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WQ

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Hyperdemocracy
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EDITOR'S COMMENT

With this issue, under the happiest of circumstances, I bid farewell both to the *Wilson Quarterly* and to the Woodrow Wilson Center. Though feelings are always mixed on such occasions, the happiness that predominates derives from a well-founded confidence that the new leaders of the *WQ* and the Center, Steve Lagerfeld and Lee Hamilton, respectively, will do their best to preserve and extend the spirit of humane, disinterested scholarship that has long informed both—and that has distinguished the Center from a small universe of institutions that call themselves “think tanks.”

The Center, in truth, is not a think tank, as one of its founding fathers, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, has frequently observed. It is an institute for advanced study, created to honor the 28th U.S. president by “symbolizing and strengthening the fruitful relation between the world of learning and the world of public affairs.” That’s lofty rhetoric, to be sure, but one reward of a long connection with the Center has been seeing the very real ways in which the knowledge produced here has gradually made its way into the larger world—sometimes via this magazine—to influence debate and action in such areas as urban policy, foreign affairs, defense and security, and education. The work of the men and women of the Center has figured no less significantly in the ongoing debates about our values and culture—“softer” stuff, you might say, but nevertheless the stuff that makes us who we are, as a people and a nation.

The steadfast support of countless Center friends, including you readers, represents a triumph of vision over shortsightedness and a deep intuition that the American experiment is fundamentally tied to the pursuit of knowledge. When questioned about the relevance of that pursuit, as the Center often has been in recent years, I am reminded of Benjamin Franklin’s rejoinder to the Parisian cynics who, witnessing the maiden flight of the hot-air balloon, asked of what use it could be. That quintessential American replied, “Of what use is a new-born baby?”

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Baby Girl (1963) by Marisol, from the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, N.Y. Design by Adrienne Onderdonk Dudden.

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The Banality of Evil

It is curious that Stephen Miller ["A Note on the Banality of Evil," *WQ*, Autumn '98] would discuss "evil," banal or otherwise, without a reference to Ernest Becker's posthumously published *Escape from Evil* (1975). Becker (1924–74) also questions Hannah Arendt's description of Adolf Eichmann's variety of evil as "banal." In my view, Arendt's belief that it was possible for evil to be banal prevented her from looking at how generalized and basic evil is to our existence. While the Nazi's particular version of "love, harmony, unity" might strike most of us as perverse and horrible, it points to a paradox that Becker discovered and explained. Evil in fact originates from man's urge to attain some form of heroic victory over what he perceives as evil.

The heroic "Aryan" worldview of Nazism and its cult mentality served to separate the "true believers" from the larger culture. Nazism provided a sense of immortality and superiority to party members. The party in turn directed the attention of the citizenry to the contrast between "true/good" Nazism and the "false/evil" worldview of Judaism. In many places throughout the world, considerable resources are still devoted today to enforcing the idea that the "evil" members of a given society must be eradicated in order to assure the safety and immortality of its "good" members.

The horror of the world's Eichmanns, past and present, is that they believe that their motives are altruistic. That Eichmann killed millions from a posture of self-righteousness is a frightening and cautionary tale for all of us.

Neither Eichmann nor the evil he helped perpetrate should ever be considered banal. Evil is too much a part of our lives. Perhaps when we stop relegating evil to the level of banality, we might be more able to confront it constructively.

Richard Reid
Salem, Ore.

Stephen Miller's annoyed tone toward Hannah Arendt's argument about the banality of evil reminds me in a strange way of Norman Mailer's exhaustive inquiry into Lee Harvey Oswald's assassination of President Kennedy. Mailer said the reason he spent all that time, money, and effort chasing down every imaginable lead was that he found it unacceptable to believe that an event of such historic, world-changing proportions could have been caused by someone so, well, banal as Lee Harvey Oswald. Not only was Oswald a colorless figure, but his landing the job that put him in the Texas School Book Depository building the day and time Kennedy's motorcade went by was, by any evidence Mailer could uncover, random.

Mailer said he was certain he would uncover new figures and new facts that would make the pivotal event of our generation at least better understood. His research was perhaps more exhaustive than any that preceded it. He said that if he could find no conspiracy or sinister plot, it would be cause for deep despair. When he could find none, he simply recorded his efforts and closed the book, refusing to conclude what he had said he would, and what Hannah Arendt did conclude, that evil is banal.

"Chaos," wrote Henry Adams, "is the law of nature; order the dream of man."

Blayne Colmore
La Jolla, Calif.

Stephen Miller rehearses anew and refreshingly a number of the flaws in Hannah Arendt's "muddle," as he puts it, with evil. Refreshing, too, is his implied rejection of Susan Sontag's absurd suggestion that "we no longer have the religious or philosophical language to talk about evil," as if metaphysical drivel had ever taught us much (though it would be wrong to argue that it has taught us nothing).

In *Evil and the Demonic: A New Theory of Monstrous Behavior* (NYU Press, 1996), I proposed that evil can most clearly be understood not as a metaphysical problem but as a

peculiar type of behavior, with nameable elements—such as massive violence, deliberation, and the censorship or destruction of language itself—which certain people engage in under specific and describable circumstances. While my proposals, supported by evidence from history, literature, law, psychology, and film, have received considerable attention in the British press, including the *Times Literary Supplement*, they have been largely ignored in the United States.

Making, I trust, suitable allowances for my own possible ineptitudes, I remain persuaded that the cold shoulder accorded these ideas is due precisely to the unending influence of Arendt's dictum that all evil must somehow be "banal," which, as Miller notes, is both a historical fraud and senseless. The unwillingness to consider alternative approaches to the subject may also be due to the widespread conviction, among American intellectuals at least, that anyone who perpetrates evil acts must be mentally disturbed, if not deranged or mad. Adolf Eichmann was none of these, and in this fact lies the terror of the man: if we cannot find anything wrong with him, and yet he commits evil acts, then evil itself must be redefined as normal or "banal," or merely antisocial or criminal—despite the fact that evils such as genocide obviously reach beyond any ordinary definitions of antisocial behavior or criminality.

One might as well describe typhoons as normal or banal, or argue that the murderousness of a Nero or Stalin is merely a matter of viewpoint, or as "banal" as the rather milder behavior of saints, porpoises, and roses.

Paul Oppenheimer
Dept. of English

City College of the City University of New York
New York, N.Y.

Stephen Miller asserts that Hannah Arendt's theory about the banality of evil was wrong, categorically rejecting her suggestion that some instances of evil can be characterized as bureaucratic and unthinking. I agree with Miller that much of the world's injustice is associated with recognizably evil motives. Arendt's theory, however, leaves plenty of room for such intentional and evil-minded wrongdoing.

Miller's article, then, raises two big questions: (1) Did Arendt really write that all evil was bureaucratic and unthinking?

(2) Are there at least some situations in which injustices can best be described as bureaucratic and unthinking?

Arendt recognized evil motives and actions, but held that banal evil was far more destructive. "Thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together . . . that was . . . the lesson one could learn in Jerusalem," she wrote in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Arendt illustrated a new way of looking at some, but not all, evil. She did not suggest that a person who consciously commanded and directed a genocidal bureaucracy, i.e. Hitler, could be considered banally evil. Arendt's theory invites us to continue characterizing most thuggery (for example, rapes, muggings, and face-to-face killings) as driven by evil motive.

Whether or not one feels that Adolf Eichmann himself lacked evil intentions of the traditional type, Arendt's concept of the banality of evil has broad application. Thoughtless and unemotional bureaucrats are quite capable of facilitating widespread and palpable injustice. (Heard any HMO stories lately?) The banality of evil, for example, accounts for the diversion of psychological attention toward the repetitive and oftentimes thoughtless tasks encouraged by bureaucracies. This habit of turning attention to small and imminent tasks numbs one's ability to seek the big picture. As a result, the evildoer is not literally "thoughtless" but severely distracted from moral considerations. In Arendt's view, then, evil can sometimes be seen as an "emergent" property of large groups of actors bureaucratically fitted with such mental blinders.

Arendt got it right. Where the banality of evil applies, it applies well.

Erich Vieth
St. Louis, Mo.

Was it by chance or choice that "A Note on the Banality of Evil" by Stephen Miller was juxtaposed with "The End of Wilderness" by Marilynne Robinson?

The chemical and nuclear poisoning of our world, the destruction of forests, the extinction of entire species, and the extermination of native peoples is every bit as evil as the Nazi Holocaust. Are the bureaucrats who brought about these evils perverted demons or merely hard working people doing their

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job? The executives of oil and timber companies perhaps do not really have evil intentions when they destroy environmentally sensitive areas. They are simply providing more profits for shareholders, cheap fuel, and jobs. The result is pure evil, but the intentions are banal.

One of our American heroes, Benjamin Franklin, spoke of a technology for genocide: "If it be the design of Providence to extirpate these savages in order to make room for the cultivators of the earth it seems not improbable that rum may be the appointed means." And then there was General William Tecumseh Sherman, who wrote to President Grant: "We must act with vindictive earnestness against the Sioux, even to their extermination, men, women and children. Nothing else will reach the root of this case." Thus our elected and appointed officials set in motion events that led to the massacre of Native Americans.

When we look beyond the Holocaust, Arendt was correct. Evil is banal. Corporate executives, elected officials, bureaucrats of all kinds carry out the vilest evil in the name of economic or political necessity. It is because these evils are banal and universal that Robinson is also correct; we have lost wilderness and will soon lose the world.

*John Raffensperger, M.D.
Chicago, Ill.*

Stephen Miller ends with the conclusion that Hannah Arendt "got two very big things wrong: the nature of Eichmann and the nature of evil." That would suggest that Mr. Miller possesses the correct understanding of the nature of both evil and Adolf Eichmann. The world would be better served had he shared that important knowledge rather than trying to discredit Arendt's sincere effort and repeating the implication that she was intellectually, if not morally, corrupted by her association with Martin Heidegger.

The truth is that evil and the human person are profound mysteries no one has yet fathomed. All efforts to explain the person by a construct called a "nature" or to supply an adequate explanation for evil have fallen short. Arendt deserves indulgence for at least trying to explain why so much of modern evil has the aspect of the banal, especially since aspects of evil are

all we can comprehend.

Ken Whelan
San Francisco, Calif.

The New Economy

“What ‘New Economy?’” by J. Bradford De Long [WQ Autumn ’98] is intriguing, and its skepticism about Silicon Valley optimists is well founded. As Louis Uchitelle writes in the *New York Times* (Oct. 18, 1998), “Economic growth measured over the entire cycle makes the expansion of the 1990s the weakest since World War II. . . . The reason is productivity . . . in the current expansion productivity growth has averaged only 1.3 percent a year.” An article in the *New England Economic Review* (Nov./Dec. 1996) summarizing the work of economist Dale Jorgenson, notes that he “concludes that human and physical capital accumulation, properly measured, explains almost all growth with little scope for innovation or knowledge-based spillovers.”

Considering the emerging market crisis in Asia, Russia, and Latin America, not to mention the extraordinary collapse of Long Term Capital Management here in the United States, the information technology “leading sector” seems to be doing worse than “leading sectors” of the past.

Moses Moredecai Twersky
Providence, R.I.

Thank you for publishing Pamela Samuelson’s “Digital Rights War” [WQ, Autumn ’98] warning how the government is trying to restrict the full use of the new information technologies. Such restrictions would be bad business for the overall economy. They would also offer the information industries protections they do not need.

When home tape recording came on the market, the record companies complained. When the VCR became popular, the movie companies went to court. The Supreme Court correctly ruled in favor of home, or private, recording. In both cases, the complaining industries ended up making money from the new technology.

I suggest that all computer users, in fact all those who read, contact their representatives about this legislation. The president and vice president may be contacted on line at www.whitehouse.gov. One may find the addresses of congressional representatives at

<http://congress.nw.dc.us/coastal/search.html>.

Rayner Colton
Brooklyn, N.Y.

I found Edward Tenner's article "Chronologically Incorrect" [WQ, Autumn '98] refreshing. With all the publications reporting how the world will come to a halt on January 1, 2000, it's about time someone gave the alternative perspective. I agree with Tenner that there are largely unheralded problems with embedded systems but far too many "experts" have profited from writing alarmist tracts about our impending doomsday. When I was a Barnes & Noble employee, I was disgusted with the books written on the subject, and worse yet, the fact that they were selling. Then customers started coming in with wide eyes and shaking voices asking for survival guides. I fear that this is just a hint of what is to come.

Adam Jerdee
Ames, Iowa

Poetry, More or Less

A recent letter from a reader expressed concern about the relative lack of poetry in the WQ. For the sake of balance, let me say I am concerned about the relative abundance of poetry in the magazine, five pages in the Autumn issue! A regular reader (and subscriber) for more than 17 years, I have "harrumphed" as the WQ has become more literary, less scholarly. Over the years, it has become less of what I first saw in it, less of what attracted me to it.

Yes, poetry is an important contributor to our lives and there are many publications that effectively serve to support its practice. Allow them to do the job. Please confine WQ's poetry to the often interesting "Arts & Letters" section of the Periodical Observer.

My vote is to have the WQ focus on the message rather than the medium.

George Haverly
Chelsea, Mass.

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FINDINGS

The Shrinking Vote of the Poor

Voters confounded the pundits in November's congressional elections by turning out in greater numbers than predicted. But turnout, at 36 percent, was still down, continuing a decades-old trend, and that suggests that another important pattern also continued: the influence of the poor and less affluent in elections is steadily shrinking.

Political scientist Tom DeLuca of Fordham University offers a graphic illustration of this trend in *American Demographics* (Nov. 1998). He created an "index of inequality" by dividing turnout among the poorest 20 percent of the population by turnout among the richest 20 percent. The index in the table below shows that a low-income person was only about half (53.3 percent) as likely to vote in the 1996 presidential election as an affluent one. (Comparable information on the incomes of voters in the 1998 elections is not available yet.) That compares with 64.4 percent in 1964.

Election	Overall Turnout	Bot. 5th	Top 5th	Inequality Index
1996	49.0	38.7	72.6	.533
1992	55.2	42.0	78.0	.538
1988	50.1	42.2	73.7	.573
1984	53.1	44.7	74.7	.598
1980	52.6	45.7	76.2	.600
1976	53.5	46.7	74.1	.630
1972	55.2	49.5	79.7	.621
1968	60.9	54.5	81.3	.670
1964	61.9	54.1	84.0	.644

DeLuca points out that since turnout is already so unequal, voter inequality will increase even if turnout in the two income quintiles drops by the same amount. Why? Just imagine that the affluent send 70 voters to the polls, the poor 40. Then subtract, say, 20 voters from each group. The loss to the less affluent is proportionately greater.

The Longest Day

Lower income people may be suffering at the polls, but not, apparent-

ly, at the time clock. Economist Dora L. Costa of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology notes in a National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper (No. 6504) that the poorest 10 percent of working men in the 1890s worked about two hours more per day than the top 10 percent of wage earners. By 1973, the gap had narrowed to just over half an hour. By 1991, the tables had turned and the better-off men were working a half hour more per day than their poorer counterparts. Costa believes the shift could account for a quarter of the increase in income inequality between 1973 and 1991.

The Triumph of Muzak

In *Twice* (Vol. 2, No. 2), British writer Rick Poyner assays the history of Muzak since its escape from the elevator:

There are still those who rail against the idea of "canned" music in public places and demand the right to shop or eat or work without a soundtrack. But they are fighting a losing battle. In the 1980s, Muzak's long-held distinction between instrumental background music and vocal "foreground music"—supposedly a no-no—collapsed. In the right circumstances, almost any kind of music could be played as background accompaniment to other activities, and this is what most of us were already doing at home, in our cars, or jogging in the park wearing a Walkman.

Little by little the idea of background music even started to become hip. In 1978, revisiting composer Erik Satie's idea of "furniture music," Brian Eno released *Music for Airports*, a new kind of ambient music (as Eno dubbed it) intended to be as "ignorable as it is interesting." . . .

Muzak undoubtedly works. It's a kind of Prozac for the ear. It trades on our associations, reflexes, emotions,



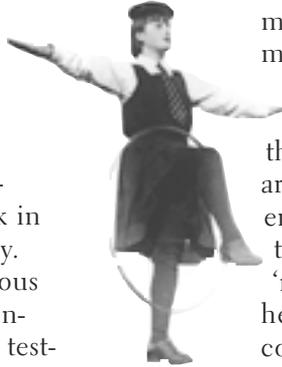
and memories, and the sales shoot up. Soothed by its ubiquitous “sensurround” comforts, directed by its irresistible beat, we are slowly forgetting that one of the factors that gave music its extraordinary pleasure and meaning, for the consumer of recorded sound, was deciding for yourself what to hear.

Slouching toward The Millennium

“Sit up straight!”
“Get your elbows off the table!”

Why are such stern parental injunctions now so seldom heard? America’s “posture wars” have a complex history, write David Yosifon and Peter N. Stearns in *American Historical Review* (Oct. 1998). The wonder is that the posture imperative did not vanish long ago with other elements of Victorian etiquette.

What kept posture alive, and actually made it more of a concern than ever, say Yosifon and Stearns, a graduate student and dean, respectively, at Carnegie Mellon University, was a posture counterattack in the early 20th century. Americans were anxious about the rise of a consumer society, which tested personal character with its endless material pleasures. What better way to stiffen resolve than to stiffen spines? Physicians suddenly detected what they thought was a new rash of spinal ills caused partly by another feature of modern life: children’s long indoor confinement to school desks. The rising physical education movement seized on the good posture crusade, partly as a route to professional respectability. Public school students were subjected to professional posture assessments, as were students at elite men’s and women’s colleges in the East, many of whom were photographed in the nude in the 1920s—which caused a scandal



when some pictures popped out of college archives 70 years later.

Posture died not only because of advances in medical knowledge (though some doctors now wonder whether we’ve slumped too far) but because of new moral thinking. In 1946, Dr. Benjamin Spock suggested that children slouch in response to “too much criticism at home” and other assaults on their self-esteem. But the reality is that Americans had been steadily slouching deeper into their seats for most of the century, the authors say. By 1983, even Miss Manners declared that “a less formal posture . . . is no longer punishable by hanging.” Posture, Yosifon and Stearns conclude, “bent to the times.”

Saddam Hussein, Ph.D.?

Has Saddam Hussein found time during his busy career as a tyrant to immerse himself in American academic journals? That question came to mind when his ever-slippery United Nations representative delivered the warning on November 15 that the soon-to-be resumed work of UN arms inspectors in Iraq would be governed by certain previously unmentioned “modalities.” “What’s a ‘modality?’” asked a *New York Times* headline. No wonder the *Times* was confused. *Modality*, after all, is a favorite term of academic jargon-meisters, lending the authoritative bouquet of science and mathematics to a variety of mundane and frequently meaningless utterances. Most often *modality* is used as a synonym for *variety* (e.g., “modalities of discourse”), which it is not. The word has several very precise modalities—oops!—meanings, and it turns out that Saddam’s mouthpiece outfoxed the academics and confused the *Times* by the devious device of using one of them correctly. Modalities, according to *The American Heritage Dictionary*, are “the ceremonies, forms, protocols, or conditions that surround formal agreements or negotiations.”

AT ISSUE

And Who Will Shape the Village?

On the surface, it would seem that our children have never had it so good. We, their doting parents, will do anything for them, and they know it. The sacrifices we make for them we wear like badges of honor—the early mornings spent watching them play soccer in the rain, the endless batches of cookies baked for school sales, the countless miles logged chauffeuring them to their various activities. Determined to correct what we judge to have been the mistakes of our own parents, we have chosen to make our commitment to our kids absolute, our involvement in their lives total.

Sometimes, though, something happens that makes me wonder if our approach is flawed, and that it is only the strength of our numbers—swollen by our own births during the baby boom—that has convinced us that our way of raising kids may be better. Recently, I was at the pediatrician's office with my children, enduring a long wait to be seen, when suddenly the sound of a child's voice—"No!"—echoed from the exam area. A boy of perhaps seven rocketed into the waiting room, with his mother and a nurse in hot pursuit. "We're only trying to weigh you," the nurse said, attempting to reassure the child just as his mother caught up to him. Without warning, he whirled and punched his mother, hard, right in the stomach. For an instant she and I locked eyes, and I knew what she was feeling. Mortification, of course, but something even worse: panic. *What do I do now?*

My mother would have known what to do—she'd have walloped me halfway into next week. Perhaps at the time I might not have appreciated it, but I certainly would have known I had it coming. Yet the issue is moot, because the incident would never have occurred. I was no angel as a child, but I understood that there were certain unspoken behavioral taboos, and hitting your mother ranked high on that list. Our parents

commanded unconditional respect, which they mostly got both from us and from the other children with whom they came in contact. Now that we've become parents ourselves, their assured authority remains a remote mystery, a totem we grasp at but can never quite acquire. This is nowhere more obvious than in the ambiguous messages we constantly send to our own offspring.

Take our efforts to transform our kids into bright, articulate youngsters. From an early age we encourage them to speak up, no matter how inane or off topic their comments. Is it any wonder that eventually they turn into chronic interrupters? Mealtimes used to be the occasion for children to be exposed to

the pleasures—even the occasional mysteries—of grown-up ideas and words. Youngsters were welcome to absorb what they could, even allowed to interject an opinion if they were able to make a reasonable

case for it. Now the level of discourse has dipped to the level of the lowest common denominator, with children injecting the crude vernacular of their friends into what was once the most civilized of settings.

Equally misguided is our current tendency to justify everything we ask our kids to do. When I was a child, only one reason seemed sufficient to explain all parental requests—"Because I *told* you so!"—but now every command seems to require elaborate justification. Every request now turns into a debating match, hardly the behavior we want our children to carry into the adult working world (unless we're positive we want them to grow up to be lawyers).

Such efforts fit into what seems like a grand societal program of "esteem building." Child development advice books and gurus such as Penelope Leach and T. Berry Brazelton all preach the virtues of constant praise and positive reinforcement. And what could be the harm in making our children feel good about themselves, in telling them,

WQ

in the words of Barney, the TV dinosaur, that “you are special”? The problem, to put it bluntly, is that not all kids are. We want to encourage kids to succeed (measured by good grades or tallies in the win column), but there is unease among adults about too much praising, for fear that kids less bright or not as skilled athletically will feel slighted. The solution: awards given for effort and participation, rather than achievement. Even overpraising gifted kids can backfire, giving them the sense that they’ve already accomplished enough and so deadening their desire to push themselves further.

But we save perhaps our greatest parental miscues for the realm of discipline. Nowadays, the only thing consistent about how we discipline our kids is our inconsistency. Few would endorse a return to the corporal punishment of bygone days—*spare the rod, spoil the child!*—but our children would benefit from clearer limits on their behavior. Yet we feel conflicted about being too tough on our kids, in part for fear of damaging their self-esteem. Our reluctance to chastise our children might have even more to do with feelings of guilt that come from spending so much time away from them. In those precious moments together, we dread being anything less than their best pals. But it’s hard to have it both ways, to be both playmate and disciplinarian. Once we’ve let them peek through the curtains at the real us, we sacrifice the aura of authority that we associate with our own parents. It takes our kids longer to understand that the game is over and that it’s time to toe the line.

In years past—it must have been when our parents were kids, because such things had mostly disappeared by the 1960s, when I was growing up—parents had powerful allies in their quest to raise

morally upright kids. Moral instruction was a part of the public school curriculum, not restricted, as it mostly is today, to church-backed private schools and Sunday school classes. The lessons brought strong reminders that a higher power was on the lookout for wayward boys and girls. Today kids receive their moral lessons partly from parents, teachers, and other adults, partly from the media—where they have such sterling role models as Bart Simpson and the gang on *South Park*—but mostly—as Judith Rich Harris points out in her book, *The Nurture Assumption*, and in her essay in this issue (see page 30)—from other children, most of whom are likely to be as clueless as themselves.

Our communities used to be more closely knit places, where adults kept a careful eye on all the kids in their neighborhood—not only to ensure their safety but also to curb any mischief-making. Now we are less willing to get involved, and children in general pay for our aloofness.

Rather than obsessing endlessly about our *own* children, trying to transform them into new and improved models of ourselves, we ought to demonstrate that our commitment extends beyond the backyard. This would take a different kind of courage, probably more than we’ve got. It requires that we reach out to kids whom we now tend to ignore or shun, the ones who mask their troubles with false bravado and announce their tough-guy “maturity” with nonstop streams of obscenity. If we want to bring about real change, we might consider expending a little less energy on shaping our own children into bright, shining examples for the world and a little more on finding ways to improve the worlds they inhabit.

—James Carman

RAISING THE AMERICAN CHILD

Once considered the province of mother wit and custom, child rearing at the turn of the 20th century assumed the sober mantle of science. Since then, successive generations of mostly male experts have taken turns lecturing parents, often with conflicting advice, on how best to raise their children. But what, if anything, has really changed in the patterns of “scientific” advice-giving since the earliest years of the enterprise? What has been discovered, and what has been ignored? And how much should we trust the experts’ underlying confidence in the power of parents to shape their offspring? Our authors consider these and other aspects of a peculiarly American obsession.



- 14 *Ann Hulbert examines the work and legacies of the founders of scientific child rearing*
30 *Judith Rich Harris challenges the focus of most child rearing theories*

The Century Of the Child

by Ann Hulbert

Blizzards are famously conducive to conceiving babies, and during a huge snowstorm that blanketed the East Coast in mid-February 1899, a particular group of American women and a few men certainly had babies on the brain. But they were not at home feeling snug. The sturdiest among an anticipated audience of 200 or so were fighting their way to the third annual convention of the National Congress of Mothers in Washington D.C. En route to the capital for four days of speeches and discussion about the latest enlightened principles of child nurture, the women delegates and the experts who had signed up for the event found the traveling rough. “Nearly all trolley lines had abandoned their trips . . . and livery men refused to send carriages out,” it was reported later in the proceedings of the Congress. “Hundreds of travelers were compelled to remain from 12 to 24 hours in ordinary passenger coaches without food or sleep.”

The progressive-spirited teachers, mothers, reformers, doctors, and others who finally arrived in Washington, full of “strange and wonderful stories . . . of their adventures,” encountered a virtual state of nature. The city was threatened by a coal famine because trains had not been running. Gas had given out, leaving many parts of the capital in darkness. “Food was also scarce, and the streets impassable,” transformed into mere paths flanked by walls of snow 10 to 12 feet high.

The primitive gloom made an ironic setting for a self-consciously modern gathering dedicated to ushering in “the century of the child,” a vista of human improvement that a speaker at an earlier convention had described in the grandest of terms: “It is childhood’s teachableness that





A scene from the 1899 blizzard that blanketed Washington, D.C., during the third annual convention of the National Congress of Mothers.

has enabled man to overcome heredity with history, to lift himself out of the shadowy regions of instinct into the bright realms of insight, to merge the struggle for existence into mutual coordination in the control of the environment. . . . The very meaning and mission of childhood is the continuous progress of humanity.” The February storm seemed to mock the faith in control of the environment. Rude nature had dramatically assumed the upper hand in Washington as 1899 began.

Yet for that very reason, snowbound Washington also made an ideal backdrop for the conference. Among the participants who filled the pews of the First Baptist Church at 16th and O streets there was an exhilarated sense that the elements had supplied them with an occasion to display their true missionary mettle. “Notwithstanding the difficulties experienced in reaching their destination,” the Congress secretary proudly reported, “not a single speaker failed to appear.” The two most prominent child-rearing authorities of the day, the stars of the program, were not about to miss the opportunity to address such a stalwart audi-

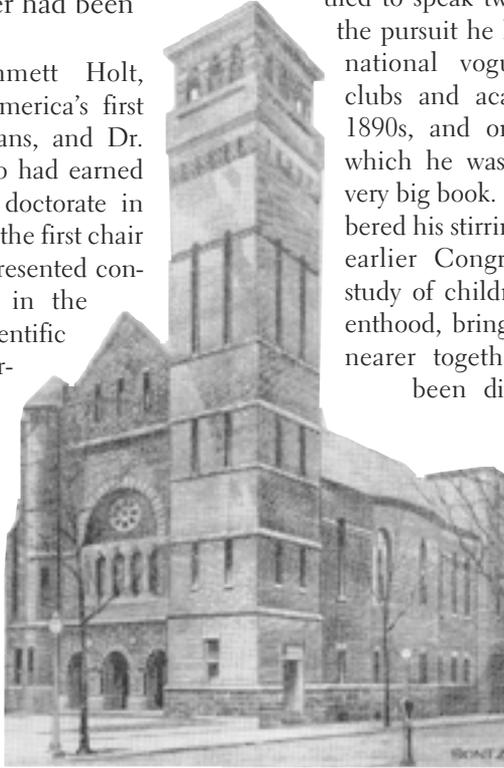
ence—especially, perhaps, since each knew the other had been invited.

Dr. Luther Emmett Holt, known as one of America's first and finest pediatricians, and Dr. G. Stanley Hall, who had earned the first psychology doctorate in the country and held the first chair in the discipline, represented contrasting approaches in the emerging field of scientific child-rearing expertise. They did not consider themselves competitors. They knew there was plenty of room for both of them as public, highly professional spokesmen for the cause of childhood. Still, each was also well aware that amid the growing clamor of concern

about children, it was worth an uncomfortable journey to make sure his presence was registered on such a high-profile occasion as this one.

Dr. Holt, whose manual, *The Care and Feeding of Children*, had been selling unprecedentedly well since its publication five years before, made his way from New York City to deliver a talk on his specialty, "The Physical Care of Children." With the punctiliousness that was his trademark, he informed modern mothers of their duty to become scientific professionals on nutritional matters. They were also to guard their growing children vigilantly against germs and undue stimulation. Holt prescribed systematic study—of children and of expert wisdom—as the necessary antidote to old-fashioned sentimentality.

Dr. Hall, the president of Clark University and an early supporter of the Congress (he sat on its Committee on Education), came all the way from



The First Baptist Church

Worcester, Massachusetts. He was scheduled to speak twice, on "child study," the pursuit he had helped to make a national vogue among mothers' clubs and academics alike in the 1890s, and on adolescence, about which he was then busy writing a very big book. If his listeners remembered his stirring proclamations at an earlier Congress about how "the study of children . . . enriches parenthood, brings the adult and child nearer together," they must have

been disappointed when he had time to deliver only "Initiations into Adolescence," which didn't begin to live up to its titillating title. This romantic guru was known for effusions about the age "when temptations are hottest, when the pressure is highest, when young people

must have excitement or be dwarfed." But here he spoke in his encyclopedic vein. As Hall droned on, summarizing mountains of data on puberty rites the world over, even the most attentive in his audience might have been tempted to sleep.

Except that it was a point of pride with the self-consciously modern mothers gathered at the Congress, as it was with the self-consciously "expert" men who addressed them, to expect an exhaustive treatment of the many child-related topics presented to them. The long-running 19th-century fascination with childhood had become a demanding fixation as the 20th century neared. Dr. Holt opened his talk by marveling that "at no previous time has there been such a wide general interest in all that concerns childhood, as shown by the numerous books constantly issuing from the press upon these subjects, the periodicals devoted to the different

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phases of the child problem, and finally, but by no means least, by the organization of such societies as this.”

Holt notably omitted women’s magazines. In fact, wide and general interest in the subject had already been thriving for decades. Pious portraits of tender youth and devoted maternity were a staple of the burgeoning 19th-century popular periodical market, with its mostly female audience. Child-rearing advice books and columns by women and moralizing clergymen had found an eager readership, especially in the Northeast. But it was precisely Holt’s point to mark a new, austere modern beginning. This was no Victorian crusade on behalf of children, led by soft feminine hearts and by gentle ministers from the pulpit. The “child problem” now required studious thought for its solution, and scientists fresh from the labs proposed to train maternal minds.

The “child problem,” to put it differently, had grown up. It was going to school, becoming “professionalized,” like so much else in the era. Men of science applauded the impressive growth spurt in a proprietary spirit, rather like proud parents. Indeed, they were playing a formative role in endowing motherhood with new rigor, and their efforts were welcomed by middle-class women who had been struggling for decades to upgrade the status of child rearing. Where parents had once relied on “uncertain instinct” and religious dogma in guiding the growth of their progeny, now they could aspire to “unhesitating insight”: that was the promise of the turn-of-the-century “ideology of educated motherhood,” as one historian has called it.

According to the emerging scientific wisdom, children were to be viewed for the first time as children, rather than as little adults. It seemed even possible, to judge by the calls to rigor and the warnings against mere “affection,” that mothers were being invited to become more like men—or at any rate less infantilely feminine. At least powerful male scientists, not just genteel ministers, were now paying serious attention to them and their charges. To be a “disciple” of the eminent clergyman Horace Bushnell, author of

Christian Nurture (1847), or even of such European pedagogic prophets as Friedrich Froebel and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, was no longer the acme of advanced middle-class motherhood, as it had been at the height of the Victorian cult of domesticity. The new and secular maternal ideal, modeled by the pediatric and psychological experts themselves, was to master what was now proclaimed to be a modern, systematic discipline.

I

The turn-of-the-century “discovery” of childhood was hardly the first time that adults in the Western world had subjected the family, especially the treatment of its younger members, to self-conscious scrutiny. Pick the end of any post-medieval century and you can find historians discerning a dramatic shift in, and rising concern about, parent-child relations. In his classic work on the subject, *Centuries of Childhood* (1960), the French historian Philippe Ariès locates the dawn of a new “child-centered” conception of family life in the Renaissance and Reformation worlds, as education acquired new social and moral importance. The “affectionate” family was in the process of being born (the first of many times). “The care expended on children inspired new feelings, a new emotional attitude, to which the iconography of the 17th century gave brilliant and insistent expression,” Ariès observes. “The child became an indispensable element of everyday life, and his parents worried about his education, his career, his future.”

Another wave of anxious interest broke at the turn of the 18th century, when John Locke published his hugely influential *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). Noncoercive, rational instruction became the parent’s responsible, rewarding duty. Nurturing “filial reason” rather than breaking fierce infant wills became the goal. By the late 18th century, in the equally influential *Émile* (1762), Jean Jacques Rousseau had issued the call for more freedom for children’s “natural inclinations.” The trick was subtly to tailor the

The learning and training of a child is woman's wisdom.

—Alfred Lord Tennyson (all set-off quotations and advertisements come from the souvenir program of the National Congress of Mothers, 1899)

guidance of children to their growth, which entailed yet more intensive (but unobtrusive) tutorial efforts. Worshipful attentiveness on the part of adults, the Romantic poets concurred, was the least the imaginative child of nature deserved.

The solicitous nurturing doctrines found an especially fertile seedbed—to use the gardening imagery the pedagogues loved—in colonial America, where an upstart generation was settling down far from home. The “American revolution against patriarchal authority,” as the literary historian Jay Fliegelman calls it in *Prodigals and Pilgrims* (1982), was about freeing sons as well as about deposing kings—about preparing children for independence rather than exacting slavish obedience from them. Child-rearing advice began to appear, the bulk of it aimed at fathers during the 18th century, warning against parental tyranny and worrying about self-control. The message also pervaded the bestsellers of that newborn genre, the novel (in books by Daniel Defoe, Lawrence Sterne, and Samuel Richardson, and their American imitators). The family dramas most popular in America often turned on children's new claims to self-determination, and parents' new obligations to educate without dominating.

The turn of the 19th century brought yet another crisis of the family and a surge of concern about child rearing. The demographic, economic, social, moral, spiritual, literary, and intellectual influences at work creating an increasingly child-preoccupied culture in industrializing America defy neat summary. But a familiar refrain brackets the cen-

tury's beginning and its Victorian close: the “affectionate” (suffocating, according to many) family had arrived, again, this time in newly feminized form.

Liberal theologians revised harsh Calvinist tenets, granting children redeemable, docile wills and their parents more power over the shaping of them. Philosophers had reasoned carefully with fathers a century before, urging the wisdom of careful reasoning with children. Now ministers, relying less on the “theology of the intellect” and more on the “theology of the feelings,” appealed to mothers to rely on their “feminine instinct and sensitivity” in the shaping of innocent souls. With the decline of a subsistence agrarian economy, especially in the minister-saturated Northeast, more and more men left the hearthside and the company of their children to compete in the new world of the market. Home became the special, “separate sphere” of women, who were no longer partners with men in productive household labor. Instead wives and mothers were expected to serve as ministering presences in what was heralded as an emotional, spiritual “haven” from the rapacious realm of money and the machine.

Tributes to gentle maternal molding power, and tracts on how best to apply it to sweetly malleable youth, were the core of the Victorian “cult of true womanhood.”

While patriarchal power retreated behind an impressive beard, paeans to feminine “influence” abounded, glorifying its uncoercive yet pervasive sway. “Like the power of gravitation,” Sarah Hale, an editor of a prominent woman's magazine, exclaimed, it “works unseen but irresistibly over the hearts and consciences of men.”

Even if one allows for



“A little child shall lead them.”

the conventionally breathless rhetoric in which it was couched, this exaltation of feminine suasion often sounded strained. Certainly the work entrusted to America's delicate hearts was daunting. From within their serene temples, angelic mothers were single-handedly supposed to solve what had long been, and has remained, the essential child-rearing dilemma: how to secure obedience yet foster independence, all without rousing undue resistance. The challenge, in other words, was to reconcile authority and liberty—a challenge that, of course, faces adults, not simply children, and that confronted Victorian women in particular more starkly than ever before.

So what was left to discover at the turn of the 20th century? That the child had not really been discovered after all, and that neither the fathers' nor the mothers' answers to the dilemma seemed to work satisfactorily—for fathers and mothers, that is. It was difficult to say whether they worked for the child, since she was yet to be discovered, as was the shape of the unknown future she would inhabit. Only a new quest for the child, the creature of the future, could begin to answer the question. It was time for scientists and children to pick up where philosophers and fathers, and then ministers and mothers, had left off. By the end of the deeply polarized Victorian era, even (or especially) revered mothers and industrious fathers welcomed wisdom from such enlightening, unthreatening sources. And what child complains about being made the center of attention? You might say “the century of the child” was born to save a marriage.

The Victorian science of differentiating men and women (the former “great brained,” the latter equipped with, among other things, an expanded “abdominal zone . . . [which] is the physical basis of the altruistic sentiments”) was still popular, but under increasing pressure from feminists and lack of evidence. The sci-



FRETFUL CHILDREN are nervous, peevish and ill-tempered because of lack of proper and sufficient nourishment. Children, during the period of rapid growth, require a great diversity of food material. Too much meat and sweets will make them fretful and ill-tempered. Quaker Oats will build up the child's body and—then comes good nature. Delicious for breakfast and supper.

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ence of the child offered an opportunity to rise above the dichotomies of abstract “masculine” reason and abundant “feminine” emotion. Instead, scientists heralded imaginative observation—a specialty of youth—as the key that would unlock the secrets of growth and guidance. Children should be seen but not heard: that old adage cried out for revision in the century of the child, Americans in the Progressive era agreed, but their first impulse was not to encourage, or expect, a dramatic rise in the infant noise level. The new imperative was, above all, for adults to use their eyes in ways they had never before bothered to—to cultivate a childlike curiosity about children. They had “seen” them, but they had never really looked at them, much less considered making an effort to imagine how the world might look to them. It was time to focus steadily on children and watch them change, rather than merely gaze down upon them fondly and dream about (or dread) their future.

Darwinism gave empirical scrutiny of the human species a new impetus, if not a

completely respectable imprimatur in all eyes. But tracing mankind's origins in children rather than to monkeys was an appealing enterprise. The child provided what Darwin's theory needed, an example of evolution in action: one didn't have to subscribe to the doctrine that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny (though many did) to find the spectacle of adaptive development inspiring. At the same time, Darwin's theory offered what the new devotees of childhood needed: an example of systematic observation in action. In fact, Darwin, as his American followers eagerly emphasized, paved the way. He kept notebooks about his own offspring, whose first tears, fears, reflexes, rages, noises, and subsequent social and verbal antics he tracked

rhea, which was commonly blamed on teething. But by the 1890s, most medical men were ready to agree with Dr. Thomas Morgan Rotch of Harvard Medical School that the culprit was "an infectious disease caused by a specific organism not yet discovered." Dr. Holt's drily descriptive *Diseases of Infancy and Childhood* (1897) served as a landmark for his academic colleagues: an unprecedentedly methodical map to aid in the search to identify not one specific organism, it turned out, but many.

At exactly the same time, psychology took an experimental, genetic turn, spurred by a conviction that the intricate secrets of human consciousness were to be found in its unfolding, which could be watched in the growing infant. "The opening germ of intelligence [considered] from the colder point of view of science": that was the guiding interest of a new school of psychologists, as James Sully, a British professor of philosophy of mind and logic, put it in his influential *Studies of Childhood* (1896). "Genetic psychology is the psychology of the future," Dr. Hall proclaimed from his post at Clark, where he arrived in 1881, determined to establish the discipline on newly scientific footing, complete with laboratory resources. The old introspective approach was passé. "We must carry the work of Darwin into the field of the human soul," Hall announced—which meant carrying it also into the nurseries of America.

The psychologists stressed the rigorous, unfeminine spirit required for this babygazing, but they also acknowledged that mothers, logging long hours with the small specimens, might be useful accomplices—given some training. The pediatricians, too, emphasized that the new hygienic regimens called for an exactitude and discipline heretofore lacking in the female precincts of the nursery. But Dr. Holt's *Care and Feeding of Children* promised to equip nurses and mothers, through exacting dietary prescriptions, to

with a naturalist's curiosity and a father's empathy.

As the century ended, biology promised to bring order and light to the fields of American medicine and psychology, which had long been dominated by, respectively, quackery and philosophy. The alluring new specimen for study was the child. Pediatrics was officially ranked a specialty, and a cutting-edge one, at a meeting of the American Medical Association in 1880. The quest was on to discover and control the infecting germ, and there was no place like childhood for grim clues to work with. In America, as in most of the Western world, more than a quarter of all children born between 1850 and 1900 died before they turned five. Half of them were killed by summer diar-



It seems crystal clear at the outset, that you cannot govern a child, if you have never learned to govern yourself.

—K. D. Wiggin

keep germs at bay. The rather grudging, condescending tone did not deter eager mothers. If anything, it seemed to serve as a goad. The scientific perspective on child rearing presented a welcome challenge to increasingly urban and educated American women. In 1888, a group of upper-middle-class New York City mothers formed the Society for the Study of Child Nature, and within a few years mothers' clubs and child study groups were meeting all over the country.

II

In the convening of the National Congress of Mothers, the widespread mood of a closing century coalesced into a self-conscious, institutionalized movement for a new era. As Alice Birney, the Congress's president, observed to the assembled company at the first meeting in 1897, they were joining what "is, as every one knows, an age of 'movements' . . . a time of specialized work and of organized effort." At the podium, specialists confirmed their status as popular experts, translating new and arcane science for everyday use by parents, whose more organized efforts as child rearers could spare the nation so much social woe. "Given one generation of children properly born and wisely trained," exclaimed an editorial in the *New York Times* hailing the advent of the Congress, "and what a vast proportion of human ills would disappear from the face of the earth!"

What distinguished the Congress, which was suffused with familiar Victorian tributes to "the highest and holiest of missions—motherhood," was the welcome it extended, and the perfect platform it provided, to experts as high and nearly holy allies in the cause. This was a *modern* children's crusade designed for a newly scientific age and for a newly mixed company of

missionaries. The National Congress of Mothers provided a much publicized occasion to celebrate and promote an unprecedented relationship in American family life, between parent—mother—and professional expert. In the contemporaneous domestic science movement (the Home Economics Association was founded in 1899), a similar partnership had formed, but with a notable difference: the experts on household management, like their audience, were themselves women. The Congress was a meeting ground for a growing class of enlightened women, who were better educated than ever before and restless at home, and a new variety of enlightened, ambitious men. They were pioneering professors of psychology and medicine, fresh from studying with the revered scientific eminences of Europe. They aimed not just to put their fields at the forefront of the American academy, but to wield influence outside its walls as well.

The bridge between experts and mothers was the concept of "vocation," which conveniently blended spiritual zeal with practical goals and, above all, with arduous educational demands. In *The Century of the Child*, a bestseller in 1909, Ellen Key invoked "an entirely new conception of the vocation of mother, a tremendous effort of will, continuous inspiration." To appreciate the novelty of the conception, it helps to look back to a similarly challenging vision of motherhood that had surfaced half a century before in one of the early homegrown examples of secular advice literature for American parents, Lydia Sigourney's *Letters to Mothers*, published in 1838. Sigourney, too, heaped on the impressive pedagogical credentials in her counsel to mothers:

Wise men have said, and the world begins to believe, that it is the province of women to teach. You then, as a mother,

are advanced to the head of that profession. I congratulate you. You hold that license which authorizes you to teach always. You have attained that degree in the College of Instruction, by which your pupils are continually in your presence, receiving lessons whether you intend or not, and if the voice of precept be silent, fashioning themselves on the model of your example.

Since then, however, a decisive shift had taken place in the educational requirements of motherhood. Teaching was no longer the essence of the mission; invisible and unconscious “influence” was no longer the method. At the dawning of the modern era, scientific men were saying, and women were evidently avid to believe, that it was the duty of mothers to embark on the even more exacting (and exciting) task of learning—from their children, and from the experts who would show them how to study that subject right under their nose. It was not a demotion, for now self-development was part of what had previously been billed solely as selfless devotion. “What, then, would we have?” asked a speaker at the first Congress of Mothers. She had her answer at the ready: “that women, mothers especially, who are becoming students of everything else under the sun become students of childhood and students of every system, scheme, plan, and practice for the development of the body, mind, and character of the child; not that the students of to-day shall make good mothers, but that the mothers of to-day shall make good students.”

The notion of parenthood as a postgraduate calling offered a way to deal with important dilemmas facing mothers and experts. It supplied an answer to the question of what all those college-bound women would do when they finished their studies, which would prepare them for so much more than merely following in their mothers’ old-fashioned domestic footsteps. They would keep on studying, without having to leave home to do it (except perhaps to attend a conference or two or three).

Alice Birney and her followers were not about to oppose educational opportunities for women. They were too “advanced” for

such reactionary sentiments. But they were hardly radical feminists either, as Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English emphasize in *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Expert Advice to Women* (1978). Uneasy that “all the caps and gowns” might stir undomestic ambitions, the Congress leaders made a point of extolling college (where 85,000 women were enrolled by 1900) as the crucial prerequisite for enlightened motherhood. “No boy of hers will get to that sorrowful age when he feels that he knows a great deal more than his mother,” the Congress’s magazine emphasized. “She can be his friend and companion for all time.” And with “knowledge and training,” no mother would find the domestic sphere “narrow and monotonous,” or merely soft and sentimental. To “turn back into the home the tide of femininity, which is now streaming outward in search of a career,” and to harness women’s new powers and ambitions to ever more challenging domestic purposes, was one important aim of the organization.

The experts’ role as prophets of health, both physical and psychological, fulfilled their ambivalent ambitions as well. Dr. Holt and Dr. Hall had entered academia in the 1880s as it was acquiring professionalized prestige in America, eclipsing the clergy in status. The two of them, like their growing cohort of colleagues, were excitedly committed to pushing back the frontiers in the most promising and fastest growing domain, science. Their success represented dramatic upward mobility. Their fathers had been northeastern farmers, and none too prosperous ones at that.

Yet the big-city bustle and godless lab work also needed a higher justification for these earnest sons of the soil, whose mothers had been pillars of piety. Like so many men during the fin-de-siècle period of rapid urbanization, Hall and Holt had left their fathers in the dust, and their supremely capable mothers as well. Once arrived in the metropolis, they could afford to feel qualms about their escape. Their fathers’ rugged sacrifices, too little appreciated then, now merited gratitude. Their

devout mothers' insistent admonitions against selfish materialism and vain ambition had left deep marks, too. Hall, an earnest Baptist, and Holt, a more conflicted Congregationalist, had the preacher impulse in their blood, and were determined to prove themselves upstanding guides to the future, not impious rebels against the past.

In the closing decades of the century, a new pulpit beckoned. Science was proving itself a morally high and socially helpful pursuit, and a well-funded one, thanks to the support of plutocrats eager to burnish their reputations for posterity—and in need of donnish advisers in the cause. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., was consulting Holt on the creation of what was to become the Rockefeller Institute in New York. The businessman and speculator Jonas Clark, founder and funder of America's first graduate faculty devoted to scientific research, had turned to Hall to guide it more than a decade earlier.

The academics certainly did not consider themselves hired help. The rich men were in a sense their patrons. It mattered to the robber-barons-turned-philanthropists that the specialists brought with them not merely professional standing but public repute as well. In turn, the experts obviously benefited: thanks to the prominent backing, their popular profile rose. No plutocrat could quite hope to become an icon of selfless authority, but his attending doctor—his presiding professor—could. Emissaries between the lab and the mother's lap, the experts on children could help sanctify both realms, bringing rigor into the home and vigor into the halls of knowledge.

What the mission of enlightened child rearing required, and had created, was a new authority figure for an age in which parental authority had once again become a question. In the speeded-up world that was dawning, parents could no longer simply be active, unreflective models for their

children. Nor, for the same reason, did it seem possible any longer for parents themselves to rely on mere apprenticeship to their parents as a guide to the new child-rearing challenge. Their own upbringings, it was easy to feel, had not equipped them for the difficult task of preparing their own children for a future that would be unimaginably different. The recognition of parents' duty to prepare children more assiduously to exercise their full right to independence dated back to Locke and before. What stands out at the turn of the 20th century is the explicit emphasis by parents on their own right to disobey their parents, or at least to do things differently—and scientifically.

An antidote to sentimentalism had an appeal for everybody. Middle-class women were not only more educated, they were also less occupied with productive household labors and burdened with fewer children. (The fertility rate among white women dropped from seven in 1800 to 3.9 in 1890 to 3.2 by 1920.) They wanted serious work and status. They still spent plenty of time on domestic chores—servants were scarcer, and the rest of the family pitched in less—but child rearing was obviously the duty that could be most rewardingly upgraded. Middle-class men were eager to feel that their wives were working, and that their children had value—and would have future value because they were being raised to thrive in the competitive, complicated world of the future. Socializing children for a century marked by change and by ever more complex organization no longer presented itself as a straightforward matter of turning out hardy sons, or of rearing entrepreneurs who, if they relied on their reason, took risks, and were lucky, might surpass their fathers. Nor were daughters simply to be molded softly in their mothers' selfless image. Because children had to be prepared for futures

Adult anarchy is nursery lawlessness come to the full
corn in the ear. —Parkhurst

in a world set up increasingly along managerial and professional lines, it stood to reason that middle-class motherhood should become a vocation of professional management.

The expert emerged as the missing link: the modern parent's modern parent. He would do more than provide a new model of childhood. He would himself serve as a new model of parenthood for mothers who, like the children they were in charge of, were demanding and receiving more serious attention and social status than ever before. The experts would be as intently and self-consciously observant of mothers as mothers were to be of their children; as full of ambition for the ever higher development of mothers as mothers were to be for their children's perfection; as torn between the goals of empowering and controlling mothers as mothers were to be when it came to their children; as insecure about their true status in the eyes of mothers as mothers were in relation to their children.

The experts' attitude toward fathers was much less clear. On the one hand, the experts masculinized a field that had been, at least in memorable lore, the province of women. They made child rearing a systematic vocation, overseen by men. Thus in theory, at least, they opened it to men as it had never been before, serving as role models of male interest and mastery themselves. On the other hand, in making parenthood a vocation, rather than an avocation, they effectively consigned fathers, the wage earners, to the sidelines. It was a paradox, the full implications of which gradually became apparent, that the cure for the "feminization" of the family in fact helped perpetuate the problem in different forms. The dictates of scientific, "professional" nurture scripted an ever more

intensive, exclusive relationship between mother and child.

In the meantime, what the expert-guided approach to parenthood promised to dispense with was precisely what the prescientific approach inevitably entailed, and what the entrepreneurial character needed to be ready to face, even embrace: risk taking. A child's health was now considered to be largely under his mother's control (with help from doctors). Equally novel, a child's fate was no longer assumed to be under his father's control, determined by his father's career and station—which meant, somewhat paradoxically, that the child's growth required much more careful supervision. The utmost parental vigilance was now required to prepare children, as Dr. Holt put it, "to grapple successfully with the complex conditions and varied responsibilities which will be their lot."

III

This new authority figure, the child-rearing expert, did not present a single image of enlightened parenthood but, appropriately enough, two basic models—one sterner and more "masculine," the other empathetic and effusive, yet both impressively scientific. At the podium at the National Congress of Mothers, Dr. Holt and Dr. Hall made an emblematic pair. Approximate contemporaries, Hall at 55 and Holt at 45 performed as complementary public promoters of enlightened wisdom about children. Their show had gone on the road during the 1890s, when Holt came out with his best-selling little book and Hall took up a bustling lecture schedule. (During 1893–94, he gave 34 major public speeches.)



Dr. G. Stanley Hall

Each looked perfectly cast for the part he played. Holt was the rationalist authority in the physical realm. The pediatrician, who had once described the child as a “delicately constructed piece of machinery,” taught that the key to growth and health lay in a regimented diet. He was a study in buttoned-up propriety, always “immaculately dressed,” his hair “parted exactly in the middle,” as a devoted former student described him, evidently awed. “Not one hair was out of place.” Holt’s speaking style was just as meticulous. “He spoke in short, crisp sentences, in a voice low and clear. His manner was deadly earnest . . . there was never any digression from the steady progression of facts.”

Hall’s completely different appeal, in his biographer’s words, “was his special combination of moralism and romanticism.” His vast domain was the unplumbed depths of the child psyche, in which he believed lay the “soul of the race,” the secrets of nature. He had the full beard, the piercing eyes, and the shining pate of a prophet. His former friend William James once said of Hall, when they had become rivals, that he “hates clearness . . . and mystification of some kind seems never far distant from anything he does.” His writing could indeed be Teutonically convoluted, but apparently his rhetorical style at the podium struck his listeners as warm and inspirational. There was nothing crisp about it. Hall cascaded, speaking “with great sincerity and naturalness of manner, gliding easily from simple exposition to lyrical hyperbole.”

In his speech to the Congress, Holt outlined, in Lockean spirit, the all-important power of parental nurture, especially during the formative period of infancy. Hall took a more Rousseauian tack, championing the child’s own natural impulses and rich imagination as the best guide to his growth. If Holt was

the “diet” man, carefully prescribing what should (and, as important, should not) go into the child’s stomach, Hall was the “diary” man, exhaustively transcribing what comes out of the child’s mind. Straitlaced Holt was concerned to turn children into grownups in a grown-up way: step by step. He placed the emphasis on what the young lacked, and what adults could supply, which was rationality and a well-trained will. Hall was a quirkier fellow. He was fascinated by the process of growth and drawn to the notion that adults should “become as little children,” or at any rate remain

in touch with the invigorating tumult of adolescence. For he was struck by what adults lacked, which youth seemed to have in such abundance: spontaneity, deep reservoirs of feeling and imagination, and a phenomenal capacity for growth.



Dr. L. Emmett Holt

The preacherly manner of both men has an inevitably quaint ring, but the turn-of-the-century urgency that animated them sounds remarkably current. In their contrasting approaches to “the child problem,” Holt and Hall established the poles that have oriented debate on this favorite American fixation ever since. And their lectures, like the addresses delivered throughout the Congress of Mothers, joined in pointing up two defining features of the child-rearing advice genre.

First of all, an enterprise officially dedicated to the understanding and the rearing of children has been from the very start as preoccupied, if not more preoccupied, with criticizing and training parents, mothers in particular. Alice Birney’s welcoming address in 1899 mentioned children only in passing, in blandly general terms. It was their

duncelike elders who obsessed her and her fellow Congress members. “The innocent and helpless are daily, hourly, victimized through the ignorance of untrained parents,” she scolded. “I claim, without hesitancy, the greatest evil to-day is the incompetency, the ignorance of parents, and it is because of this evil that others exist.”

Second, and obviously related, this brand of how-toism has never engaged in the conventional business of dispensing reassurance. On the contrary, among its central purposes has been to conceive, and constantly reconceive, parenthood as an ever more demanding and time-consuming endeavor. At times, the experts seem to have been convinced that all those ignorant parents were a carefree or impulsive lot—in need of a stern talking to and a daunting endeavor

an enterprise could inspire stability in women, and new energy in men. It also held out the promise of selfless self-discovery and liberating self-control for all—including, it sometimes seems as an afterthought, children.

The catchall diagnosis that America is alarmingly full of parents who are heedless, or anxious, or both—and ill equipped to deal with the challenge of modern childhood—is, in short, an old one. So is the nostalgic verdict that children themselves have become anxious, and all too often heedless, to a degree never before seen. “The conditions which kept child life simple and natural 50 years ago have largely changed since that time; on every side there is more to stimulate the nervous system and less opportunity for muscular development,”

Dr. Holt explained. “One of the most important reasons for this is the far greater proportion of children now than formerly who are reared in cities and large towns”—and who spend lots of time in “the modern school,” as Dr. Hall worried in his speech to the Congress on child study. The child shut “away from Nature and free movement and play in an unwholesome air, worried and nervous.”

Innocent children, they both felt, were becoming “miniature men and women” before their time.

In their talks at the Congress neither expert said much, in any direct way, about his vision of children. (Nor, notably, did any of the speakers at the event: the new focus on the child, so often and widely celebrated, could be fuzzy indeed.) What their remarks do convey is their conception of mothers, as they saw them and as they hoped to see them. Actual mothers, to judge by the tone of their talks, bore an uncanny resemblance to children in their need of training. The ideal parent, perhaps not surprisingly, turns out to be a figure on the order of the expert himself.

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to cure their flighty selfishness. More often, the experts expressed a different, self-contradictory view: their unnervingly arduous counsel was intended to help cure a widespread case of nerves among parents.

As Birney and her colleagues said again and again, the problem as they saw it was a nation in danger of being overrun by self-conscious, neurasthenic adults: men enervated by excessive thinking and working, women worn down by, as Alice James’s doctor put it, “the *emotions* . . . the most exhausting of all mental attributes.” The remedy they prescribed was systematic, intensive study and training of children, the fresh hope of humanity and the future. Such

America looks to-day, not to legislative enactments, nor
to public organizations, but to her homes, as
containing the bud and promise of her future glory.

—Anonymous

The era of the amateur mother was over. On that all-important point Hall and Holt completely agreed. They knew that they could count on the audience to concur as well. Still, the experts made sure to emphasize just how all-consuming a challenge such a pathbreaking transformation in status implied: mothers were more important than ever, but the new independence and confidence the advisers promised them would require some studious self-doubts. Mothers now had elevated guides, in the form of scientific experts and sanctified children. There was also a new prerequisite for would-be enlightened parents: a willingness—even better, a passionate eagerness—to question their own instincts.

A tremendous effort of will, continuous inspiration”: The reformer Ellen Key’s characterization of the “entirely new conception of the vocation of mother” conveyed the intensity that was winning adherents, or at least proponents, as the 19th century closed. With her gift for blending rhapsody and rigor, Key captured the spirit of eager bonding among expert, parent, and child that suffused the turn-of-the-century moment. “Our soul is to be filled by the child just as the man of science is possessed by his investigations,” Key wrote in her book, conjuring an image of lab-coated mothers measuring formulas and weighing babies. Then she rephrased the ideal of emulation in a more romantic vein. Mothers are to “be as entirely and simply taken up with the child as the child himself is absorbed by his life.” At the 1898 meeting of the National Congress of Mothers, a speaker had proposed the missing analogy, which cozily closed this circle of avid learners. Mary Lowe Dickinson, president of the National Council of Women in New York City,

had welcomed the scientific experts in attendance as, what else, children—“children [who] have been gathering their pebbles on the shore—new views, profounder convictions, broader theories, more comprehensive plans, deeper truths, more solid facts, daintier dreams, more practical methods—and have brought those pebbles here.”

She spoke accurately, as well as colorfully. This was the early childhood of the experts’ enterprise, the wonder years. As popular and academic pioneers in the fledgling field of child study, Dr. Holt and Dr. Hall showed youthful energy, optimism, and industry. Their missionary work among mothers invigorated them as they dipped into their own childhoods for more than a few of their pebbles of child-rearing wisdom. They had no idea, of course, where those ideas would lead. Rather, they expected them to be swept aside by waves of change, which would eventually deliver the definitive science of child rearing.

Instead, their basic ideas have been tossed around, in what have turned out to be ebbs and flows in child-rearing fashions. In the 1920s, Dr. John Broadus Watson claimed Holt as his inspiration. Hall’s student Dr. Arnold Gesell emerged as a dispenser of popular advice in the 1930s. As Dr. Benjamin Spock soared to unprecedented prominence in the 1940s, his nemeses were Holt and Dr. Watson. At the same time, a Hallian spirit resurfaced in the “conservative radical,” as one of Spock’s biographers called him. You can still hear faint echoes of these pioneering experts, if you try, in the post-Spock din of advice, where nutrition how-to-ism thrives and titles like *How to Talk so Your Teenager Will Listen/How to Listen so Your Teenager Will Talk* always sell. The child, as they say, is father to the man.

IV

We have been trained, in no small part by the developmental ethos of our child-rearing experts, to seek out that child-father, to look for coherent progression in our own characters and in those of our children. And we are usually good at finding unity and continuity, at least in retrospect. But it is hard to trace clear lines of descent, or ascent, amid the tangles of a century's worth of child-rearing expertise. That no definitive, mature science of child rearing has emerged is hardly a surprise. The hope for one now looks naive, a failure to recognize the gap that inevitably yawns between "is"—the descriptions and explanations provided by science—and "ought," the social choices we make.

The surprise is that the state of child-rearing wisdom still seems so immature. The proliferation of expertise has been phenomenal, but progress has been anything but straightforward. It is striking first, how few uncontested and empirically well-grounded advances have been made in scientific descriptions and explanations of children's "natures"; second, how consistently divided the prescriptions for "proper" nurture have been; and third, what unexpected, self-contradictory implications those prescriptions often have for parent, child, and society.

To be sure, there is a great deal more data about children's physical, psychological, emotional, and cognitive development now than there was in 1900, when Dr. Holt was busy exploring small stomachs and Dr. Hall was distributing questionnaires on every child study topic under the sun, from shyness to doll playing. But much of what has now been proved, or supported with many studies, had been guessed in at least rudimentary form decades earlier. Neuroscientific research in the 1990s, to cite some of the more impressively exact work that has lately been done, has focused on the spectacular growth in neural connections in infants. Stress of different kinds can impede all-important hook-ups; the

holes in the net are visible for the first time, thanks to new imaging technologies. In his speech to the Mothers Congress, Holt emphasized that "the brain grows more in the first two years than it does in all the rest of the life of the individual," and he warned of its vulnerability to pressures of various kinds.

The prescriptions offered by Holt and Hall are a paradigmatic case of the something-for-everyone style of expertise that has prevailed era after era. The experts were rarely in the business of completely overthrowing their predecessors. They reigned more cautiously, by a system of checks and balances. Thus, Dr. Watson's behaviorist strictures shared the stage with Dr. Gesell's hereditarian policies. And Dr. Spock's long-running pre-eminence only proves the point. The secret of his great popularity was his ability to deliver mellifluously mixed messages. The cacophony of counsel in his wake contains just about everything—from cut-and-dried disciplinary techniques to the discursive guidance offered by Drs. T. Berry Brazelton and Penelope Leach, from tips on helping your child get ahead to concern about "the hurried child."

Making neat sense of the shifting prescriptions is not easy. The obvious temptation is to say that child-rearing wisdom, only tenuously based on science, instead keeps time with prevailing social trends—that the experts are transparent social and psychological ideologists of their age. Stand far enough back, and it is possible to discern a shift in child-rearing themes that neatly complements a shift from a production-age to a consumption-age to an information-age culture. Thus expert and parent interest has moved from children's bodies and characters to their emotions and personalities, and then to their brains and temperaments.

But what is more notable is that expertise has not marched in lock step with the times, or at least not predictably so. The dominant experts have been emblematic figures, but not mainstream ones. Dr. Hall sermonizing and talking

about sex, Dr. Watson extolling the lab and then excelling in the ad business, Dr. Spock in his suit on the antiwar barricades: the advisers have been cutting edge and old-fashioned at the same time. Plenty in their wisdom has been self-contradictory, and quite different from what it seems. Thus the stricter rationalists—such as Holt and Watson—sound like advocates of conformity, but their advice often leaves more room for individuality, for both mother and child. It's the romantics, from Hall to Spock and beyond, who espouse freedom and fluidity. Yet they aspire to greater, if subtler, control over the psyches and anxieties of parents and children.

Their audience has been as full of contradictions as they are. Ever since the National Congress of Mothers, mothers have clamored for tips fresh from the child development labs, and

then complained about all the competing, contestable advice on offer. They have yearned to have their burdens lifted, and then avidly absorbed prescriptions that exalted and extended the responsibilities of parenthood. The more taxing and anxiety inducing the advice, often enough, the better. Working mothers gravitate to advice on the crucial importance of bonding. Stay-at-home mothers have proved a ready market for warnings about the importance of youthful autonomy.

Perhaps it is no wonder that the experts suspect mothers of often failing to follow their advice with any consistency. How could they? That may, in fact, be the saving grace of the genre. A century of dizzying advice may well have helped parents keep their heads. After all, when every wave of expert counsel conflicts with another, it is hard to get too carried away.

How to Succeed in Childhood

by Judith Rich Harris

Every day, tell your children that you love them. Hug them at least once every 24 hours. Never hit them. If they do something wrong, don't say, "You're bad!" Say, "What you did was bad." No, wait—even that might be too harsh. Say, instead, "What you did made me unhappy."

The people who are in the business of giving out this sort of advice are very angry at me, and with good reason. I'm the author of *The Nurture Assumption*—the book that allegedly claims that "parents don't matter." Though that's not what the book actually says, the advice givers are nonetheless justified in their anger. I don't pull punches, and I'm not impressed by their air of benevolent omniscience. Their advice is based not on scientific evidence but on prevailing cultural myths.

The advice isn't wrong; it's just ineffective. Whether parents do or don't follow it has no measurable effect on how their children turn out. There is a great deal of evidence that the differences in how parents rear their children are not responsible for the differences among the children. I've reviewed this evidence in my book; I will not do it again here.

Let me, however, bring one thing to your attention: the advice given to parents in the early part of this century was almost the mirror image of the advice that is given today. In the early part of this century, parents were not warned against damaging their children's self-esteem; they were warned against "spoiling" them. Too much attention and affection were thought to be

bad for kids. In those days, spanking was considered not just the parents' right but their duty.

Partly as a result of the major retoolings in the advice industry, child-rearing styles have changed drastically over the course of this century. Although abusive parents have always existed, run-of-the-mill parents—the large majority of the population—administer more hugs and fewer spankings than they used to.

Now ask yourself this: Are children turning out better? Are they happier and better adjusted than they were in the earlier part of the century? Less aggressive? Less anxious? Nicer?



It was Sigmund Freud who gave us the idea that parents are the be-all and end-all of the child's world. According to Freudian theory, children learn right from wrong—that is, they learn to behave in ways their parents and their society deem acceptable—by identifying with their parents. In the calm after the storm of the oedipal crisis, or the reduced-for-quick-sale female version of the oedipal crisis, the child supposedly identifies with the parent of the same sex.

Freud's name is no longer heard much in academic departments of psychology, but the theory that children learn how to behave by identifying with their parents is still accepted. Every textbook in developmental psychology (including, I confess, the one I co-authored) has its obligatory photo of a father shaving and a little boy



A Meeting (undated), by Marie Bashkirtseff

pretending to shave. Little boys imitate their fathers, little girls imitate their mothers, and, according to the theory, that's how children learn to be grownups. It takes them a while, of course, to perfect the act.

It's a theory that could have been thought up only by a grownup. From the child's point of view, it makes no sense at all. What happens when children try to behave like grownups is that, more often than not, it gets them into trouble. Consider this story, told by Selma Fraiberg, a child psychologist whose book

The Magic Years was popular in the 1960s:

Thirty-month-old Julia finds herself alone in the kitchen while her mother is on the telephone. A bowl of eggs is on the table. An urge is experienced by Julia to make scrambled eggs.... When Julia's mother returns to the kitchen, she finds her daughter cheerfully plopping eggs on the linoleum and scolding herself sharply for each plop, "NoNoNo. Mustn't dood it! NoNoNo. *Mustn't* dood it!"

Fraiberg attributed Julia's lapse to the fact that she had not yet acquired a super-ego, presumably because she had not yet identified with her mother. But look at what was Julia doing when her mother came back and caught her egg-handed: she was imitating her mother! And yet Mother was not pleased.

Children cannot learn how to behave appropriately by imitating their parents. Parents do all sorts of things that children are not allowed to do—I don't have to list them, do I?—and many of them look like fun to people who are not allowed to do them. Such prohibitions are found not only in our own society but everywhere, and involve not only activities such as making scrambled eggs but patterns of social behavior as well. Around the world, children who behave too much like grownups are considered impertinent.

Sure, children sometimes pretend to be adults. They also pretend to be horses and monsters and babies, but that doesn't mean they aspire to be horses or monsters or babies. Freud jumped to the wrong conclusions, and so did several generations of developmental psychologists. A child's goal is not to become an adult; a child's goal is to be a successful child.

What does it take to be a successful child? The child's first job is to learn how to get along with her parents and siblings and to do the things that are expected of her at home. This is a very important job—no question about it. But it is only the first of the child's jobs, and in the long run it is overshadowed in importance by the child's second job: to learn how to get along with the members of her own generation and to do the things that are expected of her outside the home.

Almost every psychologist, Freudian or not, believes that what the child learns (or doesn't learn) in job 1 helps her to succeed (or fail) in job 2. But this belief is based on an obsolete idea of how the child's mind works, and there is good evidence that it is wrong.

Consider the experiments of developmental psychologist Carolyn Rovee-Collier. A young baby lies on its back in a crib. A mobile with dangling doodads hangs overhead. A ribbon runs from the baby's right ankle to the mobile in such a way that whenever the baby kicks its right leg, the doodads jiggle. Babies are delighted to discover that they can make something happen; they quickly learn how to make the mobile move. Two weeks later, if you show them the mobile again, they will immediately start kicking that right leg.

But only if you haven't changed anything. If the doodads hanging from the mobile are blue instead of red, or if the liner surrounding the crib has a pattern of squares instead of circles, or if the crib is placed in a different room, they will gape at the mobile cluelessly, as if they've never seen such a thing in their lives.

It's not that they're stupid. Babies enter the world with a mind designed for learning and they start using it right away. But the learning device comes with a warning label: what you learn in one situation might not work in another. Babies do not assume that what they learned about the mobile with the red doodads will work for the mobile with the blue doodads. They do not assume that what worked in the bedroom will work in the den. And they do not assume that what worked with their mother will work with their father or the babysitter or their jealous big sister or the kids at the daycare center.

Fortunately, the child's mind is equipped with plenty of storage capacity. As the cognitive scientist Steven Pinker put it in his foreword to my book, "Relationships with parents, with siblings, with peers, and with strangers could not be more different, and the trillion-synapse human brain is hardly short of the computational power it would take to keep each one in a separate mental account."

That's exactly what the child does: keeps each one in a separate mental account. Studies have shown that a baby with a

> JUDITH RICH HARRIS, *the author of The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do (1998)*, is a former writer of college textbooks on child development. The essay that led to her controversial book won an award from the American Psychological Association. Copyright © 1999 by Judith Rich Harris.

depressed mother behaves in a subdued fashion in the presence of its mother, but behaves normally with a caregiver who is not depressed. A toddler taught by his mother to play elaborate fantasy games does not play these games when he's with his playmates—he and his playmates devise their own games. A preschooler who has perfected the delicate art of getting along with a bossy older sibling is no more likely than a first-born to allow her peers in nursery school to dominate her. A school-age child who says she hates her younger brother —they fight like cats and dogs, their mother complains —is as likely as any other child to have warm and serene peer relationships. Most telling, the child who follows the rules at home, even when no one is watching, may lie or cheat in the schoolroom or on the playground, and vice versa.

Children learn separately how to behave at home and how to behave outside the home, and parents can influence only the way they behave at home. Children behave differently in different social settings because different behaviors are required. Displays of emotion that are acceptable at home are not acceptable outside the home. A clever remark that would be rewarded with a laugh at home will land a child in the principal's office at school. Parents are often surprised to discover that the child they see at home is not the child the teacher sees. I imagine teachers get tired of hearing parents exclaim, "Really? Are you sure you're talking about *my* child?"

The compartmentalized world of childhood is vividly illustrated by the child of immigrant parents. When immigrants settle in a neighborhood of native-born Americans, their children become bicultural, at least for a while. At home they practice their parents' culture and language, outside the home they adopt the culture and language of their peers. But though their two worlds are separate, they are not equal. Little by little, the outside world takes precedence: the children adopt the language and culture of their peers and bring that language and culture home. Their parents go on addressing them in Russian or Korean or Portuguese,

but the children reply in English. What the children of immigrants end up with is not a compromise, not a blend. They end up, pure and simple, with the language and culture of their peers. The only aspects of their parents' culture they retain are things that are carried out at home, such as cooking.



Late-20th-century native-born Americans of European descent are as ethnocentric as the members of any other culture. They think there is only one way to raise children—the way they do it. But that is not the way children are reared in the kinds of cultures studied by anthropologists and ethnologists. The German ethnologist Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt has described what childhood is like in the hunter-gatherer and tribal societies he spent many years observing.

In traditional cultures, the baby is cuddled for two or three years—carried about by its mother and nursed whenever it whimpers. Then, when the next baby comes along, the child is sent off to play in the local play group, usually in the care of an older sibling. In his 1989 book *Human Ethology*, Eibl-Eibesfeldt describes how children are socialized in these societies:

Three-year-old children are able to join in a play group, and it is in such play groups that children are truly raised. The older ones explain the rules of play and will admonish those who do not adhere to them, such as by taking something away from another or otherwise being aggressive. Thus the child's socialization occurs mainly within the play group. . . . By playing together in the children's group the members learn what aggravates others and which rules they must obey. This occurs in most cultures in which people live in small communities.

Once their tenure in their mothers' arms has ended, children in traditional

cultures become members of a group. This is the way human children were designed to be reared. They were designed by evolution to become members of a group, because that's the way our ancestors lived for millions of years. Throughout the evolution of our species, the individual's survival depended upon the survival of his or her group, and the one who became a valued member of that group had an edge over the one who was merely tolerated.

Human groups started out small: in a hunter-gatherer band, everyone knows everyone else and most are blood relatives. But once agriculture began to provide our ancestors with a more or less dependable supply of food, groups got bigger. Eventually they became large enough that not everyone in them knew everyone else. As long ago as 1500 B.C. they were sometimes that large. There is a story in the Old Testament about a conversation Joshua had with a stranger, shortly before the Battle of Jericho. They met outside the walls of the beleaguered town, and Joshua's first question to the stranger was, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?"

Are you one of *us* or one of *them*? The group had become an idea, a concept, and the concept was defined as much by what you weren't as by what you were. And the answer to the question could be a matter of life or death. When the walls came tumbling down, Joshua and his troops killed every man, woman, and child in Jericho. Even in Joshua's time, genocide was not a novelty: fighting between groups, and wholesale slaughter of the losers, had been going on for ages. According to the evolutionary biologist Jared Diamond, it is "part of our human and prehuman heritage."

Are you one of *us* or one of *them*? It was the question African Americans asked of Colin Powell. It was the question deaf people asked of a Miss America who couldn't hear very well but who preferred to communicate in a spoken language. I once saw a six-year-old go up to a 14-year-old and ask him, "Are you a kid or a grownup?"

The human mind likes to categorize. It is not deterred by the fact that nature often fails to arrange things in convenient clumps but instead provides a continuum.

We have no difficulty splitting up continua. Night and day are as different as, well, night and day, even though you can't tell where one leaves off and the other begins. The mind constructs categories for people — male or female, kid or grownup, white or black, deaf or hearing — and does not hesitate to draw the lines, even if it's sometimes hard to decide whether a particular individual goes on one side or the other.

Babies only a few months old can categorize. By the time they reach their first birthday, they are capable of dividing up the members of their social world into categories based on age and sex: they distinguish between men and women, between adults and children. A preference for the members of their own social category also shows up early. One-year-olds are wary of strange adults but are attracted to other children, even ones they've never met before. By the age of two, children are beginning to show a preference for members of their own sex. This preference grows steadily stronger over the next few years. School-age girls and boys will play together in places where there aren't many children, but when they have a choice of playmates, they tend to form all-girl and all-boy groups. This is true the world around.

The brain we won in the evolutionary lottery gave us the ability to categorize, and we use that skill on people as well as things. Our long evolutionary history of fighting with other groups predisposes us to identify with one social category, to like our own category best, and to feel wary of (or hostile toward) members of other categories. The emotions and motivations that were originally applied to real physical groups are now applied to groups that are only concepts: "Americans" or "Democrats" or "the class of 2001." You don't have to like the other members of your group in order to consider yourself one of them; you don't even have to know who they are. The British social psychologist Henri Tajfel asked his subjects—a bunch of Bristol schoolboys—to estimate the number of dots flashed on a screen. Then half the boys were privately told that they were "overestimators," the others that

they were “underestimators.” That was all it took to make them favor their own group. They didn’t even know which of their schoolmates were in their group and which were in the other.

The most famous experiment in social psychology is the Robber’s Cave study. Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues started with 22 eleven-year-old boys, carefully selected to be as alike as possible, and divided them into two equal groups. The groups—the “Rattlers” and the “Eagles”—were separately transported to the Robber’s Cave summer camp in a wilderness area of Oklahoma. For a while, neither group knew of the other’s existence. But the first time the Rattlers heard the Eagles playing in the distance, they reacted with hostility. They wanted to “run them off.” When the boys were brought together in games arranged by researchers disguised as camp counselors, push quickly came to shove. Before long, the two groups were raiding each other’s cabins and filling socks with stones in preparation for retaliatory raids.

When people are divided (or divide themselves) into two groups, hostility is one common result. The other, which happens more reliably though it is less well known, is called the “group contrast effect.” The mere division into two groups tends to make each group see the other as different from itself in an unfavorable way, and that makes its members *want* to be different from the other group. The result is that any pre-existing differences between the groups tend to widen, and if there aren’t any differences to begin with, the members create them. Groups develop contrasting norms, contrasting images of themselves.

In the Robber’s Cave study, it happened very quickly. Within a few days of their first encounter, the Eagles had decided that the Rattlers used too many “cuss-words” and resolved to give up cussing; they began to say a prayer before every game. The Rattlers, who saw themselves as tough and manly, continued to favor scatology over eschatology. If an Eagle turned an ankle or skinned a knee, it was all right for him to cry. A Rattler who sustained a similar

injury might cuss a bit, but he would bear up stoically.



The idea for group socialization theory came to me while I was reading an article on juvenile delinquency. The article reported that breaking the law is highly common among adolescents, even among those who were well behaved as children and who are destined to turn into law-abiding adults. This unendearing foible was attributed to the frustration teenagers experience at not being adults: they are longing for the power and privilege of adulthood.

“Wait a minute,” I thought. “That’s not right. If teenagers really wanted to be adults, they wouldn’t be spraying graffiti on overpasses or swiping nail polish from drugstores. If they really wanted to emulate adults they would be doing boring adult things, like sorting the laundry or figuring out their taxes. Teenagers aren’t trying to be like adults; they are trying to *contrast* themselves with adults! They are showing their loyalty to their own group and their disdain for adults’ rules!”

I don’t know what put the idea into my head; at the time, I didn’t know beans about social psychology. It took eight months of reading to fill the gaps in my education. What I learned in those eight months was that there is a lot of good evidence to back up my hunch, and that it applies not only to teenagers but to young children as well.

Sociologist William Corsaro has spent many years observing nursery school children in the United States and Italy. Here is his description of four-year-olds in an Italian *scuola materna*, a government-sponsored nursery school:

In the process of resisting adult rules, the children develop a sense of community and a group identity. [I would have put it the other way around: I think group identity leads to the resistance.] The children’s resistance to adult rules can be seen as a routine because it is a daily occurrence in the nursery school

and is produced in a style that is easily recognizable to members of the peer culture. Such activity is often highly exaggerated (for instance, making faces behind the teacher's back or running around) or is prefaced by "calls for the attention" of other children (such as, "look what I got" in reference to possession of a forbidden object, or "look what I'm doing" to call attention to a restricted activity).

Group contrast effects show up most clearly when "groupness"—Henri Tajfel's term—is salient. Children see adults as serious and sedentary, so when the social categories *kids* and *grownups* are salient — as they might be, for instance, when the teacher is being particularly bossy—the children become sillier and more active. They demonstrate their fealty to their own age group by making faces and running around.

This has nothing to do with whether they like their teachers personally. You can like people even if they're members of a different group and even if you don't much like that group — a conflict of interests summed up in the saying, "Some of my best friends are Jews." When groupness is salient, even young children contrast themselves with adults and collude with each other in defying them. And yet some of their best friends are grownups.



Learning how to behave properly is complicated, because proper behavior depends on which social category you're in. In every society, the rules of behavior depend on whether you're a grownup or a kid, a female or a male, a prince or a peon. Children first have to figure out the social categories that are relevant in their society, and then decide which category they belong in, then tailor their behavior to the other members of their category.

That brief description seems to imply that socialization makes children more alike, and so it does, in some ways. But groups also work to create or exaggerate

differences among their members—differences in personality. Even identical twins reared in the same home do not have identical personalities. When groupness is not salient—when there is no other group around to serve as a foil—a group tends to fall apart into individuals, and differences among them emerge or increase. In boys' groups, for example, there is usually a dominance hierarchy, or "pecking order." I have found evidence that dominant boys develop different personalities from those at the bottom of the ladder.

Groups also typecast their members, pinning labels on them—joker, nerd, brain—that can have lifelong repercussions. And children find out about themselves by comparing themselves with their group mates. They come to think well or poorly of themselves by judging how they compare with the other members of their own group. It doesn't matter if they don't measure up to the standards of another group. A third-grade boy can think of himself as smart if he knows more than most of his fellow third-graders. He doesn't have to know more than a fourth-grader.



According to my theory, the culture acts upon children not through their parents but through the peer group. Children's groups have their own cultures, loosely based on the adult culture. They can pick and choose from the adult culture, and it's impossible to predict what they'll include. Anything that's common to the majority of the kids in the group may be incorporated into the children's culture, whether they learned it from their parents or from the television set. If most of the children learned to say "please" and "thank you" at home, they will probably continue to do so when they're with their peers. The child whose parents failed to teach her that custom will pick it up from the other children: it will be transmitted to her, via the peer group, from the parents of her peers. Similarly, if most of the children watch a particular TV show, the behaviors and attitudes depicted in the show may be incorporated into the norms of their group. The child whose parents do not

permit him to watch that show will nonetheless be exposed to those behaviors and attitudes. They are transmitted to him via the peer group.

Thus, even though individual parents may have no lasting effects on their children's behavior, the larger culture does have an effect. Child-rearing practices common to most of the people in a culture, such as teaching children to say "please" and "thank you," can have an effect. And the media can have an effect.

In the hunter-gatherer or tribal society, there was no privacy: everybody knew what everybody else was doing. Nowadays children can't ordinarily watch their neighbors making love, having babies, fighting, and dying, but they can watch these things happening on the television screen. Television has become their window on society, their village square. They take what they see on the screen to be an indication of what life is like—what life is supposed to be—and they incorporate it into their children's cultures.



One of my goals in writing *The Nurture Assumption* was to lighten some of the burdens of modern parenthood. Back in the 1940s, when I was young, the parents of a troublesome child—my parents, for instance—got sym-

pathy, not blame. Nowadays parents are likely to be held culpable for anything that goes wrong with their child, even if they've done their best. The evidence I've assembled in my book indicates that there is a limit to what parents can do: how their child turns out is largely out of their hands. Their major contribution occurs at the moment of conception. This doesn't mean it's mostly genetic; it means that the environment that shapes the child's personality and social behavior is outside the home.

I am not advocating irresponsibility. Parents are in charge of how their children behave at home. They can decide where their children will grow up and, at least in the early years, who their peers will be. They are the chief determiners of whether their children's life at home will be happy or miserable, and they have a moral obligation to keep it from being miserable. My theory does not grant people the license to treat children in a cruel or negligent way.

Although individual parents have little power to influence the culture of children's peer groups, larger numbers of parents acting together have a great deal of power, and so does the society as a whole. Through the prevailing methods of child rearing it fosters, and through influences—especially the media—that act directly on peer-group norms and values, a society shapes the adults of the future. Are we shaping them the way we ought to?

Isaiah Berlin

on

Edmund Wilson

An interview by Lewis M. Dabney



Isaiah Berlin in 1996

Edmund Wilson (1895–1972) and Isaiah Berlin (1909–97) were among the leading figures of 20th-century transatlantic intellectual life, Wilson the American critic and man of letters, and Berlin the British intellectual historian and political philosopher. The two met in 1946, when Wilson, the older by 14 years, was just over 50. “He spoke in a moving and imaginative fashion about the American writers of his generation, about Dante,” Berlin writes in a short memoir focused on Oxford and on London literary life in the fifties. “He then talked about Russian literature in general, and particularly about Chekhov and Gogol, as well as I have ever heard anyone talk on any literary topic. I was completely fascinated; I felt honored to

have met this greatly gifted and morally impressive man.” They would become fast friends, seeing each other throughout the 1950s and ’60s in London and Oxford as well as in Manhattan, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and at Wilson’s old stone house in upstate New York.

The following conversation took place in London on the afternoon of March 27, 1991. I had written to Berlin, telling him that I was editing Wilson’s last journal, *The Sixties*, and beginning a biography of the critic. Sir Isaiah suggested we meet at the Athenaeum Club in London. There, at a table in the long, elegant drawing room, I proposed that he fill out the account of Wilson begun in the memoir a few years before. In this piece, he offers an impression of Wilson’s “curiously strangled voice, with gaps between his sentences, as if ideas jostled and thrashed about inside him,” emerging in “short bursts, emitted staccato, interspersed with gentle, low-voiced, legato passages.” Sir Isaiah’s own deep, soft voice also came in bursts, trailing off at the end of a breath and emphatically resuming. For two and a half hours (with an intermission for tea) he displayed a penetrating intelligence, warmth of heart, and moral seriousness that reminded me of the same qualities in his old friend.

I began by asking whether Wilson had changed over the many years the two knew each other.

Berlin: No, I think he was exactly the same. Intent, intense, passionate, serious, had no small talk, and everything he said meant something. How wonderful to be a man, every one of whose sentences conveyed something! With no chatter.

D: His conversational self matched his literary persona?

Berlin: Yes, he spoke as he wrote.

*Berlin recalled arriving in the United States in February 1940 for a two-month stay, eager to meet the author of *Axel’s Castle* and *The Triple Thinkers*, “excellent books, wonderful books.” Talking in New York with people from *Partisan Review*, he was “shocked” to learn that they “were not pro-Edmund.” “I mean, he was my hero, continuously. And I used to ask them, ‘What about Edmund Wilson?’ They would answer, ‘Well. . . .’” At the time Berlin had no idea that Wilson had taken Mary McCarthy away from Philip Rahv, one of *Partisan Review*’s editors. Later, while serving as a British official in Washington during the war, he had expressed his interest in Wilson to Felix Frankfurter and others whom the critic knew, but it turned out that Wilson “was unwilling to meet somebody contaminated by working in an embassy, above all the British Embassy,” who “could only want to use him for propaganda purposes.” We discussed the reversal of the New Republic’s socialist isolationism by the magazine’s British owner, Leonard Elmhirst, who in 1940 descended on the editors and began printing letters that favored intervention in the European conflict, at which point Wilson resigned. His bitter talk of a British-Stalinist alliance would seem less foolish when Michael Straight, the son-in-law whom Elmhirst left in charge, confessed in his autobiography to having been recruited at Oxford by the KGB. Wilson’s *To the Finland Station* also appeared in 1940.*

Berlin: I didn’t read it then; it would have interested me. I would have disagreed with it, too, and did, in some ways. Afterwards I persuaded him to change the introduction, the last introduction. He didn’t need much persuasion. He had been to Russia, in the mid-’30s, and he used to preach to me.

D: About what it had really been?

Berlin: The horrors, yes. And in the end he said in a strangled voice, “Ah, you know those things you used to say about Lenin, and you thought I was too kind to him, didn’t you? Yes, well, well, yes, too kind to him. Yes, well, maybe I was.”

That was all. And when I read it after his death I saw that his line had indeed changed. The rest remained intact.

D: But were you never impressed by the idea that they were accomplishing something in Russia under Lenin's leadership?

Berlin: Never, never. Everybody around me was.

D: Tell me about your reservations.

Berlin: It was quite simply that I was born in Riga and was in Petrograd, as it was called, during the Revolution. My parents were timber merchants, who supplied timber to Russian railways under the tsar and under the Bolsheviks. We were never visited, never touched, and we left in 1919 quite legally, without difficulty. They simply left because they loathed it. And I remember 1918–19 clearly. I remember the horrors of innocent people being shot. Nothing like Stalin, but, I mean, it was known that atrocities went on.

D: So you were inoculated.

Berlin: That's all. I don't think I would have been anti-Soviet otherwise. I was surrounded by people who gravitated in that direction.

D: How did you become interested in Russian literature?

Berlin: When we came to England in 1919, I never spoke Russian, at all. My parents talked English to each other. But I went on reading it because I knew the language. I had one Russian friend at school, the son of a famous painter, whom I used to talk to in Russian once a fortnight, but that preserved it, to my own surprise, and then I began reading Russian criticism quite heavily, in the late '30s. In 1946 I went to the Soviet Union and met Pasternak, I met Akhmatova, I met all these people, I was very moved by it all, I read their works. They gave them to me, they read aloud to me. I had an extraordinary time with Russian writers—all this I reported, and it came back to Edmund, and he conceived of me as somebody who straddled—

D: When you told him about these experiences that fixed his image of you?

Berlin: Yes, he was not at all interested in any ideas that I had about philosophy, or politics, in my field. He was polite, but he was completely bored by it. He saw me as a bridge between Russia and the West. Sort of an interpreter, a good interpreter, who knew certain things about Russia that the West didn't quite. He always had to categorize people. I belonged to the category of some kind of bridge figure between two worlds. That's how he saw me.

D: And how do you see his need to categorize?

Berlin: I don't think he was very interested in people, as people. Only if they had something to give or stood for something. Books, ideas. Auden was a very good poet, Spender was a very nice man. Who else did he know here? Sylvester Gates was a friend from way back. Edmund met Maurice Bowra and hated him. In *Europe without Baedeker* (1966) he describes him, without giving him a name, as a snob, in very, very hostile colors. But everybody had to be something.

D: And where did this need for people to represent things come from, do you suppose?

Berlin: I never knew that. I have no idea. Was it back in Princeton, as a student? He adored his professors from those days, you know, Norman Kemp Smith and the dean, what was his name?

D: Dean [Christian] Gauss.

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Berlin: He was very important to him. Wilson's friends always had to have some sort of—it's difficult to describe—they didn't need to be people on stage, didn't need to wear masks, you see, didn't have to be actors, but they had to be expressive of love, hate, poetry, prose, England, America, honesty, dishonesty, falsehood, truth. Somerset Maugham for him was simply a vulgar philistine who was very good at promoting his own stuff and therefore a typical anti-art man, a sort of middle-brow writer.

D: He wrote an article called "Somerset Maugham and an Antidote," which is a nice title. He had a fierce prejudice against Maugham.

Berlin: Well, he was right about that. Maugham was not a great writer, and did more propaganda for himself than any other author ever did. He talked about his art—nonsense. Craft. Hard work. Realism. Life. But all that talk about art—there was no such thing.

D: What do you think of Wilson's criticism of Russian literature?

Berlin: He had some inner feeling, some extraordinary understanding of what the Russians meant. Sometimes he talked nonsense. For example, the two pieces on *Zhivago*. The first article—

D: Was wonderful. The second was lousy.

Berlin: Yes, all that philological stuff, he got from those two ladies, those two White Russian ladies, whoever they were, egged him on by saying "Ham-let," "Little Ham." He didn't really know the language well. In the famous row with Nabokov he was wrong.

D: Yes, he was wrong about words. But did you think he was wrong about Nabokov's translation? I thought the translation of *Eugene Onegin* was "perverse-pedantic-impossible," as Edmund said.

Berlin: Absolutely right about it. It was an absolute monstrosity. He was a moral being, Edmund was, whose approach to life was indelibly moral, as is that of the Russian writers. Ultimately, the Russian approach is the moral approach. Nabokov was purely aesthetic—Edmund admired him, liked him, was amused by him. Don't think he meant much to him. Still, anybody Russian was of interest to Edmund. He had this terrific sense of the greatness of Russian literature. Wonderful people, wonderful literature, he used to say.



Edmund Wilson in 1963

D: Did you like [Wilson's wife] Elena [of aristocratic Russian and German background]?

Berlin: Very much. She made him happy. She was a very nice woman, she was gentle, she was sensitive, she was aristocratic. She was sad, deeply sad.

D: Why?

Berlin: Who can tell? An unhappy first marriage. To a Canadian? And she was low—low spirited, rather, as opposed to high spirited.

D: Which Edmund was?

Berlin: Oh, Edmund boiled, you see. Why did she marry him? He got on with her, all right. He did with everybody. His passion for women was unquenchable.

We returned to Wilson and the English.

Berlin: He was defensive about America, is what it was. He didn't need these European snobs.

D: Because he had grown up in a time when America did not yet feel that it had a culture?

Berlin: Quite.

D: And it acquired that feeling through the work of the writers of the 1920s, but Edmund was old enough, being educated before World War I—he was educated in a provincial ambience that looked to Oxbridge, old Princeton kind of thing. His first trip to Europe was in the summer of 1914.

Berlin: Tell me, what happened to him then? Defiant Americanism?

D: I would say aspirant Americanism. He wanted to make a culture and—

Berlin: He was very conscious of the low rating, some kind of disparagement of American writers by English critics. "They think of themselves as superior to us, they think they're marvelous, and they think we're just provincials." There was a bit of that among us.

D: It came from before World War I.

Berlin: But the English went on thinking that in the 1930s and '40s. When Bowra said about Ezra Pound's essays, "He's a terrible bore and what is much worse, an American bore," that rightly aroused all Edmund's worst suspicions about the horrible way the English ran on.

*I reminded Sir Isaiah of Evelyn Waugh's famous snub of Wilson in 1945, when he had tried to interest Secker and Warburg in publishing *Memoirs of Hecate County in England*. When Wilson was out of the room at a London party, his hostess asked the other guests to be discreet about this subject. Instead, Waugh elicited from Wilson that the book had just been turned down because of "the laws relating to pornography," then pronounced, "In cases of this kind, we usually advise publication in Egypt." Did Sir Isaiah agree with Stephen Spender (whom I had interviewed the day before) "that Waugh's condescension shaped Wilson's later attitude toward literary England?"*

Berlin: No, no. I absolutely disagree.

D: Stephen told me that Waugh's rudeness—

Berlin: Had nothing to do with it. Wilson had a perfectly happy time during World War II, being against the war. Then he met the British, in 1946.

D: It was 1945 when he was sent abroad by the *New Yorker*.

Berlin: When he came to England he was already bristling. He said to me, in 1946, Churchill is nothing but a romantic American journalist. That isn't due to being offended by Waugh. I think Stephen's exaggerating. Edmund was offended, no doubt, and Waugh meant to offend him, and meant to offend him

because he was an American.

D: A Yank, as Waugh says in his journals.

Berlin: Waugh was very upset when he went to Boston and found a terrible thing there—I was at Harvard at the time and I saw him—nasty man, Waugh, genuinely nasty, deeply nasty, and I knew him—he didn’t like me and I didn’t like him, but I knew him. And what upset him was that the Unitarians were the top people in Boston, socially, the Catholics the bottom. An unnatural state of affairs, and that he couldn’t get over. He was terribly, tremendously indignant about that. No, Waugh was a sort of self-made romantic snob. He was expelled from some club for throwing something at one of the waiters because he thought a gentleman did that, had an imagined idea of how gentlemen behaved, and lived up to some kind of entirely made-up view of a country gentleman—assumed they disliked Jews. He was anything but, himself. Born in Golders Green. Yet Wilson knew that Evelyn Waugh was a small genius. He thought him [an] odious, dreadful fellow, but he knew he was gifted.

D: And it was the same with Bloomsbury?

Berlin: Wilson regarded the thin-blooded ghosts of Bloomsbury somewhat as D. H. Lawrence did. He did not enjoy himself with them as he did with the aged Compton Mackenzie, a jolly fellow who drank and womanized and had adventures and had wonderful times in Greece, and wrote books which had to be censored. None of this trembling aesthetic. But Wilson was an extremely penetrating and honest critic. If they wrote something good, he would say so.

I suggested that Wilson valued British literary life “as he saw it in your generation, in your circle, yourself and Spender and Auden and others.”

Berlin: Yes, yes.

D: Why do you think that it meant as much to him as it did?

Berlin: I think, just for obvious reasons, because the writers are good, because he enjoyed them, he liked it because he thought well of it. Not because they’re pleasant.

D: I think that in England he felt a cultural continuity hard to sustain in the United States.

Berlin: But there wasn’t, you know. It was an illusion. We’re talking about the 1930s. Spender, Auden, Day Lewis, even Aldous Huxley, don’t come out of some obvious—Eliot was a great influence on all these people, but they don’t go back to the ’20s.

D: Not, at any rate, as Edmund did.

Berlin: I think Edmund felt there was such a thing as literature, as the tradition. He was a man who lived entirely in books. If there was ever a man fixated on books, it was Edmund. Now, in this rich world of, as it were, advancing literature, England played a major part as far as English literature was concerned. America played a minor part; he knew it, and therefore, he was man enough, in a sense—I mean, that’s the world he valued, he was happy in, he breathed the air of. That’s the point, not so much the continuity as simply good books, interesting books, ideas.

D: He had a feeling, in his later years, that he was not in the swim of contemporary American culture.

Berlin: That’s right, but he was much more in the swim of ours. He was greatly admired, greatly admired by many of us. But when he was in England, he was like a cat on hot bricks.

D: A cat on hot bricks?

Berlin: Unfriendly country, unfriendly country; he was a genuine Anglophobe, in

spite of the glorious literature.

D: And he had been an Anglophile underneath, in his youth, which he had had to repudiate.

Berlin: Could be, could be. Pride in his ancestors, traveled down to see some church service in East Anglia [where Wilson's maternal forebears lived before sailing for the colony of Massachusetts Bay].

I observed that in The Fifties Wilson was sometimes hard on Sir Isaiah.

Berlin: So he was. Look, he liked catching one out, to begin with. I remember he was frightfully pleased when he discovered that in a book on Karl Marx I described someone as a physicist, when, in fact, he was a biologist; he was delighted by that inexactitude. He liked me, we were friends, but something about me irritated him, also. Something did.

D: I'll tell you what he thought it was, or at least what name he gave to it: "I love Isaiah and he's an international figure, but there's the Oxford-cliquish side of him."

Berlin: There was no clique, there was no Oxford clique, or any other. When he came to stay, that evening when I invited Iris Murdoch and John Bayley, disaster, disaster. He was talking about whom he wanted to see. In Magdalen, it was A. J. P. Taylor he liked. He said, "He's my kind of man. He's a hostile fellow." He liked A. J. P.'s *boutard* against the Establishment, and Cecil Roth because of the Jews. I tried to stop him from meeting Cecil Roth, who was one of the world's greatest bores. He really was. He wasn't what Edmund thought him—he was a very hard-working antiquarian. Knew nothing about books. Accurate, no inspiration, no historical sense, a great deal of sort of accumulation of quite uninteresting detail and for some reason Edmund conceived an admiration for him, because of his own interest in the Jews. I said to him, "Look, he's a most dreadful bore, do you really want to go and see him?" He decided I was deliberately preventing him from seeing Cecil Roth because he wasn't one of the clique.

D: Why do you think Edmund needed to jump in that way, to impose that category?

Berlin: Because he didn't like my friends, didn't like David Cecil.

D: There was something he thought was fishy about these British—

Berlin: Not fishy, no, but narrow, academic, snobbish, thought too well of themselves. Some kind of little thing, you know—conceited people, highest opinion, all they wanted was to please each other.

D: Is there any truth in it?

Berlin: Some. Well, everybody, you see, lives in a circle of friends; it's unavoidable, and my friends were . . . whoever they were. Edmund exaggerated. He always had to have some doctrine, some theory, to explain things.

D: His early criticism of American culture was different. It relied on detail and aesthetic judgment. I agree with you about that tendency in his later work.

Berlin: He was not intuitive, he was not intuitive. He made up theories. He built hypotheses, in all his writings, like that. As a critic, he would conceive some hypothesis and then he would support it with every argument he could. He didn't react directly, line by line, he wasn't an impressionist critic.

D: He needed to make a case.

Berlin: And in theoretical terms. He wanted to know why this happened. Until he made a theory, he wouldn't leave it.

D: Now, how is it possible that such a man could be wonderfully illuminating as a critic?

Berlin: Because, of course, he understood—he was extremely penetrating, had deep insight. No intuition, that's another thing. But when he read a book he

knew what it was saying, he understood, deep understanding—and not only books, but milieus, too. He understood what [Charles-Augustin] Sainte-Beuve came out of, what kind of society it was that generated these people. But all that is—and in the good sense—theory. He was an old-fashioned, 19th-century critic who, whenever he wanted to write about somebody, read all their works and accumulated an enormous amount of information until some shape emerged, built itself in his head.

Berlin recalled not liking two of Wilson's friends. One was Hannah Arendt, another "that famous writer, you know, the left-wing dramatist in whose apartment the Wilsons stayed in New York."

D: Lillian Hellman.

Berlin: I thought she was too awful, quite apart from her Stalinism and everything.

D: As a dramatist?

Berlin: Not that so much. I thought she was an awful woman. I was very put off. I met her exactly twice, once in Washington in 1941, when she defended the Soviet Union in the worst possible way—the worst things were what she defended. And once in Oxford, when she came to tea. They were doing *Candide*, for which she wrote the words and Bernstein wrote the music. I remember it was a kind of musical, and she invited herself to tea with me. I felt awkward because I thought she wasn't a nice person, that's all. Apart from the Stalinism, which didn't endear her either. Edmund defended her, I never knew why. She was a vulgar writer, she was gifted—quite gifted in a commercial way. But I was on Mary McCarthy's side when she insulted her.

D: When Mary said that every word she wrote was a lie, including the "ands" and "thes."

Berlin: Yes, "ands" and "thes," very funny.

D: But in what terms did Wilson defend her?

Berlin: Well, remember that he stayed for weeks in her apartment. He said, "No, no, she's all right, she's got good qualities. I know you don't like her. No, no, there's something to her, she's an old friend."

D: He would have credited her with standing up in the Joe McCarthy years. That she had been a Stalinist long after the Moscow Trials, at a time when it was disgraceful still to be a Stalinist: somehow he didn't hold this against her in a serious way.

Berlin: Evidently not. People make mistakes.

Berlin recalled the pleasure of being asked "to write in diamond" on the windows of the old stone house at Talcottville, as other close friends of Wilson's later years were invited to do, with the diamond stylus Elena gave him.

D: Did you carve that poem in the glass? Were you up there in the attic, on the third floor?

Berlin: He did it.

D: While you were there?

Berlin: Yes. From the prophet Isaiah. It's Hebrew, on the glass.

D: I've seen it, but I didn't know how to translate it.

Berlin: He talked nonsense to me about it. He thought I identified myself with the prophet Isaiah.

D: Did you think that he overly romanticized Hebrew and the Jews?

Berlin: Gravely. There's that rather bad story about the Messiah coming ["The Messiah at the Seder"].

D: Did he make too much of the Jewish intellectual tradition, the idea that the

Jews had helped keep the flame of the spirit alive? He sort of believed that.

Berlin: Maybe. He never said it to me. I'll tell you a funny story—two funny stories. He went to Jordan, and when he came back from Jordan, he had to pass through the Mandelbaum Gate. The Israeli passport officer looked at his passport, noticed it was Edmund Wilson, then said, "I think your dating of the Dead Sea scrolls is not quite right. I think it should have been 50 years before." And Edmund answered, and the chief officer said, "Stamp Mr. Wilson's passport. You can't discuss the scrolls here, not on the government's time." He talked to me about that afterwards, saying, "Only in Israel would I find a passport officer who wished to question the date of the scrolls." That pleased him.

D: It pleased him deeply.

Berlin: Then he went to see the man he most admired in Israel, who was a scholar called [David] Flusser in Jerusalem, who talked to him about the Bible and the scrolls. Edmund asked him what he thought of Israel. Flusser said, "*Israel est un très petit pays. Et je ne suis pas patriot.*" He was delighted with that. Anybody who said he wasn't a patriot went straight to his heart.

D: And yet, in a complex way—

Berlin: He was an American patriot. I remember it well, he once said to me, "The great thing about America is that there is a new generation coming, educated engineers. They're wonderful people, these people, not appreciated in Europe, but they're the people who are going to make America." And that's when he said, "One sometimes has one's best ideas in the bath. The bathroom is a great American invention."

D: Well, now, while we're waiting for our tea, do you feel that Edmund was a nice man, essentially—in spite of his sometimes putting down friends in his journals?

Berlin: Yes, I do. Because of course he had an enormous heart, and that's what made him the critic he was. He was all too human, Edmund. From time to time, he became angry and bristled, talked nonsense, and became grumpy and hostile, but that was all in the end unimportant. He could be offensive, but it was unimportant. He was deeply moved, he was deeply moved by whatever was moving. Deeply moved by books, deeply moved by individuals, by their circumstances.

D: If you thought that Edmund was great in any way, insofar as that word is not misused in his case, what would you think it was?

Berlin: He was the greatest critic of his time. For me.

D: And why?

Berlin: Because he went more deeply into the nature of the works about which he wrote, because he interpreted them.

D: In the light of the person and the times?

Berlin: Well, not even that, that was the method. Because somehow what he said was more interesting, more memorable, and above all, more profound. How to quantify depth? I mean, I ask you, would you mind telling me how to define the word *depth*? Or *deep*? But there is a definition: it comes from the nature of wells. That's what's deep. If I say to you, Dostoevsky is a deeper writer than Tolstoy, what does that mean? It's a little difficult to say. Yet we know what we mean. I think Edmund had an insight into books, into writers, and into social circumstances, the effect of both education and environment, and had ethical, critical views on writers deeper than those of any other contemporary critic. I can think of nobody—Eliot was a great critic, too, but that was from a point of view less sympathetic to me. I mean, he put together a very definite theory, an approach. I admired the approach, but it didn't speak to me. Wilson's did, from the beginning. When I read *Axel's Castle*, I understood something I hadn't understood before. That's very endearing.

D: And he kept that up for you over the years?

Berlin: Forever.

D: All the way to the end.

Berlin: Sometimes he talked nonsense, as I've told you, about [Boris Pasternak's] *Dr. Zhivago* (1958) and other things. He overestimated [André] Malraux grossly. Grossly. He was a gifted writer, but the *Musée Imaginaire* (1947)—at least what Wilson writes about in it—was not a great work.

D: Do you think he overestimated [Ignazio] Silone, on the basis of *Bread and Wine* (1937)?

Berlin: Yes, he was a nice man, very nice, decent, but not a great writer. Edmund was prepared to stand up for Malraux and Silone. They were Communists when he was left-wing. But Malraux became a Gaullist, and Silone worked for the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which from Edmund's point of view was no good.

D: And Wilson turned out to be right about that.

Berlin: Oh, yes.

D: On account of the secret CIA subsidy. If they'd only been open about it.

Berlin: Oh, I quite agree. Nothing would have been wrong. That was blown by Conor Cruise O'Brien, whom Edmund should have liked but never met. They would have gotten along.

D: He was not tolerant of Dos Passos, not when Dos—

Berlin: Dos went to the right.

D: Way over to the right and perhaps prostituted himself unconsciously to a political cause, as he had not when he was on the left.

Berlin: Exactly. Edmund very strongly disapproved of this. Yet he sometimes praised second-rate writers for political reasons. Solidarity of some kind. That's exceptional. In general, everything he wrote appeared to me to be wonderful. I was an unqualified admirer. Look, there's nobody else in America to equal him. Who else is there? Who else can you mention in that breath?

D: The New Critics taught people how to read poetry, which I'm afraid we may be forgetting now. For a while, in the 1950s, Lionel Trilling was more important than Wilson in New York intellectual circles.

Berlin: Trilling was nowhere near so good. I knew Trilling and his work.

D: Why nowhere near so good?

Berlin: Because he wasn't as penetrating, he wasn't as profound; he was a delicate, sensitive, extremely honest, and very communicative writer, but he understood far less. Edmund penetrated beneath the surface in an extraordinary way, and also he had great emotional understanding of the writers he wrote about. And conveyed it.

D: Could give himself to the subject.

Berlin: And conveyed it. I mean, let me tell you, he was full of prejudices, full of quirks, full of all kinds of nonsensical beliefs, all kinds of loves and hates of a ludicrous kind, but they didn't matter. He was a better writer in the sense that every sentence he wrote was more authentically thought and more authentically felt. In that way Trilling was like other critics, just intelligent sentences, but in Wilson's case, it was filled with some kind of personal content. That's why one would read him. I read Wilson compulsively. I read Trilling with pleasure, but it wasn't the same feeling. And Wilson was a very good writer. And he was serious. It's difficult to convey what the word *serious* means, but he was serious. He was the opposite of smart, the opposite of frivolous, the opposite of amusing, the opposite of brilliant. He was none of those things, simply a serious critic, of the first order. And of them, there are not many in the history of literature. Matthew Arnold was a great critic.

Sainte-Beuve was a great critic. . . . You can say about Edmund that everything he wrote in one way or another was memorable. It cannot be said of many people. Because he put his blood in it.

D: A book was the lifeblood of a spirit.

Berlin: Indeed. He shed his own blood in order to make others live. Somebody once said, [Ulrich von] Wilamowitz—great German critic—made a very profound statement, when he was writing about Greek and Latin authors. He said, “You know, we don’t really know what they meant. How can we, after two thousand years?” In Homer—you remember, Lewis?—Achilles can’t come and talk to Odysseus unless blood sacrifices are made, and when he is pumped with blood, then he can talk. And Wilamowitz said, we have to give our blood to these people, to make them speak. Then they speak with our blood, not theirs.

D: And that’s what Wilson was doing?

Berlin: Well, that’s what Wilamowitz meant, that maybe it wasn’t what they [the Greek and Latin authors] meant at all. Maybe it’s what we make them mean.

D: That’s right.

Berlin: In Edmund’s case the writers are more recent, are recent enough—

D: That we can be close to seeing them in their own terms, if we give our blood. Right?

Berlin: Precisely. But there are people who hate this kind of—my friend David Cecil, to whom I was devoted, didn’t like Edmund’s writings at all, because he thought that’s not what criticism was about. Criticism was to convey the artist’s process, how Virginia Woolf wrote, how a poet made his books, how Thomas Hardy composed, but not about where he was born or why he thought what he thought, or what the politics were or what his interest was in this or that, or what his inner life was. Cecil thought that criticism was what we did in the *conservatoire*. Edmund believed that art was communication. Art wasn’t simply contemplating a beautiful object and saying, “I’m not interested in whether the jeweler was a good husband, nice father, where he lived, and whether he made a lot of money.” What do you do if you contemplate the object?—you say how marvelous it is. And Edmund did not believe that, nor do I. He believed the opposite, that art was communication. The great thing about the good artist is what he communicates, and why.

We speculated about the tensions in Wilson’s personality.

Berlin: He would never have drunk as he did if he didn’t have to drown something. Unhappy man. I don’t know why, but he wasn’t comfortable in his own skin. He didn’t know quite how to get about. Elena was a great solace to him. She made him feel comfortable, kept his irritation down. He was terribly grateful to her. Terribly grateful.

D: But you felt there was something he was trying to get away from or drown?

Berlin: Well, there was something in him which made him uneasy. Of course, he was a highly neurotic man, as who can deny? Nervy. A little paranoid, thought somehow people were after him, all kinds of people wanted to do him down, bit of that. But he was lonely too, to some extent, in spite of Elena. And when he disliked, he disliked. When he despised, he despised. Poor Archie MacLeish went to bed—after that poem—“The Omelet of A. MacLeish.” For about a week [in 1938] he couldn’t get up. Well, he was crushed, crushed. I once asked Edmund, “Why did you do this to poor old Archie?” He said, “Oh, he’s just an idiot, you know.” That’s what he said. He’s an idiot. He didn’t say he was hateful, awful, or—

D: He felt that MacLeish was watering down the standard of the poets whom he imitated, corrupting taste. But there was a meanness in that piece. Not Evelyn Waugh meanness, but intellectual meanness.

Berlin: He had meanness. He wasn't unmean. As a human being he was somewhat difficult. If you say somebody's difficult, what does that mean? Difficult is exactly what he was. And there was all this Punch and Judy stuff.

D: That was a sublimation of something?

Berlin: Difficult to say what. The Punch and Judy stuff, all that; party tricks; all that sort of magic stuff.

D: Did you have an impression of his aging in the later years?

Berlin: Yes, when I saw him in the 1960s there was something old, old, about him. Not senile but old.

D: He had supported himself as a professional literary man through the cultural changes of 50 years, and his private life before Elena was as wearing as it was intense.

Berlin: There was something heavy and slow and sort of uncomfortable about him. But uncomfortableness was one of Edmund's attributes. He was an uncomfortable man, uncomfortable with himself; and that's what caused the friction, and the friction caused the genius. He was always worried about whether he thought this or that was true or false, he was always rubbing something on something inside himself, and that produced the sparks. He was not bland; he was the opposite of being peaceful, Goethe-like, the Olympian sage, for whom everything flowed in a harmonious manner. He was disharmonious. It was difficult for him, life was difficult, and writing was difficult. But it was all worthwhile, because of the triumph. He was a very, very honorable figure whichever way you looked at it.

The Two Brazils

“We progress at night when the politicians sleep,” goes an old Brazilian saying. Today, after more than a decade of political and economic change, Brazil’s landless, its evangelicals, its indigenous peoples, and others have emerged into the daylight. Brazil’s future lies as much in their hands, our author writes, as in those of the politicians and bankers.

by *Kenneth Maxwell*

Only a year ago, Brazilians were full of confidence that their country was poised to surge into the 21st century, that perhaps it was finally on the road to becoming the great power many had long imagined it would be. In 1994, Finance Minister Fernando Henrique Cardoso, a former Marxist professor of sociology turned neoliberal reformer, had masterminded a sweeping currency reform—the Real Plan—which joined other liberalizing measures and thrust

Brazil, with the world’s eighth largest economy, into the forefront of the global trend toward open markets and free trade. Not only were Brazilians prospering but their decade-old democracy had found solid footing. Later in 1994, Cardoso was rewarded for his efforts as finance minister with the presidency, becoming Brazil’s second directly elected civilian chief executive since the military surrendered power in 1985.

Then came the global economic crisis, beginning with the currency collapses in





Rushing forward in “an avalanche of hope,” an army of the landless occupies a 205,000-acre latifundio north of Brasília in 1996.

Southeast Asia in 1997, escalating with the Russian defaults last August, and landing with a crash on Brazil shortly after. Having failed, despite its many other successes, to get its fiscal house in order, Brazil found itself dangerously dependent on infusions of foreign capital to finance its trade and government deficits, struggling to stay afloat even as nervous investors fled with their dollars.

Cardoso, who won a second term in October in the midst of the crisis, was forced to take drastic measures to cut gov-

ernment spending, increase taxes, and reduce indebtedness. In return, Brazil won a \$41.5 billion bailout orchestrated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—and the guarantee of more painful measures to come, as well as a recession that promises to be long and deep. Cardoso, who was, in his Marxist days, a high priest of dependency theory—the notion that the developed capitalist nations would forever hold the less developed economies in thrall—must have wondered if he had been so wrong after all.

Yet Brazil's decade of political and economic success has changed the country in certain irreversible ways. And the changes will, paradoxically, complicate its recovery. Prosperity, the opening up of political life, and the expansion of educational opportunities brought with them a deeper political engagement by the population, and the emergence of unions, political parties, and a variety of grassroots organizations. To a degree that is unprecedented in the country's history, Brazilians have found their political voice, and they have begun to rethink what it means to be Brazilian.

The IMF-mandated policies thus risk bringing about headlong confrontation between the Brazil of bankers and businessmen and a new Brazil of political and social activism. One thing is certain: the Brazilian government can no longer rule by dictate or from the top down, whatever it may have promised the IMF.

How successfully these two Brazils work out their collective future will be one of the most dramatic stories of coming months, and not only for Brazil. Failure in this South American giant will profoundly affect the reforms under way throughout Latin America as well as the assumptions on which the new international economic order has been founded. It is precisely for this reason that U.S. treasury secretary Robert Rubin declared that Brazil is "too big to be allowed to fail."

Brazil for many foreigners is still the land of the bossa nova and "The Girl from Ipanema," but Brazilians themselves are becoming irritated with their country's willful folkloric self-image as forever young, bronzed, and beach bound, oblivious to the past and giddily committed to a future as ephemeral as the country's torrid *telenovelas*. Antonio Carlos Jobim, author of that great lyrical celebration of Ipanema beach and the graceful passing beauty of its denizens, once said that Brazil is "not for beginners." And he was right.

Brazilians still want to have fun, to be sure, and no one is proposing the abolition of Carnival. Yet as Brazil has embraced

democracy over the past decade, bringing new voices into the political and social arenas, Brazilians are beginning to recognize that getting to the future involves understanding the past.

This new concern with history is reflected in the recent vogue for restoring colonial architecture—some of the most extraordinary examples in the Americas—which was once allowed to rot or was simply swept away to make room for modern buildings. In Bahia and São Luis in Maranhão, splendid baroque churches and 18th-century townhouses have been magnificently restored; old forts and ruins of Jesuit missions along the southern frontier have become popular tourist attractions. But these buildings are artifacts of the traditional Brazilian history, while the past that Brazil is rediscovering is replete with contradictions.

Brazil's transition to national independence in 1822, unlike that of its Spanish American neighbors, preserved great continuity in institutions—the military, the law, and administration. It was led, after all, by the eldest son of the Portuguese monarch, who promptly named himself Emperor Pedro I. Portuguese America, unlike its Spanish-speaking neighbors, also avoided fragmentation into numerous new republics. Independent Brazil emerged as a monarchy with its huge territory intact. The state as it developed was, as a consequence, highly centralizing, and the national mythology it spawned depicted the country as a product almost exclusively of the coastal Portuguese and the imperial inheritance.

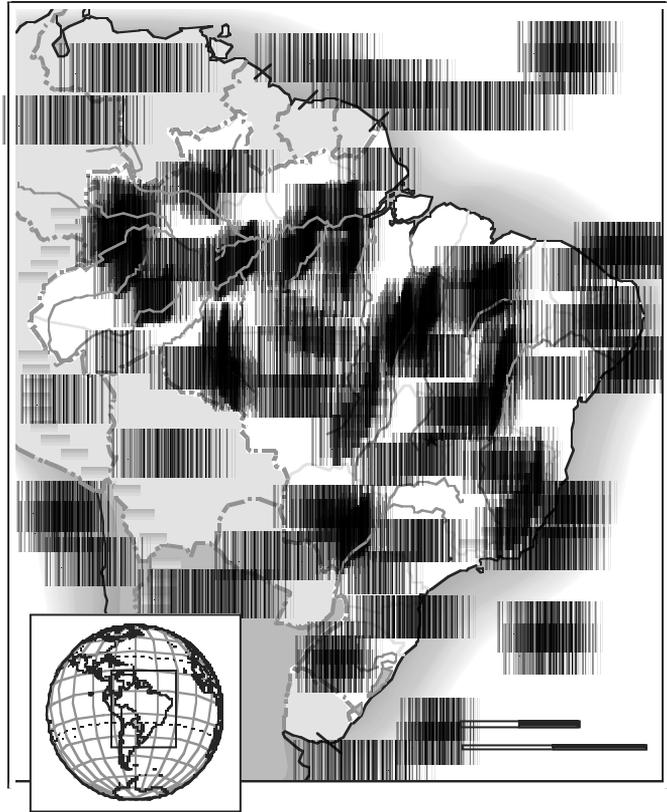
But today Brazilians are learning a new history. It brings into focus the unruly Brazil of the escaped slaves who held out for decades in the backlands of what is today the state of Alagoas against the Portuguese in the 17th century; the bloody uprisings in the Amazon, Pernambuco, and the southern borderlands of Rio Grande do Sul against the Brazilian empire in the early 19th century; and the extraordinary messianic communities of the semiarid interior of Bahia brutally sup-

pressed a century ago and immortalized by the great Brazilian essayist Euclides da Cunha in his *Rebellion in the Backlands*, and more recently by the Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa in his *War at the End of the World*. The historian Laura de Mello e Sousa calls this the Brazil of the “unclassified ones”—the majority of the Brazilian population, neither white nor black, neither slave master nor slave in origin, not landowners but squatters and small holders, not only Portuguese but Italians, Germans, Japanese, Arabs, and Jews, as well as mestizos, mulattos, Indians, and Africans, not only bankers but small entrepreneurs and shopkeepers, not just bishops but African *orixás* and Pentecostal pastors.

The recognition of the “unclassified ones” has been accompanied by the emergence of movements among the landless, the indigenous peoples, industrial workers, Protestants, and others. African Brazilians are perhaps the most important group now finding a political voice.*

For centuries, they retained a resilient pluralistic religious and cultural presence at the core of Brazilian society, but one barely recognized in the corridors of elite power until very recently. São Paulo elected its first black mayor,

Celso Pitta, in 1996, and President Cardoso brought Edson Arantes do Nascimento, universally known as Pelé, the great Brazilian soccer star, into his cabinet as minister of sport. The new vice governor of Rio de Janeiro, Benedita da Silva, is an African Brazilian born in a Rio favela (shantytown). As more Afro-Brazilians have moved into the middle class, black faces have also appeared more regularly in



advertisements and the press.

Brazil’s rediscovery of history challenges above all the peculiar legacy that has since the 18th century allowed the country’s rulers to graft the imperative of authoritarianism onto their vision of the future. It was this mindset that made the French positivists so attractive to the military officers who overthrew the monarchy in 1889, and to the generals who seized control in 1964. It is perfectly summed up in the motto emblazoned across Brazil’s national flag: *Ordem e Progresso* (Order and Progress). Democracy in Brazil has all too often been seen as the enemy of progress, the harbinger of anarchy, disunion, and backwardness.

*Racial self-definition is a complex matter in Brazil, where a very wide range of racial categories between black and white has traditionally been recognized. The count of “African Brazilians” varies from a high of 120 million, using a U.S. definition that includes all persons with some degree of African ancestry, to Brazil’s official 1991 census estimate, which lists only seven million blacks (*pretos*) and classifies 62 million Brazilians as browns (*pardos*). Essentially in stark contrast to the traditional U.S. classification, being black in Brazil means having no white ancestors. Brazil was the foremost recipient of African slaves in the Western Hemisphere.

That, it seems clear, will no longer do.

Brazil's transformation grows in part out of its recent prosperity. When I first came to Rio de Janeiro as a student in the mid-1960s, the country was still largely rural, with short life expectancy, large families, low per capita income, and a high illiteracy rate. By the 1990s, Brazil, with a population of more than 160 million, had become one of the world's largest economies, with a per capita income of more than \$5,000. Family size had dropped dramatically, from six children per family in the 1970s to 2.5 in the mid-1990s. It had become a largely urban country. Brazil's two million cars in 1970 had grown in number to 26 million, its TV sets from four million to 31 million. Infant mortality had decreased from 118 per 1,000 in 1970 to 17 per 1,000, and illiteracy has greatly diminished.

Today the Brazilian states of São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul, if they stood alone, would be numbered among the richest 45 nations on earth. The economy of Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost state, abutting Argentina and Uruguay, was built on European immigration and cattle. The state of São Paulo has a gross national product larger than Argentina's, and São Paulo City is a megapolis with a population of 15 million and a vibrant financial, cultural, and business life; the state-supported university of São Paulo is a world-class institution. Like several of Brazil's larger cities, São Paulo has a lively press; dailies such as the *Folha de São Paulo*, the grand old *Estado de São Paulo*, and the business-oriented *Gazeta Mercantil* are as articulate, critical, and influential as any quality newspaper in Europe or North America. Brazil also boasts one of the world's most successful television networks, TVGlobo, and one of its most aggressive publishing empires, Editora Abril, proprietor of the mass-circulation newsweekly *Veja*, which reaches more than four million readers, all of them full-fledged members of the emerging global consumer order.

A large segment of the population, perhaps 40 million people, however, remains in poverty, with incomes below \$50 a

month. Brazil's income disparities are among the worst in the world. The most impoverished 20 percent of Brazilians receive a mere two percent of the national wealth, while the richest 20 percent receive 60 percent. Festering shantytowns surround the large urban centers, and Rio's favelas are especially notorious for crime and violence. This is the Brazil of half-starved children playing outside makeshift shacks in dusty northeastern villages and smudge-faced urchins knocked out by glue sniffing, huddled together under benches in São Paulo's principal downtown squares. But extreme poverty is now concentrated in the semiarid Northeast of Brazil, where drought and disease have long been curses of biblical dimensions. Both were greatly aggravated in 1998 by the effects of El Niño. Brazilians are proud to call themselves a racial as well as a political democracy, and are irritated when scholars and activists point out that poverty is disproportionately concentrated among the Afro-Brazilian population. In fact, whites on average earn two-and-a-half times as much as blacks. As veteran Brazil watcher Ronald Schneider notes, out of 14,000 priests, 378 bishops and archbishops, and seven cardinals, the Brazilian Catholic Church has only 200 nonwhite priests. Similar disproportions can be seen in Brazil's diplomatic service and military officer corps.

Nevertheless, the poor have seen their lives improve over the past decade, with large numbers of people moving up from the bottom ranks of society into the emerging middle class. The credit for this change belongs to Cardoso's Real Plan, introduced in 1994 while he was finance minister under President Itamar Franco. Confronted with economic chaos and feverish inflation, Cardoso created a new currency, the real, linked to the U.S. dollar, with its value pegged to permit only minimal depreciation. Inflation plunged from more than 2000 percent annually to single digits, with instant tonic effects felt throughout the country.

Suddenly, as the currency stabilized, Brazilians had money to spend for refrigerators, televisions, and clothing. Analysts

looking at consumer trends over the past six years reckon that some 19 million people have moved from basic subsistence into the lower level of the Brazilian middle class, which today embraces some 58 million people. Those who remained poor benefited as well, finding more money in their pockets for meat, chicken, eggs, corn, and beans. Their income increased by 30 percent during 1995–96 alone.

In earlier decades, poverty pushed millions of Brazilians from the hinterlands into São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro and out into the frontier on the western fringes of the Amazon basin. During the 1990s, prosperity allowed many of the smaller cities in the interior of Brazil to flourish, attracting some five million mostly middle-class people searching for a better quality of life.

The spread of prosperity and population over the face of Brazil have made it both a more homogenous and a more complex society. For four-and-a-half centuries, most of Brazil's population remained around key seaports close to the zones where sugar, cotton, cacao, coffee, and other major export commodities are grown. Brazil's first historian, Friar Vicente do Salvador, writing in 1627, said that the Portuguese settlers and their African slaves "scratched at the seacoast like crabs." The first Europeans to penetrate the vast interior were intrepid missionaries, explorers, and ruthless Portuguese frontiersmen traveling up the Amazon River and the tributaries that run south into the La Plata basin. This huge geographical area, larger than the contiguous United States, remained for centuries a hollow frontier, incorporating vast unexplored territories and many thousands of indigenous peoples unknown to the Portuguese governors and viceroys who ruled until 1808, or to the Portuguese monarchs who held court in Rio de Janeiro between 1808 and 1821, or to the Brazilian emperors Pedro I and Pedro II, who succeeded them after the declaration of Brazil's independence from Portugal in 1822, or to the generals and civilian politicians who established the United States of Brazil in 1889.

Yet slowly and inexorably the hollow

frontier was filled in, as cattle ranchers moved inland from the coast and squatters established themselves between the plantation-dominated littoral and the backlands. These independent-minded mixed-race families lived largely outside the juridical formulas that elsewhere defined and contained both Portuguese masters and African slaves, but they helped root Brazilian society in the Brazilian landscape.

In the 18th century, the first great modern gold rush brought European settlers, slaves, and, belatedly, government, into the mountainous interior of what is today the state of Minas Gerais. Today the spectacular churches and mountain towns they constructed are among Brazil's most precious colonial heritage; here the magnificently carved figures of the Apostles by the crippled mulatto sculptor Aleijadinho stand as marvels of this age of extravagance and piety. In the 19th century, large-scale coffee bean plantations were developed in São Paulo and Paraná in the south, reviving the demand for African slaves. After the abolition of slavery in 1888, immigrant laborers poured in from Italy and southern



A street-level view of Brazil's mid-1990s prosperity in the southern city of Curitiba.

Germany, joined in the 1920s by newcomers from Japan. By the early 20th century, a cotton textile industry was established in São Paulo, augmented in the 1960s by steel and automobile industries, creating an industrial urban working class and a powerful business elite.

Both civilian and military rulers saw the development of the interior as the means to Brazil's future greatness. In the late 1950s, President Juscelino Kubitschek

forced through the extraordinary plans for the futuristic new capital and federal district of Brasília, set down like a spaceship on the largely uninhabited high plateau of Goiana in the center-west of the country. Modernistic bowls, towers, and upturned cups contained the Congress and its functionaries, dwarfed against a backdrop of enormous sky and red earth. Soon thereafter, the generals who ousted Kubitschek's successor, President João Goulart, and established one of Latin America's longest-lived military regimes (1964–85), embarked on a series of grandiose schemes to develop the Amazon. Ignoring the established river-based lifelines, they drove roads straight through the tropical rainforest and built huge dams to tame the Amazon's tributaries and flood the river plains, often with disastrous ecological consequences. The highways brought with them economic exploitation and its predictable companions, greedy speculators and corrupt and callous bureaucrats, as well as a plague of infectious diseases. The forced contact with the outside world was disastrous for the remaining 250,000 Brazilian Indians, the majority living in the Amazon forests. The long-isolated Yanomami were hard hit with malaria as 10,000 prospectors invaded their territory in the late 1980s.

The military regime also poured money into the expansion of higher education, substituting more pragmatic American approaches for the old French-influenced disciplines that had produced Cardoso and other scholars. But this only created a new generation enamored of democracy as well as technology. Purging and exiling Cardoso (who was seen as a dangerous Marxist despite the fact that he was the son and grandson of generals) and other professors from the University of São Paulo and other major institutions also had paradoxical consequences. It provoked U.S. foundations, notably the Ford Foundation, to invest heavily in a parallel system of private research centers in Brazil that would later provide a haven and political base for the democratic opposition.

Meanwhile, the exiles were welcomed on American campuses. Cardoso, who lived in Chile, and later in France,

became a visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford University, and spent two years at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, working closely with that wise and brilliant pragmatist, the veteran economist and proponent of reform by "muddling through," Albert O. Hirschman. When he returned to Brazil in 1970, Cardoso, like many of the other upper-middle-class exiles of his generation, had become thoroughly cosmopolitan, skeptical of Marxism, well connected in the wider world, and thoroughly knowledgeable about the workings of the U.S. political and economic systems.

Momentous changes were also taking place at the grassroots within Brazil. Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, trade unions that had been founded in the 1930s during the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas on an Italian fascist model as syndicates dependent on the state, shook off government control. Most formidable was the metalworkers' union in São Paulo. The unions nourished the emergence of a new Workers' Party (PT) in 1980 and a National Trade Union Confederation in 1983. Together they provided a base for the charismatic Luís Inácio da Silva, popularly known as Lula, who rose through union ranks from the shop floor and awakened hopes that he would become a Brazilian Lech Walesa. He has run three times unsuccessfully for the presidency, most recently in October 1998.

The Workers' Party thrives nevertheless, especially in the industrialized south of Brazil, and in the 1998 election gained control of the important governorship of Rio Grande do Sul with the election of PT candidate Olívio Dutra. But the organization of workers was not restricted to the industrial zones. Threatened by the encroachment of cattle ranchers and loggers, rubber tappers on the Amazon frontier began to mobilize in the 1980s to protect their livelihood. Like the metalworkers in São Paulo, these poor workmen produced a formidable grassroots leader from among their ranks, Chico Mendes. His rubber tappers' organization linked up

with Brazilian social activists and international environmental groups to pressure the Brazilian government for recognition of their grievances and to carve out ecological reserves to protect the forests on which their way of life depended. They also developed critical networks of international supporters in Europe and the United States who were able to pressure international lending agencies such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank into incorporating ecological concerns into their decisions about loans to Brazil.

The indigenous communities, facing a life-and-death struggle for survival as the outside world pressed in on their remaining refuges in the Amazon basin, also found a voice during the 1980s. With the support of international organizations such as the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Survival International, tribes such as the Kayapó and Xavante pressed for recognition and protection against the freelance gold prospectors who were invading their forests and polluting their rivers with deadly mercury. A Xavante chief, Maríó Jaruna was elected as federal deputy and Ailton Kremak of the Kayapó became well known in Brasília and among the international human rights networks.

While the hierarchy of the Catholic Church was divided on its approach to political activism, grassroots clergy strongly influenced by liberation theology provided organizational support to Brazil's many new reform movements. Protestant fundamentalists have also emerged as a force in the Brazilian social and religious landscape. Small, impeccable, white Pentecostal meeting houses now dot the landscape. The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, founded in 1977 by a Pentecostal pastor, Edir Macedo, claims more than 3.5 million members and receives more than \$700 million in annual donations. It owns Brazil's third largest TV network and 30 radio stations. As it is often said in Brazil: "Catholics opted for the poor; the poor opted for the evangelicals."

Many Protestant converts come from the lower levels of the new urban middle class. Protestant evangelicals practice a

faith of personal salvation and promote a frugal lifestyle emphasizing thrift and family. They are seen as a conservative force; at the local level, however, their organizations have quickly shifted to municipal activism, seeking improved water supplies and better services, which has propelled them increasingly into politics. The evangelicals have a caucus of 35 deputies in the Brazilian Congress, and an evangelical bishop in Rio de Janeiro, Carlos Rodrigues, received a huge vote in the recent congressional elections. The new governor of the state of Rio, Anthony Garotinho, is also an evangelical. Responding to the Evangelical challenge, the Catholic church in Brazil is now encouraging a powerful charismatic movement that is galvanizing many of the faithful in Brazil's cities. The charismatics, like the evangelicals, place a strong emphasis on family values, but they, like the Catholic hierarchy, are also critical of the harshness of Brazil's capitalist system.

Most threatening to Brazil's political elite and to its large rural landowners in particular has been the emergence of a powerful rural movement of the landless. Founded in Rio Grande do Sul in the mid-1980s, the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Movement of Landless Rural Workers, MST) now has some 500,000 members, including all sorts of people from the margins of Brazilian society: the unemployed, migrant agricultural workers, the illiterate, slum dwellers, all people the traditional Left believed it was impossible to organize, stimulated by Brazil's total failure for centuries to break the power of the great *latifúndios* and bring about any meaningful land distribution. Less than one percent of farms, all over 500 acres in dimension, account for 40 percent of all occupied farmlands in Brazil. The movement was also energized by the expulsion of many small holders from their plots, especially in Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná, and Santa Catarina, by the mechanization of large-scale soya and wheat production in the 1980s. The MST is now the largest and best-organized social movement in Latin America, with successful cooperatives, a Web site, and extensive

international contacts. Its members often take the law into their own hands, invading properties and setting up squatter settlements, sacking warehouses to obtain food, and challenging landowners. Almost as often they provoke violent reactions from *fazendeiros* (large landowners), local police, and hired gunmen.

What the MST seeks is access to land and the breakup of the large estates, many of which remain undeveloped and unproductive, or are held for tax purposes or to draw government subsidies. Its ideology is an eclectic mix of revolutionary socialism and Catholic activism, as befits an organization built in large part by itinerant priests. Its most prominent leader is an economist named João Pedro Stédile, who did post-graduate work in Mexico and takes inspiration from the Mexican Zapatistas. He argues that the Brazilian elite is too “subservient to foreign interests”—an obvious swipe at the IMF and the forces of global capitalism as well as the former *dependentista* now lodged in the futuristic presidential palace in Brasília.

Finally there is the Brazilian environmental movement, composed of some 800 organizations stirred into being by the uncontrolled destruction of the Amazon rain forest, ecological disasters in the grotesquely polluted chemical complex at Cubatão in São Paulo state, and rampant encroachment on the remnants of the once lush Atlantic forests.

In 1998 forest fires in the Amazon region, aggravated by the impact of El Niño, were the worst on record, but the Cardoso administration did little to respond until the extent of the catastrophe became difficult to hide. The devastating drought in the Northeast, another predictable consequence of El Niño, also received scant attention until famished peasants organized by the MST raided warehouses and occupied bank agencies and police stations. This finally caught the attention of the indifferent bureaucrats in the surreal world of Brasília, preoccupied with the purchase of expensive Oriental carpets for their offices so that “foreign visitors could be more elegantly received,” as a spokesman for the minister of communi-

cation explained to the *New York Times*. Not surprisingly, all these movements strike a raw chord with the “owners of power,” as the brilliant Brazilian lawyer and social critic Raymundo Faoro so aptly put it. Owing to the overseas support the environmental movement receives, the Brazilian military views it as a pawn of foreign interests, part of a thinly disguised effort by the United States to take the Amazon away from Brazil. The military intelligence network closely monitors the activities of the MST, and Cardoso’s ministers dismiss the movement as “enemies of modernity.” It was similar attitudes that a hundred years ago led to the repression and slaughter in the backlands so brilliantly immortalized by Euclides da Cunha and Vargas Llosa.

The great 20th-century Brazilian historian Sergio Buarque de Hollanda defined a Brazilian as a “cordial” individual, and Brazilians are like their president, people of great and infectious charm. But where politics and social conflicts meet, their country can be a very violent place. It has many martyrs to prove it, among them Chico Mendes, gunned down in 1988 by cattle ranchers threatened by his rubber tappers’ movement. More than a thousand labor leaders and grassroots peasant activists have been assassinated in Brazil since the mid-1980s. In much of the country the murderers of activists act with impunity. In November 1998, Miguel Pereira de Melo, the crusading Brazilian photojournalist, was killed by gunmen. He had recorded the 1996 massacre of landless peasants by military police and was about to testify at the trial of those officers.

The subtler obstacles to pluralism may prove the hardest to overcome. Reform will require changing an oligarchic style of politics and an entrenched bureaucracy that have both skillfully deflected challenges for centuries. Indeed, the deals made to bring about the transition from military to civilian rule during the 1980s guaranteed the persistence in power of many old-line politicians, including pre-eminently the powerful Bahia political boss, former state governor, and current president of the Senate, Antonio Carlos

Magalhães. ACM, as he is universally known, is a gregarious, tough, and single-minded political operator who proudly professes his admiration for Napoleon. Today he is more influential than ever, a pivotal figure in the coalition that supports President Cardoso—an odd but very Brazilian twist of fate since Cardoso was precisely the sort of upper-class intellectual that Magalhães and other power brokers under the military regimes of the past most distrusted.

The bosses and bureaucrats have plenty to protect. The welfare and pension system, for example, does virtually nothing for the poorer workers but vastly benefits state functionaries. In 1996, Brazil had 29 four-star generals on active duty and 5,000 people drawing generous pension checks at the four-star level, including far-flung relatives of dead and retired officers.

Brazil's formal political structure also makes reform excruciatingly difficult. It has 27 state governors and more than 5,500 municipal mayors (*prefeitos*), many of whom have run up massive deficits which by tradition the federal government is expected to cover. The 1988 constitution obliges the central government to transfer a large share of tax revenues to the state governments and municipalities but without a commensurate shift of responsibility for government programs. The idea was to devolve power and encourage democracy. The result was to strengthen parochial interests and the local political bosses. These problems were aggravated by the Real Plan's success,

since, during the years of high inflation, government deficits had miraculously disappeared as delayed payments wiped out obligations. But after 1994 such flimflams no longer worked, as money retained its value. The opening of the economy and the stabilization of the currency had some perverse effects as well. Many industrial workers were displaced as imports flooded the consumer market. Not only did the service sector expand, but many industrial workers were forced into the informal sector. Subsequently, unemployment increased dramatically.

Cardoso hoped to pass a half-dozen ambitious reform measures during his first term—from cutting public payrolls to rewriting tax laws—and, not surprisingly, all fell victim to constant dilution and delays. His major success, altering the constitution to allow for his own re-election, was bought at the high cost of also allowing state and local political bosses to run for re-election. They promptly opened the spending spigots to ensure victory at the polls, swelling public-sector debt to more than \$300 billion in early 1998 and leaving Brazil pitifully vulnerable when the international crisis hit.

President Cardoso will find it difficult to deliver on his promises to the IMF. Arrayed against him will be both the old corporatist interests, eager to protect the past and their own privileges, and the newly assertive groups such as the MST, which disagree with the path chosen for the future.

Cardoso's popularity, though great enough to secure him a clear majority in



The ideological divisions in President Cardoso's political coalition were the target of this Brazilian cartoon last year. Mayor Celso Pitta of São Paulo is second from the left; Antonio Carlos Magalhães, or "ACM," is second from the right.

last October's election, is based almost entirely on the success of the Real Plan. He views himself as a man of the Center-Left, an adherent of the new "third way" of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, but is perceived by the public as being a political leader decisively of the Center-Right, the friend of bankers, industrialists, civil servants, and politicians rather than workers and the landless. As the realities of IMF-imposed austerity begin to hit home—Brazil's economy was already shrinking by the end of 1998—Cardoso may find his popular support waning. He has consciously steered away from the heady rhetoric of populism, avoided demagoguery, and preferred persuasion and compromise to executive decree, but the next year may well test his resolve.

Lula lost the 1998 election in part because he chose to attack the Real Plan. But the 1998 elections also saw the emergence of middle-class Workers' Party leaders who spoke a language closer to that of the new social democrats of Europe, consciously avoiding the radical rhetoric of the shop floor. These Workers' Party representatives in Congress are likely to provide solid opposition to Cardoso's IMF-inspired policies over the next year. The center-left political allies within Cardoso's own political family also risk being alienated by his orthodox economic retrenchment,

which will cut deeply into the social programs Brazil so desperately needs. Nor will the president find support from powerful governors among whom he will find fewer friends than during his first term, especially since they will be forced to bear the brunt of the budget cuts. Particularly troublesome will be the newly elected governor of the important state of Minas Gerais, the former president Itamar Franco, under whom, as finance minister, Cardoso implemented the Real Plan. The erratic Franco is still deeply resentful that Cardoso and not he got all the credit. Nor will the protests of landless rural workers go away. Stédile in particular makes no secret of his desire to "finish off the neoliberal model."

It is ironic that in the charged international economic climate in which Fernando Henrique Cardoso begins his second term as president, the protection of the Real Plan, by plunging Brazil into recession, now poses the greatest threat to the benefits it brought to many Brazilians. Yet posing one of the greatest challenges to the IMF-mandated program to satisfy the international markets are groups and forces within Brazil that barely existed before political and economic liberalization began a decade ago. The travails of the Brazilian economy—no matter where they lead—should not obscure the significant success story the rise of these new voices represents.

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Hyperdemocracy

American politics is more open and inclusive than ever. News about politics and government endlessly cascades from the media, and public opinion is incessantly sounded and courted. Yet Americans seem more and more alienated from the political process. Could it be that we have too much democracy?

by Hugh Hecló

At the heart of American politics is a belief in self-government—the democratic faith that through argument, deliberation, and persuasion people are capable, in the long run, of discovering and promoting their common good. If such a faith sounds naive, consider the alternatives: rule by the most powerful, or rule by “experts,” insiders, or whoever is exalted enough to tell other people what to do. Americans have chosen a very different approach—government by discussion—and it is at the very foundation of America’s political institutions and procedures.

But American politics has been transformed in recent decades. The political system has become sensitive—indeed, hypersensitive—to the public’s opinions and anxieties. The traditional parties and interest groups, as well as the Constitution, have been pushed into the background, as polls, the media, and ideological activists and advocacy groups have moved to the forefront. American democracy is more open and inclusive than ever before, and citizens have unprecedented access to information about the workings of their government and the issues before it. Yet instead of becoming more engaged in democratic politics, the public has grown alienated from it. Americans today typically report feeling like victims of the political system, like harried subjects more than proud citizens.

If the twin hallmarks of America’s new “hyperdemocracy” are democratization and distrust, a question arises: can a republic so constituted long endure?

From the beginning of the republic, American politics has been on a course toward greater democracy. To be sure, there have been zigs and zags along the way, as with the imposition of segregation after the end of slavery. But the inexorable movement has been to expand the meaning of “we, the people” to encompass *all* the people.

Within a generation of the Constitution’s ratification, property qualifications for white male electors began to be dismantled. In the late 19th century, women began to gain the vote at the state level, and in 1920, with the 19th Amendment, they obtained full electoral equality with men. Constitutional mechanisms that the Framers had employed to refine public participation, keeping the demos at a safe distance from the government—devices such as the Electoral College and the indirect election of senators—faded into insignificance or were removed. Then, after the midpoint of the 20th century, came the culmination of formal political inclusiveness, with the national guarantee of voting rights for black Americans and young adults, and the judicial embrace of the principle of “one person, one vote.”

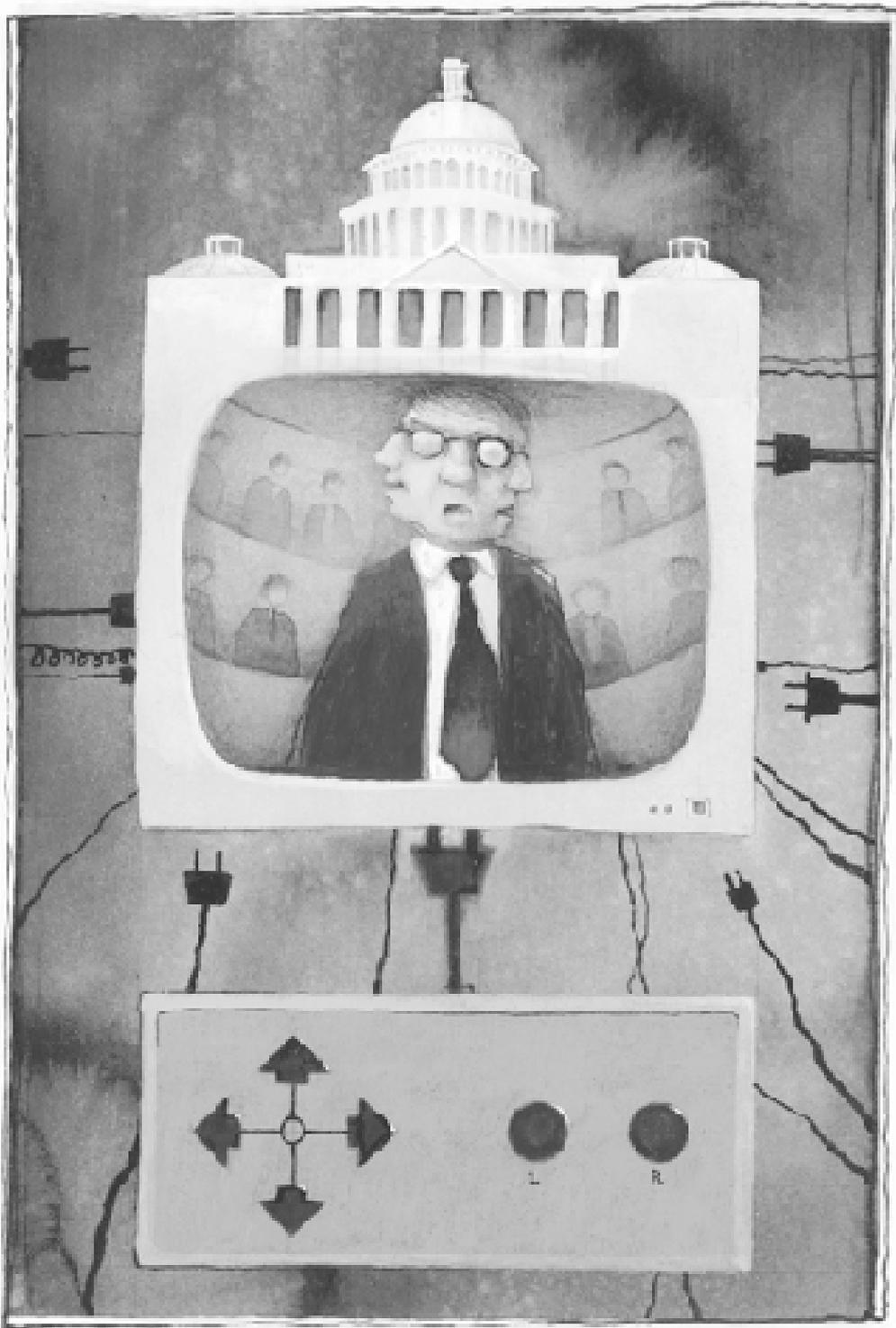


ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW TRUEMAN

Thus, over the little more than two centuries of its existence, the United States has gone from a time when less than one in 20 Americans had a voice on such a momentous issue as the ratification of the Constitution to today's mass democracy, in

which virtually any adult who is not deranged or in prison can register and vote (though a declining proportion of eligible Americans take the trouble to do so).

But even that is not the full extent of the massive democratization of American pol-

itics. The judiciary—the least democratic branch of government—has also grown more inclusive in recent decades. New legislation and more activist judges have made the courts far more accessible. Restrictions have been relaxed on who can initiate legal action, lawsuits have been more readily permitted in behalf of entire classes of people, and successful plaintiffs have been allowed to recover their legal expenses from their defeated adversaries. All these actions have opened the doors of the judicial process wider to organized advocacy groups, such as environmentalists and consumer crusaders. Rules of administrative law that once mainly protected business from government have been broadened to let such groups influence the courts' administrative decisions.

Since the tumultuous 1960s, more and more Americans have banded together in movements of all sorts and sizes. In the mid-1950s, the only contemporary “movement” of which the average citizen was likely to be aware was the communist one (whose domestic influence had been much exaggerated by the demagogic senator Joseph R. McCarthy). Two decades later, however, a multitude of movements were vying for the public's attention, including drives for civil rights, women's rights, the environment, consumers, farm workers, welfare rights, and abortion rights, to name a few. Of all the interest groups with headquarters in Washington today, roughly 70 percent have appeared since 1960. With government now touching virtually every aspect of Americans' lives, a huge, complex, and diverse array of organized advocacy groups have sprung up around it. America has had agitational groups before, but never anything like this.

The civil rights movement of the 1940s and '50s was a prototype of many of the other movements that subsequently came into being. These often began as rather loose gatherings of

enthusiasts for particular causes; gradually, the crusaders became more organized and more media savvy—and a semipermanent lobbying presence. As advocacy groups multiplied, they contributed to a growing consciousness of, and preoccupation with, public policy. Semidormant groups such as the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society, noticing the aggressive activities of such upstarts as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, awakened from their slumber and became actively involved with national issues. The new “public interest” lobbies, working for the environment or consumers or clean government, not only roused competitors into action but also stirred the affected entrenched interests into opposition. Advances in communications technology, such as faxing and e-mail, facilitated mobilization of the like-minded. Ambitious government initiatives (such as the Clinton health care plan) to deal comprehensively with a problem sometimes set previously harmonious groups (hospitals, doctors, insurers) against one another.

In the new, politically charged environment, activists abound, but in their crusading zeal, they are very different from average citizens. The activists are seldom satisfied with moderate, nondoctrinaire solutions to public problems—just the sort of solutions that ordinary Americans tend to favor. The arena in which public policy is made today is filled with activists and groups pursuing their own ideological agendas. These far from disinterested groups include many supposedly nonpartisan think tanks and policy institutes, as well as a host of self-proclaimed “defense funds,” “coalitions,” “action groups,” “forums,” and “networks.” To the advocates behind such banners, reaching a settlement on a particular issue is often far less important than “framing the issue,” “setting the agenda,” or “sending messages.” Indeed, since the long-range settlement of an

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issue would, in effect, render it useless as a weapon, that may well be the last thing the advocates want.

Earlier in this century, it was possible to do a good deal of policymaking behind the scenes, with relatively little publicity being given to the people or the processes involved. Richard E. Neustadt's classic *Presidential Power* (1960), for example, portrayed a relatively insulated world of Washington bargaining. Public opinion remained a distant force, a "prestige" factor, changing only slowly and only occasionally of indirect use to the men—and they were almost always men—inside the "Washington community" who were arguing among themselves and determining public policy. Today, that world has vanished. Publicity, exposure, investigation, revelation, and campaigning for policies through the media have become the norm. This is true whether the policy involves health care or gun control or even impeachment of a president.

The insistence on greater exposure and participatory openness in the political environment traces back, once again, to the turbulent events of the 1960s and early '70s—to Vietnam and Watergate. After the resignation of President Richard Nixon, the most sustained and comprehensive effort at ethics reform and public disclosure in American history took place. In Congress, publicly recorded votes, open committee meetings, televised debates, and more democratic procedures became the order of the day. Throughout government, new freedom of information laws, mandating public disclosure and public hearings, were put into place.

Informal forces for openness have been even more influential. Exposés of real or imagined abuses have become a staple of TV journalism, while "interpretive" reporting has become standard in newspaper journalism. Reporters now routinely seek to unmask the "real" meaning of events by portraying them as attempts by one side or another to gain political advantage.

The trend toward "democratic" open-

ness has also been aided by the advances in communications technology. With TV minicams, video recorders, portable audio recorders, cell phones, photocopiers, faxes, and the Internet all in widespread use, it has become virtually impossible for political leaders to limit criticism by monopolizing information.

Obviously, the new openness is both good and bad. It offers access to voices that would not otherwise be heard, and it encourages exposure of political failures and wrongdoing. But it also promotes grandstanding, needless disputation, and endless delay. Perhaps worst of all, it creates in the American public a pervasive sense of contentiousness, mistrust, and even outright viciousness.

This is not to urge a return to policymaking behind closed doors. But it is to put the gains from openness in perspective by recognizing the drawbacks—and to acknowledge the frustrations that now are endemic to American politics. In one policy area after another in recent decades, large coalitions have disintegrated and been supplanted by multitudes of small groups, contentiously doing battle with one another. In the public arena today, there are many voices, but few leaders able to "deliver" large blocs of supporters and, therefore, to bargain quietly among themselves to hammer out agreements. Party leaders can no longer rely on "their" voters, since Americans do not have the same party loyalty they once did. In hyperdemocracy, it seems, openness prevails at every turn.

Information about politics and public affairs now flows continuously into the public forum. *All news, all the time.* As a result, individuals and groups must make ever more frenetic efforts to be heard above the din—and must reduce their thoughts to shouted messages.

Americans today are informed more rapidly about more subjects than ever before. But the complexity of public problems usually gets lost in the dramatic factoids and disconnected commentaries. Instead of knowledge about public affairs, Americans acquire a superficial knowingness.

Sixty years ago, broadcast radio news programs provided virtually no reliable information about many vital national conditions, such as crime, poverty, educational performance, and illegitimacy rates, to mention a few. Today, thanks to technological advances, such information is rapidly gathered and universally disseminated. But data seldom speak loudly for themselves, and often are easily overwhelmed by drama, slogans, and images.

During the run-up to the 1992 election, for instance, the official data on the economy were mixed, with inflation and interest rates low and the unemployment rate rising, albeit, by historical standards, only moderately. This mixed assessment of the economy's condition was no match for the more dramatic news stories telling of individual Americans who had lost their jobs. Throughout the 1992 economic recovery, media coverage of the economy was overwhelmingly negative, as was the public perception of economic trends and George Bush's related performance as president.

While modern media deluge the public with information, they give the impression of national problems as always unresolved, and their frequent exposés suggest that official venality is largely to blame. Even with the best of intentions, the exposé approach to policy issues can be quite misleading. It plays to short attention spans, short-term reactions, and the inevitable human demand for simplified dramatics. Media attention typically lurches from one "hot" topic to another, stressing in each case only one side of the issue, be it positive or negative, evoking enthusiasm or fear. Even though Cable Network News offers news around the clock, CNN stories average only about three minutes each, while the typical stories on the three major broadcast networks' nightly newscasts are even shorter.

In the past, policymakers usually had time to deliberate before the public weighed in with its opinions. That did not guarantee wise decisions, but it at least encouraged thoughtful ones.

Today, however, technology has reduced the time for deliberation. Call-in talk shows register public responses even as major events unfold, and the Internet gives anyone with a computer and a modem minute-by-minute access to pending legislative committee agendas and congressmen's voting positions, as well as e-mail facilities and bulletin boards. Computer-enhanced call-in campaigns to policymakers are common, as are fax campaigns by interest groups seeking to give the purported "popular" reaction to decisions or events. On hot issues, decision-making now often has an "on-line" quality.

Competing for attention, modern media often associate immediacy with importance, and intensity with seriousness. A dull congressional vote, agency announcement, or international agreement may represent important change in the world, but it holds little attraction for the media next to a plane crash or a public clash of personalities. As the current media vernacular puts it, "If it doesn't bleed, it doesn't lead." Consequently, information about public policy choices tends to be conveyed in the form of human interest "story lines" involving dramatic conflict, visual imagery, and compelling hopes and fears. This may help to expose corruption and draw attention to significant social problems, but it also tends to create phony conflicts and distorted perceptions. Even media-sponsored policy debates often merely provide, in place of a one-sided presentation of an issue, two one-sided presentations, albeit from opposite sides. In the electronic talk show of democracy, those citizens in the middle who see merits and demerits on both sides of an issue tend to be systematically excluded.

We, of course, are complicit with the media in all this. Each of us has a limited attention span, a desire to respond quickly if that makes our voice more likely to be heard, and an inclination to favor dramatic entertainment over substantive information. But today's communication technology enlarges these

natural individual proclivities and projects them onto public thinking in society as a whole. In the end, what is typically transmitted by our communication media is not so much information as such but rather feelings—whether of sorrow, shock, joy, or fear. The social order is experienced vicariously through the mass media as a gnawing daily presence, an unending succession of arguments never settled, about social problems never resolved.

Alongside innovations in communication technology, there have also been remarkable developments in “political technologies”—sophisticated techniques for studying, manufacturing, organizing, and manipulating public opinion to produce political support for candidates and causes. The techniques are by no means foolproof; often, deployed in competition, they cancel each other out. Nevertheless, they have a cumulative impact on the whole political process, giving it a far more contrived quality than it had until as recently as the 1950s. Indeed, scientific polling—which has been a prominent part of public life since the 1960s—proved to be the midwife of hyperdemocracy.

While polling techniques have advanced considerably in recent decades, the major news organizations rarely use them to examine policy issues in any significant depth. Most of their surveys are done instead with the idea of generating “news” stories about the popularity or unpopularity of particular viewpoints and personalities. The questions asked are usually too simple to elicit anything more than “off-the-top-of-the-head” opinions.

Meanwhile, politicians and advocacy groups engage in ceaseless private polling, using their surveys to plan political strategy, design media campaigns, or target fundraising. With the aid of polls and focus groups, public figures often are able to take inoffensive, usually vacuous, stands on controversial topics.

It was but a short step from polling to find out what the public thinks to political technologies to tell the public what it wants to hear. Since the 1950s, when

politicians and “advertising men” first discovered each other, specialized political consultant services have arisen to cover every imaginable point of contact between leaders and led. These services, in all their jargon-ridden splendor, now include survey research, strategic planning, direct marketing, image management, media materials production, “media buying,” event management, targeted “grassroots” mobilization, and opposition research. (Full-service “oppo firms” are currently the fastest-growing segment of the consultant industry.) And then there are the extensive fundraising services needed to pay for all the others. The 15 most expensive Senate campaigns in 1994 spent 70 percent of their funds on the services of consultants.

With electoral politics coming to resemble a political arms race, consultants have succeeded in turning what once was seasonal work into permanent employment, using their arts of continued talk not only to win elections but to push policies on issues such as tax reform and health care. As First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton observed, “You have to run a campaign for policy just like you do for elections.” The failure of her drive for health care reform did not alter that. Today, hundreds of permanent policy campaigns are going on continually in this country. This is the context in which policymaking now takes place.

For the making of public policy, hyperdemocracy presents three general problems. *Policy debate occurs without deliberation. Public mobilization occurs without a public. And the public tends to distrust everything that is said.* These are hardly minor defects in our government-by-discussion.

The political environment of hyperdemocracy systematically discourages policy arguments that are substantive and responsive to competing ones. This is because good policy argumentation is bad political management. The central insight of professional political management was expressed in 1967 in a strategy memo by Raymond K. Price, a Nixon adviser who was seeking to develop a “new Nixon”:

It's not what's *there* that counts, it's what's projected—and carrying it one step further, it's not what *he* projects but rather what the voter receives. It's not the man we have to change, but rather the *received impression*. Reason requires a high degree of discipline, of concentration. . . . Impression can envelop [the voter], invite him in, without making any intellectual demand. [Italics in original]

In the media battle over public impressions, those who seek to educate the voters by providing information, or to answer opponents' criticisms, usually lose out to those who "frame" issues and images, shift focus and counterattack, avoid admissions of ignorance or uncertainty, and exaggerate conflict over policy for dramatic impact. These strategies exploit the modern media's appeal to our short attention spans, quick responses, and appetite for drama.

Winning policy debates in the world of consultant politics and hyperdemocracy is defined as coming out on top in a series of disconnected, adversarial contests, in which results are measured by vote percentages and by how well each side "moves the [poll] numbers." Doing whatever it takes to win on these terms has become normal practice, not because consultants and their clients are bad people, but because all participants recognize that that is the principal standard by which they will be judged and rewarded. However, from the point of view of the average citizen, the likely result is a general atmosphere of contentiousness, without contending arguments about policy problems moving, in a rational way, any closer to resolution.

The politics of advocacy groups shows a similar pattern. Policy disputes are likely to begin not with good-faith bargaining in a search for agreement but with confrontation. Adversaries, since they are not backing the advocates' cause, are presumed to be enemies. And since the leaders of advocacy groups need dramatic, easily under-

stood threats to the cause in order to raise funds and mobilize supporters, they are very careful to avoid any "sell-out," to the point where policy activists often refuse to agree with their adversaries even when they really do agree. For this reason, much of what passes for policy debate involving advocacy groups actually has little or nothing to do with making policy, in the sense of finding a settled course of public action with which people can live. The "debate" instead becomes a forum for ideological crusades—confronting power with power, fundraisers with fundraisers, media campaigns with media campaigns. Policy debates on welfare reform, affirmative action, foreign trade, abortion, crime, business regulation, and environmental crises are rich in examples of this phenomenon of debate without deliberation. Honest skepticism and moderated thinking get pushed to the sidelines.

The overall result is to give the public a distorted picture of the underlying realities. The policy experts are perceived to be in much greater disagreement, and to be far more contentious, than they usually are when the cameras and microphones are turned off. Sudden, dramatic actions are made to seem more important—and the long-term consequences of chronic problems less important—than, more often than not, they really are. And what has been aptly called a culture of complaint emerges stronger than ever from policy debates in which seemingly dramatic conflicts never really settle anything or lead anywhere.

The public in America's hyperdemocracy is at once better known and more remote than ever before. Polling and other technologies now make it possible for politicians, consultants, and the media to "know" the public without having any true political relationship with it. Images are relentlessly bombarded at the faceless consumers of the mass media. In daily news "sound bites," "horse race" stories, and political ads, the public is courted but not engaged—asked to make a kind of passive consumer purchase but not any larger, more active political commitment.

Meanwhile, mobilization of selected segments of the electorate takes place. Instead of trying to create coalitions and mobilize the general public, consultants and politicians break the public down into various narrow demographic subgroups and target their resources on those already inclined in their favor. Computer-generated lists of potential supporters, profiled by demographic, consumer, and political characteristics, can be compiled, personalized mailings sent out, and a database of the like-minded developed for future use. In hyperdemocracy, this sort of political mobilization appears to be the most effective way to harvest funds, drive up poll numbers, and get supporters to vote—to do everything, in short, except mobilize *the public*, which includes too many ordinary folk who are not true believers and so, as one leading consultant put it, “are not profitable to work.” The result of all this, as Harvard University political scientist Morris Fiorina has observed, “is unnecessary conflict and animosity, delay and gridlock, and a public life that seems to be run by wackos.”

No wonder the public at large now looks upon politics and government with deepening distrust. To be sure, democracy and distrust have gone hand in hand from the start of the republic. The colonists who transformed themselves into American citizens created an unprecedented form of popular government and looked to it to secure their rights and actively legislate for the public good. Yet, at the same time, they were deeply suspicious of government’s power to subvert their liberties.

Today, however, this venerable ambivalence toward government has become dangerously unbalanced. Although Americans remain strongly attached to the symbols of their constitutional regime, and, apparently, to their basic form of government and the values on which it was founded, they seem in recent decades to have let skepticism toward authority devolve into cynicism toward all politics and government. To doubt and question public authority is a time-honored

American tradition. Always to expect the worst of it is not.

Cynical views of government have undoubtedly been encouraged by national leaders’ poor performance in office. Watergate and Vietnam, for example, were used for years as shorthand explanations for failures of leadership. But distrust is at least as great among younger generations who know of these events only through history books. Changing party control of the White House in 1992 and then Congress in 1994 appears to have done nothing to dispel public distrust and cynicism. And President Bill Clinton’s admitted misbehavior and prolonged prevarications about it have hardly improved the situation. If anything, the public has come to be more or less uniformly distrustful of whatever is being done in government by whoever is doing it.

At all levels of government, the political culture of hyperdemocracy encourages citizens to behave like spoiled children, demanding that government “meet my needs,” and alternating between sullen withdrawal and boisterous whining. And like angry children who nonetheless never doubt that their mother will always be there to ultimately set things right, Americans—at the same time that they exhibit an almost pathological cynicism about the political processes by which they govern themselves—generally express immense, not to say blind, faith in their nation’s future and in its standing as a democratic model for the world. In short, they naively trust in the ultimate unimportance of their distrust—that when things get bad enough, the system somehow will automatically right itself, presumably through the efforts of other people, who do not share their cynicism. But the truth is that the ills of hyperdemocracy are not self-limiting or self-correcting. Things *can* keep going from bad to worse. And as concerns the quality of the public discussion that is so basic to democracy, things have been getting worse for some time now.

What is to be done? It seems to me that there are two possible courses. One is the apparently logical but actually impractical solution of curbing the “exces-

sive” democratization that has taken place. We might try to restore some of the forms of indirect democracy, and thus erect firewalls between the governing institutions and mass opinion. For example, as keeper of its own rules, Congress could reduce the number of recorded votes, turn off the TV cameras, and return to routinely excluding the public from committee meetings. Whatever the merits of doing all this might be, however, it would be completely at odds with the whole spirit of the times. Such measures would be attacked as “elitist” and “antidemocratic”—and even if taken, they would soon be reversed. In short, it almost certainly isn’t going to happen. One may as well propose returning to the indirect election of senators or replacing presidential primary elections with conclaves of the Electoral College.

The second possible course, and the more realistic one, I believe, is to try to cure the ills of hyperdemocracy with more genuine democracy. Historically, democracy has been continually redefined—and it hasn’t always been easy. It took acts of political creativity in the 19th century to produce the legislative structures, budget processes, political parties, and interest groups that Americans soon took for granted. It will require at least as much political creativity today to counteract hyperdemocracy’s pathogenic side effects while preserving its benefits.

We must create new arrangements that will make it safer for those who would lead us to tell the truth as they see it, and make it easier for us—who would be citizens—to hear and act on competing truth claims in a well-informed way.

First, we need to make some changes in

the media. Mere admonitions to media folk to do better will not suffice. We need to make some *institutional* changes. In particular, we need to turn the Public Broadcasting Service, which is now almost three decades old, into a public service telecommunications system geared to the needs of *citizens*, not just consumers of information and images. I have in mind a system at the national, state, and local levels that would integrate public television and radio with live-coverage public affairs channels, local public-access cable channels, interactive discussion forums, high-quality public affairs databases, and other on-line services relevant to public deliberation. The mission would be to offer timely, reliable information relevant to us as citizens, and nonpartisan forums for sustained public discussion of this mountain of information. Political candidates should be given free airtime,

to spare them the degrading, distracting, and potentially corrupting need to go around begging for funds in order to be able to address the public via the media. Whatever one’s philosophical view of public financing of elections, the real question, ultimately, is not whether, but how, the telecommunications revolution

that is under way today is going to affect America’s politics. If this is left solely to the mercies of commercial incentives, hyperdemocracy in the future promises to be even more grotesque than it is today.

Next on my agenda for reform is an item that is already being implemented in some places. It’s called “civic journalism” or “public journalism,” and it seeks to go beyond traditional reporting to get both journalists and their audiences more engaged as citizens. Instead of being content with just reporting incidents of crime as they occur, for



instance, newspapers and television stations that engage in civic journalism typically work together to examine the neighborhood crime problem in depth and to develop a public “conversation” about it. In civic journalism, it is recognized that journalists and news organizations have civic responsibilities too, and should not just be serving up disillusioning news stories for readers or viewers to passively consume.

Closely related to civic journalism is the need to improve the way we usually gauge public opinion. Instead of conducting superficial polls gathering snap reactions to simplistic questions—or, even worse, taking the often extreme ravings of isolated crank callers to radio or TV phone-in shows as representative of public opinion—the news media and allied institutions need to make serious efforts to probe public thinking. In so-called deliberative polling, for example, survey researchers explore what representative samples of citizens think about particular issues when given unbiased information and adequate time to discuss and absorb it. Another approach to plumbing public opinion—already taken by some community groups—is to hold “national issue forums,” at which citizens try to work their way through the hard choices often involved in deciding on public policy. Since efforts to make deeper soundings of what the public really thinks are not likely to be prompted by commercial motives, support from foundations and other nonprofit organizations would be needed. To tame hyperdemocracy, we must drastically reduce the influence of public opinion at its shallowest, and the way to do that is to pay a lot more attention to public opinion at its most thoughtful.

Finally, I urge the importance of civic education. If we are to eliminate the ills of hyperdemocracy, people must want to behave like citizens. This is not “natural” behavior; it must be taught and learned. For schools, of course, it is far easier to go along with the larger culture and teach youths to have self-esteem and insist upon their rights. Civic education, by contrast, links rights to responsibilities, and teaches youths to listen as well as to speak, and to work together with others to solve mutual public problems.

To bring our raucous hyperdemocracy under control, we need not retreat from its openness, inclusiveness, or dependence on modern media technology. But we must work at organizing the talk of democracy in ways that make it better—more honest, more deliberative. Today, interest groups and political activists at the extremes are heard the most because they shout the loudest. They do not want a more genuinely democratic process of making public policy. They want to own the policy answers. To overcome their influence, we must find ways of engaging the informed and active consent of a much broader public—a citizen public that is truer to the vision of self-government than a consumer public can ever be. In the end, I believe, we must heed the advice given by “a parting friend” of the nation just over two centuries ago. Laying down his public duties for the final time, George Washington urged those who came after him to remember that “in proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion be enlightened.” This was never more essential than it is today.

EUDORA WELTY

The Necessary Optimist

Eudora Welty's hard-earned comic vision makes her a rare and valuable presence in the American literary procession. Yet her standing as a modern classic should not divert us from the rewards of reading her closely.

by Jay Tolson

Last year was in many ways the best and worst of years for Eudora Welty. Not only did more than the usual number of tributes come her way, all richly deserved for a career of astonishing literary achievement; more pointedly, proof of her achievement—five novels, four collections of short stories (and two previously uncollected stories), nine essays, and a memoir—was brought together in two handsome volumes in the Library of America series, an honor tantamount to canonization and so far accorded no other living American writer.

But the year also had its lows, not the least being the poor health that has kept the 87-year-old writer less “locally underfoot” in her native Jackson, Mississippi, than she ever imagined being. For someone who has derived so much inspiration from the lifeline of gossip, house-bound immobility resulting from advanced arthritis and osteoporosis has been a hard blow—almost as hard as the abandonment of writing gradually forced upon her by those same afflictions.

There were blows of a literary nature as well. Almost inexplicably, none of Welty's works appeared on a curiously assembled (but widely discussed) list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th cen-

tury drawn up last summer by the board of the Modern Library. Although the list was conspicuously short on women writers in general, the omission of Welty prompted at least a few howls of protest and even a defensive explanation from one of the panelists: Welty was more a short story writer than a novelist. That defense might have seemed plausible if such mediocre works as James Dickey's *Deliverance* and Carson McCullers's *Heart is a Lonely Hunter* hadn't edged out any one of at least three novels by Welty that can more legitimately lay claim to distinction: *Delta Wedding* (1946), *Losing Battles* (1970), and *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972).

Lit biz is not literature, of course, but even accounting for lit biz standards and the chromosomal bias of the mostly male panel, the slight seemed to hint at troubles ahead as far as Welty's literary reputation is concerned. A recent *New Yorker* article by Claudia Roth Pierpont suggests that Welty has already “entered the national pantheon as a kind of favorite literary aunt—a living exemplar of the best that a quaint and disappearing Southern society still has to offer.” If this deftly condescending characterization is true, Welty is likely to be remembered as the endearing, widely loved spinster writer of Jackson, who,



Eudora Welty (1988), by Mildred Nungester Wolfe

remaining in her mother's house, turned out a few remarkable stories, rich in regional dialect and freakish characters, but never attained her artistic majority. Pierpont even goes so far as to conclude that Welty ceased being an "intrepid explorer" and became "a perfect lady—a nearly Petrified Woman—with eyes averted and mouth set in a smile."

Yes, to be sure, there were those novels. But isn't there something a little daunting and unapproachable about them, something decidedly literary in an

almost Jamesian sense? Such demurrals are increasingly common, even among some of Welty's admirers. And there we have it: on one hand, cuddly and dear, virtually a state monument, with libraries named after her and even a Mississippi state holiday declared in her honor in 1973; on the other hand, too difficult, too obscure, too literary. It would be hard to concoct a better recipe for oblivion.

This is an odd fate, to say the least, for a writer who was until recently a lively presence on the American literary scene. Though never "easy" and sometimes risk-

ing inclusion in that faintly damning category of “writer’s writer,” Welty, in her long creative run—roughly from the late 1930s through the early 1970s—acquired a sizable and devoted following. Published in such popular magazines as *Harper’s Bazaar*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *New Yorker*, her stories won several successive O. Henry prizes and were included, with almost metronomic regularity, in annual *Best Short Story* collections. The novels didn’t exactly fall into black holes either. Even the lesser *Ponder Heart* (1954) was taken as a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, as certain a seal of middle-brow approval as America has. Lacking that promotional boost, the finer, later novel *Losing Battles* outsold *The Ponder Heart* and all of her other fiction. Perhaps most astonishing, her literary curtain call—the beautifully rendered memoir of her writerly stirrings in the bosom of a close and adoring family, *One Writer’s Beginnings* (1984)—not only made it to the *New York Times* bestseller list but stayed there for almost a year. Not a bad run for what began as a series of lectures at Harvard University.

The big literary prizes came as relatively late icing on the cake—the Pulitzer, the Gold Medal of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, the National Medal for Literature, the American Book Award (twice), the National Book Critics Circle award, and the presidential Medal of Freedom. Even the French got in on the show, first making her a knight in the *Ordre des Arts et Lettres* and then inducting her into the *Legion d’honneur*. *Pas mal*, as they say in Paris.

Yet for all that, Welty’s reputation is anything but secure. The two-part formula for oblivion is not easy to counter, and though Welty has tried to discourage critics and biographers from making it too easy to see her work as the charming artifact of an endearing personality, one of last year’s setbacks was the publication of a biography that comes close to doing just that. Welty could not have made her mis-

givings any more plain to the would-be biographer, Ann Waldron, when she came through Jackson on the first of several visits. “I want my work to stand on its own,” Welty said. In addition to refusing to cooperate, she let her friends know that she disapproved of the project, and none of those friends, laments Waldron in her preface, wanted “to hurt or displease her by talking to her biographer.”

The least that can be said of a biography completed under such circumstances is that it is a triumph of determination over formidable odds. It is also, in fairness, a useful book, fleshing out many of the known facts and rendering them in an affectionately respectful way. Yet, despite the book’s virtues, there is something frequently flat-footed about Waldron’s probing of the motives, feelings, and experiences of her myriad-minded subject, and the result sometimes verges on the kind of reductiveness that Welty feared.

This is nowhere more obvious than in Waldron’s handling of what might be called the “ugly duckling” question. Simply put—and it is simply put—Waldron reports the testimony of several Jackson contemporaries to the effect that Welty was no beauty, was in fact quite the opposite. “She was ugly to the point of being grotesque,” says one anonymous informant, no doubt a former belle. Other informants say similar things, though most are quick to add that Welty charmed everybody despite her looks—after all, she was voted “Best All Round Girl” by her high school senior class.

This is an important matter. Properly explored, it would help explain how Welty became both an insider and an outsider in her native Jackson—both attached to and alienated from a world that could be almost savage in its superficial complacency. But Waldron is reluctant to probe the facts, and that reluctance ends up being as reductive as it is misleading. For though Welty’s looks might not have conformed to local debutante standards of beauty—she was tall and ungainly—she

>JAY TOLSON, the editor of the *Wilson Quarterly*, is the author of *Pilgrim in the Ruins* (1992) and also edited *The Correspondence of Shelby Foote and Walker Percy* (1997). Copyright © 1999 by Jay Tolson.

was anything but ugly, and her wit and humor made her a vivid, attractive presence. Yet Welty knew what she was up against. She felt the verdict of the belles, felt it confirmed in the stinging absence of dates, and to win some share of the popularity that the class beauties enjoyed as their birthright, Welty had to stretch herself, cultivating not only her intelligence and imagination but her quite considerable charm. She was successful, too. But having to earn the regard of her peers this way—and no doubt sometimes sensing a measure of condescension in their affection—must have brought pain. And that raises an obvious question. Why didn't Welty turn bitter and resentful, or at least get out of Jackson and leave it permanently behind? That question may be the central mystery of her life, and the answers lie scattered throughout her work.

Those answers have to do with such qualities as acceptance, forgiveness, and a knowing self-possession, qualities nurtured from Welty's earliest years by loving parents but maintained and refined in the making of her art. This is not to say that Welty's art is in any ultimate, or even important, sense a therapeutic exercise. But it is, among other things, a delicately gentle means of settling scores, of forgiving while rebuking.

Waldron sheds some helpful light on that crucially important family background, but no account is more intimately revealing than Welty's own in *One Writer's Beginnings*. There we learn that her parents were themselves both outsiders and insiders in their community, having settled in Jackson shortly after their marriage in 1904. Eudora's mother, Chestina, was a West Virginia schoolteacher, and her father, Christian, was an Ohio farm boy who had brought his new bride to Jackson

so that he could take up a career in the insurance business. By the time Eudora, born in 1909, reached high school, her parents were local pillars. Her father had climbed to the position of vice president and general manager of the Lamar Life Insurance Company, whose new 13-story headquarters seemed to command a view over the whole of Mississippi, and her mother had become a civic dynamo who



Utica, Mississippi (this photograph and subsequent ones taken by Eudora Welty)

seemingly chaired every service and arts organization within the city limits.

Yet more valuable to Eudora and her two younger brothers than their parents' worldly standing was the close home life they created—close not only because of the love between them but also because of a shared sense of life's precariousness. Both had lost parents when young,

Christian nearly lost Chestina to an infection following the stillbirth of their first child, and Chestina would lose Christian to leukemia in 1931. Amid the currents of love and protectiveness—Christian even scored the soles of his daughter’s new shoes to prevent her from slipping on the hardwood floors—Eudora felt that she lived a charmed childhood, complete with an endless supply of books and enchanted trips to both ancestral homes. Those trips, she writes in *Beginnings*, were “wholes unto themselves”—and, more important, clues to her future vocation:

They were stories. Not only in form, in their taking on direction, movement, development, change. They changed something in my life: each trip made its particular revelation, though I could not have found words for it. But with the passage of time, I could look back on them and see them bringing me news, discoveries, premonitions, promise—I still can; they still do.

The attention and love of doting parents, particularly those of a strong-willed mother, were not unmixed blessings. Welty sensed early on what a struggle it would be to find and maintain some measure of independence. “It took me a long time to manage . . . for I loved those who protected me—and I wanted inevitably to protect them back. I have never quite managed to handle the guilt. In the act and course of writing stories, these are two of the springs, one bright, one dark, that feed the stream.”

Welty did find her way into the larger world, even in high school, where her artistic gifts, quick wit, and charm made her particularly popular among a gaggle of literary types, including a future editor of the *New York Times Book Review*. Welty continued to widen the distance from home, heading off at age 16 to the Mississippi State College for Women, where she studied for two years before transferring to the University of Wisconsin for her last two undergraduate years.

Wisconsin, as well as giving her an excellent grounding in literature, made her mindful of how different the part of the

world she came from was. The relative coolness and taciturnity of the midwesterners brought on nostalgia for the gabby sociability of Jacksonians, however small-minded they might be. Though she never took to Madison, Welty clearly found a spiritual home in New York City, where in 1930, determined to write but not to be a teacher, she enrolled in a yearlong advertising program at Columbia Business School. The city was then alive with theater and music, some of the best of the latter being played in the jazz clubs of Harlem, and Welty felt energized. But this liberating interlude did not last. Her father’s fatal illness pulled her back to Jackson, and though she tried to return to New York after his death, career uncertainties—it was the Depression, after all—and her mother’s need brought her back home for good. In that trajectory of thwarted escape, it is hard not to see the fate of another southern writer, Flannery O’Connor, whose struggle with lupus forced her to return to her home in Milledgeville, Georgia, not long after she had broken away from it. For both writers, personal disappointment proved to be literature’s gain, forcing them to come to terms with the worlds they knew best.

If Welty sometimes chafed under the restrictive regime of her domineering mother—who, among other imperious gestures, refused to allow the writer Henry Miller into the house during his pass through Jackson in 1941—she did not sit around moping. Working briefly for a local radio station and then a newspaper, she was soon hired as a publicist for the Works Progress Administration, a job that for two years (1935–36) took her throughout the state interviewing and reporting on people from all walks and stations. It was in many ways an invaluable experience, perhaps the most important of her life. “I realized later what a protected life I’d led,” she told an interviewer in 1977. “You know, I thought I’d been so sophisticated in New York, and I didn’t know a thing. I didn’t know what people were really like until then.”

Long an avid photographer, she began to train her camera on those Missis-



“Midway Attractions,” Jackson, Mississippi

sippians she had previously barely noticed, poor white hill farmers, black Delta farm workers, touring carny folk, and indigent houseboat dwellers passing their days on the Pearl River. What is remarkable about these pictures—many of which are collected in *Eudora Welty Photographs* (1989)—is not so much the artfulness of composition but the unobtrusive way in which she captures people going about their business, visiting with friends, or idling about their homes. Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange also explored this world of the poor and hard-bitten, but their photographs had a way of transforming their subjects into political and social icons—plain-folk heroes struggling against the conditions of wretched poverty and hardship. One can see signs of that struggle in Welty’s photographs as well, but they emerge less forcedly amid the dailiness of her subjects’ comings and goings. What one finds in these photographs is a respectful tact, a refusal to presume to say more, or less, about what these lives mean than what the totality of the facts allows. Yes, we see a black man dressed up in his finest clothes, buying a ticket at the “colored entrance” of a downtown Jackson

movie theater, but we know what is wrong with this picture without having to be told, because the picture at the same time allows us to see a man who is on his way to a couple of hours of blissful, well-deserved escape.

It is hard to overstate the importance of such tact to Welty’s work. It is virtually the hallmark of her fiction. And it certainly characterized the first of her published stories, “Death of a Traveling Salesman,” which appeared in the highly regarded magazine *Manuscript* in 1936. Drawing on what she had witnessed in the hard-scrabble hill country, she evokes a sad yet revelatory encounter between a salesman, desperately ill with a fever, and a poor but generous couple who take him in for the evening after his car gets stuck in a ditch. The magic of the story is the way in which Welty allows us inside the mind of the salesman as the scales fall from his eyes and he discovers what he has before him: a man and a woman in love and expecting their first child, a scene of such mutual tenderness and solicitude that the dying salesman cannot fail to see what has eluded him all his life. “Bowman could not speak. He was shocked with knowing what was really in this house. A marriage, a fruit-

ful marriage. That simple thing. Anyone could have had that.” The poignant last line captures the salesman’s final effort to defuse the power of the revelation, but the truth won’t let go of him. He must acknowledge it, as well as his envy and his gratitude, and does so later that evening, not only leaving the last of his money with the couple but, in a final, pathetic gesture of consideration, muffling the sound of his failing heart as he falls to the ground on his attempted return to the car.

Welty’s first published stories—some of which were shepherded along by Robert Penn Warren at the newly founded *Southern Review*—quickly drew the attention of New York publishers, who begged Welty to write a novel. Welty, however, was too caught up in the current of story writing to break away from the form, and her newly acquired agent, Diarmuid Russell (son of the Irish poet “A. E.”), started placing her work in some of the better-paying magazines. By 1941 she had completed the 14 stories that would appear in *A Curtain of Green*, stories in modes as various as the dramatic repertoire of the touring players in *Hamlet*. Even the brilliant comic monologue, “Why I Live at the P.O.,” has a subtle, almost tragic undercurrent, suggestive of the biblical accounts of the petty jealousy and envy that divide the human family, and human families.

For some readers, that first collection marked Welty’s artistic high point. In the *New Yorker* essay, for example, Pierpont argues that Welty began her turn toward evasive obscurity after *A Curtain of Green*, not only in the fable-like novella *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942) but in her second short story collection *The Wide Net and Other Stories* (1943) and the novel *Delta Wedding* (1946). Drawing on Waldron’s research, Pierpont finds a partial explanation for this turn in the relationship between Welty and a man named John Robinson. A long-time friend, the handsome insurance claims adjuster lived and worked in New Orleans while he and Welty embarked upon what appears to have been a purely platonic romance—platonic because, as it turned out, Robinson

was homosexual. Both Waldron and Pierpont find evidence of frustration’s toll in the peculiar representation of sex in Welty’s work: when not altogether missing, it tends to find expression in furtive seduction or outright rape, typically presented in tortured language.

Frustrating as it might have been, the relationship with Robinson went on for many years, and with Welty he shared his fascination with his Delta planter ancestors. Taking her to old family haunts, he even let her read his great-great-grandmother’s diary, a reading that directly inspired *Delta Wedding*. It was this aspect of their relationship that Pierpont finds even more destructive of the writer, turning her, Pierpont asserts, into a southern sentimentalist who “spread fairy dust over the cotton fields” and looked away from the “lies and fears” of a corrupt and exploitative system.

What is astonishing about this reading is how closely it echoes the careless assessments of such early, influential critics as Isaac Rosenfield and Diana Trilling, the second of whom found *Delta Wedding* deficient in “moral discrimination.” Yet much has intervened since those first profoundly indiscriminate readings, including Welty’s own patient attempts to explain the indirect ways of her art (not to mention, in her 1965 essay “Must the Novelist Crusade?” the dangers of overt moralizing). One would think that a critic today would enter Welty’s fiction more alert to her subtle but devastating indictments of the ills of southern society—not only the racism and exploitation bound up with slavery and its long aftermath but the class viciousness and snobbery among whites, the disfigurement and rage resulting from so much repressed sexual energy, and the ostentatious cultivation of manners and gentility to muffle many of those darker aspects of life in Dixie. The problem—at least for readers such as Rosenfield, Trilling, and Pierpont—is that Welty refuses to depict these ills in isolation from the rest of the picture, which includes real heroism, beauty, humor, and even the binding power of

enmity and hatred.

So with such elusive works as *The Robber Bridegroom*, one must attend closely to matters of tone or else risk not seeing how this beguiling little fable allegorizes the real (and grim) romance of the rise of the southern gentry just as surely as William Faulkner does, though in a different mode, in *Absalom, Absalom*. The tone is set in the first line: “It was the close of day when a boat touched Rodney’s Landing on the Mississippi River and Clement Musgrove, an innocent planter, with a bag of gold and many presents, disembarked.” The single adjective of the sentence says it all, and layer upon layer of irony builds out from it. For there is nothing innocent in this world. Everything is taken, stolen, plundered. It is a world of envy, greed, and violation. The novella’s “hero,” Jamie Lockhart, forcefully deflowers Musgrove’s daughter (whom a wicked and envious stepmother has tried to destroy in her own way) long before he marries her and makes himself into a New Orleans gentleman, whose property and house on Lake Ponchartrain are maintained by an army of slaves—thereby learning better than anyone, as the narrator slyly concludes, “that the outward transfer from bandit to merchant had been almost too easy to count it a change at all.”

The moral discriminations that Trilling and others found lacking in *Delta Wedding* are, if anything, even sharper in that novel than in *Robber*, though the reader who blinks or turns deaf ears at crucial junctures may miss them. If the novel appears to be an adulatory portrait of the quaint and lovable ways of the “aristocratic” Fairchild family of Shellmound Plantation, it is because the dominant (though not exclusive) narrative perspective is that of the nine-year-old Laura McRaven, who (her mother, a Fairchild, recently deceased) has come to the Delta for the wedding of her cousin Dabney. For Laura, the place and the family have a mythical grandeur, sprinkled quite liberally with fairy dust. Not that she isn’t a perceptive girl in many ways. She

notes with some astonishment the little cruelties that the Fairchild children insouciantly inflict upon others. But much flies past her, including the fact that her cousin’s intended is completely unsuitable in the eyes of most of the Fairchilds.

Of course, it is never explicitly stated that this man, Troy Flavin, the plantation overseer who comes from dirt-poor hill country, is of the wrong class, but the Fairchilds express their disapproval in countless ways—all of which Welty deftly dramatizes without ever putting the point on a placard. For the truth behind the truth is that the Fairchilds know that they need Flavin, and the Flavins of the world, to keep things running and under control, even as they disdain them. Flavin’s role is nowhere more dramatically underscored than in the account of his dealings with a black field hand who has slashed two other workers with an icepick and is threatening to hurl his weapon at Flavin:

“You start to throw at me, I’ll shoot you,” Troy said.

Root vibrated his arm, aiming, Troy shot the finger of his hand, and Root fell back, crying out and waving at him.

“Get the nigger out of here. I don’t want to lay eyes on him.”

Witnessing this scene is one of the Fairchild sisters, Shelley, who is afraid to leave through the manager’s door now that there’s blood on it. “As though the sky had opened and shown her, she could see the reason why Dabney’s wedding should be prevented. Nobody could marry a man with blood on his door.” But running back to the house along the bayou, Shelley is besieged by dark, conflicting thoughts:

Shelley could only think in anger of the convincing performance Troy had given as an overseer born and bred. Suppose a real Deltan, a planter, were no more real than that. Suppose a real Deltan only imitated another Deltan. Suppose the behavior of all *men* were actually no more than this—imitation of other men. But it had previously occurred to her that Troy was trying to imitate her father. (Suppose her *father* imitated . . . oh, not he!) Then all men could not know any too well what they were doing.

In scores of other ways, Welty suggests that the world of the planters is seething with discontent, barely suppressed violence, and unnameable passions (Flavin, it is strongly hinted, has impregnated a black servant named Pinchy). More devastating, Welty gives us the spectacle of the endless, delusional preening and self-worship of the

rious sack and cadging food wherever she can. Encountering a Fairchild, or any other white person, Aunt Studney has only one thing to say: "Ain't studyin' you." There's far more than the fool's brilliance in that line. It sums up her blunt refusal to render the service that the Fairchilds and their ilk demand incessantly of their retainers: their full, undying attention. "Ain't studyin' you" is an emancipation proclamation as powerful as Lincoln's, and the spirit of refusal behind it was spreading rapidly among blacks throughout the Delta during the decade, the 1920s, in which Welty set her novel.

But is there something about the fiction of Welty that too easily invites the charge of fine writing? Is it an art too much enamored of indirection and poetic implication, and lacking in moral heft or philosophical or spiritual vision?

It is tempting to say no and leave it at that, perhaps adding that Welty's fiction, like all great literature, more truly reads the reader than vice versa. However accurate that may be, it does not forestall a more polite dismissal of Welty's work, one which calls it

"classic" and places it on such a lofty pedestal that it becomes, like the work of Henry James, almost unread.

Welty might seem to have made herself a candidate for that dubious honor by hewing so strictly to the exacting procedures of her art, and, above all, by being responsive to what the story, each new story, requires. For Welty, this has consisted of many things. It has always meant that she has had to discover the proper "voice" for each story. Trusting the authority of voice is the lesson she



"Tomato-Packers' Recess," Crystal Springs, Mississippi

Fairchilds themselves. Their fecklessness and vanity are so comically inflated, so elaborately played out in their mannered existence, that they almost endear, as, in similar ways, Chekhov's gentry do. But only almost. To the Fairchilds, other people—and particularly blacks—exist only in terms of what, and how, they do *for* the Fairchilds. There is no more powerful rebuke to their vanity and heedlessness than a character named Aunt Studney, a wizened, half-mad crone—thought to be a witch—who wanders the plantation, carrying a large, myste-

learned reading and listening to stories in her childhood. “The sound of what falls on the page,” she explains in *One Writer’s Beginnings*, “begins the process of testing it for truth, for me. . . . When I write and the sound of it comes back to my ears, then I act to make my changes. I have always trusted this voice.” For that reason, among others, her art steadily evolved and changed, never resting with one particular manner or mode.

Another requirement is distance. Finding it, for her, “is a prerequisite of my understanding of human events, is the way I begin work. Just as, of course, it was an initial step when, in my first journalism job, I stumbled into making pictures with a camera. Frame, proportion, perspective, the values of light and shade, all are determined by the distance of the observing eye.”

Welty is not a writer who sets out with a clear or fully developed sense of where she is going with a story. She often discovers what she is up to only when she is far along—and sometimes only when others point it out to her. (Her agent, Diarmuid Russell, told her that one of her stories was really the early part of a novel, and indeed it went on to become *Delta Wedding*.) Nor has Welty been one to write about actual people, others or herself, or other people’s stories—at least not in any direct, journalistic way. But she is clearly a master at transforming experience into fictional material that is distinctively her own.

What gives her stories their force is her ability to evoke some essential mystery at the heart of her characters’ being—a mystery that presents itself through its connections and resonances with other elements of the story, including other characters, action, details of place or atmosphere, certain phrases of dialogue. Talking about one of her own stories in the essay “Writing and Analyzing a Story,” she observes, “Above all, I had no wish to sound mystical, but I admit that I did expect to sound mysterious now and then, if I could: this was a circumstantial, realistic story in which the reality *was* mystery. . . . Relationship

is a pervading and changing mystery; it is not words that make it so in life, but words have to make it so in a story. Brutal or lovely, the mystery waits for people wherever they go, whatever extreme they run to.”

Devotion to such a goal in writing may seem like a formula for preciousness or formalism, but it’s not. Nor is it subjectivism, in the worst, tirelessly self-regarding sense (which may be considered a shortcoming in an age that worships tell-all memoirs or thinly veiled autobiographical fictions). If Welty believes emotion is the source of a story—whether it be love, pity, or terror—she also holds that each story is instigated “not in subjective country but in the world itself,” in “some certain irresistible, alarming (pleasurable or disturbing), magnetic person, place, or thing.” For Welty, the instigating elements have been not only the physical places of her home and region but their very specific social realities, and her stories grow out of her characters’ varied responses to these circumstantial realities. If there was ever a considerable weakening of her fiction, it was in those stories of *The Bride of Innisfallen* (1955) that are set in foreign locales rather than in the circumstantial reality she knows best. They tend to lack a crucial electrical charge.

Welty did lose some creative propulsion between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s, largely because of her mother’s incapacitation after cataract surgery and illnesses that led to the deaths of her two brothers. But the anguish of the civil rights struggle prompted her to write two of the most directly occasioned stories of her career, “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” and “The Demonstrators.” The first, written in a furious outpouring right after the killing of civil rights leader Medgar Evers, was an attempt to imagine the mind of the assassin, and it was so uncannily close to the facts that certain details had to be altered in galleys before the story came out in the *New Yorker*. The voice of the imagined killer is hatred pure:

Then the first thing I hear 'em say was the N. double A. C. P. done it themselves, killed Roland Summers, and proved it by saying the shooting was done by a expert (I hope to tell you it was!) and at just the right hour and minute to get the whites in trouble.

You can't win.

This, you might say, was Welty confronting her beloved, maddening South at its lethal, beastly worst. It is also Welty at her most unflinchingly honest. But the triumph of the totality of her work—and what makes her hard to place in American literature—is a credible optimism that prevails despite her refusal to ignore what is horrible and deadly.

This optimism, this ruthless serenity, is rare in our literature, where Calvinist uncertainty continues to drive brooding and seemingly endless self-scrutiny—a solipsistic exercise that too often ends in tragic hopelessness and despair. Not so with Welty or her work. Though no formal churchgoer (like her parents, who sent their children to Methodist Sunday school but seldom attended services themselves), Welty writes out of a vision that is as firmly comic as that of the great religious writers, including Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy—or, for that matter, Chaucer and Dante. She writes out of a sense of the highest love, of charity, perhaps even to preserve that sense of ultimate hope in the face of so much that would defy it. Even her depiction of the fallen world of the plantation society in *Delta Wedding* moves toward a cautious optimism. Because Dabney Fairchild does finally marry Troy Flavin, there is hope that this working man, so vitally connected to the realities of the world, may finally bring the Fairchilds to recognize the human cost behind the system that supports their idyllic ease.

For Welty, the maintenance of hope has involved repeated reckonings with the circumstantial reality of her life, nowhere more directly than in her novel *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972). Welty's close friend, the novelist Reynolds Price, takes the latter to be her "strongest, richest work," and it is not hard to see why. Finished under the draft title "Poor Eyes" only five months after the deaths of her mother and brother in January 1966 and

published first in the *New Yorker* in 1969, the novel is a work of pristine spareness but endlessly ramifying implication. "If the early work is classic," Price says, "this might be medieval—in its fullness of vision, depth of field, range of ear. Jesus *and* goblins. Macbeth *and* the porter. There is no sense however of straining for wholeness, of a will to 'ripeness,' no visible girding for a major attempt."

What we have is the story of Laurel McKelva Hand, a widow living in Chicago who has come south to New Orleans to be with her father, Judge McKelva, as he prepares to undergo an operation on one of his eyes. Laurel's mother having died a few years earlier, the Judge has taken a new bride, a woman named Fay. Of distinctly lower-class origins and younger even than Laurel, she is crude, overbearing, almost savage in her insistence upon *her* needs, *her* rights. As the Judge's recovery from the seemingly successful retina surgery goes from bad to worse, Fay's nerves and patience fray—until, on her birthday, in a desperate moment at the hospital, she shakes her prostrate husband, shouting "I tell you, enough is enough!" A nurse pulls her away, but soon after the incident the Judge dies.

The aftermath of the death—Laurel and Fay's return to the family home in Mount Salus, Mississippi, for the funeral and the ordering of affairs—is the novel's core, as Laurel attempts to make sense not only of her father and his second wife but of her complicated mother (the details of whose West Virginia childhood and early adult years are patterned almost exactly after those of Welty's mother) and, ultimately, herself. Going through letters and photograph albums, Laurel comes to see more clearly the complexity of her mother's loving demands on her husband, and how the painfulness of her dying could have led him to seek the animal vitality of his second wife Fay. Laurel even finds a way of accepting, if not liking, Fay.

This happens after they almost come to blows over a breadboard that Laurel's husband, Philip (killed in World War II), had made for her mother, and

which Laurel finds in badly abused condition. As they argue over the board, all of Laurel's resentments of Fay come tumbling forth. "My mother . . . predicted you," Laurel says. "But your mother, she died a crazy!" Fay retorts. Laurel then lets loose with the strongest charge, that Fay killed her father, but Fay, a force as insistent as the weather, comes back, "I was trying to scare him into living!"—and even more viciously counterattacks, "I was being a wife to him! Have you clean forgotten by this time what being a wife is?"

Laurel explains that it was Philip who had made the breadboard and that she wants to take it back to Chicago to try her mother's bread recipes on it. "And then who'd eat it with you?" Fay asks. Laurel starts to talk wistfully about how Philip used to love bread, but Fay interrupts most savagely, "Your husband? What's he got to do with it? He's dead, isn't he?"

Laurel, at the height of her vulnerability, suddenly sees how much more vulnerable Fay is, how she is no more than a child. Lacking memory or imagination, she is truly incapable of fighting back. Laurel could prevail easily at this moment, because she senses her antagonist's fear, but somehow the memory of one of Fay's nephews, a sweet boy named Wendell who had come to the funeral with the rest of Fay's Texas family, brings

her up short. Memory, vulnerable as it is to assault, becomes an active force of forgiveness. And the fact that Laurel's precious memory of her long-deceased Philip—which she cannot deny has removed her too much from life—can be so vulnerable to attack is paradoxically strengthening: "The memory can be hurt," Laurel reflects, "time and again—but in that may lie its final mercy. As long as it's vulnerable to the living moment, it lives for us, and while it lives, and while we are able, we can give it up its due."

The fact that Welty's biographer deems this "not a joyous story" and says that to read it, as she does, "as a reflection of Eudora's life is to be moved to despair," shows just how easily Welty's optimism can be mistaken for its opposite. Waldron fails to see that Laurel prevails precisely because she has the imagination to understand, and thus to accept, even life's unthinking, raw brutality. This is not prettying things over. Welty did not win the regard of her admirers, not even her fellow Mississippians, by behaving nicely and producing reassuring pictures. She is admired for seeing justly. And to see justly is to put in perspective. This is the formula of Welty's hard-earned optimism, and also the reason for its necessity.

Out of the Alcoves

How did America win the Cold War? An unusual new film recalls the important role played by a small and much maligned band of labor leaders, intellectuals, and political figures.

by Seymour Martin Lipset

Sixty years ago, four young radicals all found their way to the same tiny corner of New York's City College. There, in an alcove of the college cafeteria, they underwent a political and intellectual transformation, emerging from bitter struggles with campus Communists as zealous anti-Stalinists and eventually as leaders of the anti-Stalinist movement in America. The four men and their movement are the subject of an unusual documentary film called *Arguing the World*, which has been shown in scattered theaters around the country and is scheduled to be aired nationally on PBS on March 26.

The four went on from the alcoves to play prominent roles as writers, thinkers, and editors of politically important anti-Stalinist magazines: Daniel Bell, a social democrat then and now; Nathan Glazer, a radical Zionist then and a Democratic neoconservative now; Irving Kristol, a Trotskyist then and a Republican neoconservative now; and Irving Howe, a Trotskyist then and a moderate socialist at his death in 1993. After World War II, all four wrote for influential anti-Stalinist organs such as *Partisan Review*, the *New Leader*, and *Commentary*. In 1953, Kristol helped create *Encounter*, a transatlantic anti-Stalinist journal based in Britain, and Howe went on to found *Dissent* in 1954, along with the late Michael Harrington (who deserves to be in the film, but did not go to City College). In 1965, Kristol and Bell launched the *Public Interest* (with Glazer later replacing Bell as coeditor). This is only the barest thumbnail

sketch of their extraordinary careers—Bell and Glazer, for example, went on to do important work as sociologists. Both are now retired from Harvard University.

But *Arguing the World* is not only about these four men. It is a contribution to the larger story of anti-Stalinism, the highly energized brand of anticommunism that played a major and not fully appreciated role in undermining the Soviet Union. Thousands of anti-Stalinist ex-radicals like these four emerged almost everywhere Marxist groups existed—in Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, Colombo, Brussels, Warsaw, Mexico City, Toronto, London. All had become convinced that the Soviet Communists had betrayed the Russian Revolution, trampling the dream of a free and democratic socialism and creating instead a brutally exploitive totalitarian society, while at the same time undermining the struggle against fascism in pre-Hitler Germany and in the Spanish Civil War of 1936–39. Very often, their convictions grew out of dismaying firsthand experiences. Returning to London in 1945 from negotiations with Stalin and Vyacheslav Molotov at Potsdam, British foreign secretary Ernest Bevin, who had had plenty of experiences with the Stalinists as the head of Britain's Transport and General Workers Union, was asked what the two Soviet leaders were like. Just like the Communists, he replied—by which he meant, of course, the Communists in the Transport Workers Union and the Labor Party.

The ex-radicals were bitter enemies of the Stalinists, and they made the downfall



A Communist leader of the 1930s rallies his followers for a march in New York City's Union Square.

of the Soviet Union and the destruction of the Communist Party their most important goal. That was one of the qualities that distinguished them from other anti-communists. With a few notable exceptions—such as senators Robert La Follette, Jr.,* Henry “Scoop” Jackson, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan (another veteran of City College)—they were not forces in electoral politics. Rather, as the film makes clear, they battled the Stalinists, the Stalinists’ friends and fellow travelers, and the soft Left in the nation’s cultural and political institutions—in the intellectual and academic worlds, in the trade unions, in the Democratic Party and other political groups, and in the student movements of the 1930s and ’60s.

Let me return to the alcoves for a moment. I spent most of four years in them, from 1939 to ’43, one year as a Trotskyist and the rest as an unaffiliated

anti-Stalinist socialist. I came to know the four men in the film well, and remained friends with three of them afterward.

The alcoves were the heart of radical politics at City College, a venue for a steady stream of debate and invective between Stalinists and anti-Stalinists. They were room-sized chambers in the college cafeteria with wooden benches on three sides and an opening to the main eating area. In front of each alcove was a large table, strong enough to hold the orators who frequently stood atop it to harangue those who gathered. The Stalinist or Communist alcove was known as the Kremlin, and the one next door, inhabited by a variety of anti-Stalinist radicals—Trotskyists, Socialists, anarchists, socialist Zionists, members of assorted splinter groups—was called Mexico City in honor of Leon Trotsky’s exile home. Proximity, of course, led to shouting matches, even though the Communists forbade their members to converse with any Trotskyists, whom they defined as fascist agents. My recollection is that students, occasionally joined by some junior faculty, were there all day, talking, reading, arguing, and eating.

*La Follette, Wisconsin’s Progressive Party senator, switched to the Republican line in 1946. Left-wing but anticommunist, he earned the enmity of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, which worked to undermine his candidacy. La Follette lost the Republican primary by a relatively small margin. The winner was Joseph McCarthy, who went on to a seat in the U.S. Senate.



“Arguing the world” at a 1940 City College gathering. Standing on the right is Irving Kristol.

In the world beyond the alcoves, most of the anti-Stalinists were social democrats, descendants of the Russian Mensheviks, but the Trotskyists had the keenest understanding of the character of Stalinism. Leon Trotsky, Soviet commissar of foreign affairs and head of the Red Army under Lenin (1917–24), had clashed with Stalin after Lenin’s death, arguing for a somewhat less repressive and more consistently revolutionary socialism, and was rewarded with exile in 1929 and assassination 11 years later.

For the anti-Stalinists, the alcoves were classrooms. The older and more knowledgeable taught the newer recruits. They gave lectures, answered questions, and explained passages in Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky. The principal form of recreation, other than talk, was chess. Irving Howe was my first political instructor among the City College Trotskyists. Ironically, the last time I saw

him was at Rosh Hashanah services at a Conservative synagogue on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Fifty years had passed, yet Irving was clearly unhappy to have an erstwhile comrade catch him praying.

All Trotskyists had party names. I was Lewis. Horenstein became Howe. He was the only one to keep his pseudonym. Kristol was Ferry. As he mentions in the film, during most of his time at City he remained on the periphery of the Trotskyists, among the close sympathizers, along with a good friend, Earl Raab. In theoretical discussions, James P. Cannon, the national leader of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, used to speak of “the party periphery,” pronouncing the last word as *perry-ferry*, so when they finally joined, Raab became Perry and Kristol took the name Ferry.

After I joined the Trotskyist youth movement in 1939, I recruited a good friend of mine, Peter Rossi, who later

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went on to become a leading sociologist. What party name did he pick? Rosen. This largely Jewish group finally recruits an Italian American, and he wants to be known by a Jewish name. Irving Howe took on the awkward task of telling Rossi that it would be better if he used a non-Jewish pseudonym.

Although the film doesn't mention it, some of those who hung around the alcoves were government agents. I found out later that the authorities could become quite confused about political matters. In the 1970s, when I needed a security clearance in order to serve on a federal commission, I listed Irving Kristol as one of my long-time acquaintances, in part because he was the most conservative person I had known for more than 20 years. A reference from him, I thought, might speed the clearance. When an FBI agent came around to discuss my file, however, my relationship with Kristol was his main concern. Was I aware, he asked, that Irving Kristol had been active in the Social Problems Club at City College? Not only was this a ridiculous error—the Social Problems Club was a Communist front—but the agent apparently did not have a clue about what Irving Kristol, the founder of the neoconservative movement, had been up to politically since he left City College.

Only a short part of the film deals with the alcoves. Most of it uses still pictures and interviews to chart the political and intellectual careers of the four men. It is one of the very few documentaries that has attempted to show the world of political intellectuals—how they are formed, how they change, and how they affect political life and society at large.

From the 1930s on, the anti-Stalinists tried to convince others on the left that the Soviet Union was the antithesis of everything that democratic socialism stood for, a much greater enemy of democracy than capitalism. Mario Soares, a Socialist who led the fight to stop the Communists from commandeering Portugal's 1974–75 revolution (and

later became his country's president), summed up the anti-Stalinist position when he said that the conservatives are our rivals, the Communists our enemy.

In the United States, the role of the anti-Stalinist radicals was particularly important because few liberals were as vigorous in their rejection of Stalinism. Many liberals up to the 1960s were opposed to dictatorship and communism but wanted everyone left of center to work together. They were particularly impressed by the strength of the Soviet Union and its seeming opposition to fascism (except, of course, during the years of the Hitler-Stalin pact). They were reluctant to believe that the Soviet Union was a repressive society.

The Communists were never uncertain about who their enemies were: they always considered the Trotskyists, the Social Democrats, and the anti-Stalinist trade union leaders and intellectuals their main foes. Whenever they gained strength anywhere in the noncommunist world, they used it to try to dominate organizations on the left, including, in the United States, the Democratic Party and the labor movement. All of these efforts spawned committed anti-Stalinists. Communist domination of the Washington State Democratic Party for a time in the 1930s made Henry "Scoop" Jackson into an informed and active anti-Stalinist. (James Farley, one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's chief political operatives, once said there were 47 states and the Soviet of Washington.) In Minnesota, where Governor Elmer Benson followed every twist and turn of the Communist line, Hubert Humphrey, Evron and Jeane Kirkpatrick, and Max Kampelman, among others, were galvanized into action.

The contest was particularly heated inside the trade unions, since their shared Marxist background told both the Communists and the anti-Stalinist radicals that the unions were the essential institutions. At the peak of their strength in the 1930s and '40s, the Communists controlled unions accounting for more than a third of the members of the Congress of Industrial Organizations and

a significant segment of the American Federation of Labor. Out of the nasty battles fought within the trade union movement emerged anti-Stalinist leaders such as David Dubinsky, Walter Reuther, Albert Shanker, George Meany,



Before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947, Ronald Reagan criticized Hollywood Communists but defended free speech.

and James Carey. After World War II, the anti-Stalinist unions played an important role in the international arena, especially through the labor-financed Free Trade Union Committee, a massive effort to support democratic trade unions in post-war Europe and other regions.

The contribution to the anti-Stalinist struggle by conservative and Republican groups is more difficult to evaluate. Though obviously anticommunist, the conservatives lacked the firsthand knowledge and passion of the anti-Stalinists. They were inclined to view the more numerous and outspoken New Dealers and liberals as more important foes.

During the 1940s and '50s, the congressional investigations of Communist activities in the United States, chiefly the work of right-wing Republicans, handed the Stalinists a useful means of rallying support in the liberal and civil liberties communities. Unlike America's real radicals, from the Wobblies to the black militants of the 1960s, the Communists, as Dan Bell notes in the film, never defended their right to be Communists. They

either lied about their membership in the party or took the Fifth Amendment, arguing that the conservatives were attacking them because they were liberals, trade unionists, blacks, or Jews. Very often the tactic worked.

From the anti-Stalinists who became conservatives—including James Burnham, Whittaker Chambers, and Irving Kristol—the Right gained a political education and, in some cases, an injection of passion. The ex-radicals brought with them the knowledge that ideological movements must have journals and magazines to articulate their perspectives. In 1955, for example, William F. Buckley, Jr., launched *National Review* at the urging of Willi Schlamm, a former

German Communist. In its early years, *National Review* was largely written and edited by the Buckley family and a handful of former Communists, Trotskyists, and socialists, such as Burnham and Chambers. It played a major role in creating the Goldwaterite and Reaganite New Right and in stimulating an anti-Soviet foreign policy.

The most important convert to anti-Stalinism, of course, was Ronald Reagan, a former trade union leader and near-radical liberal Democrat, whom the Hollywood Stalinists initially regarded as a close ally. After becoming president of the Screen Actors Guild in 1947, he quickly learned about the ways of the Stalinists from battles within the union and the Hollywood community. When he reached the White House, he appointed a large number of anti-Stalinists—including Elliot Abrams, Carl Gershman, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Max Kampelman, and Richard Perle—to high positions on his foreign policy and defense teams, despite their social democratic commitments.

I believe that the vigor of Reagan's for-

eign policy and of his opposition to the evil empire was largely a product of his anti-Stalinism rather than his conservatism. He pressed the military and ideological struggle against communism much more intensely than his efforts to cut taxes, balance the budget, or enact the right-wing social agenda. Most conservatives and businesspeople were willing to deal with Communists in order to expand trade, as Richard Nixon and George Bush did (along with Democrats Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton). Reagan and other anti-Stalinists were not.

The four intellectuals featured in *Arguing the World*, like other anti-Stalinists, often went their own ways on questions of domestic and foreign policy. Kristol and Howe represent the two poles, with Kristol becoming a neoconservative Republican and Howe remaining very much a man of the Left. But the anti-Stalinists were united in their opposition to the rising New Left in the 1960s. As Irving Howe makes clear in the film, the anti-Stalinists quickly recognized Stalinoid traits in the young radicals—their opposition to debate, to a university open to all thought, to ideological pluralism, and, in the end, to democracy itself.

Nat Glazer and I were on the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley in 1964 when the radical attack on political pluralism—precursor of the more recent insistence on political correctness—began with the Berkeley Free Speech Movement (FSM). Glazer and I tried to stem the movement, at one point addressing hundreds of student activists from an impromptu soapbox on the roof of a captured police car in front of Sproul Hall, the Berkeley administration building. We argued that civil disobedience was warranted in resisting manifest evils that could not be fought by democratic means. But we said that the Berkeley evil was not of that magnitude. The issue in Berkeley was never free speech, which was abundant, but a stupid university regulation, Rule 17, that required that public political activities could only be conducted in the context of a debate, with different sides represented.

The New Left failed from the beginning to understand the totalitarian nature of Stalinism. Indeed, although its leaders did not know it, the Free Speech Movement itself was a target of the Stalinists. As I learned at an off-the-record meeting that a *New York Times* editor held with some faculty and administrators, the most powerful Communist trade union leader in the San Francisco Bay area had proposed an unusual deal to the University of California regents. Communist students on the Berkeley campus would put an end to the movement's protest if the Regents would agree to expel Mario Savio and other activist leaders and modify Rule 17. The Stalinists regarded the FSM leaders as rivals and uncontrollable adventurers and anarchists.

How strong were the Stalinists in America? Especially during the 1930s, but continuing into the '50s and '60s, they were a major force in intellectual life, in publishing, and in Hollywood. They dominated a large segment of the labor movement, and they had influence within the civil rights groups. Anti-Stalinists who raised questions about the extent of this influence were charged with redbaiting and McCarthyism, but the information now coming out of archives in the former Soviet Union and from U.S. government files supports many of their arguments. We now know, for example, that Harry Bridges, the head of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Association who gained fame as a leader of the 1934 general strike in San Francisco, was not only a member of the Communist Party of America but served on its Central Committee. Alger Hiss, who famously insisted that he had been unjustly accused of spying for Moscow, was apparently identified in a coded Soviet intelligence cable as one of theirs. Copies of the receipts sent to Moscow for the millions in annual subsidies received by the Communist Party of America and of orders from Moscow to change the party line and leadership explode the Left's cherished notion that the American Communists were an independent radical force.

The revelations from the archives are a continuing source of astonishment, especially to the many liberals who remain in denial, refusing to acknowledge that the Communists were a real force in the United States. But the anti-Stalinists are not surprised. Sometimes the fear of being denounced and ostracized as redbaiters, and of losing or being denied jobs, particularly in the intellectual and academic worlds, kept them from saying as much as they might have, but by persistently writing and speaking out about the nature of Stalinism and the Soviet Union they encouraged the majority of American Democrats and liberals to accept Ronald Reagan's efforts to break up the Soviet Union.

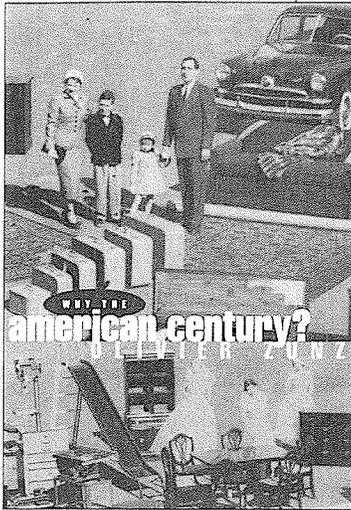
Before Reagan, few of us expected to see the demise of Soviet Communism. I think many feared that Whittaker Chambers was right when he wrote that we were on the losing side of history. Fortunately, Reagan knew better. He understood that the empire was not only evil but inefficient and ineffective, and that if pushed, it would collapse. So did others, including anti-Stalinist political and labor leaders such as Moynihan and Al Shanker, who knew from personal experience that the Communists could be beaten. As novelist Arthur Koestler wrote,

the ultimate struggle for freedom would be between the Stalinists and the anti-Stalinists. And, I'm glad to say, we won.

Epilogue

I cannot resist adding a personal story. Before entering City College in 1939, I attended Townsend Harris High School, then affiliated with the college, which enabled bright students to get through in three years. Like the college, Townsend harbored large numbers of Communists, Trotskyists, and Socialists, most of whom moved on to the alcoves. I was the leader of the anti-Stalinists, having joined the Young People's Socialist League at 14. For much of my stay at Harris, I argued almost daily with a leader of the Young Communists. We argued about everything: the Moscow trials, the Spanish Civil War, the Popular Front, Roosevelt and the New Deal, the role of the German Communists in aiding Hitler's rise to power. After we graduated, the young Communist went on to Brooklyn College and eventually became a distinguished psychologist.

Fifty years later, I attended the reunion of our Harris class. He was there, and I beckoned to him. When he came over, the first words he said to me after half a century were, "You were right." Sometimes you win an argument.



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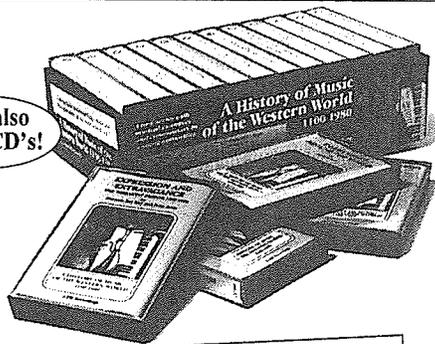
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CURRENT BOOKS

The Strangest Courtship

ABOUT FACE:

*A History of America's Curious Relationship with China,
from Nixon to Clinton.*

By James Mann. Knopf. 420 pp. \$30

by Anne F. Thurston

The relationship between the United States and China since the Nixon-Kissinger opening of 1972 has been one of the “strangest, most extraordinary . . . America has had with any nation in this century.” So claims James Mann, former Beijing bureau chief of the *Los Angeles Times*, in his eminently readable, often provocative chronicle of American policy toward China during the last quarter-century.

Mann’s title refers to the wide swings of U.S. foreign policy—from the giddy partnership with China that began under Nixon, to the sometimes punitive distancing following the bloody military suppression of popular demonstrations in Beijing in 1989, to President Bill Clinton’s constructive engagement. Mann is not the first to note the swings in U.S. perceptions of China. Images of Genghis Khan and Mao Zedong, cruel and inhumane, have long competed in the American mind with pictures of a Confucian China, stately and staid, cultured and proud. And these misperceptions have often guided U.S. policy.

About Face describes the latest shifts in thinking. But Mann’s real contribution, what gives the book life, is his account of the formation of American policy. Relying on interviews with key officials, as well as documents, diaries, and notes (some obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests), Mann builds the case that policy-making about China has been extraordinarily secret, personalized, and elitist, frequently circumventing the ordinary processes of government.

Mann’s revelations will surely reopen old wounds. He provides, for instance, a new interpretation of the banquet debacle that

tarnished President George Bush’s visit to Beijing in 1989. Fang Lizhi, a physicist who was China’s leading dissident, had been invited to the American-hosted dinner. Chinese security personnel stopped him before he reached the banquet, and the resulting controversy became the media focus of Bush’s visit. National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft later alleged that the American embassy had blindsided the White House by neglecting to flag Fang’s name on the invitation list. U.S. ambassador to China Winston Lord was replaced shortly thereafter. Mann, however, quotes two declassified cables from Lord and the Beijing embassy that make explicit mention of Fang’s invitation, predict official Chinese annoyance, and warn of likely media attention. The response of former officials promises to be as revealing and lively as the book itself.

A central thread of Mann’s story is the evolution of U.S.-China relations. Through friendship with China, President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger sought to shift the international balance of power in order to goad the Soviet Union into détente. “With conscientious attention to both capitals,” Kissinger told Nixon in 1973, “we should be able to have our maotai and drink our vodka, too.”

Over the years, however, the rationale for U.S.-China relations became more blatantly anti-Soviet. “America was not fighting communism in general, but the Soviet Union in particular,” Mann observes. Especially after the establishment of diplomatic recognition in 1979, the Carter administration gave “a military, anti-Soviet cast to America’s relationship with China, creating ties in which

the interests of the Pentagon and the CIA became all important.” The United States established listening sites in northwest China, where Americans shared intelligence information on the Soviet Union with their hosts. When China invaded Vietnam only weeks after diplomatic recognition, Chinese ambassador Chai Zemin received nightly intelligence reports from President Jimmy Carter’s national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, “far beyond anything Chinese intelligence could have collected.”

In 1980, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the shift was complete. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown visited China, and Carter for the first time authorized the sale of “non-lethal” military equipment to China, such as air defense radar and transport helicopters. Europe, meanwhile, was already selling China lethal weapons, with the encouragement of the Carter administration.

Mann singles out a (then) young China scholar from Columbia University, Michael Pillsbury, as the progenitor of this military relationship. In 1972, Pillsbury met Chinese general Zhang Wutian at a United Nations reception hosted by the government of Albania. The two men continued to meet, and Pillsbury reported on their conversations to the Department of Defense, Air Force intelligence, and the Central Intelligence Agency. (Mann assumes that Pillsbury was working with American intelligence agencies.) Pillsbury, variously described as idiosyncratic, bright, garrulous, and undisciplined, began suggesting a new military relationship to prevent rapprochement between China and the Soviet Union. The Joint Chiefs scoffed when Pillsbury first broached the proposal privately, but tacitly approved when he floated it in *Foreign Policy* in 1975.

But Pillsbury was on the far fringes of power when, under Carter, something akin to this recommendation became official policy. Mann gives Pillsbury undue credit for the development of U.S.-China military ties. Military and intelligence ties were important even during the Nixon administration. These connections strengthened under Carter, when diplomatic relations made closer ties possible.

Other connections also grew stronger during the Carter administration. Cultural, academic, and scientific exchanges proliferated. American tourists began pouring into China as Chinese students and researchers flocked to American universities. Mann is nonetheless critical of the Carter administration for giving China “virtually a blanket exemption for the



human rights policies [it] so readily applied elsewhere.”

That criticism is overstated but highlights a continuing dilemma in U.S. policy—how to recognize China’s undeniable progress in human rights while protesting continuing violations. Several Democracy Wall activists (including the recently released Wei Jingsheng, now in exile in the United States), were arrested during the Carter years. But China also made great advances. Living in China during 1981–82, I intensively interviewed victims of the Cultural Revolution—individuals who had suffered grievous abuse for more than a decade. Most had only recently been rehabilitated after returning from years in jail or exile. They were just moving back into homes that had long been occupied by “revolutionary rebels.” Families were reuniting, husbands and wives moving in together again, fathers and sons greeting each other, stunned and transformed, for the first time in a decade. In the universities, the entering classes of 1977 and 1978 had passed the first college exams offered since the start of the Cultural

Revolution. These students were the best and brightest of China, and starved for knowledge. In the countryside, the people's communes, which had brought untold suffering to China's peasants (somewhere between 27 million and 43 million people died during the famine that followed the formation of the communes in 1958), were being dismantled. The land was being returned to family control.

Carter's single term of office coincided with what many Chinese called their second "liberation." For the United States to have suddenly elevated human rights to the decisive issue would have made a mockery of the suffering from which so many Chinese were recovering. This time, American policymakers got it right.

Since the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989 and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the United States has had difficulty formulating a new policy toward China. No longer are a handful of elites defining the rela-

tionship. One leading China specialist and former government official describes the process today as "policymaking by franchise," with business interests, human rights groups, Congress, and the broader public all pushing to make their voices heard.

If the American relationship with China is one of the strangest in this century, it will surely be one of the most important in the next. Mann notes a lingering Cold War mentality in the United States, a continuing need for an enemy, and the possibility that China might qualify. But new enmity is not in the interests of the United States, China, or the rest of the world. If Mann's book engenders not merely controversy but serious public debate on the nature of the U.S.-China relationship, we may actually learn something from history.

> ANNE F. THURSTON, a former Wilson Center Fellow, is the author of the recently published monograph, *Muddling toward Democracy: Political Change in Grassroots China (U.S. Institute of Peace)*.

Cedar Tavern Days

THE LAST AVANT-GARDE:

The Making of the New York School of Poets.

By David Lehman. Doubleday. 433 pp. \$27.50

by Martha Bayles

The classic New York School poem is probably Frank O'Hara's "The Day Lady Day Died." Written on the afternoon of July 17, 1959, the date of jazz singer Billie Holiday's death, it begins with a lazy stroll through Manhattan: a shoeshine, a malted, a stop in a bookstore for "a little Verlaine," buying some Strega and Gauloises for friends on Long Island, and finally seeing "a NEW YORK POST with her face on it." In the final stanza, the vague, insouciant warmth of the previous 25 lines focuses to a burning intensity: "and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of / leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT / while she whispered a song along the keyboard / to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing."

In the last four decades, countless poets have imitated O'Hara's casual, tossed-off style, making it hard to imagine its original freshness. In fact, one cannot walk into a poetry reading (or "slam") these days without hearing echoes of O'Hara and his friends John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and James Schuyler. For that reason alone, this fascinating but flawed book about the "New York School" of poets is welcome.

O'Hara once described his style of writing as "I did this, I did that." The formula may work for poems such as "Lady Day," but "this one did this, that one did that" proves to be a poor approach to organizing the first 90 pages of an ambitious literary study. Lehman, the author of *Signs of the Times*:

Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man (1991), one of the few nonacademic books to deal a body blow to postwar French literary theory, hardly intends to “deconstruct” the lives of his four appealing subjects. But that is the effect when, in this opening section, Lehman fails to stick with any one narrative, to conjure any one milieu, or to portray any one personality. Fragments of ideas and anecdotes float in space, and the reader who does not already know the essential work of these poets may decide that it is not worth knowing.

The persistent reader—that is, one who already admires these poets and is resigned to the dismal fact that even books about literature are no longer polished by an editor’s hand—eventually will be rewarded by Lehman’s portraits of the individual poets. Writing about Ashbery, for example, Lehman shows how the poet’s youthful enthusiasm for the French surrealists and their Freudian-Marxist theories of “unconscious” or “automatic” writing led him to experiment with bold “verbal disintegrations,” while at the same time his work as an art critic fostered clear perception and logical argument. The result, in Ashbery’s best poems, is a crackling tension between the centrifugal and centripetal powers of language.

Yet even here, the editor’s hand is missed. Among those claiming to inherit Ashbery’s legacy are the “Language school” poets, Charles Bernstein and others, who were inspired by deconstruction during its academic heyday in the 1970s. As Lehman reports, Ashbery has expressed a reluctance to shift his mantle to a group of writers whose poetic purpose is to undermine “hegemonic discourse.” In a speech in acceptance of the 1995 Frost Medal from the Poetry Society of America, he distanced himself from the Language poets, saying, “I wanted to stretch, not sever, the relation between language and communication.” Since this passage is essential to understanding Ashbery’s position as the most eminent and influential of the New York poets, why is it buried in the epilogue?

The task of the intellectual historian is similar to that of the biographer: to weave a compelling human story together with a narrative of how certain ideas germinated,

developed, and matured. Lehman struggles with this task, sometimes in vain. Why does he call the New York poets “the last avant-garde”? His answers vary with the context. For instance, when quoting Koch’s praise of O’Hara’s work as “the last stage in the adaptation of twentieth-century avant-garde sensibility to poetry about contemporary American experience,” Lehman admits that the New York poets learned many tricks from such European avant-garde movements as Italian futurism (before World War I) and Dadaism, the 1920s movement that mocked the pretensions of high art and is still very much present in so-called postmodernism. But Lehman also argues that his poets added a uniquely light touch of their own as well as a genuine appreciation for things American, from hamburgers to Hollywood movies. In other contexts, however, Lehman credits the New York poets with radical originality. At one point he writes that “Koch’s experimentalism counters the establishment view that poems arise out of experience and express irreproachable sentiments in an earnest manner.” Koch’s first collection, *Thank You and Other Poems*, was published in 1962; what “establishment” does Lehman have in mind?

Lehman’s uncertain grasp is even more evident in his treatment of the painters who inspired and often befriended the New York poets. Indeed, the label “New York School” was originally applied to the abstract expressionists who seized the artistic initiative from the French after World War II. While offering many fascinating anecdotes—for example, that O’Hara “was one of the few in the art world of the 1950s who refused to choose between Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning when everybody else had chosen sides as if at a stickball game in the street”—Lehman finds it no easier to define the avant-garde in painting than in poetry. At the outset, he asserts that in the visual arts the only true avant-garde in the 1940s and 1950s was the abstract expressionists, and that their artistic practices were closely akin to those of his poets. Yet when it emerges that his poets were personally closer to certain figurative painters—notably Jane Freilicher, Larry Rivers, and Fairfield Porter—Lehman shifts gears and asserts that

the latter were the true avant-garde. This shift would be far less confusing if Lehman's explanation of the continuities and discontinuities between figurative and abstract painting were presented coherently instead of scattered throughout the text.

Also scattered about are Lehman's often foolish enthusiasms. "Personism" was O'Hara's tongue-in-cheek name for a one-man literary movement that he claimed to have invented while writing a love poem to a young male dancer: "While I was writing it I was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born." There is really no more to Personism than the notion that a poem can be as spontaneous and intimate as a phone call. Lehman's problem is that he takes this wispy of an idea more seriously than O'Hara did. "The jest conceals an important insight," says Lehman. "Poetry—avant-garde poetry at any rate—is conditioned by the most technologically advanced means of communication of the time. . . . When Elizabethans addressed sonnets to each other, there was no faster means of communication." Does he mean to say that the

Elizabethans wrote sonnets because they did not have telephones? Once again, a careful editor would have caught this silliness (and suggested, perhaps, that Lehman update his discussion to include e-mail).

Among the painters Lehman discusses, perhaps the most appealing figure is Porter. After all, he had the insight to see in the heavy-handed art criticism of the highbrow former Trotskyist Clement Greenberg "the technique of a totalitarian party on its way to power." Muddled perhaps by his own wobbly definitions, Lehman confesses to being attracted by Porter's definition of the avant-garde as "those people with the most energy." In an age characterizing itself as postmodernist, and therefore presumably post-avant-garde (what is more modernist than the idea of the avant-garde?), this definition has the virtue of simplicity, at least. Perhaps Lehman should have stuck with it.

> MARTHA BAYLES, *the former literary editor of the Wilson Quarterly, teaches humanities at Claremont McKenna College. She is the author of Hole in Our Soul: The Loss of Beauty and Meaning in American Popular Music (1994).*

Arts & Letters

N. C. WYETH:

A Biography.

By David Michaelis. Knopf.

576 pp. \$40

Like the Irish painter John Butler Yeats, the American painter Newell Convers Wyeth is known chiefly as the father of a famous son. Unlike John Yeats, N. C. Wyeth (1882–1945) doesn't deserve the slight. Starting in 1902, he dominated the field of book and magazine illustration for 43 years, producing landscapes, still lifes, portraits, and murals. He vivified the great children's classics: *Treasure Island*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Yearling*. He won every possible award. Without ever asking for a raise (to his publishers' delight), he managed to support five children and various in-laws. Yet for all that, N. C. Wyeth considered himself a

failure—which, of course, makes him a fascinating subject for biography.

The Wyeths are often perceived as the quintessential American clan, East Coast pioneers holed up at the "Homestead" in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. In truth, the elegiac vision that made their artistic work so powerful had its source, as Michaelis shows, in an immigrant's experience of America. N. C. Wyeth's mother, Hattie, born to Swiss farmers, romanticized her parents' homeland, finding in it all that was lacking in America and in her very American husband, Andrew Wyeth, Jr., a dealer in livestock feed. In becoming an illustrator, N. C. fulfilled his mother's artistic aspirations (while also satisfying his bean-counting father). The price of maternal dependency, the author suggests, was a need for failure, which N. C. satis-



fied by clinging to “the shopworn idea of a high-low split between artists and illustrators.”

N. C.’s work brought him little satisfaction. “Letters of praise,” Michaelis notes, “stung him like a lash.” The typically poor quality of reproductions grieved him. “I would work my heart out,” he wrote, “and then it all seemed small and fleeting when transferred to the magazine page.” He seldom went a season without an episode of black despair.

Fatherhood proved his greatest source of pleasure. He was the breakfast chef—pancakes—and would wake the household by playing thunderous chords on the piano. “My art vanishes into the merest speck when suffered comparison to the one Divine and tangible sensation bequeathed to us: parent to child, child to parent,” he wrote. Andrew Wyeth would later say that it was his father’s “great willingness . . . to give and give and give” that kept N. C. from becoming a great painter. N. C. taught all five children to draw and paint, and to feel—as did he and his mother—too much. “Nostalgia,” N. C. once wrote, “is a personal experience I hallow as another might a religion.” Separation and loss, as Michaelis observes, became central to the Wyeths’ sense of themselves—and to their artistic achievement.

N. C.’s relationship with his son Nat was close but complicated. The only child who didn’t become an artist, Nat nonetheless married one, Caroline Pyle. In proper Greek tragic fashion, Caroline and N. C. fell in love. N. C. refused to own up to the relationship when Nat confronted him. Not long after, on October 19, 1945, N. C. was taking Caroline’s three-year-old son, Newell, for a ride in his station wagon when the car stalled, or stopped, on some railroad tracks. An oncoming train instantly killed both grandfather and

grandson. Was it a suicide—had the boy been not Nat’s child, but N. C.’s? Family opinion divided. Michaelis doesn’t try to decide, observing only that “fathers who die violent deaths inhabit shallow graves.”

A beautiful stylist with long experience writing for magazines, Michaelis knows how to set up a story. That he didn’t do so here—there is no introduction—suggests that he wanted the intrinsic drama of his material to speak for itself. But given the author’s incisive analysis throughout, one can’t help wishing for some discussion of N. C. Wyeth’s place in the history of American art, and for some reflections on the mythic hold the Wyeth family exercised on the popular imagination. We don’t get anything of the kind until the final page, when Michaelis terms the Wyeths “a federal family” like the Roosevelts and the Kennedys. Surely more could have been said, without compromise or hype.

—A. J. Hewat

DAWN POWELL.

By Tim Page. Holt. 362 pp. \$30

In 1940, a week before the publication of her novel *Angels on Toast*, Dawn Powell wrote in her diary: “A new book coming out no longer rouses any hope. As the day approaches, I look at the book section and think with a sudden horror that this is the last Sunday I will be able to look at a book review without sick misgiving—no review, bad review, or patronizing review . . . and after that the nervous, weary effort to pick up and begin again after another disappointment.” Powell was in her forties at the time, and had been writing for 20 years. She knew whereof she spoke.

Coming to New York at 22 from a miserable Ohio childhood, armed only with courage and ambition, she became known as a good-time drinker and a prodigious wit. From the 1920s on, nearly everyone who met her thought her the funniest woman they had ever known, and many (among them John Dos Passos and Edmund Wilson) considered her a social satirist of the first order. A great future loomed. She began to write novels—*The Tenth Moon* (1932) and *Turn, Magic Wheel* (1936), among others. Half of them provided a dark view of the midwestern small-town life she had come from, but the other half were witty send-ups of social climbers in New York. It was the big-city novels that made sophisticated readers say Dawn Powell was going to do for New York what Balzac had done for Paris.

Somehow, it never came off. Success eluded her, the novels did not get stronger, the promised career died aborning. Powell's spirit, however, proved as tough and enduring as that of the city she loved. Life was hard—her only child was autistic, she and her husband drank too much, the money evaporated, and one day she was old and poor, with no more parties to go to. But, inevitably, there would come a moment when she would see the unexpected humor or poignancy or treachery of some situation or other, and the next thing you knew she was writing another novel. When she died in 1965, her books long out of print and she herself a largely forgotten figure, she was still writing.

In 1987 Gore Vidal, who had known her when he was young, wrote a celebratory piece about Powell, and soon she was being rediscovered. Tim Page, a music critic at the *Washington Post*, became a one-man "Save Dawn Powell" operation, working relentlessly to have her novels reprinted and her diaries published. Now he has written her biography.

When we assess this renewed literary presence in our midst, it is the diaries that seem to compel. The fiction feels painfully dated now—the satire thin, the writing brittle, the characters without intrinsic interest—but in the diaries we have the live spirit of the woman for whom writing and New York were so marvelously one. Here, Powell is literate and hilarious, wise and heartbreaking, and endlessly self-renewing. In 1950, in a moment of exhaustion, she writes in her diary: "The reason friends in late middle-age appear inadequate is that one expects them to give back one's youth—everything one once had with them—and one charges them with the lack that is in oneself, for even if they could give, your container is now a sieve and can hold no gifts for long." Six years later, she's writing: "Just thought why I don't sell stories to popular magazines. All have subtitles—'Last time Gary saw Cindy she was a gawky child; now she was a beautiful woman. . . . I can't help writing, 'Last time Fatso saw Myrt she was a desirable woman; now she was an old bag.'" The insight of the first entry juxtaposed against the irrepressibility of the second is Dawn Powell at her most characteristic—vital, gallant, urban—and that characteristic self is more consistently there in the diaries than in the novels.

Page's biography is what is known as serviceable. The perspective is devoted, the take uncritical, the prose pedestrian. Yet it captures admirably the rough-and-tumble spirit of a writer who deserves a place at the American table.

—Vivian Gornick

IRVING HOWE:
Socialist, Critic, Jew.

By Edward Alexander. Indiana Univ. Press. 284 pp. \$35

"For more than 50 years, from the 1940s to the 1990s, Irving Howe was a kind of miracle." So begins Alexander's estimable study of one of the century's more formidable literary and cultural critics. Irving Howe was a key member of the New York intellectual circle, that "herd of independent minds" (as critic Harold Rosenberg once quipped) that helped shape postwar American politics and culture. Howe, who died in 1993, was indeed something of a miracle.

The circumstances of Howe's youth were inauspicious: he was born in 1920 into the humble, Yiddish-speaking, East Bronx home of David Horenstein (a failed grocer) and his wife, Nettie. He attended City College of New York, became involved in sectarian, anti-Stalinist politics, and as late as 1947 was still railing at the "imperialist" antagonists of World War II—Allied and Axis alike—in the pages of the Trotskyist *Labor Action* and *New Internationalist*. Even after he gained a broader audience by publishing essays and reviews in *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, *Politics*, the *New Republic*, and *Time*, Howe remained a critic who embraced lost causes: socialism, the idea of which he never abandoned; Yiddishkeit, the disappearing secular culture of Eastern European immigrant Jews; and literary humanism, the scourge of contemporary poststructuralist critics.

To what, then, do we attribute his continued hold on us? What qualities still draw us to his remarkably diverse oeuvre, which includes studies of Sherwood Anderson, William Faulkner, Thomas Hardy, Leon Trotsky, American communism and socialism, Walter Reuther, Ralph Waldo Emerson, American Jews, and Yiddish literature—not to mention *Dissent* magazine, America's finest journal of left political and cultural analysis, which Howe founded in 1954 and edited until his death?

According to Alexander, Howe "wrote

about politics and literature and Jews with the productivity of a major industry; and yet his scores of books and hundreds of essays not only met the demanding scholarly standards of the academy but were written with an analytical sharpness, polemical bite, and lethal irony that raised them above the level of what was (and is) generally found in journals of literary and cultural opinion.”

An additional strength of Howe’s criticism, astutely explored by Alexander, is his extraordinary ability to hold opposing ideas in creative tension—a kind of negative capability produced by years of dialectical thinking—which resulted in richly fertile discussions of aesthetics and politics, Judaism and “Jewishness,” and socialism and tradition.

Short of reading Howe himself, especially his moving autobiography *A Margin of Hope* (1982), those (likely younger) readers in need of an introduction would do well to begin with Alexander’s biography. Perhaps the book’s greatest virtue is the extent to which it amplifies Howe’s distinctive voice through generous quotation. Such solicitude is all the more admirable given that Alexander is a conservative. (Howe once referred to him as “my favorite reactionary.”) Unlike so many contemporary biographies and works of literary criticism, this one does not suffocate its subject in a miasma of theory or specious psychoanalytical diagnosis.

Not that Alexander fails to criticize Howe. He censures his subject for misguided views of World War II and his (and the New York intellectuals’) abject neglect of the Holocaust and his own Jewish identity. Only occasionally do Alexander’s opinions become obtrusive, as when he repeatedly rebukes Howe for his views on Zionism, Israel, and the Palestinians. Anyone interested in Howe’s varied career, and the historical context that has given it its particular shape—American radicalism, the Cold War and anticommunism, the New Left, literary modernism, Jewish life—will profit handsomely from reading Alexander’s respectful book.

—Harvey Teres

**THE FACE OF RUSSIA:
*Anguish, Aspiration, and
Achievement in Russian Culture.***

By James H. Billington. TV Books.
269 pp. \$29.95

“Now we have hope,” a Moscow woman quietly commented in August 1991 as it

became clear that the Communist coup attempt against the fledgling Russian democracy had failed. Today, economic and institutional collapse continues to threaten the young democracy, yet Russian artists and intellectuals remain free to create without fear of political repression. Never before, in fact, have Russians been so free to explore human experience through artistic expression. Their persistent belief in an art that seeks to transform rather than merely to entertain may offer the greatest hope for preserving their democracy.

In *The Face of Russia*, Billington, the Librarian of Congress, seeks to tell “the story of the Russian people as seen through their art.” Conceived as a companion volume to a PBS series, the book identifies three fundamental forces in the development of the Russian arts: Russian Orthodox spirituality, closeness to nature, and the habit of borrowing from the West—the “recurrent tendency to take over, lift up, and then cast down new forms of creativity,” from icon painting to constitutional democracy. The author traces this pattern in the religious culture of the 15th to 17th centuries, represented by wooden churches and the icon painting of Andrei Rublev; the aristocratic culture of the 18th and early 19th centuries, represented by the imperial palaces of Bartolomeo Rastrelli and the literary legacy of Nikolai Gogol; and the mass culture of the later 19th and 20th centuries, represented by the music of Modest Mussorgsky and the films of Sergei Eisenstein. Through each of these art forms, Russians transformed foreign models into radically innovative original works in what Billington describes as “a culture of explosive revolution rather than gradual evolution.”

While not purporting to be a comprehensive guide to the Russian artistic experience, this is an informative and highly readable essay. By avoiding some of the more obvious choices of artists and art forms, Billington has produced a personal book, conversational in tone and enlivened by his reminiscences. Few would argue with the author’s belief that, in order to understand the Russian people, their history, and their future, it is both important and infinitely rewarding to study their art.

—Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter

Science & Technology

THE INVISIBLE COMPUTER: Why Good Products Can Fail, the Personal Computer Is So Complex, and Information Appliances Are the Solution.

By Donald Norman. MIT Press.
315 pp. \$25

“When you come to a fork in the road, take it,” Yogi Berra is said to have counseled. Two decades after its birth, the personal computer industry has reached such a juncture. Microsoft’s hegemony has enriched many on Bill Gates’s version of *The Road Ahead*, while leaving critics (including antitrust lawyers) yearning for a diverging path. Gates has proposed an international supernet of machines from many manufacturers, delivering all forms of information, entertainment, and advertising, and controlled by different versions of a Microsoft Windows interface. The flaws are apparent: voluminous code, ubiquitous bugs, expensive support, fixes that introduce new problems, shifting interface standards.

While *The Invisible Computer* has few pages on Microsoft as such, Donald Norman might be called the Anti-Gates. Norman, formerly a professor at the University of California, San Diego, and at different times an executive at Apple and Hewlett-Packard, is a cognitive psychologist challenging the conventions of colleagues from electrical engineering and computer science. His previous books have examined how people actually use things of all kinds, and how designers can reduce users’ frustration.

Instead of Gates’s master device, the personal computer, controlled by a standardized interface and doing many tasks simultaneously, Norman’s ideal is an array of “information appliances,” stand-alone products optimized for specific tasks. Most of our everyday technology is already dedicated, from radio and television receivers to toasters and microwave ovens. And we already have more special-purpose computers than we realize, from pocket calculators, organizers, and even translators to microprocessor-controlled video cameras. These rarely require bulky manuals or training courses, and we can carry them easily. Why, the author asks, can’t the rest of our information devices follow this model?

By abandoning what Norman considers the impossible goal of making complex tasks easy through a universal, intuitive interface, designers can produce special-purpose equipment that can be far easier to use. (Even today, standard spreadsheet software can generate no output as handy as the paper-tape record from a cheap pocket calculator, a device whose use requires almost no training.) In an appendix, Norman lists some new possibilities for information appliances, including a home medical adviser, a weather and traffic display, an electronic garden device that both monitors conditions and instructs owners, a home financial center, and even body implants.

Other researchers, notably those in the MIT Media Lab, have been developing some of these ideas. What makes Norman’s approach unusual is his vision of *replacing* rather than *augmenting* computing as we know it. Two concepts are essential. One is “human-centered development,” based not on asking people what they want but on observing their behavior. The other is development of a data exchange standard for information appliances so that producers can work together, bypassing the heretofore-sovereign central processing unit of the PC—and thus the operating system as we know it.

Norman recognizes the obstacles. He acknowledges that many human tasks are inherently difficult; even some apparently effortless ones take years of childhood and youth to master. He also understands that revolutionary, “disruptive” technologies are less appealing to managers than incremental improvements to existing technologies. Most seriously, he sees the necessity for a single data exchange standard. The endless wrangling over digital television and videodisks, clouds the outlook, sadly, for future harmony involving even more divergent interests.

Readers need not agree with all of the author’s prescriptions to value his knowledge, insight, and humor. Historical vignettes—operating instructions for early radios, the rise and decline of the number of aircraft instruments—are delightful in their own right. Norman shows there is at least one road not yet taken.

—Edward Tenner

**HOW THE CANYON
BECAME GRAND:**

A Short History.

By Stephen J. Pyne. Viking.
199 pp. \$24.95

In the late 1850s, an army expedition exploring the Colorado River made the first recorded descent to the floor of the Grand Canyon. “The region is, of course, altogether valueless,” Lieutenant Joseph Christmas Ives later wrote in *Report upon the Colorado River of the West* (1861). “It can be approached only from the south, and after entering it there is nothing to do but leave. Ours has been the first, and will doubtless be the last, party of whites to visit this profitless locality.”

By 1875, though, another explorer, Major John Wesley Powell, had called the view from the canyon’s rim “the most sublime spectacle on the earth.” And in 1903, the site received the presi-

dential seal of approval: Theodore Roosevelt told reporters gathered at a luxury hotel on the canyon’s South Rim that the view was one of the “great sights every American should see.”

In this slender, lapidary account, the author considers how observers of different eras have perceived the Grand Canyon. Pyne, a historian at Arizona State University, makes a simple point: despite the geographical impediments to reaching and exploring the canyon, “the real question of access was mental.” Some of the earliest Spanish explorers, for example, were able to comprehend the canyon’s features only by comparing them to the cathedrals of 16th-century Seville. As Pyne explains, “There was hardly yet a cosmology suitable for interpreting a landscape as peculiar as the Canyon. The



Palisades of the Desert (1996), by Curt Walters

earth was believed to have commenced a few thousand years before. . . . Perspective had entered Spanish art only a handful of years [earlier, and] the conventions of modern landscape . . . were still a century in the future.” Even the 19th-century artists who brought the American public its first pictures of the canyon didn’t quite get it—their early drawings, Pyne demonstrates, “show an almost fabulous lack of correlation to any [of the canyon’s] tangible features.”

How did perspectives change? For one thing, the great age of discovery in the American West coincided with a scientific revolution that invigorated the study of geology.

“Between the late 18th century and the mid-20th,” Pyne notes, “the known age of the earth increased a millionfold, from less than 6,000 years to more than 4.6 billion.” In that context, the Grand Canyon

suddenly appeared, quite literally, as a revelation, an opening up of the workings of natural history. “The Grand Canyon,” Pyne writes, “symbolized earth history as nowhere else on the planet.” Suddenly America had a historical monument, and it was a monument to the *world’s* history—older, grander, and more important than anything previously imagined.

Today, the Grand Canyon stands as a powerful symbol of unspoiled wilderness. We think we know the canyon, but in many ways we are probably still as blind as the early Spanish explorers. “The Canyon has something yet to say,” Pyne concludes, “even if each visitor hears only the echo of his or her own voice.”

—Toby Lester

Contemporary Affairs

***THE RISE OF THE IMAGE, THE
FALL OF THE WORD.***

By Mitchell Stephens. Oxford Univ.
Press. 259 pp. \$27.50

Teenage son and father meet in the hall. Son has been watching ESPN. Father has

been reading the *New York Times* sports section and *Sports Illustrated*. Father knows who’s leading the league in hitting. Son understands the themes of the season.

Wife is a visual type, too. Assistant managing editor in charge of the look of a leading news-

magazine. Spends workday creating graphic illustrations and retouching photos to communicate truth.

Father struggles for weeks to get through Don DeLillo's *Underworld*. Puts it down. Too many stories. Too many characters. Too many scenes chock-a-block, one after the other.

Family in front of the TV. Son has the remote. No attention span. Changes from station to station. Drives father crazy. By the time he begins to get into whatever is on, commercial or event or boring political speech, son switches stations. Wife grabs the remote. Settles on MTV. Son leaves to go play video game.

Father is asked to review Mitchell Stephens's new book, *the rise of the image, the fall of the word*. Begins to understand.

The temptation is to glorify the past, particularly the past that not only produced us but honored the skills and values that we call our own. But the good old days were usually not as good as we remember them, and the bad new days often trouble us simply because they challenge assumptions that we hold dear. Just as we condemn video as an inadequate and banal communications medium, the elite chattering classes of yore trashed each of its predecessors: writing, printing, photographs, and radio.

The rise of the image, the fall of the word is a fascinating, counterintuitive tour de force, driven by Stephens's belief that we are at the beginning of a communications transformation as fundamental as the introduction of writing 3,500 years ago. In the view of the author, a journalism professor at New York University, the creators of MTV were on to something that ultimately will lead to new truths, new understanding, and levels of communication that we cannot yet grasp.

Stephens first describes how new communications media get introduced into society. Initially, people use the new medium to imitate the old. Early television, for example, simply put existing media—theater, radio, and film—in front of the screen. Stephens next lays out the qualities of what he believes will be the next dominant communications form: moving (usually very quickly moving) images. Finally, he speculates on what tomorrow's "new video" might actually look like: fast, densely paced, asymmetric, surrealistic, full of computer-generated graphics and doctored photos, organized more like music than prose. To make his argument, Stephens draws upon a wide range of sources from history, pop culture, film, liter-

ature, and advertising, as well as his experience as a teacher and father.

The picture is at once optimistic and disconcerting. It's upsetting to be told that the world that produced you was neither the highest stage of human achievement nor the last, that the truisms by which you have lived are being superseded, and that your kids, even the little ones, are heading into intellectual frontiers that are beyond your willingness, if not your capacity, to absorb. Stephens has created a different way of thinking about the sands that we feel shifting so quickly under our feet. If he's right, this book review may be a dying art form about a dying art form—and we have reason to be hopeful about what will take their place.

—Marty Linsky

**GLOBALIZATION:
*The Human Consequences.***

By Zygmunt Bauman. Columbia Univ. Press. 138 pp. \$24.50

Francis Fukuyama ignited an op-ed page controversy in 1990 by portraying the conclusion of the Cold War as "the end of history." In its own way, Bauman's new book is equally apocalyptic: it declares the end of geography.

Bauman, a Polish-born sociologist who has spent much of his career in England, recounts ways in which the technological advances of the past quarter-century have freed knowledge, capital, and political power from the traditional restraints of physical space, allowing them to rocket across the globe at the touch of a computer key. Corporations move where they wish, when they wish. So do the elites who manage them, the specialists who staff them at the highest levels, and the academics and cultural professionals who operate comfortably in their world. Meanwhile, the traditional world of familiar physical space, of local businesses, stable relationships, and face-to-face public communication, is collapsing all across Western civilization. "With distances no longer meaning anything," Bauman observes, "localities, separated by distances, also lose their meanings."

Bauman is not the first to notice such changes, nor does he claim credit for the phrase "end of geography." But he does offer a systematic and wide-ranging (if occasionally sketchy) analysis of its consequences—most of which, in his view, are unfortunate. The fruits of postgeographical life, for instance,

are not widely shared. While the elites live in time rather than space, forging a single international culture through e-mail and jet travel, the much larger cohort of “locals” remains trapped in the obsolete territorial culture, stuck in the cold reality of decaying communities and jobs that disappear virtually overnight, leaving them worse off than they were before. For the majority, even in the world’s most advanced countries, Bauman argues, there is nothing liberating about the Internet and the instant flow of information. Cyberspace, he says, “keeps the globals in the sieve and washes out the locals.”

But for all the disparities in affluence, opportunity, and satisfaction, the globals and the locals have one thing in common: neither has any real security in their new environment. Work in the global economy may pay well, but employment is more precarious than ever, the author warns, and so are the privileges of global membership that successful careers seem to promise. “After all,” Bauman asserts, “most jobs are temporary, shares may go down as well as up, skills keep

being devalued and superseded by new and improved skills. . . . There are so many banana skins on the road, and so many sharp curbs on which one can stumble.”

There is a term that describes all that we are losing, Bauman says: the German word *sicherheit*, a concept that signifies safety, security, and certainty—all three mixed together and all at the same time. Life after geography, in Bauman’s view, is life without *sicherheit*, and it is a life that millions all over the world, elites and masses alike, find profoundly unsettling.

This book will convince few who are not in sympathy with its ideas at the outset. To those who reflexively celebrate the expansion of personal choice and individual freedom, it will seem bewildering and overwrought. But anyone prepared to move beyond the seductiveness of libertarian ideology—anyone willing simply to look around and see the scars of global economic change on the streets of an ordinary city—will find *Globalization* as eloquent a summation of the problem as they are likely to encounter anywhere.

—Alan Ehrenhalt

History

KING LEOPOLD’S GHOST: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa.

By Adam Hochschild. Houghton
Mifflin. 384 pp. \$26

Ever hear of the Congo Holocaust? Neither had journalist and *Mother Jones* cofounder Adam Hochschild, despite years of writing about human rights and a visit to central Africa. Tantalized by a footnote referring to millions of lives lost to slave labor around the turn of the century, Hochschild delved deeper. He soon realized that he had in fact encountered the story before—in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. In *King Leopold’s Ghost*, Hochschild draws on memoirs, missionary accounts, government records, and the testimony of Africans themselves to unearth the long-forgotten facts behind Conrad’s fiction.

The tale begins with Europe’s scramble for Africa. Frustrated by his “small country, small people,” King Leopold II of Belgium desperately searched for a colony to call his own. He tried to buy Fiji; he offered to take the Philippines off Spain’s hands. With the help of the British explorer Henry Morton Stanley, he

finally settled on the Congo—a virtually unknown area larger than England, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy combined. By 1884, Leopold had established the Congo Free State as his personal property.

A master of spin and a genius at manipulation, King Leopold played on the European public’s desire to combat the “Arab” slave trade and civilize the region’s inhabitants. Lauded as a humanitarian, the king in reality presided as self-appointed “proprietor” over a colony characterized by slave labor, severed hands, kidnapping, and mass murder. Between 1890 and 1910, his quest for ivory and rubber cost the lives of half of the region’s 20 million inhabitants and brought him more than \$1 billion (in today’s dollars).

Although the king remains a shadowy villain, Hochschild vividly brings to life the activists whose battle against Leopold dominates the book’s second half. At the heart of the effort to expose his abuses are the journalist and Congo Reform Association founder E. D. Morel and the atrocity investigator Roger Casement, the colony’s first British consul. Also of great interest are two African Ameri-

cans—the journalist George Washington Williams and the missionary William Shepherd—whose impassioned activism helped launch the 20th century’s first international human rights campaign. By focusing on characters such as these, Hochschild manages to transform what might have been dry history into a page turner.

“Did the Congo reformers . . . save millions of lives?” Hochschild asks. “It would be a fitting climax to our story if this were so, for a splendid movement deserves splendid results.” But that wasn’t exactly the case. Although reports of atrocities dropped off after the king was forced to sell his colony to the Belgian government in 1908, the reduction resulted primarily from such changes as the shift from wild to cultivated rubber. And forced labor, hostage taking, and beatings with the infamous hippopotamus-skin whip called the *chicotte* continued until World War II. Still, Hochschild argues, the movement succeeded in making Leopold’s atrocities part of the historical record and in keeping alive the “human capacity for outrage.”

—Rebecca A. Clay

ATHENS:
*A Portrait of the City in
Its Golden Age.*

By Christian Meier. Trans. by Robert
and Rita Kimber. Metropolitan.
640 pp. \$37.50

The great 19th-century historian Jacob Burckhardt no doubt had it right: “Conditions in Periclean Athens were such that no sensible and peaceful person of our day would want to live under them.” But Burckhardt’s judgment has not kept us from endlessly revisiting the Athens of the fifth century B.C. in our minds. We recognize how much poorer we would be without the ancient Athenians’ intellectual, cultural, and political legacy, the brilliance of which remains undimmed by the darker aspects of the era—the city’s ceaseless belligerence, the limits to enfranchisement (only men could be citizens), the slavery.

The Greek city-states, petty and contentious and cruel, were in seemingly continuous conflict with one another. The mystery, the wonder, is that in this shifting, rocky soil there took root the beginnings of Western democracy. Meier, a professor of ancient history at the University of Munich, sorts out the strands of this astonishing development with clarity and intelligence. He makes it possible for the con-

temporary reader to return with new confidence to the dense pages of Herodotus and Thucydides and to feel again the lasting power of those formidable first histories.

The notable figures of golden age Athens who crowd Meier’s pages—the for-better-and-for-worse politicians, the vexing sophists and philosophers, the poet-dramatists who interpreted the world for their audiences, the architects and sculptors who dressed the city in physical glory—are all participants in the monumental development that is the author’s principal concern: the progression of Athenian political institutions toward democracy.

Through a process for which the historical documentation is incomplete, there occurred a radical transformation of political thought in Athens at the close of the sixth century B.C. and on into the fifth. The Athenians took control of their destiny and gradually came to identify themselves with the polis and the interests of the polis. The citizens *were* the city. Athenian democracy grew in accordance with two fundamental principles: first, all decisions were to be made as openly as possible on the basis of public discussion; second, as many citizens as possible were to take part in the political process and hold office.

Meier frames his narrative with two great encounters at sea. In 480 B.C., the Athenians abandoned their city and took to ships for a battle near the island of Salamis with the invading forces of the Persian king Xerxes. The Athenians defeated the Persians and saved Greece, and the stage was set for Athens’s subsequent domination as a naval power in the Aegean. In 416, during the long war with its military rival Sparta, Athens sent a fleet to the island of Sicily to conquer the city of Syracuse. It was a mad enterprise, and the Athenians awoke too late from delusion to defeat and humiliation far from home. Though Athens continued to fight Sparta for another 10 years, until losing the naval battle of Aegospotami in 404, the Sicilian expedition was an emblematic disaster.

The rise and fall of the Athenian empire—in the decades between Salamis and Syracuse—is in the grand tradition of cautionary tales. Meier does not labor to draw lessons about the perils of unrestrained striving for power, but they are everywhere apparent. The city could no longer function democratically once it succumbed to the temptation of irresponsible policies. Not all fifth-century politicians were Pericles, and, in the end, the

Athenians were persuaded by their ambitious leaders to overreach. Athens did not disappear after the fifth century: Plato was not yet 30 years old at century's end, and Aristotle had not been born. But henceforth, and to this day, the city would matter for the might of its mind.

—James Morris

THURGOOD MARSHALL:

American Revolutionary.

By Juan Williams. Times Books. 459 pp. \$27.50

In the latest addition to the substantial literature on the first black Supreme Court justice, Williams charts Marshall's transformation from a child of rather humble but middle-class origins (his mother was a schoolteacher, his father a steward at an all-white yacht club) into an "American Revolutionary" honored by blacks as "Mr. Civil Rights." Spurred on by his mother's unwavering support and reoriented (temporarily) from parties to studies in college, Marshall found his life's focus under a hard-driving Howard Law School mentor, Charles Houston. Houston drew Marshall into NAACP work in the deep South, immersing him in the fight against the white primary, lynching, segregated transportation, restrictive covenants, and school segregation. It all culminated in Marshall's triumph in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), in which the Supreme Court unanimously declared that segregated public education violated the Fourteenth Amendment. Marshall was rewarded for his accomplishments, first with a federal judgeship in 1961 and then with a place on the Supreme Court in 1967.

As the years passed, though, Marshall became increasingly bitter. He lamented the civil rights movement's shift from law to other tools of reform. He bridled not only at Black Power militants but, privately, at the nonviolent protests of Martin Luther King, Jr., as well. Later, the growing conservatism of the Court and the White House seemed to seal Marshall's view that the country had breached the promise of the civil rights revolution.

Williams provides a lively and readable introduction to the justice's personal and professional life, drawing on Marshall's correspondence, other primary documents, and extensive interviews (but, surprisingly, neglecting the existing literature on Marshall and the civil rights movement). A *Washington Post* journalist and the author of the book companion to the PBS documentary *Eyes on*

the Prize, Williams proceeds case by case through Marshall's extensive legal career, offering helpful summaries but little sustained analysis of the justice's brand of civil rights activism.

In the final chapter, the author suggests that Marshall's approach rested on a belief that individual rights are paramount. How did this philosophy affect other aspects of Marshall's life, such as his personal indulgence or his distaste for King? Williams never says. His thin rendering of Marshall's beliefs also fails to account for the justice's descent into bitter isolation, given his legendary successes. While Williams depicts Marshall as a straightforward believer in individual

rights, the evidence points toward some more strained individualistic ethos that emphasized the personal dimension of offense and grievance, individual rights and redress, law as the only solution to



social wrongs, and the autonomous nature of human achievement—not all of which are easily reconciled with the collectivist underpinnings of civil rights and social life more generally. The author provides the details of Justice Marshall's life without fully reflecting on its ultimate meaning and trajectory.

—Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn

THE BRITISH MONARCHY AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

By Marilyn Morris. Yale Univ. Press. 229 pp. \$28.50

As French revolutionaries toppled the Bourbon monarchy, many Britons, including Edmund Burke and Edward Gibbon, worried that their throne might be next. For the British crown, the 18th century had not been the best of times. Jacobites, supporters of the Stuart pretenders, incited rebellions in 1714 and 1745. During their collective reigns (1714–60), George I and George II proved altogether inept at public relations, and they were frequently subjected to satirical attacks. George III lost the American colonies, a defeat that left him so despon-

dent that he considered abdicating. In his influential *Rights of Man* (1791–92), Thomas Paine lauded the French Revolution and dismissed the British monarchy as useless. The head of the Manchester Constitutional Society declared that Paine “has wounded [the British aristocracy] mortally . . . and monarchy will not, I think, continue long in fashion.”

But the British crown did not fall. Morris, a history professor at the University of North Texas, contends that most of Paine’s admirers favored only parliamentary reform, not abolition of the monarchy. By the end of the 1790s, moreover, “the invasion scare and dread of Bonaparte drew people together in defense of the nation.” Britons realized that their monarchical constitutional order protected against both the horrors of the Reign of Terror and the despotism of Napoleon.

While persuasively arguing that most Britons of the 1790s opposed revolutionary change, Morris points out that we should not be too quick to dismiss those who feared that “the French disease” (as Gibbon termed it) might infect Great Britain. Toward the end of the decade, a group of British and Irish repub-

lican extremists formed a revolutionary underground in hopes of coordinating a French invasion, an Irish rebellion, and an insurrection in London. Though their plot failed, small bands of revolutionaries sometimes do succeed, as the world has learned in the two centuries since.

Morris gives considerable credit to George III for shoring up the monarchy. He had survived the shame of the American defeat to become “a cultural icon” widely admired for his patriotism, his dedication to the duties of kingship, and his “paternal disposition.” A devoted husband and regular churchgoer, George was accessible, often appearing in public with his children and chatting with commoners. Press coverage of the royal family’s activities increased during the decade, and, for the most part, familiarity bred affection. George’s position as “moral exemplar,” Morris observes, “eclipsed his political role.” Yet charisma and affability are only part of the explanation. Britons, regardless of their feelings for the monarch and the royal family, have always associated the crown with political stability—as much in the 1790s as in the 1990s.

—Stephen Miller

Religion & Philosophy

KADDISH.

By Leon Wieseltier. Knopf. 588 pp.
\$27.50

The death of a parent is supposed to bring you face to face, as nothing else can, with the realities of time. When Leon Wieseltier’s father died, the event, though not unexpected, plunged him backward in time and into the mysteries of his own tradition. Determined to honor his father with a proper Kaddish, the ritual Jewish observance of a year of daily mourning, Wieseltier found himself in synagogue two or three times a day, immersed in customs and laws from which he had long kept his distance. Why was he doing it? What could be the legal or theological basis for this enigmatic custom, in which the name of God is obsessively “magnified and sanctified,” and death, mourning, and sorrow are never mentioned?

Torn between these questions and the certainty that he was doing the right, the only, thing, Wieseltier turned to the tradition itself

for help. The result is a reader’s diary of his journey down the byways of Jewish law, of Talmudic and rabbinic commentary and arcana, the “sea” of Jewish tradition about which the rabbis say, “Turn it and turn it, for everything is in it.” This is no mere narrative of the sort that has become familiar: the secular Jew returning to the fold, or the untrained Jew becoming entranced late in life with the richness of Torah, Talmud, and ritual observance. Wieseltier was trained rigorously in all those things as a youth and gave them up only later to become a journalist and public intellectual (he is literary editor of the *New Republic*). Unlike the many who “return,” the author starts with the tools to read and navigate the sources.

Perhaps more striking, he has a feel for the meandering, spiraling form of these voluminous sources, in which rabbis jump from century to century and from topic to topic, multiplying distinctions and piling cases upon cases. This cadence Wieseltier man-

ages, rather remarkably, to reproduce, letting his reading and the calendar pull him from medieval folktale to Enlightenment response, from philosophical aperçu to ritual prescription to outright flight of fancy. Wondering why mourners all say the Kaddish in unison rather than following a leader, Wieseltier finds a 19th-century Moravian rabbi citing a 16th-century Egyptian rabbi's account of an incident in which one mourner, vying for the leadership role, punched another in the face. Dipping into the mystics, he stumbles on an enchanting line of commentary that says the Kaddish is intended by the mourners to console God himself for the delay of redemption—and that it is said partly in Aramaic to keep it private from the angels, who do not understand that tongue!

The result comes as close to the feel of studying Talmud as the modern layperson without extensive Jewish education is likely to get. It's a lovely excursion, threaded through with the mysterious beauty of the Kaddish itself, a prayer that another writer, Allen Hoffman, once described as "the building-blocks of the universe rumbling against one another as their names are called."

—Amy E. Schwartz

**MANIFESTO OF A PASSIONATE
MODERATE:**

Unfashionable Essays.

By Susan Haack. Univ. of Chicago Press. 223 pp. \$22.50

"Anyone except cops and charlatans," the Czechoslovak Academy of Science immunologist-poet Miroslav Holub writes, "must realize that the ideas and laws of basic research [i.e., scientific inquiry] have nothing to do with power, for a simple, fundamental reason: that an Eastern political leader owing to his constitutional laziness understands them no better than does a creation-science evangelist who has trouble with the American IRS because of his Sunday TV profits."

But cops and charlatans are not the only dissenters. Reputed deep thinkers—in some odd disciplines, a majority of the reputed deep thinkers—defend the antic proposition that scientific inquiry and its results have *everything* to do with power. These are the adherents of social constructionism, who populate many academic fields, from poli-

tics to epistemology, plus those public philosophers who are proud to be postmodern. They are conscripts to one side in the culture wars, the side that seeks to debunk science, the idea of objectivity, the possibility of transcultural knowledge, the notion of truth—a word they never use except surrounded by quotation marks.

For Susan Haack, these current fashions on many questions of science, objectivity, knowledge, and truth are, in a word, nonsense. And tasteless, to boot. Haack's credentials—she is a noted logician, epistemologist, and philosopher of science—should not imply, as they might for some distinguished philosophers, anesthesia in the prose. On the contrary, Haack's writing is as lively as Holub's. Her sentences and paragraphs are honed to a fine edge, and an unexpectedly impish sense of humor invigorates some of her more technical discussions. Hers is a tough mind, confident of its power, making an art of logic.

Haack is no dogmatist, or traditionalist, or foundationalist. But she does believe in the value of philosophy, in the possibility of approaching truth that is not just agreement by bargaining. Her argumentation demonstrates, as does that of few of her contemporaries, that honest inquiry is not only possible and valuable but moral. She insists upon philosophy as the unique tool for judgment of inquiry. And for her, "scientific method" is neither more nor less than honest inquiry. The institutionalized effort (at least) of honest inquiry is what distinguishes natural science from other means of interpreting the world, and has so distinguished it for the last 400 years.

Those who cannot believe that any sensible person (let alone a professor or scholar) would argue to the contrary—and who cannot believe that their children will be taught the contrary in college—particularly need to read Haack's essays. Multiculturalism, relativism, knowledge versus propaganda, feminism, affirmative action, and yes, "preposterism": all are dealt with in (politically) non-partisan, fully documented essays. Those are important subjects that most academic philosophers, protecting perks and avoiding angst, won't go near. Haack engages them with a cool mastery. We need reminding by good philosophy of what Cicero saw: that there is nothing so absurd but some philosopher has said it.

—Paul R. Gross

POETRY

The Browning–Howard Connection

Selected and introduced by Anthony Hecht

When I was a schoolboy, Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" was a standard item in the English curriculum. It had many features calculated to excite the minds of the young, foremost among them a ruthless, egotistical tyrant of such power and vanity that he could openly admit to having ordered the execution of his own wife for the "crime" of being too pleasant to others. Critics have not been of one mind about the meaning of the poem, or even the psychology of its ducal speaker. Robert Langbaum, who regards himself as something of an authority on the poem, writes, "It is because *the duke's motive for telling the story is inadequate*, and because the situation is never resolved in that the utterance is not quite directed to the auditor and *does not accomplish anything*, that we look for a resolution in the duke's life outside the poem" [my italics, indicating where I think Langbaum mistaken]. William Harmon declares, "The duke is dignified and cagey but not quite cagey enough. Some inner compulsion, probably an overwhelming sense of guilt, has compelled him to return to the scene and situation of his crime and to confess." This seems to me equally mistaken.

Browning's duke is based on Alfonso d'Este, duke of Ferrara, whose first wife died under mysterious circumstances only three years after her marriage. Like historical novelists of our day, Browning allowed himself some latitude in creating his psychological portrait. But he was a keen student of history, and he would have known all about the moral vagaries of Italian Renaissance princes, a topic Shakespeare himself was acquainted with. Regarding the d'Este family, Jacob Burkhardt writes:

Within the palace frightful deeds were perpetrated; a princess was beheaded (1425) for alleged adultery with a stepson; legitimate and illegitimate children fled from the court, and even abroad their lives were threatened by assassins sent in pursuit of them (1471). Plots from without were incessant; the bastard of a bastard tried to wrest the crown from the lawful heir, Hercules I; this latter is said afterwards (1493) to have poisoned his wife on discovering that she, at the instigation of her brother, Ferrante of Naples, was going to poison him.

Confident, audacious, vain, Browning's duke knows just what he's up to, and has calculated to a nicety the effect his words will have on the envoy who has come to treat with him about a second marriage, and is acting as the agent of the count of Tyrol, whose court is at Innsbruck, Austria. Underneath the duke's connoisseurship, civility, and boastfulness, two stipulations are meant to be made crystal clear to the family of the potential bride: (1) The duke is a man of expensive tastes who will expect a dowry commensurate with the distinction of his noble family, and (2) he will also expect nothing but absolute submission and obedience from anyone he deigns to marry. This is the "motive" for his elaborate discourse. He feels no more *guilt* than Shakespeare's Antonio in *The Tempest*, who plots the murder of his brother, Prospero. The duke's conscience is as untroubled as Machiavelli tells us a prince's ought to

be. Doubtless this is chilling, even monstrous; yet there have been such men. That such brutal considerations should present themselves openly during the negotiations preliminary to a marriage contract should not astonish us when we recall that marriage among the nobility was largely a mercenary and dynastic matter, in which love played little if any role.

Richard Howard, a poet and professor of English at Columbia University, has written a brilliant sequel to the Browning poem, predicated on the dramatic situation as outlined above. His “speaker” is one Nikolaus Mardruz, the envoy to whom Browning’s duke has recently spoken, and who is now reporting (by written message) on that interview along with relevant observations, to his principal, the count of Tyrol. He includes comments omitted in Browning’s version: for example, the duke’s mention of “the relative consolations of semblance,” a curious turn of phrase, suggesting that the duke is (1) so old, or (2) so ill, or (3) so refined that he now prefers portraits to their subjects. This can mean that he has moved beyond sexual appetites, but it can also mean that he places no high value on the lives of others. As a diplomat/intermediary, Mardruz is easily the equal of the duke in cunning, intrigue, and cool, strategic thinking. Howard has introduced matters of age, health, and cash flow into the plottings, and the drama is greatly enlarged thereby. He might well plan to continue the sequence.

A few words need to be said about the formal elements of the two poems. Browning’s is written, not (as William Harmon declares) in heroic couplets (which are also called “closed” couplets, and in which the sense is completed in the second line), but in what might be called defiantly unheroic couplets, full of enjambments, the speaker’s impetuosity of discourse flooding through the form almost without pause to rhyme. The headlong thrust of syntax makes the formality of rhyme a secondary, if not a negligible, factor. Howard’s poem is composed in syllabics, in which syllables are counted without regard to accents. Though he has disposed his lines on the page with great craft and seamless continuity, study will disclose that he has constructed an eight-line stanza, in which the line lengths, by syllable count, run: 9, 11, 5, 5, 11, 9, 5, 5. With the ninth line, this pattern is repeated. By ingeniously placing the first set of five-syllable lines toward the left margin of the poem, and the second set toward the right, Howard has presented a visually serpentine format, suggesting the deviousness and sinuosity of his speaker, and his Mardruz is worthy of Browning.

My Last Duchess

Ferrara

That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf’s hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will’t please you sit and look at her? I said
“Frà Pandolf” by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, ’twas not
Her husband’s presence only, called that spot

Myself I find it
 but a mountebank's
 proficiency—another chicane, like that
 illusive curtain, a waxwork sort
 of nature called forth:
 cold legerdemain!
 Though *extranea* such as the hares
 (copulating!), the doves, and a full-blown rose
 were showily limned,
 I could not discern
 aught to be loved in that countenance itself,
 likely to rival, much less to excel
 the life illumined
 in Cranach's image
 of *our* Countess, which His Grace had set
 beside the dead woman's presentment. . . . And took,
 so evident was
 the supremacy,
 no further pains to assert Fra Pandolf's skill.
 One last hard look, whereupon the Duke
 resumed his discourse
 in an altered tone,
 now some unintelligible rant
 of *stooping*—His Grace chooses “never to stoop”
 when he makes reproof. . . .
 My Lord will take this
 as but a figure: not only is the Duke
 no longer young, his body is so
 queerly misshapen
 that even to *speak*
 of “not stooping” seems absurdity:
 the creature *is* stooped, whether by cruel
 or impartial cause—say
 Time or the Tempter—
 I shall not venture to hypothecate. Cause
 or no cause, it would appear he marked
 some motive for his
 “reproof,” a mortal
 chastisement in fact inflicted on
 his poor Duchess, *put away* (I take it so)
 for smiling—at whom?
 Brother Pandolf? or
 some visitor to court during the sitting?
 —too generally, if I construe
 the Duke's clue rightly,
 to survive the terms
 of his . . . severe protocol. My Lord,
 at the time it was delivered to me thus,
 the admonition
 if indeed it was
 any such thing, seemed no more of a menace
 than the rest of his rodomontade;
 item, he pointed,
 as we toiled downstairs,
 to that bronze *Neptune* by our old Claus
 (there must be at least six of them cluttering
 the Summer Palace
 at Innsbruck), claiming
 it was “cast in bronze for me.” Nonsense, of course.

But upon reflection, I suppose
 we had better take
 the old reprobate
 at his unspeakable word. . . . Why, even
 assuming his boasts should be as plausible
 as his avarice,

no “cause” for dismay:
once ensconced here as the Duchess, your daughter
 need no more apprehend the Duke’s
 murderous temper
 than his matchless taste.

For I have devised a means whereby
the dowry so flagrantly pursued by our
 insolvent Duke (“no
 just pretense of mine
be disallowed” indeed!), instead of being
 paid as he pleads in one globose sum,
 should drip into his
 coffers by degrees—
 say, one fifth each year—then after five
such years, the dowry itself to be doubled,
 always assuming
 that Her Grace enjoys
her usual smiling health. The years are her
 ally in such an arbitrament,
 and with confidence
 My Lord can assure
 the new Duchess (assuming her Duke
abides by these stipulations and his own
 propensity for
 accumulating
“semblances”) the long devotion (so long as
 he lasts) of her last Duke... Or more likely,
 if I guess aright
 your daughter’s intent,
 of that young lordling I might make so
bold as to designate her next Duke, as well...

Ever determined in

My Lordship’s service,
I remain his Envoy
to Ferrara as to the world.

Nikolaus Mardruz.



Nikolaus Mardruz to his Master Ferdinand, Count of Tyrol, 1565 *first appeared in* The Yale Review.
It is reprinted here by permission of Richard Howard.

THE PERIODICAL OBSERVER

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

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The Jefferson–Hemings Controversy

A Survey of Recent Articles

The persuasive scientific evidence in the British journal *Nature* (Nov. 5, 1998) that Thomas Jefferson fathered at least one child by his slave Sally Hemings is likely not to end debate about the character of this American demigod but only to carry it to a new level—beyond the reach of DNA testing.

Jefferson's character has come under intense scrutiny in recent decades. Earlier in this century, historians looked upon American history as a titanic struggle between Jeffersonian democrats and Hamiltonian aristocrats, noted Peter S. Onuf, a historian at the University of Virginia, writing in the *William and Mary Quarterly* (Oct. 1993). But this neat scheme was thrown into confusion by the New Deal's affirmative use of government, which New Dealers portrayed as the employment of Hamiltonian means for Jeffersonian ends. In his 1960 book *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind*, Merrill Peterson wrote that scholars were turning away from the partisan Jefferson to a new image, that of "the civilized man," with his many diverse interests and achievements. But even as Jefferson earned such admiring attention, other historians began to focus on the glaring discrepancy between his idealistic pronouncements and his behavior as a slaveowner.

"How could the man who wrote that 'All men are created equal' own slaves? This, in essence, is the question . . . that contemporary Americans find most vexing about him," observed Douglas L. Wilson, director of the International Center for Jefferson Studies at Monticello, in the *Atlantic Monthly* (Nov. 1992). In his view, asking the question that way

"reflects the pervasive presentism of our time." The question should be: "How did a man who was born into a slave holding society, whose family and admired friends owned slaves, who inherited a fortune that was dependent on slaves and slave labor, decide at an early age that slavery was morally wrong and forcefully declare that it ought to be abolished?"

But while the argument against "presentism" seems to put Jefferson's ownership of slaves in perspective, the contention that he had children by Sally Hemings (whose father was probably John Wayles, Jefferson's father-in-law) may be a different matter. "If he did take advantage of Hemings and father her children over a period of 20 years," Wilson argued in his 1992 essay, "he was acting completely out of character and violating his own standards of honor and decency."

First publicly aired in 1802 by James Callender, a scandal-mongering journalist with a grudge against Jefferson, the allegation about his relationship with his young slave was like "a tin can tied to Jefferson's reputation that has continued to rattle through the ages," historian Joseph J. Ellis observed in his National Book Award-winning *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (1997). The rattle grew very loud in 1974, when Fawn M. Brodie's best-selling psychohistory, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History*, appeared. She accepted the truth of the allegation, but put it in a benign light: it was "not scandalous debauchery with an innocent slave victim, but rather a serious passion that brought Jefferson and the slave woman much private happiness over a period lasting 38 years."



Though Brodie's interpretation proved popular, inspiring several novels as well as a movie, most historians were unpersuaded. Among scholars, particularly Jefferson specialists, said Ellis in his book, "there seems a clear consensus that the story is almost certainly not true." He called the likelihood of a liaison "remote."

Now, thanks to the inspired genetic sleuthing of Eugene A. Foster, a retired professor of pathology at the University of Virginia, and his British colleagues, the evidence is clear that Jefferson was the father of at least Hemings's last son, Eston, born in 1808. Ellis, adroitly adapting to this turn of events, appears with a co-author, geneticist Eric S. Lander, in the *Nature* issue and alone in *U.S. News & World Report* (Nov. 9, 1998) to embrace the new truth. "Within the scholarly world," he writes, "the acceptance of a Jefferson-Hemings liaison had been gaining ground over recent years. Now that it is proven beyond any reasonable doubt, the net effect is to reinforce the critical picture of Jefferson as an inherently elusive and deeply duplicitous character."

Although freelance writer Christopher Shea takes Ellis to task in the on-line magazine *Salon* (www.salonmagazine.com) for fancy footwork, the historian may have been right in both of his accounts of the pre-DNA scholarly consensus. But if a Jefferson-Hemings liaison "had been gaining ground," the reason, unmentioned by Ellis, is clear: Annette Gordon-Reed's devastating analysis of historians' treatment of the evidence, in her 1997 book *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*.

In an op-ed essay in the *New York Times* (Nov. 3, 1998), Gordon-Reed, a professor at New York Law School, says that the new scientific evidence "squares perfectly with overwhelming circumstantial evidence that has been available for well over a century. . . . The trouble is that the scholars who fashioned Jefferson's image were either unwilling or unable to weigh the matter objectively." In an 1873 interview, published in an Ohio newspaper, Madison Hemings said that he and three siblings were the children of Jefferson and Sally Hemings. Yet many historians, Gordon-Reed asserts, discounted his claim because of his race and status as a former slave, choosing instead to believe Jefferson's aristocratic white relatives. Indeed, Merrill Peterson, in his 1960 book, wrote that the Sally Hemings story persisted in part because of the "Negroes' pathetic wish for a little pride." The late historian Dumas

Malone, who spent more than 40 years writing his magisterial six-volume biography of Jefferson, dismissed the possibility of a "vulgar liaison" as "virtually unthinkable in a man of Jefferson's moral standards."

Ironically, noted Princeton University historian Sean Wilentz, reviewing Gordon-Reed's book and others in the *New Republic* (Mar. 10, 1997) prior to the DNA bombshell, the "most compelling evidence" of a Jefferson-Hemings liaison was assembled by Malone himself. It showed that Jefferson, who was with Hemings in Paris in 1789 but later spent only occasional stretches of time at Monticello until he finished his second presidential term in 1809, always happened to be visiting when she conceived a child. "After finishing Gordon-Reed," Wilentz said, "it is difficult to avoid thinking in terms of the probability, and not merely the possibility, of a Jefferson-Hemings liaison."

Now, in the *New Republic* (Nov. 30, 1998), with the liaison a virtual certainty, Wilentz concludes that the story "is about a slave-holding widower who, having promised his dying wife that he would never remarry, struck up a covert relationship with his wife's half-sister, of partial African descent, who was also one of his house slaves. It is the stuff of great history and great art. . . . And, though we may never know how much love, if any, Tom and Sally shared, the record shows at least an element of decency," in that at his death, Jefferson freed Hemings's children.

Yet Patricia J. Williams, a law professor at Columbia University, writing in the *Nation* (Nov. 23, 1998), questions the rush to "love." Jefferson "owned Sally Hemings," she notes. "[Let] us not project modern notions of romance upon unions born of trauma, of dependence and constraint."

Nearly a quarter-century ago, in a contemptuously dismissive review of Brodie's book in the *New York Review of Books* (Apr. 18, 1974), journalist-historian Gary Wills agreed. He judged the contention that Jefferson fathered children by Hemings "reasonable"—but not the notion that it was a romantic attachment. To Wills, writing more recently in *The New York Review of Books* (Aug. 12, 1993), it was "psychologically implausible that [Jefferson] had a love affair with one of his slaves. He tried to suppress their existence, so far as that was possible, from his consciousness." Many historians who admired him seem to have done the same with Sally Hemings. But no more.

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

The Southern Shift

“The Newest Southern Politics” by Earl Black, in *The Journal of Politics* (Aug. 1998), Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Rm. 313 Hamilton Hall, CB #3265, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27599–3265.

The truly “revolutionary feature” of the 1994 election was neither the Republicans’ capture of Congress nor their much-bally-hooded Contract with America. Rather, argues Black, a political scientist at Rice University, it was the fact that Republicans won majorities of House and Senate seats in both the South and the North. Not since the early 1870s had the GOP been able to do that.

The northern politicians who created the Republican Party in the 1850s believed that with enough support from the more numerous states of the North, the party could write off the South and still control the national government. Abraham Lincoln’s election in 1860 showed that it was possible to win the presidency that way. But the Civil War intensified sectional hatreds, and after Reconstruction, the South remained a persistent problem for the Republicans, Black observes. From 1874 until 1994—for 60 consecutive elections—the Republicans never held a majority of the southern delegation in the House of Representatives. Nevertheless, because northern seats outnumbered southern ones, the GOP controlled the House in almost two-thirds of the 36 congresses between 1860 and 1930. But once the Great Depression undermined their party in the North, Republicans were reduced, for the next six decades, to a permanent minority in the House.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 changed the political landscape in the Democratic “Solid South,” Black observes. In time, “blacks joined whites as full-fledged partic-

ipants,” and many whites moved to the GOP, creating “a more competitive two-party politics.” The Republicans went over the top in 1994, as their share of southern House seats jumped from 38 percent to 51 percent, then further increased in 1996 to 57 percent (where it remained after the 1998 elections).

The chief constant in southern politics since the mid-1960s, says the author, has been black voters’ overwhelming preference for Democrats. White Democratic candidates typically enjoy a 9 to 1 advantage over white Republican rivals among black voters, and black Democratic candidates do even better. Republicans need to amass white votes to offset the black ones.

This shifting political dynamic has “dramatically transformed” the South’s delegation to the House in this decade, Black points out. In 1991, it consisted of 72 white Democrats, 39 white Republicans, and five black Democrats; six years later, after the creation of many new majority-black districts, it included 71 white Republicans, 38 white Democrats, and 16 black Democrats. In the Deep South (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina), the transformation has been astonishing, with the number of white Democrats plummeting from 24 to four.

Ironically, Black observes, the party of Lincoln is now “heavily dependent on conservative white majorities for its success,” while the party so long identified with white supremacy has become “a vehicle for black Democrats and moderate white Democrats.”

A Wall of Separation?

“Original Unintentions: The Franchise and the Constitution” by Forrest McDonald, in *Modern Age* (Fall 1998), P.O. Box AB, College Park, Md. 20740.

Should judges interpreting the Constitution be guided by the original intentions of the Framers? Yes, says McDonald, a leading historian who teaches at the University of Alabama and is the author of *We the People: The Economic Origins of the Constitution*

(1958). Nevertheless, he warns, “the Constitution contains both more and less than is visible to the naked eye.” More, because certain features of the document “refer to previously existing institutions, constitutions, laws, and customs that are

nowhere defined in the Constitution itself.” And less, because the Framers sometimes failed to accomplish with their words what they intended to accomplish.

It is clear, for instance, that the Framers intended, as Article 6 states, that no religious test be required as a qualification for public office. This meant, as Edmund Randolph explained in the Virginia ratifying convention in 1788, that men of ability and character “of any sect whatever”—but not of no sect—would be able to serve in the federal government. Yet elsewhere in the Constitution, McDonald contends, the Framers not only failed to prevent religious tests from being imposed, “but even in some instances actually incorporated such tests. Unintentionally.”

The Framers said in Article 1, Section 2, that the electors for members of the House of Representatives “shall have the Qualifications requisite for Electors of the most numerous Branch of the State Legislature,” and in Article 1, Section 3, that senators shall be “chosen by the Legislature” in each state (a practice that was abandoned in 1913, with enactment of the 17th Amendment). But some states, such as South Carolina, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, had religious tests for voters and officeholders. Delaware insist-

ed that its legislators state that “I, AB, do profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, and in the Holy Ghost, one God, blessed for evermore; and I do acknowledge the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by divine inspiration.” Maryland and Massachusetts, says McDonald, “required their legislators to be of ‘the Christian religion’; Georgia, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and South Carolina required that they be of ‘the Protestant religion.’” Of the 13 states, only New York and Virginia did *not* impose any religious qualifications for legislative service.

Although the Supreme Court has often cited Thomas Jefferson’s notion of a “wall of separation” between church and state, McDonald—noting that Jefferson had nothing to do with the writing of the First Amendment or the Constitution—says that his statement “must be read in light of an important distinction. Several state constitutions, even when imposing religious qualifications for voting and officeholding, expressly forbade active ministers of the Gospel from holding public office. . . . For the Founders, to mix *church* and state was to invite dissension and disorder; to separate *religion* and state was to invite mortal peril. The difference is useful to bear in mind.”

Criminalizing Politics

Writing in *The New Republic* (Sept. 28, 1998), Michael Walzer, coeditor of *Dissent*, decries the readiness to criminalize American politics.

Yes, there really were criminal acts committed in the course of Watergate and Iran-Contra, and the people who committed them belonged in jail. But the process of finding those people and proving their criminality became a kind of surrogate politics for people like me—and it has turned out to be a very bad politics. The legal process, set loose from its everyday constraints, will always turn up criminals. But what we should want, what democratic politics requires, are opponents.

Political disagreements and conflicts in well-functioning democracies should end with congressional votes and local or national elections. Or, rather, they should never definitively end, for losers are always free to reopen the argument and to try again. Trials and impeachments make for bad endings, chiefly because they aim to be definitive. When we turn opponents into criminals and enemies, we no longer look to compromise with them or to win some temporary victory over them; our goal is to drive them out of politics entirely, ban them from office-holding, lock them up.

The reality and, even more, the threat of trials and impeachments has been a potent factor in American politics these past 25 years—a sure sign that something is wrong. We should be focused on the issues, on policy proposals and party programs, not on crimes and misdemeanors, not on sex, lies, and telephone tapes.

their power and depriving their citizens of basic rights and freedoms,” observes Fareed Zakaria, managing editor of *Foreign Affairs*, (Nov.-Dec. 1997). Democracy is flourishing: it now claims, by his count, 118 out of 193 countries. But about half of the newly “democratizing” countries are illiberal—more than twice the proportion in 1990.

In encouraging the spread of democracy around the world, Zakaria suggests, the United States has put too much emphasis on holding free and fair elections, and not enough on promoting liberal constitutionalism. (Exhausted by the Cold War, Americans have wanted to transform the world—but on the cheap, Zakaria writes in a more recent article, in the *New York Times Magazine* [Nov. 1, 1998]. In the 1990s, “few American statesmen—with the notable exception of Richard Nixon—ever wanted to make the transformation of Russia an American goal.” Aid to Russia in the 1990s has been only one-sixth that given Europe under the Marshall Plan.)

The United States also has been too quick to criticize undemocratic but “liberalizing” countries, Zakaria argues. The absence of free and fair elections is “one flaw, not the definition of tyranny,” he says. If a government with only limited democracy steadily expands economic, civil, and religious freedoms, it should not be branded a dictatorship. “Liberalizing autocracies” such as Singapore and Malaysia, and “liberal semi-democracies” such as Thailand “provide a better environment for the life, liberty, and happiness of their citizens than do either dictatorships like Iraq and Libya or illiberal democracies like Slovakia and Ghana. And the pressures of global capitalism can push the process of liberalization forward.”

Historically, argues Zakaria, democracy grew out of constitutional liberalism, as in Western Europe, a course that East Asia appears to be following today. But beginning instead with democracy does not seem to lead to constitutional liberalism, he says. Democracy has come to Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia during the last two decades, but “the results are not encouraging.” In many parts of the Islamic world, such as Morocco, Egypt, and some of the Persian Gulf states, he says, elections held tomorrow would almost certainly usher in regimes more illiberal than the current ones. Democracy

“has actually fomented nationalism, ethnic conflict, and even war” in societies with no experience with constitutional liberalism, such as Bosnia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

Adrian Karatnycky, president of Freedom House, writing in *Journal of Democracy* (Jan. 1999), has a more optimistic view. The Freedom House survey for 1998, he reports, shows a net gain of six liberal democracies during the year. “There



Celebrating the opening of the new parliament in 1996 in Sierra Leone, which Freedom House now considers “partly free”

are signs that electoral democracy eventually does have a positive effect on freedom.” The rise in the number of illiberal democracies that worries Zakaria, writes Karatnycky, apparently “peaked in the first half of the 1990s—a period of rapid democratic expansion in the wake of the collapse of Marxist-Leninist regimes.” Since then, the number has fallen. The record in recent years, says Karatnycky, shows that it is precisely the flawed, illiberal democracies that have “the greatest potential for the expansion of freedom.” Even the 30 electoral democracies that Freedom House deems only partly free, he points out, “are not states that brutally suppress basic freedoms. Rather, they are generally countries in which civic insti-

tutions are weak, poverty is rampant, and intergroup tensions are acute.”

“Despite Zakaria’s talk of constitutionalism and individual rights,” contends Marc F. Plattner, coeditor of the *Journal of Democracy*, writing in *Foreign Affairs* (Mar.–Apr. 1998), “he seems to wind up taking the much more familiar view that authoritarian capitalist development is the most reliable road to eventual liberal democracy.” It is implausible to think that autocracies such as Singapore and Malaysia “more reliably protect individual rights or have more independent and

impartial judiciaries than the Latin American democracies that Zakaria describes as ‘illiberal.’”

Zakaria overstates the disjunction between democracy and constitutional liberalism, Plattner maintains. “While many new electoral democracies fall short of liberalism, on the whole, countries that hold free elections are overwhelmingly more liberal than those that do not, and countries that protect civil liberties are overwhelmingly more likely to hold free elections than those that do not. This is not simply an accident.”

Deforming Foreign Policy

“The Protestant Deformation and American Foreign Policy” by James Kurth, in *Orbis* (Spring 1998), Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1528 Walnut St., Ste. 610, Philadelphia, Pa. 19102-3684.

Though scholars often have completely ignored its influence, Protestantism has long shaped U.S. foreign policy. But today, argues Kurth, a political scientist at Swarthmore College, a heresy of the original religion holds sway—and under its spell, U.S. foreign policy is provoking “intense resistance and even international conflict.”

In the three centuries after the Reformation began in 1517, the Protestant rejection of hierarchy and community with regard to salvation spread—particularly in the United States—to the economic realm (the free market) and the political realm (liberal democracy), Kurth says. A written contract and a written constitution, each “a version of the written covenant among individual Protestant believers,” provided order in the respective secular domains.

Driving this expansion, Kurth contends, was a dynamic within Protestantism itself, as the original idea of salvation through grace gradually gave way to increasingly secular beliefs. By the early 20th century, even the genteel abstraction of Divine Providence (itself a substitute for Christ and the Holy Spirit) disappeared, and “the various Protestant creeds were replaced by the American Creed,” a secular vision of “free markets and equal opportunity, free elections and liberal democracy, and constitutionalism and the rule of the law.”

Overseas, Kurth says, this translated after World War I into a peacetime foreign policy of “realism” (or “isolationism”) toward

strong powers, and “idealism” toward weak ones, whom the United States “sought to remake . . . in the image of the American Creed.”

In the 1970s, maintains Kurth, Protestantism’s inner decline reached its final stage, with the transformation of the American Creed into a creed of universal human rights. American political and intellectual leaders promoted this notion as a fundamental goal of U.S. foreign policy. In the decades since, America has become “a new kind of political society,” with “expressive individualism” as its ideology. “The Holy Trinity of original Protestantism, the Supreme Being of Unitarianism, and finally the United States of the American Creed have all been dethroned and replaced by the imperial self,” Kurth declares. He calls this the “Protestant Deformation.”

Today, freed by the end of the Cold War from the need “to show some respect for and make some concessions to the particularities of hierarchy, community, traditions, and customs in the countries that it needed as allies,” the United States is pursuing a foreign policy of emphasizing universal human rights. That policy has created conflicts with other nations, notably those with Islamic or Confucian traditions. But Kurth points to another danger: “The Protestant Deformation, because of its universalist and individualist creed, seeks the end of all nation states and to replace loyalty to America with gratification of oneself.” As

the United States zealously promotes the Protestant Deformation throughout the

world, it may be simultaneously promoting its own self-destruction.

Women at War?

“Feminism and the Exclusion of Army Women from Combat” by Laura L. Miller, in *Gender Issues* (Summer 1998), Transaction Periodicals Consortium, Rutgers Univ., 35 Berrue Cir., Piscataway, N.J. 08854-8042.

The perennial agitation to put women in U.S. Army combat positions has yet to convince a rather significant group: most army women.

“Enlisted women and women of color particularly are likely to *oppose* assigning women to combat military occupational specialties,” reports Miller, a military sociologist at the University of California, Los Angeles, who conducted interviews and surveys during 1992-94 at various locations here and abroad. “Many express resentment toward officers and civilian activists who are attempting to open combat roles to women.”

Some three-fourths of more than 960 army women surveyed said that women who wish to volunteer for the infantry or other combat arms should be allowed to do so, provided, many added, that they can meet the physical requirements. Nearly half would extend the voluntary option to men. Few of the women—only 11 percent of enlisted women, 13 percent of noncommissioned officers, and 14 percent of the officers—would volunteer themselves for combat roles, however. When a smaller sample of women were asked to choose between the status quo and requiring women to serve in the combat arms in the same way men do—the option the feminist activists prefer—65 percent stuck with the status quo, and 24 percent opted for the gender-blind assignment policy. (The

other 11 percent were neutral).

Female officers, who are college graduates, predominantly (70 percent) white, and career oriented, are more likely than enlisted women to favor a combat role for women—in part, no doubt, believing that exclusion from combat hinders their careers. Miller suggests that civilian feminists, who have a similar background, identify with the officers. But 84 percent of all the women in the army are enlisted soldiers, who typically enter with only a high school diploma, are mostly either black (48 percent) or other minority (11 percent), and are less likely to make the military a career. The enlisted women also would be more likely than the female officers to be killed in combat.

Miller suggests that feminist activists alter their strategy and adopt a compromise position. “Most Army women would support a policy that allows women to volunteer for the combat arms if they qualify [physically] but would not involuntarily assign them.” Instead of rejecting that policy because it would treat women and men differently, she says, feminists should accept it as an advance over the status quo. The subsequent performance of the exceptional women who were interested and qualified would probably dispel the myth that all women are unsuited for combat, she says. And the gap between the activists and the majority of women in uniform would be narrowed.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Chasing the Flat Tax Dream

A Survey of Recent Articles

As April 15th nears each year, many taxpayers struggling to find their way through the labyrinth of IRS definitions and dicta angrily conclude that there must be a better, simpler way. In recent years,

this recurrent dream has acquired a name: the flat tax.

The brainchild of Stanford University economist Robert Hall and political scientist Alvin Rabushka, the flat tax was strong-

ly advocated by 1992 Democratic presidential contender Jerry Brown, and more recently by 1996 Republican presidential aspirant Steve Forbes. In Congress, House Majority Leader Richard Arme y (R.-Texas) and Senator Richard Shelby (R.-Ala.) are pushing the flat tax hard.

Though it comes in different versions, the idea essentially is that household wages and pension income above a certain amount (but not other types of income) and corporate revenues less expenditures (including the full cost of capital investment) would both be taxed at the same flat rate. The rate is 19 percent in the Hall-Rabushka proposal and 17 percent in the Arme y-Shelby one. Tax forms could fit on postcards, it is promised, and Americans could fill them out easily, without having to resort to tax code hermeneutics. No more fuming as April 15th draws closer!

Sounds great, but the reality might not be quite so wonderful. Joshua Micah Marshall, a Writing Fellow at the *American Prospect* (May–June 1998), contends that “the flat tax would leave the rich paying less and the poor and middle class paying more.” Though proponents stress the simplicity of the flat tax, a progressive tax need not be complicated, he points out. “It would be just as easy to ‘simplify’ the tax code by creating four or five graduated tax brackets and eliminating most, or all, deductions. That’s simple, straightforward, and progressive.”

But both the Hall-Rabushka and the Arme y-Shelby proposals are also “progressive,” according to an analysis in *Contemporary Economic Policy* (Jan. 1998) by Mun S. Ho, a Visiting Fellow at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, and Kevin J. Stiroh, an economist with the Conference Board, in New York City. While the flat tax may be the soul of simplicity, figuring out its effects is not easy, because of the family allowances (excluding those whose wages are below a certain level from being taxed) and the tax on business income (which would have an impact on wages and prices). Using Current Population Survey data on households for 1993, Ho and Stiroh calculate that the average tax rate for families with less than \$10,000 in total income would be about three percent under both proposals,

and would steadily increase—to about 17 to 19 percent for families with total income more than \$1 million. That is progressive, they note, though “less so than the current combination of a personal income tax and a corporate profits tax.” In fact, they add, both flat tax proposals “shift the burden of the income tax from both high- and low-income families to the middle class.”

In their pioneering 1983 book, *Low Tax, Simple Tax, Flat Tax*, Hall and Rabushka, as quoted by *New Republic* (Dec. 15, 1997) staff writer Jonathan Chait, touted the flat tax as “a tremendous boon to the economic elite,” and conceded that “it is an obvious mathematical law that lower taxes on the successful will have to be made up by higher taxes on average people.” Comments Chait: “This candor, while admirable, did not prove an effective political strategy.” Hence, Republican flat taxers have wrapped the idea in near-soak-the-rich populist rhetoric. “It is just plain wrong that the politically well connected have been able to carve out for themselves special treatment under the law,” Arme y has said, for instance.

“To defuse the ‘fairness issue,’” reports *National Review* (Mar. 9, 1998) national reporter Ramesh Ponnuru, Arme y’s proposal, like Forbes’s, provides “generous exemptions.” A family of four earning \$25,000 would owe no tax at all. But many Republicans, writes Ponnuru, now “worry that a flat tax . . . could be a political disaster,” taking “millions of voters off the income-tax rolls [and] thus expanding the ranks of people who can vote for big government at no obvious cost to themselves.”

Whatever the merits, a flat tax is not likely to be adopted in its pure form, observes William G. Gale, a Senior Fellow in the Brookings Institution’s Economic Studies Program. “The flat tax is considered a simple tax with a relatively low rate in large part because it eliminates, on paper, deductions and exclusions that no Congress has dared touch,” he points out in *The Brookings Review* (Summer 1998). Among them: deductions for mortgage interest, state and local income and property taxes, and charitable contributions. These “loopholes,” Gale says, have long been sacrosanct, for two reasons:

“political forces and views of social equity.”
The same pressures would be at work on

any flat tax that moved from controversial
idea to inescapable reality.

Sky High

“Airline Deregulation” by John E. Robson, in *Regulation* (Spring 1998), Cato Institute, 1000
Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001.

Airline deregulation, 20 years old last October, has been a great success, contends Robson, who chaired the now-defunct Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) in 1976 when it endorsed the radical move. Americans are flying more and paying less than ever before.

In 1978, the year President Jimmy Carter signed the Airline Deregulation Act, which scrapped the 40-year-old system of government control over airline fares and service, some 275 million people flew on domestic carriers; in 1997, more than twice as many—600 million—did. Fares are 22 percent lower today, according to some economists, than they would have been if government regulation had continued. Competition among airlines is keener, with the average number of carriers per route up 30 percent since 1977, by one account. In 1997, airlines that had begun flying since 1978 held 18 percent of the market—an all-time high.

The airlines’ development of hub-and-spoke networks, Robson points out, has given travelers more choices in departure and

arrival times, and a much greater choice of destinations. Even at airports serving small communities, the number of scheduled departures increased by 50 percent, according to a 1996 General Accounting Office report, though some airports—notably those serving small and medium-sized communities in the Upper Midwest—have seen declines in service.

Another “minus” in the current situation is that a handful of hub airports are dominated by one or two carriers, including those in Atlanta (Delta), Denver (United), Detroit (Northwest), Saint Louis (TWA), and Chicago (American, United), with the result being higher fares and much gnashing of teeth by customers. At the “average” dominated airport, fares are an estimated 21 percent higher than at all other airports. Even so, Robson says, the customers there should be thankful for deregulation. Northeastern University economist Steven Morrison calculates that fares at the dominated airports are still lower than they would have been without deregulation.

Reforming Management

“‘Flexible’ Workplace Practices: Evidence from a Nationally Representative Survey” by Maury Gittleman, Michael Horigan, and Mary Joyce, in *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* (Oct. 1998), Cornell Univ., Ithaca, N.Y. 14853-3901.

Consultants and other experts have spilled much ink in recent years touting new styles of business management that supposedly improve corporate performance. If what their advocates say about “Total Quality Management,” “quality circles,” job rotation, and other such nostrums is true, then surely most companies would have embraced one or another of them by now. Well, it seems, they have and they haven’t.

Out of nearly 6,000 firms surveyed in 1993, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) found that only 42 percent had adopted any of a half-dozen specified alternative practices. Not surprisingly, such arrangements were most popular with manufacturing firms

(56 percent adopted at least one), though establishments in wholesale trade were a close second (55 percent).

Total Quality Management (which, survey takers were told, stresses “doing things right the first time, striving for continuous improvement, and . . . meeting customer needs”) found favor with 21 percent of the firms. Sixteen percent let workers have a say in buying the equipment they use, 14 percent gave small teams of workers authority over how best to get their collective job done, 13 percent permitted workers to rotate among different jobs, 11 percent had coworkers evaluate a worker’s performance, and only five percent opted for quality circles (in

which groups of workers meet for an hour or so each week to try to solve work-related problems).

While most of the 5,987 firms—58 percent—had not adopted even one of the alternative practices, and 21 percent had implemented only one, the picture changed dramatically when firm size was taken into account, note Gittleman, a BLS economist, and his colleagues. Nearly 70 percent of establishments with 50 or more employees had embraced at least one of the new

approaches. Though some analysts have argued that small businesses, being less bureaucratic, are more likely to experiment, the larger firms seem more inclined to make strides toward the “flexible” workplace. Yet the authors are also struck by the finding that no single “best practice” was embraced by a large number of firms. It could be that many techniques work only in certain kinds of settings, or that firms are still feeling their way—or that the techniques actually yield only modest results.

Galbraithian Economics

In *The Nation* (Oct. 26, 1998), Richard Parker, an economist at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, pays tribute to the unconventional wisdom of famed Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith, who recently turned 90.

In the fifties and sixties, all too many of his colleagues thought they’d found a Rosetta stone in an abstruse combination of econometrics, game theory, advanced regression analysis and computer forecasting that would unlock the market’s secrets and thereby tame its nasty cyclical fluctuations and tendencies toward maldistribution. These mid-century economists convinced themselves that because economic “laws” bore irrefutable kinship to the laws of nature, economics itself could now become the physics of the social sciences. Galbraith knew better. He understood even then that economics—far from replicating a physics that ultimately describes forces indifferent to our existence—was instead a strikingly malleable story for describing (and, not least, shaping) our social and political relations and aspirations—the ultimate achievements of human consciousness. . . .

For an age seemingly desperate to convince its inhabitants that abstractions labeled The Global Economy and The Information Age are novel, universal and implacable forces that brook no resistance, that democratic states and their citizens are subordinate (or even irrelevant) to them and that resistance is folly, Galbraith offers a durable reminder: “It is inconceivable that the public could be universally exploited without being aware of it. . . . The first step in reform, it follows, is to win emancipation of belief.”

SOCIETY

On the Academic Mind

A Survey of Recent Articles

Sex, sex, sex. The academy seems even more obsessed with it than Hollywood or Washington. *Academe* (Sept.–Oct. 1998), the normally staid magazine of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), devotes an entire issue to the subject, under the title “Consenting Adults? Sex and the Academy.”

Robert Corber, who teaches American studies and lesbian and gay studies at Trinity College, in Hartford, Connecticut, boasts that lesbian and gay scholars “have moved sexuality from the margins of the curriculum closer to the center. Building on French philosopher Michel Foucault’s groundbreaking work on the history of sexuality, these

scholars have shown that the construction of homosexuality and heterosexuality as binary opposites is at the very core of modern societies.”

The construction is so flimsy, according to adherents of “queer theory,” as to call into question the adequacy of the very terms *lesbian* and *gay*. Sexuality, in the queer theorists’ view, cannot be contained “within the fixed boundaries of a stable identity,” Corber explains, and the idea that people are either homosexual or heterosexual fails to take into account “sexualities and identities, such as sadomasochism, transvestism, and bisexuality.”

Yet even while the field is thriving, asserts Jill Dolan, executive director of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at the City University of New York, gay and lesbian teachers “remain second-class citizens of the university,” who are “still subject to workplace discrimination, hate crimes, and college and university practices that favor heterosexuality despite the best intentions of even the most liberal institutions.” A case in point: the storm of criticism that followed a 1997 conference at the State University of New York at New Paltz, which featured workshops on sadomasochism and “Sex Toys for Women.” Last June, the AAUP bestowed the Alexander Meiklejohn Award for academic freedom on New Paltz president Roger W. Bowen for his forceful defense of the conference as a matter of free expression. (The citation and Bowen’s comments are reprinted in the magazine.)

Also at issue on campus, according to *Academe*, is the vexing question of whether professors should be able to bed their stu-

dents. The traditional answer—*No!*—“has long been violated, and the violations, except for occasional scandals, have long been tolerated,” writes Ann J. Lane, a historian and director of the women’s studies program at the University of Virginia. Most often, the professors involved are older, male, married—and figures of authority. Their (usually female) student lovers often “suffer,” Lane says. “Some collapse emotionally, and even attempt suicide. Others change their majors or graduate schools, or drop out permanently.” Though the young women ostensibly are consenting adults, the reality, Lane says, is that most “are not yet fully adult.”

She favors putting such relationships completely off limits. “Sexual relations between a teacher and a student are more than private conduct; they affect the community the professor and student share with other students and teachers. . . . Becoming the lover of a student constitutes an abuse of power and a betrayal of trust.”

But Kal Alston, a professor of education and women’s studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, insists that the university should not intrude. It should not be assumed that a student is not a full adult, she says, and it is up to individual teachers to decide “what it means for them to be a ‘good’ teacher and an ethical person.”

“Most teachers recognize their influence over students and are careful not to misuse it,” Ann Lane observes. But the others exist, and they are not always aware of the harm they may be doing to the students. The teaching profession, she suggests, may well be in need today of an academic Hippocratic oath.

The New Medievalists

“Medievalisms Old and New: The Rediscovery of Alterity in North American Medieval Studies” by Paul Freedman and Gabrielle M. Spiegel, in *The American Historical Review* (June 1998), 914
Atwater, Indiana Univ., Bloomington, Ind. 47405.

Continuing its long march through academe, postmodernist thinking has now reached even into the field of medieval studies. There it is upending American scholars’ long-cherished conviction that the Middle Ages provided the seed bed of the modern, progressive West. In its place, report historians Freedman, of Yale University, and Spiegel, of Johns Hopkins University, has

come a new, postmodernist Middle Ages, which is—depending on one’s tour guide—either utterly strange and different from the modern world or a repellently familiar harbinger of the evil modern West, full of persecution and repression.

The now-passé idea that the modern, progressive state had its origins in the feudal monarchies of 12th- and 13th-century

England and France, the authors say, was “essentially the creation” of Charles Homer Haskins (1870–1937), a Wilsonian progressive and “the first true professional medieval historian” in America. In *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (1927), he challenged the assumption that modern Western civilization began in the Renaissance, pushing its origins back, as his title indicates, to the 12th century. Haskins’s protégé, Joseph Reese Strayer, equally dedicated to investigating “the medieval origins of the modern state,” maintained in a famous 1956 article, that French king Philip the Fair (1268–1314) was not a tyrant but a “constitutional” monarch.

Today’s medieval historians, such as Caroline Walker Bynum, the author of *Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (1995), came of age during the 1960s and ’70s, note Freedman and Spiegel, and bring to their work the era’s “profound suspicion of order, hierarchy, authority, and patriarchy.” They are

interested in showing how gender differences were historically produced, and in rescuing the marginal and excluded. They treat documents as “texts” rather than “sources,” and regard history as a recovery of past images rather than the truth of the past.

These new medievalists have “demonized” the Middle Ages, observe the authors. Some have highlighted its “grotesque” aspects, making the period seem almost incomprehensibly strange. Bynum, for instance, the authors note, examines medieval women who, in the name of spir-

itual transcendence, “drank pus seeping from wounds, fasted to the point of starvation, and submitted to horrifying acts of self-deprivation.” At its best, write Freedman and Spiegel, this sort of postmodernist approach offers “a more intriguing, more colorful, and less familiar Middle Ages, in which the state is more predatory, piety is more intense, and mentalities more foreign” than previously portrayed.

Other new medievalists, such as R. I. Moore, the author of *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (1987), have made the Middle Ages “darkly familiar, the analogue of a negatively construed modern West,” say Freedman and Spiegel. Instead of being “the center of a modern, rational progressive movement,” the 13th century has been transformed at their hands into “a Foucauldian Panopticon of discipline and colonization.” The focus is on heretical groups and



Torturing a heretic during the Inquisition: was it all in a medieval day’s work?

such once-marginalized subjects as incest, masochism, rape, and transvestism.

Indeed, by some accounts, report the authors, “the most popular topics in medieval cultural studies in America at the moment . . . are death, pus, contagion, defilement, blood, abjection, disgust and humiliation, castration, pain, and autopsy.” The goal of the postmodernist medievalists, conclude Freedman and Spiegel, “is not so much an expansion, enrichment, or even complication of our understanding of medieval culture but rather its ‘undoing.’”

Testing America

“Is America an Experiment?” by Wilfred M. McClay, in *The Public Interest* (Fall 1998), 1112 16th St. N.W., Ste. 530, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Extreme multiculturalists, rejecting the very idea of a common American culture, often proclaim that this country has no fixed

beliefs or standards, but rather is a continuing “experiment.” Their view reflects a misunderstanding of both America and experi-

mentation, contends McClay, a Tulane University historian.

Experiment “is always related to some specific end, some well-defined goal, some truth, hypothesis, pattern, or principle to be confirmed or disconfirmed,” he says, and effective scientific experimentation “always seeks to identify, understand, and harness the laws of nature, not transform or obliterate those laws.” And in that sense, McClay observes, America at the outset was indeed an experiment. As Alexander Hamilton wrote in *The Federalist*, it “seemed to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.”

By 1838, when Abraham Lincoln gave his celebrated address to the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois, McClay argues, the results of the original American experiment were in. The government, Lincoln said, had been “felt by all to be an undecided experiment; now it is understood to be a successful one,” having conclusively proved “the capability of a people to govern themselves.” Twenty-five years later, at

Gettysburg, he famously observed that the Civil War was “testing” whether the result of this successful experiment “can long endure.”

Change is a constant, of course, and Americans have striven to have their nation live up more faithfully to its professed ideals, particularly with regard to the treatment of black Americans, McClay notes. “But the question is whether everything is therefore to be open to transformation. . . . It is one thing to argue that the experiment needs to be conducted more faithfully and quite another to say that it needs to be redefined or junked altogether.” Indeed, he writes, love of country “is incompatible with the idea of America as an open-ended social experiment, an entity yet to be achieved, in which all options are open, all traditions subject to dissolution, and all claims revocable.” In that case, only “the narcissistic self” finally matters.

The experiment of America is meaningless, McClay writes, “unless it is undertaken for the sake . . . of those convictions, beliefs, and fundamental commitments embodied in the term ‘ordered liberty.’” The great challenge—the great *experiment*—today, he concludes, is to recover the “framework of meaning” in Western civilization that allowed those cherished ideals to flourish.

Compassion Rationed

“Relatively Disabled” by F. D. Reeve, in *Michigan Quarterly Review* (Summer 1998), Univ. of Michigan, Rm. 3032, Rackham Bldg., 915 E. Washington St., Ann Arbor, Mich. 48109–1070.

Ever since his son was thrown from a horse and left paralyzed from the neck down in the spring of 1995, poet and essayist Reeve has learned how not only the disabled themselves but their relatives and close friends must struggle against a loss of personal identity.

Within days of the accident, not only neighbors but casual acquaintances and even total strangers began approaching the author to inquire about his son Christopher’s health. Though they were often sincerely sympathetic, Reeve says, it soon became apparent that they did not want to know about the reality of his son’s “personal, day-after-day suffering—how precarious his life was, how his health fluctuated, how close he came to death in the hospital and has come afterward as well.” Instead, Reeve says, they wanted the TV version of the plight of the actor who played Superman. “They wanted to hear about his

televised role as sufferer—his fight against unconquerable odds—and I, important to them only as ‘Superman’s Father,’ was expected to assure them that the fight was still going on.”

The actor’s fans do not realize, Reeve says, “how they’re discriminating against—that is, denying individual identity to—an individual father and son struggling to maintain a difficult relationship in the face of differing values and overwhelming physical problems. In Christopher’s case, the role of ‘handicapped Superman’ has taken the place of reality. If I refuse to be de-individualized, or if I insist on mentioning the misery and hardship that my son feels daily—he who can never be alone, who must be wakened and turned every couple of hours during the night—I become a nay-sayer to the image of which he has become custodian.”

“Public stereotyping of the deaf is no less discriminatory,” adds Reeve, whose wife, Laura Stevenson, a novelist-professor, is deaf. He says, “I’ve learned that while people will go out of their way to help a person in a wheelchair, they assume that someone they can’t talk to is stupid, perhaps retarded, definitely to be avoided.” Reeve was incredulous at first when his wife told him how she was treated. But after frequently “witnessing people coldly leaving her out of the conversation—even at the faculty lunch tables in her

own college—I admit it’s true.” Moreover, he says, “people who talk to me when I meet them by myself cut me out, too, when she and I are together.”

“Everything in American media encourages people” to respond to the disabled by stereotyping them, writes Reeve. “The difference between admiring a deaf professor’s ‘courage’ or a Superman’s ‘good fight’ and developing flexible, compassionate understanding of L. Stevenson or of C. Reeve is *thought*.”

The Other Welfare Reform

“A Liberal in Wolf’s Clothing: Nixon’s Family Assistance Plan in the Light of 1990s Welfare Reform” by Alex Waddan, in *Journal of American Studies* (Aug. 1998), Cambridge Univ. Press, Journals Dept., 40 W. 20th St., New York, N.Y. 10011-4211.

Liberals still distressed by President Bill Clinton’s 1996 action ending “welfare as we know it” ought to turn their minds back to 1969, when they (or their predecessors) succeeded in defeating President Richard Nixon’s plan to overhaul welfare. That was when liberals muffed their big chance, argues Waddan, who teaches at the University of Sunderland, in England.

The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act—which, though Clinton signed it, was largely the work of congressional Republicans—turned welfare into a program of fixed block grants, gave states much discretion over how they spend the money, imposed a tough work requirement, and set a time limit of five years on any individual’s receipt of welfare.

Consider now President Nixon’s 1969 proposal. Called the Family Assistance Plan, it offered a national guarantee of an income of \$1,600 (about \$6,800 in 1996 dollars) for a family of four with the qualification that the head of the household was making a genuine effort to find or hold down a job. The welfare plan would also function as a wage supplement for the working poor, enabling such families to continue receiving benefits, on a diminishing scale, up to a total household income of \$3,920.

Nixon wrapped his plan in conservative rhetoric, particularly stressing work as an antidote to poverty. Many liberals, observes Waddan, took the president at his public word, or pretended to do so. Former vice president Hubert Humphrey dismissed Nixon’s plan as “nothing new, nothing star-

ting.” Liberals railed against the plan’s supposedly inadequate base income—\$1,600 for a family of four was well below the poverty line—and supposedly punitive work requirement. They failed to see, Waddan argues, that an income program integrating the working poor with single “welfare mothers” who did not work would be less vulnerable to criticism than the existing welfare system serving chiefly the latter group. Perhaps blinded by antipathy toward Nixon, liberals refused to grasp the possibility that once the new program was established, benefits could subsequently be expanded.

Many liberals, Waddan says, apparently made little effort to understand Nixon’s plan. George Wiley, executive director of the National Welfare Rights Organization, for instance, charged that it “discriminates against black people.” But black welfare recipients in eight southern states would have seen their benefits increase, and the other states were supposed to make up any decrease in benefits.

Nixon’s plan passed the House of Representatives but then died in the Senate Finance Committee, where liberals such as Eugene McCarthy and Fred Harris joined conservatives in the kill.

Conservative critics claimed that a guaranteed minimum income would be a disincentive to work. The American Conservative Union complained that Nixon had proposed “a far more liberal welfare program than any Democrat ever dared.” Thirty years later, that historical generalization now has the ring of prophecy.

PRESS & MEDIA

The King of Radio

“Still Going” by Marc Fisher, in *American Journalism Review* (Oct. 1998), Univ. of Maryland, 1117 Journalism Bldg., College Park, Md. 20742-7111.

“HELLO AMERICANS! THIS IS PAUL HARVEY! SSTTAANNDD BYYY FOR NEEEEEEWS!!!!”

At age 80, famed radio commentator Paul Harvey, opening each newscast with this trademark line, is still going strong from his studio on Paul Harvey Drive in Chicago, reports Fisher, a *Washington Post* editor. Culling arch, outrageous, and heartwarming items from the wire services and newspapers, he serves them up each day in his distinctive staccato style (complete with . . . pregnant pauses) to more than 1,300 radio stations, from rural backwaters to large cities.

“Dismissed decades ago as a clichéd relic of Richard Nixon’s Silent Majority, derided by the media elite as a flag-waving, red-bashing dispensary of easy bromides and patriotic pap,” writes Fisher, “Paul Harvey News & Comment’ remains by leaps and bounds the most popular program on American radio.” Harvey’s newscasts, which

air mornings and middays, regularly attract five of the 10 largest radio audiences each week, Fisher reports. Harvey’s top-rated 8:30 A.M. newscast attracts an average of five million listeners, while 2.5 million tune in to his daily afternoon “Rest of the Story” recitations, “those dramatic, if formulaic, historical vignettes in which that failed painter turns out to be . . . Adolf Hitler.”

Harvey still celebrates Main Street and believes that the business of America is business. But his political views have changed somewhat. Once an archconservative backer of Senator Joseph McCarthy, he later became a critic of President Richard Nixon’s Vietnam War policies and an advocate of abortion rights. He

now finds himself “smack in the middle of the road,” says Fisher.

“The last of the wartime generation of radio commentators . . . is also a bridge to the new era of radio talkers,” Fisher points out. Rush Limbaugh and others “have stretched



Paul Harvey, for Middle America

Carving Up the Times

Author Richard Reeves, a reporter for *The New York Times* during 1966–71, tells in *Media Studies Journal* (Fall 1998) how the *Times* changed after it created a separate Metro section in the 1970s.

[The] lasting importance of the Metro section did not have as much to do with the reported as with the reporters. Instantly, local coverage became second-front and second-class Times citizenship. No more Homer Bigarts with Pulitzers from two wars were sent out to cover fires in Yonkers. Then came the “Sections”—and still further sectioning of the paper. Both the staff and the coverage of the paper were fractionalized.

The “product,” as they say now, may have become more attractive to niche advertisers. But it may have alienated many readers. People busy pursuing happiness can use the bulk and confusion of the paper as an excuse (or reason) not to buy it every day. The Times may be better—I think it is—but now only parts of it are necessary as opposed to nice. Who needs pages of recipes, suburban lifestyles and shopping hints?

the concept of radio commentary from minutes to hours, but remained true to Harvey's basic formula of personalizing the news, turning the events of the day into a longform diary of American life." The continued popu-

larity of Harvey and his formula, Fisher suggests, is a reflection of "an American craving for belonging, an insistent desire for community in a nation that has grown . . . scattered and rootless."

Media Theory Down Under

"The Poverty of Media Theory" by Keith Windschuttle, in *Quadrant* (Mar. 1998), P.O. Box 1495, Collingwood, Victoria 3066, Australia.

Australian students aspiring to careers in journalism are flocking to programs granting degrees in communications and media studies. Little do they realize, writes Windschuttle, author of *The Killing of History* (1997), that the large doses of media theory they will have to swallow are directly opposed to journalism's underlying principles.

Those principles, he notes, include a commitment to "reporting the truth about what occurs in the world," and to informing their readers, listeners, and viewers, not just pleasing their employers or advertisers. And, of course, journalists should be committed to good, clear writing. "However, in most of the media theory that is taught within Australian communications and media degrees," Windschuttle says, "none of these principles are upheld. In fact, they are specifically denied, either by argument or example."

Australian institutions of higher learning that began to offer journalism as a subject in the mid-1970s felt it necessary, he says, to offer something besides mere vocational education. Enter British cultural studies, a movement created by English literary critics, most of them Marxists. In their view, objective understanding of any "real world" is impossible; the "real world" is nothing but a "text" to be read by literary analysis. By the late 1970s, Windschuttle writes, media students were being taught "that capitalist ideology was generated in the form of a system of linguis-

tic rules by the agents of the ruling class who worked for the media. Ideology was transmitted by communication signals and lodged not in people's conscious minds but at a level of 'deep structure' in their unconscious." The readers, listeners, and viewers, in short, were "little more than robots."

Over the years, Windschuttle notes, the fashions and gurus in media theory have changed, but assumptions about the influence of language and culture have not. Just as French postmodernist Jean Baudrillard claims there is no way to be sure that the 1991 Persian Gulf War really took place, so media theorist John Hartley, until recently a professor at Edith Cowan University, in Perth, Australia, maintains that audiences are mere fictions serving "the need of the imagining institution."

Once exposed to media theory, most journalism students come to regard it, Windschuttle says, as "a largely incomprehensible and odious gauntlet they must run."

Most of the media theorists in Australia "have never even set foot inside a newspaper office or television studio," Windschuttle observes. He would like to see the veteran journalists who also teach in Australia's universities step up to write general textbooks and develop "their own theory"—in short, compete "head on" with the addled theorists. Most of the students, he suggests, would be very grateful.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Does Knowledge Destroy Faith?

"Rationality and the 'Religious Mind'" by Laurence Iannaccone, Rodney Stark, and Roger Finke, in *Economic Inquiry* (July 1998), Texas A&M Univ., Dept. of Economics, College Station, Texas 77843-4228.

Social scientists have long been inclined to look upon religion as an irrational vestige of the premodern world, destined any day now for

extinction. *Everyone knows* that as science advances, religion retreats, and that as people become more educated, they grow less reli-

gious. But research in recent decades shows that “everyone” is wrong, report economist Iannaccone, of Santa Clara University, and sociologists Stark and Finke, of the University of Washington and Purdue University, respectively.

Despite the explosive growth of science and the increase in average education levels during the last half-century, the rates of religious belief and participation in the United States have stayed about the same. It is true, Iannaccone and his colleagues say, after examining extensive surveys from the period 1972–90, that professors and scientists are less religious than the general public. Nineteen percent of the learned professionals reject religion entirely, compared with only seven percent of the public. But, the authors add, most academics “*are* religious—81 percent say they have a religion, 65 percent believe in an afterlife, 64 percent feel near to God, and 61 percent (claim to) attend church at least several times a year.”

Moreover, the gap between the professors and the general public is no wider than it is between men and women, or between whites

and blacks. Thus, 37 percent of academics pray daily, compared with 57 percent of the public—but that 20-point difference is less than the 23 points between men (43) and women (66) who pray daily. When sex, race, and other traits are taken into account, the authors note, professors and scientists—overwhelmingly white, largely male—appear only slightly less likely than other people to pray daily. Outright rejection of religion remains more common among academics, however, but that may be because the irreligious are more drawn to the academic life, not because higher education reduces religious belief.

What’s more, observe Iannaccone and his colleagues, a 1969 survey of nearly one-fourth of all the college faculty in America indicates that by church attendance and every other measure, the professors in the “hard” sciences such as physics and mathematics are more religious than their social science counterparts. Those in psychology and anthropology, the two fields most closely associated with the idea that faith is irrational and doomed, “emerge as towers of unbelief.” Just a coincidence?

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

On the Global Warming Front

A Survey of Recent Articles

Environmentalists and others who hailed the 1997 Kyoto accord as a promising first step toward averting catastrophic global warming, and have been disappointed since by the lack of progress toward implementation, took heart from the results of a two-week conference in Buenos Aires last November. Negotiators from more than 150 countries agreed to set operational rules for enforcing the Kyoto pact by late 2000, and Argentina and Kazakhstan became the first developing countries to announce they would voluntarily adopt restrictions on their emissions of heat-trapping carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

Yet while the Clinton administration formally signed the accord in November, the pact still faces intense opposition in Congress. The administration no longer expects even to submit it to the Senate for ratification before a new president is elect-

ed in 2000. Without U.S. approval, the Kyoto treaty will not go into effect.

But how serious a step toward controlling the buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere would the Kyoto agreement really be? And is a first step, big or small, even necessary? Is there, as President Bill Clinton has asserted, “virtually unanimous opinion among scientists that the globe is warming at an unacceptably rapid rate”?

In the accord reached at Kyoto, Japan, in December 1997, the United States and other industrialized nations pledged to slash their greenhouse gas emissions between 2008 and 2012 by certain percentages (seven percent in the U.S. case) below 1990 levels. The agreement permits international trading of emissions “credits”—countries that emit less than their quota of gases can sell to other countries the rights to the balance. No restrictions are placed by the accord on developing nations.

Harvard University economist Richard N. Cooper, writing in *Foreign Affairs* (Mar.–Apr. 1998), contends that this approach is bound to fail. Global warming could not be subdued without the participation of the developing countries, which by 2010 are expected to contribute 45 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions. But China, India, and almost all other developing nations are unwilling to sacrifice their economic development and could not afford to buy emissions credits. A better way to bring manmade climate change under control, in Cooper's view, would be for nations to tax private-sector greenhouse gas emissions.

Responding in *Foreign Affairs* (May–June 1998), Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat, the chief American negotiator at Kyoto and Buenos Aires, dismisses the tax idea as impractical. “Energy taxes are anathema in the United States,” he points out. While agreeing that Kyoto pact “cannot succeed . . . unless key developing countries participate,” he says that Cooper is “overly pessimistic” about the chances of that happening.

The subsequent developments at Buenos Aires seemed to lend some credence to Eizenstat's optimism.

Byron Swift, director of the Technology Center at the Environmental Law Institute in Washington, also is optimistic. Emissions trading “could be attractive” to a developing country, he maintains in *Issues in Science and Technology* (Spring 1998), “because its sale of allowances could generate capital for projects that help it shift to a more prosperous but less carbon-intensive economy.” Still, he acknowledges, “most developing countries, led by China and India, are opposed to trading.”

The Kyoto agreement's “crash program” approach is too short-term in orientation, argues Rob Coppock, who was staff director for the National Academy of Sciences' 1991 report, *Policy Implications of Greenhouse Warming* [see *WQ*, Winter 1992,

pp. 154–155]. Writing in the same issue of *Issues in Science and Technology*, he points out that even under the Kyoto accord, “the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere will double by the end of the 21st century.” The resulting climate changes will be manageable, Coppock believes. It's what happens *after* that point that poses the biggest challenge, he says. Rather than being required to spend “excessive amounts of money for costly short-lived retrofits to meet an arbitrary deadline of 2010,” he argues, companies should be allowed to achieve low emissions later, by investing now in research and development, and phasing more efficient (and more expensive) technology in as existing equipment reaches the end of its useful life.

But are scientists really sure there is a problem? Writing in *SAIS Review* (Summer–Fall 1998), Brett Orlando, climate change program officer at the International Union



for the Conservation of Nature, cites a 1996 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a “mainstream” UN-affiliated group of some 2,000 scientists from around the world. The IPCC reached the “landmark judgment,” he

says, that “the balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on the global climate.” The previous scientific consensus, he says, was that the observed warming—about one degree F. over the last century—could just reflect natural climatic variability.

When the IPCC report was issued, however, Frederick Seitz, chairman of the George C. Marshall Institute and a past president of the National Academy of Sciences, charged in the *Wall Street Journal* (June 12, 1996) that it had been skewed to produce that “landmark judgment.” After the scientists involved had reviewed and accepted the apparently final text, Seitz asserted, changes were made “to remove hints of the skepticism with which many scientists regard claims that human activities are having a major impact on climate in general and on global warming in particular.”

In short, despite all the environmental alarms and international conferences, it appears that the scientific debate about glob-

al warming—and therefore the political debate about what, if anything, should be done—is far from over.

Paradigm Reversal

“The Revolution That Didn’t Happen” by Steven Weinberg, in *The New York Review of Books* (Oct. 8, 1998), 1755 Broadway, 5th fl., New York, N.Y. 10019–3780.

In Thomas Kuhn’s theory of scientific revolutions, postmodernist critics of science have found the perfect paradigm. Too bad for them that Kuhn’s radical notions are “quite wrong,” according to Weinberg, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist at the University of Texas at Austin.

In his 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn (1922–96) described the history of science as cyclic: periods of “normal science,” in which a particular consensus view (“paradigm”) prevails, alternate with revolutionary times that give birth to a new consensus. In Kuhn’s famous phrase, the paradigm shifts. Thus, Newtonian physics, which had gained wide acceptance in the 18th century, was supplanted by the theory of relativity in the early 20th. So great is the gulf between successive paradigms, Kuhn maintained, that scientists adhering to the new model find it all but impossible to understand what their predecessors could have been thinking. And since there is no com-

mon standard by which to judge the respective theories, a theory can be called “true” or “false” only within the context of a given paradigm. Science progresses, Kuhn believed, in much the way that Darwinian evolution does—but not, he maintained, toward objective truth. Since all past scientific paradigms had proven false, the current one was bound to give way, too. All this, of course, is catnip to the postmodernist critics who have lately insisted that scientific theories have no more intrinsic validity than, say, astrology or shamanism.

But Kuhn was mistaken in thinking that after a paradigm shift, scientists cannot understand the science that went before, Weinberg points out: “In educating new physicists the first thing that we teach them is still good old Newtonian mechanics, and they never forget how to think in Newtonian terms, even after they learn about Einstein’s theory of relativity.” Kuhn was also wrong, Weinberg says, in maintaining that the revo-

A New Natural Philosophy

Lee Smolin, a physicist at Penn State University, writes in *Oxymoron* (1998) that we are in the midst of “one of the great transformations in the history of science.”

We are abandoning the idea that the organization and beauty of any system, whether it be biological, ecological, economic or cosmological, is imposed from the outside, in favor of the conception that they arise internally by natural processes of self-organization. This is why Darwin’s so important. Before the discovery of natural selection, there were only two ways in which the organization of the world could be explained: either a god had imposed order on chaos (as in Plato’s myth of the reversing cosmos) or the order was the manifestation of mathematical laws (as in Galileo and the subsequent developments of physics). Darwin taught us that there is a third alternative: natural processes, readily accessible to our comprehension, can cause a system to evolve from a less to a more organized state. I believe that we are seeing the gradual incorporation of this insight into all the sciences that study the organization of systems, from cosmology and fundamental physics to the organization of human societies. This leads to the replacement of explanations in terms of absolute principles which are held to be eternally true with explanations that are historical and recognize the tremendous variety of possible outcomes of processes like natural selection.

lutionary shifts from one paradigm to another do not get scientists closer to the truth about nature, that all past paradigms have been rejected as utterly untrue. Newtonian mechanics, for instance, is not simply false, in the way that, say, Aristotle's theory of motion is, Weinberg points out. "Kuhn himself in his earlier book on the Copernican revolution told how parts of scientific theories survive in the more successful theories that supplant them, and seemed to have no trouble with the idea."

In *Structure*, however, Kuhn argued that Newtonian mechanics is not the same today as it was before the advent of relativity and quantum mechanics, because it was not understood then to be an approximation. This, Weinberg comments, "is like saying

that the steak you eat is not the one that you bought, because now you know it is stringy and before you didn't."

Finally, Weinberg says, Kuhn exaggerated the extent to which scientists are in thrall to the paradigm of the moment. Physicists today, for example, know that their theory of elementary particles is only an approximation to some yet unknown basic theory, and they are working hard to find new data that conflict with the current theory. Why do scientists even bother, he asks, if Kuhn's view of scientific progress is correct? "What drives us onward in the work of science," Weinberg writes, "is precisely the sense that there are truths out there to be discovered, truths that once discovered will form a permanent part of human knowledge."

ARTS & LETTERS

The New Gardens of Art

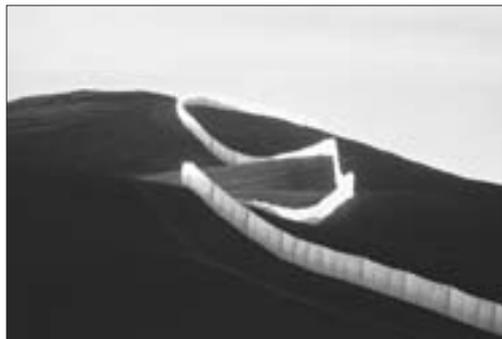
"Gardens and the Death of Art" by Stephanie Ross, in *Landscape Architecture* (July 1998), 636 Eye St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001-3736.

Today it is little more than a hobby—albeit an immensely popular one—but in the 18th century, gardening was a fine art. English author Horace Walpole even grouped it with poetry and painting—"Three Sisters, or the Three New Graces who dress and adorn Nature." Yet if gardening no longer is kin to poetry and painting, high art has not completely abandoned the landscape, asserts Ross, author of *What Gardens Mean* (1998). Many recent works of "environmental art," she argues, "fulfill the same functions" the gardens of Walpole's day did. "By inhabiting, addressing, and altering a site, they call into question our relations to landscape, nature, and art."

The contemporary artists whose works "most clearly recall those earlier gardens," Ross writes, include Alan Sonfist and Meg Webster. Sonfist's various *Time Landscapes* are tracts reproducing an urban area's vanished native flora. When his *Time Landscape* in New York

City's La Guardia Place is finished (the first stage was dedicated in 1978), it will exhibit three stages of a forest as it would have been in the colonial era. Webster's work *Pass*, installed in Saint Louis's Laumeier Sculpture Park between 1990 and 1992, reproduces a variety of different habitats and plant varieties found throughout Missouri, including a fruit orchard, a woodland stream, a pond, sun and shade gardens, herbs, berry bushes, and various prairie grasses and flowers.

But even less obviously gardenlike works of environmental art—such as Michael Heizer's desert sculpture *Double Negative* (1969), in which 240,000 tons of earth were carved out of two facing cliffs—"force us to rethink our place in the landscape, our roles as perceivers, enjoyers, consumers, destroyers," Ross observes. "They raise profound metaphysical questions about permanence and change, about human will and agency."



Running Fence, Sonoma and Marin Counties, California, 1972-76, by Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Wild over La Joséphine

“Josephine Baker and Paul Colin: African American Dance Seen through Parisian Eyes” by Karen C. C. Dalton and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 1998), Univ. of Chicago, 202 Wieboldt Hall, 1050 E. 59th St., Chicago, Ill. 60637.



Until African American dancer Josephine Baker and La Revue Nègre came to Paris in 1925, the only blacks that young French artist Paul Colin had ever seen were immigrant workers from Africa and the West Indies. Assigned to do a promotional poster for the troupe, he was astonished and captivated by the 19-year-old Baker's frenetic performance. His striking red, white, and black poster—depicting her, along with a musician and a tap dancer, as “alert, spirited, with it”—launched his career as well as hers, write Dalton and Gates, director of a research project on the image of the black in Western art and a professor of humanities, respectively, at Harvard University.

Baker and her act took Paris by storm, and Colin was a brilliant caricaturist, the authors note. “She loved to dance; he loved to draw her dancing.” His vivid, vigorous drawings “captured the spirited movements of that ‘wild dance,’ the Charleston, newly imported from the States, and the syncopated rhythms of a new art form called jazz.”

Many years later, Colin recalled his first glimpse of the dancer: “Dressed in rags, she was part boxing kangaroo, part rubber woman, part female Tarzan. She contorted her limbs and body, crossed her eyes, shim-mied, puffed out her cheeks, and crossed the stage on all fours, her kinetic rear end becoming the mobile center of her outlandish maneuvers. Then, naked but for green feathers about her hips, her skull lacquered black, she provoked both anger and enthusiasm. Her quivering belly and

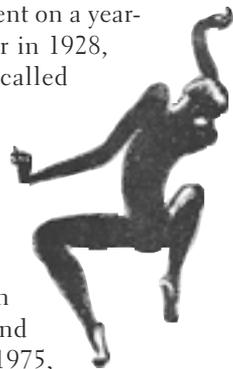


thighs looked like a call to lubricity, like a magical return to the mores of the first ages.”

In cafés and newspapers, Parisians heatedly debated whether Baker's La Revue Nègre represented a welcome infusion of new blood and energy into a stodgy, tradition-bound France, or a deplorable sign of the decline and impending fall of Western civilization. The controversy ensured the revue's success.

“If [Baker] resembled some bizarre form of wild animal onstage,” write Dalton and Gates, “on the street she was a model of Parisian chic.” In the City of Light, the authors note, Baker and other black Americans could go about without fear of encountering the Jim Crow racism that existed at home. “Often escorted by Colin, who sketched her in his studio as frequently as possible, Baker was invited to all the best parties in the city. Soon she received an offer from the Folies-Bergère to be the star of their new show, ‘La Folie du Jour.’ Within a year, there would be Josephine Baker dolls, costumes, perfumes, and even a hairdressing called Bakerfix.”

Paris's infatuation with Baker and all things *noir* lasted only a few years. When she went on a year-long European tour in 1928, the dancer was called “degenerate” in Vienna and her performance was banned in Munich. Baker continued her career in Paris, however, and she died there in 1975, a half-century after she and Parisians first discovered each other.



She Sets Her Characters Free

“Iris Murdoch and the Net of Theory” by George Watson, in *The Hudson Review* (Autumn 1998), 684 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Iris Murdoch is the rarest of novelists, an academic philosopher at Oxford University whose fiction is full of philosophy but devoid of “seminar-style debates” and ideas masquerading as characters. That sort of “philosophical” fiction, in her view, is not philosophical enough, observes Watson, a Fellow at Cambridge University.

Born in Dublin in 1919 of Irish Protestant stock and brought up in London, Murdoch is “a clever woman” whose writings “seldom descend into mere cleverness,” writes Watson. Not for her the fashionable notion that almost nothing can be truly known, and that moral knowledge, in particular, is merely personal opinion. Yet she has enjoyed “enormous success” as a novelist, from *Under the Net* (1954) to *Jackson’s Dilemma* (1996).

Murdoch “has always believed in something, has always believed that it mattered, and has always given an impression of wanting to believe more,” Watson writes. Murdoch “drifted out of communism” after World War II “into ever more skeptical versions of democratic socialism, along with encounters with Existentialism and Buddhism,” eventually arriving at a “highly personal version of conservatism, unattached to any party and increasingly drawn to religion.” But none of her writing is Christian, “not even *The Bell* (1958), her fourth novel, which first signaled her profound fascination with faith.” But it is a faith “in the good rather than in God,” he

notes. In her 1992 nonfiction work, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, she called for “a theology which can continue without God.”

“Iris Murdoch was the first, I believe,” Watson writes, “to suggest that the tradition of realism that has dominated English fiction for nearly three centuries, since Defoe, Richardson and Fielding, might in the end be more philosophical than a good deal of what passes for philosophy.” In a 1960 essay, she proposed Shakespeare as the father of fictional realism, writes Watson, “not for the commonplace reason that he drew from low life . . . but because . . . Shakespeare was the pioneer of what she called free character—of characters which, like Falstaff and Hamlet, grow into humanity beyond any pattern imposed by principle or plot.”

Murdoch is critical of the modernists on that score: the severely conservative T. S. Eliot and his school, for instance, had none of Shakespeare’s toleration and delight in the inconsistent variety of humankind.

After abandoning Marxism, observes Watson, Murdoch “was a refugee from ideas, or at least from glib theorizing. . . . Grand theory, or ideology, is the enemy of thought, and she is profoundly suspicious of anything that offers itself as a total solution.” As a character of hers remarks in *An Accidental Man* (1971), if a truth is complicated, “you have to be an artist not to utter it as a lie.”

OTHER NATIONS

The Iranian Surprise

A Survey of Recent Articles

Mohammed Khatami, the Shiite cleric who is president of Iran, is a man full of astonishments. First, he won the presidency in 1997 in an upset victory, receiving nearly 70 percent of the popular vote. Since then, as president, he has continued to amaze observers by (1) seeking to improve Iran’s relations with the outside world, including even the erstwhile “Great Satan” (a.k.a. the United States), and (2)

calling at home for respect for the rule of law, tolerance for diversity of opinions, and an Islamic civil society.

Though Khatami may not prevail, his advent, along with “widespread intellectual and cultural ferment” in the country, is “incontrovertible evidence that something dramatic” and important is occurring in Iran, maintains Fred Halliday, a professor of international relations at

the London School of Economics, writing in the *New Republic* (Oct. 5, 1998).

Khatami's thinking is on display in two books he has written: *Fear of the Storm* (1993), a collection of five essays, and *From the City-World to the World-City* (1994), a study of Western political thought from Plato to contemporary liberalism. "The latter book," notes Halliday, "is an argument for democracy and freedom, and for open dialogue between civilizations."

Two themes run through the volumes, observes Shaul Bakhash, a historian at George Mason University, in the *New York Review of Books* (Nov. 5, 1998). "First, Khatami sees Islam as a religion and civilization in crisis or, at least . . . no longer responsive to the needs of the times, whether in science, the economy, or political organization. . . . Second, Khatami believes that today 'the world is the West, or lives in the shadow of Western thought and civilization.'" Muslims must acknowledge this reality, he believes, and intellectually engage Western thought.

Khatami—whom many have likened to Mikhail Gorbachev, the reformist Communist who dug the grave of the Soviet Union—has been part of Iran's ruling clerical establishment since the 1979 revolution. Until 1992, when he was ousted as minister of culture for being too permissive, he held important positions in the Islamic Republic.

Since Khatami became president, his "attempt to expand press and political freedoms has run up against strong opposition from the conservative faction among the

ruling clerics," Bakhash observes. Though he has a popular mandate and controls most of the executive branch, conservative clerics outnumber his supporters in parliament. More important, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei—the successor to Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini—possesses greater powers. Khamenei controls the military and the national police, as well as the security agencies, Bakhash points out. He also names the chiefs of the judiciary, national broadcasting, and the foundation that controls the hundreds of expropriated industries and enterprises. And he names the principal members of the watchdog Council of Guardians, which "can strike down legislation it deems in violation of Islam."

Islam is not the problem, writes Shireen T. Hunter, director of Islamic studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, in the *Washington Quarterly* (Autumn 1998). "Islam is no more incompatible with democracy than any other religion that puts divinely inspired laws above those made by humans," she says. The problem, rather, is that the Islamist ruling class in Iran is unwilling to give up power and "bow to the will of the people."

Khatami and the reformers may be able, if they overcome conservative opposition, to "soften the harsher aspects" of Iran's political system, Hunter concludes. But they cannot achieve the president's proclaimed aims of establishing the rule of law and creating an Islamic civil society without fundamentally changing that system.

A Pilgrim in Kerala

"Poor but Prosperous" by Akash Kapur, in *The Atlantic Monthly* (Sept. 1998), 77 N. Washington St., Boston, Mass. 02114.

It is a land where portraits of Marx, Lenin, and Che Guevara are still plastered on building walls, where small paper flags bearing the hammer and sickle flutter by the roadside. You can get your car fixed (if you are lucky enough to own one) at Lenin's Auto Parts. Is this Cuba? North Korea? No, it is Kerala, a verdant Indian state with 33 million inhabitants on the subcontinent's southwest coast. It offers a model for the Indian future, insists Kapur, an Indian resident now traveling on a fellowship from Harvard University.

In 1957, Kerala installed the world's first democratically elected Marxist government, and Communists have ruled intermittently ever since. Lush plantations of cardamom, pepper, rubber, and tea fill the valleys, criss-crossed by rivers and canals. Land reform in the 1960s gave 1.5 million tenant farmers pieces of this fecund land, and a "generous" minimum wage assures a decent standard of living, at least for those who can find work. Unemployment is high at 25 percent, a result of the fact that industry has largely stayed away from the Marxist Eden.

Kerala is one of the poorest states in one of the poorest countries in the world. The state's gross domestic product, at \$1,000 per capita, is some \$200 less than the Indian average. Yet, according to Kapur, the people of Kerala enjoy advantages usually found only in the industrialized world. Life expectancy is 72 years, and infant mortality rates are low. "Perhaps most impressive," he says, is the 90 percent literacy rate, the result of a three-year literacy drive begun in 1989. More newspapers per capita are read here than anywhere else in India. Keralites are

open to new ideas, Kapur says, citing bookstores he found stocked with such titles as *Text/CounterText* and *Intimations of Post-Modernity*. Ashutosh Varshney, a political scientist at Columbia University, likens Kerala's active civic life to Tocquevillean America's.

Some of Kerala's advantages derive from its history as a cosmopolitan trading state. Its busy port city of Cochin is called the "Venice of India." Other advantages are of more recent



Portraits of Lenin and Marx grace an arch in the Indian state of Kerala, which boasts a communist government.

vintage. Stiff national tariffs on imported crops and remittances from Keralites working overseas help sustain the local economy.

Now, with India's tariffs coming down amid the gradual liberalization of the national economy, Kerala "runs the risk of being steam-rollered" by change, Kapur says. But its example, in his view, should remind Indians that success cannot be measured "merely in terms of income and output."

Love and Taxes in Russia

"Russia's Taxing Problem" by Daniel Treisman, in *Foreign Policy* (Fall 1998), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1779 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

"Russia's inability to collect taxes is rapidly becoming the greatest threat to its economic and political stability," writes Treisman, a political scientist at the University of California, Los Angeles. The desperate Russian State Tax Service has even aired a TV ad showing a businessman whose libido has deserted him because of anxiety about his firm's tax evasion—"probably the first time in history that an honestly completed tax form has been touted as an aphrodisiac."

Needless to say, the ad did not work.

Federal tax revenues fell from 18 percent of gross domestic product in 1992 to 10 percent in 1997. The Asian financial crisis and plummeting world oil prices compounded the government's financial woes. As a result, public agencies can't pay their bills. Teachers and laborers wait months or even years for their wages. In July, coal miners in Kemerovo protested by blocking the Trans-Siberian Railway for 16 days.

Tax rates were slashed during the "shock

therapy" that began in 1992, but while revenues later bounced back in Poland and other ex-communist shock therapy patients, they didn't in Russia. Russia's problem, Treisman believes, stems from the "perverse incentives" in its evolving federal tax system, which have governments at different levels competing with one another "to conceal and divert revenues that they would otherwise have to share."

Moscow typically is supposed to get 75 percent of the revenues from the national 20 percent value-added tax (VAT), and 35 percent of the revenues from the tax on corporate profits. The regional governments get the rest. In many regions, a few large enterprises predominate, and governors can look the other way when profits are kept off the books—in return for a "contribution" to off-budget funds for local development or to the governor's personal retirement fund.

Most—about 70 percent—of the decline in federal tax revenues between 1994 and '96

resulted from falling profit-tax receipts. Moscow's VAT receipts, by contrast, were relatively stable, reflecting the fact that the VAT is much harder for firms to evade.

To get more rubles flowing into federal coffers, Treisman suggests assigning *all* of the easier-to-collect VAT revenues to the federal government, and leaving all of the profit-tax money

to the regional governments.

Similar proposals, he notes, have been thwarted because they would have left most regions with less revenue. His solution: give the regional governments enough taxes to make up for their expected losses. In that way, he says, Moscow "could make the political arithmetic add up."

Chile's Two Tales

"The Dictator" by Jon Lee Anderson, in *The New Yorker* (Oct. 19, 1998), 20 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

Chile, that long, narrow sliver of a country between the Andes and the Pacific, should be the envy of Latin America today, to all outward appearances. "Prosperous [and] forward-looking," with a democratic government and a robust economy, notes Anderson, author of *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (1997), it boasts "the largest middle class in Latin America, estimated at 60 percent of its population." But how did Chile arrive at its good fortune? On that sensitive question, there is no national consensus, but "two competing versions" of Chile's recent history.

The story begins with the military coup 25 years ago against the government of President Salvador Allende. Elected president with only a third of the vote, Allende tried for three years to take Chile on the "road to socialism," nationalizing the copper mines and other industries, pushing through large-scale land reform, and increasing government spending on social welfare programs. He alienated not only the armed forces and other bastions of traditionalism but a large part of the populace. In September 1973, a junta headed by General Augusto Pinochet seized power, and soon reported that Allende had killed himself.

Chileans who call themselves Pinochetistas claim the coup saved Chile from becoming "another Cuba" and averted civil war. ("The active American role in aiding and abetting Allende's downfall has been airbrushed out of their version of history," notes Anderson.)

Pinochet gave free rein to Chilean disciples of American economist Milton Friedman, and they brought about the coun-

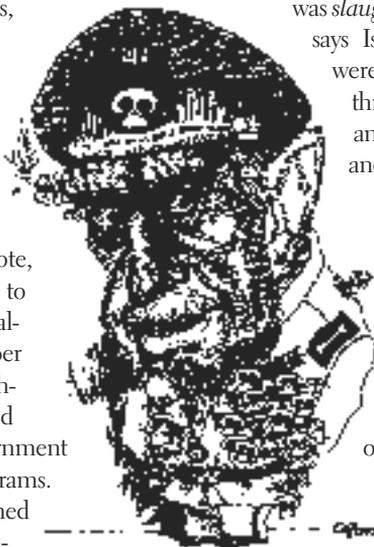
try's "vaunted economic miracle," Anderson says. Their efforts to encourage foreign investment and privatize businesses that Allende had nationalized produced "an average annual economic growth rate of seven percent for the past 14 years, a rate three times the overall Latin American average."

But what Pinochet's admirers only reluctantly acknowledge as certain "excesses" during his 17 years in power, Allende's daughter Isabel and other critics decry as mass murder. "There

was *slaughter*, there was state terrorism!" says Isabel Allende. "Many people were murdered in cold blood, their throats slit, burned to death." This and the loss of democracy, she and other Chileans believe, was far too high a price for the claimed economic progress.

More than 3,000 people were killed or "disappeared" while Pinochet was in office, Anderson notes, "and tens of thousands more were imprisoned or fled into exile." The killing continued well into the late 1980s. The dictator only agreed to give up power in 1990 (having lost a referendum on his rule two years earlier) in return for amnesty.

Pinochet's detention in England last fall (after Anderson's article appeared) at the request of a Spanish magistrate pursuing the 82-year-old retired dictator for crimes against humanity caused a fresh uproar—and even more division—in Chile. Some of his enemies rejoiced, but others of them wanted him freed and brought to justice in his own country. Pinochet's admirers, of course, wanted him simply freed. For Chileans, it seems, the past is not quite past.



RESEARCH REPORTS

Reviews of new research at public agencies and private institutions

“The First American Census in Methodological Perspective”

A workshop, November 12–14, 1998, at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C. The workshop was conducted with support from the

Donner Foundation.

The litigation and controversy over the prospective use of statistical sampling in the 2000 census have sent scholars back to the Constitution and the first U.S. census, in 1790, in search of guidance. The main conclusion to emerge from this workshop—cochaired by Margo J. Anderson, a Wilson Center Fellow and historian at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and Stephen E. Fienberg, a professor of statistics and social science at Carnegie Mellon University—seemed to be that, contrary to some claims, the Founding Fathers have precious little guidance to offer.

The GOP-controlled House of Representatives has challenged in court the Clinton administration’s plans to use statistical sampling to correct for the large number of black Americans—an estimated 5.7 percent in 1990, compared with 1.3 percent of whites—and other minorities who will not be counted in the census. (The uncounted are mostly in poor urban neighborhoods.) In November, the Supreme Court heard arguments in that case, as well as in a related lawsuit brought by private plaintiffs. Lower courts had ruled against the administration in both cases.

The Constitution originally provided (Article 1, Section 2) that members of the House of Representatives were to be apportioned among the states “according to their respective Numbers,” and that, “The actual Enumeration” would take place “within three Years after the first Meeting of the Congress,” and every 10 years thereafter. Opponents of statistical sampling have put much weight on the phrase “actual Enumeration,” contending that the Framers wanted a head count, not an estimation. Thomas Jefferson, who as secretary of state was in charge of the first census, “was familiar with methods of statistical estimation, having used them effectively in his 1782 survey

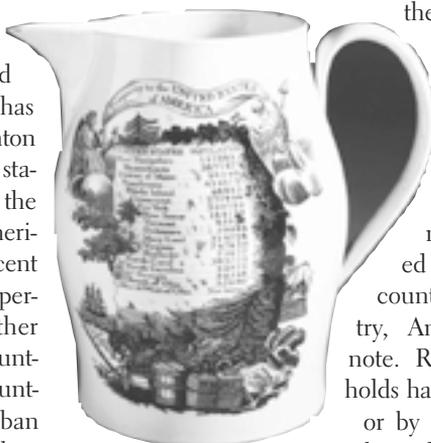
of Virginia’s population,” the House brief in the current lawsuit claims, but did not use them to adjust the 1790 census results.

However, while Jefferson had “demonstrated considerable practical ingenuity in producing estimates in the absence of a census,” says Daniel Scott Smith, a historian at the University of Illinois at Chicago, he did not draw inferences from a sample. The French mathematician Pierre Simon de Laplace was at work on probability theory in France, but Eugene Seneta, a professor of mathematical statistics at the University of Sydney, Australia, says, after an investigation of the matter, that there is no evidence that Jefferson had any knowledge of it.

The federal government has never attempted to make a physical headcount of everyone in the country, Anderson and Fienberg note. Rather, heads of households have been asked, in person or by mail, to report on their households. Nor does the phrase “actual Enumeration” seem laden with any great significance. The Framers, observes Seneta, “knew nothing

of sampling as such, and could not have rejected its use.” Reviewing the legislative history of the 1790 law authorizing the nation’s first census, Charlene Bickford, director of the First Federal Congress Project, points out that the Senate struck out the word *actual* from both the title and the text of the law. Apparently, the Senate did not consider the adjective as adding anything vital to the noun.

The Framers of the Constitution seem to have paid little attention to how the census was to be carried out. Indeed, censuses, conducted at England’s request and in various ways, were common occurrences in the colonies during the 18th century, notes Robert V. Wells, a historian at Union College.



A 1790 pitcher commemorating the first official census of the U.S. population

“The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions”

Princeton Univ. Press, 41 William St., Princeton, N.J. 08540. 472 pp. \$24.95

Authors: *William G. Bowen and Derek Bok*

Selective colleges and universities have taken a lot of heat for using race as a factor in admissions. Drawing on the records of more than 80,000 students at 28 such institutions, Bowen, president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and a former president of Princeton University, and Bok, a former president of Harvard University, assess the impact of affirmative action.

Though the black-white gap in Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores has narrowed in recent decades, it still exists, the authors note. Among more than 40,000 applicants for admission in 1989 to five selective institutions that provided detailed data, the average combined SAT score for whites (1284) was 186 points higher than the average for blacks. While 29 percent of the black applicants had combined SAT scores above 1200, nearly three-quarters of the whites did. The black applicants were “highly qualified” (about three-fourths scored higher than the average white test-taker in the nation), the authors point out, but the white applicants were “spectacularly well qualified.”

Since the five institutions took race into account, only 25 percent of all the whites who applied were offered admission, compared with 42 percent of all the blacks. If race had not been a factor, the authors calculate that the overall probability of admission for black applicants would have dropped from 42 percent to 13 percent—about half the figure for whites. Looking at all 28 selective institutions studied, the authors estimate that using a strict race-neutral standard would have cut black enrollment at least in half. At Princeton and the seven other most selective schools, black enrollment would have dropped from seven percent of the total to about two percent. Moreover, the authors point out, the academic credentials of the (hypothetically) rejected black students “were very good when judged on any absolute scale and were only slightly weaker than those of the black students who would have been retained. Selective schools attract highly talented minority candidates.”

Most of the black students who entered the 28 institutions in 1989 did well. Seventy-five percent graduated within six years—a lower proportion than the 86 percent of whites who did, but much higher than, for instance, the 59 percent of whites who graduated from the 305 National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I universities. The black students at Princeton and the seven other most selective schools had a higher graduation rate: 85 percent.

Black graduates of the 28 institutions “have done very well after leaving college,” write Bowen and Bok. Forty percent of those who entered college in 1976 went on after graduation to earn professional or doctoral degrees. Twenty years after they entered the colleges, the male black graduates were earning an average of \$82,000—twice the average for all black men with bachelor’s degrees nationwide; black women graduates of the 28 selective schools were earning an average of \$58,500. Nearly 90 percent of the black graduates reported taking part in civic activities in their communities.

Bowen and Bok acknowledge that “race-sensitive” admission policies, simply by their existence, may cast doubts on the true abilities of even the most talented black students. “More than a few black students unquestionably suffer some degree of discomfort” from this. But the black students themselves are presumably the best judges of how significant this discomfort is, and those surveyed “do not seem to *think* they have been harmed.” Seventy-five percent of the 1989-entering students who scored above 1300 on their SATs believe their college should place “a great deal” of emphasis on racial diversity.

Would society be better off without affirmative action in college admissions, cutting by more than half the number of blacks at selective schools and only slightly raising whites’ chances of admission? “Considering both the educational benefits of diversity and the need to include far larger numbers of black graduates in the top ranks of the business, professional, governmental, and not-for-profit institutions that shape our society,” conclude the authors, “we do not think so.”

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FROM THE CENTER

It is a distinct honor to introduce myself as the new director of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. I look forward with enthusiasm to the challenge of helping to lead this important institution, created by an Act of Congress in 1968, into the next century. I also look back with gratitude to the three previous directors—Benjamin Read, James Billington, and Charles Blitzer—whose unstinting efforts made the Center what it is today.

I am convinced that in the years ahead the Center can play a pivotal role in Washington, in our country, and in the world. Its great strengths include not only a talented staff but a Board of Trustees and a Council whose members are deeply committed to maintaining the Center's excellence. The Center has strong support in other communities. Over the last several months, scores of policymakers, university professors, and policy analysts have sought me out to express their admiration for its work.

From abroad comes the remarkable loyalty and support of the hundreds of scholars and public officials who visited and pursued research here in the past. Many of these alumni speak of their experiences at the Center as seminal events in their careers. Two weeks before her assassination in Saint Petersburg on November 20, Galina Starovoitova, a member of the Russian State Duma and a courageous defender of democracy, emphasized in a letter to me how important her 1989 guest scholarship at the Center had been to her, describing “vivid memories of the excellent opportunities for research and exchange of ideas I was provided there.”

The presence at the Center of this extraordinary woman, a scholar as well as a political leader, is an example of the Center fulfilling its highest aim: to promote interaction between the world of ideas and the world of policy, the world of the scholar and the world of the policymaker. Now we must ensure that in the future, leaders and scholars from the United States and abroad will single out the Center as such a place.

Our efforts to reach out to the public and to more specialized audiences are also a critical task, and are central to demonstrating the relevance of the work done here. As one of the more than 60,000 regular readers of the *Wilson Quarterly*, you understand very well the importance of ideas in public life. The Center's radio program, *Dialogue*, also plays a role in our out-

reach efforts, as do its many and varied public meetings and publications—its books, newsletters, bulletins, and World Wide Web site. Through these channels, the Center can reach hundreds of thousands of people around the world.

As my colleagues and I seek the best niche for the Center in a city with a number of established research and policy institutes, we will certainly look to the information and technology revolution for opportunities. Yet at its core, the Center must remain a place of intellectual excellence, a place where the top scholars, the exceptional thinkers, and the outstanding leaders in a variety of fields, from across this country and around the world, come to reflect, to write, and to exchange ideas with others in the nation's capital.

With its new home in the Ronald Reagan Building, the Center now provides an exhilarating atmosphere, with some of the best technical facilities, to support its many arms: the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, the Division of United States Studies, its area studies programs, and its more specialized projects. There is also enormous potential in collaborative undertakings with other institutions.

A showcase public-private partnership, the Center will continue to depend on some federal funding, but I am committed to seeing the private and other sources of revenue, now over 50 percent of the Center's funding, expand further. I am also committed to working closely with my former congressional colleagues to meet concerns about the Center they have expressed to me in recent months.

The Woodrow Wilson Center stands as a unique monument in a city of monuments, a living memorial to the 28th president of the United States. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, herself a former Fellow, was right when she said that the Center “memorializes not only Wilson, but Wilson's lifelong effort, as educator and president, to map a trail for a future that would elude the traps of the past.”

What impresses me most of all as I assume leadership of the Center is the opportunity we have, working together, to make it one of Washington's pre-eminent intellectual centers. That is our task and our mandate as we carry the Center into the next century.

Lee H. Hamilton
Director



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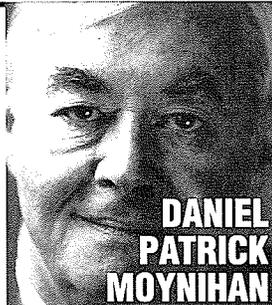
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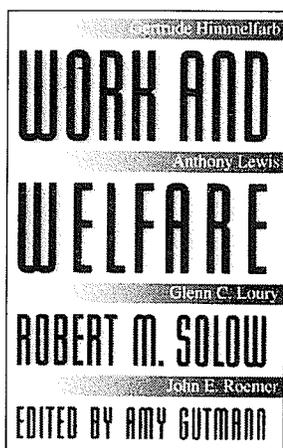
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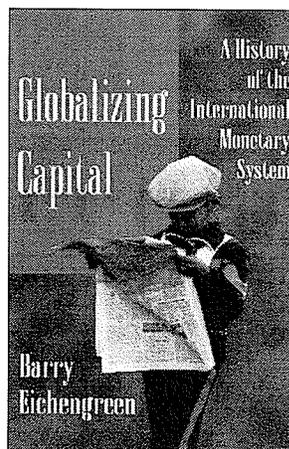
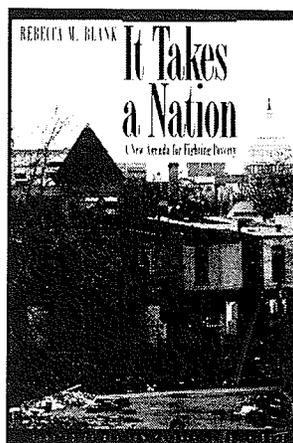
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