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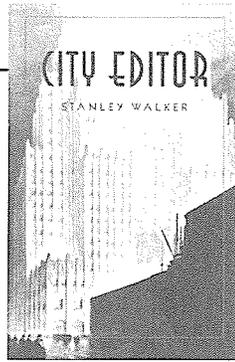
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# SCHOOL

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### CITY EDITOR

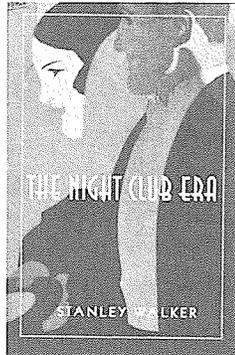
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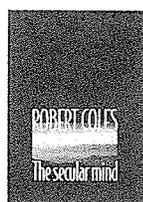
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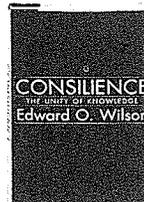
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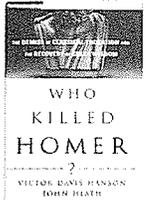
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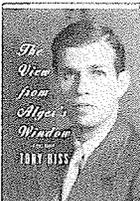
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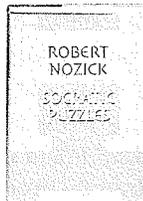
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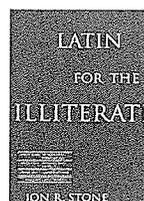
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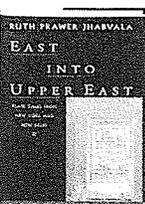
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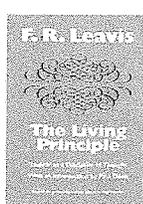
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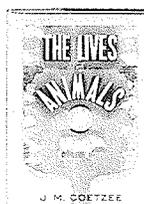
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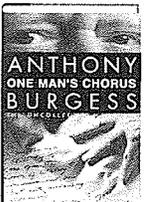
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## EDITOR'S COMMENT

**T**he media hoopla surrounding the millennium has already gained the intensity of a tropical storm, and the *WQ* is not going to toss more reams of intellectual confetti into the tempest. Yet there is a paradox about this milestone that calls out for attention. With the 20th century, we have capped a thousand years of stupendous material and, yes, moral progress with the hundred bloodiest years in the history of humankind. Not only have we endured two world wars and innumerable smaller ones but the unimaginable human devastation wrought by Hitler, Stalin, Mao, and their imitators. Not one of the nine centuries that came before can rival our own in blood.

Apart from the almost accidental tragedy of World War I, the great clashes of our bloody century have not been provoked by the hunger for land, or riches, or other traditional sources of national desire, but by *ideas*—about the value of individual dignity and freedom, about the proper organization of society, and ultimately about the possibility of human perfection. These conflicts were not incidental to the moral progress of the past thousand years but a tragic part of the quest, as societies cast off all traditional sources of moral and political authority and embraced new ideas and ideologies that led to radical evil.

So while the world faces many concrete challenges in the future, from controlling nuclear and biological weapons to coming to terms with the possibilities of genetic engineering, our own recent history should remind us that our destiny will be most powerfully influenced by the larger ideas to which we give our allegiance. At the *WQ*, this millennial reminder of the urgency of ideas fortifies our sense of mission, and we hope that readers, too, will take from the history of the 20th century a fresh appreciation of the often questioned “relevance” of the mind.

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Some letters are received in response to the editors' requests for comment.

### *Overcoming the Great Disruption*

Francis Fukuyama's account of our recent history ["How to Re-Moralize America," *WQ*, Summer '99] follows the Hegelian pattern of thesis (1950s = order) giving way to antithesis (1960s = chaos) until our buffeted ship of state finally reaches calmer waters (synthesis) in the waning 1990s. Along the way, the storm, or "Great Disruption," shakes up the passengers and damages the cargo ("Conservatives need to be realistic in understanding how thoroughly the moral and social landscapes have been altered. . .").

Paul Berman ["Reimagining Destiny," *WQ*, Summer '99] reminds us that this story is rather stark and incomplete; the 1960s, after all, were also years of moral progress, especially in civil rights and women's rights. But allowing for its defects as history, one may still ask if Fukuyama's narrative has value as a motivating prophecy. One reason I don't think so is its implicit determinism. Articulated consent to its vision of history seems irrelevant to the prospects that it will be fulfilled. "Order and rules will tend to emerge spontaneously from the ground up," so we need not worry or dream overmuch. "The innate ability of human beings to evolve reasonable moral rules" will save us, and has already begun to bring us around. As Berman points out, the application of such evolutionary ideas to history typically comes in dark and light variants. Some who read our destiny in our "innate" compulsions conclude that we are rapacious monsters, while others, with Fukuyama, regard us as rational negotiators working in the service of community interests.

I am drawn to a more dualistic description of experience that understands human beings not as programmed creatures but as free beings at war within themselves, capable of both cruelty and love. This view, well expressed by, but hardly restricted to, various religious traditions, recognizes in both our inner and outer lives (the two are not, to be sure, always perfectly congruent) a perpetual conflict between our demons and the better angels of our nature. It

regards human beings as responsible for others as well as for themselves, but as needing guidance and inspiration from language, symbols, and the example of heroic lives to aid them in the ceaseless battle against what religion calls temptation and sin. Moreover, if these symbols are to retain currency and power, they must be freshly created or periodically renewed.

Prompted by these essays to look around, I don't find in our market-driven culture many such landmarks by which we might navigate forward, or backward (if one subscribes to Fukuyama's nostalgic view of history), toward a society more fully devoted to responsibility, charity, and genuine self-fulfillment. We may, as Fukuyama believes, be settling down and sobering up; but surely there is in contemporary America, as Berman suggests ("We have no big plans for making society any better than it already is") an equally evident, and unslaked, longing for something more.

*Andrew Delbanco*

*Julian Clarence Levi Professor  
in the Humanities  
Columbia University  
New York, N.Y.*

Astonishingly, Fukuyama and Berman miss the central development behind both the "Great Disruption" and the emergence of a new mass culture: the transformation of America into an ideological state.

The ideology in question is perhaps most often known as "political correctness," now inculcated in Americans by the government, the media, the entertainment industry, even many churches. Its history, which goes back to World War I, reveals its true identity: Marxism translated from economic into cultural terms. The key intellectual work was done in the 1930s and '40s, with the development of Critical Theory by the Frankfurt School, Adorno's crossing of Marx with Freud, and Marcuse's answer to Horkheimer's question of who will replace the proletariat as the agent of revolution: a coalition of students, blacks, feminist women, homosexuals, and other socially

marginal elements. Marcuse, who joined the Frankfurt School in 1932, injected the school's ideas into the baby boom generation during the 1960s, and that generation has now made them the American norm.

History should warn us of what an ideological state can do to its own citizens. Given that this ideology is one of radical cultural inversion—the old sins are proclaimed virtues, and the old virtues are denounced as sins—the consequences are likely to be especially dire. The “end of history” is likely to be a culturally Marxist world regime. It's time for Christians and other cultural conservatives to start building parallel structures.

*Paul M. Weyrich*  
*President, Free Congress Foundation*  
*Washington, D.C.*

### *Deciphering North Korea*

With Washington and much of Asia on tenterhooks over the possibility of a second multi-stage missile launch by Pyongyang, the *WQ* showed impeccable timing with “Korean Questions” [*WQ*, Summer '99]. Robert Manning's piece is very strong, with the exception of its lurid opening, and Don Oberdorfer

puts President Kim Dae Jung in clear perspective, particularly for those unaware of his past travails as an opposition leader and failed presidential candidate.

The real gem of the triptych appears in Kathryn Weathersby's essay on the Korean War and Soviet-North Korean relations [“The Korean War Revisited”]. Her observations on the lingering effects of Stalin's “cynical, high-handed treatment” of North Korea does as much to explain its sometimes violent and enigmatic behavior today as anything I have read. North Korea's lack of trust toward all foreigners and its obsession with *juche* (self-reliance) are what Weathersby calls “an impossible legacy,” leaving Pyongyang “without an understanding of normal relations with other states or even an understanding that such relations can exist.” Those who hope for quick changes in North Korean behavior are doomed to disappointment. Weathersby's piece should be required reading for all armchair strategists on North Korea.

*Donald P. Gregg*  
*Chairman, The Korea Society*  
*New York, N.Y.*

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While Kathryn Weathersby's article on the Korean War shows again that the real-time vision of U.S. leadership in the Cold War was much better than the hindsight of academic "revisionists," her analysis needs correction: Stalin's reference to a "changed international situation" as a basis for approving Kim Il Sung's request for permission to attack South Korea in June 1950 did not mean a Soviet decision to "abandon cooperation with the Americans and pursue [Soviet] interests through more aggressive means." The last vestige of any such cooperation died with the initiation of the Marshall Plan in 1947. The Prague Coup and the Berlin Blockade of 1948 were already signs of Stalin's increasing boldness. The "changed international situation" to which Stalin referred meant his belief that prospects for a successful conquest of South Korea had improved due to the Soviet Union's possession of the atomic bomb since September 1949 and communist control of the Chinese mainland.

Weathersby implies that "careful examination" of the Panmunjom talks by a British historian in 1990 showed the United States was responsible for "dragging out" the talks. Missing is any reference to the disinclination of the United States, not to mention its ROK ally, to force North Korean and Chinese Communist prisoners of war to return unwillingly to their homelands, which was the real sticking point in the negotiations.

Weathersby's account of the Chinese intervention is elliptical and leaves the impression that Mao had limited goals and sought a stalemate, whereas in fact the Chinese recaptured Seoul and endeavored by "cautious advance" to force the United States out of Korea. In mid-February 1951, Mao Zedong said China might need two more years of fighting to achieve its objective. Only when the tide of battle turned again did a negotiated settlement become feasible.

*Kenneth N. Skoug, Jr.  
Alexandria, Va.*

Robert Manning's article ["The Enigma of the North," *WQ*, Summer '99] is an excellent antidote for much of the thinking that is prevalent in Washington on North Korea. Its importance lies in his comment, "Contrary to the conventional wisdom, North Korea is neither crazy nor unpredictable. Once its logic of bluster and brinkmanship is under-

stood, its behavior appears to be quite predictable.”

There is a widespread belief in Washington, both in the administration and on the Hill, that the regime in the North is mad, and its leader, Kim Jong Il, bizarre. The danger is that as long as the regime is considered irrational and its leader non compos mentis, a coherent U.S. foreign policy toward that regime appears unnecessary, and indeed impossible, and thus one can resort to ad hoc responses. If we consider that the primary focus of the government in the North is regime survival, then its actions become, as Manning argues, predictable. However despicable the North may be to its own people, and however provocative it is to the South, few regimes in the world have lasted as long. Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il have not been stupid on their own terms.

North Korea’s mistake lies in using provocative actions and the vilification of the United States as bargaining chips. Such actions are self-defeating if the North Koreans want Washington to lift sanctions and develop normal relations, as it appears they do. Each action provokes a negative reaction in Congress and makes it more difficult for any administration to justify “carrots.”

*David I. Steinberg  
Director, Asian Studies  
Georgetown University  
Washington, D.C.*

Robert Manning has done a service for the policy dialogue on North Korea by clarifying the options facing Washington. As Manning makes clear, North Korea is now “using” nuclear weapons. In fact, it is using nuclear weapons in more or less the way the Soviet Union and the United States did during the Cold War, by exploiting their political utility. It is true that North Korea is not firing nuclear weapons at Okinawa or Seoul, but it is certainly using them as instruments of deterrence and coercion.

North Korea is the most extreme case of a more general pattern in Asia. Nuclear escalation dangers are an important factor in the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan. Iran makes overtures to the West while simultaneously protecting its missile and nuclear weapons projects. China tests

advanced missiles of a range sufficient to strike the United States, and hundreds more to intimidate Taiwan. In each instance, states are using nuclear weapons to bolster their strategies, to send a wake-up call, or to intimidate.

The dispute on the Korean Peninsula is usually seen as the last gasp of the Cold War. But it more accurately marks the beginning of a second nuclear age, one that involves new powers and has little to do with the Cold War. Until this fundamental change is understood, U.S. policy will continue to re-fight the last (cold) war.

*Paul Bracken  
Yale University  
New Haven, Conn.*

The more the United States and its allies address their problems directly with Pyongyang, the less successful they seem to be. As Robert Manning points out, continued shipments of food and fuel will do little but “beget more bad behavior” by the North. And as long as North Korea persists in

threatening South Korea and Japan with conventional forces, ballistic missiles, and nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, the prospects of an armed rivalry among the Koreans, Japan, and China will only increase.

Instead of groveling before Pyongyang to get it to behave, the United States and its allies need to work together to advance the only sure path to peace: Korean unification. This requires that the United States and its allies stop bribing Pyongyang out of fear of what it might do militarily and instead hold it to its 1991 pledge to eliminate its ability to make nuclear weapons. It also demands that Seoul's emerging democracy become sufficiently pluralistic to accept citizens from the North, as well as sufficiently accessible to foreign capital to speed its own rebuilding. Finally, the United States must maintain its Asian defense obligations and make it clear to Beijing that China has more to gain from a prosperous, denuclearized Korea than from a divided Korea with the North goading Japan to remilitarize. These efforts may not result in any new "deals" with Pyongyang, but they are far more likely to produce peace.

*Henry Sokolski*  
*Executive Director,*  
*Nonproliferation Policy Education Center*  
*Washington, D.C.*

### *Olmsted's Urban Ideas*

Witold Rybczynski's article on "Why We Need Olmsted Again" [WQ, Summer '99] in light of urban sprawl is well argued, save for one detail: Olmsted's ideas have contributed to sprawl. Rybczynski himself raises the issue in the rhetorical question, "Olmsted, the Godfather of Sprawl?" But he then argues that Olmsted, despite designing the first large planned residential community and living in the suburbs for much of his life, was really more concerned with urban public space and would likely have rejected the private world of contemporary suburbia. While we can never be sure of the answer to this question, it is worth exploring the issue a bit further.

Olmsted was deeply concerned with ensuring that nature survived urban

expansion. In cities, this meant carving out large public spaces near the center to guarantee that at least some land remained undeveloped. While his parks now represent the crown jewels of their cities and some of America's best efforts at urban planning, for Olmsted they were a rear-guard action. For him, a more effective way to see that nature survived future urban expansion was to develop land at much lower densities, or in other words, to build suburbs.

Olmsted saw private spaces in the suburbs as more important to the survival of nature than the great public spaces in cities. The large yard, extended over thousands of homes, provided families with daily access to nature. In his book *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns* (1870), Olmsted argues that "probably the advantages of civilization can be found illustrated and demonstrated under no circumstances so completely as in some suburban neighborhoods where each family abode stands fifty or a hundred feet or more apart from all others, and at some distance from the public road." The statement places Olmsted squarely in the tradition of American planners and architects who advocated decentralizing cities. Surely many aspects of the modern metropolis would dismay Olmsted, but the large-lot subdivision that continues to drive urban sprawl would not likely be one of them.

*Robert E. Lang*  
*Director, Urban and Metropolitan Research*  
*Fannie Mae Foundation*  
*Washington, D.C.*

Regarding the fine Olmsted essay by Witold Rybczynski, I must offer one small but, to Buffalo, important correction.

While our city did dreadfully convert Olmsted's Humboldt Parkway into an expressway in the 1960s, I am pleased to report that Olmsted's Lincoln Parkway, Bidwell Parkway, and Chapin Parkway are beautifully intact, waiting to be strolled and enjoyed by all traveling Olmsted scholars and fans. Readers can find more information and a map online at <http://www.geocities.com/brodericks/index.htm>.

*Cynthia Van Ness*  
*Buffalo, N.Y.*

“Brilliantly original.”\*

# ABRAHAM LINCOLN

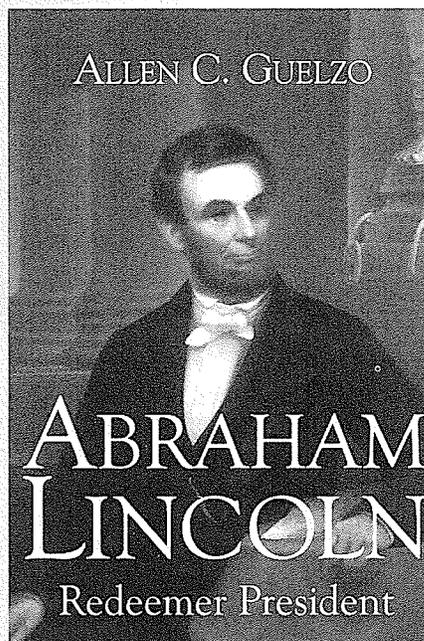
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## FINDINGS

### The Cool Revolution

Remember the old theory that climate shapes the economic, cultural, and political destinies of nations? An exhibit at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C., unintentionally restores a bit of credibility to this very un-PC notion.

On display until January 2, 2000, *Stay Cool! Air Conditioning America* shows how “man-made weather” transformed 20th-century America, and leaves the distinct impression that an engineered indoor climate is an important source of the country’s sustained success.

Imagine a world without computers, reliable pharmaceuticals, glass skyscrapers, space modules, or precision equipment—a world where cities “emptied in summers as residents fled to mountain and seaside resorts,” as the exhibit puts it, and “workers’ productivity declined in direct proportion to the heat and humidity outside.” Imagine Silicon Valley—or Houston or Las Vegas or Atlanta—thriving in 100-degree heat.

Oddly, the transformations wrought by air conditioning have attracted little scholarly attention, with notable exceptions including Raymond O. Arsenault’s 1984 article in the *Journal of Southern History* and Gail Cooper’s *Air Conditioning America* (1998). As early as 1888, factories installed mechanical cooling systems, allowing pasta and chocolate to be made year-round without turning limp or gray. Film, computer chips, many synthetic textiles, and medicines are among the goods that could not be made at all without a controlled climate. Nor would Hollywood likely exist. The Folies Bergère Theater in New York offered patrons summertime frost and fantasy as early as 1911, ending a theater custom of

shutting down in summer.

“Engineered air” changed our living and working quarters as well, though not always for the better. After air conditioning entered the average American home during the 1950s, deep porches, high ceilings, and thick walls disappeared. Man-

made climate also reshaped city skylines. Without air conditioning, soaring skyscrapers on today’s scale were unthinkable. What the exhibit doesn’t mention is that without air conditioning we also wouldn’t have “sick” buildings and, perhaps, the frenzy of the “24/7” life. It’s remarkable to think that between the office and the car, Americans now spend much of their time in envi-

ronments that simply did not exist a century ago. *Stay Cool!* leaves no doubt that life before AC differed from that of today in more ways than temperature.

### Please Pass the Poison

The controversial Australian philosopher Peter Singer recently arrived in the United States to take up a new chair in bioethics at Princeton University’s Center for Human Values. Singer is the chief theoretician of the animal rights movement—he compares the human “speciesist” dominion over the animals to “the centuries of tyranny by white humans over black humans.” A thoroughgoing vegan, he pads around in canvas sneakers. Yet he is also an aggressive advocate of euthanasia and infanticide. It all makes sense if, like Singer, you’re a radical utilitarian and believe that animals and humans have similar experiences of pain and suffering. Not one to mince words, he has argued that infanticide is justified when it makes way for another baby with “better prospects of a happy life.” Discussing one case, he wrote: “Therefore, if killing the hemophiliac



infant has no adverse effect on others, it would, according to the total view, be right to kill him.”

Singer has been equally plainspoken about his new country, writer Michael Specter notes in his *New Yorker* (Sept. 6, 1999) profile of the philosopher. Singer once declared that America’s social fabric “has decayed to the point at which there are grounds for fearing that it has passed the point of no return.” Specter writes: “When I asked him why he thought it was worth bothering with the place if it was so far gone, he replied, ‘The alternatives are all too horrible to consider. I have to at least give it a try.’”

Reading this, it occurred to us that if Singer is our only hope, he may be right: there really is a case for euthanasia.

## Red Rebound?

After decades of bad breaks in the public relations area, things finally seem to be looking up for the Communist Party USA. Its youth arm, the Young Communist League, says it has picked up 1,500 new members since launching a Web site in 1997, Leora Broydo reports in *Utne Reader* (May–June 1999). The party itself, which saw membership slide to 15,000 in the early 1990s, claims it signed up 4,000 new members during a recent four-month stretch.

Speculation is rife about the sources of the Reds’ rising fortunes. Maybe it’s the allure of lost causes or the promise of making a really awesome gesture of rebellion. Or maybe the Party simply isn’t keeping up its old membership standards. One young Communist told *Swing* (Oct. 1998), “Kids who are 17 and 18 today were 10 when the Soviet Union collapsed. They’re like, ‘Communism, what’s that?’”



## A Catholic Correction?

Fourteen years ago, in *Habits of the Heart*, an examination of contemporary American culture and character, sociologist Robert Bellah and his colleagues

quoted Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*: “I think I can see the whole destiny of America contained in the first Puritan who landed on those shores.”

They named John Winthrop as that first Puritan. But in the Jesuit magazine *America* (July 31, 1999), Bellah now says that they (and Tocqueville) were wrong. The first Puritan who contained our destiny, writes Bellah, was Roger Williams, the Baptist proponent of religious freedom who was banished to Rhode Island from the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

“Roger Williams was a moral genius,” Bellah writes, “but he was a sociological catastrophe. After he founded the first Baptist church, he left it for a smaller and purer one. That, too, he found inadequate, so he founded a church that consisted only of himself, his wife, and one other person. One wonders how he stood even those two. Since Williams ignored secular society, money took over in Rhode Island in a way that would not be true in Massachusetts or Connecticut for a long time. Rhode Island under Williams gives us an early and local example of what happens when the sacredness of the individual is not balanced by any sense of the whole or concern for the common good.”

Bellah likens America’s Protestant “cultural code” to a genetic code. “A genetic code can produce a highly successful species, successful because specialized for a particular environment. But then, even at its moment of greatest success, because of a dramatic change in that environment, the code can lead to rapid extinction.” The United States faces such a challenge today, he warns.

Bellah looks to the religious imagination for a solution, and specifically to the Catholic vision of society itself as a sacrament of God. “Just when we are in many ways moving to an ever greater validation of the sacredness of the individual person, our capacity to imagine a social fabric that would hold individuals together is vanishing. This is in part because of the fact that our ethical individualism . . . is linked to an economic individualism that,

ironically, knows nothing of the sacredness of the individual. Its only standard is money, and the only thing more sacred than money is more money. What economic individualism destroys and what our kind of religious individualism cannot restore is solidarity, a sense of being members of the same body.”

### A Tale of Two Autobiographies

The appearance of Edward Said’s new autobiography, *Out of Place*, is putting book reviewers in quite a pickle. A professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia University, author of the influential *Orientalism* (1978) and other books, Said has also been on the front lines of the Palestinian cause as a member of the Palestine National Council and, lately, a critic of Yasir Arafat’s compromises with Israel. On the left he is seen as a sainted public intellectual.

Much of Said’s moral authority derives from his own oft-declared status as an exile, along with thousands of others, from his native Palestine. In a self-portrait he has offered in various forms and forums, from *Harper’s* to a BBC documentary, Said has suggested that he lived happily at 10 Brenner Street in Jerusalem until, when he was 12, he and his well-to-do family were driven out by Jewish forces months before the Arab-Israeli war of 1948–49.

But it is all a lie, charges Justus Reid Weiner in *Commentary* (Sept. 1999), which is published by the American Jewish Committee. A scholar in residence at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Weiner says he spent three years researching property deeds, school records, and other sources. He says that Said was born in Jerusalem—apparently on one of his family’s visits to his uncle’s house on Brenner Street—but as his birth certificate specified, his permanent residence was in Cairo, where his family had moved about nine years earlier. Until Said went to the United States (his father was a U.S. citizen) to complete his education in 1951, Weiner asserts, he attended

private English schools in Cairo.

Replying in the online magazine *CounterPunch* ([www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org)), Said alleges a number of factual errors and labels Weiner a Zionist “propagandist.” He does not directly answer the central charge that he did not grow up in Jerusalem. “I have never claimed to have been made a refugee, but rather that my extended family . . . was,” Said writes. The house on Brenner Street was “a family house in the Arab sense, which meant that our families were one in ownership.” Much of the true story, Weiner says, is recounted in Said’s new book, albeit without any hint that the facts may be at variance with his earlier accounts.

### Y2K II?

What could be worse than the Y2K problem? No less a source than software maker Adobe gives the answer in the summer issue of its eponymous magazine: “Paper documents, especially those made before the use of pulp (and the introduction of acid), can remain in good condition for hundreds of years, but a typical digital file on a CD-ROM might stay fully intact for only 30 years.

Hardware and software can become obsolete even more quickly. Like the millennium bug, digital storage is taking time to register as a serious problem, but it could be far more potent: huge amounts of knowledge recorded in the late 20th century exist only in digital form. Obviously, important digital files must be transferred every few years to fresh disks. . . .

“But skeptics claim that there won’t be time or money to make sure all that important data get transferred—there’s just too much of it. The best way, they say, to preserve a digital file? Print it on acid free paper.”



## *Our Educational Ambivalence*

America's schools must be doing at least a few things right. After all, despite their well-publicized shortcomings, the United States is—for the moment, at least—the undisputed economic and cultural champion of the world. There are many other explanations for this success, such as the American openness to immigrant talent and an economic system that gives generous scope to the ambition of individuals. But surely our educational system has something to do with it.

It's not difficult to pinpoint some of the system's strengths. Higher education in this country, for all its flaws, is the envy of the world. We make up for a lot of lost intellectual ground when the kids go off to college, and especially when they enter graduate school for more specialized training. Nothing seems to concentrate the American mind like the need to pay the rent. If international test comparisons are to be believed, moreover, the American system also performs relatively well in the earliest years of education, up to junior high school. But then relative performance begins to slip, and by graduation day American kids are clinging to some of the lower rungs of the international ladder. (See the chart on page 47.)

What happens in those middle years—the last years of formal education for many students—is one of the great mysteries of American education. The stacks of educational research produced over the last couple of decades yield little enlightenment. Experts tend to change the subject when queried. I suspect that one reason for this silence is that many of the answers lead straight to the “soft” realm of culture and values.

We missed one opportunity for a national discussion of educational values some years ago when controversy exploded around a study showing that black students were hampered by a cultural prejudice of their peers: doing well was seen as “acting white.” It was an important discovery, but what wasn't much

examined in the ensuing controversy was the assumption that whites themselves “act white.” The truth is that Americans of all kinds are deeply ambivalent about academic achievement.

One source of mixed emotions is American egalitarianism and its noxious sibling, the spirit of conformity. Over the past summer, I watched some overachieving suburban parents worry (along with my wife and me) over whether to send their children to an enriched public school program. Beneath the prudent questions—would the additional challenges be good for the child?—there was a strong and unexpected undercurrent of another sort, a worry that committing the children so completely to academic pursuits might deprive them of a “normal” childhood. By junior and senior high school, the forces of “normalcy” are cresting inside the schools, pushed along by those two great forces for adolescent conformity, hormones and popular culture. High achievers still tend to earn as much ignominy as honor.

More educational ambivalence grows out of our cultural decision to value schooling almost solely in economic terms, reducing the intrinsic rewards of learning to a mere afterthought. If the purpose of an education is to get a good job, schooling itself becomes a job, or very like one. There's merit in this approach, yet in the back of their minds many parents also want to spare their children this introduction to the rat race. They watch with a certain dismay as the homework piles higher with every new school year and the academic stresses weigh ever heavier. Perhaps they decide not to insist on that extra hour with the books—there will be time enough for all that later in life, they think.

These forms of educational ambivalence are deeply rooted in soil far from the classroom door. They ought to serve as reminders that the improvement of American education cannot end with the renovation of the schoolhouse.

—Steven Lagerfeld

WQ

# The Environmental Factor

*Do the world's environmental problems threaten American national security? A look inside a decade-long debate.*

*by Geoffrey D. Dabelko*

It should have been the best of times for a little-known assistant professor at the University of Toronto. In a lengthy 1994 *Atlantic Monthly* article that electrified readers all the way to the White House, journalist Robert Kaplan not only paid homage to the research of then 37-year-old Thomas Homer-Dixon but compared him to George F. Kennan, the architect of the containment doctrine that guided the United States during a half-century of cold war. Citing Homer-Dixon's 1991 work in the academic journal *International Security*—"even bolder and more detailed" than Kennan's "X" article of 1947—Kaplan sketched a dark view of the global future in which growing scarcities of water, forests, arable land, and fish, along with rapid population growth and other ills, would breed civil strife and war. The environment will be *the* national security issue of the 21st century, Kaplan declared, and Homer-Dixon held the keys to understanding it.

Kaplan's own travels through the chaos of West Africa, where he saw governments and entire societies in places such as Sierra Leone and Togo crumbling under the weight of unbearable environmental and demographic stresses, seemed to bring these academic hypotheses to life. "Africa may be as relevant to the future character of world politics as the Balkans were a hundred years ago, prior to the two Balkan wars and the First World War," he suggested.

"The Coming Anarchy," as Kaplan's arti-

cle was called, touched a nerve in Washington. Vice President Al Gore asked the Central Intelligence Agency to oversee a systematic investigation of the causes of "state failure" it described. Samuel R. Berger, then deputy national security adviser, scheduled a hurried meeting to address the issues Kaplan had raised. Homer-Dixon became a regular on flights between Washington and Toronto.

The article appeared at an opportune moment, arriving on the heels of a series of foreign-policy crises far afield of usual American interests: the 1993 military debacle in Somalia, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and the simmering civil war in Liberia. President Bill Clinton suggested that "the coming anarchy" might be the successor vision to Mel Gibson's emblematic depiction of a broken and lawless post-nuclear holocaust world in the film *The Road Warrior* (1982). American foreign policy officials were struggling to understand the roots of these conflicts, casting about for a new vision to replace containment as a guide in the post-Cold War world. Was the violence in the less developed world finally sufficiently menacing to warrant sustained attention from security thinkers? Were the long-ignored environmental and population crises in these areas finally reaching a boiling point?

As they read Kaplan's account of anarchy in West Africa, moreover, officials in Washington were faced with what seemed a parallel case much closer to home. For years



*Capital Growth* (1997), by *Martin Langford*

there had been a steady influx of impoverished refugees from Haiti, but in 1994 it suddenly turned into a torrent, as thousands of Haitians attempted the desperate raft trip to southern Florida. In October, President Clinton felt compelled to respond, ordering the U.S. military not only to stem the tide of refugees but to restore the democratically elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power in Port-au-Prince. Haiti's dismal ecological state seemed a likely root cause of its problems. Decades of rapid population growth had pushed poor farmers onto ever more marginal lands, stripping the island nation of its forests and the precious topsoil they protected. As the lives of hillside

farmers tending tiny plots became increasingly precarious, Haitians migrated by the thousands to the cities, where overcrowding and deteriorating conditions provoked protests and riots. The instability weakened Aristide's government and encouraged the 1991 military coup against him—and ultimately helped spur the exodus to Florida.

**B**ut inevitably the “coming anarchy” bubble burst. Kaplan's thesis was beset by critics on all sides—by defense planners and intellectuals concerned about diverting money and attention from the Pentagon's core war-fighting mission (was the army supposed to plant trees on

Haitian hillsides?), as well as by environmentalists who objected to the idea of defining the environment as a security issue. Some academics criticized Homer-Dixon for going beyond his evidence—he spoke in Kaplan’s article of proliferating dictatorships and predicted the collapse of India and Pakistan. Most important, Kaplan’s “anarchy” thesis suffered an obvious logical flaw. While poverty and environmental destruction were grievous problems in the less developed countries, most of them remained far from the complete collapse suffered in Haiti and West Africa. “The Coming Anarchy” looked to many critics like little more than a perverse form of travel journalism with intellectual window-dressing. It certainly was no guide to the world’s future.

The nature of the environment’s contribution to conflict—“sub-national, persistent, and diffuse,” to quote Homer-Dixon in one of his more characteristic cautious moments—also made responses difficult to devise and even harder to justify. There is something appealing about taking aim at the root causes of conflict, but reactive steps aimed at the symptoms (seal off the borders, and if that doesn’t work, send in the troops) always seem to take precedence. American foreign policy and security spending patterns strongly reflect that predilection—just over \$18 billion in 1997 for foreign aid (which includes military assistance) and more than \$300 billion for the Department of Defense and intelligence community.

Yes, there are meaningful connections between environmental problems and organized violence, many concluded, but in the backlash after Kaplan’s article, few were prepared to say that the environment plays a more significant role than the traditionally understood political, economic, and social causes of conflict. As the meltdown of Yugoslavia commanded more of its attention, the policy crowd moved on to other theories about the roots of conflict. Ethnicity and “the clash of civilizations,” as Harvard University’s Samuel Huntington put it in a

1993 article, now claimed the spotlight. (Kaplan added fuel to these fires as well with a 1993 book, *Balkan Ghosts*.) The job of figuring out precisely what role the environment does play as a source of conflict is now back in the hands of a growing group of scholars and specialists. A handful of these people work at places that represent the tentative institutionalization of environmental thinking in the traditional national security apparatus, such as the Pentagon’s Office of Environmental Security.

**T**he environment has often been used as a tool of war, from the salting of Carthage to the Russians’ scorched earth retreats before the armies of Napoleon and Hitler. Plato, mocking the notion of a republic of leisure, argued that such a regime would soon resort to war to satisfy its taste for more space and natural resources. But sustained thinking about the environment-conflict connection is a product only of the last few decades. While clashes over non-renewable resources such as oil or gold are as familiar as the Persian Gulf War, the question now is about the role of renewable resources such as water, fish, forests, and arable land.

Many of the first systematic thinkers took a sweeping view, speaking not only of new environmental challenges but of entirely new definitions of national security, as the Worldwatch Institute’s Lester Brown did in a 1977 monograph, *Redefining National Security*. Jessica Tuchman Mathews, now president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, argued in a much-noted 1989 article in *Foreign Affairs* that just as the meaning of national security was expanded during the 1970s “to include international economics as it became clear that the U.S. economy was . . . powerfully affected by economic policies in dozens of other countries,” so it would need to be enlarged in the 1990s to “include resource, environmental and demographic issues.” As a case in point she cited Haiti, observing that bulldozers were

> GEOFFREY D. LABELKO is director of the Environmental Change and Security Project at the Wilson Center and editor of the Project’s ECSP Report. He is coeditor with Ken Conca of *Green Planet Blues: Environmental Politics from Stockholm to Kyoto* (1998). Copyright © 1999 by Geoffrey D. Dabelko.



*The Cost of Progress (India, 1992), by Bhudev Bhagat*

needed to clear Port-au-Prince streets of topsoil swept off the mountains during the rainy season. “Until Haiti is reforested,” she predicted, “it will never be politically stable.” Former leaders Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway and Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union joined the argument, contending that the environment at least deserved to join economics and politics as a stabilizing third leg of the security stool.

In the less developed countries of the world, these ideas have elicited mixed emotions. Obtaining food and water is a daily struggle for the world’s 800 million malnourished people, and according their problems the high priority of a security issue obviously has great appeal. But leaders in Brasília, Cairo, and Kuala Lumpur also fear that such an approach will invite violations of their national sovereignty as outside powers intervene to “help.” They gave a frosty reception, for example, to Gorbachev’s 1988 proposal to complement the blue-helmeted armed forces serving under the United Nations with

a “Green Helmet” force to react to natural catastrophes and environmental crises.

Also skeptical of arguments for “securitizing” environmental problems are a number of scholars such as Daniel Deudney, a political scientist at Johns Hopkins University. Long before Kaplan’s article appeared, Deudney had attacked the notion that environmental scarcities necessarily breed conflict and scolded his fellow environmentalists. “The nationalist and militarist mindsets closely associated with ‘national security’ thinking directly conflict with the core of the environmentalist world view. Harnessing these sentiments for a ‘war on pollution’ is a dangerous and probably self-defeating enterprise,” he declared in 1990.

**M**athews and others who argued for a broad redefinition of security sought to place the physical health of the individual or the society, rather than just the territory of the state, at the center of what was to be secured. Beginning in

the early 1990s, Homer-Dixon and other “second wave” scholars and practitioners—many based in peace research institutes in Scandinavia, Switzerland, and Germany—narrowed the scope to focus on environmental stress that causes or triggers violence: what environmental problems breed armed threats to territory and populations? Their findings have been surprising.

It is an article of faith, for example, that the world faces imminent “water wars.” Former United Nations secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali once predicted that “the next war in the Middle East will be over water, not oil.” But scrutiny of the historical record reveals that scarcities of renewable environmental resources have rarely been a direct cause of wars *between* states. There are arguably only two relevant cases in recent history. During the intermittent Anglo-Icelandic “Cod War” of the 1970s, a dispute over access to dwindling fish stocks, British and Icelandic vessels played chicken in the frigid waters off Iceland. The 100-hour Honduran-Salvadoran “Soccer War” of 1969 was a far more serious affair. Sparked by soccer match incidents, its root causes lay in overcrowding and severe deforestation that over the years had driven thousands of Salvadorans across the border to an unwelcoming Honduras. The brief war left several thousand dead.

**E**nvironmental woes do, however, contribute to conflicts *within* nations—and the overwhelming majority of armed conflicts occurring around the world today are internal battles. Writing in 1994, Homer-Dixon pointed to an environmental influence on two types of internal conflicts: “ethnic clashes arising from population migration and deepened social cleavages due to environmental scarcity,” and “civil strife (including insurgency, banditry, and coups d’état) caused by environmental scarcity that affects economic productivity and, in turn, people’s livelihoods, the behavior of elite groups, and the ability of states to meet these changing demands.” Researchers at Homer-Dixon’s Peace and Conflict Studies Program at the University of Toronto (where he is now an associate pro-

fessor of political science and director of the program) and the Swiss Environmental Conflicts Project have identified and studied more than 50 cases.

The states of Assam and Tripura in eastern India, for example, have been inundated in recent decades by tens of thousands of Bangladeshi immigrants seeking to escape flooding, drought, and famine in their low-lying, land-poor homeland. The newcomers altered the local balances in landownership, political power, ethnicity, and religion, stirring local resentments, riots, and an anti-immigrant movement that advocated independence from India and deportation of “alien land-grabbers.” The violence, which was particularly intense in the early 1980s, has claimed thousands of lives.

**I**n Chiapas, Mexico, another set of environmental disturbances—soil erosion and deforestation, along with rapid population growth among the local Indian populations—helped fuel the angry demands for land reform that propelled the 1994 Zapatista uprising. The Zapatistas’ attacks shocked Mexico and the world, speeding the peso crisis that rocked not only Mexico but world financial markets.

Yet for every Chiapas, there is at least one other case where severe environmental stress does not lead to conflict—Taiwan with its severely polluted air and water, Madagascar with its rapid loss of biodiversity, or Costa Rica with its appalling deforestation. During the second wave, researchers asked only how the environment might contribute to conflict, not why it might do so in some cases and not in others. This is one of the subjects of the current “third wave” of research.

Efforts in the third wave include the continuing statistical work of American scholars on the U.S. government-sponsored State Failure Task Force and other quantitative research conducted by Norwegian peace researchers Wenche Hauge, Tanja Ellingsen, and Nils Petter Gleditsch. These massive number-crunching efforts seek to find correlations between “state failures” or “civil wars” and environmental stress. Both studies are quick to identify other political, economic, and social variables as more critical than

the environment. They highlight instead the weaker indirect effects of the environment on other factors that correlate with state failure or civil war, such as infant mortality and other quality of life indicators.

They also seek to identify both the specific vulnerabilities of states and what researchers call their “capacity,” or ability to cope with environmental challenges. These are difficult statistical exercises, hampered by the absence of even the most basic data on such matters as deforestation, air quality, and water quality. For vulnerability, one can ask, as the State Failure Task Force did, What proportion of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture? How much storm damage is experienced each year? For capacity: How professional or corrupt are the state bureaucracies? How developed are rail and road systems? In his new book, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence* (1999), Homer-Dixon points to the importance of addressing the “ingenuity gap” many less developed countries suffer.

In a sense, this focus on the ability of governments and societies to cope with environmental challenges merely puts the problem back in terms of age-old concerns. The ability to adapt has always been paramount in the survival of peoples, nations, and civilizations. But it also does something new if until now you have been thinking only in terms of targeting root causes (environmental stress) or obvious symptoms (violence).

Homer-Dixon argues that “the world will probably see a steady increase in the incidence of violent conflict that is caused, at least in part, by environmental scarcity.” This is the kind of statement that has earned him criticism in the past for violating the scholarly taboo against “using the future as evidence.” Looking over the horizon is the business of practitioners and politicians, these critics maintain, while scholars properly confine themselves to the evidence of the past and present. Yet, at the same time, policymakers complain that Homer-Dixon and others fail to offer specific policy recommendations. It may be a good sign that both sides are unhappy, a sign that progress toward some kind of new understanding is under way.

An important question now is how the

environment and conflict research will be used. Will the more industrialized countries use this knowledge to anticipate conflicts and attempt to seal them off from the rest of the world, or will they try to fashion cooperative remedies for environmental and demographic problems and strengthen the ability of less developed countries to meet challenges?

Some encouraging signs suggest that the industrial powers will take the wiser way. Earlier this year, for example, a pilot study on environment and security by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization included in its recommendations a call for environmental and developmental aid. Recognizing shared environmental problems—which are in a sense common enemies of our own creation—holds the potential to bring countries together. The promise can be glimpsed not only in all-encompassing efforts such as the 1987 Montreal Protocol on ozone depletion, but in much smaller realms. In southern Africa, joint water projects have eased tensions between semi-arid South Africa and its once hostile neighbors. Despite intense differences over human rights, Taiwan, spying charges, and other issues during the last three years, the United States and China have managed to sign more than 20 cooperative bilateral agreements involving water, energy, forest, and other environmental projects.

Our new understanding of the impact of environmental challenges tends to blur some of the hard and fast distinctions between traditional definitions of security and more ambitious modern ones. Helping a Haiti or a Sierra Leone may not yield an immediately identifiable payoff in averting a particular conflict, yet it does aid the cause of peace and tranquility. In the future, a definition of security that leans exclusively on conflict and its prevention will be too cramped to accommodate the reality of a world in which renewable resources will be ever scarcer and in which it will be increasingly difficult to seal ourselves off—morally, emotionally, and physically—from poverty, disease, and environmental degradation in the less developed nations.

# Call Me Mister

*In which the author laments the demise of formal address and other useful ceremonial distinctions.*

*by George Watson*



Some years ago, when T. S. Eliot was the grand old man of English letters, a younger poet, Kathleen Raine, wrote a letter to a newspaper complaining about the growing lack of formality in London literary life.

She had just had a letter from an aspiring young poet she hardly knew addressing her as “Dear Katherine.” So the offense was double. Her name was Kathleen, after all, and in any case they were not on first-name terms. Worse still, the letter writer was asking her to show his poems to someone he called Tom Eliot, whom he had never met. It was all going too far, said Miss Raine, too far and too fast, and unless someone protested it would all go further still.

Which it did. But the rot had set in much earlier. On November 12, 1940, as the danger of a Nazi invasion receded, Winston Churchill issued a memo from 10 Downing Street condemning the use

of first names. “The Prime Minister has noticed that the habit of Private Secretaries and others addressing each other by their Christian names about matters of an official character is increasing, and ought to be stopped.” First names should only be used in brief notes, he went on, or in “personal and private” communications. That shows how soon the decline started. Churchill, who was by then in his sixties, already belonged to another age. The last British prime minister to enter the House of Commons during the reign of Queen Victoria, who died in 1901, Churchill seems also to have been the first whom his sovereign addressed in letters by his first name. During the war, King George VI often wrote to him affectionately as “My dear Winston.” There is no reason to suppose Churchill resented it. But then, his objection to informality among officials had a practical motive: “It is hard enough to fol-

low people by their surnames.”

By the end of Churchill’s century, however, informality had gone much further, and it is no longer realistic to expect to be addressed by a last name at all, with or without a Mister. It is first names all the way. Perhaps that helps to explain the vast popularity of costume dramas based on classic novels such as Jane Austen’s or E. M. Forster’s. The appeal of such films is anthropological, among other things, since they tell of a world of manners in the last century, or early in this, hardly less remote than that of the Trobriand Islands. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, the Bennets, who have been married for years and have several daughters of marriageable age, address each other with evident affection as Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet. That probably leaves a young audience gasping in wonder. Why did people ever behave like that? Many who watch such films, it seems clear, have not just forgotten formality but the whole case for formality, which goes far wider than forms of address. So perhaps this is the moment to make that case.

**F**ormality and informality are contrastive systems, and the one exists only by virtue of the other. If you abolish formality, then you abolish informality too. Those who say they like things to be informal should consider that argument closely. It is not only forms that are lost when they are forgotten. It is intimacy too. That is why, if you totally abandon conventions in favor of social simplicity, you find conventions re-entering the back door. In the 40 years I have known the United States, as a British visitor, I have watched middle-class America pass through several such changes. In the 1950s, as if conscious that the new simplicity was making life dull, which it was, the American middle class dedicated itself briefly to the interesting task of recomplicating it, and a visitor could find life in the United States something of a social minefield. Alistair Cooke used to call it “Galloping Gentility.” Then it turned simple again in the 1960s, as a

dogmatic protest against a repressive society; then more formal again. That may surprise Americans who usually think of their social life as rootedly simple, compared with that of Europe, but a British visitor can find its minor ceremonials exacting, and had better get them right. Decorum is a matter of little things, and little things can mean a lot.

The British, for example, do not necessarily shake hands with a host on leaving a party; in America the gesture is obligatory, and its omission can be resented. Nor do the British repeat a name on being introduced, which to that small extent makes life simpler in the United Kingdom, where the name is in any case often inaudible and one is not necessarily supposed to care. If Americans think their social life informal, they should think again. It has plenty of rules, along with its own characteristic table manners. Some of them are nationally distinctive, and strangers had better try to observe them or at least take note of them. But then it is a law of existence that one only notices a rule when it is unfamiliar. Rules you already know, such as saying please and thank-you or knowing how to use a knife and fork, are obeyed without thinking, and cease to exist, in the mind, as rules at all.

Some issues are subtler than shaking hands. The trouble with being told, “You don’t have to worry, we are all quite informal here,” is that the statement can easily mask a silent certitude that rules will in fact be observed. A visitor to an East Coast university was once assured at a faculty party, where first names were universal, that everybody was treated equally—no nonsense, for example, about the college president arriving last, as royalty does, or leaving first. There was a good deal of happy laughter, in which the president joined, at the thought of institutions where such rules are kept. Then the visitor noticed that the president had arrived last, and, incidentally, left first.

Another aspect to the cult of the informal in America is its myth of youth, which Bernard Shaw once remarked was

among its oldest traditions. There is a tendency to think that the United States is a recent institution. The myth may have weakened lately, but it is still there, and you can still astonish people by telling them that the United States has the oldest constitution in the world or, to drop a real bombshell, that the White House, which was rebuilt after Washington, D.C. was burned in 1814, is older than Buckingham Palace. The earliest surviving portions of Buckingham Palace, which are invisible from the street, date only from the 1820s, and what you see from the outside, if you are prepared to crowd in among all those Japanese tourists, dates from around 1913, including its famous balcony. That is a truth that goes against the grain, and if you have come to England to see old things, that is not what you want to be told.

**I**n Europe, Old World courtesy can be sadly lacking, and the decay of formal address is only part of a wider pattern. E. M. Forster, shortly before he died in 1970, remarked that he had stopped writing fiction because he did not understand modern manners. In his Cambridge youth, young men had walked arm in arm and addressed each other by their last names; now they did not walk arm in arm, and addressed each other by their first names. That must have made him feel he wanted to retire. But if the formal and the informal depend on each other, then first names have by now lost their power to make any point at all. Once upon a time their initial use felt like ice breaking, especially between a man and a woman. In *The Eustace Diamonds* (1873), Anthony Trollope tells how, when Frank Greystock proposes marriage to Lucy Morris, who already loves him, she begins her letter of acceptance with “Dear Mr. Greystock,” and it was a matter of great consideration for her, Trollope remarks, to get even as far as that.

But after biting her pen for ten minutes, during which she pictured to herself how pleasant it would be to call him Frank when he should have told her so, and had found, upon repeated whispered trials, that of all names it was the pleasantest to pronounce, she decided upon refraining from writing it now.

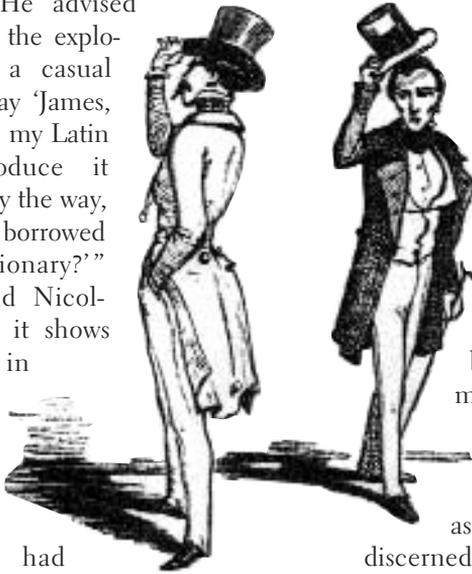
No doubt she did manage it in the end, after they were safely married—the world had moved on from Jane Austen’s time—and there are other trials of courage the heroines of English fiction have never had to face at all. Pronouns, for example. English is the only European language with only one pronoun of address, which is “you.” On the continent of Europe, where there are two, there are tough decisions to be taken every day, and you had better get them right. In northern India, there are three pronouns of address, which occasionally baffles even Indians. But one can always walk around a pitfall. One solution, a student at the University of Delhi once told me, is to address a total stranger in English.

First names were once a shock, though sometimes a pleasant one. Virginia Woolf, in a letter to Siegfried Sassoon in which she first called him Siegfried, calls it uncompromisingly “the horrid plunge,” which amounts to asking him to forgive her, as he did. In English boys’ schools down to the Second World War, last names were in universal use, and even to know the first name of another boy could feel like acquiring a guilty secret that could one day be used to mock him. But then a lot of English first names from the 19th century, such as Archibald and Marmaduke, suddenly looked ridiculous in the 20th, for unknown reasons, which perhaps explains the sudden fashion among authors for initials on title pages:

> GEORGE WATSON, a Fellow of St. John’s College at Cambridge University, is the author of *The Lost Literature of Socialism* (1998). Copyright © 1999 by George Watson.

P. G. Wodehouse, I. A. Richards, C. S. Lewis. I only once heard Lewis called Clive, which was indeed his baptismal name, and that was by a colleague who was his contemporary. In practice he expected to be called Jack.

On the other hand, the “horrid plunge” sometimes had to be taken. The question was how. When Harold Nicolson’s son Nigel was a schoolboy at Eton in the 1930s, he wrote to his father asking how he could most tactfully switch to calling his best friend James. Harold Nicolson, a helpful and loving father, had an answer to that. He advised Nigel to “smother the explosive word” with a casual phrase. “Do not say ‘James, have you borrowed my Latin dictionary?’ Introduce it more gently: ‘Oh by the way, James, have you borrowed my Latin dictionary?’” That is in Harold Nicolson’s diaries, and it shows that even if in English there is only one pronoun of address, subtle problems still remain. But then Harold Nicolson had been a diplomat, and for subtle problems he had subtle solutions.



Where do we go next? Some would say that formal address is now forever dead and buried, that we should accept it by shifting to other ceremonial distinctions such as wearing neckties for dinner, if not always for lunch, opening doors for ladies and older men, and deferring to the opinions of social superiors. Manners change, but remain manners. The dogs bark and the caravan moves on. Nobody bows anymore, for example, though it was common in Europe down to the 19th century and one of the reasons, as the poet Keats tells in a letter of May 1818, why his brother George emigrated to farm in the United States. He disliked

bowing, or rather the obligation to bow, and “I would sooner he should till the ground than bow to a customer.” The curtsey seems to have gone the same way as the bow—gone with the wind—though it was once customary in the Old South.

All this once seemed of enormous importance, and perhaps was. When Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States in the 1830s and wrote a famous book called *Democracy in America*, the country did not yet have universal adult, or indeed male, suffrage, even in the northern states. But then by democracy Tocqueville meant the abolition of hereditary rank and the manners that habitually accompanied it, and he saw America as a land where differences of rank no longer counted, as he believed, and had not yet been replaced by the majesty of the law. The natural fear of such a society was anarchy. The more realistic fear, as Tocqueville perceptively discerned, was an excess of social conformity. Leveling could make for a dull, uncreative land.

Perhaps he was right to be worried. Americans still do not sense the majesty of law, though they take prudent care to stay out of its way, and formal address has mostly gone the way of the curtsey and the bow. Social conformity, many would say, is here to stay, and I no longer confidently expect to be addressed as Mister, on either side of the Atlantic, though I am not against it. But though much is lost, much remains, and other formalities expressive of social distance are still firmly in place and likely to remain so. I hope in my time to take advantage of all of them. I wear a tie for dinner, if not for lunch, expect younger men to open doors for me, and above all I expect them to defer to my opinions.



*"Shall the people rule?" was Bryan's slogan in his third presidential campaign in 1908.*

# The Forgotten Forerunner

*William Jennings Bryan survives in popular memory chiefly as the much ridiculed figure of the Scopes trial. But he was much more than that. The first celebrity-politician and thrice the Democrats' presidential nominee, he turned his party into the standard-bearer of modern liberalism.*

*by Michael Kazin*

**I**n the United States, few things are more durable than the historical images of our national leaders. Despite the arduous efforts of debunkers, both scholarly and polemical, George Washington remains, for most Americans, the selfless father of his country, Abraham Lincoln the self-made man who emancipated the slaves, and Franklin Roosevelt the empathetic leader who ended the Great Depression and won the antifascist war. Negative perceptions have similarly long lives, to the chagrin of those who've written revisionist biographies of the likes of Herbert Hoover and Richard Nixon.

On the hazy image of William Jennings Bryan hangs a sign that reads "old-fashioned." Thrice the unsuccessful Democratic nominee for president (in 1896, 1900, and 1908), Bryan is easy to portray as a tribune of lost causes. The man known as the Great Commoner defended the inter-

ests of small farmers, railed against the speculators of Wall Street, crusaded to ban the saloon, and denounced the teaching of evolution in public schools. His clumsy performance at the 1925 Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee (followed, just days later, by his death), earned him the derision of leading intellectuals and journalists. H. L. Mencken's scathing postmortem on Bryan as an agrarian charlatan, the would-be "Pope of the peasants," has echoed through the decades.

Yet for all his defeats, electoral and otherwise, Bryan was more a pioneer than an opponent of political change. Although he was not blessed with a powerful intellect, he and his career in politics gave early notice of two of the most significant features of American political life in the 20th century: the empowering of the federal government to regulate corporate power and, in limited ways, to redistribute income; and the building of a mass follow-

ing on the strength of celebrity. Moreover, with Congress today urging that the Ten Commandments be posted in school-rooms, Bryan's fundamentalist stand no longer seems quite so out of step with our political culture.

The lifelong Democrat was the key figure in transforming his party from a bulwark of conservative thinking and policy into the standard-bearer of modern liberalism. In 1896, after a short legal career and two terms as a Nebraska member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Bryan won his first presidential nomination by eloquently defying Grover Cleveland, the incumbent president of his own party. Confronted by the worst depression the United States had ever endured, Cleveland rebuffed pleas by wheat and cotton farmers for debt relief and by unemployed workers for jobs—but rushed federal troops to Chicago to break an 1894 national railroad strike led by future Socialist leader Eugene V. Debs.

In 1896, Bryan became chief spokesman for insurgent rank-and-file Democrats and adherents of the Populist party (including Debs) who vowed to reverse Cleveland's disastrous course. Bryan demanded that the state intervene to help "the struggling masses" of workers, farmers, and small businessmen and rein in the power of their employers and corporate competitors. "There are two ideas of government," declared the Nebraskan at that year's Democratic national convention. "There are those who believe that, if you will only legislate to make the well-to-do prosperous, their prosperity will leak through on those below. The Democratic idea, however, has been that if you legislate to make the masses prosperous, their prosperity will find its way up through every class that rests upon them."

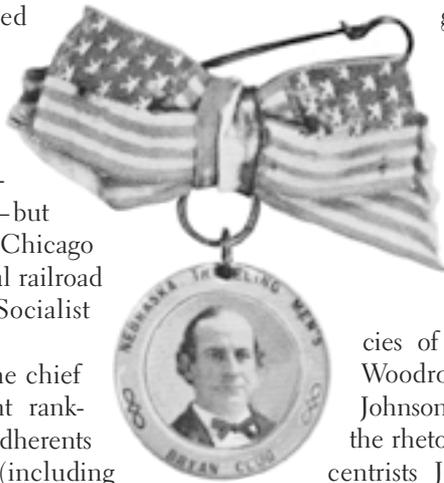
Bryan won the nomination (as well as that of the Populist party) but lost that election to William McKinley, who had a war chest 10 times larger and posed as "the advance agent of prosperity." Although the turnout of eligible voters (more than 80 percent) was among the highest ever, the underfinanced Democrat lost thousands of votes to fraud and employer intimidation.

Despite the outcome, the conviction at the heart of Bryan's candidacy lived on in more than a half-century of public rhetoric and action. The big issue of the 1896 election—whether to adhere to the gold standard or to inflate the currency by basing it on both gold and silver—soon faded. But

the idea that the federal government should routinely take the side of wage earners and other citizens of modest means (known in Bryan's day as "the producing classes") grew in popularity and was the basis for the domestic poli-

cies of liberal presidents from Woodrow Wilson to Lyndon Johnson. (It also was evident in the rhetoric, if not the actions, of centrists Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton.)

Though Bryan was unable to win the White House, by remaking the Democrats into a vigorous party of reform he set the stage for the men who did. Under his leadership, Democrats first pushed for energetic antitrust prosecutions, laws to limit working hours and set minimum wages, measures to subsidize farmers and protect union organizers, and a federal income tax (for many years, imposed mainly on the rich). Conservatives in his party, backed by wealthy men such as financier August Belmont and including the redoubtable machine of Tammany Hall, refused to accept many of the changes. In 1904—



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four years after Bryan's second loss to McKinley — they wrested control of the Democratic convention away from the Great Commoner and his allies and nominated for president one of their own, Alton Parker, a respected New York judge. That fall, Parker suffered a crushing defeat, winning fewer states and more than a million fewer popular votes than Bryan had in either 1896 or 1900. Laissez-faire Democrats would never be able to dominate the party again.

In 1908, Bryan faced only minor opposition on his way to a third presidential nomination. That year, he again proved

a political pioneer, winning the active support of the American Federation of Labor, headed by Samuel Gompers—and thus forging the bond between unions and liberal Democrats that has lasted into the postindustrial age. Herbert Hoover once snapped that the New Deal was “Bryanism under new words and methods,” proving that bitterness need not impair one’s historical vision.

Bryan’s progressive populism also led him to champion causes that did not gain majority support in his time and remain controversial in ours. He argued, for example, that private businesses should be banned from giving any money at all to political campaigns. “Big contributions from those who are seeking Government favors,” Bryan warned in 1924, “are a menace to honest government.” His solution was public financing—10 cents for each vote an established party received in the last federal election and the same amount



*Though alone on a burning deck in this 1896 cartoon, Bryan won 47 percent of the popular vote to McKinley’s 51 percent.*

for each certified member of a new party. “This would,” Bryan predicted, “prevent the obligating of parties or candidates to the predatory interests.” Americans today might not endorse his particular plan, but they would certainly applaud his determination to get big money out of politics.

A century after Bryan’s heyday, many assume that candidates or officeholders espousing such liberal views will be secular minded, or at least careful to wall off their religious beliefs from their politics. The Great Commoner would have considered any such separation both illogical and immoral. He was raised in a family of devout Protestants who prayed three times daily and regarded the Bible as the foremost guide to correct behavior, both public and private. Though, like all good Democrats, he idolized Thomas Jefferson, perhaps the least pious man ever to occu-



*Critics decried Bryan's use of Christian symbols and rhetoric.*

py the White House, Bryan routinely drew on Scripture to underline the righteous sincerity of his own political views. “If my party has given me the basis of my political beliefs,” he concluded in 1924, speaking at his last Democratic convention, “my Bible has given me the foundations of a faith that has enabled me to stand for the right as I saw it.”

**B**ryan brought his version of democracy by the Good Book to bear on every major issue he cared about. In 1899, to press the case that employers should pay higher wages, he declared, “God made all men, and he did not make some to crawl on hands and knees and others to ride upon their backs.” A year later, while opposing, on anticolonialist grounds, the U.S. war against Filipinos fighting for their independence, he asked: “If true Christianity consists in carrying out in our daily lives the teachings

of Christ, who will say that we are commanded to civilize with dynamite and proselyte with the sword?” In 1908, to underline the urgency of breaking up trusts, he told a Carnegie Hall audience, “I insist that the commandment, ‘Thou shalt not steal,’ applies as much to the monopolist as to the highwayman.”

Bryan routinely applied his fundamentalist faith to social maladies. While rejecting the liberal interpretation of the Bible espoused by some Social Gospelers, he warmly agreed with the practical remedies proposed by such figures as Baptist theologian Walter Rauschenbusch, who

called for churches to side with the urban poor. Bryan, a man from the Great Plains, did not move in the world of municipal reformers and settlement house workers that was the crucible of the Social Gospel. But he backed their causes and worked with the Federal Council of Churches, founded in 1908 to coordinate their activities.

Where Bryan did part company with Protestant liberals was in his insistence that the religious creed of the majority always ought to prevail in the public sphere. This led him to take positions that provoked the scorn of Mencken and other, less iconoclastic critics. Bryan was firmly convinced that any nation that allowed destructive, un-Christian practices to flourish was on the road to ruin. Few Social Gospelers objected when he directed this indictment against the liquor “trust.” After all, the demand for prohibition enjoyed support from nearly every Protestant denomination in the

country. More controversial was Bryan's proposal that states mandate Bible reading in public schools. And his decision, in the early 1920s, to throw his declining energies into the crusade against Darwinism tarred him ever after as an apostle of ignorance.

One need not defend Bryan's role as chief prosecutor in the case against John Scopes for violating a Tennessee law against the teaching of evolution in the public schools. But one should recognize that it sprang from the same spirit of Christian empathy that motivated his support for wage earners and farmers and his denunciation of corporate power and imperial conquest.

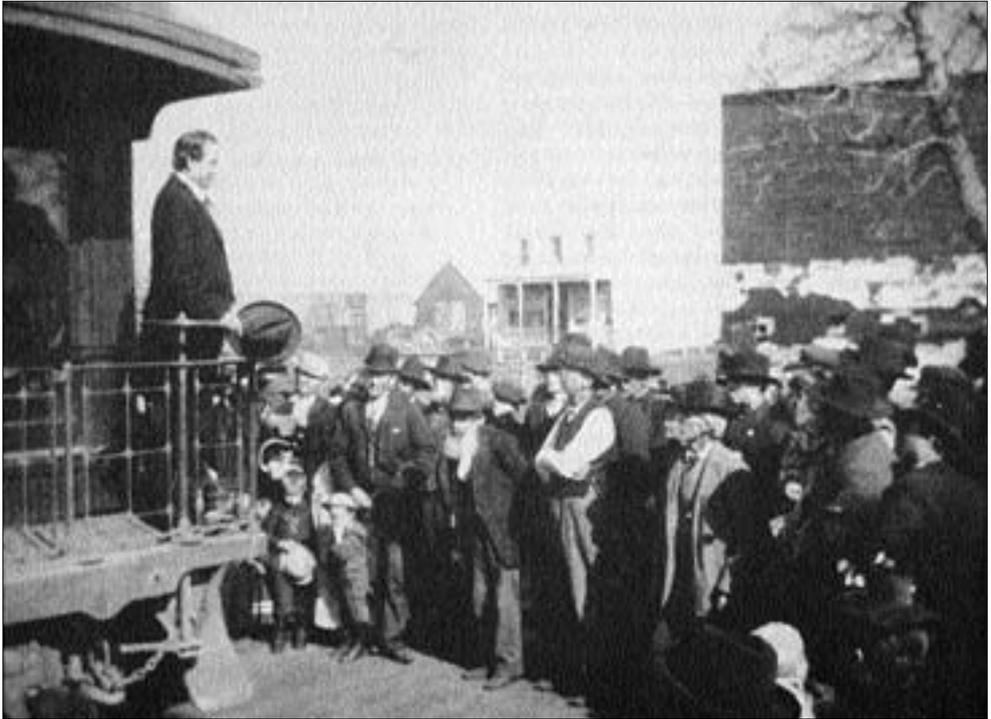
Bryan objected to evolutionary theory on the grounds of what might be called sentimental democracy. He feared that agnostic intellectuals were seeking to substitute a cruel belief in the "survival of the fittest" for faith in a loving God—the only basis for moral and altruistic conduct that most ordinary people had. Bryan, like many other Americans at the time, thought that Darwinism implied social Darwinism, particularly a belief in eugenics, promoted by influential scientists as the surest way to improve the human race. The consequence, the evangelical populist predicted (in a speech he did not live to deliver), would be "a system under which a few supposedly superior intellects, self-appointed, would direct the mating and the movements of the mass of mankind—

an impossible system!" Hitler's excursion into eugenics only a decade later suggests that Bryan's fear was not entirely unfounded.

A few figures on the contemporary religious right have embraced the Great Commoner as a pioneer in their own struggle to remoralize politics. In 1994 Ralph Reed, then chief strategist of the Christian Coalition, placed Bryan alongside Martin Luther King, Jr., as one of the great American champions of "religious dissent." Certainly, the Nebraskan's campaign against Darwinism didn't expire with him. Kansas opted this summer to delete virtually any mention of evolution from the state's science curriculum. Numerous school boards have bowed to grassroots pressure and now grant equal time to Genesis and natural selection.



*Cartoonists were often unkind to Bryan, but their endless attention helped to turn him into a national celebrity.*



*Bryan's whistlestop campaign in 1896 was a first for major-party presidential nominees.*

Last spring, Representative Tom DeLay (R.-Texas), one of the most powerful conservatives in Congress, laid some of the blame for the massacre in Littleton, Colorado, on school systems that “teach the children that they are nothing but glorified apes.”

**B**ryan, of course, would blanch at DeLay’s hosannas to the free market and his contempt for labor unions. The America in which one could be both a prominent conservative in religion and a left-liberal in politics no longer exists. Even in Bryan’s heyday, fundamentalist Protestants split their votes between the major parties, neither of which had a monopoly on pietistic causes. But starting with the Scopes trial, the national press subjected fundamentalists to such ridicule that many gave up politics altogether and others withdrew to their Bible schools and denominational institutes to build strength for future challenges. In the 1930s, the Democrats under Franklin Roosevelt muted talk of evangelical moralism and welcomed, on

an equal basis, Americans of all religious faiths and none. Had Bryan lived another decade, he would have had to make a torturous choice between his party and the political demands of his faith.

Bryan did, however, presage the future in a way that goes beyond matters of legislation and ideology. He was the first celebrity politician in the modern sense—renowned for his personality and his communication skills as much as for the substance of his beliefs. Before Bryan’s 1896 campaign, no major-party nominee for president had toured the country, speaking to millions and shaking hands and sharing small talk with the crowds. Tradition required presidential candidates to maintain at least the appearance of a dignified distance from the hurly-burly of politics. But the Democrat needed to overcome the huge financial advantage enjoyed by his opponent, McKinley, who stayed on his front porch in Canton, Ohio, greeting a continual stream of citizen delegations traveling to see him gratis on the GOP’s money train.

The remarkable canvass during which Bryan traveled more than 18,000 miles and delivered as many as 36 speeches a day (resting, of course, on the Sabbath) proved to be a superb form of self-promotion. One newspaper dubbed him “the best advertised man the country has produced since the days of P. T. Barnum.” The 1896 campaign made Bryan a controversial but universally recognized figure who, for the rest of his life, was in constant demand as a public speaker, the subject of countless newspaper profiles, editorial cartoons, and silent newsreels. Even if they didn’t share his views, Americans enjoyed reading about the Commoner’s exploits and listening to his stem-winding oratory.

**B**ryan reveled in all the attention and knew how to stoke it. From the late 1890s to the early 1920s, his lengthy talks on political and religious subjects were always the top attraction on the Chautauqua circuits that wound through small towns in the Midwest and West; he also consistently drew big crowds in urban venues. Even in traditionally Republican towns, “Bryan Day” was a big occasion. At each stop on his schedule during a 1912 swing through Michigan, storekeepers and factory owners gave employees the day off, flag-draped autos paraded him through the streets, and a National Guard band serenaded the uncommon Commoner as he approached the big tent for his address. Bryan endeared himself to local planning committees by charging a flat fee of \$250 per speech, no matter how big the crowd.

The permanent campaign to boost his fortunes and his favorite issues was also waged in print. Starting in 1901, the once and future candidate published—from Lincoln, Nebraska—his own weekly newspaper (inevitably titled *The Commoner*), which boasted a circulation in excess of 100,000. Throughout his career, he also penned a steady stream of pieces for national magazines and big-city newspapers, as well as a dozen books rich in anecdote and aphorism—two

based on foreign trips undertaken, in part, to burnish his statesmanlike image. This man who had enjoyed his only electoral success as a congressional candidate from Nebraska in the early 1890s was seldom out of the public eye until his death more than three decades later. Bryan’s presidential nominations in 1900 and 1908, his status as the most stalwart reformer in his party, and his 1913 appointment as Woodrow Wilson’s secretary of state (a post he resigned in 1915 to protest the U.S. tilt away from neutralism before the country entered World War I) all depended on his ability to cultivate his status as an affable political star whose eloquence always made for good copy.

But the Commoner was one celebrity who did not take his nickname for granted. Bryan had risen to fame as a champion of “the struggling masses,” and that identity enabled him to build and retain a loyal following with which every other national politician had to contend. The most abundant evidence of how “Bryan’s people” viewed the world can be found in the huge volume of mail they sent to him, a sample of which is kept in the Library of Congress. Bryan received thousands of letters from ordinary Americans—craftsmen, self-employed professionals, farmers, traveling salesmen, homemakers, and a surprising number of children. The size and passion of this correspondence were unprecedented for a political figure never elected to the White House. Contrary to his agrarian image, Bryan’s correspondents were found as frequently in cities as in small towns and were spread across the nation, most numerous in the Middle West and thinnest in New England and the Deep South. The overwhelming majority were, like their hero, white Protestants from evangelical denominations. But until the eve of the Scopes trial his correspondents rarely expressed anger at those of other religious persuasions.

Often, in fact, Bryan’s followers portrayed their defeated champion as a man

ahead of his time, “an inspired prophet in the affairs of our nation,” as a Baptist minister put it in 1915. The Commoner seemed to them a paragon of honesty and principle in a public arena that had grown venal and mendacious. Frequently, correspondents mingled spiritual and secular images in ways that must have gratified their hero. Just after the 1896 election, W. R. Alexander, an unemployed printer from Des Moines, Iowa, wrote to Bryan, “Yesterday I took off the badge . . . which I had worn during the campaign and left it on the dresser.” His wife found the badge, “burst into tears,” and quickly pressed it within the pages of the family Bible. Later that day, the couple opened the book to find that the badge “rested” next to the 37th Psalm—which opens, “Fret not thyself because of evildoers. . . .” The message seemed self-evident to the couple, who had depleted their savings and were about to default on an \$800 mortgage. “We both read it and cried. . . . We feel that we have lost a near and dear friend in this campaign, but thank God he is not dead, but more determined than ever to lead us out.”

Adoration of Bryan could also spring from less desperate motivations. In the late 1890s, his handsome, virile likeness was familiar to anyone with access to a Democratic broadside or a partisan newspaper. The many letters he received in those years from Americans too young to vote often exhibited the kind of whimsical infatuation we now associate with fans of movie stars and rock musicians. In 1899, Texas teenager Ruby Gardner tried to kiss the Commoner when he passed through her hometown on a speaking tour. Bryan jokingly declined the offer, and the episode became an amusing item in the nation’s press. Soon after, Gardner wrote to her hero that “very proper old ladies” were upbraiding her, but, to her delight, “I am the recipient daily of letters from all over the country sympathising [sic] with me in my failure to kiss the great W. J. Bryan.” Youth rebellion could take rather innocent form in late Victorian America.

The object of all this affection had a large, if seldom appreciated, influence on

American political culture. Before the 1896 campaign, major-party presidential candidates considered it undignified to stump for themselves; partisan foot soldiers took the battle to the enemy, while aspirants for George Washington’s chair remained above the fray. After Bryan broke that tradition and almost scored an upset victory, future nominees increasingly found it necessary, even enjoyable, to let the voters judge them in the flesh.

Inevitably, the personal campaign tended to equate the man with his message. In 1900 Theodore Roosevelt, Republican candidate for vice president, made a point of traveling more miles and claiming to give more speeches than Bryan had four years before. The hero of the Spanish-American War regarded the populist Democrat as naive and dangerous, but he was quick to imitate Bryan’s oratorical marathons and relentless self-promotion. Later, as president, Roosevelt continued in the same fashion, becoming the first chief executive who routinely traveled around the country to speak to the public. TR’s great popularity as a “rhetorical president” was built on the same friendly but vigorously anticorporate image Bryan had pioneered.

**N**otwithstanding Roosevelt’s best efforts, the affable, go-to-the-people national campaign was, for decades, closely associated with progressive Democrats who followed Bryan’s lead, embracing the idea that theirs was the only party of and for the common people. Woodrow Wilson, with his restrained, professorial manner, was something of an exception. But from the late 1920s to the late 1960s (and again, in the 1990s, with Bill Clinton), every Democratic nominee for president played the happy warrior—cracking jokes, beaming for the cameras, flailing the rich and the comfortable before audiences of the insecure. During the 20th century, the GOP could produce only two candidates—a war hero, Dwight Eisenhower, and a movie star, Ronald Reagan—able to project a relaxed yet uplifting image on the stump and in the media.



*Bryan's clumsy performance at the 1925 Scopes trial, along with ridicule from defense lawyer Clarence Darrow and journalist H. L. Mencken, gave him the lasting image of an agrarian charlatan.*

The rise of the accessible, rhetorical chief executive has a structural element as well as a partisan one. As the governmental apparatus grew more bureaucratic and legislation more complex, Americans hankered for leaders who could make the enterprise of governing seem more personal and comprehensible. The electorate has struck an implicit bargain with the political class: if we can no longer understand or control much of what our government is doing, at least give us men and women to head it who can comfort us and, on occasion, provide a thrill.

Leadership by celebrities has its drawbacks, of course. The tendency—first exemplified by Bryan—to build a following that often confuses loyalty to the candidate with knowledge about the candidate's issues has only been magnified in the age of televised campaigning. Since the epochal campaign of 1896, American voters have expected or, at least, hoped to be moved by a presidential candidate

more than by the stated principles or program of the party to which he or she belongs. Such anticipation may have weakened the everyday practice of democracy, which requires citizens to draw inspiration from the routines of governance. These are seldom as entertaining as a speech by a master orator or a witty, 30-second spot.

So some blame or credit must be given to the great political evangelist for blazing the path that has led to our uncertain present. He was as liberal on social and economic policy as FDR, as consistent a political evangelist as Pat Robertson, and nearly as beloved a political celebrity as Ronald Reagan (though the latter was better at converting renown into votes). What is more, Bryan was the first in a line of ideologically stalwart candidates for president—Robert LaFollette, Barry Goldwater, George Wallace—whose crusades foreshadowed shifts in national policy. “He was one of the creative losers,” columnist George Will has remarked, “having left larger marks on the nation

than many a winner has done.” Why, then, does Bryan still get labeled a reactionary?

Part of the reason is the poor reputation of those who are viewed as trying to impose their moral standards on others. Hardly anyone at the end of the 20th century suggests that making alcoholic beverages illegal would solve the manifold problems associated with drinking. And, notwithstanding Tom DeLay’s recent remarks, no one of prominence in the Christian Right is eager to mount a serious challenge to the teaching of evolution. Americans remain among the most religiously observant people on earth, but most have also accepted the reality of their nation as a quilt of pluralisms—creedal, cultural, and demographic—that neither should nor could be unraveled.

**T**he political consequences of that assumption lie at the root of Bryan’s image problem. In policy, the Commoner was a forerunner, but his strong bond with his followers ended up limiting his understanding of how the nation was changing. He was too good a politician to believe that the white evangelical Protestants who flocked to his speeches and flooded him with adoring mail were, even then, a working majority (in fact, he never won more than 47 percent of the vote).

Yet Bryan’s deepest concerns were always the same as theirs, and, as he grew older and abandoned his hopes for the presidency, electoral wisdom gradually gave way to crusading zeal. In the 1920s, he disagreed with his more bigoted supporters who parroted Henry Ford’s anti-Semitic theorizing or joined the Ku Klux Klan. But he refused to exclude them from the ranks of the well-meaning majority, as eastern, big-city progressives such as Alfred E. Smith demanded. The New York governor, after all, was a “wet” and the spawn of Tammany Hall. Bryan could not allow his kind to win the cultural war within the Democratic Party or in the nation at large. After they did triumph with Franklin Roosevelt in the

1930s, their heirs—urbane liberals of immigrant stock—drew the portrait of Bryan as benighted and passé. Gradually, evangelical Protestants of the middling classes and the middle of the country moved toward a Republican Party that lauded them as part of a “silent majority.”

The tribal bitterness of a losing faction is difficult to erase from historical memory. Thus, historian Richard Hofstadter concluded that Bryan, at his death, “had long outlived his time.” And viewers of the popular play and movie *Inherit the Wind* come away wondering how a major party could ever have considered this humorless zealot a suitable nominee for the presidency.

Yet dismissing the man sells both him and our political history short. During the campaign of 1896, a teenager in Springfield, Illinois, sent a poem of praise to the Democratic candidate. In the last stanza, Vachel Lindsay (who grew up to be a writer of some distinction) wrote:

Hail to the fundamental man  
Who brings a unifying plan  
Not easily misunderstood,  
Chanting men toward brotherhood.  
So be you glad, American,  
When, after planning many weeks  
The folks by thousands come to town  
And Bryan SPEAKS.

Those awkward lines suggest why, more than a century later, Lindsay’s boyhood hero deserves our attention. Bryan did indeed have a knack for making significant public issues sound urgent, dramatic, and clear—and encouraged average citizens to question the words and interests of the powerful. That attribute made reform, economic and moral, seem both more attractive and more feasible. It is a skill lacking in our contemporary leaders, as tolerant as most now are of religious and racial diversity. Bryan’s sincerity, warmth, and evangelical ardor won him the hearts of many Americans who cared for no other politician in his day. We might listen to their reasons before we decide to mistrust them.

# THE LONG ROAD TO BETTER SCHOOLS

Nobody is claiming victory yet, but there is a distinct sense in the air that a corner has been turned in the struggle to improve America's public schools. State standards, charter schools, and other structural reforms all satisfy the quintessentially American belief that if you fix "the system," you fix the problem. Our contributors demur, maintaining that our commitment to excellence in education has yet to be truly tested. They point to several human and intellectual problems that still stand in the way of the schools' escape from mediocrity.



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# The Parent Trap

by Tom Loveless

A new kind of revolution of rising expectations is sweeping the United States. It is a revolution fomented by reformers who believe that setting higher expectations in the schools is the key to improving academic performance. There is bipartisan political enthusiasm for the creation of tough new learning standards. Just about everyone wants to end social promotion, the practice of passing a student on to the next grade regardless of whether he or she has learned anything. Reformers poke, prod, cajole, and coax schools to embrace lofty academic expectations which, they believe, schools would not adopt on their own. They are confident that such heightened expectations will yield dramatic increases in student achievement.

In focusing on the schools, however, reformers are taking for granted one of the most powerful influences on the quality of American education: the American parent. They assume that parents will do whatever is necessary to raise children's levels of achievement. But will they? Do parents really consider classroom learning the most important aspect of their children's education? What are they willing to give up so that their children will learn more? Will family life change as academic achievement assumes a more prominent role in education? Will political support for reform remain firm if parents recoil from the everyday costs?

There are indications that many parents have trouble accepting the fact that

improving education is not a pain-free exercise. In Virginia, when tough new statewide tests revealed earlier this year that only 6.5 percent of the schools met state standards, many parents (and others) responded with cries of anger and disbelief. Their anger was directed not at the schools but at the standards. There are other signs that parents' commitment to academic excellence is not very deep. A 1996 Gallup Poll asked: "Which one of the following would you prefer of an oldest child—that the child get A grades or that he or she make average grades and be active in extracurricular activities?" Only 33 percent of public school parents answered that they would prefer A grades, while 56 percent preferred average grades combined with extracurricular activities. (Among private school parents, the breakdown was almost the same, 34 percent to 55 percent.)

The importance of nonacademic activities in teenagers' lives is thoroughly documented in *Beyond the Classroom* (1996), a study of how American teens spend their out-of-school time, the portion of their weekly schedule that (in theory at least) parents directly control. Three nonacademic categories dominate, according to Temple University psychologist Laurence Steinberg: extracurricular activities, primarily sports, consuming 10 to 15 hours; part-time employment, 15 to 20 hours; and a host of social activities, including dating, going to the movies, partying, and just hanging out with friends, 20 to 25 hours. The national average for time spent on



*The Choice (1998), by Marlene Baron Summers*

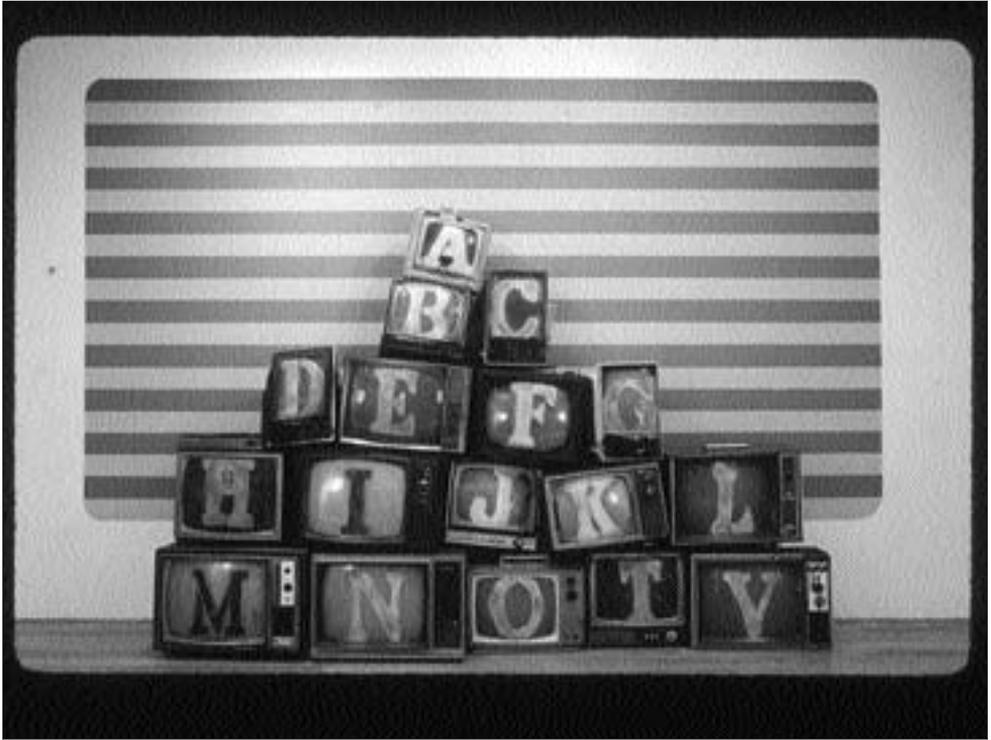
homework is four hours per week, not surprising given the few waking hours that remain after the whirlwind of nonacademic pursuits.

**T**his distribution of teens' time represents a huge drag on academic learning. More than one-third of the teens with part-time jobs told Steinberg they take easier classes to keep up their grades. Nearly 40 percent of students who participate in school-sponsored activities, usually sports, reported that they are frequently too tired to study. More than one-third of students said they get through the school day by "goofing off with friends," and an equal number reported spending five or more hours a week "partying." And these self-reports probably underestimate the problem.

The big story here is that teenagers' time is structured around the pursuit of a

"well-rounded" life. American families might value academic achievement, but not if it intrudes on the rituals of teen existence, especially part-time employment, sports, and a busy social calendar. This stands in stark contrast to the situation in other nations. In Europe and most Asian countries, it is assumed that the central purpose of childhood is to learn. Part-time employment of teenagers is rare, sports are noticeably subordinate to a student's academic responsibilities, and although there is plenty of socializing, it is usually in conjunction with studying or working with others on academic projects. The American student's four hours per week of homework is equal to what students in the rest of the industrialized world complete every day.

Significant cultural differences also appear in how parents judge their children's academic performance. A study by



The Building Blocks of Life (1985), by John Fekner

James Stigler of the University of California, Los Angeles, and Harold Stevenson of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, asked several hundred mothers from the United States, Japan, and China about the school performance of their fifth-grade children. More than 50 percent of the American mothers pronounced themselves very satisfied with their children's schoolwork, as opposed to only five percent of the Asian mothers. On tests measuring what these same children actually knew, however, the American students scored far below their Chinese and Japanese counterparts. When asked to explain their children's poor performance, the American mothers cited a lack of inborn ability. When the Japanese and Chinese children failed, their parents blamed the kids for not working hard enough.

American parents see academic

achievement as a product of intrinsic ability rather than hard work, as just one of many attributes they want children to possess, and as something their own kids are accomplishing anyway. These beliefs, along with widespread peer pressure against academic excellence (who wants to be a "geek"?), an unrelenting strain of anti-intellectualism in American culture, and the weak academic demands of schools, combine to dampen the importance of academics for American youth and their parents.

**W**e need not let educators off the hook, but parents bear some responsibility both for the lax standards in today's schools and for students' mediocre achievement. Parents appear more willing to embrace academic excellence in the abstract than to organize their family's daily life in order to achieve it. They enthu-

> TOM LOVELESS is director of the Brown Center on Education Policy and a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution. He is the author of *The Tracking Wars: State Reform Meets School Policy* (1999). Copyright © 1999 by Tom Loveless.

siastically support attempts to change schools in general but are ambivalent when it comes to schools they actually know.

Polls show that parents believe their children's schools have higher standards and are of significantly better quality than the nation's schools in general. This phenomenon—the idea that “I'm OK, but you're not”—also shows up in surveys on health care (my doctor is great, but the nation's health care stinks), Congress (my representative is terrific, but Congress is terrible), and the status of the American family (mine is in fine shape, but families in general are going to hell in a hand basket).

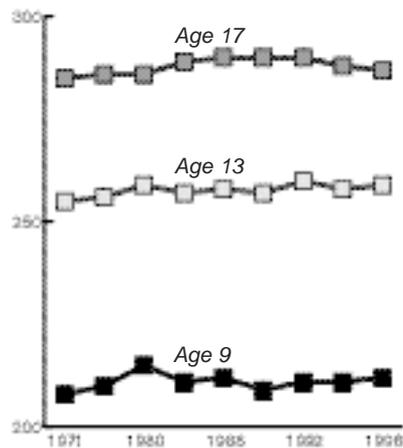
Such complacency undermines meaningful school reform. Raising the level of achievement is hard work. Unless children can actually learn more math, science, literature, and history without breaking a sweat, then the prospects for reforms that ask children and parents for more—more time, more homework, more effort—are not very good. We don't hear much about what today's educational reforms may require of families. Indeed, when it comes to the subject of parents, the rhetoric seldom gets beyond calls for more “parent involvement” or for “empowering” parents. Reforms that grant parents control over where their children go to school, a favorite of the Right, or that offer parents a stake in governing local school affairs, a favorite of the Left, may prove to be valuable public policies for other reasons, but they have not yet convinced skeptics that they will significantly increase student achievement.

**I**n Chicago, an experiment that involved creating parent-dominated school “site councils” to oversee individual schools produced a few renaissance stories, but also tales of schools engulfed in petty squabbling. As vouchers and charter schools become more widespread, will parents actually take advantage of the opportunities to improve the education of their children? Buried in the national comparisons of private and public schools is an interesting and relevant anomaly. Despite well-publicized research showing that private

schools outperform public schools on achievement tests, more students transfer from private to public school than vice versa at the beginning of high school, precisely the time when one's academic accomplishments really start to matter in terms of college and employment. The desire to keep extracurricular activities close to home and to keep their children close to neighborhood kids appears to weigh heavily in parents' choices.

Another reason to doubt that empowered parents will wholeheartedly insist on higher achievement can be found in the history of American schooling. Schools have always attended to the convenience of parents, and, as a result, cultivating the

### *Reading Performance, 1971–96*



The National Assessment of Educational Progress has tracked students' reading ability since the early 1970s. The chart shows a slight improvement among 9- and 13-year-olds through 1980, but virtually no change thereafter—and no significant change among 17-year-olds during the entire period. The maximum score is 500. There is only one bright spot (not shown): the gap between white and black students narrowed from 1971 to 1988. But then the improvements stalled, and among 13-year-olds the race gap widened.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education*, 1999.

mind has simply occupied one place among many on a long list of purposes for the school. At the beginning of the 19th century, education came within the province of the family. Children learned reading at home, along with basic arithmetic and minimal geography, science, and history. Farming dictated the tempo of family life. Older students only attended school during the winter months, when their labor wasn't needed in the fields. At other times, even toddlers were sent to school, crowding classrooms with students from three to 20 years of age.

Later in the century, as fathers and mothers abandoned the farm for the factory and intermittently relocated in search of work, the modern public school began to evolve. One of its functions was custodial, providing a place for children to spend the day while busy parents earned a living. The magnitude of the change is staggering. As late as 1870, American students attended school only an average of 78 of 132 scheduled days; today's students spend more than 160 days in the classroom, and the modern school calendar runs to 180 days. More than 90 percent of school-age children now attend high school. At the beginning of the century, less than 10 percent did.

But the school's power is limited. Its monopoly over children's daylight hours never led to the recognition of intellectual activities as the most important pursuits of adolescents, either outside or inside school. Why do parents allow two-thirds of today's teenagers to work? After-school jobs are considered good for young people, teaching them a sense of responsibility and the value of a dollar. Most Americans think it's fine if teenagers spend 20 hours a week flipping hamburgers instead of studying calculus or the history of ancient Rome.

**T**he development of young minds also finds competition in the school curriculum itself. For example, the federal government has funded vocational education since 1917. Americans have always expected schools to

teach students the difference between right and wrong and the fundamental elements of citizenship. In the last three decades, schools have also taken on therapeutic tasks, spending untold time and resources on sex education, psychological counseling, drug and alcohol programs, diversity training, guidance on topics such as teen parenting, sexual harassment, and a host of other initiatives that have little to do with sharpening the intellect.

Some analysts maintain that parents don't support such diversions from academic learning, that these programs are nothing more than the faddish whims of professional educators. If so, parents have been awfully quiet about it. A more reasonable explanation is that, with parents busily working at two or more jobs, with many of these topics awkward for parents to discuss, and with parental authority showing its own signs of weakening throughout society, parents now look to schools to provide instruction that they once delivered themselves.

**S**chools are acting more like parents, and implementing real academic standards will probably force parents to act more like schools. They will need to stay informed about tests scores and closely monitor their children's progress. Parents of students who fall short of standards must be prepared for drastic changes in family life. Summers will be for summer school, afternoons and weekends for tutoring. This will cost money and impinge upon family time. Struggling high school students will be forced to spend less time on sports, to forgo part-time jobs, and to keep socializing to a minimum.

No one knows how parents will react to such changes. Higher standards are overwhelmingly supported in public opinion polls, but what will happen when they begin to pinch? In 1997, hundreds of parents in an affluent suburb of Detroit refused to let their children take a high school proficiency test, arguing that the nine-hour exam was too long and that it would unfairly label children who per-

## *The Fail-Proof Teaching Test*

The Allies won World War II.

Really? I wasn't sure. Thank goodness the study guide I bought for the Indiana state teacher certification test included that important reminder in its social studies review. Other sections explained that it is incorrect to use "double negatives in standard written English," that "maps are drawings which [sic] show where places are in relation to each other" and that an \$80 dress that is 20 percent off costs \$64.

The actual test, which I took a few weeks ago, wasn't much more difficult. Sadly, my experience underscored a recent report by the Education Trust, a nonprofit organization in Washington, that found that teacher certification tests, which are required by 43 states and the District of Columbia, are far from challenging.

I should say that while the test I took was not rigorous, it was long. The test, which covered virtually every area of science, math, the arts and education theory, went from 8 A.M. to 5:30 P.M., save for two 25-minute breaks. From questions about the cold war to classroom discipline, the test required basic cognitive abilities, the fortitude to stay focused for eight-and-a-half straight hours and a No. 2 pencil—and not much more than that.

This test, like so much of what I am asked to do to prepare for a career as a secondary-school teacher, is not intellectually challenging, but is instead just plain tiring. It's as though anyone who can simply survive such a mind-numbing, serpentine process is ready to be a teacher.

Forget smarts; what it takes to become a state-certified teacher is not critical thinking, but eighth-grade skills and an ability to follow directions and rules that are often arbitrary.

Consider the education class I had on adolescent psychology. Each student had to give a presentation to the class. Though the content of my presentation was perfectly acceptable to the professor, I was marked off on my grade because I didn't give the class a hand-out sheet.

"But I didn't have anything I felt needed to be written up and handed out," I protested.

"That doesn't matter," the professor told me. "You always give the class a handout when you do a presentation."

I understand that it is difficult for states to determine who is qualified to teach. And I'm happy to be tested. But challenge me. Make me prove that I can reason and think and, in turn, teach students to reason and think. Give me essay questions about John Dewey or Jean-Jacques Rousseau rather than multiple-choice questions about the pitfalls of using an overhead projector.

The Education Trust also states that the scores necessary to pass teacher certification tests are laughably low: "Students would receive F's for producing such scores in the classroom, yet this is all states require of their teachers." Indeed, unlike on most standardized tests, you don't get an extra penalty for giving wrong answers on teacher certification tests. Thus, test-takers are encouraged to guess wildly on questions for which they do not know the answers.

Why are the tests so easy, I asked one of my education professors. "If they were any harder, not enough people would pass, and then we would have a shortage of teachers," he replied.

He said it with a laugh, but I fear that he's right. The number of school-age children is expected to rise substantially in the near future, and thousands of teachers—state-certified ones who know that the Allies won World War II—will be in demand.

—Kathleen Mills

*Kathleen Mills is a graduate student in education at Indiana University. This essay first appeared in the New York Times (July 19, 1999).*



*After School (1984), by Kathryn Freeman*

formed poorly. In Portland, Oregon, the school district invited the parents of 3,500 youngsters who had failed statewide proficiency exams to send the children to a summer school session set up at great expense and amid much hoopla; only 1,359 kids were enrolled. Every state has its share of stories. The elimination of social promotion presents the biggest test. Will the parents of children who are compelled to repeat, say, third or fourth grade, continue to support high standards? Or will they dedicate themselves to the defeat and removal of standards? In districts that see huge numbers of students facing mandatory summer school or failing to win promotion to the next grade, will parents push to water down tests and lower passing scores?

Some years ago, I came face to face with some of these implications when I taught sixth grade in a special program for exceptionally gifted, high-achieving youngsters,

students approximately two years above grade level in all subjects. The curriculum was accelerated to the eighth- and ninth-grade levels, and I taught all academic subjects. Students applied for admission to the program, and my fellow teachers and I stressed that it wasn't for everyone. Parents seeking an education emphasizing creativity or the arts were advised to look elsewhere. An extremely bright student who hated doing homework would also have had a difficult time.

Getting to know the parents of my students was one of the most satisfying aspects of my job. They were actively involved in the school and indispensable in organizing field trips, raising money for computers, putting on plays, and doing anything else that enhanced their children's education. If ever a group supported lofty standards, this was it. But dealing with parents was

not all sweetness and light. Grading policies drew the most complaints. One upset parent threatened a lawsuit because I gave a zero to a student who cheated on a test. During a three-hour, late-night phone call, an angry mother repeatedly told me that I would suffer eternal damnation because her son had received grades disqualifying him for admission to an honors program.

Complaints were also voiced because I didn't accept late homework—"We had friends over last night and Johnny simply didn't have time to do his history," one father explained in a note—or because I wouldn't excuse absences for family ski trips or a student's "R&R day" of TV soap operas and game shows. And these complaints came despite the fact that enrollment in the program was by choice, the school's reputation for academic rigor well known, and the policies on these issues crystal clear.

Such conflicts go with the territory. Anyone who teaches—and sticks to the principles making the career a serious undertaking in the first place—will experience occasional problems with parents. The usual conflicts stem from the different yet overlapping roles that parents and teachers play in a child's life. Both are concerned with the same individual's welfare, but their roles are not interchangeable. Parents are infinitely more important to a child's upbringing, but the teacher is usually the most significant nonfamily adult presence in the child's life and, ideally, is more objective about the child's interactions with the larger world. Teachers pursue goals established by society rather than the family. They must be warm and understanding, but they must also make decisions serving the best interests of 30 or more people who have much to accomplish every day in the same small space.

**T**he differentiation of parent and teacher roles, which strengthened schools and families in the 19th century, may be at the bottom of many parents' unrealistic perceptions of

their children's school experiences. Just as reformers are probably right that the demand for high educational standards must come from outside the schools, the imposition of academic burdens on children probably must come from outside families.

There is some evidence that parents intuitively understand this. In a recent study by the Public Agenda Foundation that examined how parents view their role in education, parents said that the most significant contribution they can make is to send children to school who are respectful, hard working, and well behaved. They do not want a bigger say in how schools are run. Nor do they want to decide curricular content or methods of instruction. They trust educators who have earned their trust, and they want schools to do their job as schools so that parents can do their job as parents.

**T**hese seem like reasonable sentiments. But in the same study, parents also admit that they absolutely hate fighting kids to get them to do their homework. They gauge how things are going at school primarily by how happy their children seem and nearly 90 percent believe that as long as children try hard, they should never feel bad about themselves because of poor grades. These attitudes are potentially in conflict with more rigorous learning standards. If social promotion ends, many children will be held back in a grade despite their having tried hard. And these children will be unhappy. Other children will not get the acceptable grades they once did. A lot of people are going to be very unhappy.

Higher standards and the end of social promotion now enjoy tremendous popular support. But the true test will come when words become deeds. Until now, raising expectations in education has been portrayed as cost-free. It isn't. Schools and students and parents will bear the costs. If parents are not willing to do so, few of the ambitious changes American reformers are now so eagerly pursuing will make much difference.

# Local Illusions

by Chiara R. Nappi

If there is one thing virtually all American school reformers of every stripe agree upon, it is the sanctity of local control of the public schools. From conservative voucher advocates to the most liberal proponents of progressive education, the reformers praise local control for ensuring responsiveness, flexibility, and accountability. Parents everywhere are convinced that local school districts give them a measure of control over the quality of their children's education, while the tax-sensitive take comfort in the notion that local control assures scrupulous oversight of their tax money. In a society beset by disaffection from political institutions, the local school district enjoys a reputation as an idyll of grassroots democracy.

Twenty-three years ago, when I arrived in the United States as an Italian postdoctoral fellow in physics, I scarcely expected to experience that so-called idyll, much less to serve on a local school board. At first, I became interested in the question of why women and minorities were so badly under-represented in the ranks of American science—more so than in Italy or Brazil or any number of other countries. It was hard not to conclude that the absence of a standard curriculum requiring sustained exposure to math and science—the kind of curriculum other countries have—was largely to blame.

By 1990, when my own children were elementary school students in the public



schools of Princeton, New Jersey, this recognition took on more than academic significance. Dissatisfied with the curriculum my children were being taught, I became involved in several national and state efforts to draft math and science standards, notably the New Jersey Math Coalition Committee on Standards and the New Jersey Statewide Systemic Initiative. Virtually all of these efforts, however, seemed to me exercises in futility. Educators who served on the standard-setting committees did not truly favor detailed curriculum standards, which they regarded as an intrusive effort to curtail teachers' autonomy. The states were reluctant to impose detailed standards for fear of interfering with the autonomy of the traditionally independent local school districts. If you really want to change the schools, I was told, that is where you must go: to the local school district. And so, in April 1993, after running with other reform-minded candidates, I won a seat on the Board of Education of the Princeton Regional Schools.

There I eventually recognized the unhappy truth about the American education system. Far from being the source of the sys-



School Scene, Pennsylvania (ca. 1920) by J. C. Huntington

tem's strength, the local school district is perhaps its greatest weakness. Local autonomy, and the fragmentation it fosters, is the source of many of the problems of the American education system, from uneven student performance to incompetent or ill-prepared teachers. Instead of ensuring control of the schools by parents and taxpayers, it guarantees control by the teachers' unions. It invites abuse by ideologically motivated groups and by special interests. While local communities are deeply divided by their own conflicting visions of education and plagued by low levels of community participation and high levels of lobbying by vested interests, a deeply entrenched educational bureaucracy of administrators and teachers fiercely defends its turf. The local school board is a dysfunctional democracy. Local control has evolved into the ideal structure for preserving the status quo.

Americans did not choose local autonomy, they inherited it. The American education system has always perplexed foreign observers, surprised to find that one of the essential

activities of any advanced society is not viewed in the United States as a national responsibility. The system grew out of the special circumstances of the country's early European settlement. Carving isolated new communities out of the wilderness, the earliest colonists founded their own schools, raising money, building the schoolhouse, writing the curriculum, choosing books, and hiring teachers. As rural settlements evolved into towns, professional administrators were hired, but the old local citizens' committees, now transformed into school boards, remained in charge. Because the Founding Fathers made no mention of it in the Constitution, responsibility for education fell to the states. Bowing to the fact that most school funding comes from local property taxes, the states traditionally have delegated responsibility for education to local communities. Today, more than 95,000 citizens govern 15,000 school boards (all but three percent of them elected) across the country.

Few Americans realize what a daunting and unmanageable job they have handed

to their school boards. Board members, usually volunteers who hold down full-time jobs, must shoulder an enormous variety of issues and responsibilities: school budgets, construction and maintenance, labor negotiations, personnel, and curriculum—all responsibilities that in other countries are dispersed among local, regional, and national authorities. Hours upon hours must be spent preparing for and attending often interminable public meetings, and there are endless closed-door sessions to discuss labor disputes, employee grievances, administrators' evaluations, contract negotiations, and other "confidential" matters. The board's most important job, setting educational policy for the district and overseeing its implementation, often gets pushed aside in the press of business.

When educational issues do appear on the agenda, the debate is seldom dispassionate and rational. No other arena of politics excites as much passion and stirs as many furious ideological clashes as the education of children. Board members risk not only public abuse but their personal relationships and friendships. Budget hearings are notoriously acrimonious, but every educational issue—curriculum, school construction, redistricting, staff dismissals—can stir conflicts. Each issue draws aroused parents who are affected by the specific decision that the board is going to make. The crowds can be rowdy and intimidating; a vocal and persistent opposition can easily pitch a district into a continuing state of chaos and completely undermine its elected board of education.

Yet citizen participation tends to be episodic. School board elections, for example, have consistently low voter turnout across the country. Even in Princeton, a university town with a history of passionate ideological battles over educational issues, only 15 percent of the eligible voters bother to cast ballots. Except in times of crisis, the educational forum in many communities is left to small but determined pressure

groups—agitating for everything from more spending on special education to programs targeted to specific ethnic groups—whose members tirelessly go to each and every thinly attended meeting to press their demands.

The various costs of school board service are great enough to discourage many people from seeking seats. In New Jersey, school board elections attract an average of only 1.5 candidates per seat. The average board member serves only two and a half years, even though a full term runs three years. The demands also tend to winnow out those who are not willing to turn themselves into politicians and run a political campaign for office. This does not necessarily produce the best people for the job, as the contentiousness, ineffectiveness, and (occasional) corruption of many school boards attests.

The most important result of local governance, however, has been to make teachers' unions the major players in school politics. School board members and administrators come and go, but the teachers and their unions stay. School boards are divided and weakened by internal strife, but the teachers' unions are strong and united. No change can occur in the district unless the union approves. (State unions and the National Education Association exert enormous influence at other levels: 11 percent of the delegates to the 1996 Democratic convention belonged to the teachers' union caucus.) If an unwanted reform gets through, the local union can resort to the polls, where the combination of low voter turnout and union organization gives them a distinct advantage.

**R**eform-minded school superintendents, charged with the implementation of school board policies but lacking the tenure guarantees that teachers enjoy, are frequent victims of union wrath. In 1995, the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association, opposed to Superintendent Howard Fuller's pro-

> CHIARA R. NAPPI is a theoretical physicist at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. She served on the Board of Education of Princeton Regional Schools from 1993 to 1996. Copyright © 1999 by Chiara R. Nappi.

gram to increase academic achievement (school autonomy in exchange for stricter accountability), elected a slate of anti-superintendent candidates. Fuller resigned rather than face what he called “death by a thousand cuts.” Philadelphia’s superintendent, David W. Hornbeck, is currently under siege for similar reasons. Last year, in my own district, Superintendent Marcia Bossart left after four years of pushing to introduce district-wide standards and to improve teachers’ performance. She had struggled on for several months after the Princeton Regional Education Association, which had fought her for years, finally elected a slate of candidates opposed to her attempts to change the system.

Only by understanding the forces of inertia and immobility that grip local school districts is it possible to comprehend the damage done by the fragmentation of the American education system. Until a decade ago, for example, it was accepted that school curriculum standards were a prerogative of the local school districts. In principle, this meant that there was in place a district curriculum approved by the local board of education. In reality, individual classroom teachers in many districts (including my own) were left to set their own curriculum, often without even the barest guidelines about what was to be accomplished in the classroom. Decisions about curricula, textbooks and other instructional materials, and the amount of time spent on different subjects—all were left to the discretion of individual teachers. It was a recipe for educational chaos and underachievement.

Since the early 1980s, when some of the first widespread alarms about abysmal student performance were sounded, reformers have achieved some successes in introducing national guidelines and state standards. Americans increasingly recognize that a nation without high standards of education will not prosper for long in a global economy. But many of the new guidelines and standards are vague and undemanding. Americans are still reluctant to compromise the prerogatives of the local districts, and the

education establishment has resisted more detailed statements of standards, which it sees, accurately, as a means of increasing the accountability of teachers and administrators. Standards are supposed to spell out in detail what students are expected to learn and be able to do at each grade level, but in the many fat books of standards produced at the national, state, and local levels, it is still practically impossible to find precise statements about what students should learn and when they should learn it.

### The Achievement of U.S. High School Seniors An International Comparison

Country	Mathematics	Science
Netherlands	560	558
Sweden	552	559
Denmark	547	509
Switzerland	540	523
Iceland	534	549
Norway	528	544
France	523	487
Australia	522	527
New Zealand	522	529
Canada	519	532
Austria	518	520
Slovenia	512	517
<b>Int'l Average</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>500</b>
Germany	495	497
Hungary	483	471
Italy	476	475
Russian Fed.	471	481
Lithuania	469	461
Czech Rep.	466	487
<b>United States</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>480</b>
Cyprus	446	448
South Africa	356	349

In the *Third International Mathematics and Science Study* in 1995, American 12th graders scored below the 21-nation average in both math and science. The relative performance of Americans declines as they advance through the school system. U.S. 4th graders performed very well—outscored, for example, their peers in every nation except South Korea in science—but 8th graders’ scores slipped into the middle ranks. The scale ranges from 0 to 1,000.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education*, 1999.

Because there is no agreement on what students should learn, there is no agreement on what teachers must know. This helps explain why so many of the nation's teachers' colleges and university-based schools of education provide inadequate professional preparation. Rather than emphasize substantive knowledge in biology, history, or any of the other subjects the teachers will be discussing in the classroom, these institutions tend to stress pedagogy and "process"—focusing on teaching methodologies and learning theories, and often promoting new, untested doctrines. Teachers, according to the doctrines currently holding sway in some of these institutions, should be trained to be "facilitators" who enable students to learn on their own. "Filling chil-

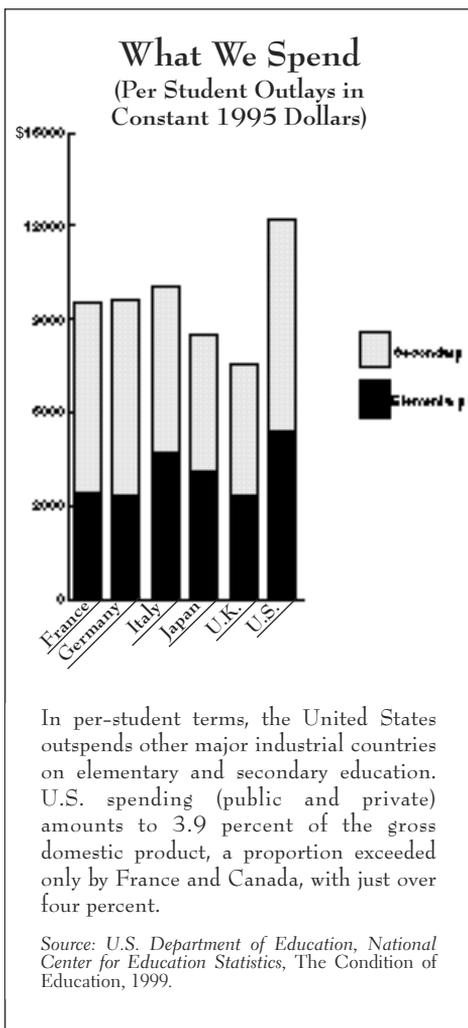
dren with facts," as the imparting of knowledge is often derisively termed, is seen in these quarters as a highly regressive practice. Thus, 34 percent of U.S. mathematics teachers at the 12th-grade level and 53 percent of all secondary-level history teachers neither majored nor minored in their subject in college. Forty percent of public school students are likewise without a competent science teacher.

Sometimes it is not just specialized knowledge that is lacking. In 1997, the Connetquot school district in Long Island, New York, made headlines when it revealed that only a quarter of the applicants for teaching jobs in the district had passed a reading comprehension test designed for the district's high school juniors.

Although the poor performance of American teachers is often lamented, not much has been done to improve it. And again the system's fragmentation is largely to blame. The teachers' colleges and schools of education have not shown much interest in raising requirements for graduation on their own, in part because they fear that they would lose students to less demanding institutions. The states exercise little supervision over these institutions; most do not even require them to be accredited.

Once they graduate, teachers are subject to few assessments. Requirements for obtaining a state teaching license vary widely by state, but they tend to be far from demanding, often entailing nothing more than a demonstration of general cultural knowledge. In most states, passing the test once assures lifelong possession of a teaching certificate. What slips through these procedures is suggested by the case of Massachusetts, which last year became the 44th state to require a test in basic competency for prospective teachers. But unlike most of the other states, Massachusetts chose to administer a rather rigorous test. Sixty percent of the candidates failed. Predictably, disappointed test takers threatened to sue, arguing that the exam was too hard, a product of irresponsible "teacher bashing."

Even more problems plague the way teachers are hired and tenured. Hiring is





Playground (1986), by P. J. Crook

almost always left to school principals, who often don't pay much attention to the academic records and professional competency of the candidates. They are more likely to be interested in whether the new teacher fits the "culture" of the school or whether, apart from teaching, he or she can coach football or some other sport.

Once hired, the teacher can look forward to lifetime job security with the almost automatic grant of tenure (after only three years, in many states). Once tenure is granted, a teacher's performance is often beyond scrutiny. Job evaluations are infrequent, and the procedures for removing incompetents are so expensive and time consuming that many districts do not even try.

As if poor training, ill-conceived hiring practices, and inadequate job performance assessments were not enough, teachers also receive virtually automatic salary increases. Despite years of agitation by reformers,

fewer than five percent of all contracts allow a performance-based component in the determination of teachers' compensation. Why? Because of the determined resistance of local teachers' unions.

There are a few signs of change amid all this dismal news. For example, a number of states are beginning to exercise greater quality control over new teachers. In Massachusetts, despite the outcry over the new state licensing exam, state officials have proposed not only retaining the test but requiring teacher candidates to have a bachelor's degree in a core subject area. No longer would a degree in education suffice. In Pennsylvania, education secretary Gene Hickok has announced a plan that would require certified mastery in each teacher's academic major. President Bill Clinton climbed on the bandwagon earlier this year with his proposal for a national teachers' test.

But these relatively modest efforts would apply only to prospective teachers. Attempts to impose quality controls on the teachers already working in the public schools meet bitter resistance from the teachers' unions. In New Jersey and New York, for example, the unions beat back attempts to end the de facto lifetime state certification that protects many incompetent teachers. New York will now require recertification, but, bowing to union pressure, it set only minimal standards for winning it.

Local control of the schools also has important consequences for the inequality and overall cost of American education. Because the schools are still financed largely out of local property taxes, less affluent districts in New Jersey spent only 70 percent as much per pupil in 1990 as more affluent districts. The city of Philadelphia spends on average \$3,000 less per student than districts in the suburbs. In the Chicago area, some districts spend twice as much as others (\$12,000 versus \$6,000). Several states have tried in recent years to address these inequalities. Under a New Jersey Supreme Court order to bridge the gap, New Jersey in the mid-1990s tried to control the outlays of richer districts. But the most effective way to alleviate economic disparities among districts is to switch from local to state financing of schools. In 1993, the state of Michigan started shifting the source of public school revenue from local property taxes to state sales taxes. Today, about 70 percent of school money in Michigan comes from state taxes. It is too soon, however, to gauge the impact on equity.

Not to be underestimated, finally, are the simple dollar costs of local autonomy. The duplication of administrative structures and services in each district significantly increases school costs. Thus, New Jersey, with 611 independent school districts, twice the national average, has the highest per pupil cost in the country. Efforts to reduce these expenses by creating regional school districts meet stiff resistance, especially from affluent communities that can afford to create their own islands of educational privilege. This resis-

tance, often complicated by ethnic and racial issues, is probably one of the main reasons district boundaries survive. Shifting to state financing of the schools would ease the impact of economic disparities among districts and might help reduce the fierce commitment to the district form of local autonomy.

**A**fter more than 200 years, local governance in American education is here to stay. But its ill effects could be offset if the states played a more active role in education. The introduction of educational standards and state tests is a step in the right direction and a clear indication that states are willing to take on the job. The states have even directly intervened to rescue failing school systems. In New Jersey, the state assumed control of Jersey City's problem-plagued school system in 1989. In 1991, the Massachusetts state legislature, its patience with Boston's ineffective elected school board exhausted, gave the city's mayor the authority to appoint its members. The mayors of Chicago and Detroit have won similar powers, and New York City's mayor may soon join them. Even charter schools, which appeal to the supporters of local governance, actually enhance the states' role in public education. Charter schools are public schools that are run independently of local school boards and district teachers' unions but submit to the same state rules and regulations as any other public school. They report directly to the state department of education, which judges their performance and decides whether to grant or revoke their charter.

There is much more that the states can do. Many management tasks can be accomplished much more efficiently by regional educational agencies. Teachers' contracts and employees' salaries should be negotiated at the state level, a step that would certainly go a long way toward promoting "equity" in education. The states should also impose rigorous standards on teachers' colleges and schools of education. They should require serious state exams and certification for teachers seek-



*Boston Latin School (1996), by Nicholas Nixon*

ing a job in the state. At the regional level, teaching candidates should be listed according to their academic credentials and test results, and schools should hire their teachers out of this pool of applicants. Small districts should consolidate in order to share services, resources, and personnel, and to increase the educational opportunities available to students (such as magnet and vocational schools).

Local school boards would still have important work to do. Handing over their management and administrative functions to regional and statewide bodies, they would concentrate on school policy, interpreting state mandates, tailoring them to the local situation, and monitoring the performance of students and staff.

Eventually, by combining elements of school choice and the “site-based management” now thought to be essential to effective schools, it may be possible to create a new form of local control. If states finance and assume

responsibility for public education, autonomy could easily shift from school districts to individual schools, which would be run by their own governing bodies but would ultimately be accountable to the state. These schools would enjoy enough freedom to implement their own educational programs, but they would do so within a framework established by the state, the way today’s charter schools operate.

Without the constraints of district boundaries, students could choose to attend the schools that better meet their interests and needs, as students in many other countries with successful systems do today. In practice, elementary and middle school students would likely remain in neighborhood schools, while high school students would pick and choose. Not only would such a design represent a more modern and more effective interpretation of the cherished concept of local autonomy, but it would also move the United States a good way toward the realization of another long-cherished ideal, equity in education.

# The Teachers' Muddle

by Charles L. Glenn

Everyone seems to want to get in a whack at the public schools for causing America's problems. A few years ago they were blamed for the competitive weaknesses of the economy—though we haven't heard many people giving them credit for its strong performance since! Lately they have been condemned for their failure to prevent violence, though young people are far safer in school than on the streets.

Not all of the criticisms of American public education are as mindless as these. Thoughtful commentators such as E. D. Hirsch, Jr. and William Kirk Kilpatrick have shown how poorly many schools meet the need of impoverished children. These commentators have also rightly criticized many schools for failing to guide children of all social classes toward a coherent sense of right and wrong. Addressing these and other ills of public education will require reforms more radical than any tried so far. It will also mean rethinking some of our most basic practices, and none is more badly in need of reconsideration than the preparation of teachers.

Teachers are often unfairly blamed for the educational incoherence targeted by critics such as Hirsch in *The Schools We Need: And Why We Don't Have Them* (1996) and Kilpatrick in *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong* (1992). It would be fairer to place the responsibility upon those of us who think and write about the purposes of education, and upon our predecessors. Teachers and those preparing to teach receive very confused signals about what is expected of

them. I am not referring to disagreements about specific content—though, as Hirsch shows, there is vast confusion in that respect as well—but to conflicting messages about the fundamental mission of public schools in a liberal democracy.

The conflict over mission involves a prior question that is fundamental: should schools seek to influence the character of their pupils, or should they limit themselves to developing skills and knowledge in a value-free manner? This question would have seemed the proverbial “no-brainer” for many centuries. It was simply assumed that schools taught far more than academic skills and knowledge. Many would have argued that character formation was their primary task.

Under a republican form of government in which “the people” (or some portion of them) were the final source of political authority, this concern was especially pressing. As Montesquieu pointed out in *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), “there need not be much integrity for a monarchical or despotic government to maintain or sustain itself. . . . But in a popular state there must be an additional spring, which is virtue.” For this reason, “it is in republican government that the full power of education is needed. . . . One can define this virtue as love of the laws and the homeland. This love, requiring a continual preference of the public interest over one's own, produces all the individual virtues. . . . in a republic, everything depends on establishing this love, and education should attend to inspiring it.”



4-B (1937), by Louise Emerson Rönnebeck

The American founding generation agreed. Benjamin Rush urged, in 1786, that “our schools of learning, by producing one general and uniform system of education, will render the mass of the people more homogeneous and thereby fit them more easily for uniform and peaceable government.” Thomas Jefferson wrote, the same year, that schools were the most important instrument of society for “ameliorating the condition, protecting the virtue, and advancing the happiness of man.” The 1790s brought a spate of proposals to create a national system of education. A generation later, Horace Mann pointed out that “it may be an easy thing to make a Republic, but it is a very laborious thing to make Republicans. . . . But if . . . a Republic be devoid of intelligence, it will only the more closely resemble an obscene giant . . . whose brain has been developed only in the region of the appetites and passions, and not in the organs of reason and conscience. . . . Such a republic, with all its noble capacities for beneficence, will rush with the speed of a whirlwind to an ignominious end.”

But there is also a strong countertradition

that the state should not be allowed to interfere with matters of conscience through control over religion and education. Indeed, proposals to give government—which is to say the state or national government—a strong role went nowhere until the middle of this century. Local control through what at one time were more than 100,000 elected school boards placed decisions close to parents and other concerned citizens. Slowly and inexorably, however, state governments began to assert control over what was taught, and by whom. By the 1970s, local control had grown largely meaningless in a public education system that strove for uniformity. The official role of the federal government in education is still very limited, but the carrots and sticks that it employs have a profound impact, especially on schools that serve poor children.

**R**esistance to government control of education has continued because critics believe that giving government the power to shape the beliefs and attitudes of children is, over the long term, a threat to freedom. Such critics share with the promoters of a strong

## The Wages of Teaching

Annual median salaries of elementary and secondary teachers in constant 1998 dollars

Year	Salary
1971	\$34,113
1975	\$31,581
1981	\$28,576
1983	\$31,122
1987	\$34,893
1989	\$34,668
1993	\$34,947
1995	\$35,134
1998	\$35,099

Teacher salaries fell in real terms between 1971 and 1981, but have risen slightly since. Swelling school enrollments and the growing proportion of teachers age 45 and over (median salary: \$41,661) may point to rising pay in the future.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education*, 1999.

state role a high estimation of the power of schooling to counter the influence of family and society on the developing child. They agree that schools and teachers are a crucial factor in preserving or transforming culture and social life. In *On Liberty* (1859), John Stuart Mill spoke for those who urged that government should not be entrusted with a monopoly on schooling, while conceding it the role of ensuring that schooling was available to all:

The objections which are urged with reason against State education do not apply to the enforcement of education by the State, but to the State's taking upon itself to direct that education, which is a totally different thing. . . . All that has been said of the importance of individuality of character, and diversity in opinions and

modes of conduct, involves, as of the same unspeakable importance, diversity of education. A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another; and as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government . . . in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body. An education established and controlled by the State should only exist, if it exist at all, as one among many competing experiments, carried on for the purpose of example and stimulus, to keep the others up to a certain standard of excellence.

Educational policy and practice in the United States, after half a century of increased government interference, seem to be moving in a contrary direction, toward the position Mill suggested nearly 150 years ago: "many competing experiments" in the form of magnet schools, charter schools, and (at least in a modest way) publicly funded private and religious schools. This openness to many different ways of educating is coupled with a growing stress on outcomes measured by standardized tests. In effect, policymakers are saying to educators, "So long as you get to the goals that we set, you are free to choose what road you take."

Parents, in turn, are showing themselves increasingly picky about the schools to which they entrust their children. And something like a million American children are being schooled at home by parents who have not found any school to their liking.

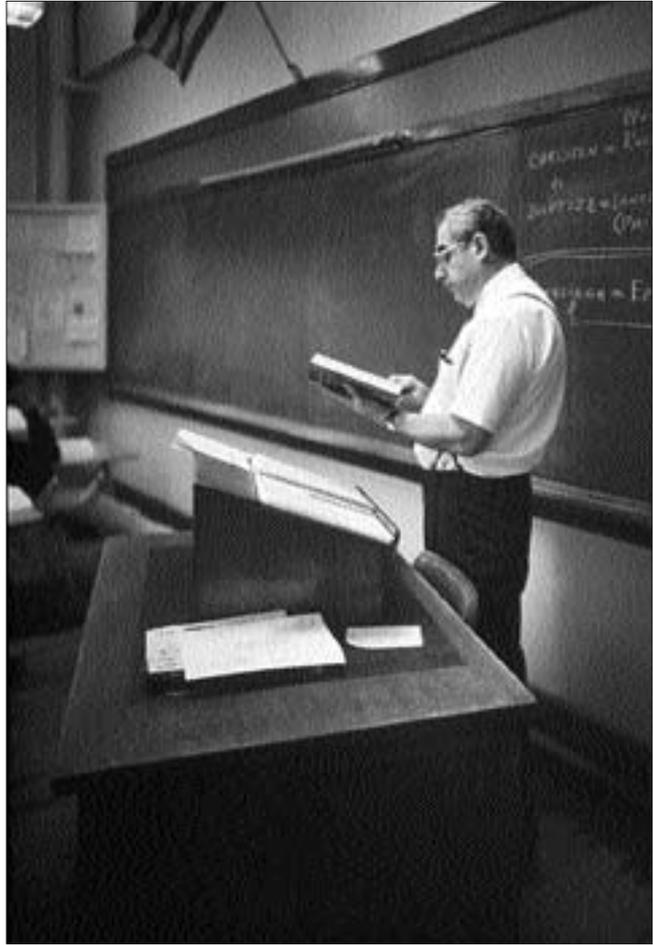
There seem to be two reasons for the new openness to diversity in American education. The first is that parents are themselves better educated and more demanding as "con-

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sumers” of schooling for their children. In increasing numbers, they are not willing simply to accept whatever is provided by the nearest public school. The second reason is the growing body of evidence, notably in the Rand Corporation’s *High Schools with Character* (1990), that schools with a distinctive character, including faith-based schools, are more effective than schools reflecting a lowest common denominator of values.

For teachers, these two developments mean that they will be held accountable for measurable results, and may well find themselves working in schools offering a distinctive approach to education. They will need to adapt to these expectations. If fortunate or enterprising, they may find themselves in schools that match their own convictions about education—if they have any. If they do not have any clear ideas about the goals of education, they are likely to find themselves in schools as incoherent as they are, schools that do not have strong parent constituencies and are difficult and unsatisfying places in which to work.

What do I mean by “convictions”? Not beliefs about the comparative merits of phonics and whole language as methods of reading instruction, or whether English or the home language of immigrant children should be used to teach them to read. Those are issues that can be resolved over time by research, which frequently points to some sort of mixed model. Nor am I referring to strictly religious beliefs about, for example, the means of salvation. There is, instead, a middle ground of ways of understanding what is necessary to a flourishing life, and parents seem to choose schools (or



Robert Gaudio, English Teacher, Hazleton Senior High School, Hazleton, Pa. (1992), by Judith Joy Ross

choose to home-school) on the basis of their concerns in this domain.

Here is a primary source of the confusion of teachers today. School reformers celebrate distinctive approaches to education, and parents seek them, but the norms of the profession continue to insist that all teachers (and schools) are interchangeable, and that neither should “impose their values.” But good teaching is all about urging those we teach to accept what we believe to be true and worthy of their acceptance. Bad teaching imposes values, too, and schools that are incoherent are not neutral or “value free.” Cynicism, indifference to truth, disinclination to carry out tasks thoroughly, and disrespect for others—all of these can be learned in school.

Only schools with a distinctive character

to which staff and parents alike are committed can shape the character of pupils in positive ways. This is one reason why Catholic schools now enroll many non-Catholics, and some Evangelical schools serve pupils from non-Evangelical families. Parents in these cases perceive that a school centered on a religious ethos, even if it is not their own ethos, is more likely to reflect their own convictions about the good life they want for their children than a school without such a common ground. Motivated pupils, a relatively safe and undistracted environment, and a size that allows the pupils and adults to know one another well more than offsets, for these parents, the material advantages that public schools, with their computer labs and highly credentialed teachers, usually enjoy. Shared values and clarity about goals offer a distinct advantage to faith-based schools. According to a study by Susan P. Choy for the National Center for Education Statistics, 71 percent of teachers in small (fewer than 150 pupils) private schools agree that “colleagues share beliefs and values about central mission of school,” compared with 41 percent of those in small public schools. In large schools, with more than 750 pupils, both numbers drop, to 49 percent in private schools and only 26 percent in public schools.

Teachers who want to work in schools that are built on a shared understanding of education—and increasingly these will be the schools in demand by parents and supported by public policy—need to have thought carefully about their own convictions as to how to promote character and worthy life goals in their pupils. Unfortunately, many teachers have been made tentative and confused about such matters by their own schooling, and by college or graduate school teacher-training programs. They have been told that public schools should be “value neutral,” and have taken that to mean that they should seek to give the impression that they have no fixed convictions about any matter on which Americans disagree. Even more damaging, they may let their pupils assume that they have no understanding of the nature of a

good and honorable life, which would serve to anchor such convictions.

It would be impossible as well as wrong for government to impose a single model of character formation upon every school, and to insist that teachers share or at least express an official worldview in their classrooms. There is room for a variety of approaches capable of nurturing decent human beings who are responsible citizens. Perhaps it would help, however, to illustrate with contrasting models described in two of the oldest descriptions of education in the Western tradition, and by the most influential 20th-century thinker about education, John Dewey (1859–1952).

In the fifth book of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, Moses tells the people of Israel:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations. . . . Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. . . . These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deuteronomy 4:5–6, 9; 6:6–7)

This way of understanding education sees it as the transmission of a tradition that provides authoritative guidance about the behavior, including daily habits, and the attitudes that sustain an ideal of life and of community. Continuing in this tradition signifies “wisdom and understanding,” since it requires inner conviction as well as external compliance.

The second account is a famous parable from Plato's *Republic*. Socrates offers "an image of our nature in its education and want of education":

Behold! human beings living in an underground cave, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the cave; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets. . . . And do you see men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

You have shown me a strange image [Glaucou replies], and they are strange prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

"Like ourselves," Socrates says; that is, we are also prisoners of the illusions he has been describing. Education is the process by which one is forced to look toward the light, and then is led unwillingly up the path out of the cave to stand in the light of day, and at last look toward the sun itself. "Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?" Of course, and this is why the educator is called literally to disillusion

pupils from what parents and society have taught.

Plato's understanding of education is fundamentally different from that expressed in Deuteronomy. While they have in common a social goal, that of developing and sustaining the virtues required by a particular society, the biblical strategy involves binding the individual to a tradition of norms and loyalties shared generation after generation. Plato's strategy involves liberation from the prevailing understanding of reality in the interest of transforming, rather than preserving, the social and political order. The teacher inducts his pupil into a higher wisdom that serves as the basis for a total reconstruction of society, including the most intimate relationships. Anything that stands in its way is self-condemned as ignorance and prejudice.

While John Dewey's account is informed by an entirely different metaphysic and anthropology, he shares Plato's concept of education as movement away from inherited habits and understandings. "Growth itself," he wrote in *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), "is the only moral 'end.'" Everything that promotes the growth of the child into a person who continues to grow through new experiences of shared problem solving is good education. "Growth," Dewey wrote a few years later, "is not enough; we must also specify the direction in which growth takes place, the end towards which it tends. . . . Does this form of growth create conditions for further growth, or does it set up conditions that shut off the person who has grown in this particular direction from the occasions, stimuli, and opportunities for continuing growth in new directions?" In other words, "truth" resides in the search itself. Dewey contrasts his position with that of "reactionaries [who] claim that the main, if not the sole, business of education is transmission of the cultural heritage."

The educational goals described in Deuteronomy are consistent with the practice of many schools, whether religious or not, that give priority to helping pupils to master the knowledge and the moral precepts that previous generations have found

important. These schools teach history and languages (even “dead” languages) and the great literature of their cultural heritage, as well as traditional virtues.

Schools that follow the model suggested by Plato try to teach a fundamentally different way of understanding the world, one that requires rejection of much in the tradition and much of what children have been told by their parents. This is education for personal and social transformation, described brilliantly in Rousseau’s *Émile* (1762) and attempted by various totalitarian regimes, starting with the French Revolution and culminating in the efforts to create the “new Soviet man” during 70 years of communist education. A less sinister form of transformative education is provided in mission schools that enroll children from non-Christian homes with the goal of instilling a new understanding of reality in their charges.

Dewey’s emphasis on growth has had an enormous influence upon American classrooms, and not only in schools that describe themselves as progressive. In this spirit, educators invoke the slogan, “Teach the child, not the subject.” They talk of “critical thinking” as more important than mastery of facts about history or society. And they urge that skills such as reading or accurate spelling not be taught until they are “developmentally appropriate.” For many middle-class children who benefit from enriching home experiences, such an emphasis on self-direction and cooperative learning based upon group projects can mean happy school days. For children from homes that are not rich in “cultural capital,” a series of nondirective classrooms can result in a grievously inadequate education.

Each of these differing views of education could shape a coherent school, though some of us will prefer one and some the other. The trouble is that seemingly contradictory elements from each are often mixed together in the orientation that future teachers are given to the nature of their vocation.

They are told that they will have to cover the content that increasingly is specified in state curriculum frameworks, though this is

often presented as an unwelcome interference with their creativity as teachers and with the real interests and needs of their future pupils. Much of this content, inevitably, is “conservative,” in the sense that it reflects the accumulated wisdom of society about what is important to know.

Future teachers are also told that it is part of the mission of the public school to take the leading role in the transformation of society, by convincing pupils that the beliefs of their parents and of their communities of faith or tradition about the roles of men and women, about sexual orientations and practices, and about a host of other sensitive matters are simply wrong. In Plato’s sense, teachers are to disillusion their pupils about what they think they know and what meaning to attach to it.

They are also told that their primary concern should be with the pupil’s own needs and interests, and that curriculum mandates should not be allowed to interfere with the natural unfolding of individuals. Such preachments are not only of recent vintage. They were given definitive expression in a book published nearly 75 years ago, *Foundations of Method*, by William Heard Kilpatrick (no relation to William Kirk Kilpatrick). Summarizing the book recently, Hirsch discerned “the identification of correct pedagogy with liberal, democratic American ideals; the dubious claim that it was basing itself on the most advanced scientific research; the insistence upon the individuality of the child and the autonomy of the teacher; the disparagement of mere subject matter and of other nations’ educational methods; the admonition to teach children rather than subjects; the claim that knowledge is changing so fast that no specific subject matter should be required in the curriculum; the attack on rote learning; the attack on tests and even report cards; the claim that following the project method would develop critical-thinking skills. Kilpatrick’s book even celebrated the whole-language over the phonics approach to reading instruction.”

Implementing any one of these approaches consistently requires choices that essentially exclude the others. This is not to say



Possibilities and Pragmatics (1990), by Vivian Torrence

that teachers who are seeking to transmit a tradition of knowledge and virtue are not free to criticize aspects of that tradition, or that they should be so enamored of the subject matter that they forget the pupil. Nor is it to suggest that those who follow a “child-centered” approach have no concern at all with the needs of society. But teachers who are unclear about their primary goals and how they will seek to reach them are likely to fall into a hopeless muddle of half-attempts and self-contradictions.

**T**eacher preparation that fails to grapple with the goals of education, by showing how the selection of classroom method and curricula follows from the choice of goals, not the other way around, is a formula for incoherent and ineffectual education. That is, unfortunately, a confusion that “educators” have imposed upon teachers. Sometimes it

seems that only the essentially negative virtue of “tolerance” is allowed a role in public schools—which is often a cloak for undermining traditional values. But forswearing any intention of influencing the habits, attitudes, and settled dispositions of pupils shows a fundamental lack of respect for their potential as human beings, and for the noble vocation of teaching.

If we are entering, as it appears, an era of many competing educational experiments, teachers and school administrators must be made aware of an essential truth: different ways of understanding the goals of education have different implications for the classroom and curriculum. Before this can happen, however, we need to recognize that the competing goals of education themselves reflect different philosophical, even theological, choices about how we understand the nature of reality itself.

# Our Uneducated Educators

by Paul A. Zoch

There is a troubling paradox at the heart of America's efforts to reform the public schools. After many decades of clamor for change and improved student achievement, one of the few groups that seem to lack any sense of urgency is also one of the most important: the principals and other administrators who actually lead the schools. Having long resisted state-mandated tests as intrusive and inaccurate assessments of "mere" basic skills and contrary to the true spirit of education, they now cite rising scores on such exams as evidence of success. Never mind the evidence of our senses, much less of international comparisons that show American students barely able to outperform their peers in Cyprus. The nation's youngsters are meeting "world class" standards. The principals and the educationist brain trust in the university-based schools of education have the problem largely in hand. Students in Germany, Japan, and South Korea, watch out—graduates of American high schools now read at least at the ninth grade level.

Some light is shed on this paradox if one asks a simple question: who is the best-educated person at your local high school, the person whose sterling academic and intellectual accomplishments serve as a model and inspiration for students and faculty? Most likely it is not the principal or even the superintendent of the district, but the valedictorian or salutatorian of the graduating class, or

perhaps another student in the top five percent of the senior class. One of my former students, for example, passed advanced placement (AP) exams in chemistry, biology, American history, English, calculus, and Latin, making the highest possible score of 5 on all but one, on which he scored a 4; the minimum passing score is 3. By passing those exams, he demonstrated his mastery of the subjects at the college level and earned college credit in those fields. Many other students can boast of similar accomplishments. Can their principals and superintendents?

That the answer is a resounding and sardonic *no* points to a grave defect in America's education system: the lack of authentic intellectual and academic leadership in the public schools. What leadership there is sets a standard of academic submediocrity, guided by the principle that it is not important to *be* educated; it is important only to *appear* educated.

The academic and intellectual aimlessness of our schools is a direct outgrowth of their leaders' impoverished academic backgrounds. About one-third of the principals surveyed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) in 1987 held undergraduate degrees in business, education, or physical education. (More than half had earlier worked as coaches, including 28 percent who served as athletic directors.) The academic quality of degree students entering education pro-



Spring (1986), by Stasys Eidrigevicius

grams is revealed by their low scores on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), the ticket to college admissions. The maximum combined score is 1600. In 1980, around the time when many of today's younger administrators were undergraduates, the average combined SAT score of education majors was 807, and of business majors, 852. Average scores in other majors ranged from 886 in the arts and humanities to 911 in the social sciences to 1055 in the physical sciences. (Last year, I wrote letters of recommendation for graduating seniors whose combined SAT scores were 1400, 1430, and 1490; the AP wizard mentioned earlier

scored 1570.)

We can gauge the academic quality of the remaining two thirds of administrators by examining how graduate students in education score on the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), a required test for most graduate school applicants. The highest score possible for each of the three sections (verbal ability, quantitative ability, and analytical ability) is 800. In verbal ability, education graduate students who took the test in the period from October 1989 to September 1992 scored 462, placing next to last, 25 points behind the supposedly "verbally challenged" engineers. Nor did education students shine in quantitative ability; their average score of 503 placed them dead last. In analytical ability, they barely avoided last place with a score of 531, one point ahead of those in the "other fields" category.

How will our "educational leaders" lead our students to success in math and science after scoring so poorly on a mathematics exam that, according to its designer, the Educational Testing Service, "does not extend beyond [what is] usually covered in high school"?

**W**e need not rely on test scores to assess the academic abilities of these leaders—and, indirectly, the standards prevailing in the academic discipline that has certified them as educational leaders. Consider this memorandum written by a principal to the 150 teachers in the

Texas high school where I work: “Spring is upon us. We need to take time in your classes to re-emphasize the dress code. There are no shorts to be worn.” Or this greeting from an administrator who had previously served as a principal in another district:

Hello, I am the new Tech Prep Specialist in the district. In recent weeks, I have previously had the pleasure of meeting many of you, however there are many that I have yet to make your acquaintance. It will be my personal vendetta to meet each of you and remember your name as well as what you do before the year’s end.

Alas, many parents and teachers across the country can report similar incidents. In my school, even a formal document such as the school’s student handbook is riddled with grammatical and stylistic errors. It provides one of the few occasions when a teacher can be glad that students read so little.

**A**dministrators are drawn from the ranks of teachers, of course, and at least in this area of competence one study shows that they come from the bottom ranks. In the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey, education administrators’ average score of 326 in prose literacy put them behind the average score of 333 attained by the teachers they supervise and, in theory, lead. The administrators tied with registered nurses, and surpassed only one professional category: sales supervisors and proprietors.

The dismal academic performance of administrators has not gone entirely unnoticed. In 1989, for example, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration issued a report calling for a radical overhaul of the preparation of principals

and administrators. “Faculties and deans in schools of education are frequently embarrassed by the academic performance of educational administration graduate students,” the report noted—this in a field where people are not easily embarrassed by low achievement. “Many graduate programs adhere to an unspoken pact that any teacher, even an unsuccessful teacher with marginal academic ability, has an inalienable right to study for an administrator’s certificate, and persistent candidates are almost always admitted.”

At no time during their own education, whether in high school or college, or in their professional training, are educational leaders required to succeed, as the best students in our schools do, in courses of AP depth and quality in core subject areas. They do not need to be educated; a degree in education will do. That credential is won by taking courses in curriculum, education law, education finance, psychology, and educational leadership.

Running a school or school district is a complicated endeavor, requiring specialized knowledge and training. But apart from necessary instruction in such matters as management and law, our educational leaders are steeped in the intellectual equivalent of astrology, alchemy, and pig Latin. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration itself recommended that the master’s degree in education and administrator certificates be abolished. The content presented in such programs, it concluded, is “irrelevant, outdated, and unchallenging.”\*

A few anecdotes illustrate the infamous Mickey Mouse nature of education courses. A colleague of mine, while

\*Our country is awash in products of the education schools. Consider this appalling calculation: Between 1970 and 1993, American institutions of higher learning granted 2,871,292 bachelor’s and 2,184,671 master’s degrees in education. There are approximately 40 million students in the public schools today. That means there is at least one person with a bachelor’s in education for every 13.9 students in the United States and one with a master’s in education for every 18 students.

> PAUL A. ZOCH teaches Latin in a public school in Houston, Texas. His book *Ancient Rome: An Introductory History* was recently published by the University of Oklahoma Press. Copyright © 1999 by Paul A. Zoch.



*False Ceiling (1995), by Richard Wentworth*

teaching full-time at our high school, was also taking three graduate courses in education at night in pursuit of his master's degree. "Isn't that a lot of work?" I asked him one day, noting that he still managed to go fishing every weekend. He said he never had to study, and was making A's. I asked why he was not doing something more interesting and worthwhile, like getting a master's in his subject, rather than education. "No way," he said, astounded that I would even ask such a question. "I probably couldn't handle just one graduate course in [the subject] while teaching full-time."

A course I took to help fulfill the requirements for my teacher's certificate had a reading list consisting, in its entirety, of one slim book of approximately 100 pages and two articles of approximately 30 pages each. The other education courses I have had, all of which carried graduate credit and, according to educationists, are equal in rigor to graduate

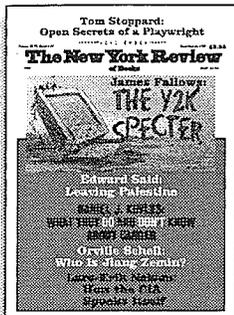
courses in other fields, were no more challenging than 9th-grade algebra.

Recognizing some of the weaknesses of today's schools, educationists at universities have been busily churning out books and articles on what makes effective educational leaders and principals. (What were they looking into before, one wonders?) The research shows that "effective schools"—the schools where, generally, students learn what they are supposed to—succeed by virtue of a principal who is an instructional leader animated by a vision of what the school should be. Therefore, educationists argue, principals must be given broader powers in the management of their schools and the curriculum. But what will inform the "vision" of administrators who lack a solid grasp of academic subjects? In most cases, it will be the vacuous doctrines of the educationists.

Many of the guideposts suggested by effective schools research do not bode

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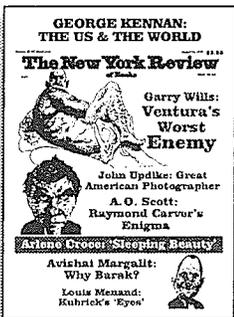
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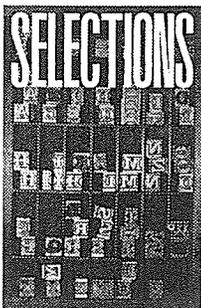
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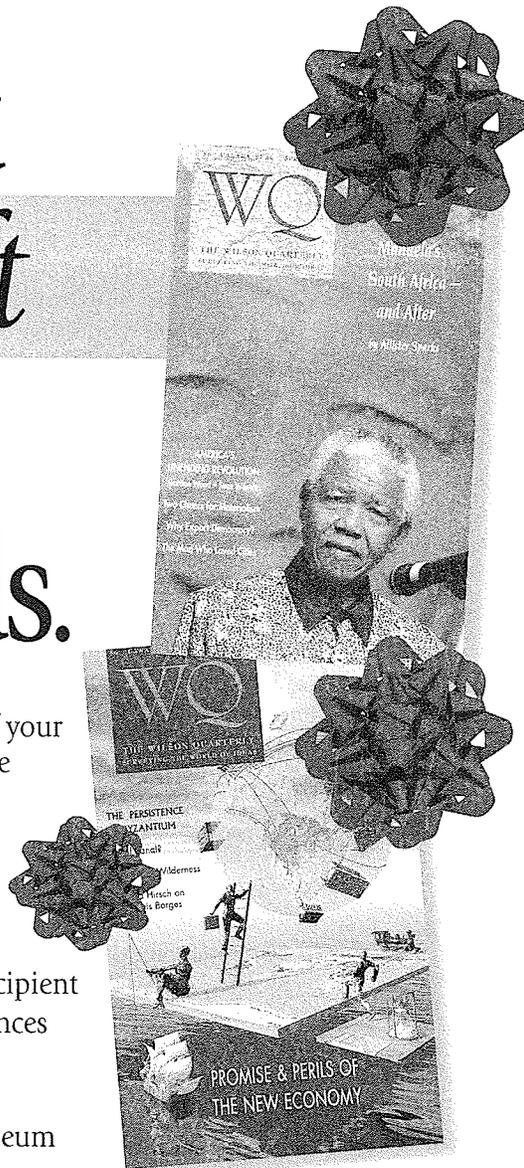
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well for the achievement of a clearer sense of direction at the top of the nation's schools. In 1990, for example, John E. Walker, now professor emeritus of educational administration and supervision at Arizona State University, presented a list of the "12 key skills every principal should possess," derived from a study of three principals by the NASSP: "problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, sensitivity, stress tolerance, oral communication, written communication, range of interest[s], personal motivation, and educational values."

Never mind that this careful research has produced a list of "skills" (some of which are not skills at all) required in virtually any profession. Examine instead Walker's description of the one singular attribute, "educational values":

Aside from an excellent academic preparation, these three outstanding principals had life experiences that enabled them to work with and understand people. All were involved in sports; they knew what it took to succeed and the importance of hard work. They loved people, especially kids. All could be successful superintendents, but two out of three said they never wanted to lose contact with kids.

These exemplary principals had a solid grasp of many disciplines, including essential elements of instruction, self-esteem programs, community education, public relations, retention, student testing, suicide prevention, stress management, and child growth and development. Other areas of expertise included parenting, homework, study skills, latchkey programs, and school-business partnerships.

One must remind oneself that Walker is describing the principals' *educational* values. Apparently, effective principals have on their minds everything but stu-

dents' mastery of demanding academic subjects.

To the principal or superintendent fortified by such bizarre doctrines, the fact that he holds power and authority in the school proves that knowledge and academics really are not very important; it is important only to possess the credentials of formal education. After all, he is in a position of authority, despite what is probably a lowly academic record, and he rose to his position of high prestige and pay not because of his academic brilliance but because he fulfilled the requirements in education. The honest principal may recognize that many of the teachers under his authority are better educated than he is, but this may merely serve, in his mind, to validate his experience: if the teachers are so smart, why is *he* in charge of *them*?

Such attitudes have a demoralizing trickle-down effect. Even teachers who are fervently devoted to cultivating a love of the pursuit of knowledge in their students may think twice: if academic knowledge is so important, why is a less educated person earning more money, enjoying greater prestige and power, and serving as the school's standard-bearer? Thus ignorance becomes legitimized, the norm; the school's academic standards have been compromised and vitiated in the very position where they should be most sanctified.

**I**t is very unlikely that, in setting standards and creating their vision of the school, administrators will reach the obvious conclusion: "The students need to be smarter than I am." After all, they are just kids, and it would be unfair to expect them to become as knowledgeable as a highly educated adult with a master's degree or doctorate. The principal may even think it reasonable if his charges achieve less than he did when he was in high school since, after all, he was enough of an academic success to become the head of his own school, and many students will not aim that high. It is a frightening thought: to

administrators it looks like success if graduating seniors are as well educated as they are!

In a 1987 survey, four years after publication of the landmark national report *A Nation at Risk*, only 46 percent of principals agreed with the proposition, “Schools require far too little academic work of students.” The former principal who did not know the correct meaning of *vendetta* revealed his thoughts on academic standards by showing teachers a clip from *The Bells of St. Mary’s*, in which Father O’Malley—no Jesuit, this padre—advises Sister Benedict to pass the failing Patsy, so her self-confidence (i.e. self-esteem) will not be harmed, standards being rather arbitrary anyway.

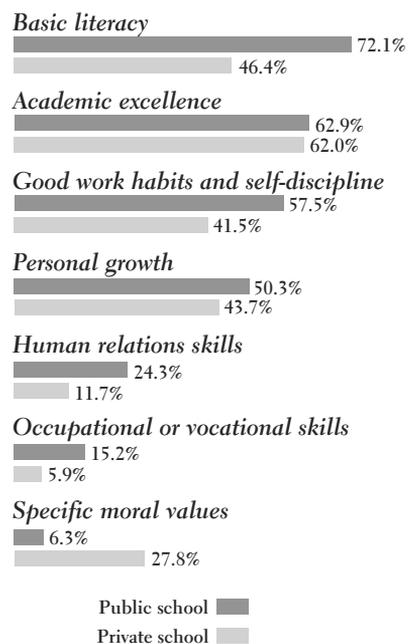
**F**rom an administrator’s perspective, higher standards, even if they were needed, would have a variety of other drawbacks. They would increase the chances that more students would fail courses, making them ineligible under the “no pass, no play” laws for extracurricular activities, including, worst of all, sports. Besides the harm that failure might do to the students’ “self-esteem” and the certainty of blistering phone calls from irate parents, the principal would also have to be aware of how a high failure rate would make the school appear. And the drop-out rate might rise. Overall, the principal would have to conclude, higher standards are a bad idea.

Unfortunately, there is no alternative to relying on principals and administrators for leadership. School boards have too many varied responsibilities, and members generally serve only part-time. Moreover, virtually all school boards are elected, so popularity with the voters is a more important qualification than academic achievement and wisdom. Can we turn to parents for leadership? While many are committed to getting the best education possible for their children, many more are not. In any event, parents are too removed from the schools’ daily operations to play a very effective role.

Teachers can provide some leadership, but they hold the least power in the schools and not infrequently are, like the administrators, ardent educationists. This was vividly illustrated recently at my own school by a de facto straw poll on teachers’ educational values. During our in-service training before the first day of school, we teachers were divided into groups of seven. Each group was given a large paper cutout of a student and some marking pens, with instructions to list on the cutout the characteristics we wanted our graduates to take along with them when they graduate from high school. After 30

## Principal Goals

In a 1993–94 opinion survey, school principals were asked to rank their educational goals. The chart below shows the percentage who ranked each goal first, second, or third. More than one-third of the principals did not choose “academic excellence” as one of their top three goals.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey: 1993–94 (Principal Questionnaire).

minutes of brainstorming, the groups presented their results.

The first two groups listed high self-esteem, good grooming, job prospects, good ethical character, freedom from drugs and alcohol, politically active, socially conscious, and similar characteristics. It was not until the third group—mine—that a singularly academic characteristic made an appearance. It was not an outlandish wish: “the ability to read and write and do math at the 12th grade level.” The fourth group continued in the vein of the first two, setting its sights on producing graduates who wear their pants at waist level and don’t wind up in prison. To its credit, the fifth group included “has a common core of knowledge.” The sixth and seventh groups resumed the undiluted stream of educationist psychobabble, adding to their list of objectives the hope that our graduates would be . . . happy! Nobody in the whole assembly seriously challenged the absurdity of suggesting such an elusive and personal condition as a goal of the schools.

After the last group finished its presentation, the school principal, our educational leader, commented that we had come up with an exceedingly large number of goals. We would need to concentrate on just a few, he suggested. *Which* few, however, was a subject he never addressed.

Our schools sorely need academic czars to crack the whip behind students to get them moving toward substantial academic goals. If we are to have authentic academic leadership in the schools, we must have principals and superintendents with solid



An Unusual Period of Company (1997),  
by Maysey Craddock

academic backgrounds. A first step would be to require that all current principals and superintendents pass AP exams or their equivalents in English, calculus, a science, a non-native foreign language, and history. Administrators who did not pass these tests within five years would be sent back to the classroom to teach whatever subject they once taught. No matter how passionately and sincerely they might pro-

test their love of education and learning, those who failed such tests would reveal that they do not love them enough.

We should also demand that future principals and superintendents have at least a master’s degree in a traditional academic subject, not education or business. Virtually all principals surveyed by the NASSP held at least a master’s degree, but only two percent of these degrees were in fields other than education.

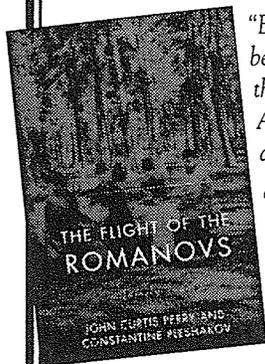
Our schools need more education and knowledge, not more educationist tripe, with its emphasis on vague emotional, social, political, and psychological goals and its ugly tendency to rationalize and legitimize ignorance. Knowledge, not the mere shadow of knowledge, must be the guiding principle in our schools, and the standard for excellence in education must be set by intellectually accomplished principals and superintendents. Otherwise, we will be left with a choice between wringing our hands over the ignorance of our young people or contenting ourselves with their success at emulating their educational leaders.

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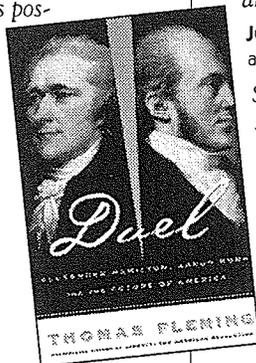
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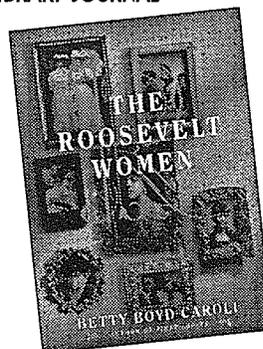


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# An American Dilemma

*Americans have come to depend on big government, but they aren't happy about it. We can't live with the federal leviathan, it seems—yet we can't live without it. It is a predicament with a history—and a way out.*

*by R. Shep Melnick*

Like New England weather, American politics during the 1990s has been subject to abrupt and drastic changes. In early 1992, Republican president George Bush seemed a shoe-in for re-election, Democrats were in firm control of Congress, and pundits were sure that the era of divided government was here to stay. But just a year later, Bill Clinton was sitting in the White House and the ascendant Democrats, now in control of both the presidency and the Congress, were promising a new era of activist government. Yet it didn't happen. In 1994, after the health care debacle, the Republicans captured both houses of Congress for the first time in more than 40 years, vowing to roll back federal entitlements and regulatory programs. "The era of big government is over," Clinton famously conceded in 1996. But later that year, it was the conservative

Republicans who were in retreat, their majority whittled away as Clinton, promising to protect Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment from Republican "extremists," easily won re-election. Who will control Congress and the White House after the 2000 elections is anybody's guess.

These frenetic ideological changes in the political atmosphere do not simply reflect the fluctuating fortunes (or the follies) of individual political leaders, nor are they just the results of the long-standing practice of throwing the rascals out. They have occurred too frequently to be taken for the "cycles of history" in which liberalism and conservatism alternately lay claim to the public's favor. They suggest instead that basic contradictions in the American view of government, after gathering force for a century, are finally coming to a head.

Americans spent much of the 20th



Political Descent '96, by Edward Sorel

century expanding the reach and powers of the federal government. Yet at the same time, the practices and institutions that connect citizens to the public realm—from locally based political parties to regional loyalties—were steadily being undercut. No lasting public philosophy arose to provide a coherent

explanation of government's new role. Today, as a result, we have a political discourse that fails to acknowledge one of the central realities of our political life: "big government," Bill Clinton notwithstanding, is here to stay.

Clinton's sound bite is only the most dramatic manifestation of a widespread

inability (or unwillingness) to come to terms with the permanence of the national welfare and regulatory state. Liberals are forever warning that it is about to be dismantled by devious corporate interests, closet racists bent on eliminating civil rights laws, or religious zealots. Conservatives are forever lamenting that “big government” has been foisted upon an unsuspecting public by wily politicians, unaccountable judges, or a secularized elite—and calling for the public to revolt.

Americans en masse are no more satisfied. During the 1950s and early 1960s, about three-fourths of the public believed “you can trust government in Washington to do what is right.” Today, only about one-fourth expresses such confidence. But this distrust of “big government” is not based on hostility to identifiable government activities. By large margins, Americans support major regulatory and entitlement programs. Indeed, they frequently demand *more* services, benefits, and protections. Though loathing bureaucracy in the abstract, they report favorable opinions of agencies with which they have had contact. Americans, it seems, can’t live with big government—and can’t live without it. So the voters alternately box the ears of those who defend it and of those who promise to shrink it, with the only rule being that the party that appears most in control of the government takes the biggest beating.

The disjunction between Americans’ expansive expectations of government and their low opinion of politics is not just the product of flawed rhetoric. Its origins go back to the turn of the century, when Progressive reformers sought to construct a strong national government to counter the power of the emerging large corporations and to improve the

welfare of the average citizen. Aided by two world wars and a prolonged depression, Progressive and New Deal reformers were remarkably successful not only in expanding the responsibilities of government but in destroying the turn-of-the-century political institutions they despised. Determined to rid politics of corruption and parochialism, and to make it more open, more principled, more rational, and more nationally uniform, these reformers attacked and weakened political parties and local government, precisely the two main institutions that linked average Americans with their government. Consequently, as Americans became more dependent on government, they became more detached from politics. They came to fear that they had little influence over the government that had so much sway over them.

At the beginning of the 20th century, control over most programs affecting the lives of Americans still lay with state and local governments. It was nearly as it had been a century before, when, as political scientist James Sterling Young writes, “almost all the things that republican governments do which affect the everyday lives and fortunes of their citizens, and therefore engage their interest, were . . . *not* done by the national government.” By the late 19th century, the federal government had grown somewhat, but almost all its employees worked in the Post Office Department, the Department of Agriculture, or the notoriously corrupt Pension Office, which aided Civil War veterans. Until the 1890s, even immigration policy remained in the hands of the states, despite the fact that the Constitution explicitly assigns control over citizenship and naturalization to the federal govern-

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ment. In the first three decades of the 20th century (except during World War I), the federal budget consumed less than three percent of the gross national product—a figure that has since grown to about 25 percent. Even in those cases where the federal government did act, its policies usually reflected local pressures and demands.

This decentralization of governmental powers rested not only on a deeply embedded constitutional vision but on a political foundation defined by intense sectional loyalties and marked social and economic differences among regions. Most distinctive was the South, with its racial caste system, backward economy, and peculiar politics. The West stood out too, being sparsely populated, largely without water, and dependent on extractive industries such as mining and, to an extraordinary extent, the use of federal lands. These strong regional differences in interest and outlook were reflected and reinforced by the local political parties and, through them, shaped national politics.

A variety of social, economic, and political changes—everything from world war to the invention of air conditioning—slowly smoothed away many of the sectional idiosyncrasies. Intermittent crises produced policy “breakthroughs,” such as the regulation of the railroads and the trusts in the late 19th century, the passage of the Social Security and Wagner acts in 1935, the creation of a permanent military establishment after World War II, and the enactment of civil rights legislation in the mid-1960s. Each of these initiatives was hotly contested. But each expansion of federal authority made the next a little easier. Eventually the ruling presumptions about government were reversed. Today, the discovery of new social problems, from AIDS to teen smoking, inevitably leads to demands for governmental solutions. And—just as important—national uniformity has become the norm. It is regional variation that now requires special justification.

In retrospect, the long congressional debate over the 1964 Civil Rights Act—which banned racial discrimination in schools, employment, and public accommodations—was the death knell for the old regime of limited and decentralized government. In 1964 and 1965—without depression, war, partisan realignment, or an immediate crisis of any sort—Congress enacted the Voting Rights Act, Medicare, Medicaid, the Economic Opportunity Act, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and immigration reform. The next 10 years brought the “reconstruction” of southern education; rapid expansion of health, safety, consumer, and environmental regulation; and new national programs to aid the elderly, the poor, and the disabled. During the 1970s and 1980s, federal aid to the states shrank, but federal mandates multiplied. Washington was in the driver’s seat.

Even as the federal government was becoming a pervasive presence in American life, political parties—one of the chief links between citizens and government—were losing their vitality. For more than a century, the party system stood as a bulwark against the centralization of authority, blocking all efforts to build an effective national administrative apparatus or to end institutionalized racism in the South. National parties were little more than large agglomerations of state and local parties that mostly tended to matters at home and came together only quadrennially to choose a presidential candidate.

That started to change toward the end of the 19th century, when reformers wittingly and unwittingly planted the seeds of party decline. Primaries and open caucuses limited party leaders’ control over nominations. The Australian ballot (which replaced the old one-party paper ballots that encouraged party-line voting), stiffer registration requirements, direct election of senators, referendums and initiatives, limitations on patronage,

and nonpartisan municipal elections all helped to deprive state and local party organizations of power and purpose. Later, rising education levels and new forms of political communication, from direct mail to TV ads, sped the breakdown, weakening voters' ties to parties and parties' links to elected officials. In escaping the corruption, parochialism, patronage, and inefficiency of traditional party politics, the country also lost its most reliable instrument for developing stable political loyalties and building governing majorities.

**I**n a few respects, the *national* parties have become stronger than ever. The national Democratic Party, starting in the 1960s, became more aggressive in specifying the rules states must follow for selecting delegates to national nominating conventions. The Republican National Committee has been quite successful in fundraising, recruiting candidates for Congress and state legislatures, and defining conservative issues.

In Congress, party unity has increased significantly over the past two decades despite the erosion of partisan ties among the electorate. On Capitol Hill, the ideological gulf between the two parties has widened. The tendency toward the nationalization of politics and the ideological polarization of the two parties reached its apogee in the 1994 elections, when the Republicans (ostensibly the party of decentralization) mounted a national congressional campaign on the basis of a specific platform, the Contract with America. Thirty-four Democratic incumbents were swept from office and House Republicans gained a 231–203 majority. Under Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia, partisanship in the House intensified. In 1995, two-thirds of all roll call votes in the House pitted the majority of one party against the majority of the other—a 40-year high.

The new congressional partisanship owes much to the breakdown of the old

regional party loyalties. Much of the South has moved into the Republican column, depriving the Democratic Party of a conservative internal counterweight and tilting the GOP rightward.

The resulting increase in ideological coherence in Washington has further discredited the parties in the eyes of the voters. Whether out of moderation, indecision, or a stubborn desire to have their cake and eat it too, most American voters have refused to endorse either party's program. Instead, they alternate between decrying politicians' lack of principle and condemning their excessive zeal for principle. The nationalization of American politics thus has paradoxically produced ideologically polarized parties without an ideologically polarized or partisan electorate.

**E**arlier in the century, when Progressives and New Dealers envisioned and built a strong national government, they, of course, did not intend to produce an alienated citizenry. On the contrary, they wanted—by means of presidential leadership and a more collectivist public philosophy—to bring the people closer to the government.

They looked to the president, along with nonpartisan administration by “experts,” to give unity, energy, and direction to the country. The president, exercising moral leadership from the “bully pulpit,” would forge direct ties with voters, giving them both a political voice and a sense of attachment to their government. Drawing strength from the people, the president would be able to subdue the inevitably parochial Congress and the reactionary judiciary.

Strong, determined presidents (especially Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson) certainly played a key role in the expansion of federal power. But since the election of Richard Nixon in 1968, latter-day progressives have regarded the presidency more with trepidation than with hope. The expansion of entitlements, social regulation, and civil

rights has come, for the most part, from Congress and the federal courts, not the executive branch. The Warren and Burger courts increased federal control over state and local governments, establishing uniform national rules on such matters as criminal procedures, electoral participation, desegregation, welfare eligibility, abortion, and conditions within state prisons, mental hospitals, and other institutions.

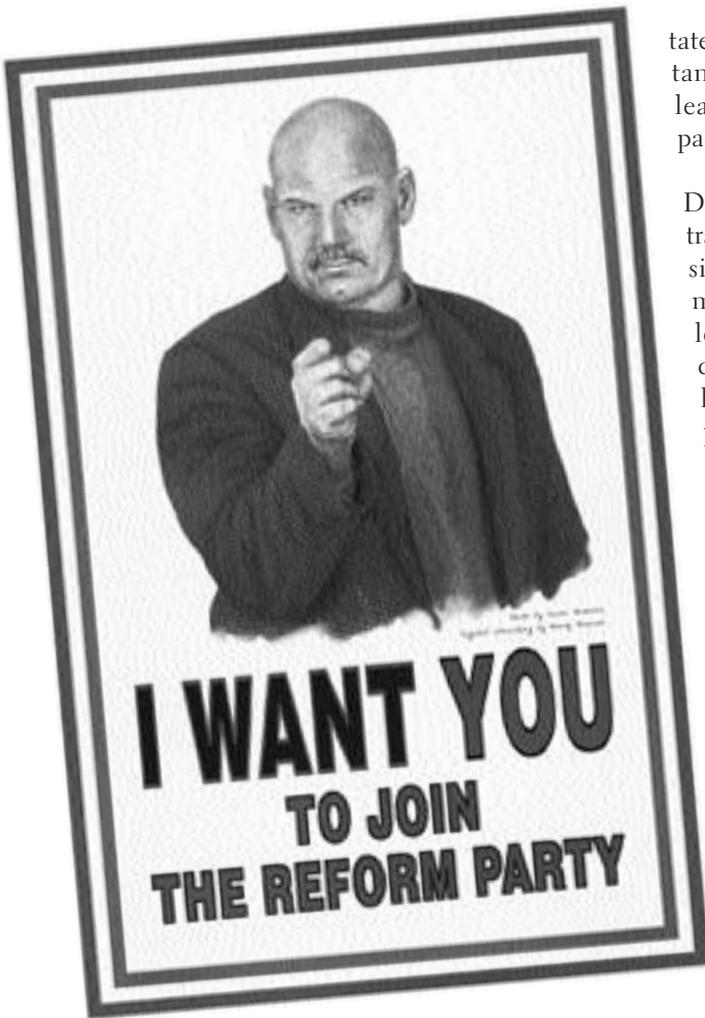
**I**n the 1970s, the Democratic Congress reasserted its authority and created a plethora of regulatory and spending programs opposed by Republican presidents. Instead of growing more autonomous, most federal agencies have become subject to increasing demands, constraints, and oversight by congressional subcommit-

tees and federal courts. Thus, remarkably, the growth of federal responsibilities in recent decades has coincided with a *dispersal* of power at the national level.

Not only has the presidency lost power to the Congress and the judiciary, but the whole political system has become more fragmented and individualistic—far from the smoothly functioning unit the Progressives imagined. If partisanship was the organizing principle of politics at the last turn of the century, individual policy entrepreneurship is the touchstone of politics on the verge of the 21st century. Congress decentralized its own governance in the 1970s, and today, in sharp contrast to the New Deal era, individual senators and House members frequently cultivate constituencies outside their home states or districts and seek to influence national policy and



*Municipal corruption under party bosses such as William Tweed stirred public outrage and led to reforms that weakened political parties.*



*Wrestler-turned-governor Jesse Ventura is now seeking a Reform Party presidential candidate to rally the disenfranchised.*

gain national recognition. Today's politicians, for the most part, do not advance by deferring to authority or working their way up the organization, as in the days of the party machine. Though some candidates may be recruited to run by the national party, the more common course is for candidates for public office to select themselves, as well as to define themselves, market themselves, and create their own campaign organizations and even their own think tanks. Occasionally, as during 1994–95, these independent contractors find advantage in uniting behind a leader who shares their policy preferences. But whenever ideology or electoral considerations dic-

tate, they do not hesitate to distance themselves from such leaders—as Newt Gingrich painfully learned.

The Progressives and New Dealers hoped to supplant the traditional American emphasis on individual rights with a more collectivist public philosophy. Yet over the past quarter-century, Americans have become even more prone to “rights talk.” The traditional understanding of individual rights as limitations on government authority has been amended to include positive rights to an array of government entitlements and protections. In his 1944 State of the Union address, FDR himself pointed the way. His “Second Bill of Rights” included “the right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation”; the right to “adequate medical care,” “a decent home,” and “a good education”; and “the right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident and unemployment.” Each of those rights, Roosevelt noted, “must be applied to all our citizens, irrespective of race, creed, or color.”

More than a half-century later, the rights to an appropriate education, adequate nutrition, clean air, accessible public transportation, and a discrimination-free workplace are all firmly embedded in both statute and American political culture. And according to opinion surveys, most Americans today would also include health care and adequate provision for retirement as basic rights of citizenship.

This new understanding of rights rep-

resents a tremendous change in outlook. Eighteenth-century liberalism promised security from civil war, anarchy, and arbitrary government action. Contemporary liberalism promises much more: security against the vagaries of the business cycle and other hazards created by dynamic capitalism, against the prejudices of private citizens and the consequences of three centuries of racism, against the impediments of congenital disability and inevitable old age, and against the consequences of poverty and of family decomposition. Whereas protecting traditional rights usually meant restraining the growth of government, the new understanding has required expansion of the public sector and extension of federal authority, subtly combining old institutional and rhetorical forms with new policy substance.

Although this redefinition of rights helped to reconcile the American liberal tradition with the welfare state, it also placed many of the most important public policies—notably Social Security, Medicare, and various anti-discrimination laws—above mere “politics.” Such fundamental rights must be protected from the low machinations of politicians, from “politics as usual.” Today’s “rights talk” thus reveals both Americans’ high expectations of government and their lack of confidence in politics.

Americans’ pessimism about popular control of government should not obscure the fact that in many ways American institutions have become more open, democratic, and responsive. Long-standing barriers to political participation by African Americans have been eliminated. Party competition has at last come to the South. Today, most candidates are selected in open primaries rather than by a handful of party regulars. In many states, initiatives and referendums—legacies of the Progressive past—have become important forms of policymaking. At the national level, various new legal rules have given members of the public and

advocacy groups more of a say in the proceedings of federal courts and agencies. Changes in campaign finance laws have made it easier for thousands of corporations, unions, and professional associations to participate in politics. While it is fashionable to decry the role of money in politics, recent experience confirms the observation that James Madison made more than 200 years ago: increasing the number of interests engaged in politics tends to decrease the influence of any one of them.

The mobilization of so many competing groups, along with the new individualism and entrepreneurship in politics, has helped to make American political life unusually contentious, unpredictable, and bitter. No one’s electoral or budgetary base is as secure as it once was. Unable to achieve a clear electoral mandate, Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, frequently resort to scandalmongering, personal vilification, and endless investigation. In this, they are aided by advocacy groups that build their mailing lists by exaggerating the threats to the interests they represent.

Electoral officials these days spend more time campaigning and fund-raising and less time legislating and getting to know one another. Consequently, they are less likely than in the past to develop personal loyalties or a sense of camaraderie. Political differences are no longer suspended for evening poker games, as they were routinely during the late Speaker Tip O’Neill’s rise to power in Congress. For many politicians today, politics is now a “blood sport” to be fought with all available means, no matter how low or ludicrous. The incumbent member of Congress who dons the mantle of “outsider” and campaigns against “Washington” has become almost a stock figure of American politics.

In this overheated political environment, it is hardly surprising that most citizens take a skeptical view of their lead-

ers. They have little direct political experience against which to compare the pictures painted by hyperventilating combatants. Most Americans, as much as they claim to admire outspokenness and adherence to principle in their representatives, are uncomfortable with the inevitable contentiousness of politics. And when the contention turns poisonous, as is so often the case now, they are that much more uncomfortable.

Americans have long taken pride in cultivating a certain contempt for politics and in verbally cutting their leaders down to size. In the past, such disdain reinforced the nation's deep-seated commitment to limited government. Today, however, it is awkwardly paired with a deep-seated commitment to *energetic* government.

**F**or nearly half a century, political scientists have offered a standard prescription for the popular disenchantment with politics: strengthen political parties and make them more "responsible," i.e. ideological. But to the extent national parties have become more influential and more ideologically consistent in recent years, disenchantment has only *increased*. Clearly, this route to reform has reached a dead end.

More than 150 years ago, Alexis de Tocqueville emphasized the close link between American decentralization on the one hand and Americans' high levels of political participation and sense of civic efficacy on the other:

It is difficult to force a man out of himself and get him to take an interest in the affairs of the whole state, for he has little understanding of the way in which the fate of the state can influence his own lot. But if it is a question of taking a road past his property, he sees at once that this small public matter has a bearing on his greatest private interests, and there is no need to point out to him

the close connection between his private profit and the general interest. . . . Local liberties, then, which induce a great number of citizens to value the affection of their kindred and neighbors, bring men constantly into contact, despite the instincts which separate them, and force them to help one another.

Not only is it easier to unite to fight city hall than to change policy inside the Beltway, it is also easier to sustain local organizations when they experience inevitable political setbacks.

Liberals, of course, fear that decentralization is merely a Trojan Horse for delivering a smaller, leaner, and meaner public sector. They can point to many instances in which congressional Republicans have preferred free markets to local control and have cast aside their alleged attachment to federalism in order to "get tough" on a nationwide basis with criminals, deadbeat dads, and doctors performing abortions.

**T**he fact that conservatives are often fair-weather federalists should remind liberals that state and local governments are not their enemies. Volumes of research show that public education performs best when it is most decentralized. In recent years, state and local governments have often been more aggressive than the federal government in support of environmental protection and affirmative action. African Americans wield more power at the local level than they do in Congress. In short, liberals have less to fear from decentralization than they realize.

Americans do not trust "big government," but they do not want to relinquish the benefits, services, and protections that government provides. One way to cope with this dilemma is to bring the providers of those benefits, services, and protections closer to the people who receive them. This would be a peculiarly American solution to our peculiarly American dilemma.

# THE PERIODICAL OBSERVER

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## *The Joyless Victory*

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

When NATO's war over Kosovo ended last June with the saving appearance of victory and not a single American life lost, there was, curiously, no sense of triumph among Americans: no jubilation, no parades, no boost in the polls for President Bill Clinton. Was this because of general indifference to events in the Balkans—or widespread suspicion that the victory was hollow?

William Kristol and Robert Kagan, editor and a contributing editor, respectively, of the *Weekly Standard* (June 14, 1999), see the victory as all but complete. "Slobodan Milosevic's capitulation to U.S. and NATO demands represents a triumph for American power and principle, for the U.S.-led alliance, for President Clinton, and for the small but stalwart group of Republicans . . . who supported the war from beginning to end." It showed "that American power, even when less than artfully applied, is a potent force for international peace, stability, and human decency."

Though the war proved a military success, Michael Mandelbaum, a Fellow of the Council on Foreign Relations, considers it "a perfect failure" in light of its avowed objectives. The people of the Balkans emerged "considerably worse off than they had been before," he writes in *Foreign Affairs* (Sept.–Oct. 1999). Before NATO's intervention, some 2,500 people had died in Kosovo's civil war between the Serb authorities and the ethnic Albanian insurgents of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). After, "an estimated 10,000 people died violently in the province, most of them Albanian civilians murdered by Serbs." Besides saving lives, NATO also sought to prevent the

forced displacement of the Kosovar Albanians. When the bombing began, an estimated 230,000 had been displaced; when it ended, 1.4 million had been.

"The alliance also went to war, by its own account, to protect the precarious political stability of the countries of the Balkans," Mandelbaum notes. "The result, however, was precisely the opposite: the war made all of them less stable." Moreover, though the United States and other NATO countries were not waging war to serve their own national interests, the war damaged those interests by worsening relations with Russia and China.

While Milosevic's "calculated savagery" deserves most of the blame for the murderous expulsion of Kosovar Albanians, some must go to U.S. secretary of state Madeleine Albright and her fellow diplomats, contends Mark Danner, a staff writer at the *New Yorker*. At Rambouillet, the French chateau to which the Serbs and the KLA were summoned at the beginning of this year after the cease-fire arranged last fall broke down, American and Western diplomats "practiced a statecraft that was ill-prepared, fumbling and erratic," he writes in the *New York Review of Books* (July 15, 1999), "and no one can say what Kosovo might look like—and how many Kosovar Albanians might still be alive—had Secretary Albright not handed to the Serbs an arrogant ultimatum": accept the detailed plan presented for the political autonomy of Kosovo under NATO auspices, or else. Albright and her fellow diplomats were confident that there would be "a quick capitulation, or at the very least a rapid Milosevic retreat," Danner notes.

The secretary of state subsequently claimed “that ‘before resorting to force NATO went the extra mile to find a peaceful resolution,’” observes Mandelbaum, but the peace settlement that ended the bombing “included important departures from Rambouillet that amount to concessions to the Serbs.” Had these concessions been offered before the bombing began, he suggests, the bombing and “ethnic cleansing” might have been avoided.

The initial refusal by the KLA (which had been labeled a terrorist organization by U.S. officials) to sign the Rambouillet agreement “let the NATO alliance off the moral hook and should have been used as an opportunity to step back,” argues Joseph S. Nye, Jr., dean of Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, writing in *Foreign Affairs* (July–Aug. 1999). “Instead, the United States ‘fixed the problem’ by pretending to believe the KLA’s promise to accept autonomy within Yugoslavia. The United States then threatened to bomb Serbia. Milosevic called the American bluff and initiated his planned ethnic cleansing of Kosovo.”

Suddenly, Kosovo took on far more importance to the United States, Nye observes. Milosevic’s savage campaign could not be ignored, and Britain and other European allies now joined the United States in calling for NATO action. Failure to act would have meant a major crisis in the American alliance with Europe.

Military analysts are only beginning to decipher the lessons of Kosovo. John Keegan, the noted defense editor of London’s *Daily Telegraph* (June 6, 1999) and author of *The First World War* (1999), declared that he and other military thinkers of the past half-century had been wrong to insist that a war cannot be won by airpower alone—though he allowed that the evidence as to precisely how airpower had succeeded in this case was not all in. Indeed, Tim Butcher and Patrick Bishop of the *Weekly Telegraph* (July 22, 1999) call that success into question, reporting that “a private, preliminary review by NATO experts” concluded that the alliance’s 78-day bombing campaign “had almost no military effect on the regime of President Milosevic, which gave in only after Russia

withdrew its diplomatic backing. . . . [The] thousands of bombing sorties . . . failed to damage the Yugoslav field army tactically in Kosovo while the strategic bombing of targets such as bridges and factories was poorly planned and executed.”

The war highlighted a number of interesting ideological positions. The “humanitarian” label seemed utterly spurious to some on the right, such as Thomas Fleming, editor of *Chronicles* (Aug. 1999), who quotes the Roman historian Tacitus: “They make a desert, and they call it peace.” But the high purpose persuaded some on the left, such as New York University sociologist Todd Gitlin, to abandon their long-time antiwar stance and support—“in fear and trembling”—the NATO war. The Left’s “near-automatic No to military force, a staple of conviction, even ‘identity,’ for three decades, is finished,” he writes in *Mother Jones* (Sept.–Oct. 1999).

Waged in the name of “principles and values,” the war over Kosovo is a landmark in international affairs, declares Czech Republic president Václav Havel in an address delivered while the bombing was in progress, published in the *New York Review of Books* (June 10, 1999). “This is an important precedent for the future. It has been clearly said that it is simply not permissible to murder people, to drive them from their homes, to torture them, and to confiscate their property.”

That indeed was the idea, but Kosovo shows how unsatisfactory the reality of humanitarian war is, columnist Charles Krauthammer maintains in the *National Interest* (Fall 1999). Because Americans will not long tolerate casualties where no important national interest is at stake, humanitarian warfare must be virtually bloodless (at least for Americans)—which not only jeopardizes victory but exposes the people being “helped” to still greater risks.

And even, as in Kosovo, when humanitarian war ends in “victory,” Krauthammer says, the rewards are dubious: “The endless occupation of a murderous neighborhood in pursuit of utopian objectives of the most peripheral strategic interest to the United States.” In light of the Kosovo experience, he concludes, it is unlikely that “any rational Western leader” will want to repeat it.

## POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

### *The Congressional Crackup*

“Crackup of the Committees” by Richard E. Cohen, in *National Journal* (July 31, 1999), 1501 M St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

“Congress in its committee rooms is Congress at work. Whatever is to be done must be done by, or through, the committee.” So stated budding political scientist and future president Woodrow Wilson in his classic 1885 study, *Congressional Government*. For most of the 20th century this remained true, writes Cohen, a *National Journal* staff correspondent, but after three decades of decay, committee power “has largely collapsed.”

When Wilson’s rule was in force, Cohen notes, members working in committees “won deference” for the expertise they developed on particular policy matters, and committee chairmen generally “were recognized as first among equals. Their legislation was carefully crafted after extensive debate and deal-making, and was rarely challenged on the House or Senate floor.”

This system began to break down under the Democrats, he says. Committee chairmen, who were mostly southern and conservative, resisted large parts of Democratic president John F. Kennedy’s legislative agenda in the early 1960s. They went along with most of President Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society” initiatives after his landslide election victory in 1964, but once his popularity waned, the southerners and northern machine Democrats regained the upper hand and “engaged in a titanic struggle with liberal Democratic reformers who demanded a more activist federal government.”

The reformers finally won, thanks to Watergate, which prompted voters in 1974 to elect an unusually liberal “class” of representatives. Out went “iron-clad seniority rules, closed-door deal-making, and Southern dominance among congressional Democrats.”

Junior House members won seats on the most powerful panels, and subcommittee chairmen gained vast new influence. The introduction of C-SPAN cable TV coverage in the House in 1978 encouraged members to be even more independent.

The committee system subsequently became ever more ineffectual, Cohen says. During the Reagan years, with Democrats still in control of the House, important legislation such as the Social Security reform of 1983 “was written largely in informal settings outside of the committee process.” Presented with the Clinton administration’s “costly, indigestible” health care plan in 1994, neither House nor Senate committees were able to come up with credible legislation.

The next year, with Republicans now in control of Congress and committed to their “Contract with America,” a “death warrant” was issued for the old committee system, Cohen says. House Speaker Newt Gingrich “circumvented and intentionally undermined the committee process by creating Republican task forces and demanding that they write legislation reflecting his own views.” The Republicans also imposed a six-year term limit on committee chairmen in both houses, and cut committee staff positions.

Today, on issues ranging from gun control to patients’ rights, Congress confronts “party-driven legislation that was hastily brought to the House or Senate floor without a thorough vetting—or any attempts at bipartisan compromise—among the experts at the committee level.” The committee system’s breakdown, Cohen says, is “a major factor in the chaos that pervades Capitol Hill.”

### *Dodging the ‘Magic Bullet’*

“Richard Russell and Earl Warren’s Commission: The Politics of an Extraordinary Investigation” by Max Holland, in *Miller Center Report* (Spring 1999), P.O. Box 5106, Charlottesville, Va. 22905.

When the Warren Commission issued its report 35 years ago, it shortsightedly fudged a bit on its conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald,

acting alone, had assassinated President John F. Kennedy. The note of ambivalence, which has fed the popular belief in a conspiracy, was con-



*Texas governor John Connally, sitting directly in front of President Kennedy, insisted that one of the bullets had his name on it.*

trary to “all reliable evidence,” says Holland, a Research Fellow at the Miller Center of Public Affairs, and was only introduced because of a key commission member’s “misplaced pride” and antipathy toward the commission’s liberal chairman.

In testimony before the commission, Texas governor John Connally, who was wounded in the attack, insisted that one of the three shots heard in Dealey Plaza in Dallas that November day in 1963 was meant just for him. “He refused to believe that he had been injured incidentally,” Holland says. “According to Connally, the president was injured by the first shot; then he, Connally, was wounded separately by the second shot; then the third and final shot hit the president in the head.” Since it would have been impossible for Oswald to have fired the first bullet that hit Kennedy and a second one hitting Connally in the scant seconds between them, his account implied there were two shooters—a conspiracy.

Nevertheless, the medical and forensic evidence was clear, Holland says. The shot that first hit Kennedy entered the back of his neck, exited his throat, and then—according to what the commission stated was “very persuasive evidence from the experts”—hit Connally, who

was sitting in front of Kennedy in the limousine. This bullet (which skeptics came to call the “magic bullet”) *must* have hit Connally, avers Holland, for if it didn’t, as Connally claimed, then, after emerging from Kennedy’s body, it “disappeared altogether. Such a missile would truly have been a ‘magic bullet.’” (That bullet and the second, fatal one that hit Kennedy’s head “probably” did all the damage, the commission said, with the other shot—Holland believes it was the first one fired—missing

the limousine occupants entirely.)

Despite the unambiguous evidence, Holland says, the commission report left open the possibility that the so-called magic bullet might not have hit Connally after all. “Governor Connally’s testimony and certain other factors,” the commission stated, “have given rise to some difference of opinion as to this probability.”

Why did the commission thus water down the firm conclusion of its own staff? To avert a threatened dissent by one of its most influential members, conservative senator Richard Russell of Georgia, says Holland. Russell strongly disliked the commission’s chairman, Chief Justice Earl Warren, the *bête noire* of southern segregationists, and “would not permit the report—Warren’s report—to contradict the sworn testimony of a southern governor, no matter how impossible that testimony was.”

Warren wanted a unanimous report to dispel public fears. So unwarranted doubt about the single-bullet conclusion was introduced. Though conspiracy theories were sure to abound anyway, the commission itself, Holland concludes, “bears some responsibility” for the widespread disbelief in its findings.

## *Liberals Confront Sociobiology*

“Darwin’s Truth, Jefferson’s Vision” by Melvin Konner, in *The American Prospect* (July–Aug. 1999), P.O. Box 383080, Cambridge, Mass. 02238.

From the moment sociobiology (a.k.a. evolutionary psychology) first reared its head in the 1970s in the work of Harvard University zoolo-

gist Edward O. Wilson and others, liberals have been aghast. Prominent biologists on the left, such as Stephen Jay Gould and Richard

Lewontin, strongly rejected the idea that many patterns of human behavior have a basis in evolution, branding it unscientific and a reprehensible revival of 19th-century social Darwinism. The notion that much human behavior is genetically “hard-wired,” immune to environmental influences, is unacceptable to many others. But liberals ought to calm down and learn to live with it, contends Konner, a professor of anthropology, psychiatry, and neurology at Emory University.

In recent decades, he notes, sociobiological theory has gained “almost universal acceptance...among researchers in natural history and animal behavior and among many psychologists and social scientists.” The theory has not proved useful in all circumstances, he says, but without it, it would be hard to explain, for instance, the research finding that a child is at least 10 times more likely to be assaulted or killed if he or she lives in a household with an unrelated male—a finding that holds true regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, or education, and in at least four countries. Children are much safer in households with men to whom they are genetically related.

“The implications of evolution are not . . . inherently conservative,” Konner maintains. “They are, however, inherently materialist and fraught with conflict.” This makes some

liberals—those with a rosy view of human nature—uneasy. But it would not have bothered America’s Founding Fathers, he says, who had the “gift to be able to take a Hobbesian view of human life without applying a Hobbesian solution.” Scientific materialists with a realistic view of human nature, they nevertheless constructed a liberal order. “In questions of power,” said Thomas Jefferson, “let no more be said of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief, by the chains of the Constitution.”

Though it must seem inadequate to liberals who believe that human nature “is inherently good, unselfish, and cooperative,” the Constitution “has more or less worked for a couple of centuries,” Konner notes. To “those of us who see human nature as the unpleasant product of too many eons of individual selection,” that is a considerable achievement, he says. And this shows what may be “the enduring implication of Darwin’s theory for liberal political philosophy: assume the worst and you can still get something workable.” Precisely because human nature, as designed by evolution, cannot be relied upon to care for the old, the sick, and the very young in a market economy, the case for “programs and supports deliberately designed by a collective, humane, political will” to accomplish that is all the stronger.

## FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

### *History Begins Again*

“Second Thoughts” by Francis Fukuyama, and “Responses to Fukuyama” by Harvey Mansfield et al., in *The National Interest* (Summer 1999), 1112 16th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Ten years ago, in a new journal called the *National Interest*, an obscure researcher from the RAND Corporation ventured to suggest that with the West’s victory in the Cold War, the end of History was in sight. Not *history*, in the ordinary sense of the unfolding story of man’s sad stumble through the centuries, but capital-H *History*, in the Hegelian-Marxist sense of the progressive evolution of human political and economic institutions. And the “end” that Francis Fukuyama discerned was not socialism, as Marxists had supposed, but bourgeois liberal democracy and capitalism. There would be no more grand world conflicts over ideas and ideologies. His bold thesis still stirs controversy.

Now, Fukuyama says that he was wrong—but not for reasons his critics suggested.

Neither the stalling of reform in Russia nor the economic crisis in Asia, says Fukuyama, now a professor of public policy at George Mason University, invalidate his conclusion “that liberal democracy and a market-oriented economic order are the only viable options for modern societies.” Instead, he writes, the “true weakness” in his argument was this: “History cannot come to an end as long as modern natural science has no end; and we are on the brink of new developments in science that will, in essence, abolish what [philosopher] Alexandre Kojève called

‘mankind as such’ — human nature itself.

Within the next few generations, Fukuyama believes, genetic engineering made possible by the biotechnology revolution will allow “what the radical ideologies of the past . . . were unable to accomplish”: the creation of “a new type of human being.” It may well be possible, for example, “to breed less violent people, or people cured of their propensity for criminal behavior.” Already, he says, there is a foretaste of the Brave New World in the widespread use of behavior-altering drugs such as Ritalin and Prozac.

“For today, any understanding we may have of just political arrangements or a universal moral order is ultimately based on an understanding of human nature,” writes Fukuyama. “To the extent that that nature is something given to us not by God or by our evolutionary inheritance, but by human artifice, then we enter into God’s own realm with all of the frightening powers for good and evil that such an entry implies.” Humans will then be able to “change once and for all the set of genetically

controlled behaviors that have characterized the human race since . . . human beings lived in hunter-gatherer societies.” At that point, human capital-H History will be over, he says, and “a new, posthuman history will begin.”

E. O. Wilson, author of *Consilience* (1998) and *On Human Nature* (1978), and one of a half-dozen commentators on Fukuyama’s reappraisal, doubts that things will reach that pass. “By the time the treacherous waters of possible genomic intervention and replacement are charted, I suspect a moral argument will keep *Homo sapiens* from traveling there except for gene therapy and minor enhancement.”

But the weakness that Fukuyama now sees in his original argument is not the only one, in the view of Robin Fox, a professor of social theory at Rutgers University. It is a theory that, like the Hegelian one on which it is based, applies to only a few thousand years of human development, arbitrarily isolated from the millions of years of human history. For all the grand talk, what Fukuyama (and others) call “history,” Fox says, is really a mere blip on the radar screen.

## *Uncle Sam, Don’t Preach*

From an interview in *The New York Review of Books* (Aug. 12, 1999) with retired American diplomat and author George F. Kennan, the father of the containment doctrine:

*I would like to see our government gradually withdraw from its public advocacy of democracy and human rights. Let me stress: I am speaking of governments, not private parties. If others in our country want to advocate democracy or human rights (whatever those terms mean), that’s perfectly all right. But I don’t think any such questions should enter into our diplomatic relations with other countries. If others want to advocate changes in their conditions, fine—no objection. But not the State Department or the White House. They have more important things to do. . . .*

*I think the executive branch of government has been just as bad, if not worse, than the Congress in this respect. But this whole tendency to see ourselves as the center of political enlightenment and as teachers to a great part of the rest of the world strikes me as unthought-through, vainglorious, and undesirable. If you think that our life here at home has meritorious aspects worthy of emulation by peoples elsewhere, the best way to recommend them is, as John Quincy Adams maintained, not by preaching at others but by the force of example.*

## *Nuremberg Revisited*

“Nuremberg, Misremembered” by Jeremy Rabkin, in *SAIS Review* (Summer–Fall 1999), 1619  
Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

The 1945–46 Nuremberg trials of Nazi leaders are often invoked these days by proponents of the recently created International Criminal Court or the

European efforts to prosecute former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. It was at Nuremberg, claimed journalist Tina Rosenberg, writing last January in the *New York Times Magazine*, that the principle “that how a nation treats its own citizens is everybody’s business . . . was established.” But it wasn’t, argues Rabkin, a political scientist at Cornell University. The Nuremberg trials “were more flawed than we like to remember.”



*Hermann Goering, standing beside other Nazi leaders in the prisoners' box, makes his final plea as the Nuremberg proceedings neared an end.*

At the time, many Americans regarded the Nuremberg proceedings—which were conducted not by disinterested bystanders but by the victorious Big Four Allied Powers—as political “show trials.” Supreme Court chief justice Harlan Fiske Stone, privately calling the trials “a high-grade lynching party,” refused to take part in a swearing-in ceremony for the U.S.-appointed judges. A few years later, Supreme Court justice William O. Douglas protested that the leading Nazis had been tried under “an ex post facto law,” and said that “their guilt did not justify us in substituting power for principle.”

What has since come to be called the Holocaust did not figure as prominently in the Nuremberg proceedings as it does in people’s minds today, Rabkin notes. Nearly all the Nazis on trial claimed to know nothing about the death camps, and with only a few exceptions, they had not been in situations that required them to know about them. American prosecutors were intent, not upon fixing responsibility for the mass murder of European Jews, but upon showing that the defendants had committed “crimes against peace” by conspiring to launch a war of aggression.

Though early trial planning resulted in the inclusion of a “crimes against humanity” category, such offenses were never clearly distinguished from other “war crimes.” The Nazi regime’s prewar perse-

cutions were not prosecuted. “American trial planners were well aware that international law, at that time, provided no basis for holding government officials personally liable for persecution of their own citizens,” Rabkin says.

Nor was the Nuremberg tribunal authorized to look into war crimes generally, certainly not any that might have been committed by the Allies. For the most part, the German defendants were not even allowed to cite Allied practices similar to their own. “While the Germans were charged with initiating an aggressive war against Poland,” Rabkin notes, “the Soviet Union had launched its own conquest of eastern Poland at the same time,” then embarked on aggressive wars against Finland and the Baltic states. The crimes of communist dictator Joseph Stalin’s regime were politely overlooked, along with the earlier Soviet-Nazi collaboration.

In 1945, Rabkin writes, “American leaders were not prepared to make themselves—or anyone else—the guarantors of universal justice. . . . American forces certainly had not battled their way into Germany to stamp out murderous oppression wherever it might be found.” More than a half-century later, however, “we see things differently—or pretend that we do,” forgetting “that effective justice does rest on armed force” and that use of force is often very costly in lives and treasure.

## *Sizing Up China*

“Does China Matter?” by Gerald Segal, in *Foreign Affairs* (Sept.–Oct. 1999), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

In the continuing debate over China’s significance for the West today, Segal, director of studies at London’s International Institute for Strategic Studies, weighs in with a dismissive appraisal. “Odd as it may seem, the country that is home to a fifth of humankind is overrated” as an economic market and a military power, he says. “At best, China is a second-rank middle power that has mastered the art of diplomatic theater.”

Economically, China is of little importance, particularly outside Asia, Segal maintains. In 1997, it accounted for only 3.5 percent of world gross national product, compared with the United States’ 25.6 percent, and for only three percent of world trade—less than the Netherlands’ share. Even China’s portion of Asian trade is only 11 percent. “Despite the hype about the importance of the China market, exports to China are tiny,” he says. Of U.S. exports, less than two percent go to China—about a third less than go to Taiwan. And, at the moment, China’s economy “is effectively in recession,” Segal observes. It is doubtful that it has had, or will have anytime soon, a double-digit rate of growth, despite the limited reforms of the last 20 years and exaggerated claims based on questionable data. He sees all this as part of the overblown view of Asia generally. Fears that the Asian financial crisis would cripple Western economies have proved groundless, but the lesson has yet to be learned about China.

Militarily, China is a “second-rate” power—stronger than most of its Asian neighbors but unable to take on the United States, Segal writes. True, it may pose a threat to the Philippines. “But sell the Philippines a couple of cruise missiles and the much-discussed Chinese threat will be easily erased. . . . Even Taiwanese defense planners do not believe China can successfully invade.”

It does matter that Beijing has nuclear weapons targeted at the United States, Segal notes, and that it steals U.S. nuclear secrets. But China still is, like Iraq, only “a regional threat to Western interests, not a global ideological rival” such as the Soviet Union was. “Such regional threats can be constrained. China, like Iraq, does not matter so much that the United States needs to suspend its normal strategies for dealing with unfriendly powers.”

In light of China’s strategic threat, limited though it is, “it is ludicrous to claim, as Western and especially American officials constantly do,” Segal says, “that China matters because the West needs it as a strategic partner. The discourse of ‘strategic partnership’ really means that China is an adversary that could become a serious nuisance. Still, many in the Clinton administration and elsewhere do not want to call a spade a spade and admit that China is a strategic foe.” Yet to exaggerate the threat is alarmism. “Only when we finally understand how little China matters,” he says, “will we be able to craft a sensible policy toward it.”

## ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

### *Overlooked Success Story*

“U.S. Wage-Inequality Trends and Recent Immigration” by Robert I. Lerman, in *The American Economic Review* (May 1999), American Economic Assn., 2014 Broadway, Ste. 305, Nashville, Tenn. 37203.

Economists have been sounding the alarm in recent years about a broad increase in earnings inequality. Though Lerman, an American University economist, has argued that no such increase took place after 1986 (see *WQ*, Summer 1998, p. 126), there has been little, if any, disagreement that wage

inequality increased between 1979 and the mid-1980s. Until now.

Lerman insists that something important has been left out of earlier assessments: the impact of immigration. In 1996, about seven percent of the U.S. labor force consisted of immigrants who had arrived during the pre-

vious 16 years, mostly from low-wage countries. To economists gauging income inequality, Lerman argues, things look worse than they should, because these low-income folk don't show up in their 1979 base year measurements. But they do appear in later measurements, dragging the averages down.

Lerman's solution is to estimate the immigrants' wages in their home countries, then add them into the base year (1979) calculations. Instead of falling by 1.4 percent between 1979 and 1996, he finds, the median wage rate for all workers *increased* by 5.6 percent. And instead of the huge 16.6 percent growth in "inequality," there was a 4.7 percent *decrease*. (In this measure of inequality, the wage rate for the top 10 percent of earners is compared with the wage rate for the bottom 10 percent.)

Among nonelderly *male* workers, however, the median wage rate (\$16 an hour in 1979) still declined, albeit by a lesser amount (5.4 percent, instead of 10.4 percent). Even so, the "inequality" ratio for the male workers, rather than increasing by 22.2 percent, dropped by 1.6 percent. According to a 1997 analysis, immigration was responsible for as much as 55 percent of the relative wage decline experienced by high school dropouts and other low-wage workers.

But immigrants' own wages have more than doubled—"more than enough," Lerman says, "to offset relative wage losses of other workers at the low end of the wage spectrum." And when the immigrants' "rapid wage gains" are taken into account, he concludes, "most of the estimated rise in wage inequality disappears."

## A New Adam

"Adam Smith: Critical Theorist?" by Keith Tribe, in *Journal of Economic Literature* (June 1999), American Economic Assn., 2014 Broadway, Ste. 305, Nashville, Tenn. 37203.



Adam Smith emerges from recent historical scholarship as a moral philosopher and a cultural critic.

Adam Smith (1723–90), the father of modern economics, has long been seen as a prophet of free markets and free trade. In recent decades, a new "historical" Smith has emerged, writes Tribe, an economist at Keele University, in the United Kingdom. But when revisionists turn Smith into a moral critic of modern capitalism, he contends, they go too far.

"Adam Smith is conventionally thought to have provided an account of the economic path to human progress by demonstrating how market rationality arises out of the impulses of individuals driven by their own passions," Tribe says. Neglected, however, was Smith's role "as an analyst of commercial society, ethics, and social progress." Now, thanks to Donald Winch's *Adam Smith's Politics* (1978), Vivienne Brown's *Adam Smith's Discourse* (1994), and other recent studies, Smith's place in the Scottish and European Enlightenment has been emphasized. His arguments in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) have come to be viewed in the context of an 18th-

century debate on commerce and civilization—and seen that way, says Tribe, they appear “remote from the ‘economic individualism’ so often attributed to him.”

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Smith employed his famous “invisible hand” metaphor, writing: “The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity . . . they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants.” Economists have usually interpreted this to refer to the way in which markets and the price mechanism produce the best possible distribution of goods, but Brown—who views Smith’s works in the light of Stoicism and 18th-century rhetoric—gives it a different reading: that Smith is endorsing a traditional Stoic idea that the distribution of material goods has nothing to do with the distribution of happiness. Even if she is right, Tribe notes, that does not invalidate the common understanding of Smith’s “invisible hand” view of markets.

Smith’s argument, however, has often been linked with the “Private Vices, Publick Benefits” paradox originated some 50 years before by the philosopher Bernard

Mandeville, who believed that utterly unrestrained self-interest produced social gains. Smith, though, held a different view, Tribe says. “The Smithian conception of self-interest is not an injunction to act egoistically and without moral scruple, safe in the knowledge that by doing so the public good would somehow or other result: it is embedded within a framework of social reciprocity that allows for the formation of moral judgment.” Indeed, Tribe says, Smith’s invisible hand metaphor was “an allusion to the manner in which self-interest and sociability combine to render commercial society virtuous and prosperous.”

Some revisionists, such as Spencer J. Pack and Patricia Werhane, have gone too far, trying to turn Smith completely upside down, Tribe says. Pack, in *Capitalism as a Moral System: Adam Smith’s Critique of the Free Market Economy* (1991), offers “what Smith would write if he were alive today, not what he did write in the 18th century,” while Werhane’s efforts, in *Adam Smith and His Legacy for Modern Capitalism* (1991), “founder on the lack of evidence for her case.”

“Smith certainly recognized that, while commercial societies were powerful civilizing forces, not all aspects of their development were positive,” Tribe observes. But that hardly makes him a 20th-century critic of modern capitalism.

## *The Good Luck Economy*

“Is Inflation Dead?” by Roger E. Brinner, in *The New England Economic Review* (Jan.–Feb. 1999), Research Dept., Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, P.O. Box 2076, Boston, Mass. 02106–2076.

The American economy has lately seemed to defy the economists’ gloomy wisdom that a falling rate of unemployment eventually leads to a rising rate of inflation. Employers, the theory says, start competing for scarce labor by offering higher wages. The last few years have brought both very low unemployment (under five percent) and declining or steady price inflation. Is this because workers, more insecure perhaps because of the well-publicized layoffs of the early 1990s, have become reluctant to demand higher wages? No, argues Brinner, chief economist of the Parthenon Group, a Boston-based consulting firm. The happy

situation today is due simply to good luck.

“Inflation is not dead,” he asserts. Workers’ real wages have been rising faster “in response to low unemployment, just as in past decades.” While nominal wage inflation remained relatively stable in 1997 and ’98 at around three to four percent, real wage inflation began rising in late 1996.

If that is so, why haven’t prices been following suit, as employers seek to cover the higher costs that rising wages represent to them? The answer, Brinner says, is that price inflation has been held down by some fortunate “supply shocks.” These include:

- Falling oil prices. “After rising sharply in

1990, oil prices declined in the early 1990s. They jumped up in 1996 but retreated in 1997 and plummeted in 1998.”

- “Lower costs for imported goods because of a strong U.S. dollar. Besides their direct effect, lower import prices also cut component costs and increase competitive pressure on domestic producers.”

- A rising stock market has cut pension costs for employers providing defined benefit pension plans.

- Inflation in health care costs has been reduced because of changes in the industry resulting from increased competition and pressures from employers and government.

“Prices reflect total labor costs, not just wages,” Brinner notes. “Therefore, any surprise reduction in the cost of fringe benefits relative to base wages would also trim price inflation.”

Usually, “unemployment is the dominant

influence on inflation,” Brinner observes. In the late 1980s, however, a surge in inflation took place that, while frequently blamed on the drop in the unemployment rate to 5.3 percent, “was actually due to a confluence of adverse inflation shocks” from other sources, including rising prices for oil and other imported goods.

“Conversely,” Brinner says, “the moderate inflation of recent years is due to a confluence of beneficial shocks from all factors other than unemployment.” Were it not for the declining prices of imported goods and energy, and the slower growth in the cost of fringe benefits, the tight labor markets in 1997 and 1998, he says, would have added perhaps a full percentage point to the wholesale price index. In short, he concludes, the good fortune of recent years “[does] not herald a new economy, forever destined to enjoy high growth and low inflation.”

## SOCIETY

### *The New Mating Game*

“How We Mate” by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, in *City Journal* (Summer 1999), Manhattan Inst., 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

Laments about the decline of marriage and the traditional family have almost become a tradition themselves in recent years, but Whitehead, author of the influential 1993 *Atlantic Monthly* article, “Dan Quayle Was Right,” holds out little hope that the decline will be reversed. “A fundamental and probably permanent change in the way we mate” has taken place, she contends.

“Though the majority of Americans will marry at least once,” Whitehead reports, “the marriage rate among unmarried adults has nevertheless declined by a third between 1960 and 1995.” Cohabitation is now the rule rather than the exception. Two-thirds of the young adults born between 1963 and 1974, according to Whitehead, “began their partnered lives through cohabitation rather than marriage,” compared with only 16 percent of men and seven percent of women born between the mid-1930s and early 1940s. Seemingly vanished are many of the rituals of romantic courtship. “By the time they leave their

teens,” says Whitehead, “many single young women have experienced at least one round of [sexual] hookup-breakup, and they carry its emotional baggage” into their twenties, as each new relationship “starts out at a lower level of trust and commitment than the one before.”

While “living together” was pioneered by privileged college students during the 1960s and '70s, today it is more common among 25- to 39-year-olds who lack a college degree. By the 1980s, 45 percent of female high school graduates were opting for cohabitation as a first union, compared with 24 percent of female college grads.

Among African Americans, cohabitating unions often begin earlier and are much less likely to lead to marriage than such unions among whites. Those black couples who do marry—as portrayed in such popular movies as *Waiting to Exhale* (1995)—have very high rates of divorce, and, says Whitehead, “those who stick it out have strikingly high rates of marital dissatisfaction.”

In the evolving new mating ritual, in Whitehead's view, "men and women can pursue their reproductive destinies with only minimal involvement with each other." At first, both sides seem to benefit: "men get sex without the ball and chain of commitment and marriage; women get a baby without the fuss and muss of a man around the house." Women's economic independence and the pill have encouraged women to accept this new deal. Today, 53 percent of teenage girls think it is "a worthwhile life-style" to have a baby without getting married. Among teenage boys, when asked their views on dealing with an unwed girl's pregnancy, 59 percent said that rather than marriage, adoption, or abortion, the best option was for her to have the baby and the father to help with support.

Such loose arrangements give men the

freedom to walk away at any time, leaving women to raise the children. Even women who opt for single motherhood, according to survey responses, often rethink their choice by the time their children reach the age of six, particularly those with sons. It is far easier for men to find the situation that suits them, and many opt for a pattern of serial monogamy, sometimes involving marriage or remarriage, but more often not. Except for a lucky few in the upper-middle class, women are more often left embittered and alone, struggling to work and raise children on their own. In the end, the new mating pattern, says Whitehead, "which began with the promise of enlarged happiness for all, generates a superabundance of discontent, pain, and misery, something that should be a matter of concern to a society as solicitous of adult psychological well-being as ours."

## *The Road to Grandmother's House*

"The Making of the Domestic Occasion: The History of Thanksgiving in the United States" by Elizabeth Pleck, in *The Journal of Social History* (Summer 1999) Carnegie Mellon Univ., Pittsburgh, Pa. 15213.

On Thanksgiving Day 1880, dozens of drunken youths careened through the streets of Philadelphia, wearing makeshift masks and women's clothing, just as Thanksgiving "Fantastics" had been doing for generations. They were followed by eager groups of younger boys who donned rags and knocked at the doors of the well-to-do, demanding treats. Beginning with this drunken working-class carnival, Pleck, a professor of history at the University of Illinois, traces Thanksgiving's progression toward the sedate domestic occasion it is today.

Thanksgiving didn't become a peaceful familial feast by accident, Pleck argues. While it had bona fide historical origins—starting, of course, with the Pilgrims' 1621 meal with their Wampanoag neighbors, and later, the issuance of ad hoc proclamations of a national day of thanksgiving by Presidents Washington, Adams, and Madison—Pleck contends that the holiday was "invented and reinvented" over a period of almost two centuries by a series of politicians, social reformers, and ordinary citizens. Among them was Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of *Godey's Lady's Magazine*. Beginning in the 1840s, she con-

ducted a campaign to spread Thanksgiving, hoping that a unifying holiday would help avert a civil war. Partly in response to her efforts, President Lincoln declared Thanksgiving a legal holiday in 1863. Even so, it continued to be little celebrated outside New England.

That changed during the Industrial Revolution, when Thanksgiving was readily adopted by those who wished to restore the morality and simplicity of a previous age. It became a holiday of homecoming for the newly mobile younger generation, a time of reunion and renewal. Despite this gradual familialization, however, Thanksgiving would only become an exclusively domesticated occasion in the 1910s, says Pleck. Amid the labor strikes and general unrest of the period, unruliness of any sort came to seem threatening to the middle and upper classes. Public tolerance of the Fantastics' rowdy parades declined and the ritual disappeared.

As immigrants streamed into the United States, the holiday took another turn. Progressive social workers and teachers, anxious about the immigrant tide, portrayed

Thanksgiving “as a day when all Americans could feel they belonged to the nation.” Schoolteachers filled their classrooms with pictures of Pilgrims and turkeys, painting a rosy picture of the Pilgrims as the very first immigrants—historical figures with whom any recent arrival could identify.

Only one element was missing from Thanksgiving as it is today—football. Though collegians had played the game on

turkey day since the 1880s (as the upper-class counterpart to Fantastic parades), football did not become a central part of the holiday until the advent of radio broadcasting in the 1920s. This, for Pleck, was the last feather on the old Pilgrim turkey, for it carved out a masculine niche in what had become a feminine domestic festival, cementing Thanksgiving’s place in American life and lore.

## *Justice for Juveniles*

“The Honest Politician’s Guide to Juvenile Justice in the Twenty-First Century” by Barry C. Feld, in *The Annals* (July 1999) of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 3937 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19104.

In its landmark 1967 ruling, *In re Gault*, the Supreme Court extended to youthful offenders some of the procedural safeguards given adult criminal defendants. In the decades since, contends Feld, a University of Minnesota law professor, the juvenile court has been turned into “a scaled down, second-class criminal court” that provides “neither therapy nor justice.”

The Progressive era “child savers” who brought the juvenile courts into being around the turn of the century aimed to reform rather than punish youthful offenders. Unwittingly, says Feld, the Supreme Court opened the door for judicial, legislative, and administrative changes that have effectively ended that mission.

Juvenile courts now turn over many youthful offenders to other institutions. Many white, female, and middle-class school truants and troublemakers, whose missteps would not have been offenses if committed by adults, have been shifted to private mental health and drug treatment facilities. At the other end of the spectrum, serious youthful offenders, disproportionately black and male, increasingly have been transferred to criminal courts for prosecution as adults. There, Feld observes, violent offenders are given “dramatically more severe sentences” than they would have received as juveniles. Ironically, most of the nonviolent serious offenders “actually get shorter sentences.”

The ordinary delinquents left in the juvenile system, meanwhile, are punished more severely than they would have been in the past, Feld says. The states are moving away

from the traditional therapeutic emphasis in juvenile justice, emphasizing instead responsibility and accountability. Yet at the same time, “most states continue to deny juveniles access to jury trials or other rights guaranteed to adults,” he says. (In any event, Feld avers, juvenile correctional facilities provide virtually no “meaningful rehabilitative programs.”)

Feld welcomes some of the changes. “The juvenile court . . . characterized delinquents as victims rather than perpetrators, and subjected them to an indeterminate quasi-civil commitment process.” Its “treatment ideology” underemphasized “offenders’ duty to exercise self-control.”

But the juvenile court’s underlying concept of combining “social welfare and criminal social control in one agency” remains “fundamentally flawed,” Feld maintains. Why wait for youngsters to commit crimes before giving them better education and health services? Why offer social services to those young criminals who won’t benefit?

Feld’s solution: abolish juvenile courts, putting youths accused of crimes in the regular justice system with special procedural safeguards and formal recognition of youthfulness as a mitigating factor with categorically shorter sentences. Then, once sentences have been imposed and personal responsibility affirmed, place the convicted youths in designated correctional facilities “with resources for self-improvement.” By virtue of their age, he notes, youthful offenders eventually return to society. They ought to be prepared.

## Rescuing Idle Youth

“An Ideal Life in the Woods for Boys”: Architecture and Culture in the Earliest Summer Camps,” by W. Barksdale Maynard, in *Winterthur Portfolio* (Spring 1999), Univ. of Chicago Press, Journals Division, P.O. Box 37005, Chicago, Ill. 60637.

With the approach of Labor Day each year, some four million children return home from more than 7,000 summer camps throughout the United States. Now often a way for working parents to keep their vacationing offspring occupied, summer camp once was intended to serve a more overtly character-building purpose: giving boys from affluent families an antidote, in the form of nature, to the corrupting influences of urban life. Maynard, an art historian at the Delaware College of Art and Design, explains how summer camp became a treasured American institution.

Springing from a long tradition of rural boarding schools, the summer camp was established on an entirely separate basis for the first time in 1881. Ernest Balch, a Dartmouth College student, founded Chocorua on a

small wooded island in Squam Lake, New Hampshire. This “utopian experiment in the physical and moral education of boys,” says Maynard, began with a single house and six boys, and grew to serve more than 30 boys. “Camp architecture . . . toed the line between nature and culture, wildness and civility.” In shanties that a visitor described as “pretty much all roof and piazza,” the boys had a protected view of nature, Maynard notes, while “a blazing fire in the hearth” inside “offered a reassuring, homelike ambience.” The camp operated for nine summers. In the end, however, Chocorua proved a financial disaster, ultimately costing Balch \$8,000.

But the venture inspired imitation. In 1885, John F. Nichols, a Massachusetts divinity student, founded Camp Harvard at Rindge in southern New Hampshire. Two years later, the camp—renamed Asquam—moved to a forested hilltop overlooking Squam Lake. Asquam became “the flagship of the early camping movement, a high-profile institution catering to the sons of rich and influential families,” Maynard says. At Asquam, the now-familiar title “counselor” came into use. But in 1899, the camp made the mistake of setting up a winter session to complement the summer one. “The result was financial ruin and the demise of both versions of Asquam in 1909,” says Maynard.

Fortunately, the Asquam system had spread, leading to an “explosive growth in camping, from about 20 programs in 1890 to some 500 by 1905.” The “most successful and influential” camp modeled on Asquam, Maynard says, was Pasquaney, also located in New Hampshire. Founded by Yale University alumnus Edward S. Wilson in 1895, the camp served the “scions of prominent Eastern families” and itself inspired at least a dozen other



Boys at Camp Chocorua join Ernest Balch, the New Hampshire camp's founder, in an outdoor chapel service.

institutions, including the “first girls’ camp of importance,” Redcroft, in 1900. Pasquaney continues to thrive today. In 1997, a total of 101 boys from seven countries attended.

Summer camps came into existence as part of the “back to the country” movement that grew out of anxieties about idleness and soft urban life around the turn of the century. It also produced the YMCA camps, the

Boy Scouts (imported from England in 1910), and the Camp Fire Girls. For youths who spent their summers in the rustic settings, the experience was often memorable. Diplomat William C. Bullitt, a former Pasquaney boy who attended Yale and Harvard Law School, later said that Pasquaney stood alone as “the best educational institution in the United States.”

## *Cooking Up Soul Food*

“The Origins of Soul Food in Black Urban Identity: Chicago, 1915–1947” by Tracy N. Poe, in *American Studies International* (Feb. 1999), George Washington Univ., Washington, D.C. 20052.

Soul food may be a mouthwatering emblem of African American identity, but not so long ago rib joints and chicken shacks were points of controversy among black Americans.

When African Americans journeyed northward in the Great Migration that began during World War I, they brought their rural southern culinary tradition with them, writes Poe, a doctoral candidate at Harvard University in the history of American civilization. But their “backward” ways seemed to threaten the hard-won respectability of the middle-class blacks already established in Chicago and other northern cities.

“With their sidewalk barbecue pits, ‘chicken shacks,’ and public consumption of watermelon,” says Poe, “an ugly stereotype of Southern migrants” as crude, unclean, and backward folk “soon developed, no less among the black middle class than among white Chicagoans.” The migrants, however, “could not understand what the problem was” with their traditional southern food.

Southern cuisine (eaten by both whites and blacks) was largely the creation of slave

cooks, using foods and preparations of Africa, Europe, and early America, Poe says. Besides fried chicken and fish, typical foods ranged from barbecued pork to one-pot dishes with regional names such as “sloosh,” “cush-cush,” and “gumbo.” “Most significantly, however,” she writes, “black people developed an affinity for the parts of animals normally discarded by whites: entrails, known as ‘chitterlings’ (pronounced ‘chitlins’); pigs’ heads, which were made into ‘souse,’ a kind of headcheese; [and] pigs’ and chickens’ feet.” One censorious front-page story in the *Chicago Defender*, an African American newspaper, was simply headlined “Pig Ankle Joints.”

Gradually, however, a sense of racial solidarity emerged, Poe says, and the prejudice against southern food and eating rituals faded. By 1940, the *Defender* was reporting a southern heritage celebration, complete with traditional food, sponsored by the NAACP Ladies’ Auxiliary. It wasn’t called “soul food” yet, but urban African Americans had already embraced southern cooking as a part of a common heritage.

## PRESS & MEDIA

### *Wire(d) Stories*

“What I Saw in the Digital Sea” by Frank Houston, in *Columbia Journalism Review* (July–Aug. 1999), Journalism Bldg., 2950 Broadway, Columbia Univ., New York, N.Y. 10027.

Web journalism is fast evolving—but, unfortunately, some of its best potential is being left behind, according to Houston, a freelance writer. The twenty-something jour-

nalist went to work for Fox News Online in New York in October 1996, hoping to contribute fresh news feature stories. He quit in disillusion a little more than two years later,

he writes, having come to see “Web journalism for what it is becoming: a machine moving at the speed of the [news] wires, in terms of content, and in the direction of television, in terms of form. Experiments in storytelling are on an indefinite hiatus.”

Houston’s job originally was “to create feature stories that push the technological and interactive envelopes, working with a graphic designer, two producers, a photo editor, and, usually, a video producer.” Early in 1997, for example, after IBM’s Deep Blue computer bested chess champ Garry Kasparov, Houston and his colleagues prepared a feature about Cassie, an experimental robot equipped with artificial intelligence that was assembled at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Combining video and text “in a new way,” he says, the feature—complete with links to various explanatory sidebars and “a meticulously accurate graphical representation of [the robot’s] thought processes”—proved one of their most popular feature stories, getting some 7,000 “page views” during the week it was on the site.

But top online news stories get that many page views in mere hours, Houston notes, and most people, research has found, spend only seconds visiting a news Web page. Not surprisingly, he and his colleagues soon found the Web moving away from costly and complicated features. “Technology’s thrust, it turns out, is to satisfy the need for speed. The emphasis shifts to shorter, more frequent stories and breaking news”—a trend evident not only at Fox but at its .com competitors, CNN, MSNBC, and ABCNews. The result:

between late 1997 and late ’98, daily page views on the Fox site as a whole roughly doubled—from 600,000 to 1.2 million (and reached 2.2 million on one particularly hot news day).

In their unquenchable thirst for breaking news, ironically, the Web sites have turned to the established wire services, such as the Associated Press and Reuters. The broadcast owners of online news sites lack the staff to compete with the wire services—and, in the absence of substantial Web ad revenues, the willingness to spend money to develop one. Newspaper owners of Web sites give priority to their newspapers and aren’t accustomed to publishing on the frenetic schedule of the wire services, with their continual stream of updates, adds, and new leads. “When an Amtrak train crashes . . . the *New York Times* and other newspaper sites go with wire copy on their home pages,” Houston notes. Only after the newspaper’s reporters have written their stories for the paper’s next edition are the wire stories on the home page replaced with the “homegrown” ones.

One way that Fox and other news organizations have tried to distinguish themselves from the wire services, Houston observes, is by providing, on big stories, a wealth of background material, from interviews to interactive maps. But “appending a library” to breaking wire stories, Houston says, is hardly the same as innovative journalism, with fresh insight and compelling stories. For now at least, he sadly concludes, Web technology’s own imperatives seem to be driving out that kind of journalism.

## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

### *The Antiliberal Philosopher*

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

Imagine a world in which the whole scientific enterprise has been virtually destroyed by a vengeful public maddened by a series of environmental disasters. Eventually, enlightened people try to revive science, but all they have to work with are shards of the past, devoid of the theoretical context that gave them meaning. They have

no way of coherently reassembling the surviving fragments, yet they connect them anyway—and almost no one realizes that what now comes to pass for “science” is not proper science at all.

That, according to philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, is much the situation in which moral discourse is conducted today, with

words such as *good* and *moral* reduced to relics of a lost past.

Currently a professor at Duke University, MacIntyre, author of the influential *After Virtue* (1981) and other works, “is possibly the greatest moral philosopher of the last 50 years and certainly the most unyielding critic of liberalism writing today,” observes Adam Wolfson, executive editor of the *Public Interest*, in the *Weekly Standard* (July 26, 1999). “You can violently disagree with MacIntyre, as many do, particularly on the socialist left. Or you can violently agree with him, as many do, particularly on the Catholic right. But you can’t get away without knowing about him.”

Born the son of a doctor in Glasgow in 1929, MacIntyre studied at the University of London and other British universities, then began teaching. In 1947, after “hanging around at the edge of the Catholic Church,” he told *Lingua Franca’s* (Nov.–Dec. 1995) Paul Elie, he joined the Communist Party. In his first book, *Marxism: An Interpretation* (1953), Elie notes, MacIntyre “espoused the Marxist creed while . . . lamenting ‘the death of religion.’”

Leaving the party well before the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, he became involved with a Trotskyist group, the International Socialists. “As MacIntyre explains it now,” writes Elie, “Marxism was most valuable to him as a critique of liberalism,” with its arbitrary moral judgments.

In 1969 MacIntyre moved to the United States, where he would teach at a succession of universities and make a philosophical journey from Trotskyist to Aristotelian to Thomist—a pilgrim’s progress that would leave many on the left aghast and some on the right uneasy.

Discussing *After Virtue* in the *New Criterion* (Feb. 1994), Maurice Cowling, an emeritus Fellow at Peterhouse College, Cambridge University, says MacIntyre contended “that moral inquiry had been impoverished by the destruction of Aristotelianism in the 17th century and the disconnection of ethics from divine law in the 18th century. Existing ‘languages of morality,’ in his view, were merely fragments of a conceptual scheme which was no longer present in its entirety.”

For MacIntyre, says Edward T. Oakes, a Jesuit professor of religious studies at Regis University in Denver, Colorado, “emptying moral discourse of teleological concepts [i.e. concepts of final causes and ends] because of the perceived impact of Newton and Darwin has been . . . the catastrophe of our times.” In the Aristotelian tradition, MacIntyre has written, “there is a fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature.” Were this distinction restored to ethics, observes Oakes in *First Things* (Aug.–Sept. 1996), then describing something or someone as “good” would not express a merely emotional judgment but would convey facts about the thing or person. For MacIntyre, notes Elie, “the moral choice is between Nietzsche and Aristotle, between nihilism and a life and world teleologically ordered.”

In 1983, two years after the acclaimed *After Virtue* appeared, MacIntyre converted to Catholicism. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988), he argued that truth emerges from the conflict of traditions. He proposed Thomism, which reconciles Aristotelianism with Christianity, as the most truthful tradition, “rationally superior” to all its rivals. The book was given a hostile reception on the left, and the reviews, says Elie, “were fragrant with anti-Catholicism.” Philosopher Martha Nussbaum accused MacIntyre of “recoiling from reason,” of being “in the grip of a worldview that is promulgated by authority rather than by reason.”

Uncowed, MacIntyre went on in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990), Wolfson notes, to try “to show how the Thomistic tradition can defeat its two main rivals: the liberal Enlightenment and post-modernism.”

Though conservatives find much to admire in *After Virtue* and the subsequent works, some are disturbed by what Wolfson calls MacIntyre’s “root-and-branch antagonism towards the liberal tradition, which dates back to his Marxist past.” MacIntyre confuses real liberalism with what passes for it in academe, in Wolfson’s view, and overlooks “the moral resources within [the] liberal tradition.”

## Fundamental Intolerance?

“Religious Outlook, Culture War Politics, and Antipathy toward Christian Fundamentalists” by Louis Bolce and Gerald De Maio, in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Spring 1999), Annenberg Public Policy Center, Univ. of Pennsylvania, 3620 Walnut St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19104-6220.

In recent decades, Americans have become quite intolerant of religious intolerance. Anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism are no longer socially acceptable, a sign of progress for which the spread of education is often given some credit. Yet ironically, the highly educated seem to be among the chief harborers of religious intolerance today: they simply cannot stand Christian fundamentalism.

“Roughly one-fifth of the nonfundamentalist [white] public hold intensely antagonistic sentiments toward fundamentalists,” report Bolce and De Maio, political scientists at the City University of New York. Other “culturally conservative religious groups” (e.g., Evangelicals, Seventh-Day Adventists, Pentecostals, and Mormons) also stir “significant” antipathy.

In surveys taken in 1988, 1992, and 1996, Americans’ feelings toward various groups were gauged on a “temperature” scale running from 0 (most negative) to 100 (most positive). Feelings about the poor were as warm as 69, while attitudes toward poor people on welfare got as cold as 47. Attitudes toward Christian fundamentalists were just about as frosty (45-49)—scoring higher than the frigid 35 for illegal aliens, but still well below the scores for past pariahs. Catholics, Jews, and blacks were held in warm regard (58-64).

The term fundamentalism was coined in 1920 by Curtis Lee Laws, a Baptist editor seeking to rally support for the “fundamental truths of Christianity.” Five years later, iconoclastic journalist H. L. Mencken popularized the term in his coverage of the famous Scopes trial, in which a Tennessee teacher was convicted of violating a law against teaching evo-

lution. Mencken called fundamentalism a “malignant imbecility,” and its followers “anthropoid rabble.” The harshly unflattering image has more or less stuck. But Bolce and De Maio say it no longer fits. Today’s fundamentalist is “more educated [and] politically sophisticated . . . less the ignorant hillbilly or cracker, and more a conservative suburban housewife who votes Republican.”

For many years, antifundamentalism was spread across religious and political lines, but a distinct shift occurred in 1992, the authors say, as fundamentalists allied themselves more explicitly with the Republican Party. This polarized sentiment, with other conservative groups warming toward their new allies, while “Jews, the highly educated, sec-



*Pariahs to the Volvo set: Baptists at a revival meeting.*

ularists, and Democratic voters became relatively more negative.” Indeed, Bolce and De Maio say that 37 percent of highly educated white Americans are “intensely antagonistic” toward fundamentalists.

Foes of fundamentalism claim their opposition reflects not prejudice but rather “attempts to guard democratic civility and pluralism,” note Bolce and De Maio, who avoid evaluating the claim. Similar arguments, of course, were once made about Catholics and Jews.

## SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

### *The Fetal Patient*

“The Littlest Patient” by Dario O. Fauza, in *The Sciences* (July–Aug. 1999), New York Academy of Sciences, 2 E. 63rd St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Surgeons in recent decades have acquired a new patient: the fetus. The risks of fetal surgery are great, but so is the ultimate promise, says Fauza, a pediatric surgeon at Children’s Hospital in Boston.

“Only about 200 fetal surgeries have been performed so far on human beings,” he writes, “and the results have been tantalizing, but disappointing as well.” Of some 120 fetuses operated on in the last two decades at the University of California, San Francisco—which is one of two major fetal surgery centers in this country, along with the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia—only about half the babies survived; lately, though, the success rate has been closer to 75 percent. “Fetal surgeons,” says Fauza, “have treated such potentially fatal defects as a hole in the diaphragm, which can prevent the lungs from developing adequately, and an obstruction of the urinary tract, which can destroy the kidneys. And the day may not be far off when more intricate operations, such as open-heart surgery and even liver transplants, will be performed inside the womb.”

For most of medical history, the fetus was largely a mystery. Not until the 1960s were the first tentative efforts at human fetal surgery made. In 1963, two Columbia University obstetricians performed a blood transfusion on a fetus suffering from fatal anemia. While the open surgery was technically a success, the baby was born prematurely and died. However, that same year, a New Zealand obstetrician, addressing the

same sort of fetal problem, used a needle guided by X-rays instead of open surgery, and the baby survived. Two years later, in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the first open fetal surgery in which the child survived was performed. It remained an isolated success, however, as most subsequent attempts failed.

Interest in fetal surgery revived in the late 1970s, when prenatal ultrasound became commonplace, letting physicians observe the unborn in the womb. In 1981, a pediatric surgeon at the University of California, San Francisco, introduced open fetal surgery to treat severe blockages of the urinary tract. Then, in the early 1990s, videofoscopic surgery was introduced, in which the lens of a video camera is inserted into the uterus through one of several small incisions, enabling the surgeon to see the fetus on a screen while carrying out the operation through the other incision(s).

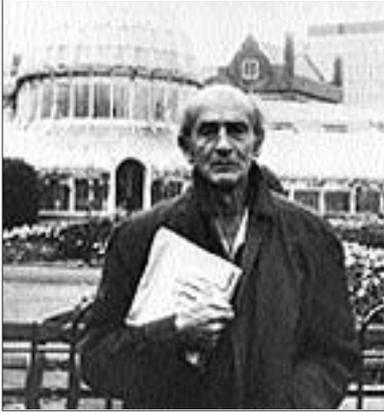
Fetal surgery, however, is still relatively dangerous to the pregnant woman, who risks hemorrhage, or lung or kidney failure. Because of that, Fauza says, such surgery “is undertaken only when the fetus’s life is imperiled, and only if there is little chance that the mother’s fertility will be compromised.” As the techniques become more refined, he says, success rates will increase and the strain on the mothers will lessen. Eventually, he believes, fetal surgery will allow “most birth defects to be repaired in an optimal way.” Inasmuch as three percent of newborns today have major birth defects, that will be no small advance.

### *The Empire of Science*

“A View from the Bridge: The Two Cultures Debate, Its Legacy, and the History of Science”  
by D. Graham Burnett, in *Daedalus* (Spring 1999), Norton’s Woods, 136 Irving St.,  
Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Forty years ago, British novelist and former physicist C. P. Snow (1905–80) decried the chasm separating “the two cultures,” scientific and literary, stirring up tremendous controversy on both sides of the Atlantic. The disjunction Snow posited is still “regularly lamented in

scholarly symposia, cited by academic administrators, and invoked to help account for everything from the ‘science wars’ to the history of environmental policy,” observes Burnett, a historian of science at Columbia University. Unfortunately, he contends, the “Snowian dis-



Snow (right) is “as intellectually undistinguished as it is possible to be,” sneered Leavis (left).

junction,” as it has been called, is simplistic and pernicious.

In his 1959 lecture at Cambridge University, Snow claimed that scientists “have the future in their bones,” while literary intellectuals and other humanists could not even describe the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which, he asserted, was roughly “the scientific equivalent” of a play by Shakespeare. The result was a traditional (nonscientific) culture devoid of “social hope.” And this, in the context of the Cold War and the rising expectations of “poor” nations, he warned, was dangerous.

Three years later, British literary critic F. R. Leavis (1895–1978) mounted a venomous attack. To link “social hope” and material goods, Leavis said, was “a confusion to which all creative writers are tacit enemies.” Science and technology would never bridge the gap between the individual and society; only language and literature could allow human beings to transcend themselves. Any comparison between the Second Law of Thermodynamics and the sacred sphere of literature was just “a cheap journalistic infelicity,” Leavis said.

“For the historian of science,” writes Burnett,

“a double irony binds these claims” about the Second Law of Thermodynamics. That law, articulated in various ways beginning in the 1850s, holds that while energy is conserved, entropy (or disorder) seems to be constantly increasing in the universe. The implication—that the universe “appears headed for maximum entropy or ‘heat-death’”—was spelled out in popular journals and impressed writers in Britain and France, as scholars have shown. “If you take it to heart,”

wrote the novelist Joseph Conrad, “it becomes an unendurable tragedy.” Thus, Burnett points out, “the very decay Snow decried in the moral fiber of literary culture, it turns out, cannot be fully understood without reference to the history of his own beloved Second Law.”

At the same time, and with equal irony, Burnett adds, Conrad’s *Shadow-Line* (1917), “which Leavis brought forward as a self-evident proof of the irrelevance of the Second Law, would be better read as a parable of its broad cultural significance.”

In the hands of those who use it, Burnett says, the “two cultures” disjunction—given renewed expression, for instance, in *Consilience* (1998) by Edward O. Wilson, the founding father of sociobiology—tends to devalue humanistic inquiry. In Wilson’s eyes, according to Burnett, “the humanities and social sciences represent science’s last frontier,” a domain awaiting conquest. The real need, however, suggests the historian of science, is not to “bridge” Snow’s two cultures, but to recognize that both are part of a larger culture and to understand how they and it came to be.

## ARTS & LETTERS

### *Deconstructing the Professors*

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

All right, so tenured radicals in academe have turned English departments into ideological hothouses for the growth of literary theory. That’s yesterday’s news. The ques-

tion for today is: Have the resulting sunbursts of theory nevertheless lit up the landscape for the humble souls at work trying to create literature? Have writers found the critics’ reve-

lations about the hidden influence of class, race, and gender, all the exquisitely nuanced insights into the literary enterprise, *helpful*?

The overwhelming answer is *not at all*, to judge from a symposium on “The Situation of American Writing 1999” in *American Literary History* (Summer 1999). Of the 26 novelists, poets, and other writers canvassed by the journal, only three give today’s academic critics anything like an unqualified “thumbs up.”

“Literary theorists are creating their own kind of creative writing and no longer producing literary criticism to explain or translate traditional literary efforts. Good on them!” declares Michael Martone, author of *Fort Wayne Is Seventh on Hitler’s List: Indiana Stories* (1993).

Samuel R. Delany, a black, gay writer of science fiction whose 22-page response to the editor’s questions takes up one-sixth of the whole symposium, says that, being a critic as well as a fiction writer, “I have all the sympathy in the world for critics. (Do I have something important to say? I should hope so.)” He calls for “much *more* scholarly consideration of contemporary writing—preferably passionately felt.”

The third yea-sayer is feminist Gail Godwin, author of *Evensong* (1999) and other novels. “Yes, academic critics have something important to say to me. I often read criticism to get fresh orientation.” The criticism she reads, however, is apparently not of the more theory-ridden variety. She credits Richard Poirier’s *Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (1987), George Steiner’s *Real Presences* (1989), and Caroline Walker Bynum’s *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (1984) with having recently inspired her. She also “treasure[s] the three book-length studies of my work to date.” Godwin, too, would like scholarly critics to give more attention to contemporary fiction. But she also urges them to be prepared to defend “important literary works” from assaults in the name of “current academic ideologies and current standards of political correctness.”

The other 23 symposium contributors, however, have few kind words about academic criticism today. “None of the theorists

ever said one thing that mattered to me or to any of the writers I know and admire,” comments Pulitzer Prize-winning poet W. D. Snodgrass, whose most recent book is *After-Images* (1999).

Contemporary criticism, according to the stern indictment delivered by William Gass, author of *The Tunnel* (1996) and *Omensetter’s Luck: A Novel* (1966), and an emeritus professor at Washington University in Saint Louis, “has fallen into the clutches of obfuscating ideologues who have no feeling for literary quality, who write only for one another, who are partisan in all the wrong ways and ignorant of what is going on in contemporary literature as a developing art. Philosophically, many of these critics are scandalously careless of evidence, incapable of clarity, eloquence, or rigor. . . . Most writers and most philosophers have nothing but contempt for these ‘movements.’”

Annie Dillard, author of *For the Time Being* (1999) and *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974), agrees. “Academic criticism has lost all usefulness to literature; it sees writers as mere unconscious spokespeople for their races, classes, and genders,” she says. “The New Criticism [of the 1940s and ’50s] focused on close readings of texts, and as such gave writers heart. Academic criticism today abandons literature as elitist in very concept; it has become mere sociology.” However, she anticipates that “this abuse will stop soon. It’s a dead end.”

“For the whole of my career,” writes novelist Madison Smartt Bell, author of *Doctor Sleep* (1992) and *Waiting for the End of the World* (1985), “academic scholarship has abdicated its interest in contemporary literature in favor of myopic concentration on critical theory. . . . Right now, I can think of only three significant literary critics who are not [also] practitioners of the genre they criticize: Helen Vendler, Sven Birkerts, and Bruce Bawer. . . . and the latter two built their careers outside the academy.”

Scholars should be taking the lead in “defining the shape of literary posterity,” Bell observes. The absence of such criticism today poses “a real problem,” in his view. “Consider the critical rescue and reconstruction of Faulkner’s reputation in the ’50s—

could anything remotely similar happen now?"

In his introduction to the symposium, *American Literary History* editor Gordon Hutner seems somewhat pained by all the hostile responses. "It is unfortunate enough that writers have mostly turned away from what professors have to say, but this rejection is all the more regrettable for being based, as it often is, on 20-year-old perceptions about the academic tolerance for jargon, a conviction about the sterility of the academy for which, with a little bad faith, justification can always be found. Not even three of the 26 respondents have mentioned the scholar-

ly turn to history, much less something called the New Historicism, or cultural studies. Nor do they seem to care much about the nuances in our various, frequently [heated] exchanges over multiculturalism and the canon."

Nevertheless, Hutner believes there is "richness to be found in continuing exchanges" between academic critics and writers. But Gass, for one, disagrees: "Academics are consumed by political issues they have made as petty as themselves. So I don't at this time envision profitable exchanges between such scholars, such critics, and such writers."

## *A Thoroughly Modern Austen*

"Jane Austen Changes Her Mind" by Christopher Clausen, in *The American Scholar* (Spring 1999), 1785 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Fourth Floor, Washington, D.C. 20036.

It sometimes seems that the most popular serious novelist at the close of the 20th century is an author of the early 19th: Jane Austen (1775–1817). All but one of her six novels have made their way to movie theaters and television screens in recent years. Something about Austen's well-regulated bucolic romances, in which the woman gets not only her man, but an estate and a fortune as well, is charming readers and audiences on an impressive scale.

Critics, however, have had difficulty pinpointing just what that "something" is. They have interpreted the social commentary of Austen's tales to represent everything from radical feminism to "systematic conservatism[ism]." But for all that diversity, there has been remarkable consensus that all of Austen's novels are consistent in whatever social ideology they display.

But Clausen, an English professor at Pennsylvania State University, argues that Austen's last novel, *Persuasion* (published posthumously in 1818), "represents an unprecedented shift of direction." *Persuasion* is still quintessential Austen in its plot and the value it places on the happiness of a match well made. But where her other novels hold marriage from or into the landowning, fortune-holding gentry as the standard for success, *Persuasion* promotes different, more modern manifestations of that happiness.

*Persuasion* finds Anne Elliot, the second

daughter of the flighty, spendthrift Sir Walter Elliot, having fallen in love with young Captain Wentworth, but nonetheless being dissuaded from marrying him: Wentworth, without family background or money, is hardly qualified for a match with an Elliot. However, after eight years of separation and a good deal of miscommunication, Anne and Wentworth marry and find their own sort of happiness. True, Wentworth possesses an impressive fortune, but it is a fortune won in his naval victories, not bequeathed along with a title and manor. That the hero of the novel would thus choose and pursue a vocation (and do so enthusiastically and successfully) would be unheard of in Austen's earlier novels. But in *Persuasion*, it is only the sailors and their wives, never the gentry, who find fulfillment in their marriages, wherein men and women appear to have nearly equal status and childlessness does not equal failure. Significantly, Lady Russell, a family friend of the Elliots who can be taken as a stand-in for Austen herself, at long last admits (in Austen's words) that "she had been pretty completely wrong" in her earlier criticism of Wentworth and counsels Anne to marry him after all.

Though Austen herself was silent on the cause of her shift in values (and Clausen wisely declines to speculate), the result is a new spin on the "authentic" Austen novel. And happily for Austen fans, it still makes a pretty good movie.

## Go Fish

Architect Frank Gehry's new Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, has been hailed as a work of genius. According to Myra Jehlen, an English professor at Rutgers University, writing in *Raritan* (Spring 1999), Gehry's success owes much to his grandmother's cooking, which provided the fish shape that has long been his aesthetic standard, and to the computer, which has allowed him to pursue it.

*It was almost two centuries ago that Emerson thought one should pattern one's creations on nature, and with the accelerating rate of technological evolution, it might as well be four. An architect making a building he himself cannot see whole without the aid of a computer while imagining that he was copying nature seems unlikely. But of course Gehry does not think that when, as he puts it, he does fish, he is following nature directly; he is being an artist. . . .*



*The fish-shape is more than an aesthetic opportunity but less than a cosmic scheme. It embodies a conception of self-sufficient and at the same time globally effective creativity; the connection between fish and both the beginning of time and the origin of life (in his own biography and in the history of the race) attests to this conception without extending it into a philosophical program. Similarly Gehry's relation to technology, in contrast, say, to the relation of the Bauhaus to the machine, is personally empowering but does not engage him in a world view. The computer that is enabling him to replace geometric abstraction with zoomorphism has simply made Gehry, in his words, "once more the master builder." "Once more" because the technology had developed beyond the control of an individual builder and now he has regained mastery. The technology remains as powerful or more, but he has become still more so.*

## In Defense of Cultural Studies

"Those Who Disdain Cultural Studies Don't Know What They're Talking About" by Rita Felski, in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (July 23, 1999), 1255 23rd St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037.

Ever since physicist Alan Sokal smuggled his deliberately nonsensical essay (in which he solemnly maintained, among other things, that physical reality is "a social and linguistic construct") into the cultural studies movement's premier journal, *Social Text*, a few years ago, cultural studies has come to seem, well, a bit passé. Felski, an English professor at the University of Virginia, rises in defense of the relatively new (but now apparently "old") interdisciplinary field.

*Cultural studies*, she complains, has come to be simply a term of abuse—shorthand for taking a political approach to literature. And as such, it is rejected by critics who want "a return to aesthetics in literature. . . . They want to talk about language, style, and sensibility, about why they love poetry and what makes Shakespeare a great writer."

But cultural studies "has always been concerned with language and form," Felski contends. "It is just as much about the aesthetic

dimension of the social world as it is about the social dimension of a work of art." The discipline, which originated in England in the 1960s, treated culture anthropologically, "seeking to make sense of the entire range of symbolic practices, texts, and belief systems in society rather than equating culture exclusively with high art." Cultural studies scholars showed "how the most ordinary behavior—eating, wearing clothes, shopping, going to the beach—involves complex rituals, symbolic expression, and multilayered levels of meaning."

In short, Felski says, cultural studies "enlarged rather than erased our aesthetic sensibility," expanding it to encompass such forms of popular culture as "rap music, sitcoms, science-fiction novels, [and] slasher movies." In the influential *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), for instance, Dick Hebdige "explored the aesthetics of British

youth culture," showing that "punks" employ "avant-garde techniques of collage, bricolage, and surreal juxtaposition, combining random, mass-produced objects—dog collars, safety pins, school uniforms—in a perverse parody of consumer culture." Similarly, Kobena Mercer, in a much-cited essay in his *Welcome to the Jungle* (1994), "unraveled the multileveled meanings of black hairstyles."

Cultural studies seems fated, Felski observes, "to be faulted by historians for not being historical enough, by sociologists for not being sociological enough, and by literary critics for not being sufficiently interested in literature. There is also a rich vein of self-criticism within [the field] itself." Nevertheless, she concludes, since "cultural studies" has been pressed into use as "a much-abused term [of abuse] in America's culture wars," it is time "to insist on its distinctive identity and its integrity as a scholarly field."

## OTHER NATIONS

### *The German Left's Ordeal of Power*

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

The postwar era in German history came to an end last fall when chancellor-for-life Helmut Kohl was turned out of office. During his 16-year rule, the Christian Democrat had helped to gain the West's victory in the Cold War and the reunification of his nation. When the 68-year-old, pro-American chancellor became "history," many observers worried about what would happen under his younger successor, Social Democrat Gerhard Schröder.

In the early 1970s, Schröder was head of the Hanover branch of the Jungsozialisten, radical youth organization of the Social Democratic Party, notes Josef Joffe, editorial page editor of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in Munich, writing in *National Interest* (Summer 1999). German defense minister Rudolf Scharping also had been a leader of the radical youth group, while foreign minister Josef Fischer, the leader of the Green Party (which is the junior partner in the ruling "Red-Green" coalition), had run with street-fighting anarcho-socialists in Frankfurt.

All three men, Joffe writes, "came of political age in the heady '60s when they imbibed pretty much the same ideological brew in the 'anti-imperialist struggle' against the Vietnam War: anti-capitalism, anti-Americanism, and 'anti-anti-communism,' plus what the French call *tiers-mondisme* [Third World-ism] (especially of the 'anti-Zionist' variety) and contempt for 'bourgeois' political virtues such as moderation, compromise, and pluralism."

Today, Joffe says, "the only thing remotely 'red' about [Schröder] is his pricey Cuban Cohiba cigars," while erstwhile rock thrower Fischer, since moving to the head of the Foreign Office, wears only gray three-piece suits. When NATO's U.S.-led air war against Serbia began last March, the former antiwar activists, whose parties had long opposed America and NATO, sent German strike aircraft into combat for the first time since World War II.

Like Bill Clinton when he first assumed the U.S. presidency, however, Schröder on taking

office hit the ground stumbling, observes freelance writer K. Michael Prince in the *Washington Quarterly* (Summer 1999). Germany for the last dozen years has been plagued by high unemployment, now about 10 percent, and twice that in parts of the former East Germany. Schröder, while offering few specifics, presented himself to the voters as an agent of change. But early in his administration prospective economics minister Jost Stollman, who had symbolized the candidate's "New Center" approach during the campaign, departed. Old-fashioned socialist Oskar Lafontaine then became finance minister—only to exit less than five months later,



Britain's Tony Blair joins Schröder in hailing the "New Center" political look.

after encountering stiff opposition from German business. These sudden shifts didn't help the Schröder administration's reputation for disarray.

The Red-Green government does have some accomplishments, observes Andrei S. Markovits, a political scientist at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, writing in *Dissent* (Summer 1999). The most notable is "a new citizenship law that redefines what it means to be German."

Citizenship is based no longer on blood lineage but on place of birth (provided the parents are married and at least one of them has lived in the country legally for eight years or more)—good news for many of the roughly 100,000 children born each year to foreign residents. Moreover, revisions in the naturalization law shortening the 15-year residency requirement to eight years will allow roughly half of the 7.3 million foreigners in Germany to become citizens.

Nevertheless, Markovits says, the government's overall record is mixed, and the German Left, after being in power for a year, is experiencing "its most profound identity crisis since 1968." There has been little progress on social justice or ecology, he says, and unemployment has been reduced only slightly.

Globalization means that Germany's unemployment problem "can only be solved if the conditions for investment become more attractive," argues Gerd Langguth, a political scientist at the University of Bonn, writing in the summer issue of the *Washington Quarterly*. Direct foreign investment in German companies fell from 18 billion deutsche marks in 1995 to 1.1 billion in 1996; Asian and American companies in the latter year withdrew more capital from Germany than they put into it in the form of new investments.

Germany has also been experiencing "a brain drain" of medical and scientific researchers to other countries, Langguth says. He blames this, at least in part, on the ambivalence that many Germans seem to feel toward modern technology. Much criticism is leveled in Germany "against things modern, against progress, and against technology—and it carries more weight than elsewhere in the world, thus preventing social progress here. In the fields of modern biotechnology and gene technology, almost all the key patents are held by American enterprises." Much the same is true for the computer, communication, and office machine industries.

In the worldwide commercial competition for markets, Langguth notes, "many states have much lower wages and impose much lighter governmental burdens (for example, regarding environmental protec-

tion) than Germany.” The average gross monthly wage in the Czech Republic, for instance, was \$337 in 1997, and in Bulgaria, \$94—while in Germany last January, it was \$2,706.

More than half of Germany’s gross national product (\$2.1 trillion in 1998) is spent by the federal government, the *Länder* (states), or local authorities. Because of global pressures, this massive public spending must be reduced, Langguth says.

Taking a first step in that direction after eight months of economic muddle, Schröder and new finance minister Hans Eichel in

June unveiled a package of budget and tax cuts. It would slash state expenditures by \$16 billion next year, freeze pensions for two years, end many subsidies, and reduce the state’s share of national income to 40 percent over the next several years.

Many of Schröder’s fellow Social Democrats deem this “New Center” move a betrayal of their party’s traditions. But political scientist Lutz Erbring told the *New York Times* (July 25, 1999) that, in essence, Schröder “is gambling that a majority of Germans have the common sense to see that he is right.”

## *The End of Islamic Revolution?*

“The Decline of Revolutionary Islam in Algeria and Egypt” by Fawaz A. Gerges, in *Survival* (Spring 1999), International Institute for Strategic Studies, 23 Tavistock St., London, England WC2E 7NQ.

Though Islamic extremists in Algeria and Egypt continue to mount terrorist attacks, they no longer pose a serious threat to the survival of the pro-Western regimes there, contends Gerges, a professor of international affairs and Middle East studies at Sarah Lawrence College. “Unable to face or subvert the superior forces of the governments they opposed, militant Islamists in Algeria and Egypt instead terrorize the civilian population and deter foreign investment.”

In both countries, as elsewhere in the Middle East, Gerges says, the Islamic movements have been fractured by factionalism. In Algeria, the Groupe Islamique Armée (GIA) since 1996 “has targeted civilian areas inhabited by supporters of its rivals, particularly the mainstream *Front Islamique de Salut* (FIS).” Many of the civilians slain in this oil- and natural gas-rich land of 29 million “are partisans of various Islamist groups,” Gerges points out—a fact often overlooked by the news media. “Algeria’s Islamist revolution is devouring its children.”

Now headed by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the military-dominated Algerian regime, which began a crackdown on the Islamic Front umbrella group in 1992, seems to have won the war, Gerges says. In 1997, the Army of Islamic Salvation (AIS), the armed wing of the FIS, declared a unilateral, unconditional peace, and began collaborat-

ing with the Algerian army in its fight against the GIA. The GIA guerrillas have been reduced in number to a few hundred, Gerges says, “and the arbitrary and irrational nature of GIA violence has alienated an outraged public.”

In Egypt, the violence has been intermittent rather than protracted, but since the early 1990s, thousands have been killed or injured, and the tourist industry badly damaged. By 1995, however, President Hosni Mubarak’s government had limited the threat posed by militant Islamist groups such as al-Jama’a and Jihad, killing most of their effective leaders and confining most of the violence to gun battles between the authorities and militants in central and upper Egypt, away from Cairo and most tourist sites. In 1996, the government declared victory.

But the destruction of al-Jama’a and Jihad as organized movements, Gerges notes, “caused them to splinter into radical cells and factions,” which it was difficult for the government to control. Just how difficult became clear in September and November 1997, when al-Jama’a and Jihad made terrorist attacks in central Egypt, Luxor, and Cairo itself, leaving more than 100 Western and Egyptian civilians dead. In Egypt and in the wider Muslim world, the Luxor massacre turned public opinion against al-Jama’a, which is now only “a shadow of its

former self, with its rank and file in exile or on the run.”

The fall of the Egyptian or Algerian regimes to Islamic militants, Gerges points out, would have suggested “a new, expansive

stage in an ‘Islamic Revolution’ that began with the overthrow of the Shah’s regime in Iran in 1979.” But 20 years after that event, he concludes, “the Islamist revolutionary movement seems to be a spent force.”

## Mexico’s Trial by Fire

“Mexico’s Coming Backlash” by M. Delal Baer, in *Foreign Affairs* (July–Aug. 1999), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

As Mexico moves toward a presidential election next July, proponents of democracy can take satisfaction in the fact that for the first time in 70 years, the long-dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) could lose. But they shouldn’t be too satisfied. So far, writes Baer, of the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, “more democracy has brought renewed political infighting, assassinations, and guerrilla violence.” If a minority government comes to power, the result could be chaos.

Mexico, which had a history of succession by assassination until 1929, achieved stability then by opting for one-party rule by the PRI. Regional chieftains agreed to submit to a powerful presidency in return for a share of the political and economic action. “Only when this system of power sharing broke down was Mexican democracy born,” notes Baer. In 1987, after President Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado named Carlos Salinas de Gortari as his successor, a host of young, free-market *tecnicos* (technocrats) held sway in Mexico City, much to the dismay of old-line PRI politicians. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano then formed the dissident, center-left Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) as a refuge for exiled PRI populists.

Today, Mexico essentially has a three-party system, with the PRI, the PRD, and the center-right National Action Party (PAN) vying for

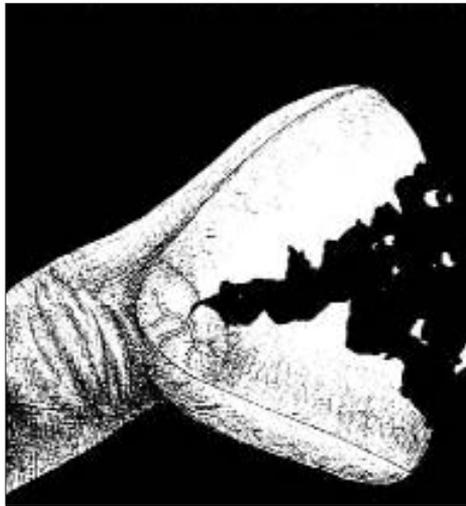
power. The winner next July possibly could draw less than 40 percent of the vote. Mexico “could become ungovernable,” warns Baer.

“Mexico has spent billions of dollars creating technologically sophisticated and credible electoral institutions, revamping voter ID cards and registration lists, and establishing the nonpartisan, autonomous Federal Electoral Institute,” Baer says. “But the cultural values needed to underpin democratic governance—tolerance, compromise, and civic participation—remain weak.”

“In their 11 years in power” under Salinas and Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, she notes, “Mexico’s young technocrats have led a restructuring that has produced the privatization of state-owned industries, fiscal discipline, and [the North

American Free Trade Agreement]. But a backlash is in the air.” Mass protests erupted this year when President Zedillo proposed electricity privatization. To the public, Baer says, the shadow over the self-exiled former president Salinas, who has been linked with various shady dealings, “has made privatization synonymous with corruption.”

The 1994 assassination of PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio, which ended seven decades of peaceful presidential successions, still hangs over the political scene, Baer says. “The specter of political violence has become very real. . . . The post-Colosio landscape is populated with angry



*Is the ruling PRI, often derisively portrayed as a snake, coming apart?*

apparatchiks, ruthless drug traffickers, scheming palace politicians, and messianic guerrillas who have sprung up like poisonous mushrooms." Mexico's big cities are also being "overwhelmed by crime." Some 1.5 million crimes were reported nationwide in 1997, but only 150,000 arrest warrants were issued. Police corruption is rife.

"As the capital sinks beneath a wave of crime, the provinces smolder, and drug lords send corruption creeping through the establishment," Baer writes, "Mexico's rulers seem more interested in fighting one another than their common enemies. For the country to survive as a democracy, this will have to change—and soon."

## Health Care Heaven?

"Health Care in Canada: Incrementalism under Fiscal Duress" by C. David Naylor, in *Health Affairs* (May–June 1999), 7500 Old Georgetown Rd., Ste. 600, Bethesda, Md. 20814–6133.

Canadians have long taken great pride in their publicly funded health care system, which provides high-quality treatment to all citizens, regardless of wealth or income, while still keeping costs under control. In recent years, however, Canadians' confidence in their cherished "Medicare" system has been badly shaken, reports Naylor, a professor in the Department of Medicine at the University of Toronto.

As successive governments in Ottawa have struggled with budget deficits and a massive national debt, federal support to the 10 provinces and two northern territories, which administer the health care system, has been steadily reduced. As a proportion of provincial health expenditures, direct cash transfers from Ottawa fell from 30.6 percent in 1980 to 21.5 percent in 1996 (and to even lower levels in richer provinces). The provinces, meanwhile, had their own fiscal problems. As a result, Naylor says, provinces have massively reduced inpatient hospital care, with fewer admissions and shorter stays. Between 1986 and 1994, despite the growth and aging of the population, use of costly hospital beds for short-term care decreased by 27 percent. Nine out of 10 provinces (with Ontario, the largest, the conspicuous exception) moved to consolidate hospitals under regional authorities. In Ontario, a commission appointed by the government in 1996 ordered 40 out of 139 hospitals to close or merge.

"Three decades of centrally capped budgets and a decade of unprecedented constraints have wrung much of the fat out of Canada's hospital systems," Naylor writes. But the cutbacks have also sapped Canadians' confidence, with only about 40 percent in 1996 rating the health care system

"excellent" or "very good," compared with some 60 percent five years before. About 25 percent judge it "fair" or "poor."

In a 1998 survey, 46 percent of Canadians said the recent changes had harmed the quality of care. That perception may not be accurate, however. So far, studies have turned up little hard evidence to support it, Naylor says. One study, for instance, found "that despite downsizing of the Manitoba hospital sector, surgery volumes rose dramatically, utilization fell least for patients who were particularly sick or poor, and short-term mortality outcomes for a set of tracer conditions were improving." A 1996 poll in Ontario showed much dissatisfaction with waiting times for cardiac and other types of specialized surgery. Yet fewer than one in 250 patients die while awaiting coronary artery bypass graft surgery in Ontario—"a death rate lower than expected for cardiac patients in general," Naylor says. When the waiting lists for that surgery have grown too long, as happened in 1990 and 1997, the Ontario ministry of health has expanded surgical capacity and quickly shortened the waiting lines.

Canada's budget woes have started to ease, which is good news for Medicare. Its single-payer system will emerge usefully streamlined, Naylor says. Nevertheless, debate over the ban on private insurance for publicly insured medical services has been rekindled, and many Canadians, including some policymakers, "pine for greater stability in health care." The best way to achieve it, in Naylor's view, is by piecemeal reforms. Despite their recent loss of enthusiasm, he says, Canadians are not about to jettison their distinctive approach to health care.

## RESEARCH REPORTS

*Reviews of new research at public agencies and private institutions*

### *“The Underclass Revisited.”*

The AEI Press, c/o Publisher Resources Inc., 1224 Heil Quaker Blvd., P.O. Box 7001,  
La Vergne, Tenn. 37086–7001, 43 pp. \$9.95.

Author: *Charles Murray*

With the crime rate down, welfare rolls shrinking, and the labor market tight, the underclass is out of the spotlight. But it has been largely untouched by these positive social trends, reports Murray, author of the influential *Losing Ground* (1984).

By *underclass*, he explains, he means the millions of people—chiefly urban, black, and low-income—who are cut off from mainstream America, “living a life in which . . . productive work, family, [and] community . . . exist in fragmented and corrupted forms.”

The falling crime rate—down by 17 percent nationally between 1991 and 1997—has mainly been achieved, he writes, “not by socializing the underclass but by putting large numbers of its members behind bars.” During those years, the number of people in prison or on probation or parole increased by 25 percent, to 5.7 million.

Despite an economy that has employers begging for help, Murray says, 23 percent of young black males not in school, the military, or prison were jobless in 1997 and not even looking for work.

Out-of-wedlock births, at least, are not on the rise. The proportion of black children who are born to unwed mothers has even dropped slightly, from a high of 70 percent in 1994 to 69 percent in 1997—

still disturbingly high. And in 1997, 26 percent of white children were born to unmarried women, “a figure comparable to the black ratio in the mid-1960s.”

It is still uncertain, Murray says, what the slimming of the welfare rolls since the 1996 reform (by 38 percent for blacks and 33 percent for whites, as of mid-1997) means for the underclass. However, unofficial data reported in mid-1998, he says, suggest that many of the women leaving welfare “would not have spent much time in the system anyway and are not part of the underclass.” Moreover, “no . . . body of research demonstrates that it is good for children when a single mother works—rather the opposite.”

“Economically,” Murray writes, “underclass neighborhoods are probably somewhat more prosperous than they were during the recession of 1991–1992.” However, it is “not at all clear” that there has been any social improvement. The infant mortality rate fell sharply between 1982 and 1997, but the incidence of very-low-birth-weight babies (under 3.3 pounds) increased by 38 percent among blacks and 22 percent among whites. Despite improved medical care, it appears that more and more women “are getting pregnant and then failing to take even rudimentary care of themselves.”

### *“World Population Beyond Six Billion.”*

Population Reference Bureau, 1875 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Ste. 520,  
Washington, D.C. 20009–5728, 44 pp. \$7.

Authors: *Alene Gelbard, Carl Haub, and Mary M. Kent*

In the century now ending, the population of the world has tripled in size, from fewer than two billion in 1900 to more than six billion—a landmark theoretically reached on October 12, according to the Population

Reference Bureau. Life expectancy has increased by two-thirds, and the dire predictions of Thomas Malthus and his successors have not come true.

Nevertheless, say the authors, all affiliated

with the Population Reference Bureau, more than one-fifth of the world's people live in poverty, subsisting on less than \$1 a day. Many specialists predict dramatic declines in life expectancy in parts of sub-Saharan Africa as a result of the spread of AIDS and HIV.

In the United States, life expectancy is now 76 years, compared with 68 years at midcentury and 47 years in 1900. Americans and others in developed countries also have had low rates of fertility in recent decades. In not one major industrialized country today do women, on average, have more than two children. In nearly all of Europe and Japan, population growth has come to a halt. Indeed, in 14 European countries, there is natural decrease—fewer births than deaths each year.

Less developed countries, however, experienced rapid population growth during the last half-century—from 1.7 billion people in 1950 to 4.7 billion in 1998. The growth would have

been even greater had fertility rates not begun to fall—from an average of 5.9 children per woman to three in Latin America and the Caribbean, for example.

But fertility rates remain high in Africa, the authors say, where “widespread poverty, high rates of illiteracy, largely rural populations, and strong traditional preferences for large families do not favor a rapid decline.” A high rate also persists in the Middle East, though the situation varies from country to country. In recent decades, Arab women, who traditionally wed in their teens, have been waiting longer—with the median age of marriage in Saudi Arabia, for instance, advancing from 16 to 21.

The world's population is expected to keep growing, at least for the next few decades. But United Nations projections for 2050 range widely—from a decline to four billion to an increase to 27 billion.

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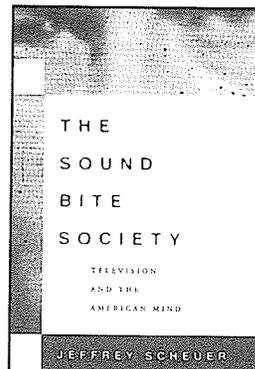
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## CURRENT BOOKS

# *The Poet-Critic*

*NO OTHER BOOK: Selected Essays.*

By Randall Jarrell. Edited by Brad Leithauser.  
HarperCollins. 376 pp. \$27.50

*REMEMBERING RANDALL:*

*A Memoir of Poet, Critic, and Teacher Randall Jarrell.*

By Mary von Schrader Jarrell.  
HarperCollins. 173 pp. \$22

by Jay Parini

The poet-critics continue to hold our interest, especially by contrast to more academic critics—the poststructuralists, in particular, whose writing has been ascendant during the past two decades. The poet-critics' essays, like their poems, are “news that stays news,” to borrow a phrase from Ezra Pound. One still reads, for example, the criticism of Ben Jonson, John Dryden, Dr. Johnson, Samuel Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, and T. S. Eliot. One occasionally rereads essays by John Crowe Ransom or Robert Penn Warren. More academic critics, by contrast, rarely survive their time. Who but historians of criticism now reads even the best of Cleanth Brooks, Walter J. Ong, Louis L. Martz, or W. K. Wimsatt, all strong critics in their time?

Randall Jarrell (1914–65) was the best poet-critic of his generation. Although he was by far a better critic than poet, his criticism gained its uncanny power from the fact that Jarrell understood what was at stake in the writing of poems. He knew that poetry was, if properly conceived and executed, a central form of culture, and that if the standards for poetry deteriorated, a general deterioration of thought and feeling—of expression—would follow. As a result, one still

reads his essays as if they were bulletins from the front.

Jarrell was only 51 when he died, yet he left behind a diverse body of work, including the first-rate essays gathered in this comprehensive selection by Brad Leithauser, himself a wonderfully intelligent poet, novelist, and critic. *No Other Book* is especially welcome because the original editions of Jarrell's essays have lapsed from print. Taken together, these pieces represent one of the most alluring critical projects of this century.

What set Jarrell apart was good taste, broad learning, uncommon sense, and a passion for clarity. Reading him, one

feels completely confident that what he says is what he means, and that he will not put on airs or play falsely. This does not, of course, mean that he will not use every device available to the critic, including certain forms of indirection. Jarrell is subtle, and the more readers know, the more they will get from him. Still, one cannot quite hope to know as much as Jarrell: he seems learned in unlikely ways and confident of his opinions. That is part of his allure.

Leithauser wisely puts “The Obscurity of the Poet,” a lovely and wide-ranging piece, first in his selection. Consider an early,



memorable sentence in that essay: “If we were in the habit of reading poets their obscurity would not matter; and, once we are out of the habit, their clarity does not help.” Jarrell was used to hearing people decry the obscurity of Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Edward Thomas, and others. He was frustrated by this situation, noting with disdain the disappearance of a public used to spending time with poetry: “You need to read good poetry with an attitude that is a mixture of sharp intelligence and of willing emotional empathy, at once penetrating and generous.” In effect, he was describing himself.

“To the Laodiceans” remains the most influential essay ever written on Robert Frost, mostly because Jarrell understood that Frost was a terrifying poet well before this became a commonplace. Frost had never lacked for an audience that appreciated his work, but he did—at least by the late 1940s and early 1950s—seem to be slipping among the critics, who preferred the difficult poems of Eliot and Stevens to his blunt, plainspoken work. Jarrell declared “Provide, Provide” an “immortal masterpiece,” and offered an explication of “Design” that would shape the view of Frost taken by future critics such as Lionel Trilling and Richard Poirier.

Like W. H. Auden, whom Jarrell the critic resembles—indeed, Jarrell often strikes me as an impersonator, but a brilliant one, of Auden’s critical voice—he is good at a certain form of abstraction. Jarrell brilliantly turns the Audenesque tone on Auden, in “Changes of Attitude and Rhetoric in Auden’s Poetry,” when he offers an exhaustive list of Auden’s stylistic characteristics in the rhetoric of his early poems—and the list runs to 26 entries! Like many readers (myself included), he prefers the earlier to the later Auden, where the poet’s rhetoric tends to degenerate. With eye-catching cogency, he writes: “Auden wished to make his poetry better organized, more logical, more accessible, and so on; with these genuinely laudable intentions, going in the right direction from his early work, he has managed to run through a tremendous series of

changes so fast that his lyric poetry has almost been ruined.” Jarrell wrote this in 1941, well before his subject launched into what we now think of as “later Auden.”

Like Leithauser, I have admired Jarrell for years, and found him particularly bracing and exemplary when I first began to write criticism myself. My impression was that Jarrell gnawed at the poem before him, tearing away the flesh to reveal glistening bone. What surprised me, on rereading these essays, was how rarely Jarrell gets close to an individual poem; rather, he selects the poems he deems worthy, often the less familiar ones, then stands back and admires them, inviting the reader to gaze beside him. In the manner of the New Critics, he adores quoting. “To show Whitman for what he is,” he writes, “one does not need to praise or explain or argue, one needs simply to quote.”

Jarrell’s prose often seems rushed but never sloppy. The writer appears to feel under immense pressure because he has so much to say with so little time, so little space, to do justice to his arguments. Unlike Eliot’s essays, Jarrell’s feel shapeless, ad hoc, and impulsive; yet they quiver with life, with perceptions one is grateful for, with formulations that seem exact, even exacting, as when he writes of Pound: “A great deal of the Cantos is interesting in the way an original soul’s indiscriminate notes on books and people, countries and centuries, are interesting; all these fragmentary citations and allusions remind you that if you had read exactly the books Pound has read, known exactly the people Pound has known, and felt about them exactly as Pound has felt, you could understand the Cantos pretty well.”

In the end, Jarrell’s readings of specific poems seem less significant than his tone. Jarrell loved poets and poetry, and his work teems with affection and sympathetic understanding. But that is only part of the tone. There is also a cultivated distance, a sense of fierce judgment, unreservedly rendered, as when he writes that “Melville’s poetry has been grotesquely underestimated.” The stance is bold, intimate, and authoritative—

and time has proved Jarrell right. We hear the characteristic tone again at the end of his great essay on Robert Lowell, "From the Kingdom of Necessity": "One or two of these poems, I think, will be read as long as men remember English." This was in 1947! Lowell had a long, tortuous path ahead as a poet, but Jarrell was already making shrewd judgments, predicting developments in Lowell's work that would become obvious only a decade or so later.

Admirers of Jarrell will want to know more about the conditions under which he wrote, but little help will come their way from Mary von Schrader Jarrell, his widow. Her *Remembering Randall* consists of nine essays, none of which seems especially shrewd or perceptive, although each has moments of interest or charm. Mary and Randall met at the Rocky Mountain Writers' Conference, where he was on the faculty and she was a student. The teacher-student relationship seem never to have quite been put behind them, and Mary's obvious adoration retains a slightly immature feel. She obliquely describes Jarrell's sad descent into depression, as if (understandably) she cannot quite look at the terrible thing directly. She maintains that a bad review in the *New York Times* provoked Randall to slice his wrists, but that his death seven months later, when he was struck down by a car in Chapel Hill,

North Carolina, was an accident.

In the end, the criticism is what matters. For contemporary poets, Jarrell has tossed out bones still worth chewing on, as in "On Modernism," where he puts the situation of the poet in the latter half of the 20th century quite nakedly: "It is the end of the line. Poets can go back and repeat the ride; they can settle in attractive, atavistic colonies along the railroad; they can repudiate the whole system, à la Yvor Winters, for some neoclassical donkey caravan of their own. But Modernism As We Knew It—the most successful and influential body of poetry of this century—is dead."

Poets are left, as it were, stranded. Jarrell believed that, and this doubtless added to his despair. But his essays are so full of life, so rippled with perceptions, shafts of acute vision, neatly framed contrasts, and witty formulations, that one cannot but hope his death was genuinely an accident. The man in the essays—that familiar voice—does not sound like someone who would kill himself; he appears wry and full of wisdom, a model of sanity. *No Other Book* comes at a good time to remind us of who he was and what he gave us. It should grace every serious reader's bookshelf.

> JAY PARINI, a poet and novelist, teaches at Middlebury College. His recent books include *Benjamin's Crossing* (1996), *House of Days* (1998), and *Robert Frost: A Life* (1999).

## *Laying Down Arms*

*THE SOUL OF BATTLE:*

*From Ancient Times to the Present Day,  
How Three Great Liberators Vanquished Tyranny.*

By Victor Davis Hanson. Free Press.

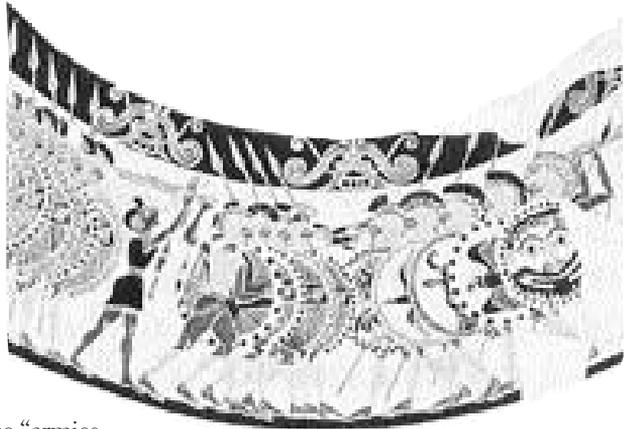
480 pp. \$30

by Andrew J. Bacevich

This is a book about citizen armies, military genius, and wars of liberation. It posits a specifically democratic tradition of martial greatness—of mighty armies raised out of seemingly unlikely material, entrusted

to the command of eccentrics, and embarking "on a moral trek into the heart of slavery." Called upon to fight not for glory or conquest but for freedom, citizen-soldiers become fierce, implacable warriors, a

“democratic militia” that marches deep into enemy territory to vanquish evil. Having accomplished their liberating mission, these warriors put aside their arms and hasten to resume their peacetime pursuits. Yet in doing so they impart a residue of “civic militarism” to the rest of society. Their sacrifices rekindle a spirit of civic vitality. The righteousness of the cause for which they fought spurs a democratic renewal that persists long after these “armies of a season” have dispersed.



The proponent of this provocative thesis, Victor Davis Hanson, is a distinguished historian of the ancient world who teaches at California State University, Fresno, and lives on (and works) his family’s farm in the San Joaquin Valley. Hanson is also, not incidentally, an agrarian. Indeed, that outlook, with its sturdy faith in the virtue of the common folk, its distaste for the urban, industrialized world, and its antipathy to privilege, pervades the work, imbuing it with originality and passion.

Hanson builds his argument for a democratic way of war on three cases. Beginning with Greece in the fourth century B.C., he recounts the story of Epaminondas, whose rugged Theban infantrymen invaded Sparta, crushed its army, and freed the Helots from subjugation. Next, he turns to William Tecumseh Sherman’s Army of the West, whose spectacular “march to the sea” in 1864 doomed the Confederacy and sealed the demise of slavery. Finally, he examines the campaigns of General George S. Patton’s Third U.S. Army, sweeping across France and through Germany to destroy Hitler’s Reich and liberate the prisoners of Nazi death camps.

In Hanson’s telling, these campaigns are all of a piece. Each pitted an army of yeomen, inspired by deep-seated convictions, against a self-proclaimed elite: hoplites against Spartan regulars, midwestern farm boys against the planter aristocracy, conscript GIs against Aryan “supermen.” Each army fought under a military misfit of fierce disposition and unappreciated humanity. Epa-

minondas, Sherman, and Patton, according to Hanson, all understood that the humane way to wage war is to end it quickly and decisively. Each believed that doing so required not slaughter but maneuver. Determined to spare his own men, each avoided head-on collisions with the enemy’s army, instead (and over the objections of timid superiors) moving on the enemy rear and thrusting deep into his homeland. Victory in each instance expanded the realm of freedom so that the military campaign itself became a ringing affirmation of democracy.

The author works hard to make the facts fit his thesis, but not altogether successfully. To portray Sherman’s westerners as decisive, he minimizes the contributions of Ulysses S. Grant and of the Army of the Potomac. Yet from 1861 all the way to 1865, the Army of the Potomac did most of the fighting and dying. Sherman could tear through Georgia and the Carolinas only because Grant had fixed the main Confederate army in Virginia and was relentlessly grinding it down. Nor did Sherman see his march as a purposeful act of liberation. His voluminous wartime correspondence suggests a commander less intent on ringing in the day of jubilee than on compelling recalcitrant rebels to submit to federal authority, thereby restoring the Union. The fate of African Americans was at best a secondary consideration.

In emphasizing the achievements of Patton’s army, similarly, Hanson is dismissive of the other formations, American and allied, that played a hand in liberating Europe. The

Third Army alone could no more have defeated the Wehrmacht than Sherman's westerners could have singlehandedly defeated the Confederacy. To highlight the genius of Patton himself, Hanson does a hatchet job on Omar Bradley, admittedly not one of history's Great Captains, but a competent officer and decent man. In Hanson's hands, Bradley becomes a cautious, unimaginative hack, consumed with dislike and envy of his flamboyant subordinate. Dwight D. Eisenhower fares only slightly better. Such, to be sure, were the views that Patton himself harbored, but to adopt them uncritically is to render an unbalanced portrait of the high command in the European theater. Finally, to imagine that Patton viewed his mission chiefly in moral terms, with the liberation of death camps his central purpose, is to engage in myth making, imposing our present-day consciousness of the Holocaust onto an earlier era. However fashionable it may have become to pretend otherwise—indeed, however much we may wish it had been otherwise—American soldiers fought not to save European Jewry or any other victims of Nazism, but simply to finish the job and go home.

Such reservations notwithstanding, *The Soul of Battle* remains a compelling book, suffused with the author's deep faith in democracy. Growing out of that faith are several expectations: that when the people choose war they should do so for reasons that rise above the sordid calculations of kings or princes; that an army of citizen-soldiers should be an expression of democracy itself, differing in spirit and behavior from mercenaries animated by visions of empire or expectations of plunder; that democratic armies should give rise to a humane style of generalship that restores peace without needless slaughter; that the outcome of wars undertaken by democracies ought to be redemptive.

We might argue as to whether the armies of Epaminondas, Sherman, and Patton truly lived up to such expectations. But surely Hanson is correct that there attaches to the destruction of militarism, slavery, and totalitarianism by democratic armies a grandeur that compels lasting admiration. Indeed, jux-

taposed with the perplexing military history of our own time—Iraq left under the thumb of Saddam Hussein, Somalia abandoned, Rwanda ignored, Kosovo ravaged by Serb predators, Serbia by NATO bombs—the grandeur of those achievements becomes all the more evident.

Perhaps Hanson's three cases spread across two millennia are too few in number to qualify as much of a tradition. Indeed, other cases—in the American experience alone, the Indian campaigns, the war with Mexico, the Philippine insurrection, and Vietnam—suggest that the democratic way of war all too often resembles war waged by nations to whom democracy is an alien concept. Ultimately, the nature of war at least as much as the nature of society determines the behavior of fighting men and their generals.

Does an appreciation for the enduring nature of war (and for the iron laws of politics) absolve democracies of any obligation to attempt to transcend its bleak imperatives? With his unbounded confidence in the people, Hanson emphatically answers no. He insists that the people can bend war to serve the interests of freedom. Certainly he is correct in suggesting that any democracy that gives up the effort to do so, that becomes cynical and craven in its use of military power, sullies itself and imperils its own existence.

Disguised as a work of scholarship, *The Soul of Battle* is in fact a timely and bracing polemic. Its true purpose is to indict the democracies of our own day, the United States foremost among them, for fabricating a new military tradition that is paltry, mean spirited, timorous—and explicitly designed not to engage the passions of the people. Victor Davis Hanson summons those sharing his faith in democracy to restore the connection between that faith and our military policies, so that the purposes for which democratic nations employ power and the way they fight reflect the will of the people. For citizens of the democracy that has arrogated to itself the role of world's only superpower, that message demands thoughtful consideration.

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# Au Revoir to France?

FRANCE ON THE BRINK:  
*A Great Civilization Faces the New Century.*  
By Jonathan Fenby. Arcade. 449 pp. \$27.95

by Amy E. Schwartz

Grumbling at France and its unaccountable insistence on remaining French is an indoor sport whose popularity reaches from the humblest spat-upon package tourist to the highest levels of France's fellow NATO governments. Foreign employers rage at the restrictive labor rules and the incredibly high costs of hiring and firing French workers. Business types jeer at the impending 35-hour work week enacted by Lionel Jospin's Socialist government. Diplomats tear their hair over the French government's periodic need to show that its interests are independent of the rest of the world's, whether by testing nuclear weapons, breaking the ranks of a worldwide embargo to enter an oil deal with Iran, or steering executives of non-French companies to allegedly bugged seats in Air France's business class. And individual visitors, no matter how admiring, sooner or later long in private for some crushing answer to the sublime French certainty that no way but the French way can possibly be correct.

Jonathan Fenby maintains that the French way of doing things has brought France's civilization to the brink of disaster. He believes that France—the exceptional, the brilliant, the stylish—is mired in statism and corruption, unable to face its problems. “The French have to confront the implications of a future which lies in an increasingly integrated con-

tinental, bringing with it responsibilities and challenges,” he writes near the end of his book. “For all the pull of rural life and tradition, they have to come to grips with the modern nature of their nation. The state and the politicians have to free themselves from the grasp of lobbies. . . . Public morality has to triumph over corruption. . . . Government has to see itself an enabler of the individual genius of its people. . . . The elite has to become more open to the world and its ideas.”

It seems a tall order for any nation, let alone one that the author has just spent 400 pages denouncing for institutional sclerosis and narrow self-regard. Yet Fenby styles himself a Francophile, and he has the credentials to prove it: a French wife, years of experience covering the country for various British newspapers, and an enthusiastic palate that delights in the nation's endless offerings of food and wine. But he is a Francophile mordantly critical of the object of his affections, particularly what it has become in recent years. He writes, he would have you know, more in sorrow than in anger.

In a clever chapter on “Vanishing Madeleines,” he laments the decay of the world-renowned symbols of French life. “*Foie gras* is

imported from Central Europe and snails from as far away as Taiwan. That essential element in traditional French hygiene, the



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bidet, is now installed in fewer than 10 percent of new bathrooms.” Berets? Only three factories in France still make them—a tenth of the number before World War II. Baguettes? “As people grow richer and more urbanized, they eat less bread. A century ago, the average French person consumed 219 kilograms a year. . . . In the 1990s it fell below 60 kilos. Parisians now average only 36 kilos a year.” Cafés? Three thousand close each year, half of them in Paris, as patterns of life change and people do less drinking. In another chapter, he bemoans the vanishing of the country’s rural roots as villages wither and their customs die out: “The annual killing of the pig and the use of every morsel down to the ears and tail for food has been supplanted by preserved cold cuts in cellophane from the local supermarket.”

But here the argument becomes contradictory, even circular—because if anyone shares Fenby’s solicitude for these local customs, these symbolic hallmarks, it is the French government. It pours out subsidies for agriculture, for small-town living, for those who bake baguettes in the traditional manner. It nests daily life in regulations intended to encourage people to patronize small grocers and eat fresh bread. And those regulations and subsidies, in turn, are a large part of what drives Fenby and other critics of French exceptionalism round the bend. His ideal—a modern France, fully integrated with the Continent, no longer in the grip of lobbies and special interests—would be a France losing ever more swiftly the things that mark it off from the rest of the world.

The book has other weaknesses as well. Fenby laments the number of scandals in high places, the lack of turnover in political office, the gap between the well off and a resentful underclass, the strain of integrating racial minorities—but he never compares the French experience with that of other countries. What nation *has* figured out what to do about its underclass? An otherwise gripping chapter on Jean-Marie Le Pen and his National Front ends with the party’s “implosion,” undercutting the author’s argument that the Front’s persistence signals deep trouble in the electorate. A section on

Francophobia is little but a collection of lame jokes and nasty newspaper headlines. Elsewhere, the problem is pure rummage: Fenby loves lists, and he has an odd habit of rattling off a long series of unconnected one-sentence items on a theme, for all the world like someone reciting the results of a Nexis search.

France on the Brink finally hits its stride in the last four chapters, when it settles down to a straightforward narrative account of the last three presidents of the Republic: Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, François Mitterrand, and Jacques Chirac. Here is grist for Fenby’s contention that high-level French politics is ingrown and arid of ideas. He follows the career-long hatred between the Socialist Mitterrand and the neo-Gaullist Chirac—each of whose overriding political goal was to keep the other from power—and tracks Mitterrand’s cynical flip-flopping between left and right. “If one constant ran through Mitterrand’s long career,” he writes, “it was his ability to disown his beliefs of yesterday.” Arriving at the great conundrum of recent French politics—why, in 1997, a faltering Chirac called new elections that lost him his huge parliamentary majority and forced him to appoint socialist Lionel Jospin as prime minister—Fenby offers little in the way of new reporting to clear up the mystery. Plainly, though, he is as suspicious of Jospin’s efforts to invent a French “third way” as he is of previous governments’ temporizing.

France may well be due for another set of rude shocks to its beloved way of life. Surrounded by countries buffeted by similar forces, and committed to that engine of change, the European Union, it has nonetheless held out longer than its neighbors. Its many fans—Fenby indubitably among them—still hope for a miraculous solution, one that lets France retain its distinctiveness without lapsing into insularity. Nothing better demonstrates the continued aura of French aplomb and self-confidence than the faith that France will find this salvation.

> AMY E. SCHWARTZ writes about cultural issues for the Washington Post.

## Arts & Letters

### FAREWELL:

#### *A Memoir of a Texas Childhood.*

By Horton Foote. Scribner. 287 pp. \$24

Foote tells his memoir of youthful days in Texas the same way he has presented the material in his many plays, movies, and other books: deliberately, in detail, and unhurriedly. The man refuses to be rushed. But, in time, one realizes that his wanderings are not without purpose, and that he has achieved a surprising economy of words.

Foote reveals the deep threshings of sharks beneath the placid waters of his native Texas village, Wharton, the “Harrison” of his fictional works. Perhaps no other American writer so consistently depicts small-town virtues or convivialities being gnawed away by man’s inherent greed or anger or foolishness or fears—yet he comes off more as a casual reporter than as one sitting in hard-eyed judgment.

Even as a boy working in his father’s dry goods store, Foote had an eye for people and their conduct. He would listen to the yarns of old men in the local spit-and-whittle club: “Each of the men then began to tell their own stories of the past. The scandals, private or public, and the deaths by drowning in the river, the tales of gamblers, and drunks, and murderers, and of the ones murdered, of adulterers and adulteresses, of when this brother did that, and no it was the other brother, hour after hour.” There is so much evidence in this memoir of Foote’s living a life of professional observation early on—and as much a life of the mind as his cultural circumstance permitted—that one wonders why it took him so long to see himself for the writer he became rather than the actor he first aspired to be.

An editor hoping to make me a “commercial” writer at the outset of my career, 30-odd years ago, said, “Don’t write like Horton Foote. He’s good to read, but he won’t make a quarter for himself or his publisher.” Well, I gladly would have written like Horton Foote if I could have. And while his sales figures may never have rivaled those of Tom Clancy or Jackie Collins, they will not have to hold any benefits for this 83-year-old, the winner of a Pulitzer Prize and two Oscars, the author of *The Young Man from Atlanta*, *The Trip to Bountiful*, *Tender*

*Mercies*, *The Orphans’ Home Cycle*, and many other original stage plays and screenplays, plus such screen adaptations as Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

The title of this memoir in no way indicates that Horton Foote is hanging up his pen. It was chosen because, in heading out to the Pasadena Playhouse at age 17 to study acting, he was bidding farewell to the old hometown—or so he thought. He moved back again after many years of meandering, though his life’s work makes clear that Wharton and its people never once left his mind.

—Larry L. King

### SIN IN SOFT FOCUS:

#### *Pre-Code Hollywood.*

By Mark A. Vieira.

Harry N. Abrams. 240 pp. \$39.95

### PRE-CODE HOLLYWOOD:

#### *Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930–1934.*

By Thomas Doherty.

Columbia Univ. Press. 430 pp. \$49.50 cloth, \$19.50 paper

In 1999—“the summer of the dirty joke,” as the *New York Times* dubbed it—65 seconds of orgy in Stanley Kubrick’s *Eyes Wide Shut* were digitally altered to satisfy the Motion Picture Association of America’s rating board. In a rare show of unanimity, film critics in Los Angeles and New York condemned the board for “trampling the freedom of American filmmakers.” Those critics—and members of the ratings board, too—will find valuable perspective in



two new books recalling the merry boom and dismal bust of “pre-Code Hollywood,” that all-but-unexamined period when American filmmakers operated free from official censorship.

The label “pre-Code” is something of a misnomer. The Production Code, setting rules for Hollywood’s purity, was adopted with lofty purpose in 1930—“correct entertainment raises the whole standard of a nation”—and widely flouted until 1934, when Joseph Breen became the enforcer of a new and more stringent Code.

Many films from the pre-Breen years no longer exist, at least in their original version. In order to secure reissue thereafter, films made before 1934 had to be submitted to the Code and—retroactively—to the Code’s splicer. This had irreversible results when the original negative was cut, as it often was. Among films that no longer exist in the form in which they were made, and in which they made film history, are *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *Mata Hari*, *Shanghai Express*, *King Kong*, *42nd Street*, *Frankenstein*, *Public Enemy*, *Tarzan and His Mate*, and *Animal Crackers*.

Making the pre-Code era doubly worth examining is that it coincides with the worst years of the Great Depression, a trauma that challenged the fundamental values and assumptions of American society. In his witty and weighty *Pre-Code Hollywood*, Doherty, who teaches at Brandeis University, traces Hollywood’s surprising and little-known response to the calamity. Such pictures as *Wild Boys of the Road* and *Heroes for Sale* told bitter, disillusioned stories in their titles alone, while others, such as *Gabriel over the White House*, flirted with what Doherty calls a “dictator craze.” Cinematic “insurrection”—a key word in the subtitle—would come to an end with the enforcement of the Code, as would Mae West’s suggestive sashays and any celluloid hints that the glamor of crime ended anywhere but the gutter or the hot seat.

Vieira’s *Sin in Soft Focus* details pre-Code history and its no-longer-available films in a clear and lively text that inevitably pales alongside the 275 photographs, many of them unfamiliar, all of them beautifully reproduced. They seductively evoke the period, shimmering with a black-and-white elegance so alluring, ironically, that it is easy to see what alarmed the bluestockings.

Vieira, a Los Angeles-based film historian

and photographer, writes with indignation of the mischief done by cardinals with scissors. The Code was almost entirely spearheaded by American Catholics, and the author quotes a Cleveland bishop exhorting parishioners, “Purify Hollywood or destroy Hollywood!” Vieira raises the question whether anti-Semitism underlay the Code, then lets Code czar Breen answer it. Describing Hollywood’s mogul class to a fellow Catholic, Breen said: “Ninety-five percent of the folks are Jews of an Eastern European lineage. They are, probably, the scum of the earth.”

Doherty, by contrast, defends Breen—who enforced the Code from 1934 until 1954 and wielded as much power over pictures as Louis B. Mayer or Jack Warner—as a virtuous aesthete who thought of himself as a “creative collaborator.” All he wanted for American cinema, writes Doherty, was “to imbue it with a transcendent sense of virtue and order,” and in doing so he came out “on the side of the angels.”

Really? They would strike Vieira as avenging angels, one suspects. And why do virtue and order, especially when “transcendent,” sound so like the professed goals of every reformer who ever sharpened the scissors, lit the bonfire, or—come to think of it—digitized the orgy?

—Steven Bach

### **THE BROKEN ESTATE: *Essays on Literature and Belief.***

By James Wood. Random House. 272 pp. \$24

Wood, a young, Cambridge-educated Englishman who is now a senior editor at the *New Republic*, belongs to a critical tradition that has largely expired in the thin air of current academic practice. Learned, passionate, and judgmental, he recalls Lionel Trilling and Edmund Wilson, critics who believed that literature matters to the way we live and that its quality can be established through exegesis and argument. Wood’s grave and rather pretentious title sets the tone for this collection of 21 essays on 19th- and 20th-century writers of fiction and poetry, a span stretching from Austen and Melville to Pynchon and Updike, with a swipe at Thomas More and a wicked reduction of the critic George Steiner thrown in for good measure.

Wood is especially attracted to such writers as Melville, Gogol, Arnold, and Flaubert, who

seem to him to struggle with the distinctions between literary belief—the assent fiction wins from us to credit its reality—and formal religious belief. Those distinctions became harder to maintain after the ascendancy of the novel in the mid-19th century, when, in Wood's view, the old estate—"the supposition that religion was a set of divine truth-claims, and that the Gospel narratives were supernatural reports"—no longer held. Novels caused the Gospels to be read as a collection of fictional narratives, even as fiction acquired the status of religion under the influence of writers (Flaubert pre-eminently) who made literary style an object of worship. "For it was not just science," writes Wood, "but perhaps the novel itself which helped to kill Jesus's divinity, when it gave us a new sense of the real, a new sense of how the real disposes itself in a narrative—and then in turn a new skepticism toward the real as we encounter it in narrative."

Novels have been credited with a lot in the past: they have ended innocence and toyed with readers' affections and shredded the social fabric. But did they really bring down God? (Yes, there is that escape-hatch "perhaps.") Wood was raised in an evangelical nook of the Church of England, he tells us, but has since become an atheist. Yet he cannot quite let go of the faith he has tried to replace with the lesser consolations of art; in this book, at least, the loss informs his vocation.

Wood is a fearless and astute critic, who has not only read everything but come to terms with it—come to *his* terms with it, that is. Fiction for him is about narrative and character, and the best fiction creates characters who get away from their authors and move in a reality beyond the confines of the page, so that we can imagine their spillover lives. Among the

writers he thinks great are Austen, Melville, Gogol, Flaubert, Proust, Lawrence, Woolf, Joyce, and Mann; no argument there (well, Lawrence perhaps). Wood's notions of what makes for great fiction—"fiction as it should be: a free scatter through time, unpressed, incontinent, unhostaged, surprised by the shock of its unhindered passage through frontiers it, and not history, has invented"—appear to champion a wild expansiveness. But they are actually rather stern criteria, disqualifying those who play by different rules (Updike, Pynchon, DeLillo); allegorists are at special risk of being sent early to the showers.

"The writer-critic," Wood says, "is always showing a little plumage to the writer under discussion." He shows a lot of plumage, and his attraction to simile and metaphor seems irresistible. He notices air conditioners "dripping their sap, their backsides thrust out of the window like Alisoun, who does the same in Chaucer" (though presumably without chilling the room). Then again, he can be graceful and apt: "Fiction should seem to offer itself to the reader's completion, not to the writer's. This whisper of conspiracy is one of fiction's necessary beauties."

The last of these essays originated in part as a sermon at an Oxford college, and that's appropriate, because Wood writes as if he would be right at home in a pulpit. He is immensely serious about locating the abiding achievement of literature and honoring its importance as an alternative to faith. But when the furrow in his brow threatens to suck in the rest of him, he can provoke even an admiring reader to blasphemy: "Lighten up: they're only books." As indeed they may be, to those whose estate is still whole.

—James Morris

## Science & Technology

**WHAT A BLESSING SHE HAD CHLOROFORM:**  
*The Medical and Social Response to the Pain of Childbirth from 1800 to the Present.*

By Donald Caton. Yale Univ. Press.  
288 pp. \$30

I had my kids without anesthesia and treasure the memory, an attitude that a col-

league of mine likens to making a fetish out of having dental work without painkillers. Pain relief during childbirth raises a host of questions: What is best for the mother? What is best for the baby? What is "natural," and does that matter? The world is full of people who think they know the ideal birth experience, and, therefore, full of women who think they got it wrong.

Caton demonstrates that women, obstetricians, social theorists, and preachers (among others) have been reading significance into labor pains for at least two centuries. The author himself is an obstetrical anesthesiologist, trained to alleviate the pain of childbirth, and spurred to undertake this book by his surprise that “many women did not want my help.” His historical account is naturally shaded by his professional assumptions (as he freely acknowledges), but it is also informed and enlivened by his technical and scientific understanding of anesthesia.

Ether was first used in childbirth in 1847. In 1853, Dr. John Snow (of epidemiologic fame for tracing a London cholera epidemic to a contaminated well) administered it to Queen Victoria during labor. Later, her daughter was given chloroform during her labor, prompting the queen to utter the sentence that gives the book its title. Caton dis-



cusses the reception of ether and chloroform among physicians and patients, tracing the changing social interpretation of pain and the strands of medical doubt (in the mother, ether caused nausea, chloroform caused liver damage—and no one knew their effects on the infant). He moves on to scopolamine, the notorious “twilight sleep” of the early 20th century, and argues that educated, affluent American women demanded it as their due and their emancipation. In his account, the profession has responded to the wishes of pregnant women, adjusting medical practice as the patients’ attitudes shifted. Natural childbirth and Lamaze simply continue this trend.

The book’s foremost strength is its intelligent combination of the science of pain relief—which remains one of the great gifts of modern medicine—with a rich matrix of social history. Caton touches on the medical inter-

pretation of pain, the position of women in society, and the emergence of science as a driving force in medical change. If his perspective remains that of an anesthesiologist, convinced that most fully informed women will choose medication, his intriguing story nonetheless helps us understand childbirth, pain, and pain control.

—Perri Klass

***THE MEN THEY WILL BECOME:  
The Nature and Nurture of  
Male Character.***

By Eli Newberger

Perseus Books. 288 pp. \$25

Another book on the subject of boys being boys, this one from the pediatrician who testified against Louise Woodward, the British nanny found guilty by a Massachusetts jury of shaking her infant charge to death. The founder of the Child Protection and Family Violence Unit at Children’s Hospital in Boston, Newberger rejects the argument, advanced by Judith Rich Harris last year in her controversial *Nurture Assumption*, that peers play a defining role in development. We are born with traits but not character, he says. Character is learned, primarily from one’s parents, and as it develops it becomes “a resource for shaping the part of temperament that is malleable.” When character is badly shaped, Newberger looks to the parents first. Parents who, for instance, dislike having an innately shy, inhibited child may “drive him into being an aggressively disobedient child.” The author rejects genetic determinism except insofar as he believes males are hard-wired to pursue power and must learn self-control.

Newberger concludes his anecdotal analysis by championing the wisdom of “all the great moral philosophers from Aristotle to Bernard Shaw,” to wit: the “pathway to character” is “to renounce some of the satisfactions which men normally crave.” In place of caveman power plays, he recommends “reciprocity in marriage, parenthood, work or play.” And to those adages he appends the Socratic oath. With self-knowledge “comes the possibility of fulfillment, and of character that will continue to be strengthened by choosing to do right, and, after failure, to do better the next time.”

You knew this, of course, but there’s no harm in hearing it again.

—A. J. Hewat

# Contemporary Affairs

**FASTER:**  
*The Acceleration of Just  
About Everything.*

By James Gleick. Pantheon. 324 pp.  
\$24

Living in the fast lane obsesses us. We speed-dial and leave a message on a quick-playback answering machine. Hastening through our crowded appointment schedule, we punch door-close buttons in elevators that accelerate to near eardrum-blowing thresholds. In the last decade alone, we have eliminated fadeaways between TV commercials, diminished the duration of news sound bites by half, and developed instant opinion surveys.

In this infectious, tongue-in-cheek romp, science writer Gleick—author of *Chaos: Making a New Science* (1987) and *Genius: The Life and Science of Richard Feynman* (1992)—examines modernity’s attempts to freeze and squeeze time. He looks at how we poll, trade stocks, package food, and edit TV programs, all with the goal of compacting more information into a shorter duration. The author argues that our quest to live in “real time,” where the world both near and far reacts instantaneously to our every action, began with the computer. Gleick is a master at explaining how computers speed everything from air and road traffic to directory assistance.

But he argues that all our time-saving measures don’t really add up. The microwave lops only four minutes off food preparation time, and about one-quarter of our phone time is spent on hold. When new time savers render old ones obsolete, we are obliged to learn new skills, which of course itself takes time. Overall, our lives may be less efficient and fast paced than we like to think: according to time usage surveys, the average American spends three hours a day watching TV, an hour eating, an hour on the phone, four minutes having sex (roughly equivalent to the time spent filling out forms), and six hours working. That last figure, despite our workaholic frenzy, is not increasing.

Why does time so consume us? For one

thing, we confront too many options, and selecting among them takes time. We also structure our lives so that we can have more leisure—but leisure too can become overstructured, only adding to our feeling of being pressed. In addition, perhaps we seek the sense of accomplishment that comes with deeming ourselves organized and in control, however delusional the belief may be.

In the dwindling nonindustrialized cultures of the world, work and leisure conflate. People don’t fill time; it fills them. By contrast, those of us in industrialized countries were trained, long before we became technophiles, to treat time as a commodity, an entity that exists outside ourselves—just look at that gadget on your wrist. All commodities can be spent, wasted, or rationed, and our stock of time, like many other commodities, often seems inadequate to our needs.

—Anthony Aveni

**AN AFFAIR OF STATE:**  
*The Investigation, Impeachment, and  
Trial of President Clinton.*

By Richard A. Posner. Harvard Univ.  
Press. 276 pp. \$24.95

Someday a great legal thinker will write a wonderful book on the investigation and impeachment of President Bill Clinton. Posner, the prolific and generally brilliant chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, seems in many ways the ideal author. He is rigorous factually and legally, and he has a concern for the interaction of morality and law that is critical to any meaningful examination of the subject.

Unfortunately, Posner’s book comes too early to transcend the discussions that took place as events were unfolding, and too late to add to those discussions. It was written as the scandal was playing out, and much of it feels like an elegant rehash of arguments debated in real time on MSNBC: what constitutes an impeachable offense, the viability of lame-duck impeachments, the constitutionality of censure. Posner generally defends Ken-

neth Starr, and he spends considerable time emphasizing the seriousness of Clinton's offenses and the strength of the evidence against him. He evinces amused contempt toward the congressional proceedings, and less-amused contempt toward the president's defenders.

The author does present several useful and often witty insights. A provocative section examines the battle over Clinton as a species of war. In addition, Posner's portrayal of the Kulturkampf dimensions of the saga is keenly compelling. And he is at his best when attacking the public intellectuals and legal experts who served as ever-present and almost-ever-banal commentators. Posner criticizes them for both "reticence and stridency": they generally failed to take on the scandal's fundamental ethical questions, in his view, and the commentary we did get was shabby, predictable, and often dishonest. He observes that "it is tempting to conclude . . . that

the left intelligentsia lacks a moral core, while the right intelligentsia has a morbidly exaggerated fear of moral laxity."

But readers looking for big-picture answers will be disappointed. Posner ultimately hedges on whether President Clinton's conduct merited impeachment. His qualified defense of the independent counsel, though persuasive as far as it goes, doesn't take on the more sophisticated criticisms, those that focus not on specific ethical allegations but on Starr's pattern of sublimating all other social and governmental interests to the immediate, though often marginal, needs of his probe. Posner's distaste for the independent counsel law (which Congress has allowed to lapse) and his disapproval of the Supreme Court's decision allowing the Paula Jones case to proceed are conventional wisdom. *An Affair of State* lacks the altitude needed for a major work on this familiar subject.

—Benjamin Wittes

## Religion & Philosophy

**DANTE ALIGHIERI:**  
*Divine Comedy, Divine Spirituality.*  
By Robert Royal. Crossroad. 246 pp.  
\$16.95

You can't say we lack tools for the study of Dante (1265–1321). Every used-book store in America has a dozen translations of the *Divine Comedy*, by everyone from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Dorothy Sayers to Mark Musa and Kathryn Lindskoog. John Ciardi's complete version deserved all the prizes it won back in the 1970s, and the first volume of Robert Pinsky's colloquial translation appeared in 1995, to considerable acclaim. And then there are all the secondary works, many of them designed to help students and general readers through Dante's poem. Just in the last few months we've had Alison Milbank's historical study *Dante and the Victorians*, Marianne Shapiro's *Dante and the Knot of Body and Soul*, Marc Cogan's superb *Design in the Wax: The Structure of the Divine Comedy and Its Meaning*, and a thin paperback entitled *Dante for Beginners*.

In other words, Royal's *Dante Alighieri*, the new introduction to the *Divine Comedy* in Crossroad's "Spiritual Legacy" series, should be an entirely unnecessary book. It should be—but it isn't. That's in part because Royal does a fine job of leading readers through the long and difficult poem, but also in part because so few prior commentators seem to believe that Dante meant what he said—that the *Divine Comedy* is genuinely about the divine, that it tells the tale of the soul's journey to God. You can work your way through thousands of pages about Dante, learning all about Italian politics, Renaissance love poetry, and medieval theology, without ever discovering what Royal emphasizes: every line of the *Inferno* aims up through the *Purgatorio* to the *Paradiso* and the mystical vision of God. If we fail to see the *Divine Comedy* as spirituality, we'll never grasp it as poetry.

A Catholic scholar in Washington, D.C., Royal is president of the new Faith and Reason Institute, the author of several previous works on literature and theology, and a man with a deeply mystical sense of Dante's purpose. Interspersing effective commentary with quotations through three chapters, each a long but helpful run through Dante's cantos, Royal conveys the sense that, however interesting the lost sinners in Hell are to moderns, the saved sim-



ners in Purgatory are even more interesting, and the saints in Heaven more interesting still.

Economic considerations seem to have forced Royal to rely on Longfellow's 19th-century translation, which has an expired copyright and not much else to recommend it. Whatever Longfellow means at the end of the *Inferno* by "The Emperor of the kingdom dolorous / From his mid-breast forth issued from the ice," it's not Dante's Italian. It's not even English. Too, all introductory commentaries have to scrimp somewhere, and this new volume never clearly presents the cosmological structure of Dante's universe—the medieval sense that when we look up at the sky we are (as C. S. Lewis once described it) looking in at the heavens rather than out at space. But in nearly every other way, Royal's *Dante Alighieri* remains a model of the kind of commentary we need, a first-rate spiritual introduction to the *Divine Comedy*.

—J. Bottum

# History

**LAWRENCE:**

*The Uncrowned King of Arabia.*

By Michael Asher. Overlook Press.

418 pp. \$35

Myth and reality were forever at war in the life of T. E. Lawrence (1888–1935). To detractor-in-chief Richard Aldington, author of a hugely controversial 1955 biography, the soldier-scholar who strove for immortality in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1935) was “an impudent mythomaniac.” To Winston Churchill, though, *The Seven Pillars* is among “the greatest books ever written in the English language.”

Eighty years after the Arab Revolt, it is probably fair to say that the abiding view of Lawrence the aesthete and champion of Arab independence is kept alive not by the epic prose of his memoir—one of those classics that are nowadays more read about than read—but by David Lean’s spectacular 1962 film. As they used to say in the old movie trailers: Peter O’Toole is Lawrence of Arabia. There is a certain irony in that appropriation of Lawrence’s image. “Other than stars of the screen,” writes Asher, “Lawrence was perhaps the first international megastar of the century, and ‘Lawrence of Arabia’ was created by its first major publicity campaign.”

Newspaper correspondents who interviewed the young Army colonel on his return from Palestine in 1918 were intrigued by his “unassuming” exterior, unaware that he had long used his apparent aloofness and modesty to enhance his personal mystique. (One of his admirers, the military historian Basil Liddell Hart, described Lawrence’s personality as that of “a woman wearing the veil while exposing the bosom.”) Lawrence made shrewd use of an American journalist, Lowell Thomas, who subsequently delivered an immensely popular series of illustrated lectures that did much to set in stone the achievements of the “Prince of Mecca.” Though Lawrence affected embarrassment at seeing his name trumpeted, he was often to be found in the audience at the talks. No wonder cynical souls accused him of backing into the limelight.

Arriving a decade after Jeremy Wilson’s authorized biography, Asher’s book is part portrait, part travelogue. A seasoned Arabist and

explorer, Asher has previously published a biography of the explorer and author Wilfred Thesiger and a study of Lawrence’s adopted brothers, the Bedu. Determined to retrace his subject’s footsteps, Asher roams through the Sinai Desert, Jidda, and beyond, constantly testing Lawrence’s account of his journeyings against the known documentation and his own experiences. Did Lawrence really carry out the execution of his servant, Hamed? Was he really raped, as he claimed, after being captured by the Turks at Dara’a in 1917? Asher at least casts doubt on Lawrence’s own words, whether in *The Seven Pillars* or in letters to friends.

Curiously, though, the flaws and paradoxes that emerge render Lawrence more sympathetic, not less. Asher depicts a self-made man of action prone to bouts of homoerotic masochism. Shrinking from danger at first, he consciously forced himself to confront violence, all the while laying the ground rules for modern guerrilla warfare—summarized in his own words as the art of deploying “the smallest force in the quickest time at the furthest place.”

Asher quickly outlines the final years. Lawrence, seemingly desperate for anonymity, used pseudonyms to enlist in the army and the Royal Air Force, then went out of his way to advertise the fact among his VIP friends and acquaintances. His death in a motorcycle accident, aged only 46, can be seen almost as a release for a man who once described himself as a clock whose spring had run down.

—Clive Davis

**THE PALLADIUM OF JUSTICE:**

*Origins of Trial by Jury.*

By Leonard W. Levy.

Ivan R. Dee. 114 pp. \$18.95

“The jury trial is at best the apotheosis of the amateur,” Harvard Law School dean Erwin Griswold once declared. “Why should anyone think that 12 persons brought in from the street, selected in various ways for their lack of general ability, should have any special capacity for deciding controversies between persons?” These days, the jury system’s perceived shortcomings and outrages are legion: the acquittals of O.J. Simpson (after nine months

of evidence and four hours of deliberation) and of the police officers who pummeled Rodney King; the \$1 million award to a woman who claimed that a CAT scan had zapped her psychic powers; the \$2.9 million awarded to a woman who spilled McDonald's coffee in her lap; the \$10.5 billion damages against Texaco (the jury reportedly tacked on another billion for each defense witness they loathed); and other tales of jurors befuddled or bamboozled, ignorant or indignant. Jury-room missteps may not be conclusive—judges routinely reduce excessive damage awards—but that's hardly a ringing defense of the system.

Now comes historian Levy, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Origins of the Fifth Amendment* (1968) and some 30 other books, to show how we got here. The jury arose eight centuries ago because Henry II (1154–1189) distrusted the traditional modes of settling disputes. Professional fighters—lances for hire—had corrupted trial by battle. Trial by ordeal was at the mercy of the supervising priest, who, if feeling charitable, might assign the litigant a less-than-nightmarish ordeal: immersing his arm in lukewarm rather than boiling water, for instance, or eating bread while those around him prayed that he would choke if guilty. So Henry established local, 12-man inquisitorial bodies and gradually expanded their jurisdiction. Why 12? According to the 17th-century treatise *Duncomb's Trials*, “If the 12 apostles on their 12 thrones must try us in our eternal state, good reason has the law to appoint the number of 12 to try our temporal.”

As Britain refined the jury system, Pope Innocent III (1198–1216) launched the Holy Inquisition against heretics. Conviction required something akin to proof beyond a reasonable doubt, which placed a premium on confessions—even confessions obtained by torture. So, despite the putatively pro-defendant standard of proof, “the entire history of the Inquisition reveals not a single instance of complete acquittal.” Levy adroitly contrasts the inquisitorial system with the jury system, and assesses why Britain did not go the way of the Continent.

The British commitment to the local jury waned when jurors in the American colonies refused to enforce unpopular laws. Parliament shifted some trials in the colonies to judges (“the most grievous innovation of all,” John Adams declared) and other trials to British

juries (exposing the defendant, James Madison wrote, “to trial in a place where he was not even alleged to have ever made himself obnoxious”). The Declaration of Independence listed these practices as proof of Britain's plot to impose “absolute despotism” on the colonies. The issue in the founding era was not amateur versus expert, as Griswold later framed it; it was citizen versus state.

When it shifts from Europe to America, Levy's book unravels a bit, with twice-told tales and meager analysis. A larger problem is that his story ends around 1800. In that year (as in 1200), local jurors were valued because they were already familiar with the parties and the dispute. By 1900, judges often kept citizens with preexisting knowledge off juries. In 1800, too, juries often determined the law as well as the facts. By 1900, the Supreme Court had decreed that jurors were duty-bound to heed the judge's instructions on the law (though they had, and still have, the raw power to acquit against the evidence). Given these and other changes since 1800, Akhil Reed Amar, in *The Bill of Rights* (1998), pronounces today's jury “only a shadow of its former self.” Such an assessment, or at least another century of history, would have enriched Levy's book.

—Stephen Bates

### ***THE HOLOCAUST IN AMERICAN LIFE.***

By Peter Novick.

Houghton Mifflin. 373 pp. \$27

### ***SELLING THE HOLOCAUST: From Auschwitz to Schindler, How History Is Bought, Sold, and Packaged.***

By Tim Cole. Routledge. 214 pp. \$22.95

The crime we have come to call the Holocaust was not known by this name during World War II, and, in the years following the defeat of Nazi Germany, it did not receive the kind of public attention that it now attracts. These two books consider how the genocidal assault against the Jews became “the Holocaust” and assumed its present prominence in contemporary culture.

Novick, a University of Chicago historian, seeks to trace the development of Holocaust consciousness in the United States and to evaluate whether such aware-

ness is “good for the Jews” and others in this country. Having read widely in the archives of major American Jewish institutions, he is at his best in showing how Holocaust consciousness evolved over time, shifting from the margins to centrality within both Jewish culture and certain sectors of American culture. As pivotal moments in this development, he correctly identifies the 1961 Adolf Eichmann trial in Israel and the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973. But with his predominantly American focus, Novick cannot explain why Holocaust consciousness developed in other countries as well.

Intent on exposing the Holocaust as a deliberately constructed strategy for shoring up American Jewish identity and mobilizing support for Zionist causes, he largely ignores less instrumental reasons why thoughtful people might feel compelled to take an interest in the Jewish catastrophe under Hitler. Where some might point to historical, religious, moral, or ethical claims on consciousness as legitimate prods to remember the Nazi crimes, Novick tends to see only the work of “Holocaust professionals” and other “promoters of Holocaust consciousness.” That approach, far too cynical and reductive, pervades this book and detracts from its value.

*Selling the Holocaust*, the work of a young British scholar, is more derivative but also less tendentious. Cole’s comparative approach serves him well as he explains how the Holocaust has been represented in different ways in Europe, Israel, and America. Focusing on three figures (Anne Frank, Adolf Eichmann, and Oskar Schindler) and three places (Auschwitz, Yad Vashem, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.), he demonstrates how little consensus there is about the proper presentation and ultimate meaning of this history. While portraying Jewish victimization at the core of their Holocaust narrative, Israelis tend to stress the heroic dimensions of Jewish resistance to Nazism, for example, whereas memorial institutions in the United States highlight the role of American soldiers in liberating the Nazi camps. But Cole’s title is unfor-

tunate, as is his repeated use of the easily exploitable phrase “the myth of the Holocaust.”

Both authors evince far more interest in the shifting images of the Holocaust than in the traumatic event itself, an interpretive strategy that, while understandable to a point, in the end reduces all history to its representations. It is true that the past cannot be understood apart from the forms that mediate it, but the pain of this particular past cries out for far more attention than it receives in either of these books.

—Alvin H. Rosenfeld

### WHO KILLED KIROV?

#### *The Kremlin’s Greatest Mystery.*

By Amy Knight. Hill & Wang. 331 pp. \$26

Bolshevik luminary, firebrand, Lenin-grad party boss, Stalin’s close associate—Sergei Kirov was all of these until he was killed by a disgruntled, probably deranged militant on December 1, 1934. Contending that political opponents had orchestrated the murder, Stalin launched the Great Terror, the monstrous, four-year-long purges of party members and the whole of Soviet society. Given his rush to lay blame and the orgy of repression that followed, many have suspected that Stalin—not Grigori Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, Nikolai Bukharin, or any of the other party leaders—masterminded the most enigmatic crime of the Soviet century, and perhaps the most consequential.

Based on Soviet archival materials and newly published documents, *Who Killed*



*Kirov?* amasses a vast array of circumstantial evidence to indict Stalin for the murder. Knight, a respected historian of the Soviet secret police and its postcommunist incarnations, provides ample motive. Kirov, she shows, was not the mindless loyalist of earlier portraits. A former journalist for a left-liberal paper in pre-Bolshevik Russia, he was better educated and arguably more complex than the rest of Stalin's camarilla. While toeing the party line, he repeatedly voiced reservations about specific policies, including the campaigns of terror against the Kulaks. "The Boss," as underlings called Stalin, distrusted dissenters, especially those who, like Kirov, were so popular with the party rank and file as to constitute potential challengers to his rule. So Stalin, even as he pretended to love Kirov, plotted against him.

In addition to ridding himself of a potential rival, Stalin was pursuing a second goal. By blaming the murder on former intraparty factionalists, he could justify the total mobilization that he deemed essential for totalitarian socialism to survive. Mass, unpredictable terror was intrinsic to his rule, Knight shows, and his obsession with traitors and capitulators was more than personal paranoia. Kirov's murder became the rationale for completely replacing the party bureaucracy, eliminating anyone who had the vaguest recollection of party history, and promoting sycophants who owed their careers to Stalin. Knight's book is both a lucid analysis of a pivotal event in Soviet history and a bitter reminder of the dark Stalin era.

—Vladimir Tismaneanu

### **THE OXFORD BOOK OF WORK.**

Edited by Keith Thomas. Oxford Univ. Press. 656 pp. \$35

*The Oxford Book of Work* is splendid but for one great flaw—it's not a book. Certainly it meets the dictionary definition: "a long written or printed work, usu. on sheets of paper fastened or bound together with covers." What's missing is narrative. This is a

volume for dipping into, not for reading straight through. I mention this because I'm a credulous shopper and often deceived.

Thomas, president of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, has created an anthology—really, a grab bag—of most anything toothsome ever written about work. With the notable exception of rock 'n' roll lyrics, nary a stone has been left unturned. Economics, philosophy, poetry, fiction, drama—all have been mined, and with happy results.

Take, for instance, this, from a letter written to a friend by Alexis de Tocqueville in 1858: "It has always been because my mind was uncomfortable at home that it sallied abroad to obtain, at any sacrifice, the relief of hard intellectual work. This is the case now. I have no child to enjoy the little noise that my name may make. I do not believe that in such times as these the slightest influence can be obtained by such writings as mine, or even by any writings except by the bad novels, which try to make us still more immoral and ill-conditioned than we are. Yet I rise at five, and sit for six hours before my paper, and often leave it still white. Sometimes I find what I am looking for, but find it painfully and imperfectly; sometimes I am in despair at not finding it at all."

I choose that excerpt not only because I love it, but because it is characteristic. Thomas wields a generous knife, and so even this slightly trimmed sample has Tocqueville on writing, childlessness, the wretched state of publishing, and the absence of Prozac. Unfortunately, this letter appears not in the section on writing but under the heading "Compensations and Rewards," which brings me to my last gripe: a volume so clearly intended as a reference should be more precisely indexed.

As with any collection of maxims, there are contradictions on work and its rewards. From Noel Coward we hear that "work is much more fun than fun," while C. Wright Mills reports: "Each day men sell little



Hammering Man at No. 3302537,  
by Jonathan Borofsky

pieces of themselves in order to try to buy them back each night and weekend with the coin of 'fun'." Still, the book is cleverly constructed, starting with original sin and clos-

ing with an Oxford don who said of retirement: "It's not too bad, but I rather miss the vacations."

—Benjamin Cheever

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Anthony Aveni**, a professor of astronomy and anthropology at Colgate University, is the author of *Empires of Time: Calendars, Clocks, and Cultures* (1989). **Steven Bach**, who teaches film and literature at Bennington College, is completing a biography of the playwright and director Moss Hart. **Stephen Bates** is literary editor of the *Wilson Quarterly*. **J. Bottum** is books and arts editor of the *Weekly Standard*. **Benjamin Cheever**, the author of three novels, is writing a book about work. **Clive Davis** writes for the *Times* and the *Sunday Times* of London. **A. J. Hewat** is associate editor at the *Litchfield County Times* in New Milford, Conn. **Larry L. King's** 13th book, *A Writer's Life in Letters, Or, Reflections in a Bloodshot Eye*, has just been published. **Perri Klass**, the author of two memoirs and three books of fiction, is a pediatrician practicing in Boston. **James Morris** is director of publications at the American Enterprise Institute. **Alvin H. Rosenfeld**, director of Jewish studies at Indiana University, is editor of *Thinking about the Holocaust* (1997). **Vladimir Tismaneanu**, professor of politics at the University of Maryland, College Park, is the author of *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (1998). **Benjamin Wittes** is an editorial writer for the *Washington Post*.

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## FROM THE CENTER

This fall at the Woodrow Wilson Center we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Kennan Institute, one of the most important institutions in the world for the study of Russia and the former Soviet Union.

The Kennan Institute was established in December 1974 as a division of the Wilson Center through the joint initiative of Ambassador George F. Kennan, then-Wilson Center director James F. Billington, and historian S. Frederick Starr. Its activities and focus have evolved over the years, but its fundamental mission has remained the same: to promote quality research on Russia and Eurasia; to foster a creative dialogue between American academic and government specialists on the region; and to encourage the integration of the American and international Eurasian studies communities into one scholarly enterprise.

The Kennan Institute, which is one of several area studies programs at the Center, offers research fellowships in the humanities and social sciences to scholars and specialists in academia, government, the media, and the private sector. Grant recipients spend up to nine months at the Wilson Center doing research, writing articles and books, and participating in public lectures and conferences.

Several aspects of the Kennan Institute—which is named after the ambassador's forebear, the 19th-century journalist and explorer of Russia, George Kennan—make it unique among American institutions of Russian and Eurasian studies.

First, the Institute truly bridges the worlds of academia and policymaking. Its Fellows range from historians and sociologists to journalists and government officials. Much of the Institute's work aims to place contemporary Russian and Eurasian issues in a broader historical context.

Second, the Institute has often focused attention on issues before they became prominent. A 1976 conference on the state of Soviet agriculture, a 1978 conference on Russian nationalism, and a 1979 conference on the Caucasus all shed light on topics that, within a decade, went on to shape developments in the Soviet

Union and its successor states in significant ways. In recent years, the Institute has stayed ahead of the curve by focusing extensively on Ukraine and on the increasingly important role of Russia's regions. During the past year alone, the Institute has hosted several public meetings on Ukraine, featuring talks by Ukrainian presidential candidates, World Bank consultants, leading American scholars, and a former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine.

Third, the Institute has a great record of sponsoring young scholars who have gone on to be leaders in Russia and other Eurasian countries. Galina Starovoitova, a guest scholar in 1989, became a leading member of the Russian Duma and a Russian presidential candidate in 1996. Yuri Baturin, who studied the Soviet Union's role in international computer regulation, became President Yeltsin's national security adviser and, later, a cosmonaut.

Fourth, the Institute plays an important role in bringing Russians, Ukrainians, Europeans, and Americans into a single, ongoing discussion. At last count, there were 243 Institute alumni in the former Soviet Union alone. The Institute has an office in Moscow and, since last fall, in Kyiv.

Fifth, the Institute works closely with several other programs at the Wilson Center. These joint activities include projects on governance, ethnicity, and comparative urban studies, each of which has a Russian dimension of immediate and historical relevance.

At a time when bilateral relations between Russia and the United States are in flux, the Kennan Institute plays a critical role in keeping ties between the two countries strong. Of all American institutions in Russia, the Kennan Institute is the one with the most respect and credibility. It promotes understanding of Russia and Eurasia here in the United States and, equally important, develops an international community of experts who have a shared commitment to fostering dialogue and strong relations between America and the nations of the former Soviet Union.

*Lee H. Hamilton*  
Director



The  
A M E R I C A N S C H O L A R



- ~ James Trilling's revelations of life with his famously cerebral parents, Lionel and Diana.
- ~ Jennifer Price's natural history of the plastic pink flamingo.
- ~ A soul-searching account of a 1911 lynching at a Pennsylvania steel mill, by Robert Worth, the owner's great-grandson.
- ~ Jonathan Rosen's exploration of the parallels between two great intellectual chat rooms—the Internet and the Talmud.
- ~ Garry Wills's debunking of the myth of Arcadia.

These are a few of the provocative essays published in recent issues of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. If they catch your mind's eye, if you have a taste for the writer's craft, if you crave a magazine that flatly rejects today's sound-bite mentality, you really ought to be reading the SCHOLAR.

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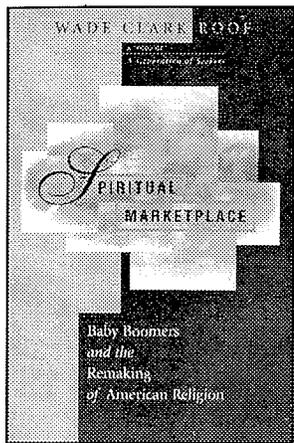
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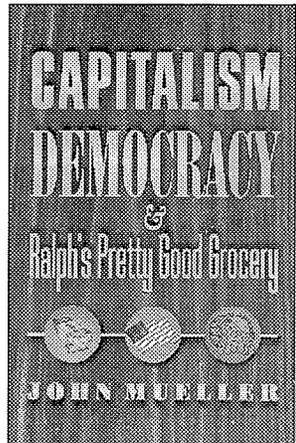
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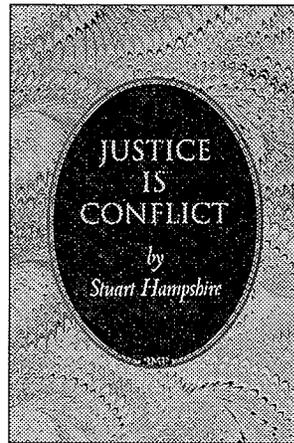
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