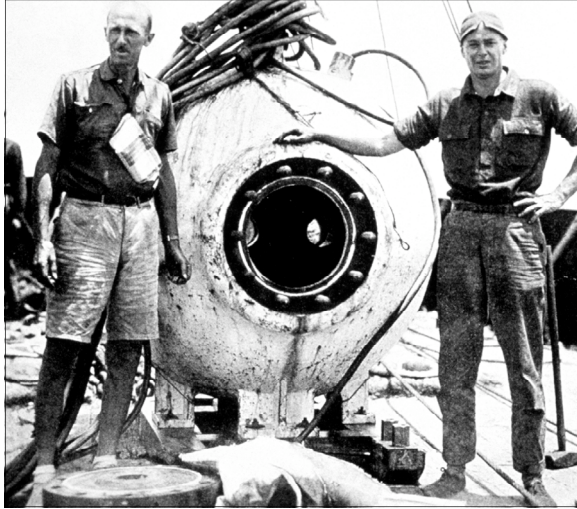
DESCENT:
The Heroic Discovery of the Abyss.

By Brad Matsen. Pantheon.
304 pp. \$25

Ernest Shackleton, Edmund Hillary—these were glorious explorers, men who performed unimaginable physical and mental feats to plant the flag for God and country. By contrast, there's something unsatisfying about the accomplishments of William Beebe and Otis Barton, who in 1934 conquered the ocean

depths by allowing themselves to be lowered a half-mile in a small steel ball. No less brave than Shackleton and Hillary, perhaps, but ingloriously helpless and totally at the mercy of their equipment.

Barton, a New York City trust-fund kid with a bad attitude toward the family plan (he dropped out of engineering school at Columbia University), saw deep-sea exploration as his route to fame and glory. Beebe, explorer, naturalist, and director of the Department of



William Beebe (left) and Otis Barton show off their bathysphere in Bermuda after their record dive in 1934.

Tropical Research at the New York Zoological Society, had collected and identified creatures of the jungle; now he wanted to do the same with those of the ocean. Beebe had the cred, but Barton—who, after getting no response to his letters to Beebe, insinuated himself into the zoologist's presence one late December day in 1928—had the blueprint.

Daydreaming through engineering classes, Barton had come up with a design for a steel sphere thick enough to resist water pressure at great depths. Of course, it would need windows of some kind, an oxygen system, telephone contact, a spotlight, and a cable and winch to lower and raise it. To sweat the details, Barton hired the eminent shipbuilding firm of Cox and Stevens, which, after much trial, error, and subcontracting, turned over a finished product. In 1930, Barton carried it by tugboat to Nonsuch Island, Bermuda, where the Zoological Society staffed a research station. There Beebe waited on the *Ready*, a tug refitted with two winches to handle the three-ton cable.

Beebe christened the four-and-a-half-foot globe the "Bathysphere," using the Greek prefix for *deep*, and without further ceremony the *Ready*, towed by a barge, headed for deep water. Beebe and Barton squeezed inside the sphere and waited for the hatch cover to be tightened. Hampered by the forced intimacy, they watched through a tiny porthole as the Bathysphere lurched downward and the multicolored world darkened to a purplish blue. At

800 feet, Beebe began seeing what he'd been hoping for: weird, fierce, luminescent sea creatures no one had seen before. But a small leak and other glitches dictated a speedy end to the Bathysphere's maiden voyage.

Barton and Beebe continued to dive together intermittently for the next four years, with Beebe cataloging marine life in the deep and Barton attempting to film it. Yet never did collaboration evoke so little gratitude on either side. Beebe came to view Barton as a whiny dilettante; Barton saw Beebe as a publicity-hogging egotist. Shortly after a historic half-mile dive in 1934, the two men parted company and never spoke again. Barton made a movie

from his amateur underwater footage, *Titans of the Deep*, which flopped. He roamed the globe for another 60 years, backed by his trusty trust fund. Beebe left the ocean, frustrated by accusations that he hadn't really discovered any new deep-sea creatures, and went back to his beloved jungle.

Brad Matsen, an expert on marine and environmental topics who produced the National Geographic ocean series *The Shape of Life*, writes engagingly about the technical and scientific contributions of Barton and Beebe, as well as their personalities—and egos. The courage of these two explorers revealed the ocean floor, yet the terror of descent taught a larger truth as well: No man can conquer the sea.

—A. J. LOFTIN

WHY WE LIE:

The Evolutionary Roots of Deception and the Unconscious Mind.

By David Livingstone Smith.

St. Martin's Press. 238 pp. \$24.95

DECEPTION AT WORK:

Investigating and Countering Lies and Fraud Strategies.

By Michael J. Comer and

Timothy E. Stephens.

Gower Publishing. 459 pp. \$185

Whatever is alive is at peril. Whatever is alive must compete for food and a mate while protecting itself against predators.

Mendacity proves helpful in all three endeavors. But when lying occurs within the tribe, it weakens communal bonds and threatens the tribe's survival. That's why it must be punished by relentless prosecutors seeking perjury convictions.

Outside the tribe, lying remains the weapon of choice. Millions are spent on camouflage, false clues, misinformation, and double agents. We come by our talent for lying by evolutionary prescription. Our animal lineage reveals a densely woven fabric of trickery and dissimulation. Henry W. Bates, the Victorian naturalist, noticed that a butterfly with poor defenses against predators would imitate the coloration and movements of a nasty bully of a butterfly, one with better defenses. Similarly, the North American hognose, a nonpoisonous snake, takes on the coloration and appearance of a cobra when attacked and hisses violently, pretending to strike.

"If someone tells you he always tells the truth, you know you have a liar on your hands," Groucho Marx once said. In *Why We Lie*, David Livingstone Smith, a professor of philosophy at the University of New England, observes that we have inherited from our evolutionary ancestors not only the need to be able to lie convincingly, but also the need to detect others' lies. Better detection skills create the need for better liars. The result is a never-ending evolutionary arms race.

We all believe we have a lie detector between our ears. Judges commonly tell jurors to consider witnesses' demeanor in evaluating credibility. Did the witness appear to be telling the truth? Many studies, however, indicate that body language and manner of speech are poor guides for evaluating truthfulness. The scientific evidence, such as it is, suggests that judges who give the standard instruction are really misleading the jury.

Long before Darwin, the common law treated lying as inherent in human nature. The law prohibited litigants from taking the oath and testifying. It was presumed that they would lie. Even a defendant charged with first-degree murder, on trial for his life, couldn't testify. The religious view was that he had probably already

committed one crime and shouldn't be tempted to compound his Judgment Day problems by committing perjury. England began allowing defendants to testify in 1885. Marshall Hall, a prominent criminal defense barrister, had lobbied for the change in the law, but he came to regret his success. Under the earlier rule, the defense counsel could suggest to the jury what the defendant would have said if only his lips weren't sealed. Hall found that defendants' own stories were far less persuasive than his versions.

The CIA and other government agencies use the polygraph to catch liars, but most courts reject it. Judges believe there is too much subjectivity in interpreting the results. What if a device *could* detect falsehood with the scientific accuracy of DNA evidence? It would place great power in the hands of the enforcer, and induce great apprehension on the part of the enforcee. One's entire life would be at the disposal of the person with the truth machine. Would we want this?

Smith worries about self-deception, "the handmaiden of deceit." It helped us ascend the evolutionary ladder, he argues, but "it is no longer such a good option in a world stocked with nuclear and biological weapons. The problem is, we are stuck with it."

Deception at Work is a compilation of every known technique, fair and foul, for catching liars and getting them to confess. One recommendation is to lie to the suspect: Tell him his partner has confessed, or his fingerprints give him away. The book identifies two principal types of lies. The achievement lie, which is told to get a job or to defraud someone, often concerns the future, whereas the exculpatory lie seeks to conceal past wrongdoing. Alger Hiss, Richard Nixon, and Bill Clinton wanted to conceal what they had done, so they lied. Perjury cases are predicated on lies about the past.

All of us are playing the game of "as if," described by Hans Vaihinger in *The Philosophy of "As If"* (1924). We act as if this illusory world of the senses were in fact reality. We act as if we had free will and were responsible for what we do. We make

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plans as if we were not under a death sentence. It is by these fictions—shall we say, these lies—that we stride confidently into the future.

—JACOB STEIN

BIG COTTON:
How a Humble Fiber Created Fortunes, Wrecked Civilizations, and Put America on the Map.

By Stephen Yafa. Viking. 398 pp.
\$25.95

In his 14th-century bestseller *Voyage and Travels*, the English knight Sir John Mandeville described a half-animal, half-plant he called the “Vegetable Lamb.” Each pod on this amazing Scythian shrub, he wrote, contained a tiny lamb, and lint from the animals could be harvested and spun into a light fabric. For many Europeans, this fanciful account represented the first encounter with cotton, a crop that would transform their clothing, their working lives, and their place in the political world.

In *Big Cotton*, journalist Stephen Yafa traces the history of the plant and its products, beginning with the near-simultaneous domestication of wild cotton in Africa, South America, India, and Mexico around 3500 B.C. Cotton fabric woven in India was a luxury in ancient Greece and Rome, and in the 1660s a craze for Indian cotton chintz infected central and northern Europe. The popularity of the fabric helped drive the English invasion of India; the colonial government promptly outlawed the Indian manufacture of cotton fabric, requiring instead that raw domestic cotton be shipped to English mills. “By depriving India of the fruits of its own labor,” Yafa writes, “England all but guaranteed that the crop would one day come to symbol-

ize colonial subjugation and provide a rallying point against it.”

The overwhelming demand for cotton goods in Europe also spurred the development of the first factory system and, in the words of one contemporary admirer, forced “human beings to renounce their desultory work habits.” In the late 1700s, fear of industrial piracy was so intense that the British refused to let cotton mill workers leave the country. But American entrepreneurs eventually smuggled some secrets out and, with the help of Eli Whitney’s cotton gin (patented in 1794), launched a homegrown industry. The nation’s textile center of Lowell, Massachusetts, hired thousands of New England farm girls to work 14-hour days with little respite, and thereby planted the seeds of the labor movement.

Northern industrialists, dependent on Southern slave labor for raw materials, were latecomers to the cause of abolition, but by the end of the 1850s, Yafa writes, many were “no longer willing to pay for their conscience with their cotton.” For their part, many Southerners believed cotton exports would underwrite their ultimate independence. In the decades after the Civil War, farmers attempted to rebuild the devastated Southern cotton economy, but they were stymied by low



Workers open cotton bales at North Carolina’s White Oak Mill in the early 1900s—one of the few mill jobs available to blacks.

prices and the invasion of the boll weevil.

American cotton continued to dominate for a time. Some growers moved west, and in the late 1800s a Bavarian immigrant named Levi Strauss bolstered the consumer demand for sturdy cotton fabric. Today, however, domestic production of cotton (like that of some other crops) survives mainly on federal subsidies, and the U.S. textile industry is swiftly disappearing; more than 210,000 of its workers have

lost their jobs since 2000. China has produced more cotton than the United States in recent decades; indeed, its mills are by far the most productive in the world.

Yafa has a weakness for trite metaphors and puns, and his eagerness to entertain occasionally gets in the way of the story. Still, his tale is ably constructed, dense with well-described heroes and villains, and largely worthy of its substantial subject.

—MICHELLE NIJHUIS

HISTORY

BORN LOSERS:

A History of Failure in America.

By Scott A. Sandage. Harvard Univ.

Press. 362 pp. \$35

Stock options, year-end bonuses, vacation houses, designer clothes—these are the measures of American achievement. The winners in this relentlessly aggressive game get lionized. Donald Trump, for instance, is the author or subject of some 15 books, not to mention his starring role in the reality-TV show *The Apprentice*. But what of those who fall short? In this important and entertaining work, Scott Sandage sets out to chronicle some of “America’s unsung losers: men who failed in a nation that worships success.”

A history professor at Carnegie Mellon University, Sandage focuses on the 19th century, an era of much economic upheaval in America. While industrialists and robber barons built their fortunes, financial panics occurred regularly. Bank closings, crop failures, and other disasters could impoverish families overnight. Diaries and letters reveal that many people were haunted by a fear of failure. “I have struggled very hard to get along and sacrificed all my comforts,” a Philadelphia merchant wrote during the panic of 1819, but “what is to become of us . . . I know not.” When he went bankrupt soon after, the merchant declared that his “days of sentiment have gone”; from now on, “the sine qua non is money.”

Money became the sine qua non of self-worth, too. Even though the volatile

worlds of business and finance took almost no account of personal merit, failure was commonly deemed to be *your fault*. Along the way, the 19th-century economy transformed the nation’s criteria for evaluating individuals: “Character,” a set of traits rooted in traditional morality, gradually gave way to “personality,” a more amorphous set of traits thought likely to bring prosperity. The expression “I feel like a failure,” Sandage notes, “comes so naturally that we forget it is a figure of speech: the language of business applied to the soul.”

In the archives of New York’s Mercantile Agency, a predecessor to Dun & Bradstreet, Sandage unearthed red-leather volumes that recount the financial affairs of thousands of businesses and individuals. Beginning in 1841, the Mercantile packaged and sold the era’s most sophisticated commercial intelligence. It gathered data on almost every triumph and reversal of fortune from a network of informers, including a young lawyer named Abraham Lincoln. The Mercantile’s reports exemplify the emerging cult of success, with their combination of empirical rigor, bourgeois moralism, and unsparing criticism of those who fell short (“has no energy & will never make a dollar”). Sandage’s recovery of these riches alone is worth the price of the book.

From college admissions to unemployment, success remains the American barometer of individual worth. How does it feel to be Willy Loman in a nation that

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idolizes Bill Gates? Sandage addresses contemporary culture only briefly, and the discussion is sometimes awkwardly grafted onto his historical narrative. But that's a minor flaw in a major contribution to American social history.

—GERALD J. RUSSELLO

JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH: *His Life, His Politics, His Economics.*

By Richard Parker. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 820 pp. \$35

John Kenneth Galbraith stands almost seven feet tall, but that's not the only thing that makes him a big man. He seems omnipresent in American history of the last half-century. Imagine Forrest Gump with a Ph.D., and you'll have a good idea of Galbraith's life as famous economist, counselor to presidents, diplomat, and best-selling author. Sadly, few economists pay attention to his work today, largely because Galbraith is a moralist in a profession dominated by objectivity and statistics. Richard Parker, an instructor at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, has come to the rescue with a biography equal to Galbraith's stature.

Born in rural Canada in 1908, Galbraith studied at Ontario Agricultural College and then at the University of California, Berkeley, abandoned agricultural economics for Keynesian macroeconomics, and served his adopted country during World War II—most importantly in the Office of Price Administration. Along the way, he developed a “talent for making friends with wealthy and powerful people” while remaining independent and strongly committed to liberal principles. Beginning in 1943, he spent five years writing for *Fortune* magazine; it was conservative Henry Luce, ironically, who enabled him to hone his journalism skills.

After struggling for tenure at Harvard (it was finally granted in 1949), Galbraith could have settled down to a comfortable academic life. Instead, he advised Adlai Stevenson and then John F. Kennedy, and, through the Kennedy connection, was appointed ambassador to India in 1961. Though serving as a diplomat, Galbraith remained a critic, even of his own boss's foreign policy toward Cuba and Vietnam.

During this busy life, Galbraith wrote about economics for a wide audience, most famously in *The Affluent Society* (1958), a book that lambasted America's “social imbalance” between private consumption and public goods. Remarkably, his status as a best-selling popularizer of economics didn't keep Galbraith from ascending to the presidency of the American Economic Association in 1972.

Parker recounts the details and does even better at supplying context. In the latter portion of the book, Galbraith's influence wanes as American politics drifts rightward; nonetheless, the biographer provides especially informative accounts of the 1970s and of economic policy under Presidents Ronald

Reagan and Bill Clinton.

Broad themes emerge, including Galbraith's struggles between careerism and a love of big ideas, and between sticking to principle and exerting influence in the gritty world of politics. Discussing his legacy, Parker sensibly suggests that economists should strive to write for a wider public. Less sensible is the author's optimism about the staying power of Galbraith's brand of liberalism.

Another shortcoming: Parker often piles detail upon detail and then squeezes in a footnote for another anecdote. Sometimes, too, he apologizes for mentioning something that's “slightly ahead of our story” or that lies “in the future.” In an



Economist John Kenneth Galbraith

800-page book, these practices get wearisome. Nonetheless, those who make it through will come away with a true appreciation of John Kenneth Galbraith's

contributions, especially the questions he asked about the moral underpinnings of modern capitalism.

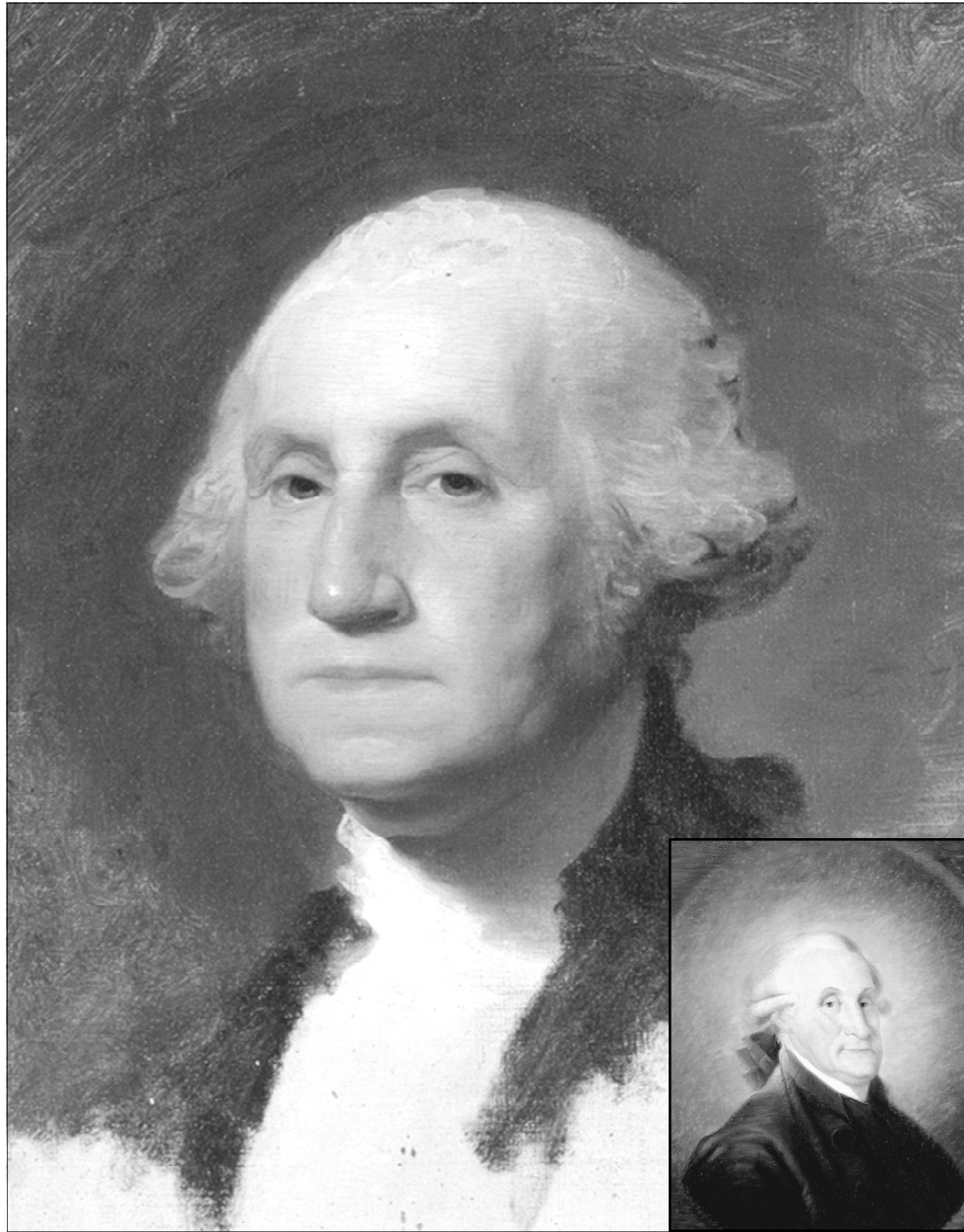
—KEVIN MATTSON

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PORTRAIT: George Washington



This unfinished portrait has defined America's conception of the Father of Our Country since shortly after Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828) painted it in 1796. Always flirting with bankruptcy, Stuart forged Washington portraiture into a cottage industry. He persuaded the reluctant president to sit for three life portraits, then reproduced at least 100 versions, most based on what became known as the “Athenaeum portrait,” above. Copies were in high demand, and Mrs. Washington was forever galled that Stuart never delivered the replicas of her husband's portrait and her own (painted at the same time) that he had promised. In 1869, Stuart's rendition of Washington entered mass production—on the one-dollar bill. A 1789 portrait by Christian Gullager (inset) illustrates how differently we might see Washington had another image gained the currency that Stuart's did. The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., is exhibiting Stuart's Athenaeum portrait and 90 other works by the artist through July 31.

Virtue. Delivered.

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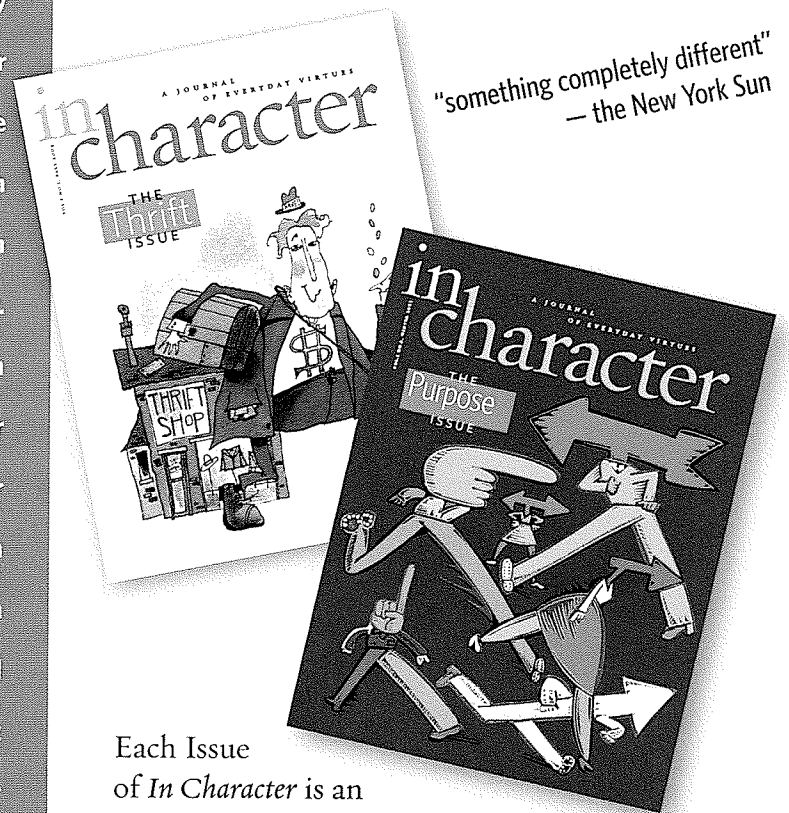
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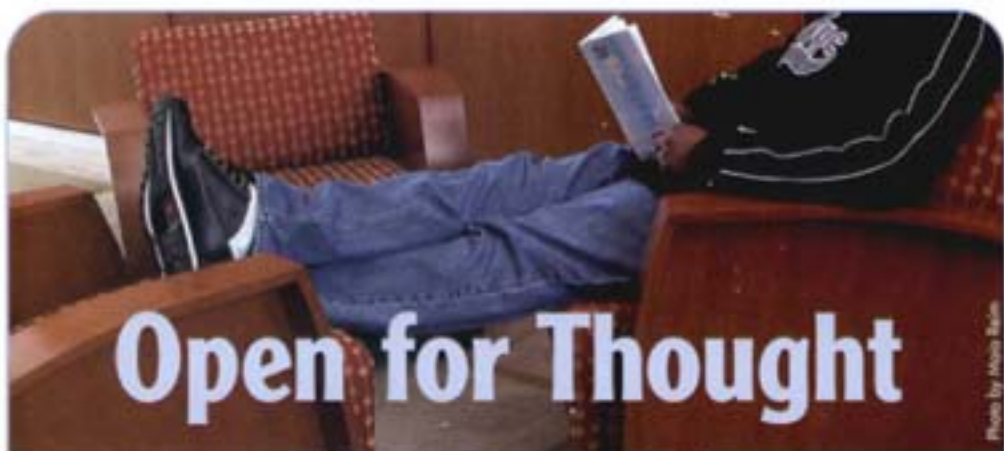
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Open for Thought

Photo by Mike Baird

ALAN WOLFE



Return to Greatness

How America Lost Its Sense of Purpose and What It Needs to Do to Recover It

RETURN TO GREATNESS

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Alan Wolfe

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