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SPRING 1996

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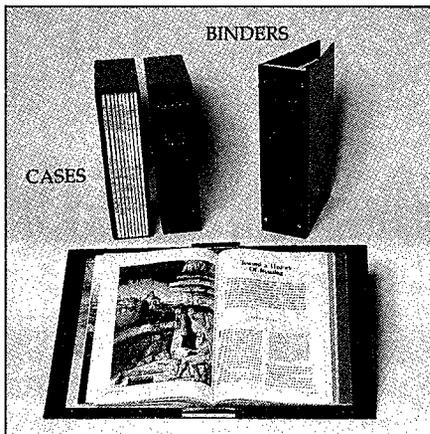
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# THE WILSON QUARTERLY

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT

When Barbara Dafoe Whitehead published her sobering essay on the effects of single parenthood on America's children in the April 1993 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, she set off a storm of controversy. Running under the title "Dan Quayle Was Right" ("It was the editor's title. I would have gone with something far less provocative," Whitehead told us), the article brought to light a raft of research showing that divorce has a far more pernicious influence on the quality of children's lives, and indeed on their future prospects, than had previously been believed.

Disturbing as it is in itself, America's divorce culture is only part of a larger story of children growing up with a single biological parent, in most cases the mother. Out-of-wedlock births and a host of recombinant family arrangements fill out the rest of the picture. As a result, we now live amid what amounts to a wide-scale social experiment on the effects of childrearing without fathers.

That experiment gives rise to a number of questions. Why are fathers necessary? What is their unique contribution to the formation of their offspring? Is fatherlessness in our time any different from what it was in others? And what effect do women have on the institution of fatherhood?

Some of the answers are beginning to come in, provided by, among others, two of the contributors to this issue, David Popenoe and Whitehead herself. If fatherlessness is indeed a major factor behind many of our social maladies—and our authors believe it is—the first step toward a remedy is understanding why.

The death this past January of our first poetry editor, Nobel laureate Joseph Brodsky, came as a blow to all of us who worked with and admired him. The short, impassioned introductory essays that Brodsky wrote for us bore the trademark of all his work: the unshakeable conviction that poetry was the thing that mattered most. His passion, artistry, and humanity will be sorely missed. Anthony Hecht will pay tribute to his work in our next issue.

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### *Only Human Nature*

I have learned much from Lionel Tiger ["My Life in the Human Nature Wars," *WQ*, Winter '96], and he is correct to point out that there are simply more and more data confirming the importance of the human genetic inheritance for understanding human social behavior. I must disagree with him, however, on two points. First, he is, I think, too optimistic when he suggests that we may be nearing the end of the "human nature wars." Some people will continue to deny the relevance of biology to human behavior, while others will read into biology the social policies they prefer. If we have bad luck, the result will be a very nasty fight between antiscientific obscurantism and racism that claims a basis in science. Right now, our luck does not look good to me, but then I am, by nature, a pessimist. Second, after noting how important it is to understand our biological natures, he immediately adds that understanding our nature tells us nothing about how we should live. Echoing David Hume, he says that when we look at the world we can see many "is's" but no "oughts." But if what we ought to do has no basis in what we are, then anything goes. People have to say such things, I suppose, but I wonder if Tiger really thinks this.

*Stephen Peter Rosen  
Harvard University  
Cambridge, Mass.*

Lionel Tiger's essay took me back to an anthropology course I had with Bernhard Stern at the New School in the early 1950s. This was at the time of the absurd Lysenko wars. [Lysenko argued that acquired traits could be inherited by successive generations.] Stern was a student of Franz Boaz and a colleague of Ruth Benedict at Columbia, and I well remember his discussion of "reductionism." He said that once mind and language enter in, we can no longer trace behavior to our origins as beasts. That was a great, liberating thought back then, as I am sure Tiger will agree.

But during all these years (I am now 73), I have been troubled by our inability to accept that humans are animals and that we still have too much of our animal nature. My problem was like that of many in those days who had thrown off religion. We wanted to believe that humans were "better" than mere animals. We wanted to believe that Lysenko was on to something, and we denounced Robert Ardrey in the heady 1960s. Later, when I read Ardrey, I found much of it fascinating and of course then saw the folly of our admiration for Lysenko.

But underlying all of this there is, for me, a feeling of sadness about the polarization. I happened to be reading an essay by Lewis Thomas called "Humanities and Science" when the *WQ* arrived (a marvelous coincidence). In his essay, Thomas says, "To observe, in open-mouthed astonishment, the polarized extremes, one group of highly intelligent, beautifully trained, knowledgeable, and imaginative scientists maintaining that all sorts of behavior, animal and human, are governed exclusively by genes, and another group of equally talented scientists saying precisely the opposite and asserting that all behavior is set and determined by the environment, or by culture, and both sides brawling in the pages of periodicals such as the *New York Review of Books*, is an educational experience that no college student should be allowed to miss."

*Pat Lievow  
Camden, Me.*

Upon reading Mr. Turner's "Birth of Natural Classicism" in your Winter 1996 issue, I experienced the same wonderful feeling of liberation and renewed self-confidence that must have swept the crowd watching the emperor parade by to display his new clothes when the little child piped up, "But he has no clothes on at all!" Thank you, thank you, thank you.

*John H. Bermingham  
Scarsdale, N.Y.*



Modernism never quite made it to the laboratories of medical schools (where I work). So postmodernism never quite made it either. Among the test tubes and pipettes, the deconstructionist thinking that spread like the plague in American academia seemed like a new virus that devours the minds of both the innocent and those who should have known better. Among those who were fighting the virus, the names of Lionel Tiger and Frederick Turner often cropped up. What made their work so interesting was that they had the audacity to pursue an evidence-based intellectual course in the midst of whirling claims and counter-claims. Much of the evidence they attended to came from biology. Then, as now, it seemed a bit crazy that such a large percentage of erstwhile intelligent and knowledgeable people would one day just up and decide that biology has nothing to do with life. Tiger and Turner were and are not among them.

*Michael T. McGuire, M.D.  
Los Angeles, Calif.*

Lionel Tiger should be congratulated for his contribution to the biological and behavioral sciences, both in his own work and during his 12-year stint as research director of the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. Since Tiger's departure, our foundation has continued to support research on the biology of aggressive behavior. Biologists who study aggression are well aware that aggression is a multiply determined behavior with contributions from genes, experience, learning, overall health, and the functions and dysfunctions of neural and endocrine systems which all humans share. Yet some critics persist in finding racism or the potential for dangerous social engineering in any biological investigation of human behavior. Recent public and political discourse about criminal violence in the United States has involved much racism and simplistic thinking, and in the past grave abuses of power have been built on wrongheaded theories of human nature. Nevertheless, the fact that biological knowledge or fantasies about human biology have been used in pernicious ways in the past should be a warning against the misuse of biology in the future, not an argument against future scholarship.

*Karen Colvard  
Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation  
New York, N.Y.*

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## FINDINGS

**CIVIL SOCIETY SWEEPSTAKES:** Don't stand in the way of all the people who are rushing to embrace the idea of civil society. They may bowl you over.

Conservatives and communitarians, Clinton backers and Buchananites—virtually all eagerly agree with the proposition that small-scale local institutions are the key to America's social health. Lately, even graying veterans of the New Left have been emerging from their velvet foxholes in academe, swearing that that was what they had in mind all along. Will Hollywood be next? A New York publisher reportedly has paid a six-figure advance for a book by Harvard University's Robert D. Putnam, whose "bowling alone" article on the decline of civil society last year excited much of the current interest.

Yet sociologist Peter Berger, one of those who wrote and thought about civil society when it was less fashionable, has called it a "social policy Rorschach": everybody sees in it what they wish. Others now see less than they wish. Elsewhere in this issue (see page 108), John Lukacs suggests that civil society enthusiasts underestimate the importance of a strong state. And in the *Weekly Standard* (Feb. 5, 1996), David Brooks wonders, "Do I want local busybodies with piddling township posts exercising their petty powers by looking into my affairs?"

**ANGRY WHITE FEMALES:** Journalists and other instant analysts have had their say about the 1994 elections. Now the scholars are weighing in with their more measured appraisals. In *PS: Political Science & Politics* (Dec. 1995), Alfred J. Tuchfarber and some University of Cincinnati colleagues upend the notion that the sweeping Republican victory was chiefly the work of "angry white males." White women, too, it seems, shifted toward the GOP in large numbers. In the South, 59 percent of white women (like 65 percent of white men) told survey researchers that they voted Republican in House races. Outside the South, 53 percent of white women (like 57 percent of white men)

opted for the GOP House candidates. The '94 elections, these scholars say, "probably" marked the beginning of "a historic period of party realignment."

**CULTURE BUILDING?:** An article in *Metropolis* (March 1996) magazine notes that we are in the midst of a public library building boom. Big-name architects (Michael Graves, Moshe Safdie, Ricard Legoreta, and Will Bruder) have been enlisted to design signature buildings in Denver, Vancouver, San Antonio, and Phoenix. "It's an odd development in these corporatist times—the library, a public building, open to all, not reserved for tourists or business bigwigs, has become the 1990s symbol of urban renaissance," observes writer Robert Neuwirth.

Maybe not that odd after all. Museums also seem to be proliferating at a heady pace. Last year, according to data collected from regional offices of the American Association of Museums, more than 60 new institutions opened their doors, ranging from the glitzy Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland to the volunteer-run Cotton Museum in Bishopville, South Carolina.

**EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY:** At a time when all parties to political debate in this country seem bent on outbidding the others in cultural pessimism, it's refreshing to read Seymour Martin Lipset's *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*, recently published by Norton. Lipset, a Wilson Center Fellow, finds more continuity than change in the beliefs and behavior of Americans:

The standard evidence marshaled to argue that America is experiencing a value crisis is unconvincing. However, it is difficult to make the opposite case that morality in America is waxing. There is indeed a widespread perception that traditional values are threatened by recent social, political, and economic developments. . . .

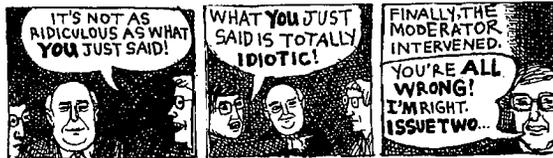
The fact that we have strong moral frameworks, rooted in ideas of equality

and liberty, around which certain new issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, and the older and continuing concern for the impoverished have coalesced, presents a challenge to American society. Some observers have suggested that an emphasis on communitarian norms is the best way to meet this challenge. This may be true for Canada, Japan, or Europe. The American tradition, however, calls for a different alternative, which may be described as “moral individualism.” An emphasis on individual morality is an elemental component of the American polity. As political theorist James Rutherford notes: “The free and equal individual with moral responsibility is the basis of communal solidarity.” This is an important assertion—that community in democratic pluralistic America is grounded in the individual as a thinking, moral actor, not in group solidarity.

**BUT DON'T DRINK THE WATER:** Three papers presented at the recent annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science strongly suggest that one of the worst things immigrants to this country can do is embrace American culture. Film critic Michael Medved cites yet another study in this vein in arguing that American mass entertainment is spreading a “plague of pessimism.” What’s worst about the “gratuitous brutality and loveless sex” in American movies and TV, he writes in *Imprimis* (Dec. 1995), published by Michigan’s Hillsdale College, is not that some children will learn to imitate it, but “the underlying message of hopelessness conveyed by these ugly, consistently dysfunctional images in our society—a message that encourages both self-pity and fear.” In one of the AAAS studies, as reported in the *Economist* (Feb. 17, 1996), children were asked to react to a photograph of a boy sitting at a table with a violin on it. (It was the young Yehudi Menuhin, but they weren’t told that.) Mexican children who still lived in their native country tended to imagine that the boy was dreaming of becoming a great musician. But after a year in the United States, Mexican children were more likely to say that he wanted to play the violin but was sad. And children born in this

country to Mexican parents were fully Americanized: like their Anglo peers, they were likely to say that the boy was being forced to play against his will.

**NO-FAULT PUNDITRY:** Ever wonder how many of the predictions of political pundits on the “shouting head” shows turn out right? In the new journal *Press/Politics* (Winter 1996), three scholars evaluated 757 predictions made by panelists of *The McLaughlin Group*.



Their conclusion: 50.1 percent were correct; 49.9 percent proved wrong. “The implication,” say the authors, “is clear: someone who tunes in *The McLaughlin Group* to get a better grip on the future would do just as well to flip a coin.”

**PHOTO TO FOLLOW:** What the low-minded might construe as one of the most “intellectual” personal ads ever published appears in *Salmagundi* (Spring-Summer 1995) in the form of an essay by Nancy Huston, a Canadian-born writer living in Paris and winner of the 1992 Canadian Governor General’s Award for French-language fiction for her novel *Cantique des plaines*. She’s in her early forties now and has finally summoned up the courage to write about “two incredibly salient features” of her life so far: namely, her superior beauty and her intelligence. “When I say I’m beautiful and intelligent, I’m not boasting,” she insists. “All I’ve done is take reasonable care of the beauty and intelligence programmed into me by the dice-toss of my parents’ chromosomes.” The former “masseur and feminist journalist, nude model and English professor, bar ‘hostess’ and guest lecturer in prestigious universities” objects to the pretense, “so prevalent” among Americans, “that we respond to each other’s minds independently of each other’s bodies, and that what we love in each other when we make love to each other’s bodies is not also, in large part, each other’s minds.”

*Don't Count on It*

How am I doing?" Mayor Edward Koch used to ask constituents he met in his travels around New York City. It is a question Americans increasingly ask of economists, demographers, sociologists, and other statistical soothsayers. It no longer seems possible for us to know how well we are faring—as individuals or as a society—on our own. An expert opinion is required.

Our dependence on statistical temperature-taking is gradually transforming politics into a form of numerical warfare.

Statistics, to paraphrase Karl von Clausewitz, is now often politics by other means. This being an election year, the latest front in the numbers war concerns our national well-being. The numbers that are most often seen in combat are enough to make you want to take immediately to your sickbed. You've seen them before: they are about job losses, downsizing, and stagnant wages. The most disturbing statistics of all are those showing that family income is virtually unchanged since about 1973.

Most people attempting to absorb these numbers seem to experience a kind of cognitive dissonance. I know I do. I graduated from high school in 1973. My family was living in the "dream home" my parents had recently built with earnings from my father's success as a small businessman. Today, however, that house (leaving aside its acre of land) would barely meet the typical young family's expectations for a starter home: three bedrooms, two (small) baths, but no skylights, whirlpool tubs, or walk-in closets. No matter what the income data say, experience says that the general living standard has soared in the "bad" years since 1973. Many Americans seem to agree. That is the only explanation that makes sense for one of the most consistent and puzzling findings of survey research in recent years: Americans keep

telling pollsters (in proportions around 80 percent) that their own lives are going well, yet a majority express deep pessimism about the general state of the nation.

There is a growing body of evidence that confirms what our own experience seems to show. Some of this evidence is as simple as elementary mathematics. For example, the average family is now smaller than it was in 1973, so there's more income per family member. But real family income is also probably

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greater than our statistics have led us to believe. It is now widely thought, for example, that the Consumer Price Index exaggerates

increases in the cost of living, and therefore understates increases in real wages. And wages are not even the whole story. Total compensation includes health insurance and other benefits, and the value of these has been rising steadily.

Some very intriguing evidence on this score comes from a study recently published by W. Michael Cox of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas and journalist Richard Alm in *Reason* magazine. They did something so commonsensical (and frankly "unscientific") it staggers the imagination. From sources as ready to hand as the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, they vacuumed up a mound of information on the way people really live and laid it out like cards on a table. The average size of a new house in 1970, for example, was 1,500 square feet. By 1990, it was 2,080 square feet. About three-quarters of those new houses had central air conditioning, while only one-third of those built 20 years earlier did. Giddily, Cox and Alm pile factoid upon factoid: households with two or more vehicles, heart transplant procedures, annual paid vacation and holidays, percentage of Americans finishing college, and on and on, everything rising, includ-

ing my personal favorite, the number of recreational boats owned, up from 8.8 million in 1970 to 16 million in 1990. All of this suggests that Americans ought to believe the evidence of their senses: they are doing much better in material terms than many commonly employed indexes suggest.

This is not to say that such indexes always lie—or that a lot of Americans haven't seen their standard of living fall. Obviously, arguments such as Cox and Alm's rely on numbers too. But they employ a kind of statistical pointillism, using masses of small strokes to draw a vague and suggestive picture of a complex reality. Numbers usually tell only partial truths. Yet, for some reason, we keep hoping to find revelation in them. In a recent *Atlantic Monthly* cover story, Clifford Cobb, Ted Halstead, and Jonathan Rowe, from a San Francisco public policy organization called Redefining Progress, launched a furious attack on the "perversity" of a single bellwether, the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP), the figure most often used as a proxy for the nation's economic health. They indignantly pointed out that the GDP does not take into account all sorts of things that affect the quality of life, such as pollution and crime. They then presented their own proposal for a "new index that gets much closer—not all the way, but closer—to the economy that people experience," which they called a "Genuine Progress Indicator." The idea stirred a dismaying amount of excitement in the media. The three writers were absolutely right to point out that the GDP is not an adequate measure of our national well-being, but they neglected to mention that nobody ever claimed it was. It is simply a gross economic indicator. To suggest that any statistical indicator is capable of answering the "how am I doing?" question is the height of folly.

About one thing the numbers speak with rare clarity: income inequality has been on the rise for more than 20 years. The change can be sized up in various ways, producing a variety of different estimates of its magnitude, but the essential

fact is inescapable. *Why* it is occurring is another matter. There is something to the headline explanations—corporate CEOs are making out like bandits, welfare recipients are watching the real value of their benefits drop—but many other factors are involved. For example, in a majority of the families in the bottom fifth of the income scale there is not a single worker, while about 80 percent of the families in the top income quintile have two workers. The most useful pieces of data confirm conventional wisdom: the swiftest runners in the income race are those with the most schooling.

It is doubtful, in any event, that income inequality itself is responsible for much of our present discontent. While it makes excellent fodder for campaign rhetoric, income inequality itself is largely an abstraction, a number. How the top five percent have fared since 1990 is not of much concern to me—unless of course their gains seem to be coming at my expense. Our interest is selective. We recoil from the corporate CEO who is making millions while re-engineering thousands of people out of their jobs, but we do not mind—indeed we heartily approve—when dozens of fresh Silicon Valley millionaires are minted with every new initial public offering on Wall Street. Soak the rich? Last October, a *Reader's Digest* poll asked a survey group how heavily a family of four earning \$200,000 a year ought to be taxed—including state and local taxes as well as federal income taxes. The median response: about 25 percent. The results were pretty consistent across lines of race, income, and gender, with the highest estimate coming from self-identified Democrats. They thought the rich family ought to pay 29 percent of its income in taxes. In reality, that affluent family's total tax bill comes to about 39 percent.

Conservatives who write about income inequality seldom fail to mention that it is misleading to look only at income quintiles. They point out that the American income structure is like a beehive, alive with movement in every direc-

tion. Naturally, there are numbers to support this, and they are impressive. One study found that only five percent of those who were in the bottom income quintile in 1979 had failed to move up at least one quintile by 1991. Fifty-nine percent jumped to one of the two top quintiles. Naturally, such numbers need to be qualified. A lot of those who made the big leap were like the proverbial college student who delivers pizzas one year and legal briefs the next. And a lot of other movers are poor people who are merely being tossed around in the bottom two quintiles.

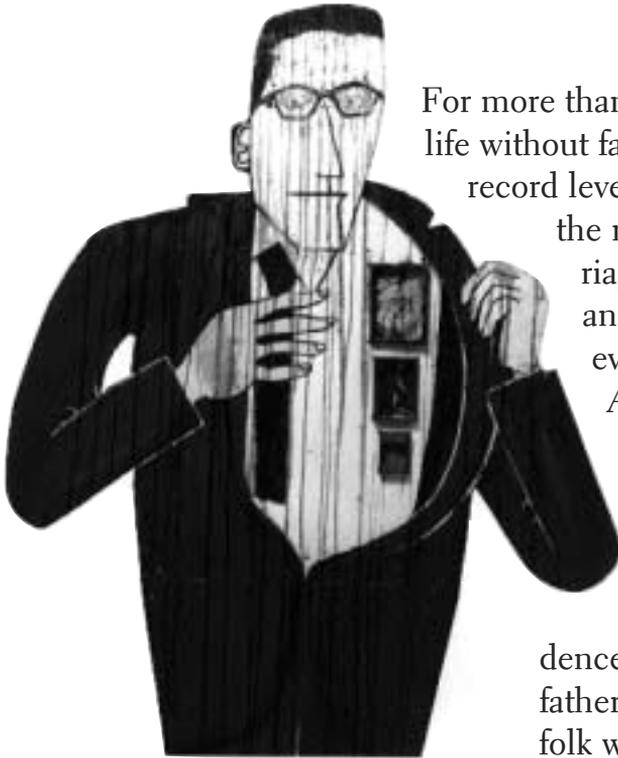
**G**rapppling with developments like these in his new book, *The Good Life and Its Discontents*, columnist Robert J. Samuelson argues that the United States is in the midst of a transition from an era of entitlement to what, with luck, will be an era of responsibility. By this he means that a generation that came of age amid unprecedented affluence transformed the American dream into an impossible fantasy, a set of entitlements to the good life that are beyond the reach of any nation. It is an ironic outcome for a generation that talked so much about the trap of materialism and how much things were going to change. The baby boomers turned out to be right, albeit for the wrong reason. Their material success seems empty precisely because it has been so easily attained.

*Ingratitude* is not a word that Samuelson employs, but it seems characteristic of a generation that has attained so much at so little cost that it doesn't trust its own experience, anxiously consulting numerical signs and portents instead. The inability to render thanks—to one's family, nation, or god—is a corrosive failure, a certain breeder of bad conscience.

But nobody should have to live without some sense of security. Conservatives are right to celebrate the restless, dynamic qualities of the American economy, which are a source of creativity and strength as well as prosperity. Yet a few certainties seem essential, even if many people won't be able to take advantage of them. They represent some of our fondest aspirations. The layoffs at AT&T and other giant corporations are so disconcerting precisely because they are so symbolic. When I graduated from college, an uncle of mine who had made enough money in trailer parks, juke boxes, and a vast assortment of other microenterprises to spend his winters in Florida by the time he was in his fifties, took me aside to offer some advice. Dustin Hoffman got one word; I got three letters: IBM. That was in the days when an IBM handshake came with vows. It is not the sort of certainty that my uncle could have tolerated for himself, but it seemed as good as gold, a commodity so precious that no one could possibly put a number on it.

—Steven Lagerfeld

# THE VANISHING FATHER



*Detail from Ed Kienholz's Walter Hopps, Hopps, Hopps (1959)*

For more than a third of all American children, life without father is now the norm. Pushed to record levels by divorce and, more recently, the rise of childbearing outside of marriage, fatherlessness afflicts whites and blacks, rich and poor—virtually every group in the population.

*Affliction* is not too strong a word for the phenomenon. While fatherhood has not fared well in a popular culture that celebrates freedom from both authority and obligation, more and more evidence shows that growing up without a father is even worse for children than folk wisdom suggests—and that it may be a root cause of a surprising array of social ills, from crime to academic failure to the decline of compassion.

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# A World Without Fathers

by David Popenoe

**T**he decline of fatherhood is one of the most basic, unexpected, and extraordinary social trends of our time. Its dimensions can be captured in a single statistic: in just three decades, between 1960 and 1990, the percentage of children living apart from their biological fathers more than doubled, from 17 percent to 36 percent. By the turn of the century, nearly 50 percent of American children may be going to sleep each evening without being able to say good night to their dads.

No one predicted this trend, few researchers or government agencies have monitored it, and it is not widely discussed, even today. But the decline of fatherhood is a major force behind many of the most disturbing problems that plague American society: crime and delinquency; premature sexuality and out-of-wedlock births to teenagers; deteriorating educational achievement; depression, substance abuse, and alienation among adolescents; and the growing number of women and children in poverty.

The current generation of children and youth may be the first in our nation's history to be less well off—psychologically, socially, economically, and morally—than their parents were at the same age. The United States, observes Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D.-N.Y.), “may be the first society in history in which children are distinctly worse off than adults.”

Even as this calamity unfolds, our cultural view of fatherhood itself is changing. Few people doubt the fundamental importance of mothers. But fathers? More and more, the question of whether fathers are really necessary is being raised. Many would answer no, or maybe not. And to the degree that fathers are still thought necessary, fatherhood is said by many to be merely a social role that others can play: mothers, partners, stepfathers, uncles and aunts, grandparents. Perhaps the script can even be rewritten and the role changed—or dropped.

There was a time in the past when fatherlessness was far more common than it is today, but death was to blame, not divorce, desertion, and out-of-wedlock births. In early-17th-century Virginia, only an estimated 31 percent





*Impedimenta (1958), by Hughie Lee-Smith*

of white children reached age 18 with both parents still alive. That percentage climbed to 50 percent by the early 18th century, to 72 percent by the turn of the present century, and close to its current level by 1940. Today, well over 90 percent of America's youngsters reach 18 with two living parents. Almost all of today's fatherless children have fathers who are alive, well, and perfectly capable of shouldering the responsibilities of fatherhood. Who would ever have thought that so many men would choose to relinquish them?

Not so long ago, the change in the cause of fatherlessness was dismissed as irrelevant in many quarters, including among social scientists. Children, it was said, are merely losing their parents in a different way than they used to. You don't hear that very much anymore. A surprising finding of recent social science research is that it is decidedly worse for a

child to lose a father in the modern, voluntary way than through death. The children of divorced and never-married mothers are less successful in life by almost every measure than the children of widowed mothers. The replacement of death by divorce as the prime cause of fatherlessness, then, is a monumental setback in the history of childhood.

Until the 1960s, the falling death rate and the rising divorce rate neutralized each other. In 1900, the percentage of all American children living in single-parent families was 8.5 percent. By 1960, it had increased to just 9.1 percent. Virtually no one during those years was writing or thinking about family breakdown, disintegration, or decline.

Indeed, what is most significant about the changing family demography of the first six decades of the 20th century is this: because the death rate was dropping faster than the divorce rate was rising, by 1960 more children were living with both of their natural parents than at any other time in world history. The figure was close to 80 percent for the generation born in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

But then the decline in the death rate slowed, and the divorce rate skyrocketed. "The scale of marital breakdowns in the West since 1960 has no historical precedent that I know of, and seems unique," says Lawrence Stone, the noted Princeton University family historian. "There has been nothing like it for the last 2,000 years, and probably longer."

Consider what has happened to children. Most estimates are that only about 50 percent of the children born during the 1970–84 "baby bust" period

will still live with their natural parents by age 17—a staggering drop from nearly 80 percent.

One estimate paints the current scene in even starker terms and also points up the enormous difference that exists between whites and blacks. By age 17, white children born between 1950 and 1954 had spent eight percent of their lives with only one parent; black children had spent 22 percent. But among those born in 1980, by one estimate, white children will spend 31 percent of their childhood years with one parent and black children 59 percent.

In theory, divorce need not mean disconnection. In reality, it often does. One large survey in the late 1980s found that about one in five divorced fathers had not seen his children in the past year, and less than half of divorced fathers saw their children more than several times a year. A 1981 survey of adolescents who were living apart from their fathers found that 52 percent had not seen them at all in more than a year; only 16 percent saw their fathers as often as once a week. Moreover, the survey showed fathers' contact with their children dropping off sharply with the passage of time after the marital breakup.

The picture grows worse. Just as divorce has overtaken death as the leading cause of fatherlessness, out-of-wedlock births are expected to surpass divorce later in the 1990s. They accounted for 30 percent of all births by 1991; by the turn of the century they may account for 40 percent of the total (and 80 percent of minority births). And there is substantial evidence that having an unmarried father is even worse for a child than having a divorced father.

Across time and cultures, fathers have always been considered essential—and not just for their sperm. Indeed, until today, no known society ever thought of fathers as potentially unnecessary. Marriage and the nuclear family—mother, father, and children—are the most universal social institutions in existence. In no society has the birth of children out of wedlock been the cultural norm. To the contrary, a concern for the legitimacy of children is nearly universal.

**A**t the same time, being a father is universally problematic for men. While mothers the world over bear and nurture their young with an intrinsic acknowledgment and, most commonly, acceptance of their role, the process of taking on the role of father is often filled with conflict and doubt. The source of this sex-role difference can be plainly stated. Men are not biologically as attuned to being committed fathers as women are to being committed mothers. The evolutionary logic is clear. Women, who can bear only a limited number of children, have a great incentive to invest their energy in rearing children, while men, who can father many offspring, do not. Left culturally unregulated, men's sexual behavior can be promiscuous, their paternity casual, their commitment to families weak. This not to say that the role of father is foreign to male nature. Far from it. Evolutionary scientists tell us that the development of the fathering capacity and high paternal investments in offspring—features not common among our primate relatives—have been sources of enor-

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mous evolutionary advantage for human beings.

In recognition of the fatherhood problem, human cultures have used sanctions to bind men to their children, and of course the institution of marriage has been culture's chief vehicle. Marriage is society's way of signaling that the community approves and encourages sexual intercourse and the birth of children, and that the long-term relationship of the parents is socially important. Margaret Mead once said, with the fatherhood problem very much in mind, that there is no society in the world where men will stay married for very long unless culturally required to do so. Our experience in late-20th-century America shows how right she was. The results for children have been devastating.

**I**n my many years as a sociologist, I have found few other bodies of evidence that lean so much in one direction as this one: on the whole, two parents—a father and a mother—are better for a child than one parent. There are, to be sure, many factors that complicate this simple proposition. We all know of a two-parent family that is truly dysfunctional—the proverbial family from hell. A child can certainly be raised to a fulfilling adulthood by one loving parent who is wholly devoted to the child's well-being. But such exceptions do not invalidate the rule any more than the fact that some three-pack-a-day smokers live to a ripe old age casts doubt on the dangers of cigarettes.

The collapse of children's well-being in the United States has reached breathtaking proportions. Juvenile violent crime has increased sixfold, from 16,000 arrests in 1960 to 96,000 in 1992, a period in which the total number of young people in the population remained relatively stable. Reports of child neglect and abuse have quintupled since 1976, when data were first collected. Eating disorders and rates of depression have soared among adolescent girls. Teen suicide has tripled. Alcohol and drug abuse among teenagers, although it has leveled off in recent years, continues at a very high rate. Scholastic Aptitude Test scores have declined nearly 80 points, and most of the decline cannot be accounted for by the increased academic diversity of students taking the test. Poverty has shifted from the elderly to the young. Of all the nation's poor today, 38 percent are children.

One can think of many explanations for these unhappy developments: the growth of commercialism and consumerism, the influence of television and the mass media, the decline of religion, the widespread availability of guns and addictive drugs, and the decay of social order and neighborhood relationships. None of these causes should be dismissed. But the evidence is now strong that the absence of fathers from the lives of children is one of the most important causes.

**T**he most tangible and immediate consequence of fatherlessness for children is the loss of economic resources. By the best recent estimates, the income of the household in which a child remains after a divorce instantly declines by about 21 percent per capita on average, while expenses tend to go up. Over time, the economic situation for the child often deteriorates further. The mother usually earns considerably less than the father, and children cannot rely on their fathers to pay much in the way of child support. About half of previously married mothers receive no child support, and for those who do receive it, both the reliability and the amount of the payment drop over time.

## *Fatherhood: New, Old, and Natural*

It's ironic that the contemporary plague of fatherlessness has been accompanied by so much talk of a "new," more caring and nurturing father. In a sense, however, the new father has been a work in progress for more than a century.

The stereotypical stern and unforgiving patriarch, often cast as the villain of the Victorian family, ceased to exist as a model—if he ever existed at all—with the decline of the Puritan family. (Evidently, it was a rapid fall: by the middle of the 18th century, paternal authority had faded to such a degree that an estimated 40 percent of all New England brides were pregnant when they exchanged their wedding vows.) The Puritan paterfamilias sank under the weight of Enlightenment ideas about freedom, personal happiness, and equality. As the authority of the state and religious institutions waned, moreover, many thinkers looked to the family as the place where civic virtues would be instilled in the newly autonomous citizen (mainly, of course, the white male citizen), and the warm and relatively egalitarian Quaker family was held up as a model. One follower of Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote of the Quaker man: he "is a good husband, for putting his whole happiness in his family life, he is forced to be good in order to be loved, and he can be happy only by making those around him happy."

The decisive change in the rise of the modern nuclear family, however, came with the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the early 19th century. "Family life," in the words of historian John Demos, "was wrenched apart from the world of work." No longer was the family chiefly a unit of economic production, intimately bound to other families in a larger community through economic, religious, and personal ties. Instead, the family became a place of refuge, or what the late Christopher Lasch called a "haven in a heartless world."

As income-producing work left the home, so too (during the weekday) did the men, withdrawing from full-time parenting and assuming instead the more limited role of breadwinner. For the first time in American history on a large scale, the home became the woman's domain. The husband, once the master of the house, became instead his wife's part-time assistant. Conservatives deplored the trend. "Paternal neglect," wrote the author of an 1842 article with that title in *Parents Magazine*, had become "epidemic." But the more the new industrial order stressed mobility and materialism, the more the family seemed to stress cooperation, love, and self-sacrifice. "The true home is a world within a world," Mrs. E. B. Duffey wrote in *What Women Should Know* (1873). "It is the central point of the universe around which all things revolve. It is the treasure-house of the affections, the one serenely bright spot in all the world, toward which its absent members always look with hope and anticipation."

The modern nuclear family ran under a drastically revised emotional constitution. Unlike its predecessor, it was devoted chiefly to the needs and care of children. It was also the first large-scale family system based mainly on romantic love. "True love" was thought to be a divinely endowed gift, and it was considered to be both the basis of a good marriage and the best path to self-fulfillment. Marriage, once thought of as first and foremost a utilitarian partnership, became warmer. The overall emotional temperature of the family rose. Alexis de Tocqueville spotted the change early in the century: "Everyone has noticed that . . . a new relationship has evolved between the different members of a family, that the distance formerly separating father and son has diminished, and that paternal authority, if not abolished, has at least changed form. . . . The master and the magistrate have vanished; the father remains."

By the mid-19th century, the first murmurings about a "new father"—more nurturing, less concerned with disciplining his children—were being heard. Yet as the century wore on, there was an important change in writings about the family. More and more, the male was thought of as a husband first, a father second.

There is no question that the cultural expectation of male leadership remained strong in the Victorian family. "When the family is instituted by marriage, it is the man who is head and chief magistrate by the force of his physical power and requirement of the

chief responsibility; not less is he so according to the Christian law, by which, when differences arise, the husband has the deciding control, and the wife is to obey,” wrote Catherine E. Beecher and her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe in their widely read 1869 book, *The American Woman’s Home*. But having been pushed out of the home and into the cold and impersonal world of the marketplace, many men sought after and treasured the intense, emotional world of women and family, which brought them some assurances of a meaningful private life.

Both female and male writers glorified women’s domestic roles, urging women to rise to new heights of moral and spiritual perfection and to use their domestic powers to the utmost in shaping civilization. Child-rearing advice literature, once directed almost exclusively at men, now spoke to women. Women, not men, led the family prayers and minded the family’s religious obligations. Replacing the traditional distrust of maternal indulgence was an elevated appreciation of maternal tenderness. Patience, kindness, and affection were now thought to be necessary not only for good child rearing but for human progress and the very salvation of the social order. “The foundation of our national character,” declared the popular 19th-century writer Josiah Gilbert Holland, “is laid by the mothers of the nation.”

In the very forces that created the modern nuclear family lay some of the roots of its decline: the over-reliance on romantic love, the increasing focus of marriage on the self-fulfillment of adults, the decline of a religious bond, the removal of fathers from many day-to-day family activities. Signs of discontent began to appear even before the century was through.

Many Americans still live in what are now called “traditional” families, but as a widespread cultural ideal the modern nuclear family died during the 1960s and 1970s. It still has much to teach us, however—especially since no fully satisfactory alternative has been discovered. This family represented a bargain between the sexes: men would work hard to provide economic support and would constrain their sexual appetites if women would stay at home and provide them with sex, children, and a warm domestic environment. Both parents would sacrifice for their children. Today there is a sense among both men and women that this arrangement requires them to give up too much—and that even if they accept it, they cannot count on their partners to do the same. Recementing the family will require some kind of new bargain between them.

Will a “new father” be part of the bargain? It’s true that today’s active fathers are more playful, more engaged, and warmer with their children than their own fathers and grandfathers were. And that is all to the good. But there is much evidence that men are very different from women in their parenting styles, and that striving for parental androgyny—making daddies into mommies—has little to recommend it.

Yet the evidence from the human evolutionary and anthropological record does not indicate that there is anything “natural” about the “patriarchal” father either. The !Kung San of northwestern Botswana, for example, give us some indication of what life may have been like among our hunter-gatherer ancestors. !Kung San fathers are closely involved with their children, and spend much of their free time with them. “They often hold and fondle even the youngest infants,” write anthropologists Mary Katz and Melvin Konner, “though they return them to the mother whenever they cry and for all forms of routine care. Young children frequently go to them, touch them, talk to them, and request food from them, and such approaches are almost never rebuffed.” Boys have easy relationships with their fathers as they grow up.

It is probably unrealistic to hope for a completely new father. But in creating a “revised father,” we would be wise to consult the Victorians and the !Kung San as well as our own desires.



*A !Kung San father and son*

—David Popenoe

Child poverty, once endemic in America, reached a historic low point of 14 percent in 1969 and remained relatively stable through the 1970s. Since then, it has been inching back up. Today more than 20 percent of the nation's children (and 25 percent of infants and toddlers) are growing up in poverty.

**T**he loss of fathers' income is the most important cause of this alarming change. By one estimate, 51 percent of the increase in child poverty observed during the 1980s (65 percent for blacks) can be attributed to changes in family structure. Indeed, much of the income differential between whites and blacks today, perhaps as much as two-thirds, can be attributed to the differences in family structure. Not for nothing is it said that marriage is the best antipoverty program of all.

The proliferation of mother-headed families now constitutes something of a national economic emergency. About a quarter of all family groups with children—more than half of all black family groups—are headed by mothers, which is almost double the 11.5 percent figure in 1970. No other group is so poor, and none stays poor longer. Poverty afflicts nearly one out of every two of these families, but fewer than one in 10 married-couple families. Mother-headed families account for 94 percent of the current caseload for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

Things are likely to get worse before they get better. Poverty is much more severe among unmarried mothers—the fastest-growing segment of the poverty population—than among divorced mothers.

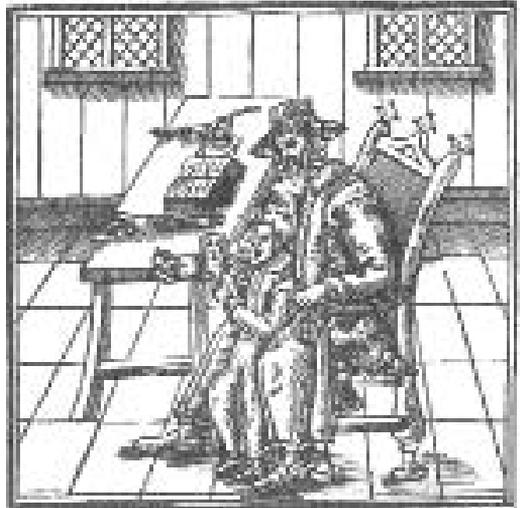
Economic difficulties—which translate into poorer schooling and other handicaps—ultimately account for a considerable share of the disadvantages found among fatherless children. By the best recent estimates, however, economic status accounts for no more than half of these disadvantages. The latest and most authoritative review of this research is *Growing Up with a Single Parent* (1994), by sociologists Sara McLanahan of Princeton University and Gary Sandefur of the University of Wisconsin. Reviewing five large-scale social surveys and other evidence (and after adjusting for many income-related factors), they concluded: “Children who grow up with only one of their biological parents (nearly always the mother) . . . are twice as likely to drop out of high school, 2.5 times as likely to become teen mothers, and 1.4 times as likely to be idle—out of school and out of work—as children who grow up with both parents.”

Such conclusions will no longer come as a surprise to many Americans. Yet it was not so long ago that the divorce revolution was given a strangely positive cast in American popular culture. If breaking up is better for parents, it was thought, it cannot be all that bad for children. What keeps parents happy should also keep children happy.

In part, this was a convenient, guilt-retarding rationalization for parents who were breaking up. But it was supported by many social scientists as well. In the 1970s, at the height of the divorce revolution, many social scientists were remarkably sanguine about the effects of fatherlessness. Typical was the work of Elizabeth Herzog and Cecelia Sudia. In a 1973 report written for the U.S. Children's Bureau entitled “Children in Fatherless Families,” they concluded from a review of existing studies that the “evidence concerning [juvenile delinquency, school achievement, and masculine identity] is neither clear enough nor firm enough to demonstrate beyond doubt whether fatherless boys are or are not overrepresented” in problem groups.

Herzog and Sudia went so far as to discount any negative effects of

divorce and fatherlessness. They claimed that discord and conflict in the home prior to a divorce are more detrimental than a father's absence after the divorce and concluded that, therefore, "one is forced to prefer a 'good' one-parent [read: fatherless] home for a child." From this sort of lesser-of-two-evils conclusion, it was but a short step in the minds of some social scientists to the view that divorce is for the best for parents and children alike.



*In early New England, fathers, not mothers, were chiefly responsible for child rearing.*

**W**hat do fathers do? Much of what they contribute to the growth of their children, of course, is simply the result of being a second adult in the home. Bringing up children is demanding, stressful, and often exhausting. Two adults can not only support and spell each other; they can offset each other's deficiencies and build on each other's strengths.

Beyond being merely a second adult or third party, fathers—men—bring an array of unique and irreplaceable qualities that women do not ordinarily bring. Some of these are familiar, if sometimes overlooked or taken for granted. The father as protector, for example, has by no means outlived his usefulness. His importance as a role model has become a familiar idea. Teenage boys without fathers are notoriously prone to trouble. The pathway to adulthood for daughters is somewhat easier, but they still must learn from their fathers, as they cannot from their mothers, how to relate to men. They learn from their fathers about heterosexual trust, intimacy, and difference. They learn to appreciate their own femininity from the one male who is most special in their lives (assuming that they love and respect their fathers). Most important, through loving and being loved by their fathers, they learn that they are love-worthy.

Recent research has given us much deeper—and more surprising—insights into the father's role in child rearing. It shows that in almost all of their interactions with children, fathers do things a little differently from mothers. What fathers do—their special parenting style—is not only highly complementary to what mothers do but is by all indications important in its own right for optimum child rearing.

For example, an often-overlooked dimension of fathering is play. From their children's birth through adolescence, fathers tend to emphasize play more than caretaking. This may be troubling to egalitarian feminists, and it would indeed be wise for most fathers to spend more time in caretaking. Yet the father's style of play seems to have unusual significance. It is likely to be both physically stimulating and exciting. With older children it involves more physical games and teamwork requiring the competitive testing of physical and mental skills. It frequently resembles an apprenticeship or teaching relationship: come on, let me show you how.

Mothers tend to spend more time playing with their children, but theirs is



*Autumn of the patriarch: many Victorian men formed warm relationships with their children.*

with their fathers . . . usually quickly learn that biting, kicking, and other forms of physical violence are not acceptable.” They learn when enough is enough and when to “shut it down.”

Children, a committee assembled by the Board on Children and Families of the National Research Council concluded, “learn critical lessons about how to recognize and deal with highly charged emotions in the context of playing with their fathers. Fathers, in effect, give children practice in regulating their own emotions and recognizing others’ emotional clues.” The findings of a study of convicted murderers in Texas are probably not the product of coincidence: 90 percent of them either did not play as children or played abnormally.

**A**t play and in other realms, fathers tend to stress competition, challenge, initiative, risk taking, and independence. Mothers, as caretakers, stress emotional security and personal safety. On the playground, fathers will try to get the child to swing ever higher, higher than the person on the next swing, while mothers will be cautious, worrying about an accident. It’s sometimes said that fathers express more concern for the child’s longer-term development, while mothers focus on the child’s immediate well-being (which, of course, in its own way has everything to do with a child’s long-term well-being). What is clear is that children have dual needs that must be met. Becoming a mature and competent adult involves the integration of two often-contradictory human desires: for *communion*, or the feeling of being included, connected, and related, and for *agency*, which entails independence, individuality, and self-fulfillment. One without the other is a denuded and impaired humanity, an incomplete realization of human potential.

a different kind of play. Mothers’ play tends to take place more at the child’s level. Mothers provide the child with the opportunity to direct the play, to be in charge, to proceed at the child’s own pace. Kids, at least in the early years, seem to prefer to play with daddy. In one study of 2 1/2-year-olds who were given a choice, more than two-thirds chose to play with their father.

The way fathers play has effects on everything from the management of emotions to intelligence and academic achievement. It is particularly important in promoting the essential virtue of self-control.

According to one expert, “children who roughhouse

For many couples, to be sure, these functions are not rigidly divided along standard female-male lines. There may even be a role reversal in some cases, with men largely assuming the female style and women the male style. But these are exceptions that prove the rule. Gender-differentiated parenting is of such importance that in child rearing by homosexual couples, either gay or lesbian, one partner commonly fills the male-instrumental role while the other fills the female-expressive role.

It is ironic, however, that in our public discussion of fathering, it's seldom acknowledged that fathers have a distinctive role to play. Indeed, it's far more often said that fathers should be more like mothers (and that men generally should be more like women—less aggressive, less competitive). While such things may be said with the best of intentions, the effects are perverse. After all, if fathering is no different from mothering, males can easily be replaced in the home by women. It might even seem better to do so. Already viewed as a burden and obstacle to self-fulfillment, fatherhood thus comes to seem superfluous and unnecessary as well.

**W**e know, however, that fathers—and fatherlessness—have surprising impacts on children. Fathers' involvement seems to be linked to improved quantitative and verbal skills, improved problem-solving ability, and higher academic achievement. Several studies have found that the presence of the father is one of the determinants of girls' proficiency in mathematics. And one pioneering study found that the amount of time fathers spent reading was a strong predictor of their daughters' verbal ability.

For sons, who can more directly follow their fathers' example, the results have been even more striking. A number of studies have uncovered a strong relationship between father involvement and the quantitative and mathematical abilities of their sons. Other studies have found a relationship between paternal nurturing and boys' verbal intelligence.

How fathers produce these intellectual benefits is not yet clear. No doubt it is partly a matter of the time and money a man brings to his family. But it is probably also related to the unique mental and behavioral qualities of men; the male sense of play, reasoning, challenge, and problem solving, and the traditional male association with achievement and occupational advancement.

Men also have a vital role to play in promoting cooperation and other "soft" virtues. We don't often think of fathers in connection with the teaching of empathy, but involved fathers, it turns out, may be of special importance for the development of this important character trait, essential to an ordered society of law-abiding, cooperative, and compassionate adults. Examining the results of a 26-year longitudinal study, a trio of researchers reached a "quite astonishing" conclusion: the most important childhood factor of all in developing empathy is paternal involvement in child care. Fathers who spent time alone with their children more than twice a week, giving meals, baths, and other basic care, reared the most compassionate adults.

Again, it is not yet clear why fathers are so important in instilling this quality. Perhaps merely by being with their children they provide a model for compassion. Perhaps it has to do with their style of play or mode of reasoning. Perhaps it is somehow related to the fact that fathers typically are the family's main arbiter with the outside world. Or perhaps

it is because mothers who receive help from their mates have more time and energy to cultivate the soft virtues. Whatever the reason, it is hard to think of a more important contribution that fathers can make to their children.

**F**atherlessness is directly implicated in many of our most grievous social ills. Of all the negative consequences, juvenile delinquency and violence probably loom largest in the public mind. Reported violent crime has soared 550 percent since 1960, and juveniles have the fastest-growing crime rate. Arrests of juveniles for murder, for example, rose 128 percent between 1983 and 1992.

Many people intuitively believe that fatherlessness is related to delinquency and violence, and the weight of research evidence supports this belief. Having a father at home is no guarantee that a youngster won't commit a crime, but it appears to be an excellent form of prevention. Sixty percent of America's rapists, 72 percent of its adolescent murderers, and 70 percent of its long-term prison inmates come from fatherless homes. Fathers are important to their sons as role models. They are important for maintaining authority and discipline. And they are important in helping their sons to develop both self-control and feelings of empathy toward others.

Unfortunately, the die for the near future has already been cast. The teenage population is expected to grow in the next decade by as much as 20 percent—even more for minority teenagers—as the children of the baby boomers grow up. Many of these restless youngsters will come of age without fathers. Criminologist James Fox warns of “a tremendous crime wave . . . in the next 10 years” fueled by what he calls “the young and the ruthless.” In 1993, for example, there were 3,647 teenage killers; by 2005, Fox expects there will be 6,000.

**T**he twin to the nightmare specter of too many little boys with guns is too many little girls with babies. Fatherlessness is again a major contributing factor.

During the past three decades, there has been a dramatic increase in the percentage of teenagers engaging in sexual activity. In the mid-1950s, only 27 percent of girls had sexual intercourse by age 18; in 1988, 56 percent of such girls—including fully a quarter of 15-year-olds—had become sexually active.

About one million teen pregnancies occur in the United States each year, giving this nation the highest teen pregnancy rate in the industrialized world. Twelve percent of all women aged 15 to 19 (21 percent of those who have had sexual intercourse) become pregnant each year. Fifty percent of these pregnancies end in births, 35 percent end in abortions, and about 14 percent end in miscarriages. Of all children born out of wedlock, most will grow up fatherless in single-parent households.

Again, there are many factors involved in this trend, including everything from the earlier age at which girls now reach sexual maturity to the weakening of cultural norms. Yet as important as any of these, if not more so, is fatherlessness. The research lends strong support to the common-sense proposition that fathers play a key role in the development of their daughters' sexual behavior. Analyzing data from the National Child Development Study, a major British longitudinal study that followed the lives of thousands of children born in 1958, researcher Kathleen Kiernan found that young women with divorced or separated parents are more like-



*Poor but proud, a South Carolina family posed for a photograph around 1890. Black families endured despite the legacies of slavery.*

ly to form unions in their teens, to have a child at an early age, and to bear children outside marriage. Kiernan highlighted one important characteristic that opens the door to other problems: girls from single-parent families are more likely to leave home at an earlier age than other girls.

The presence of a surrogate father does not help. Indeed, one of the best-established findings concerning stepfamilies is that the children—particularly girls—leave such households at an earlier age than do kids in single-parent households or in two-parent households.

On the face of it, there would seem to be at least one potentially positive side to fatherlessness: without a man around the house, the incidence of child abuse might be expected to drop. Unfortunately, quite the opposite has happened.

According to recent surveys, some 20 percent of adult women and five to 10 percent of adult men have experienced sexual abuse at some time during their childhood. Physical abuse of children is more common still, being about twice as prevalent as sexual abuse. Most evidence points to a real increase in both major forms of child abuse in recent decades.

One of the greatest risk factors in child abuse, found by virtually every investigation that has ever been conducted, is family disruption, especially living in a female-headed, single-parent household. In 1981, 43 percent of children who were reported to have been abused were living in such households.

Sexual abuse is one form of child abuse. Most of the victims (80 percent of the cases reported to child protection authorities) are girls, and most of

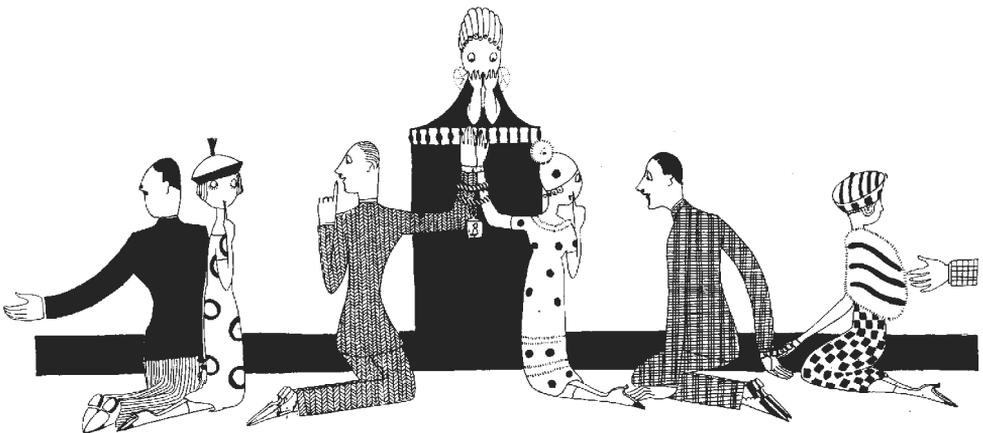
the perpetrators are men. But less than half of the offenders are family members and close relatives, and only 10 to 30 percent are strangers. The remainder are acquaintances of various kinds, including neighbors, peers, and mothers' boyfriends.

**W**hy does living in a fatherless household pose such hazards for children? Two explanations are usually given: the children receive less supervision and protection and they are also more emotionally deprived, which leaves them vulnerable to sexual abusers, who commonly entrap children by offering affection, attention, and friendship. Fatherlessness is closely involved in both of these explanations. Even a diligent absent father can't supervise or protect his children the way a live-in father can. Nor is he likely to have the kind of relationship with his daughter that is usually needed to give her a foundation of emotional security and a model for nonsexual relationships with men.

A special problem for children living with single mothers is that these mothers rely heavily on child-care providers who are not relatives. The danger is greatest, of course, when the child-care provider is male. One study of sexual abuse in Iowa found that male sitters were responsible for almost five times as much sexual abuse as female sitters, even though they provided only a very small overall proportion of child care.

By all accounts, mothers' boyfriends are another serious problem, although we lack hard data to prove it. Certainly, such predatory men are much in the news. One often hears, for example, of men who take up with a woman solely because they desire the possibility of sexual access to her daughter, and of women who urge their boyfriends to play daddy with their children, thus providing the boyfriend with an ease of access that can lead to inappropriate behavior.

Among sexual abusers who are blood relatives, only a small fraction are fathers. The great majority are uncles, grandfathers, brothers and stepbrothers, and male cousins. When a father is the perpetrator, he is typically not the natural father but a surrogate father. In a study conducted in San Francisco of 930 adult women, for example, it was found that daughters are at least seven times more likely to be abused by their stepfathers than by their biological fathers. Approximately one out of every six women who had a stepfather as a



*Divorce was already on the rise when this cartoonist satirized it in the 1920s.*

principal figure in her childhood years was sexually abused by him, compared to only one out of every 40 women who had a biological father.

Some biological fathers certainly are sexually abusive toward their daughters, however, and their numbers may be increasing. Paradoxically, this too may be related to growing fatherlessness, or at least to the circumstances that surround family breakup.

Compared to abusing stepfathers, for example, biological fathers gone bad are more likely to live hardscrabble lives, with very bad marriages, alcohol and drug problems, and poverty. Abuse is also more common in single-parent families in which the father is the single parent, and such families are growing more numerous. Third, fathers who are not in the home much and are less involved in nurturing activities are more likely to abuse their children. Strong attachment and bonding between father and daughter in infancy may be a critical ingredient in preventing later child abuse, but with so many children born out of wedlock, early bonding is something that fewer natural fathers will experience.

Still, it remains something of a puzzle why a natural father would break the universal incest taboo. There is evidence from preindustrial societies that the less confident a father is that a daughter is really his offspring, the more likely he is to have an incestuous relationship with her. Societies in which fathers have low “paternity confidence,” a term used by evolutionary psychologists, tend also to be societies with a higher incidence of incestuous relationships. (“Maternity is a fact,” observed the Roman jurist Baius, “paternity is a matter of opinion.”) Alas, we don’t need a statistical test to believe that paternity confidence must be dropping in America in the wake of the sexual revolution.

**O**ne important difference between physical abuse of children and sexual abuse is somewhat surprising: women are often the abusers. Yet fatherlessness is still an important factor. A mother is much more likely to be abusive and to allow others to mistreat her child when she does not have the support of an actively involved father. Indeed, the majority of preadolescent victims of physical abuse (and especially of more severe forms of abuse) are boys, who are generally harder to control.

Probably the most serious threat to children in single-parent families is the mother’s boyfriend. In a study of physical abuse in single-mother households, education expert Leslie Margolin found that 64 percent of the nonparental abuse was committed by such men. (Nonrelatives such as day-care providers and adolescent baby-sitters were a distant second, with 15 percent, followed by relatives.)

Why this tremendous over-representation of boyfriends? One explanation is drawn from evolutionary biology. These men are unrelated to the child, notes Margolin, and a care giver’s level of protection and solicitude toward a child is directly proportional to shared genetic heritage. And, as this theory predicts, other male nonrelatives were significantly more abusive than male relatives.

The domestic threat posed by unrelated adult males reappears tragically in step-parent households, one of America’s fastest growing family forms. Many studies have found that a child is far more likely to be physically abused by a stepfather than by a natural father. One investigation, by evolutionary psychologists Margo Wilson and Martin Daly, found that preschoolers in the Canadian city of Hamilton living with one natural par-

ent and one step-parent in 1993 were 40 times more likely to become child-abuse statistics than children living with two natural parents.

**A**nother group that has suffered in the new age of fatherlessness is, perhaps unexpectedly, women. In this new era, Gloria Steinem's oft-quoted quip that a woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle no longer seems quite so funny. There is no doubt that many women get along very well without men in their lives and that having the wrong men in their lives can be disastrous. But just as it increases assaults on children, fatherlessness appears to generate more violence against women.

Such violence, especially family or domestic violence committed by intimates, has been common throughout history. Now that women enjoy more legal protections and are less likely to marry, one might suppose that such crimes would diminish. Instead, they have increased.

Partly this is a matter of arithmetic. More than two-thirds of violence (assault, robbery, and rape) against women is committed by unrelated acquaintances or strangers. As the number of unattached males in the population goes up, so does the incidence of violence toward women.

Or consider the fact that, of the violence toward women that is committed by intimates and other relatives, only 29 percent involves a current spouse, whereas 42 percent involves a close friend or partner and another 12 percent an ex-spouse. As current spouses are replaced by nonspouses and exes, violence toward women increases.

In fact, marriage appears to be a strong safety factor for women. A satisfactory marriage between sexually faithful partners, especially when they are raising their own biological children, engenders fewer risks for violence than probably any other circumstance in which a woman could find herself. Recent surveys of violent-crime victimization have found that only 12.6 of every 1,000 married women fall victim to violence, compared with 43.9 of every 1,000 never-married women and 66.5 of every 1,000 divorced or separated women.

**M**en, too, suffer grievously from the growth of fatherlessness. The world over, young and unattached males have always been a cause for social concern. They can be a danger to themselves and to society. Young unattached men tend to be more aggressive, violent, promiscuous, and prone to substance abuse; they are also more likely to die prematurely through disease, accidents, or self-neglect. They make up the majority of deviants, delinquents, criminals, killers, drug users, vice lords, and miscreants of every kind. Senator Moynihan put it succinctly when he warned that a society full of unattached males "asks for and gets chaos."

Family life—marriage and child rearing—is an extremely important civilizing force for men. It encourages them to develop those habits of character, including prudence, cooperativeness, honesty, trust, and self-sacrifice, that can lead to achievement as an economic provider. Marriage also focuses male sexual energy. Having children typically impresses on men the importance of setting a good example. Who hasn't heard at least one man personally testify that he gave up certain deviant or socially irresponsible patterns of life only when he married and had children?

The civilizing effect of being a father is highlighted by a path breaking social improvement endeavor in Cleveland. In the inner-city Hough neigh-

borhood, social worker Charles Ballard has been turning around the lives of young black men through his Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization. Since 1982, using an intensive social-work approach that includes home visits, parenting programs, and group therapy sessions, he has reunited more than 2,000 absent, unwed fathers with their children.

The standard theory is that if you want inner-city men like these to be responsible fathers, you first must find them a job. But Ballard has stood this theory on its head. His approach is that you first must convince the young men of the importance of being a good father, and then they will be motivated to finish school and find work.

An independent evaluation of his approach showed that it really works. Only 12 percent of the young men had full-time work when they entered his program, but 62 percent later found such work, and another 12 percent found part-time jobs. Ninety-seven percent of the men he dealt with began providing financial support for their children, and 71 percent had no additional children out of wedlock.

Marriage by itself, even without the presence of children, is also a major civilizing force for men. No other institution save religion (and perhaps the military) places such moral demands on men. To be sure, there is a selection factor in marriage. Those men whom women would care to marry already have some of the civilized virtues. And those men who are morally beyond the pale have difficulty finding mates. Yet epidemiological studies and social surveys have shown that marriage has a civilizing effect independent of the selection factor. Marriage actually promotes health, competence, virtue, and personal well-being. With the continued growth of fatherlessness, we can expect to see a nation of men who are at worst morally out of control and at best unhappy, unhealthy, and unfulfilled.

Just as cultural forms can be discarded, dismantled, and declared obsolete, so can they be reinvented. In order to restore marriage and reinstate fathers in the lives of their children, we are somehow going to have to undo the cultural shift of the last few decades toward radical individualism. We are going to have to re-embrace some cultural propositions or understandings that throughout history have been universally accepted but which today are unpopular, if not rejected outright.

Marriage must be re-established as a strong social institution. The father's role must also be redefined in a way that neglects neither historical models nor the unique attributes of modern societies, the new roles for women, and the special qualities that men bring to child rearing.

Such changes are by no means impossible. Witness the transformations



*Father Knows Best—but the stereotypical 1950s dad was more democrat than autocrat.*

wrought by the civil rights, women's, and environmental movements, and even the campaigns to reduce smoking and drunk driving. What is necessary is for large numbers of adults, and especially our cultural and intellectual leaders, to agree on the importance of change.

**T**here are many practical steps that can be taken.\* Employers, for example, can reduce the practice of uprooting and relocating married couples with children, provide generous parental leave, and experiment with more flexible forms of work. Religious leaders can reclaim moral ground from the culture of divorce and nonmarriage, resisting the temptation to equate things such as "committed relationships" with marriage. Marriage counselors, family therapists, and family-life educators can begin with a bias in favor of marriage, stressing the needs of the marriage at least as much as the needs of the client. As for the entertainment industry, pressure already is being brought to bear to curtail the glamourization of unwed motherhood, marital infidelity, alternative lifestyles, and sexual promiscuity.

What about divorce? Current laws send the message that marriage is not a socially important relationship that involves a legally binding commitment. We should consider a two-tier system of divorce law: marriages without minor children would be relatively easy to dissolve, but marriages with such children would be dissolvable only by mutual agreement or on grounds that clearly involve a wrong by one party against the other, such as desertion or physical abuse. Longer waiting periods for divorcing couples with children might also be called for, combined with some form of mandatory marriage counseling or marital education.

Because the causes of the decline of marriage and fatherhood lie mainly in the moral, behavioral, and even spiritual realms, the decline is mostly resistant to public-policy and government cures. All of the western industrialized societies, regardless of governmental system and political persuasion, have been beset by the decline of family. The decline of marriage is almost as great in Sweden, with the West's most ambitious welfare state, as it is in the United States, the most *laissez-faire* of the industrialized nations.

Nevertheless, government policies do have some impact. While the statistical relationship of economic cycles to marriage and divorce is not particularly strong, for example, low wages, unemployment, and poverty have never been friendly to marriage. Government can do something about that. It can also remedy the decline in the value of the income tax exemption for dependent children and erase the tax code's "marriage penalty." As a society, moreover, we have decided, through a variety of government programs, to socialize much of the cost of growing old, but less of the cost of raising children. At the very least, we should strive for generational equity. But more than anything else, parents need time to be with their children, the kind of time that would be afforded by a more generous family leave policy.

We also should consider providing educational credits or vouchers to parents who leave the paid labor force to raise their young children. These parents are performing an important social service at the risk of damaging their long-run career prospects. Education subsidies, like those in the GI Bill of Rights, would reward parents by helping them resume their careers.

\*The suggestions that follow are drawn from *Marriage in America: A Report to the Nation* (1995), a publication of the Council on Families in America, a national nonpartisan group of scholars and family experts of which I am cochairman.

Government policies should be designed to favor married, child rearing couples. Some critics argue that the federal government should not involve itself in sensitive moral issues or risk stigmatizing alternative lifestyles. But recognizing such alternatives does not require treating them as equivalent to marriage. The government, moreover, regularly takes moral positions on a whole range of issues, such as the rights of women, income equality, and race relations. A position on the need for children to have two committed parents, a father and a mother, during their formative years is hardly a radical departure.



*The new ideal dad*

**T**oday in America the social order is fraying badly. We seem, despite notable accomplishments in some areas, to be on a path of decline. The past three decades have seen steeply rising rates of crime, declining political and interpersonal trust, growing personal and corporate greed, deteriorating communities, and increasing confusion over moral issues. For most Americans, life has become more anxious, unsettled, and insecure.

In large part, this represents a failure of social values. People can no longer be counted on to conduct themselves according to the virtues of honesty, self-sacrifice, and personal responsibility. In our ever-growing pursuit of the self—self-expression, self-development, self-actualization, and self-fulfillment—we seem to have slipped off many of our larger social obligations.

At the heart of our discontent lies an erosion of personal relationships. People no longer trust others as they once did; they no longer feel the same sense of commitment and obligation to others. In part, this may be an unavoidable product of the modern condition. But it has gone much deeper than that. Some children across America now go to bed each night worrying about whether their father will be there the next morning. Some wonder whatever happened to their father. And some wonder who he is. What are these children learning at this most basic of all levels about honesty, self-sacrifice, personal responsibility, and trust?

What the decline of fatherhood and marriage in America really means, then, is that slowly, insidiously, and relentlessly our society has been moving in an ominous direction. If we are to make progress toward a more just and humane society, we must reverse the tide that is pulling fathers apart from their families. Nothing is more important for our children or for our future as a nation.

# Women and the Future of Fatherhood

*by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead*

Much of our contemporary debate over fatherhood is governed by the assumption that men can solve the fatherhood problem on their own. The organizers of last year's Million Man March asked women to stay home, and the leaders of Promise Keepers and other grass-roots fatherhood movements whose members gather with considerably less fanfare simply do not admit women.

There is a cultural rationale for the exclusion of women. The fatherhood movement sees the task of reinstating responsible fatherhood as an effort to alter today's norms of masculinity and correctly believes that such an effort cannot succeed unless it is voluntarily undertaken and supported by men. There is also a political rationale in defining fatherlessness as a men's issue. In the debate about marriage and parenthood, which women have dominated for at least 30 years, the fatherhood movement gives men a powerful collective voice and presence.

Yet however effective the grass-roots movement is at stirring men's consciences and raising their consciousness, the fatherhood problem will not be solved by men alone. To be sure, by signaling their commitment to accepting responsibility for the rearing of their children, men have taken the essential first step. But what has not yet been acknowledged is that the success of any effort to renew fatherhood as a social fact and a cultural norm also hinges on the attitudes and behavior of women. Men can't be fathers unless the mothers of their children allow it.

Merely to say this is to point to how thoroughly marital disruption has weakened the bond between fathers and children. More than half of all American children are likely to spend at least part of their lives in one-parent homes. Since the vast majority of children in disrupted families live with their mothers, fathers do not share a home or a daily life with their children. It is much more difficult for men to make the kinds of small, routine, instrumental investments in their children that help forge a good relationship. It is hard to fix a flat bike tire or run a bath when you live in another neighborhood or another town. Many a father's instrumental contribution is reduced to the postal or electronic transmission of money, or, all too commonly, to nothing at all. Without regular contact with their children, men often make reduced emotional contributions as well. Fathers must struggle to sustain close emotional ties across time and space, to "be there" emotionally without being there physically. Some may pick

up the phone, send a birthday card, or buy a present, but for many fathers, physical absence also becomes emotional absence.

Without marriage, men also lose access to the social and emotional intelligence of women in building relationships. Wives teach men how to care for young children, and they also encourage children to love their fathers. Mothers who do not live with the father of their children are not as likely as married mothers to represent him in positive ways to the children; nor are the relatives who are most likely to have greatest contact with the children—the mother’s parents, brothers, and sisters—likely to have a high opinion of the children’s father. Many men are able to overcome such obstacles, but only with difficulty. In general, men need marriage in order to be good fathers.

**I**f the future of fatherhood depends on marriage, however, its future is uncertain. Marriage depends on women as well as men, and women are less committed to marriage than ever before in the nation’s history. In the past, women were economically dependent on marriage and assumed a disproportionately heavy responsibility for maintaining the bond, even if the underlying relationship was seriously or irretrievably damaged. In the last third of the 20th century, however, as women have gained more opportunities for paid work and the availability of child care has increased, they have become less dependent on marriage as an economic arrangement. Though it is not easy, it is possible for women to raise children on their own. This has made divorce far more attractive as a remedy for an unsatisfying marriage, and a growing number of women have availed themselves of the option.

Today, marriage and motherhood are coming apart. Remarriage and marriage rates are declining even as the rates of divorce remain stuck at historic highs and childbearing outside marriage becomes more common.



*A new beginning? All-male groups such as the Christian Promise Keepers promote renewed commitments to family. But men still need to reckon with what women want.*

Many women see single motherhood as a choice and a right to be exercised if a suitable husband does not come along in time.

The vision of the “first stage” feminism of the 1960s and ‘70s, which held out the model of the career woman unfettered by husband or children, has been accepted by women only in part. Women want to be fettered by children, even to the point of going through grueling infertility treatments or artificial insemination to achieve motherhood. But they are increasingly ambivalent about the ties that bind them to a husband and about the necessity of marriage as a condition of parenthood. In 1994, a National Opinion Research survey asked a group of Americans, “Do you agree or disagree: one parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together.” Women split 50/50 on the question; men disagreed by more than two to one.

And indeed, women enjoy certain advantages over men in a society marked by high and sustained levels of family breakup. Women do not need marriage to maintain a close bond to their children, and thus to experience the larger sense of social and moral purpose that comes with raising children. As the bearers and nurturers of children and (increasingly) as the sole breadwinners for families, women continue to be engaged in personally rewarding and socially valuable pursuits. They are able to demonstrate their feminine virtues outside marriage.

**M**en, by contrast, have no positive identity as fathers outside marriage. Indeed, the emblematic absent father today is the infamous “deadbeat dad.” In part, this is the result of efforts to stigmatize irresponsible fathers who fail to pay alimony and child support. But this image also reflects the fact that men are heavily dependent on the marriage partnership to fulfill their role as fathers. Even those who keep up their child support payments are deprived of the social importance and sense of larger purpose that comes from providing for children and raising a family. And it is the rare father who can develop the qualities needed to meet the new cultural ideal of the involved and “nurturing” father without the help of a spouse.

These differences are reflected in a growing virtue gap. American popular culture today routinely recognizes and praises the achievements of single motherhood, while the widespread failure of men as fathers has resulted in a growing sense of cynicism and despair about men’s capacity for virtuous conduct in family life. The enormously popular movie *Waiting To Exhale* captures the essence of this virtue gap with its portrait of steadfast mothers and deadbeat fathers, morally sleazy men and morally unassailable women. And women feel free to vent their anger and frustration with men in ways that would seem outrageous to women if the shoe were on the other foot. In *Operating Instructions* (1993), her memoir of single motherhood, Ann LaMott mordantly observes, “On bad days, I think straight white men are so poorly wired, so emotionally unenlightened and unconscious that you must approach each one as if he were some weird cross between a white supremacist and an incredibly depressing T. S. Eliot poem.”

Women’s weakening attachment to marriage should not be taken as a

> BARBARA DAFOE WHITEHEAD, a former Wilson Center Guest Scholar, is the author of *The Divorce Culture*, to be published by Alfred A. Knopf in early 1997. Copyright © 1996 by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead.

lack of interest in marriage or in a husband-wife partnership in child rearing. Rather, it is a sign of women's more exacting emotional standards for husbands and their growing insistence that men play a bigger part in caring for children and the household. Given their double responsibilities as breadwinners and mothers, many working wives find men's need for ego reinforcement and other forms of emotional and physical upkeep irksome and their failure to share housework and child care absolutely infuriating. (Surveys show that husbands perform only one-third of all household tasks even if their wives are working full-time.) Why should men be treated like babies? women complain. If men fail to meet their standards, many women are willing to do without them. Poet and polemicist Katha Pollitt captures the prevailing sentiment: "If single women can have sex, their own homes, the respect of friends and interesting work, they don't need to tell themselves that any marriage is better than none. Why not have a child on one's own? Children are a joy. Many men are not."

For all these reasons, it is important to see the fatherhood problem as part of the larger cultural problem of the decline of marriage as a lasting relationship between men and women. The traditional bargain between men and women has

broken down, and a new bargain has not yet been struck. It is impossible to predict what that bargain will look like—or whether there will even be one. However, it is possible to speculate about the talking points that might bring women to the bargaining table. First, a crucial proviso: there must be recognition of the changed social and economic status of women. Rightly or wrongly, many women fear that the fatherhood



*Boy on Roof (1967), by Hughie Lee-Smith*

movement represents an effort to reinstate the status quo ante, to repeal the gains and achievements women have made over the past 30 years and return to the "separate spheres" domestic ideology that put men in the workplace and women in the home. Any effort to rethink marriage must accept the fact that women will continue to work outside the home.

**T**herefore, a new bargain must be struck over the division of paid work and family work. This does not necessarily mean a 50/50 split in the work load every single day, but it does mean that men must make a more determined and conscientious effort to do more than one-third of the household chores. How each couple arrives at a sense of what is fair will vary, of course, but the goal is to establish some mutual understanding and commitment to an equitable division of tasks.

Another talking point may focus on the differences in the expectations men and women have for marriage and intimacy. Americans have a "best friends" ideal for marriage that includes some desires that might in fact be more easily met by a best friend—someone who doesn't come with all the

complicated entanglements of sharing a bed, a bank account, and a bathroom. Nonetheless, high expectations for emotional intimacy in marriage often are confounded by the very different understandings men and women have of intimacy. Much more than men, women seek intimacy and affection through talking and emotional disclosure. Men often prefer sex to talking, and physical disrobing to emotional disclosing. They tend to be less than fully committed to (their own) sexual fidelity, while women view fidelity as a crucial sign of commitment. These are differences that the sexes need to engage with mutual recognition and tolerance.

In renegotiating the marital bargain, it may also be useful to acknowledge the biosocial differences between mothers and fathers rather than to assume an androgynous model for the parental partnership. There can be a high degree of flexibility in parental roles, but men and women are not interchangeable “parental units,” particularly in their children’s early years. Rather than struggle to establish identical tracks in career and family lives, it may be more realistic to consider how children’s needs and well-being might require patterns of paid work and child rearing that are different for mothers and fathers but are nevertheless equitable over the course of a lifetime.

Finally, it may be important to think and talk about marriage in another kind of language than the one that suffuses our current discourse on relationships. The secular language of “intimate relationships” is the language of politics and psychotherapy, and it focuses on individual rights and individual needs. It can be heard most clearly in the personal-ad columns, a kind of masked ball where optimists go in search of partners who respect their rights and meet their emotional needs. These are not unimportant in the achievement of the contemporary ideal of marriage, which emphasizes egalitarianism and emotional fulfillment. But this notion of marriage as a union of two sovereign selves may be inadequate to define a relationship that carries with it the obligations, duties, and sacrifices of parenthood. There has always been a tension between marriage as an intimate relationship between a man and a woman and marriage as an institutional arrangement for raising children, and though the language of individual rights plays a part in defining the former, it cannot fully describe the latter. The parental partnership requires some language that acknowledges differences, mutuality, complementarity, and, more than anything else, altruism.

There is a potentially powerful incentive for women to respond to an effort to renegotiate the marriage bargain, and that has to do with their children. Women can be good mothers without being married. But especially with weakened communities that provide little support, children need levels of parental investment that cannot be supplied solely by a good mother, even if she has the best resources at her disposal. These needs are more likely to be met if the child has a father as well as a mother under the same roof. Simply put, even the best mothers cannot be good fathers.

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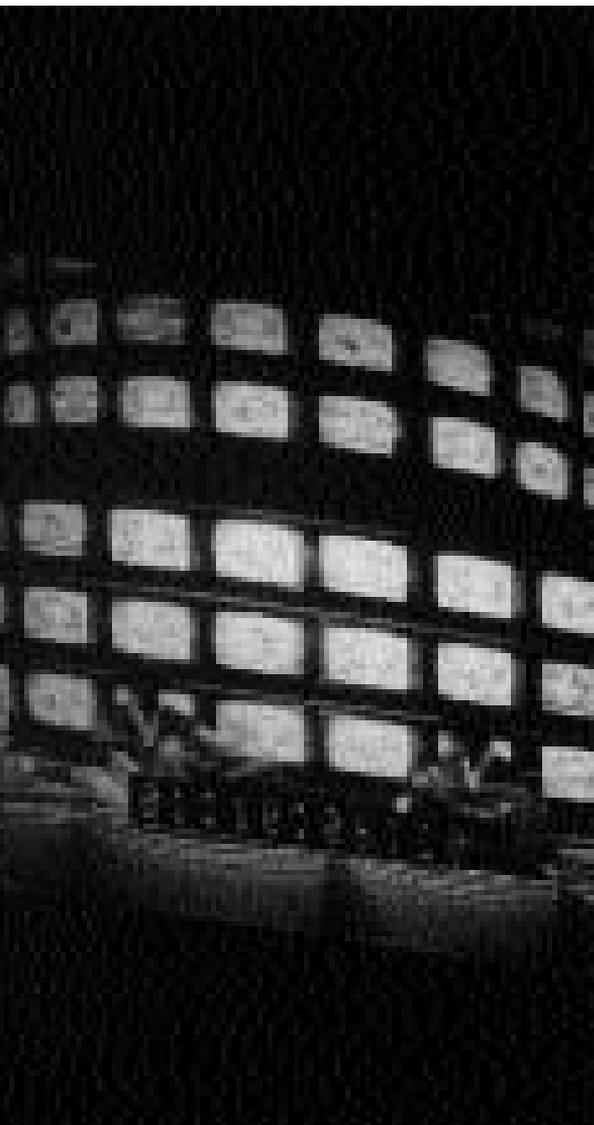
# *The State of the Art*

*At roughly 15-year intervals—“The Literature of Exhaustion” in 1967 and the “The Literature of Replenishment” in 1980—John Barth has filed reports on the state of the novel. Now, amid the fin-de-siècle buzz of hypertexts and electronic-fiction, the novelist submits an update.*

*by John Barth*

**T**he art whose state I mean to review is that of the novel in particular; the art more generally of printed fiction, especially in the United States; and the art most generally of fic-

tional narrative in whatever medium—again, especially in this country, where certain aspects of the scene are changing more rapidly, for better or worse, than they seem to me to be changing elsewhere.



Detail from Sistine Chapel by Nam June Paik (1993)

to be true), again in the *American Book Review*, declares, “The zine scene is alive and well. . . . Offhand, I can think of a dozen zines that are doing wonderful stuff: *Further State(s) of the Art*, *Puck*, *Sensitive Skin*, *Red Tape*, *Taproot Reviews*, *Dissonance*, *boING boING*, *Frighten the Horses*, *Central Park*, *Nobodaddies*, *Science Fiction Eye*, *MAXIMUMROCKNROLL*, just to name the first dozen that come to my mind.” (Those are not the first dozen that come to my mind, but let that go.)

And one Lance Olsen, likewise in the *ABR*, in an essay entitled “Deathmetal Technomutant Morphing,” declares, “Me, I’m going down reading Mark Leyner and Jean Baudrillard simultaneously, a copy of *Wired* in my lap, hypertext by Carolyn Guyer on the computer screen, television turned to MTV, windows wide open . . . my fire-retardant corrosion-resistant nickel-base alloy robo-enhanced methyl isocyanate flamethrower exploding, while I listen to Sonic Youth’s *Dirty* turned up real, REAL loud.”

I confess to being addicted to such catalogues of *Where It’s At*, catalogues with which the *American Book Review* particularly abounds. Here is another from the same lively source, by one Martin Sheter, in an essay called “Writing As Incorrectness”:

By way of beginning, I submit the following gleanings from my recent and by no means systematic reading on the subject. The reader unfamiliar with some of the names I am about to drop should not feel particularly left out. I’m unfamiliar with many of them too, and once I’ve dropped them, I intend to drop them.

“We are [in] . . . the late age of print,” declares the hypertextualist Michael Joyce in the *American Book Review*, “a transitional time when the book as we know it gives way to writing the mind in lightforms.” (By “lightforms” Joyce means reading and writing on computer screens; more on “hypertext” presently.)

A writer named Mark Amerika (too good

And then there’s what I call the “third rail”: the remarkable . . . resurgence of all sorts of creativity going on in the nineties, right under the nose of all these [American academics]—people ranging the spectrum from Hakim Bey, *Fact-Sheet 5*, R U Sirius, *ACT-UP* graphicists, feminist collaborators, black and Native-American oralists, and shock performance theoreticians, all the way to . . . MTV’s “Liquid Television,” the San Francisco “transgressive” school, Brown-University-sponsored “unspeakable practices,” various cyberpunk and slipstream fiction-alists . . . (no doubt I’ve left out quite a bit here).

Perhaps he has, but the afore-cited essay by Mark Amerika goes far to fill in any gaps in Sheter's checklist of the contemporary Action. I quote again from Amerika:

all kinds of viral shit festering there, not the least of which would include dissident comix, wiggled out zines, electronic journals, quick-time hypermedia CD-ROMs, a voluminous melange of hardcore industrial grunge post-everything music, the Internet, surfpunk technical journals, interactive cable TV . . . hypertext novels . . . the list goes on.

And on and on and on: avant-pop, splatterpunk, cybersex—you name it, if you can, or make it up, if you can't. Indeed, it's tempting to imagine that the pugnacious contributors to the *ABR* invent these wonderful catalogues as they go along, but I am assured by my more with-it informants—if scarcely reassured—that the items, however ephemeral, are for real.

If among the intentions of such in-your-face lists is to make us dinosaurs from “the late age of print” feel our dinosaurity, then they quite succeed. I confess that I am out of the loop of contemporary American letters in their most aggressively avant-pop aspect. I cannot sing along with the “voluminous melange of hardcore industrial grunge post-everythings”; I cannot line-dance with the cybersexual splatterpunk avant-poppers. And while I do not revel in my end-of-the-century dinosaurity, I am inclined to shrug my shoulders at it. I scan the *American Book Review* with considerable interest and amusement; likewise some of those “wiggled-out zines” when my former students publish in them and kindly send me copies. I maintain a benevolent curiosity about hypertext (of which more presently) out of my longstanding interest in the nonlinear aspects of life and of literature. But the American periodicals that I actually subscribe to and

thoroughly read are the *New York Review of Books*, the *Sciences* (the journal of the New York Academy of Sciences, which my wife and I enjoy as much for its art as for its articles), and *Scientific American* (the latter two partly as a source of fictive metaphors). Also *Sail* magazine, but never mind that, and *Modern Maturity*, the journal of the American Association of Retired Persons, which subscribes to me more than I to it; I look through it, but I don't inhale. The current American fiction that I most relished while preparing this essay happens to have been John Updike's latest collection of short stories, *The Afterlife*, and William H. Gass's monumental novel *The Tunnel*—two comparably masterful though radically different works of literary art from “the late age of print.” They make me pleased to have lived before the transition from “the book as we know it” to the “writing [of] the mind in lightforms” is complete.

Let me say at once, however, that I do not doubt the reality of that transition. Granted that a few writers still compose on typewriters, even on *manual* typewriters. Saul Bellow says that he uses two, one for fiction and the other for nonfiction; my Johns Hopkins University colleague Stephen Dixon worries that his prolific fiction-writing career will crash when he can no longer find anybody to service his brace of Hermes manual portables, or to supply ribbons for them. Believe it or not, a very few of us—myself and my Baltimore neighbor Anne Tyler, for two—still prefer to draw out our first-draft sentences the even older-fashioned way, with fountain pen on paper. “The muscular cursive,” Tyler calls it: scripted words, their constituent letter-atoms physically bonded into verbal molecules instead of merely side-by-siding like reciprocally indifferent subway passengers. Despite these exceptions, however, most of my comrades in arms and all of my recent students compose their fiction on word processors, and of the few of us who do not, most (myself

> JOHN BARTH, until recently a professor in the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University, is known for his many works of fiction, including *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960), *Giles Goat Boy* (1966), *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), *Sabbatical* (1982), and *Once upon a Time* (1994). This essay was delivered as part of the Woodrow Wilson Center's lecture series, *Novelists on Literature*. Copyright © 1996 by John Barth.

included) depend absolutely on our computers for editing and revision, whether we do that on hard-copy print-outs or directly on-screen. Our publishers now routinely expect the finished product on disk as well as on paper, and the hottest, thorniest issue these days in the *Authors Guild Bulletin* (another “zine” that subscribes to me) is the protection of its members’ electronic rights in book and magazine contracts as more and more of our originally printed publication goes on-line one way or another down the road and our control of copyright tends to evaporate in cyberspace. Although I might disagree with Michael Joyce about the implications of his proposition, I quite concur with the proposition itself: that we are indeed “in the late age of print,” not only as a means of producing and publishing literature but, importantly, as a means of *reading* it. One New York playwright recently described all of us authors-for-print as “roadkill on the information superhighway.” He may be right.

To afford some perspective on this transitional time, I want to back up a bit—first just a few years back, then a few decades back, if not further yet—keeping a navigator’s eye on where we are and where we seem to be going, literature-wise, as I briefly retrace where we’ve been (this is the *Sail* magazine approach to navigating the State of the Art).

A mere 15 years ago, in 1981, we received at the Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars our very first word-processed manuscript in an application to our graduate program in fiction writing. Although the piece itself was unremarkable, I was impressed by its virtually published look; it was, in fact, an early specimen of “desktop publishing.” Remembering how instructively chastened I myself had been in the early 1950s to see my own apprentice efforts first set in official, impersonal print in a student magazine—which seemed to me to make strikingly manifest both their small strengths and their large shortcomings—I imagined that this newfangled mode of manuscript production might afford our apprentice writers some measure of the critical detachment that print confers. The further

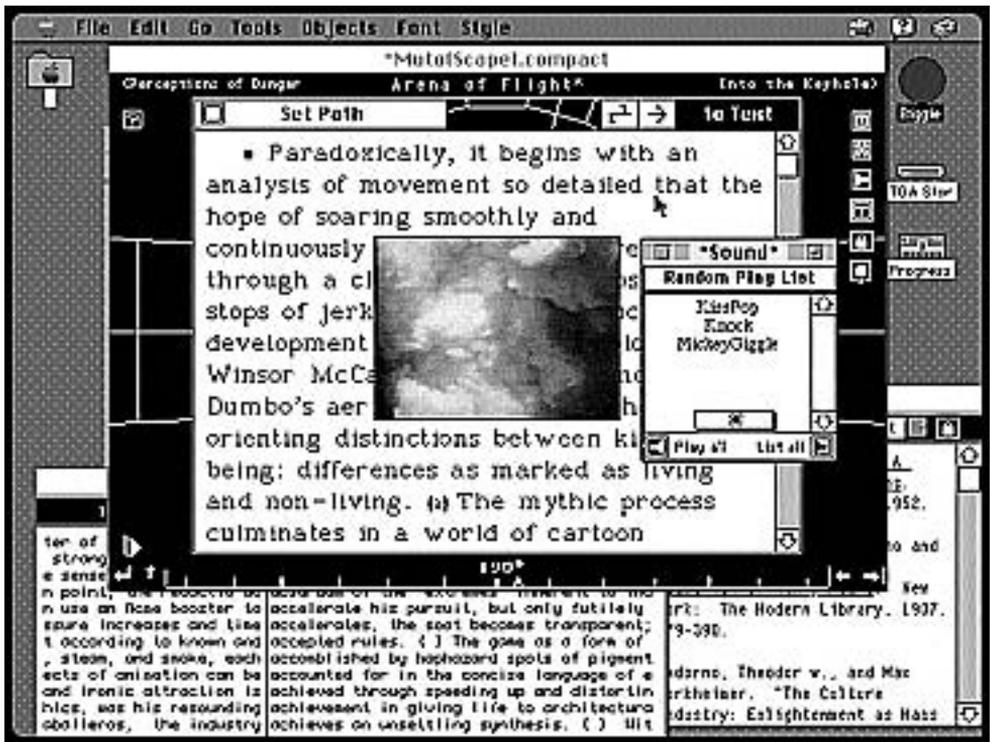
their words were removed from longhand, I reasoned, and even from homely old-fashioned typescript, the more objectively the apprentice authors would be able to assess them.

And so I showed the handsome specimen to our visiting fiction coach that year (Leonard Michaels) and expressed my pedagogical sentiments: wave of the future, etc. Michaels took one suspicious look at the justified right-hand margins, the crisp print and handsome typefaces, and said, “This is terrible! They’re going to think the stuff is finished. And it only *looks* that way.”

He was right, of course. Indeed, I have come to repeat this anecdote annually to each new crop of my graduate-student apprentices by way of cautioning them *against* fancy presentations of what is, after all, still work in process. No desktop publishing, please, I advise them. Just give us and your future editors tidy, well-copyedited pages, remarkable only for their author’s brilliance, and let’s leave publishing to the publishers.

That was 15 years ago. Then, year before last, we had our first ambassador from the vertiginous realm of Hypertext, a.k.a. “e-fiction”: interactive computer-fiction in which the “author” designs a matrix of “lexias” through which the “reader” navigates with clicks of the mouse or the keyboard, entering or exiting the narrative through any of many available doors and steering the plot along any of many optional way points.

The seminal work on the medium itself (*Hypertext*, authored by George Landow of Brown University but published by our Johns Hopkins University Press in 1992) declares hypertext to be the third great technological advance in the art of writing, after the development of the alphabet and the invention of movable type. Some curmudgeons have grumbled that the whole thing is more hype than text, but my comrade Robert Coover at Brown has become so involved in the medium that his official academic title these days is “Professor of Electronic Fiction.” In 1993, Coover published two landmark front-page essays on the subject in the *New York Times Book Review*, one called, provocatively, “The



Detail from Christopher Burnett's Muto(Scape), a 1992 interactive "hypermedia installation" in which the viewer navigates through words and images.

End of Books?," the other called "Hypertext: Novels for the Computer."

Invite those innocents still unfamiliar with hypertext to imagine a "text" (the word is already in quotes, the signal or symptom of virtuality) every word of which—or, at least, many a key word of which—is a window or point of entry into a network of associated "texts" (or graphics, music, statistics, spoken language, whatever a computer can reproduce), these several networks themselves interconnected and infinitely modifiable, or virtually infinitely so, by "readers" who can enter the "story" at any point, trace any of a zillion paths through its associated networks, perhaps add or subtract material and modify the linkages as they please, and then exit at any point, in the process having been virtual co-authors or coeditors as well as "readers" of their virtual text.

*The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.* Imagine a "loaded" display of that innocent proposition on your computer screen, such that "clicking" on any item in it opens a window menu of associations available for exploring, from the relative nimbleness of temperate zone quadrupeds, through the

history of fox hunting and its representation in painting, music, and literature, to sound tracks of hounds in full cry (with or without expert commentary) and disquisitions on animal rights—and every one of those associated "lexias" similarly loaded, another ring of keys with which one may open yet further doors, and on and on and on—no two routes through the maze ever likely to be the same, and every venturer thereinto not only a Theseus but a Daedalus, remodeling the labyrinth at will en route through it. That is hypertext, more or less, and as a potential medium of art it intrigues and disquiets me. If the prophets of the *American Book Review*, not to mention the *New York Times Book Review*, are correct, as no doubt they are, we'll be hearing more and more about hypertext as our weary century expires. (It has already made the cover of *Time*.) Indeed, a recent number of the *Authors Guild Bulletin* (Winter 1995), along with its now-standard cautionary piece on "Fair Use in the Electronic Age," included its first-ever mention of hypertextual narrative: "Electronic Fiction," by Sarah Smith (subtitled "The State of the Art"). Smith, an articulate practitioner of and apologist for her medium,

quotes a fellow hypertextualist's description of their art as "designing golf courses with holes that can be played in any order by players with greater or lesser degrees of skill and commitment." I like that metaphor—although I modestly submit that "ski slopes" would be an even better one, since, unlike golf courses, ski slopes have no prearranged sequence to be ignored or altered.

Back to my story. We welcomed our young graduate-student pioneer, who had already worked with Coover in Brown's vigorous hypertext program, into our Hopkins seminars (as did our university library into its burgeoning CD-ROM operation). We thought him a genial and knowledgeable harbinger of things inevitably to come. Fortunately for us, who have neither equipment nor expertise nor, for that matter, sufficient departmental enthusiasm, yet, to deal with this novel medium, Mr. Ho Lin's Hopkins project was a straightforward, engaging, traditionally linear print-novel ("p-fiction," I guess we have to call it now) about young Chinese Americans dreaming of Hong Kong and heisting computer chips to get there. At my urging, however, he obligingly arranged "e-fiction" demonstrations for us at the university's computing facility, and we did a certain amount of disk-and-software swapping.

Now, I'm a book person myself, but I try to keep an open mind and a mindful eye on the parameters of the medium, the edge of the envelope. I had already read Coover and others on the subject of hypertext; if I were 25 instead of 65, I daresay that I would be vigorously exploring its possibilities for my fictive purposes. I rather expected our roomful of talented Hopkins apprentices, who, after all, grew up with desktop computers, to take to hypertext fiction like grade-schoolers to Nintendo. Has it not been the job, after all, of each new artistic generation since the advent of Romanticism to render its senior mentors gently obsolete (what one sociologist has called "filiarchy," the rule of the young over their elders, and what others might call parricide)? To my surprise, however, I found that *I* was doing the prodding—"Better expose yourselves to the virus, if only to build up your antibodies," etc.—and that they, for the most part, were taking the skeptical Leonard Michaels role. Reading and

writing literature in the normal way, most of them felt, is interactivity enough: when we're being writers, we'll plot the course for you; when we're being readers, leave us alone and steer the boat yourself. My feelings exactly—more or less exactly, anyhow—but it was a touch dismaying to hear them voiced by young apprentices.

Their sentiments were sound, I believe, if unadventurous. Note that their reservations were not about the tiresome business (as many of us find it) of reading for pleasure off a video display terminal rather than curled up in a comfortable chair. We agreed that, by this century's turn, the hardware for hypertexts will likely be as portable as, and maybe even no harder on the eyes than, that jim-dandy item of low-energy, high-density information technology, the printed book. Nor had they anything against hypertext as a high-tech mode of reference browsing, as in those wonderfully manipulable CD-ROM guides to certain art collections, or the menus of menus of menus on the Internet. What they objected to, and in this I am much more with them than not, was mucking around with the traditional job descriptions of Author and Reader. "You don't like the restaurant? Then dine elsewhere—but stay out of my kitchen while I'm cooking for you, please, and I'll return the favor." (You ought, however, to try the hypertextual broccoli before making up your mind.)

I mention these two instances, from 15 and two years ago, as straws in the potentially much bigger wind of Electronic Virtual Reality, which I will not attempt to consider here. My point is that, although a few of us still prefer to compose our sentences in long-hand before turning them into pixels on a computer monitor en route to their returning into print on a page, and a few more prefer still to eschew computers altogether, the super-convenient word processor has become, in only a dozen-plus years, the production mode of choice for most writers of most kinds of writing, whether or not it affects the quality of the product. Interactive computer fiction (especially as it comes to include whole repertoires of graphic, cinematic, and auditory effects) is too fascinating not to become yet another competitor for audience attention, but one doubts that it will have nearly the market-share effect on

“straight” fiction-reading that movies and television—and, more recently, surfing the Internet—have had already. Those of us who still read literature for pleasure at all (no more than 10 percent of the adult U.S. population, says the *New York Times*) are likely to go on preferring, most of the time, the customary division of labor between Teller and Told. The Authors Guild’s justified concern with the protection of authorial electronic rights down the Infobahn is more commercial than aesthetic, a concern more about copyright than about readership. E-fiction versus p-fiction is apples versus oranges, really. In the case of either of those versus Electronic Virtual Reality, however, the difference is so enormous as to be a matter not of apples and oranges but rather of lotuses and rhinoceri, or perhaps hawks and hand-saws.

More precisely, it is the difference between virtual reality, which deals in *real virtualities*, and the purely virtual virtuality of literary texts, especially printed texts. The sights and sounds and feels of EVR are literal physical sensations generated by artificial stimuli. The printed page, on the other hand—except for illustrated texts and scratch-and-sniff kiddie books—is strictly anesthetic, however incidentally appealing to the eye and hand may be its typeface, paper stock, and binding. Even in the greatest, most spirit-stirring novels, there are no literal sights/sounds/feels/tastes/smells, only their names, artfully invoked in silent language. The virtual worlds of literature are unencumbered by literality. It is both their great limitation and their indispensable virtue that their virtuality is virtual, that they exist not in our nerve endings but in the pure hyperspace of our imaginations.

I will make my way back shortly to that distinction between the hyperspace of hypertext (not to mention the cyberspace of virtual reality) and the “meditative space” afforded by the silent, privileged transactions of the human mind and spirit with the fixed, anesthetic medium of the printed page. Before I do, however, I want to back off again, this time by 30 years or so, to explain why the electronic-fiction and virtual-reality phenomena give me a strong but rather comforting sense of déjà vu. In the late 1960s I

was living in Buffalo, New York, at the very edge of our troubled republic, and teaching at the state university there while the U.S.A. appeared to be more or less auto destructing. I vividly recall flying cross-country on a lecture tour in 1968, just after Dr. Martin Luther King’s assassination, and seeing the smoke of protest rise from one burning American inner city after another, sea to smoke-obscured sea, as in a World War II newsreel. Frequently, the campuses I visited, like the one I came home to, were occupied either by war-protesting students and faculty members or by tear gas-firing riot police and National Guardsmen. I quite remember one of my graduate students—late in the war, when the exasperated riot police moved in on us for the how-manyeth time with their gas grenades—sniffing the campus air calmly and observing, like a wine connoisseur, “Pepper-gas, Berkeley, ’66 or ’67.” All about the city, between campus strikes and trashings, pop art was popping, happenings were happening, street theater and new electronic music were ubiquitous, young American men were fleeing across the Peace Bridge to seek refuge in Canada from the draft. And back across the polluted Niagara River, from Toronto, came the siren song of Professor Marshall McLuhan, author of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, that the medium is the message and that we “print-oriented bastards” had better *get* the message that the electronic global village had rendered our hopelessly linear medium obsolete.

It was in this apocalyptic, death-of-the-novel, death-of-the-print-medium ambience that in 1968 I published a book called *Lost in the Funhouse: Fictions for Print, Tape, Live Voice*. Its title says it all, or enough anyhow for my purpose in these pages. My own attitude was that, whether or not the world ends, if enough thoughtful, intelligent people suspect that it’s ending, then that shared apprehension becomes a significant cultural-historical datum, which an artist in any medium, even poor old print, might well take note of and even turn to good account. The threat to p-fiction back then was not hypertext and EVR; we did not yet have even desktop personal computers. It was movies and television—the movies increasingly since the end of World War I, television

increasingly since the end of World War II. The “Death of the Novel” was one of the classical riffs of Modernism, that regnant aesthetic of the first half of the 20th century. The semiotician Robert Scholes quotes a mid-1960s colleague’s description of the novel as “a moderately interesting historical phenomenon, of no present importance,” and I remember my Buffalo colleague Leslie Fiedler predicting at about the same time that, if there’s any future for narrative at all, it’s up there on the big screen, not down here on the page. (This was before VCRs, when people still went out to the movies.)

But I also remember Fiedler adding, winningly, that the novel was born dying, like all of us (he had in mind the form’s origins in parody and self-satire), that it has gone on dying for several centuries since, and that we may hope it will continue its robust terminality for some time yet. Ron Sukenick, founding editor of the *American Book Review*, even published a little book in 1969 called *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories*, and I myself used to like to say that, inasmuch as I had not been born in time to write the first novel, maybe it would be fun to write the last one. In short, you did not have to be a weatherman back then to know which way the wind was blowing. (One of Fiedler’s more recent books is titled *What Was Literature?*—the same Modernist riff, rescored for full orchestra.)

The point I want to make is that a number of the talented graduate-student apprentice writers in my workshop back in those years seriously wondered whether to abandon the sinking ship of print while they could and get themselves a movie camera instead. It seemed to them quixotic, at best, to be apprentices in a very possibly moribund medium, and although I reminded them that *Quixote* is just about where we came in, that 1968 workshop turned itself into a seminar on alternatives to the line and the page. The room was alive with pop-up fictions, three-dimensional fictions done on Buckminster Fuller polyhedrons, serial fictions on scraps of paper like fortune cookie fortunes, shaken up in a cereal box (appropriately), poured out into a cereal bowl, and read serially as the members of the group passed the bowl. At one defining moment that year, we received a solicitation from a

professional avant-garde anthologist (Richard Kostelanetz) who was assembling a collection to be called *Untried Forms in Fiction*, and who was offering to pay his contributors by the page. My young pioneers were appalled: “By the *page*? Where has this guy *been*?”

But—and here is the moral of this tale—a number of us, myself included, learned from all this experimentation two lessons that I regard as equally important. The first was that the medium of print is, indeed, almost inescapably linear—*this* word and then *this* and then *this*; this line after that, this page after the one before it (what Sven Birkerts has called “the missionary position of reading”)—whereas a very great deal of our experience of life is decidedly *not* linear. We think and perceive and intuit in buzzes and flashes and gestalts; we act in a context of vertiginous simultaneity; we see and hear and smell and touch and taste often in combination, whereas print is a peculiarly *anesthetic* medium of art, the only one I know of that appeals directly to none of the physical senses. Linearity and anestheticity: two tremendous limitations of the medium of print.

However—lesson two—what a few of us, at least, came to appreciate is that to be linear is not necessarily to be obsolete, much less wicked. While much of our experience of life is of a nonlinear character, an important portion of it turns out to be of a quite linear character. We live and think and perceive and act in time, and time implies sequence, and sequence is what gives rise to narrative. *This* happened and then *that* and then *that*, and if we want to recount what happened, to share it with others and even with ourselves, we have to proceed in narrative sequence—the story of our day, the stories of our lives. Those stories are linear, even when their subject is often not, and they remain linear even when the order of narration is dischronological; even when, as Horace recommends, we begin in the middle of things. And for those aspects of our experience of life that happen to be of a linear character,

the medium of print may be a uniquely appropriate vehicle of rendition.

In short, there are lots of things you can do with a camera that you cannot do on the printed page, but there are also important things that you can do on the printed page that cannot be done with a camera. Most important among these, obviously, is the rendering of sensibility, as apart from sensation itself. Fiction cannot give us the sights, sounds, feels, and smells themselves—language itself cannot, except for occasional onomatopoeic suggestion—but fiction is uniquely privileged to tell us what things look/taste/sound/feel/smell *like*, to particular human sensibilities in particular situations. Aristotle declares that the subject of literature is “the human experience of life, its happiness and its misery.” I would add that the true subject of printed lit is the human *experiencing* of that experience; not sensation, but the *registering* of sensation in language; the typically interior, unphotographable universe of perceiving, feeling, and reflecting, as well as the visible manifestations of those feelings and perceptions. (Compare the sensuousness of Diane Ackerman’s book *A Natural History of the Senses* with the surprising aridity of its PBS-TV version.)

Forget for the moment television, movies, stage plays, and virtual-reality devices. Why can hypertext narrative not do all that I have just been praising print for doing, since its medium remains (mainly) “written” words? Well, it can, to some extent, and the proponents of electronic fiction incline to declare further that their medium “sets us free from the domination of reader by writer, from the traditional concepts of beginning and middle and end, and of fixed, permanent texts”—from, in Coover’s own words, “the tyranny of the line,” not to mention the traditional concept of copyright versus public domain. But what’s typically missing from e-fiction, precisely, are good old linearity and those traditional job descriptions of author and reader, which at least some of us find to be not oppressive or tyrannical at all. On the contrary.

It is in this connection that Sven Birkerts (in *The Gutenberg Elegies*, his lament for the passing of the Age of Print) speaks of “meditative space.” Interactivity can be fun; impro-

visation and collaboration can be fun; freedom is jolly. But there are dominations that one may freely enjoy without being at all masochistic, and among those, for many of us, is the willing, provisional, and temporary surrender of our noisy little egos to great artistry, a surrender which, so far from diminishing, quite enlarges us. As my Johns Hopkins coachees pointed out, reading a splendid writer, or even just a very entertaining writer, is not a particularly passive business. An accomplished artist is giving us his or her best shots, in what he or she regards as the most effective sequence—of words, of actions, of foreshadowings and plot twists and insights and carefully prepared dramatic moments. It’s up to us to respond to those best shots with our minds and hearts and spirits and our accumulated experience of life and of art—and that is interaction aplenty, without our presuming to grab the steering wheel and diddle the driver’s itinerary. The kind of reading I have just described requires not only meditative space but, as Birkerts observes, a sense that the text before us is not a provisional *version*, up for grabs, the way texts in the cyberspace of a computer memory always are, but rather the author’s very best, what he or she is ready to be judged by for keeps.

The ubiquitous apocalypticism of the High Sixties turns out to have marked, in the aesthetic sphere, the windup not of printed literature or even of the novel, quite, but of Modernism, for better or worse, as a “cultural dominant.” Here in America, the writers who perhaps commanded the most critical respect back then were the likes of Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, William Styron, and young John Updike. To some of us literary deckhands, however, those indisputably talented writers seemed of less impressive stature than the preceding generation of Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein—not to mention Joyce, Kafka, Mann, and Proust. My own living navigation stars and ship’s officers in those days were Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, and Vladimir Nabokov, joined presently by Italo Calvino and Gabriel García Márquez. Although the vessel did not have a name yet—Ihab Hassan’s *Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern*

*Aesthetic* was not published until the early 1970s—a number of us felt that we were working something out that would honor the high artistic standards and radical innovations of our great Modernist predecessors while maintaining a degree of skepticism and modest irony with respect to their heroic ambition. (What self-respecting Postmodernist would presume, like Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus, to “forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race”? If they were the century’s Homers and Virgils, we would endeavor to be its Catulluses and Ovids and Petroniuses—an honorable aspiration.

All of that was a generation ago. When one considers that the iconoclastic, filioclastic spirit of 19th-century Romanticism has persisted right through our own time, it was to be expected that the second generation of (lower-case) postmodern culture would look to distance itself from its immediate forebears; that impulse is as American as Immanuel Kant and Friedrich von Schlegel. I do not know how much and how consciously it has impelled younger writers in the ever-more-beleaguered medium of American trade p-fiction. I do suspect it to be among the impulses behind the phenomenon of e-fiction.

And that is quite all right: “Let a thousand flowers blossom,” etc. If the edifice of printed lit is tottering, long may it totter, like the Pisan campanile, and become all the more appealing in its totterment. If we are in the late-Cretaceous era of print, and if e-fiction turns out to be the asteroid whose impact spells our doom “in lightforms” (which I doubt), let us take comfort in the reflection that the great dinosaurs not only hung in there for another million years or two before realizing that their time was up, but in a few instances attained their most ultrasaurian proportions even as those newly evolving mammalian critters scampered between their tremendous feet—and occasionally got squashed flat. It was the same with cathedrals

and square-riggers and zeppelins and ocean liners. *Que será será*, but not always in a hurry.

Someone might assert that the sentiments I have expressed here are an example of what the aforementioned e-fictionist Michael Joyce has wittily called “modality envy.” So be it, if so it be, although I believe “modality curiosity” to be a more accurate characterization. Mine is the ongoing curiosity of a postmodern romantic formalist about the state of the art, as well as about the state of such new and, after all, essentially different arts as I believe e-fiction to be—in case there is something there that a writer like myself might make use of in my venerable medium.

This just in from *Scientific American*, one of those “wigged-out zines” to which I subscribe: it appears that we late-Cretaceous p-fictionists may have an unappreciated edge in the evolutionary competition down the road. Give us acid-free paper, a source of light, and familiarity with our language, and we are in business for the long haul. Digitalized information, by contrast (including e-fiction), turns out to be only theoretically invulnerable to the ravages of time. The alarming fact is that the physical media on which it is stored, not to mention the software and hardware required to get at it, are far from eternal, either as items in themselves or as modes of access. Jeff Rothenberg, a senior computer scientist at the RAND Corporation, declares (in print) that “the contents of most digital media evaporate long before words written on high-quality paper. And they often become unusably obsolete even sooner, as media are superseded by new, incompatible formats (how many readers remember eight-inch floppy disks?). It is only slightly facetious to say that digital information lasts forever—or for five years, whichever comes first.”

Good luck, electronic fictioneers. Even golf courses and ski slopes last longer than that.

# SWEDEN

## After the Fall

*Nowhere in the world has the dream of reason been pursued quite so vigorously as in the Kingdom of Sweden. Under Social Democratic leadership, this Scandinavian country became famous around the world for its humane “Middle Way.” Swedes believed that their distinctive “Swedish model,” with its massive welfare state, its near-full employment, and its lofty egalitarianism, provided at least a glimpse of what a rationally constructed utopia might be. In recent years, however, the Swedish model has developed serious problems, and Swedes have begun to ponder some profoundly unsettling questions—questions about who they are and where they are headed. Our author takes us to post-utopian Sweden.*

by Gordon F. Sander

**N**ever say that Swedes have no religion. That is a myth. They do indeed—although it is not Lutheranism, which is no longer even the established religion, since church and state were finally separated this year after four centuries of official union. Moreover, although 87 percent of Swedes nominally belong to the Lutheran Evangelical Church, attendance at services has long been pitifully low. Not so with Sweden’s true religion, the one in which virtually all Swedes participate. That religion is devoted to the worship of *sommar*.

*Sommar*: that sweet, intense, yet poignantly short season from mid-June through mid-August when seemingly all nine million Swedes close up shop and head upcountry, or to one of the myriad islands or archipelagos surrounding this narrow landmass on the Baltic Sea, to savor the long blue days and brief “white nights” at their rustic vacation cottages.





*The Dance of Death scene in Ingmar Bergman's The Seventh Seal (1959).*

And woe betide any Swede, particularly a public official, who dares question the sanctity of summer. A hapless foreign ministry officer learned that lesson the hard way last July when, in a letter to the leading Stockholm daily, *Dagens Nyheter*, he ventured the opinion that perhaps, from the point of view of attracting foreign investment, it might be wise if Swedes didn't take their legally mandated five-and-a-half-week vacations during summer—or, at least, didn't *all* take them then. The heretic was promptly met by a storm of criticism. (A foreign ministry press officer, discussing the troublemaker the next day, drew her finger across her throat to indicate his all-but-certain fate.)

If those who question the worship of summer are thus cast down, so especially devout worshipers are held aloft as shining examples. Thus, many Swedes hailed Göran Persson, minister of finance in the Social Democratic government, when he resisted all entreaties from his foreign counterparts and refused to interrupt his summer vacation to attend a

meeting of European Union finance ministers in Brussels. Here was a man who saw clearly where his sacred obligation lay.

Any reader who doubts that summer is the true Swedish religion should book passage on one of the restored steamboats of the old Göta Canal Steamship Company, which cross the



lush, viridian girth of the country by way of that great public work of the early 19th century. The canal, which long ago outlived its original freight-carrying purpose, links up a picturesque 500-mile ribbon of lakes and locks, stretching from Stockholm in the east to Gothenburg (Göteborg) in the west.

Better yet: take the boat that departs Stockholm at the end of the third week of June, and witness Midsummer's Eve (which falls anywhere from June 19 to 25), the absolute apogee of the Swedish year. Note the fervor with which the crew leads the ship in song on the designated day of celebration. Observe the intensity with which the young maidens (and they do look like maidens) who live by the canal search the adjoining fields and pastures for flowers for their midsummer crowns. And then at night, after your galley has docked at Motala—a fairly typical example of the sleepy small towns and cities in which more than half of the Swedish population still resides—go ashore and watch the restless youth of that Nordic Peoria stage their desultory, drunken annual riot. There is something pagan about the whole ritual—and poignant, too—as this pent-up Nordic society attempts, in one frenzied day, to rid itself of its doubts, anxieties, and demons.

Perhaps the exorcism worked in more halcyon days. Last summer, however—when I was in Sweden, on my fourth visit since 1990—there were too many doubts and demons for Swedes to drive out in a single day.

There was, for one, the still-rattling ghost of the *Estonia*, the huge, half-Swedish-owned ferry that in September 1994 sank in 15 horrible minutes in the Baltic Sea, after its cargo door came loose in heavy seas, taking close to 1,000 people to their deaths, including more than 600 Swedes—the largest number of Swedes to die from an unnatural cause in a single day since the Napoleonic Wars.

Then, in January 1995, came the “Stureplan massacre,” so named after the Stockholm square where the senseless crime took place. Denied entry to the popular discotheque Sture Companiet, a young Swedish delinquent decided to take revenge by returning with an assault rifle and opening fire on the crowd inside the disco's barred, glass doors. Four people were killed and some 20 injured.

That outrage stirred memories of a similar mass shooting that had dark-

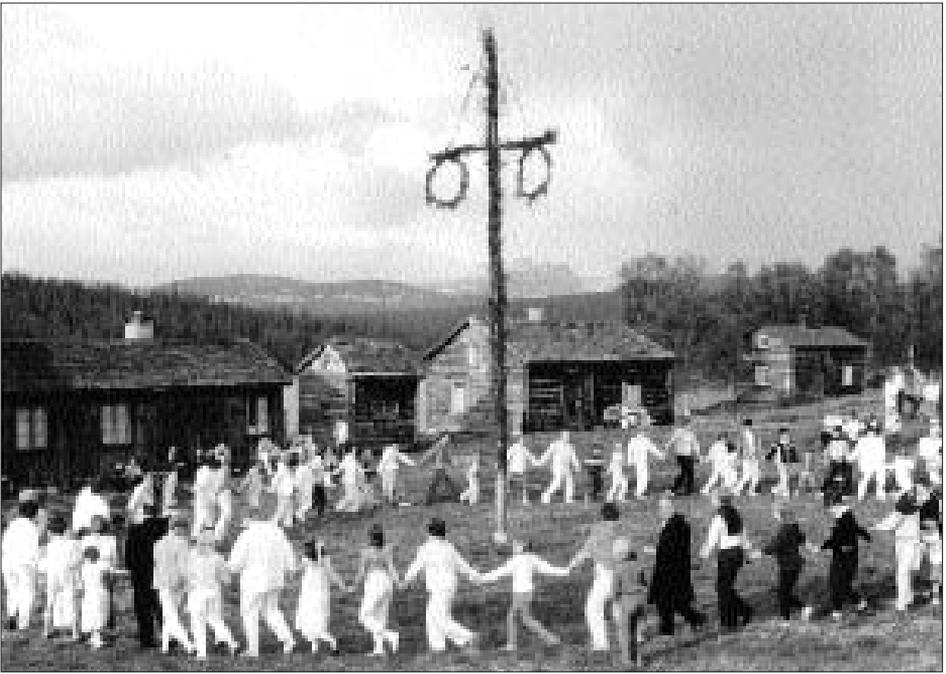
> GORDON F. SANDER is a journalist and author who writes frequently about Northern Europe. His work has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *International Herald Tribune*, the *European*, and other publications. Copyright © 1996 by Gordon F. Sander.

ened the previous summer, when a Swedish army lieutenant stationed in the northern town of Falun went berserk after being jilted by his girlfriend. With his government-issue automatic weapon, he ambushed a group of bystanders and murdered seven.

Ship sinkings, machine gun massacres, and, still unforgotten and unsolved, the 1986 assassination of Prime Minister Olof Palme—could these terrible things, many wondered, really have happened in Sweden?

“In Sweden there is a fantastic, erroneous belief in rationality,” the noted Swedish cancer specialist Georg Klein, a Hungarian refugee, recently told an interviewer. He elaborated: “People here live with the assumption that if only the laws are just, then society will also be perfect—that everything can be planned.” In Sweden, Klein explained, “there is a basic ignorance of the fact that good and evil exist within every human being—that we can never know what will happen.”

Now, in the wake of the *Estonia* sinking, the Stureplan and Falun massacres, and all the other afflictions that the Swedish nation has suffered



*In celebration of Midsummer, Swedes sing and dance around a maypole.*

since Palme’s assassination in February 1986, the once cozened and complacent Swedes seemed to be questioning their confident rationalism. Perhaps they were beginning to realize that the inexplicable and unforeseen could happen, even to them.

**T**here were doubts and anxieties, too, about matters less cosmic but no less portentous, including Sweden’s decision, in November 1994, to abandon two centuries of isolation from the Continent’s messy affairs (including World Wars I and II) and join the European Union. The national plebiscite was less than overwhelming: 52 percent approved integration, while 47 percent were opposed. A subsequent poll indicated that if Swedes were able to vote again, they would say no to Europe—as their recalcitrant Norwegian neighbors ultimately did by a



*Carlsson: a prime minister grows weary.*

margin of more than two to one.

Last September, isolationist feelings surfaced even more strikingly in the remarkably low turnout (41 percent of eligible voters) for the election of Swedish representatives to the European Parliament. Just as remarkably—and dealing a severe blow to the pro-Europeanist prime minister Ingvar Carlsson—a mere 28 percent of the vote went to his Social Democratic Party, while no less than 30 percent went to the anti-Europe coalition parties of the Lefts (formerly, the Communists) and the Greens.

But Swedes were and are troubled by more than the question

of relations with Europe. Since 1993, unemployment—once negligible and thought certain to remain so—has been hovering around 12–13 percent.\* Could it be that Sweden’s lavish welfare state was partly responsible?

There seemed to be grudging support for finance minister Persson’s campaign to bring the massive welfare state under control, and with it, Sweden’s public debt. The government budget deficit currently runs to more than 11 percent of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP). Belt-tightening measures such as cutting tax-free allowances to families with children seemed the only solution.

To many Swedes, however, especially older ones with memories of fatter, happier times, it is dismaying, if not disorienting, to see the same Social Democratic Party that had erected “the strong society”—as one of its greatest architects, Tage Erlander, the long-time postwar prime minister, proudly called it—now moving to weaken it (even if it appeared to be the *weakness* of the supposedly “strong” society, “the Swedish model,” that was necessitating the unwelcome measures).

Adding to Sweden’s confusion has been the end of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union and its empire meant that Sweden could no longer play the neutralist role it had confidently assumed during the long conflict between East and West, calling steadily, and perhaps a bit self-righteously, for peace, disarmament, and alternatives to confrontation. Internationally, as well as at home, the Swedish certitudes have been rapidly crumbling.



*Persson: his sommar is sacred.*

\*The rate of “total unemployment” in Sweden consists of the rate of “registered unemployment” (7.5 percent in May 1995) and an additional percentage (4.8 percent in May 1995) of those in the labor force who are taking part in various government-financed or government-subsidized job-training or work programs. Thus, in May 1995, “total unemployment” was 12.3 percent. In this essay, the jobless rate figures given are for “total unemployment.”



Over and over last summer I heard the same anxious questions, in one guise or another, the questions of a nation newly in search of itself, nostalgic for its past, and fearful of its future. *Who are we?* Swedes were asking. *Where are we? Where are we going?*

**A**nd who will lead us? Not Ingvar Carlsson, the recent heir to this century's tradition of long-serving Social Democratic patriarchs. In mid-August, just as many Swedes were returning to work after their long summer vacations, the 61-year-old politician announced—ostensi-

bly out of sheer weariness with politics, but doubtless also from heartsickness at having to cut back the cherished welfare state—that he would retire at the next party conference, in March 1996. (His term runs until 1998.) “I led the party back into power,” was all the tired technocrat would say in explanation, alluding to his success in November 1994 in ousting the “non-socialist” coalition government headed by Carl Bildt of the Moderate Party.

Swedes had grown accustomed to Carlsson. To many, his visage had become as familiar as an old shoe. Indeed, “the Shoe” had become his nickname. (A helpful bartender at my favorite Stockholm restaurant showed me why, by taking off his own shoe and placing glasses on it. The resemblance to the outgoing prime minister was indeed uncanny.) However, it is probably an exaggeration to say that Carlsson will be missed. After some internal jockeying, his young, tough-talking, spike-haired deputy prime minister, Mona Sahlin, emerged as his designated successor. But then, after revelations that she had misused her official credit card—a real “no-no” in a country that is prudish about personal finance—the 38-year-old heir apparent removed herself from consideration, as well as from the government. This pitched the party into a new crisis, as it searched for someone to take Carlsson’s place. No one seemed to want the job. Finally, in December, the long search came to an end when finance minister Persson—he of fiscal-austerity and stand-by-your-*sommar* fame—stopped saying no, and agreed to be nominated by the party to fill out Carlsson’s term. The news sent a wave of relief through party ranks, but it did not solve the larger problem: the party’s—and the country’s—identity crisis.

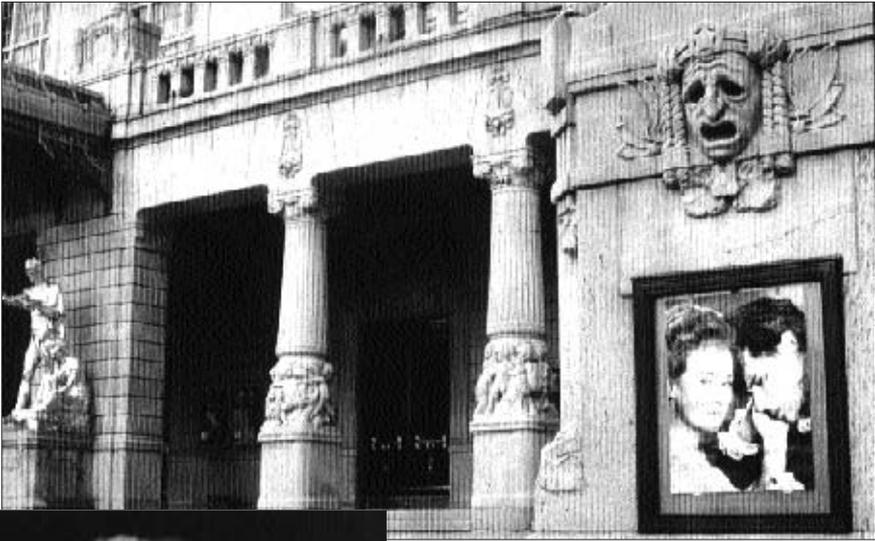
**W**ho are we? Where are we? Where are we going? This was the refrain I heard in the stateroom of the *Juno*, the longest-serving (since 1874) vessel of the Göta Canal company’s small fleet, one night last summer as I was gliding across the country and sharing aquavit with some new Swedish acquaintances. “We know we are becoming something different,” sighed Maria, a schoolteacher and married mother of three from Stockholm. “We just don’t know what it is.”

I had heard a similar plaint—with elaboration—in the comfortable Stockholm apartment of Jan Guillou, an author of best-selling detective novels and Sweden’s most commercially successful writer. He once went to jail for revealing the workings of a government espionage agency and now expresses his sometimes controversial views on current affairs in a regular newspaper column.

“People talk about an economic crisis,” Guillou said. “Perhaps there is an economic crisis. We certainly are broke. But the real crisis here is a crisis of confidence. It all began with that Soviet submarine that ran aground, after our highly trained navy failed to detect it.”

The 1981 incident, which took place near the southeastern Swedish coastal base of Karlskrona, was disturbing as well as embarrassing. It seemed to demonstrate not only the incompetence of the Swedish navy but the naiveté of official government attitudes toward the supposedly friendly communist regime in Moscow.

Guillou went on to catalog a series of further blows to Swedish self-confidence, including the one that angers and baffles Swedes the most: the protracted and thus far unsuccessful investigation into the 1986 assassination of Prime Minister Palme, who was killed while walking home with his wife from a Stockholm movie theater. The mystery writer him-



*Establishment of the Royal Dramatic Theatre (above) was among the achievements of Gustav III (left).*

self believes that the police had their man—a former mental patient who had to be released, after Palme’s widow, Lisbeth, failed to identify him in court. The besieged head of the decade-old police inquiry disagrees. Meanwhile, the media are full of conspiracy theories. “The loonies have taken over,” Guillou lamented.

Sweden is just not the same anymore, he noted, and for Swedes, this is extremely troubling. “You must understand, we’re not used to being a second-rate nation. My God, we can’t even make decent tennis players anymore!”

I heard a similar sentiment from Peter Jager, a professor of statistics at Chalmers Institute of Technology, as we lunched in his backyard on a blazing summer day: “It’s so hard to accept. We used to be the Americans of Europe. We used to be somebody.”

**F**or a relatively small, sparsely populated country on the periphery of Europe, the Kingdom of Sweden has in this century and in other recent ones exercised considerable power and influence over the world’s affairs and imagination.

In four discrete historical periods, Sweden attained or enjoyed imperial, economic, or cultural greatness. Each of these eras left its mark on the Swedish state and social consciousness. Eerily enough, each era climaxed with the murder or suicide of its most representative or formative figure. Little wonder that Sweden sometimes seems a haunted land.

Although the rest of the world has forgotten it, the Swedes once had a considerable empire. For more than a century, from the first decade of the 17th century, when the cunning Gustavus Adolphus II began to conquer his various Baltic neighbors—including the Danes, the Germans, the Poles, and the

Russians—until the second decade of the 18th, when his brilliant but demented descendant Charles XII was slain by a soldier (probably one of his own), *Sverige* ranked among the great European powers. Although it would take another century, and a series of wrong-headed wars with Russia, for Sweden to completely give up its expansionist ambitions, the end of its empire effectively took place when Charles keeled over dead in the trenches outside the Norwegian outpost of Fredrikshald, to which his forces were laying siege.

Although Sweden was reduced again to a minor state, its imperial period left it with several enduring legacies. These included a deep revulsion toward war and untidy entanglements with the Continent, as well as a massive state administration—built up, ironically, for the purpose of waging war—and a profound popular respect for the authority of the state.

The reign of Gustav III (1771–92), the so-called Gustavian Age, was Sweden's second period of greatness. It, too, left a lasting imprint on the Swedish national character. A passionate Francophile, Gustav was in Paris when his father, Adolf Fredrik, died in 1771. Returning home to take the throne, Gustav resolved to make Sweden a cultural power like France—and nearly succeeded, thanks to a wealth of talented Swedes: painters such as Carl Gustaf Pilo and Alexander Roslin, and poets and writers such as Carl Michael Bellman, Johan Henrik Kellgren, and Anna Maria Lenngren. Gustav's first concern was to protect and promote the Swedish language. To that end he founded the Swedish Academy in 1786, modeling it after l'Académie française. Later, he established and nurtured the Royal Dramatic Theatre and the Royal Opera. An amateur thespian, Gustav played minor roles in several of the productions he commissioned. No king or queen was ever friendlier to the arts, or more beloved by the intelligentsia.

The nobility, however, were less enamored of Gustav III, especially after he drew the country into a futile war with Russia (1788–90) and took steps to make himself an absolute monarch, in the style of Louis XIV. In 1792, an aggrieved nobleman shot the would-be Swedish Sun King at a masked ball—in Gustav's own opera house, no less. It would be the last assassination of a major political figure in Sweden for nearly 200 years.

Today, Gustav's influence sometimes shows up in unexpected ways. At an open-air band concert I attended last summer in Djurgården, Stockholm's Central Park, I was surprised to see figures in 18th-century garb capering about—members, I was told, of the “Gustav the Third Society.” More substantially, Gustav's enthusiastic patronage and promotion of the arts for the whole society may help to explain why there is less of a gap between elite and grassroots culture in Sweden than in the rest of Europe.

**T**he 19th century was a wrenching one for Sweden. Although individual Swedes—including explorer Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld, who assayed the first trans-Arctic circumnavigation of Asia in 1878, and the inventors Sven Wingquist, Lars Ericsson, and Alfred Nobel, who brought forth ball bearings, the table telephone, and dynamite, respectively—showed daring and inventiveness, Sweden as a nation stood out as one of the sluggards of the Industrial Age. In many ways, in fact, it remained mired in the feudal age.

Lacking in risk capital and the necessary infrastructure (at midcentury, there still were no railroads), the country had to watch the Industrial Revolution from the sidelines. Meanwhile, Swedish agriculture, hampered



*A late-19th century socialist agitator addresses workers; out of the strife came trade unions and the Social Democratic Party.*

by medieval laws such as primogeniture, could not keep up with the demands of a surging population. By the end of the century, 1.5 million Swedes—mostly displaced farmers and their families—had moved to other countries, particularly the United States. This Great Emigration of one-fourth of its people left Sweden in a bad way.

**Y**et there were glimmers of the “strong society” to come. The 1847 Poor Law required each parish and town to feed its own needy. King Oskar I (1844–59) became internationally renowned for his interest in prison reform. And in 1889, a band of Swedish progressives founded the Social Democratic Party. Although the rhetoric of the movement that produced the party, especially that of founder August Palm, a professional agitator, was severe and confrontational, in practice the party favored compromise. Credit for this goes largely to Hjalmar Branting, the party’s first secretary. A pacifist and a fervent advocate of workers’ rights, he was also a pragmatist, and he quickly moved the unstable Palm out of the way. In the next century, Branting became the first Social Democratic prime minister (1920, 1921–23, 1924–25), stepping down shortly before his death. Within two decades, the party he played so large a role in founding would usher in the Swedish model, and with it, Sweden’s golden age.

Before that happened, however, Sweden enjoyed a third period of greatness, this time economic in form. After World War I, the Swedish economy finally came into its own, as many of the industries established before the war—including those built by Nobel and Ericsson—went international. The country’s iron and shipping industries also boomed. For a while, thanks to financier Ivar Kreuger, the so-called “Match King,” Sweden appeared headed for a worldwide monopoly on match production. Kreuger’s financial position was so strong that he was able in 1927 to lend the French government \$75 million and later to give the German government an even larger loan. As the global economic crisis of the Great Depression got worse, however, Kreuger’s financial situation became

increasingly strained. In 1932, in a posh Paris apartment, the desperate financier fatally shot himself. Another Swedish leader had fallen, done in by his own hubris. Posthumous revelations of Kreuger's chicanery rocked Sweden and the international financial world. Another era of Swedish influence came to a close.

**A**s the Great Depression worsened in Sweden, tensions between labor and business rose. These culminated in a bloody—and for Sweden, very unusual—incident in the northern Ådalen Valley, when soldiers panicked during a protest by striking sawmill workers and opened fire, killing four demonstrators and a spectator.

The combination of Kreuger's suicide and the Ådalen massacre took the wind out of the imperious Swedish business community, making it easier for labor to obtain a favorable arrangement. The grandfatherly Per Albin Hansson, who had assumed the mantle of leadership of the Social Democratic Party from Branting, also exerted a calming influence. With only a brief interruption in 1936, he would serve as prime minister for the next 14 years (1932–46).

The crisis of the depression was overcome more swiftly in Sweden than in most other countries; by 1936, wages had returned to their old level, and by the end of the decade, unemployment had become negligible. During those years, the country veered away from class warfare and turned toward the Social Democratic idea of *folkhemmet*, or “people's home,” in which the government meets the needs of the people in times of joblessness, illness, and old age.

Financed by taxes on income and by employer contributions, the Swedish model, as the Social Democrats' visionary project came to be called, would



A Stockholm memorial honors Social Democratic prime minister Branting.

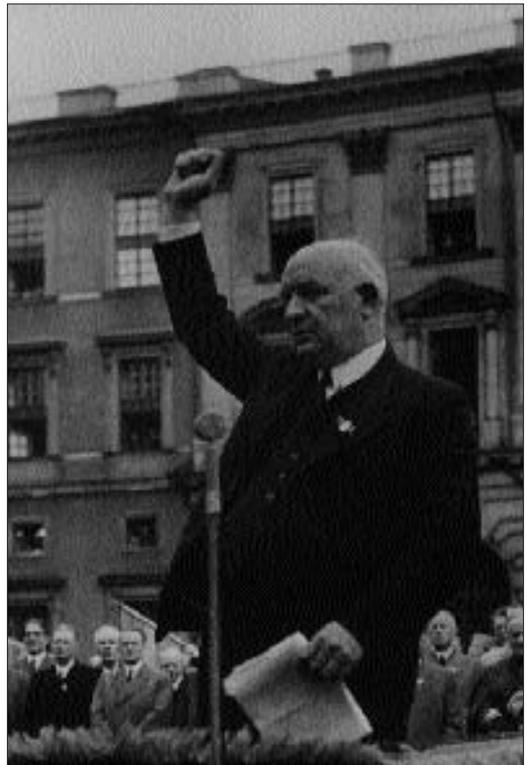
provide Swedes with unemployment insurance, a general pension fund, improved and widely available medical care, mass housing starts, and a refurbished and fully subsidized public education system. The Wallenbergs and the other 20 or so powerful families that then dominated the Swedish economy (their number is now down to about a dozen) went along with all this, on the tacit assurance that it would be financed by taxing income, rather than further taxing wealth. (A tax on wealth had been in place since 1910.) The deal proved to be a lasting one: Sweden did not adopt a capital gains tax until 1995.

In 1938, the Riksdag, the Swedish parliament, put the first element of the projected welfare state in place: a mandatory two-week paid vacation for all Swedish workers. That same year, confederated labor and industrial leaders signed the so-called Saltsjöbaden agreement (named after the Swedish resort where it was incubated). The two sides—both wanting to avert the threat of government intervention in labor disputes—agreed to be bound by procedures regulating collective bargaining and strikes. Unions had to give advance notice of any planned industrial action. The ensuing labor peace allowed employers to build up factories that had been laid low by the depression. The Saltsjöbaden agreement, and the spirit of cooperation it represented, became the real basis for the Swedish model.

Even before that historic agreement, the Social Democratic project aroused interest in Western intellectual circles. With the worldwide depression under way, American journalist Marquis Childs wrote *The Middle Way* (1936), a sympathetic account of the Swedish search for a humane middle course between unfettered capitalism and doctrinaire socialism, between fascism and communism.

Before the Swedish model (or “Middle Way”) could become a reality, however, World War II intervened, forcing a postponement of major social and economic reforms. In 1939, the year after the Saltsjöbaden accord, Germany invaded Poland; seven months later, the Nazi juggernaut swept up Denmark and Norway. Once again, as in World War I, Sweden declared its neutrality. Realizing that this meant little to Hitler—as his invasion of the avowedly neutral Netherlands in May 1940 showed—Sweden mobilized, and prepared for the worst.

Fortunately, the worst never came. Hitler decided that a neutral Sweden served Germany’s purposes, provided that it continued to supply the Reich with iron ore, which it did until almost the end of the war. It also tolerated regular infringements of its sovereignty, including, most infamously, the passage of a sealed train of armed German troops



*Per Albin Hansson addresses a throng.*



*A Swedish soldier watches as Nazi soldiers board the train for Finland in June 1941.*

in June 1941 through Sweden from Norway to Germany's then-ally, Finland.

After the war, the Social Democratic Party easily won the 1946 election (and would remain continuously in power for 30 years). The party now was ready, as was the country, to bring the *folkhemmet* into being. With its economy intact and mobilized, and possessing the largest export capacity in Europe, Sweden experienced an economic boom. The Social Democrats, following the blueprint drawn up before the war, raced to complete their vision of the perfect society, complete

with child allowances, low-cost housing, and old-age pensions. Plank by plank, the "first floor" of the long-awaited, cradle-to-grave welfare state fell into place. Sweden's golden age had begun.

**T**he Saltsjöbaden accord and its spirit of cooperation proved amazingly durable. With the Social Democratic government looking benignly on, Sweden's well-organized labor confederations—representing 95 percent of the nation's blue collar workers—and the equally well-organized Swedish employer associations were usually able to reach swift agreement on wages and working conditions. Strikes and work stoppages were rare, and Swedish industry hummed. From a low of five percent of GDP at the end of World War II, exports increased to more than 22 percent in 1950. As Swedish industry's international competitiveness grew, the postwar prosperity was sustained—and the welfare state was able to thrive.

A short recession in the early 1950s forced the Social Democrats to take a breather, but then came the postwar boom of 1955–65. Swedish exports of paper, metal, and other goods doubled, and the annual growth reached an extraordinary 5.1 percent in 1964. This export-led expansion permitted the construction of a lavish "second story" of services and benefits: improved health care, a four-week mandatory holiday, better care for the elderly, and a so-called Million housing project—designed to provide 100,000 new, low-cost apartments annually during the decade of the 1960s.

The party's ideological aim was to create an egalitarian society, one in which all who wanted to work could work. And indeed, for three decades, unemployment in Sweden rarely rose above one percent. During the 1950s and '60s, the worldwide demand for such Swedish products as paper pulp and ball bearings was so great that skilled and semiskilled workers were imported by the tens of thousands, first, primarily, from neighboring

Finland, then from Italy and other southern European countries. These *invandrare* were welcomed into the bountiful *folkhemmet* (unlike more recent immigrants from Africa and the Middle East, who have found a chillier reception and far fewer jobs).

But as classical tragedy would have it, the Social Democrats' success helped to bring about a reversal of fortune. In the late 1950s, political scientist Joseph B. Board has written, the growth of the public sector started to get out of control. So long as the prosperity kept up, most Swedes did not object, except to complain about rising taxes. With the electorate then becoming predominantly middle class, the Social Democrats adopted a strategy of extending "social benefits not just to the most vulnerable in the society . . . but to all, regardless of income," Board notes. This expansion of state largesse won the allegiance of middle-class voters but also caused the welfare state to balloon in size. Moreover, to counter the threat of growing unemployment, the ruling Social Democrats decided to create new jobs in the public sector, mainly at the local level.

As late as 1965, only one-fourth of Swedish women with children under age seven were employed outside the home, and most of these worked only part-time. Day-care centers were relatively scarce. But debate about "sex roles" became a national passion during the 1960s. The egalitarian society, it was argued, required the modification, or even elimination, of different sex roles for men and women. Progressives argued persuasively that women, even those with young children, should have the right to pursue a career. Between 1965 and 1980, the proportion of working women with preschool children rose from 27 to 64 percent.

Child care, as a result, became another important function of the welfare state. Virtually all the growth in employment since the early 1960s, according to University of Chicago economist Sherwin Rosen, has resulted from women entering the labor force and working in a local *dagis* (day-care center) or in other local government jobs. Indeed, he points out in a recent National Bureau of Economic Research study, it is precisely in the government's "greatly enlarged role in household and family activities" that Sweden differs so markedly from advanced Western countries outside Scandinavia.

Swedes liked to think that, in this as in other matters, the rest of the world sooner or later would follow their example. During the 1960s and '70s, when Sweden acquired a reputation—undoubtedly much exaggerated—for sexual permissiveness, Swedish leaders argued that a global change in sexual mores was under way. "I think that young people in the United States feel very much the same as young Swedes," said Ingvar Carlsson, then the minister of education. "But the United States authorities are slow in following up developments. In Sweden, we are quicker." The ensuing decades seemed, for better or worse (or both), to bear him out.

But Sweden's swollen public sector, observe Swedish economists Magnus Henrekson, Lars Jonung, and Joakim Stymne, had definite drawbacks: it made the economy less efficient and less able "to adapt to shocks and disturbances." This contributed to the growth rate's decline in the 1970s and '80s. So did the globalization of the economy. For a century,

Sweden had enjoyed what economists call comparative advantages, in the form of a relatively well-educated populace and a rich supply of raw materials that were in demand—and the result was sustained and rapid economic growth. But globalization changed the conditions of production and the international division of labor, and made Sweden’s traditional advantages less important.

To foster continued rapid economic growth, the economists say, Sweden needed to continually develop new “comparative advantages,” through investment in human capital, research and development, product development, and organizational changes. Overall flexibility in the system was required to enable it to adapt. Instead, Henrekson and his colleagues say, after the international oil crisis “shock” of the early 1970s and later economic blows, Sweden became less competitive in the international economy. But the Swedish economy’s serious weaknesses only gradually became apparent, allowing Swedes to continue to think they could go on as before.

**W**hile it lasted, Sweden’s golden age was the most extraordinary period in Swedish history. The nation was rich. It was at peace, both with itself and with the rest of the world. Perhaps most important, Sweden stood for something: social democracy, humanitarian values, equality, rationality—the Swedish model, the Middle Way. The world took notice. And it also observed, and was much impressed by, something else: Swedes’ rich talents in the various arts of design [see box].

During this same postwar, “harvest home” period, the great Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman achieved international fame with his dark, brooding films about good and evil. Ironically, Bergman had difficulty finding popular acceptance at home, in part because his view of human nature contrasted so starkly with his country’s utopian vision. “Every time we looked at ourselves in the mirror,” writes noted Swedish drama critic Leif Zirn in *Seeing Bergman* (1992), “we saw that we were successful, healthy, rational, and right-minded. Accidents could still happen, but in principle, Sweden had become a land without tragedies.” But that is not the country we see in such Bergman films as *The Silence* (1963) and *Persona* (1966). Bergman’s characters, notes Zirn, “suffer, they are plagued by guilt, caught up in their neuroses, and they refuse to become like everybody else—adult, cooperative, integrated.” They appear unaware of their country’s vaunted effort to cure “all ills of the psyche by means of material rewards.”

Eventually, Swedes would come to wonder if their conception of the welfare state was not too materialistic. During the golden decades, however, it seemed just fine. “From 1945 to 1975, Sweden was the best society that has ever existed in the world,” recalls Harry Schein, an Austrian Jew who, like Georg Klein, sought refuge from Hitler in Sweden and achieved success there as, among other things, founder and president of the Swedish Film Institute and president of the Swedish Investment Bank.

Most Swedes, middle-aged and older, have similar memories of that time—and they have had the greatest difficulty adjusting their outlook today. “Upon reflection,” says Schein, who writes a column for *Dagens Nyheter*, “it is easy to see that the ‘Swedish model’ evolved more through luck than skill. It isn’t so remarkable that conditions now are declining and that times have gotten tougher. What is remarkable is that this golden epoch from 1945 to 1975 happened at all.”

During the late 1960s and early ’70s, when Swedes still saw themselves

## The Swedish Genius for Design

In one of the more enduringly perceptive portraits of the Swedish character, British writer Paul Britten Austin describes the Swedes' most distinctive talent.

*To anyone with the least sense of beauty Sweden is the most delightful of countries. No hoardings, notices, advertisements disfigure its highways. The home, the office, the nice restaurants and coffee shops, the modern churches and pleasing suburbs, even the sense of beauty revealed in the tasteful arrangement of goods in shop windows, all are like an exquisite stage set to which the Swede is never done putting the finishing touches. . . . Each new hotel is an objet d'art. Its kitchens, no less than its restaurant or bedrooms, are a joy to the eye. Everyone cares that it shall be so. His environment must be människovärdig, "worthy of human beings." What medieval society lavished on churches and abbeys, he lavishes with something of the same spontaneous delight on shaping the goods of everyday life. . . . It's not surprising that Sweden and Scandinavia have revolutionized the world's ideas of design.*

*Into the innermost recesses of industrial processes the Swede brings this feeling for aesthetic values. Some of the most beautiful Swedish films are documentaries celebrating the unwitting beauties of ball-bearings, iron-ore, or the Stockholm gasworks. "The Swede," writes Ilya Ehrenberg,*

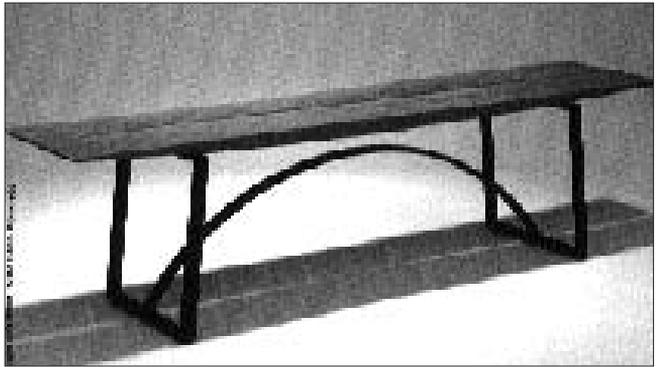
*"is the poet of matter." The harder, more immalleable the materials, the greater his poetry. He is as ready to make beautiful cutlery out of nylon and stainless steel as out of silver. Anyone can distinguish at a glance Scandinavian furniture from its foreign imitators. In the original there is a built-in love of wood—of its surfaces, its masses, its joinery, bulk, grain—that cries out for loving hands to stroke it. To make such things one must also love wood more than people. . . . The very timber becomes a sort of soul-substance, expressing life's possibilities—and its impossibilities. A Swedish chair is a poem on your carpet.*

*So with glass.*

*What is more fragile, yet more substantial? More fluid, yet more solid? More firmly there, even while it isn't there? More cold, yet more passionate? There are pieces of such glass as seem to express the whole soul of Sweden: its remoteness, its stillness, its silence, its rigidity, its intellectuality—all its complexity of light and prism, ready to catch and welcome each gleam of the sun, or, when the sun isn't there, to be a miniature sun on its own. They are like crystals, in which the Swedish psyche, gazing, sees a vision of a universe immaculate, complex, yet fundamentally understandable and controllable, reflected in a hundred flashes of light.*

*Let no one think this type of creativity peripheral, a byproduct of Swedishness. It, too, is of its very essence. Just as the exquisite furniture is called in to replace the unsatisfactoriness of the guests and the social-welfare machine renders superfluous too personal an engagement in other's fates, so this innocent paradisiac ideal, from which all complexities, uncertainties, disappointments are banished, comes to serve in lieu of spiritual ideals which, in other lands, it may be, hardly envisage perfection, but humbly strive within the terms of man's ordinary condition.*

—Paul Britten Austin, in *On Being Swedish* (1968).





*Palme: he deplored U.S. role in Vietnam.*

as “successful, healthy, rational, and right-minded,” they evinced an increased interest in foreign affairs. “The Swedes take evident pride in Sweden’s uniqueness, its vanguard role on the international scene,” American writer Susan Sontag wrote after she journeyed to the peace-loving land in 1968 to make a film. Other Americans were not so taken with neutralist Sweden, especially after Olof Palme became prime minister in 1969. An outspoken critic of U.S. policy in Vietnam, he made no secret of his pride in the fact that Sweden had given asylum to several hundred American deserters. By 1972, Washington

was so offended by Palme’s statements and actions that it briefly withdrew the U.S. ambassador to Sweden. After the war ended, Palme turned his rhetorical guns on Western colonialism and on the East-West arms race (managing to ignore the fact that Sweden was a major manufacturer of armaments).

In 1976, in part because of weariness with the strident Palme, in part because of new opposition to the government’s decades-long policy favoring use of nuclear power, the Swedes turned the Social Democrats out of office. After more than four decades in power, they were replaced by a coalition of Liberals, Moderates, and Center Party members, in various less-than-inspiring combinations. Palme and his party would be restored to power six years later (in part because of the Soviet submarine episode in 1981), but during the interregnum, Swedish government and society continued largely as before.

**A**nd the Middle Way continued to come undone. After Palme’s assassination in 1986, Swedish prime ministers would never again walk unguarded in the streets of Stockholm. Evil, it now had to be assumed, was permanently at large in utopia’s capital city. With the death of the somewhat imperious Palme—the best-known, if not necessarily the best-liked, Swedish prime minister since Hjalmar Branting—Sweden’s golden epoch of social democracy had its coda.

Palme’s death, and his replacement by the more reserved deputy prime minister, Ingvar Carlsson, led to an immediate diminution of the Swedish voice in international affairs. It also triggered some tumultuous—and very un-Swedish—fighting between Left and Right. And, by coincidence, the Swedish economy soon began an obvious downward slide toward disaster.

First, the growth in the annual GDP—which had averaged 2.0 percent annually during the 1980s—slowed; then it stopped. Then the economy actually began to shrink: the GDP decreased by 1.1 percent in 1991. Meanwhile, the rapid expansion of the public sector continued. By 1990, the total value of all forms of state-dispensed insurance, pensions, and subsidies had mushroomed from 31 billion kronor in 1970 to 573 billion kronor, and the number

of public service workers increased from less than 30 percent of the entire Swedish work force to almost 40 percent.

Such expansion necessitated ever-higher taxes. By 1990, the average family of four was paying about 55 percent of its income in taxes, and at the upper income levels, the tax rate had soared to 72 percent. One did not need to be a professional economist to realize that this tax burden was hurting productivity.

Economic growth in Sweden during the previous decade had been much the same as elsewhere in Western Europe, but it was based to a much greater extent on higher employment. Productivity (output per worker) had shown only weak growth—less than one percent in 1990. Thanks to a public insurance system open to abuse, average sick days per worker rose between 1983 and '88 by nearly one-third, from 18 days to 23, while the average actual Swedish work week shrank to an anemic 31 hours.

Sweden had kept up full (or almost full) employment—one of the chief boasts of the Swedish model—but at the cost of letting the economy overheat. In 1990, fueled by wage and price increases, inflation rose to more than 10 percent. For Swedish exporters, the worsened state of the economy meant sagging market shares and weaker earnings. Between 1990 and '91, the nation's exports decreased by 2.4 percent.

The truth could no longer be ignored: something was seriously amiss with the Swedish model.

In mid-1990, Prime Minister Carlsson took forceful corrective action. First, in a radical departure from Social Democratic practice, he sought to halt the country's runaway inflation by introducing an across-the-board freeze on wages, prices, interest rates, and dividends, as well as a two-year ban on strikes. Opposition to the plan was fierce, particularly from the Social Democrats' usual allies, the Communists. Except for the wage freeze, however, Carlsson's bitter medicine ultimately was swallowed.

At the same time, the increasingly embattled prime minister, with the help of one of the leading non-socialist parties, the Liberals, implemented a tax reform that reduced marginal taxation. For the average family of four, the tax bite dropped to around 40 percent.



*Attractive and affordable housing, such as this in the city of Göteborg, stands as one of the accomplishments of the Middle Way.*

Despite such efforts, the economic situation worsened. Unemployment rose in 1991 to 4.9 percent, of which 2.0 percent were in various government-financed or government-subsidized job-training or work programs. Rising unemployment meant greater outlays for such programs, on top of Sweden's "normal" 90 percent unemployment benefits. Since tax revenues were declining, in part as a result of the new tax reform, the outcome was a huge budget deficit.

Swedes were losing confidence in Social Democratic stewardship, and not only because of the economy. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 cast a further pall on the party, and on its two ex-allies, the Lefts (formerly the Communists) and the Greens. The latter radical group had won its first seats in the Riksdag in the 1988 election. Now, all three parties were due for a fall.

The 1991 elections—with a high (though not unusual) turnout of more than 90 percent—resulted in a substantial shift to the right. The biggest winners, the Moderates, gained 14 seats, while their fellow centrist parties, the Liberals and the Center (or Agrarians), lost 11 apiece. The Social Democrats took a big hit, losing 18 seats, while the Lefts dropped five and the Greens failed even to reach the four percent of the total vote required to be eligible to take any seats at all in the parliament.

The political landscape was further altered by the arrival of two new right-wing parties: the Christian Democrats and the New Democracy. The former group, which garnered 26 seats, could hardly be called sensational. But the far-right New Democracy, a populist party formed by Ian Wachtmeister, a flamboyant industrialist, and Bert Karlsson, a fairground owner, was a different case. Coming out of nowhere to win 25 seats in the legislature, the New Democracy had couched its largely nativist appeal in thinly veiled xenophobic terms. Although not invited to join the new minority center-right government formed by Moderate chairman Carl Bildt, the extremist New Democracy now, incredibly, held the balance of power in the Riksdag. It was not a hopeful sign.

Civilized Sweden was headed for rough waters—and the biggest waves continued to be economic. Taking his cue from Britain's Margaret Thatcher, who had brought about a conservative counterrevolution in her country, the new Swedish chief executive, Carl Bildt, set out to cut back Sweden's overgrown welfare state. Knowing that his time in office might be short, Bildt moved quickly in several directions.

The government reduced taxes further, and slashed, or at least trimmed, numerous social benefits. The first day of sick leave, for example, now became unpaid. The government also lifted some of the social burden off the shoulders of employers, reducing mandatory payments for employee benefits and eliminating many regulations on industry.

"This is like the fall of the Berlin Wall!" exclaimed a representative of the building industry, after regulations letting local authorities have a say on almost every detail of the design of a proposed building were abolished. "Socialism is gone!"

Well, not quite. Although the state bulked large in every aspect of Swedish life, Sweden, contrary to myth, had never practiced true socialism. After a half-century of Social Democratic hegemony, the means of production in Sweden remained almost entirely in private hands. And in this small kingdom, those private hands were relatively few. As much as the country had striven for egalitarianism, Sweden's corporate world

remained under the domination of about a dozen wealthy families, including the Wallenbergs, the Bonniers, and the Stenbecks. The Wallenbergs, the most powerful of them, alone owned 40 percent of the securities on the Stockholm stock market.

Capitalism had always been alive and well in Sweden, at least on a certain stratospheric level. The Social Democrats had allowed the Wallenbergs and the other families to retain their wealth and never seriously challenged their control over certain industries. (The Bonnier family, for example, virtually monopolizes Swedish publishing.) Sweden was not, nor had it ever been, a truly socialist nation, even though the omnipresent and intrusive state often made it feel like one.

Bildt was not disposed to challenge Sweden's powerful families, but he did hope to nourish the country's anemic entrepreneurial class with his tax cutting and rules slashing—and to a certain extent, he succeeded. In addition, as part of his long-range plan to make Sweden internationally competitive again, Bildt and education minister Per Unckel put considerable thought and money into education, particularly higher education and research. Over the strong opposition of the Social Democrats, the university sector was thoroughly deregulated. For the first time, Sweden's six universities and 29 colleges were encouraged to compete among themselves, both for state funds and for students.

The new non-socialist leadership also introduced competition into the state-run health sector, hoping thereby to improve productivity. Instead of giving hospitals their operating funds in bulk, Stockholm began paying the institutions on the basis of services rendered.

"Bildt did a lot, given the small amount of time he had," Greg McIvor, the Nordic correspondent of the *Guardian* and the *European*, told me last July. McIvor had settled in Stockholm in 1991, just in time to cover the Bildt "counterrevolution." "You also have to remember that he wasn't exactly the sort of chap to move you to tears. He was rather tiresome on the telly."

Not being telegenic would have hurt Bildt less had his term of office not coincided with Sweden's worst recession since the 1930s. Sweden's GDP continued to shrink, by about two percent in 1992 and again in 1993, and the jobless rate continued to soar, from 9 percent in 1992 to 12.5 percent the next year. Manufacturing and construction were especially hard hit, and so were younger workers. In 1993, 18 percent of 24-year-olds in the labor force were out of work.

With the economy declining, and the amount of unemployment benefits being doled out mounting ever higher, the Bildt government's tax cuts led to an expanding deficit, from 7.4 percent of the annual GDP in 1991 to 13.5 percent a year later. To deal with the deficit, Bildt gained Social Democratic support for two far-reaching austerity packages: one aimed at reducing public expenditures, the other at shifting the tax emphasis from production to con-



*Sweden in the '90s: A homeless man occupies a castoff trailer at a dump outside Stockholm.*

sumption. Despite the unusual political consensus, the international currency markets were far from impressed. After several weeks of fiscal bedlam in the fall of 1992, with tens of billions of kronor flowing out of the country, on November 19, 1992, the Bank of Sweden was forced to allow the krona to float. The Swedish currency immediately dropped 20 percent in value before beginning to stabilize.

The fate of the Bildt government was probably sealed on that day.

Only in 1994 did the situation begin to turn around. The economy posted a 2.2 percent rate of growth, its first expansion in three years. Exports, which had hit a low of 326 billion kronor in 1992 reached more than 471 billion. The center-right government deserved much of the credit for the modest, export-led recovery—but the electorate, which polls showed had already shifted leftward, was not willing to acknowledge that.

Even so, many Swedes had begun to accept the unpleasant prospect that their myriad benefits might have to be reduced. A 1993 report to the parliament by a group of economists, headed by Professor Assar Lindbeck, drove the point home. Blaming “several decades of mistakes and reckless policies for Sweden’s plight,” Lindbeck and colleagues declared that Swedes had to get used to lower welfare payments, including sickness and unemployment benefits. The beneficiaries also had to make higher contributions, if the country’s finances were ever to be put in order.

So be it, Swedes murmured to themselves. But as the fall 1994 parliamentary elections were to reveal, many, if not most, preferred that the surgery be performed by the Social Democrats. Ingvar Carlsson’s party increased its share of the vote from less than 38 percent three years earlier to more than 45 percent, and gained 23 new seats in the Riksdag, for a total of 165. Its status as the dominant political group in Sweden was confirmed.

While Carl Bildt’s Moderate party held its own, enjoying a slight increase over the 22 percent of the vote it had won in 1991 and retaining its 80 seats, the three other non-socialist parties all saw their tallies drop, for a loss of 20 seats. To the relief of most Swedes, the far-right New Democracy—whose representatives had alienated even many of their own supporters with their raffish, un-Swedish deportment in parliament—were eliminated from the Riksdag altogether.

Despite the nascent economic recovery, Carlsson’s new minority government faced a grim situation. Citing the “heavy burden of public sector debt,” which had rocketed from 16 billion kronor in 1991 to 168 billion just three years later, Moody’s downgraded Sweden’s long-term foreign currency debt rating to one that was lower than relatively impoverished Spain’s.

Sweden needed strong medicine—and the Social Democrats were now willing to prescribe it. The Carlsson government proposed a four-year, \$15 billion program of spending cuts and tax increases, and even put forward, for the first time ever, a capital gains tax. Among the most widely felt measures were a \$17 reduction in the monthly allowance of \$100 per child which the government had provided to every family, regardless of need, and a discontinuance of the 50 percent student railway discount. The latter provoked large nationwide student demonstrations, but the government refused to back down.

“No other government in Europe has the strength to do what we are doing,” proclaimed finance minister Persson, with some justification (as recent events in France have shown). No ministry was spared his scalpel, including foreign

affairs, which was forced to abandon its established formula of one percent of the GDP for foreign aid and opt for a somewhat smaller outlay instead.

As a result of the government's austerity program, Persson claimed, the budget deficit would be reduced from more than 11 percent of GDP in 1994 to seven percent this year, then to five percent or less by 1998.

Crucial to Persson's calculations was the expectation that people would spend just as much and save less. It was also hoped that they would work harder—those people who had jobs, that is. Implicitly, the government had abandoned the long-time Social Democratic commitment to full employment and was resigning itself to a jobless rate of 12 percent. "There is a difference between what we have to do for economic reasons and long-term ideological goals," Ingvar Carlsson had said four years before, in defense of his less severe austerity package of 1990. But without full employment, or something close to it, many wondered, what remained of Social Democratic ideology, not to mention the *folkhemmet*?

"We have come to the point where we must begin to get used to an unemployment rate of 10 to 15 percent," Harry Schein observed. "This is something new for us—an incredible pressure on society."

The Lefts, for one, refused to get used to it, breaking with the government over its employment policy in early 1995 and encouraging disaffected Social Democrats to come into their fold. Thus far, the Lefts seem to have been at least partly successful: the party made an unexpectedly strong showing last September in the elections for the European Parliament. When Carlsson, who had led the original campaign to say yes to Europe, announced his resignation, effective in March 1996, many analysts thought it might improve the chances of his party's slate of pro-EU candidates. But the move seemed to have the opposite effect.

Disenchantment—not just with European integration, but with the political system in general—seemed widespread, a reflection of the unsettling questions now loose in the Swedish psyche: *Who are we? Where are we? Where are we going?*

**T**roubled by more than just economics or politics, Swedes these days have developed doubts about their progressive and enlightened outlook. In 1944, the noted Swedish social scientist Gunnar Myrdal published *An American Dilemma*, the landmark study of race relations in America. A half-century later, the American dilemma has become, in a sense, the Swedish one as well.

Over the last decade, wave after wave of immigrants, more than a half-million in all, have come to Sweden from the Middle East, Africa, and most recently, the war-torn Balkans. In proportion to its population, Sweden—which has a liberal immigration policy and a reputation for granting political asylum—has taken in more outsiders than any other Western European nation. In 1994, the number of *invandrare* arriving at Swedish ports reached 83,000, an all-time high.

Generous to a fault, Sweden provides the newcomers with free medical care and free schooling, including lessons in Swedish, and houses them in clean, modern apartments in settler neighborhoods around the country. However, with continuing high unemployment, the state cannot give the immigrants what most of them want most: jobs. Nativist tensions reached an initial peak in 1990–91, when the first wave of refugees from former Yugoslavia arrived in Sweden, and fistfights between natives and immigrants



*Kurdish immigrants, along with native Swedes, take a stroll through an amusement park on a splendid summer day in Stockholm.*

became common. Though tensions have subsided in the last few years—witness the demise of the anti-immigrant New Democracy—many of the more recent newcomers say they feel less than welcome in their adopted country.

“Five years ago, this country was in denial of the fact that it even had an immigrant problem,” says Juan Fonseca, an immigrant from Colombia who represents the settler neighborhood of Rinkeby, just outside Stockholm, in parliament. “New Democracy was on the rise. The skinheads were prowling around. That phenomenon appears to be waning. Nevertheless, even if the state continues to offer basic services to immigrants, it can’t give them dignity without giving them jobs.”

Nationwide, about 40 percent of the immigrants who have come to Sweden over the past decade are unemployed. “There is a time bomb here,” Fonseca declared while touring his well-scrubbed, if ghettoized, jurisdiction last August. “It’s only a matter of time before the bomb goes off.” Fortunately, the murderous antforeigner riots and firebombings that have been the scourge of Germany and Great Britain in recent years have not been seen in Sweden—not yet, at least. Nevertheless, more than 100 racially motivated attacks were recorded last year. Fonseca himself went into hiding in November, reportedly as a result of nativists’ threats on his life. This moved Prime Minister Carlsson to express shame at Sweden’s failure to control its xenophobes. “We have been too soft-headed toward the racists,” the retiring prime minister said.

Meanwhile, however, pressure has been building on the Riksdag to enact more restrictive immigration legislation. “We will, of course, continue to accept Geneva Convention refugees,” Leif Blomberg, the blunt-spoken minister of immigration, told me. “But we simply can’t take everyone who wants to come here anymore. We can’t afford it.”

Blomberg may well have the most difficult job in the Swedish government today, but immigration is not the only social time bomb threatening to go off. There is also juvenile delinquency. After five separate incidents last summer in which youths 15 or younger were stabbed by other teens or preteens, the national police commissioner issued a plea, and an offer, to

all disaffected and violently inclined youths to turn in their knives and daggers to the nearest church or police station, without fear of penalty or reprisal. The cause was roundly taken up by *Expressen*, the leading Stockholm afternoon tabloid. “TURN IN YOUR KNIVES!” its front page cried for days, in a proper Swedish fit of public-spiritedness.

The campaign was a failure. After seven days, only one stiletto had been turned in, and it was plastic. The police commissioner publicly wondered whether it might be more worthwhile to make it easier for violent offenders aged 15 or younger to serve jail time. And sociologists once again took up the question of whether Swedes excessively coddle their young.

Many of the new juvenile delinquents, however, do not have proper families to coddle them. In Sweden, as elsewhere, the single-parent phenomenon has been on the rise, with 59,500 children born out of wedlock in 1993, nearly two-thirds again as many as in 1980, and almost three times the number in 1970. And divorce also has been taking its toll: 22,234 families broken in 1994, up 15 percent from 1990's total and a record high. For many years, the two-parent family had been stronger than marriage statistics (or the country's exaggerated reputation for sexual permissiveness) had led some observers to believe. Many couples who chose to live together during the 1960s and '70s, and who had children, had stayed together in common-law marriages. But now that was changing, and more and more children were growing up in single-parent households. (The increased unemployment might have been one of the culprits.) As the ties binding younger Swedes to the state, the great *folkhemmet*, and their own families, have been loosening, Sweden seems to be becoming a somewhat more violent society. Criminal assaults increased two-and-a-half times between 1980 and 1994, from 22,563 to 56,266. Wherever one turned, it seemed, the conclusion was unavoidable: Tage Erlander's “strong society” was not so strong any more.

And yet. . . . Sweden may no longer be immune to the crime, intergroup tensions, unemployment, and other difficult problems that have afflicted other Western societies, but it still can be an almost idyllic place in which to live—at least for a summer, which is how I experienced it last year, living in my rented atelier on Djurgården, in the center of Stockholm, in the shadow of Gröna Lund, the city's venerable amusement park. A number of Swedish expatriates, when informed of my plan to take up residence in the Swedish capital, warned me that the city had fallen on hard times and was now a dangerous and depressing place.

But I found Stockholm quite the opposite—particularly in comparison with New York, Paris, and the other major Western cities in which I have lived over the years. To be sure, one can see evidence, here and there, of the *folkhemmet's* changed condition. On this visit, I was distressed to see, for the first time, people rummaging through public garbage cans. Were they, I wondered, the same former mental patients who reportedly have been released prematurely because of budget cutbacks? I also noticed several mendicants sleeping in the parks. For Sweden, this was another novelty.

But not once over the course of 10 weeks was I bothered, accosted, or solicited. Not once did I see a public altercation like the ones I have grown used to encountering in my otherwise comfortable Manhattan neighborhood. Rarely, outside of bars, did I hear voices raised. As long as I stayed away from the Stureplan area, scene of the infamous Sture

Companiet massacre and a growing public nuisance, I was safe at any hour of the day. And so was my property, as I discovered when circumstances forced me to leave my bicycle unattended in front of the city's biggest department store for several days. I was amazed to return and find the bike still, gloriously, there. Obviously, Sweden is no longer utopia (if it ever was), but I found it very agreeable.

Most of the Swedes I encountered were honest, hard-working people with a palpable feeling of caring and community concern. I could see this in the unusually solicitous way in which pedestrians stepped aside for the handicapped; in the way the bus driver at my stop would wait as long as he could to pick up latecomers, greeting all with a simple but solid "Hej!"; and in the proud bearing of the captain of the ferry for Djurgården.

I was especially impressed with the high general level of education and literacy of Swedish society. Nearly everyone, it seemed, read one or more newspapers a day, watched the often dreary national news broadcasts or the MTV-style local news show, *TV Stockholm*, and could discuss the issues of the day with ease, and, when called for, with passion.

Then there is Swedish culture.

Not surprisingly, given the country's ongoing identity crisis, one of the biggest cultural trends today is nostalgia. Museum attendance is way up, according to Minister of Culture Margot Wallström. "More and more, people are looking to the past for answers," she observed, in her large, airy office overlooking Stockholm harbor. "I also believe that the move towards European integration, and the reaction to it, has enhanced people's appreciation of Swedish language and literature."

She also suggested that "we in Sweden must develop a new definition of welfare, a less materialistic definition—one that stresses culture." As to how this would be accomplished, however, the minister was less than specific.

When asked to name her favorite contemporary writers and artists, Wallström seemed at a loss. She is not the only one. Although the prolific playwright Lars Norén continues to be well regarded, and the writer Stig Larsson has many fans for his dark novels, the days when literary giants such as Harry Martinson and Pär Lagerkvist roamed the land seem long gone.

Perhaps the most refreshing development in Swedish publishing of late has been the founding of a new publishing house, LeanderMalmsten, by two brash young Swedes, Kajsa Leander and Ernst Malmsten. They have set themselves the daunting task of breaking open the monopolistic world of Swedish publishing. So far, however, LeanderMalmsten has specialized in bringing out translations of the works of American and British authors, and has steered away from publishing Swedish authors. The house recently created a sensation with its translation of *Prozac*, the controversial novel by American author Elizabeth Wurzel. Clearly, the book hit a nerve with the Swedish public: it has sold more than 20,000 copies, a colossal number for Sweden. LeanderMalmsten promises to publish talented and up-and-coming Swedish writers—as soon as it can find them.

The most lively of the arts in Sweden in recent years may be popular music. Thanks to the international success of English-singing groups such as Ace of Base and Roxette, Stockholm has become a "hot" music city. Yet there is little about the happy, bland music of these bands that can be considered distinctively Swedish—unless it is their knack for coming up with a nonthreatening,

collectivist sound. Personally, I would rather listen to the sensuous sounds of the Swedish chanteuses Lisa Nilsson and Eva Dahlgren, both of whom record in their native language and are well known throughout Scandinavia.

As for that other art for which Sweden gained international renown, the art of film, the situation today seems, to put it generously, a little murky. The Swedish Film Institute still manages to produce 20 or more features a year, a remarkable output for a country Sweden's size—but getting Swedish cineastes to see the checkered results is another matter. (Native filmmakers who manage to draw more than 100,000 people into the theaters are rewarded with a state grant of one million kronor.) Of the current

generation of Swedish filmmakers, perhaps the most talented is Suzanne Osten, writer and director of such thoughtful historical melodramas as *Guardian Angel* and *The Brothers Mozart*.

Curiously, the most successful recent Swedish-made film—and the one which Swedes insist captures the essence of Swedishness better than any other recent film—an enchanting rural comedy-cum-morality play entitled *House of Angels*, was written, directed, and produced by an Englishman, Colin Nutley.

Of course, there are still the magnificent films of Ingmar Bergman, those penetrating masterpieces that reveal a world so much at odds with the assumptions of the Middle Way, a world from which Swedes so long averted their eyes.

Lately, Swedes have been showing new interest in Bergman. Last year, the largest-ever retrospective of his works went on a world tour and was much discussed in his native land. With the passing of the long-cherished Middle Way, the vaunted Swedish model, Bergman's dark films may hold clues to the uncertain future. As Swedes seek a more realistic answer to the questions of who they are and where they are going, they may find that, in tragedy and a sense of limits, their best guide to life after the fall has been around all along.



*Stockholm's water festival draws hundreds.*

## CURRENT BOOKS

# *A Philosopher with a Difference*

ISAIAH BERLIN

By John Gray. Princeton Univ. Press. 183 pp. \$19.95

by Gertrude Himmelfarb

There is a story, perhaps apocryphal, of the Yiddish theater whose marquee proclaimed, "Tonight / *King Lear* / Translated and Much Improved." Isaiah Berlin, English intellectual par excellence, who came to England at the age of 11, who dearly loves and is much beloved by his adopted country, but who still thinks of himself three-quarters of a century later as a Russian Jew ("That is how I was born and that is who I will be to the end of my life"), would appreciate that story. He might even appreciate being translated and improved, as it were, by John Gray—appreciate the motive, at least, of an admirer who can think of no better way to pay homage to Berlin than to make of him the very model of an English academic philosopher.

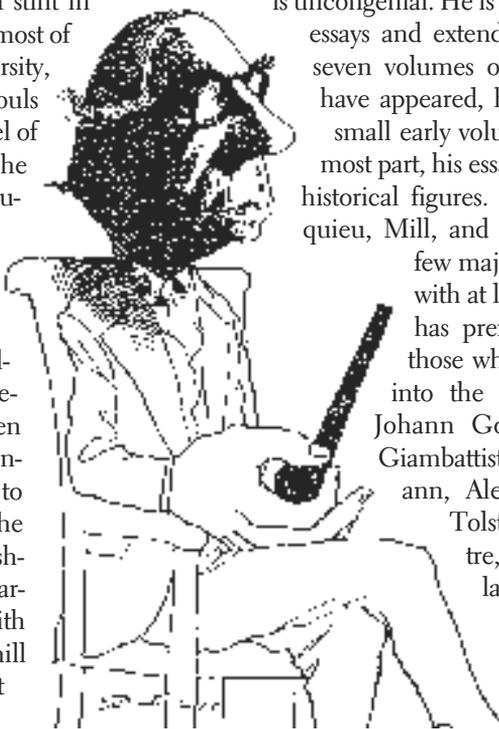
As Berlin is an Englishman with a difference, so is he an academic with a difference. Except for his wartime service in America and a brief stint in Moscow, he has spent most of his life at Oxford University, much of it at All Souls College, the very citadel of British academia. But he is hardly the typical insular professor. His friends and acquaintances include almost every public figure and intellectual of any consequence in half a dozen countries. (When Winston Churchill asked to meet Berlin, then at the British embassy in Washington, an underling arranged a meeting with Irving Berlin; Churchill soon repaired that error.) And Berlin's

interests and knowledge range well beyond the academy, into politics, literature, music, art, and whatever else appeals to his ever-curious, ever-engaged mind.

So too is Berlin a philosopher with a difference. Indeed, he insists that he is not a philosopher, that he abandoned that calling early in his career, when he found the prevailing mode of analytic philosophy too attenuated, too removed from reality. Instead, he describes himself as a historian of ideas (an intellectual historian, as he would be called in America). And it is in that role that he has made his distinctive contribution to scholarship.

It is ironic, therefore, to find Berlin's work subjected to a systematic philosophical analysis by Gray (a political theorist at Oxford), when Berlin himself has eschewed just such an analysis—not, obviously, because he is incapable of it, but because it is uncongenial. He is a prolific writer, but of essays and extended essays, not books; seven volumes of his collected essays have appeared, his only book being a small early volume on Marx. For the most part, his essays focus on particular historical figures. Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Mill, and Marx are among the few major figures he has dealt with at length. For the rest, he has preferred to write about those who have never made it into the philosophical canon: Johann Gottfried von Herder, Giambattista Vico, Johann Hamann, Aleksandr Herzen, Leo Tolstoy, Joseph de Maistre, Georges Sorel, Nikolai Bakunin.

Moreover, Berlin's essays read less like articles in philosophical journals



than like the conversation for which he is renowned—erudite, spirited, expansive, with names, ideas, and allusions tumbling out almost breathlessly. “I’ve never written much,” he recently told an interviewer. “I learned to dictate to secretaries while at the embassy in Washington.” Dictated or not, his essays resemble his conversation—just as his conversation has all the fluency and complexity of a well-wrought essay.

What Berlin’s essays do not have, however, is the unified, systematic, comprehensive character that Gray tries to derive from them. The opening paragraph of Gray’s book announces its theme: “The central claim of this book is that all of Berlin’s work is animated by a single idea of enormous subversive force. This is the idea, which I call values-pluralism, that ultimate human values are objective but irreducibly diverse, that they are conflicting and often uncombinable, and that sometimes when they come into conflict with one another they are incommensurable; that is, they are not comparable by any rational measure.” Gray baptizes Berlin’s philosophy “agonistic pluralism,” and the political outlook associated with it, “agonistic liberalism” (from the Greek word *agon*, meaning competition or rivalry).

That pluralism is one of the principal ideas in Berlin’s work is indisputable. That it is the “single idea” animating all his work is not. Indeed, the very notion of a single idea is incongruous, for it goes against the grain of that very pluralism. Berlin might be speaking of himself when he praises Montesquieu for not being “obsessed by some single principle, seeking to order and explain everything in terms of some central moral or metaphysical category.” He also commends Montesquieu for doing what he himself has so successfully done: “His virtuosity reaches its highest peak, he is most himself, when he tries to convey a culture or an outlook or a system of values different from his own and from that of the majority of his readers.”

Gray’s interpretation of Berlin depends, he says, on “several strategic omissions.” He has not made use of Berlin’s unpublished writings, early philosophical papers, Russian studies, or wartime dispatches; nor has he attended to his friendships, personality,

or conversation. Instead he has chosen to focus on Berlin’s “political thought, and on the moral theory, and the conception of philosophy, that it expresses and embodies,” believing this to be his most enduring intellectual achievement and his great contribution to liberalism.

It is an impoverished political thought, however, that cannot accommodate Berlin’s essays on the Russians, which are among his most passionate and stimulating writings. For example, his essay on Herzen and Bakunin elucidates, even better than his essay on Mill, Berlin’s own views of liberty. It was after reading Herzen’s diary, which expressed so tragically both Herzen’s zeal for revolution and his respect for the individual freedom and dignity that were imperiled by revolution, that Berlin declared Herzen to be “my hero for the rest of my life.”

Another conspicuous omission is the *A* maxim that Berlin has made famous. His essay on Tolstoy opens with a quotation from the Greek poet Archilochus: “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.” “The Hedgehog and the Fox” is one of Berlin’s best-known essays, and scores of commentators have joined him in assigning intellectual and cultural figures to one or the other category. Plato, Dante, Hegel, and Dostoevsky are Berlin’s prime specimens of the hedgehog; Aristotle, Erasmus, Shakespeare, and Goethe, of the fox. Tolstoy is ambiguous, for he “was by nature a fox, but believed in being a hedgehog.”

Berlin himself is a fox who believes in being a fox. He has learned many things from the varied thinkers he has studied, and he has acquired an abiding distrust of any form of monism. It is this distinctive play of mind that Gray tries to fit into the framework of academic philosophy by such awkward contrivances as “agonistic pluralism” and “agonistic liberalism.” In doing so, he is in danger of creating a Berlin who, like Tolstoy, is by nature a fox but believes in being a hedgehog.

What makes Berlin an unregenerate fox is his rejection not only of such obvious monistic philosophies as Platonism and Hegelianism but also of the Enlighten-

ment, for it too posits universal values. It views the good life as based upon reason and human nature, and it conceives of history as progressing in accord with some purpose, or *telos*, with perfectibility as its end.

For Berlin, unlike the *philosophes*, one's values are not necessarily rational, or universal, or compatible with the values of others, or even compatible with one's other values; nor are they always conducive to one's own good, let alone the good of society or the progress of humanity.

Berlin insists that his idea of pluralism is not relativistic. Values are objective, he says, because they can be understood and appreciated even by individuals and cultures that do not share them. And they can be understood and appreciated by them because "fully rational people" have certain values "in common," and "what makes men human is what is common to them." For Gray, this "objective pluralism" redeems Berlin from both the familiar moderate kind of relativism and the radical relativism of postmodernism.

Yet this denial of relativism is not entirely persuasive, for it presupposes precisely the common values and full rationality that Berlin elsewhere questions. Still less satisfactory is Gray's attempt to reconcile Berlin's critique of the Enlightenment with his commitment to "Enlightenment values of toleration, liberty and human emancipation from ignorance and oppression." This duality in Berlin is reflected in his essay on Mill, with its spirited defense of "negative" as against "positive" liberty, and in his writings on the "Counter-Enlightenment," which suggest the inadequacies of just this idea of liberty.

These essays on the "Counter-Enlightenment" (the term is Berlin's) may be his major contribution to intellectual history, for he resurrects thinkers—Vico, Herder, Hamann, de Maistre—who have been neglected by the dominant school of liberal philosophy. These thinkers differed profoundly among themselves, but they shared a pluralistic view of society and history that made them sympathetic to nationalism rather than universalism, romanticism rather than rationalism, and,

in some cases, authoritarianism rather than liberalism.

Berlin is fascinated by all of them even while being wary of some of them. Even in Joseph de Maistre (1754?–1821), the least congenial of them, he finds insights into human character, society, nationality, and language that make both conventional liberals and conservatives seem vacuous and naive. De Maistre, Berlin concludes, is neither a theocratic reactionary nor a modern authoritarian but an "ultra-modern" totalitarian and protofascist. This judgment may be excessive, given de Maistre's reverence for religion and his contempt for militarism. But it is interesting that Berlin could suspend that judgment long enough to appreciate those qualities of de Maistre that, if not totalitarian, are surely illiberal.

Gray agonizes over the dilemma of reconciling Berlin's sensitivity to (and, often, sympathy with) the Counter-Enlightenment with his commitment to the liberalism that is so much a product of the Enlightenment, and then of reconciling pluralism itself with liberalism. Does freedom, the primary value of liberalism, have any "privileged" status in a world of differing, discordant, and transient values? Does liberalism have any claim on reason, if reason itself has no universal validity? Is liberalism, Gray asks, "ideally the best for all human beings, or is [it] to be regarded as one form of life among many, with no foundation in human nature or the history of the species as a whole?"

It is a compelling question, worthy of the efforts of the many academic philosophers Gray invokes to help resolve it. He himself, abetted by Richard Rorty, finally concludes that liberalism has no universal validity—that pluralism, in effect, trumps liberalism. But that is Gray's own resolution, not that of Berlin, who can be quoted on both sides of the issue, sometimes suggesting that there is a radical disjunction between pluralism and liberalism, sometimes that the two are reconcilable.

If Berlin is not helpful in answering the question, it is because it is not his question; it is Gray's. The title of the most recent volume of Berlin's essays, *The Crooked Timber*

of *Humanity*, is a quotation from Kant: “Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made.” Berlin takes this as an admonition against rationalism, dogmatism, and utopianism. But it also applies to philosophy, and not only Kantian philosophy but the philosophical enterprise itself, which is always engaged in trying to straighten out “the crooked timber of humanity.” This quotation, together with

that from Archilochus, should put us on guard against any attempt to “translate and improve” Berlin. We should be content to read and appreciate him as the fox he is, and not try to make of him any sort of hedgehog.

> GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB’S most recent book, *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*, has just been issued in paperback by Vintage.

## *Victory Under Scrutiny*

WHY THE ALLIES WON

By Richard Overy. W. W. Norton. 416 pp. \$29.95

by Charles Townshend

Did the Allies win World War II, or did Germany and Japan lose it? That is the question animating Richard Overy’s striking reconsideration of the Allied war effort. Overy, a professor of modern history at King’s College, London, confronts the conventional wisdom that the war’s outcome was practically inevitable. In his view, too many people, including respected historians, succumb to the temptation to let “the figures speak for themselves.” Accordingly, they conclude that the Allied preponderance in population and industrial production doomed the Axis powers to defeat. Overy finds this assumption crude even at the material level, since more is not necessarily better. Further, he holds that it disguises the real story: that the Allies could not sit back and wait, that they had to reinvent their war-fighting skills in order to achieve victory over enemies who were astonishingly tough, especially the Germans.

In seeking a more sophisticated explanation of the war’s outcome, Overy has set himself a daunting task. Not least, it calls for mastery of a phenomenal mass of detail. The key clashes of this global conflict were not just dramatic encounters such as the Battle of Midway and the landing at Omaha Beach, but prolonged struggles of attrition: in the middle of the Atlantic, in the skies over the Ruhr and

Berlin, amid the ruins of Stalingrad. Moreover, this was a “total war,” in which the beliefs and actions of entire peoples weighed in the balance. To dissect and scrutinize such a vast conflict requires all the skills demonstrated in Overy’s earlier studies: *The Air War* (1980) and *The Nazi Economic Recovery* (1982). The result may not be flawless, but few other historians could even attempt it.

Giving some credence to the traditional idea of the “decisive battle,” Overy offers terse, vivid accounts of five crucial campaigns—the Pacific war from the Coral Sea to Midway, the Battle of the Atlantic, the Allied strategic bombing campaign, the battles of Stalingrad and Kursk, and the Normandy invasion—that are as good as any available. Then he shifts focus to four structural dimensions—economic strength, military technology, decision making, and (more awkwardly) morality—making it clear that the Allies won all the decisive battles, achieved awesome economic preponderance, chose better weapons, made fewer strategic mistakes, and had right on their side. Yet even so, Overy asks, could it all still have gone wrong?

At the heart of his reply is a lucid discussion of war economies and technology. Here the numbers speak eloquently—but not of a simple gap in crude resources,

much less in technological capacity. Rather they show that Germany, all but a superpower by 1942, failed to derive full military value from its economic and demographic resources. Consider just one astonishing statistic: in 1943, Germany produced 340 million tons of coal and 30 million tons of steel, as compared with the Soviet Union's 90 million of coal and 8 million of steel. Yet while Germany made 17,000 tanks and 27,000 heavy guns, the Soviet Union built no fewer than 24,000 tanks and 48,000 big guns. The results of Germany's productive failure were clear. During its titanic eastern front campaign, the German army suffered a steady "demodernization." At the start of the invasion of Russia, German industry's provision of up-to-date tanks, aircraft, and motor transport was scarcely adequate. By late summer 1942, even this provision was exhausted. In the wry caption to one of the book's well-chosen illustrations—German horse transport deep in Soviet territory—Overy notes, "This could almost be a scene from the American Civil War." By 1944, motorization was a distant memory for all but a few elite divisions.

Overy warns against a simple explanation. Much of the discrepancy between the two sides depended on the adaptive skills of the Allies. By 1942, the Soviet Union had lost over half its industrial base. Yet that year it produced not only more weapons than it had in 1941 but more than Germany—a staggering achievement that almost defies rational explanation. The resilience of the Soviet people, Overy says, would need a Tolstoy to do it justice. Also stupendous were the accomplishments of American industry. The production of two million trucks could almost be seen as decisive in itself. Henry Ford's Willow Run factory, new in 1942, nearly reached its 1944 target of building one B-24 bomber per hour (a phenomenally complex assembly involving a total of 1,550,000 parts).

Yet Overy is not persuaded by his own compelling examples that the war was indeed decided by Allied resources. Instead, he reminds us that these productive feats might well have been matched by Germany, if not Japan. Of course, some

of Germany's failure resulted from external pressures, notably the Allied bomber offensive. Overy credits this effort with having sharply limited the expansion of Germany's wartime production. But he does not quite grant that this check was decisive. Repeatedly, he gives more space to German failures than to Allied successes, finding in those failures a rich variety of explanations. Chiefly, he finds that Hitler never got a grip on economic organization because at heart he believed that it was less important than willpower. While the Allies went for simplicity in weapons specifications, the Germans imposed debilitating complications—the worst example being Luftwaffe procurement chief General Ernst Udet's requirement that even heavy bombers retain a dive-bombing capacity. A thicket of competing agencies made administration a bureaucratic nightmare. Complained the engineers at one research center: "Nobody would believe that so much inadequacy, bungling, confusion, misplaced power, failure to recognize the truth, and deviation from reason could really exist."

**T**he key to both German and Japanese failure was the subordination of efficiency to ideology. In Japan, the supremacy of a traditional military ethos distorted rational planning. In Germany, Nazi ideas spread throughout the system, leading to such absurdities as the virtual elimination of the country's largest and most modern motor manufacturer, Opel, because it was owned by General Motors. Hitler's misguided passion for building rockets drained enough resources for nearly a year's production of conventional aircraft. This was a systemic failure, not a collection of individual mistakes—though, to be sure, the system was abnormally dependent upon one individual, Adolf Hitler. As Overy's earlier biography of Hermann Goering shows, the baroque, chaotic nature of all Nazi decision making bore Hitler's stamp; Udet and Goering were his choices, too.

In the end, Overy does not quite overcome the conventional view that Allied victory was inevitable. Axis mistakes loom large in his telling. Acknowledging that

decisive battles such as Midway and Stalingrad hinged on a mixture of skill, courage, and sheer luck, he also affirms that they were decisive because they accelerated what was already a steepening decline in Axis material strength. He does not suggest that the Germans could have “won” at Stalingrad, even if they had reached the Volga. While this is not to say they were doomed, it comes rather close. Even the straw man of material determinism creeps into his description of the overwhelming supply backup for American combat troops, whose “fighting power” did

not always impress their opponents (and has been doubted by some modern analysts). Likewise, his assertion that the Allies won not least because their cause was just looks fairly conventional. But even if Overy does not resolve all the puzzles and paradoxes he raises, his incisive, persistent interrogation of the inner structures of this immense war makes this a uniquely challenging and rewarding account.

> CHARLES TOWNSEND is professor of history at the University of Keele. He is the author, most recently, of *Britain's Civil Wars* (1986).

## *Keepsakes of a Satirist*

*THE DIARIES OF DAWN POWELL  
1931–1965*

By Dawn Powell. Edited and with a introduction by Tim Page.  
Steerforth. 513 pp. \$32

*by Richard Selzer*

Other than the ledger of a business, a diary is the only book that is *kept*. The word implies faithfulness to the task, as in keeping at it, even as it conveys a sense of privacy, as in keeping a secret. It also suggests the tending and marshaling of thoughts that might wander away and be lost, as sheep would be, were it not for the shepherd who keeps them. The keep is also the deepest part of a castle, where the prisoners—in this instance, preferences, prejudices, urges, obsessions, and humiliations—are locked up at the same time they are given voice.

Private though the diarist's announced intention may be, it is likely that she does not keep the diary for herself alone, but in the still, small hope of making contact with others, the way an astronomer keeps his great electronic ear cocked at the void, palpitating for faint evidence that we are not alone in the universe. What is this incessant keeping if not a hankering for companionship, for that one dearest reader who will give you license, without let or hindrance, to “unpack your heart with words”? There is pathos in this diary

keeping, as if to stop would mean to die. And who knows? Maybe it would.

Call it prying, or prurience, but I confess my favorite literary genre is the diary. It is the most direct route to an author, and should that author be Dawn Powell, the entries are certain to be witty, acerbic, and touching. Only two years ago,



the name Dawn Powell would have elicited blank stares. Now, thanks to the whim of posterity and the resurrecting hand of Gore Vidal (who wrote an overview of her work), this excellent writer's reputation has been restored. For some 40 years—from the 1920s to the 1960s—Powell lived in lower Manhattan and situated her 15 satirical novels and many short stories there. It is hard to say which is more acute: her ear for speech, her eye for custom and habit, or her intuition for the relationship between tragedy and folly. Her fiction paints an incomparable portrait of her time: limited in its scope, perhaps, but impressive in its depth of perception. It can certainly hold its own with the work of such better-known peers as Dorothy Parker and Muriel Spark. It is no longer possible to make a study of 20th-century American literature without considering Powell. And now there is this superb edition of her diaries, unique among contemporary journals for its trenchant opinions and intimate views of many of the important figures of the time: Edmund Wilson, Ernest Hemingway, Mary McCarthy, John Dos Passos, Gore Vidal, Malcolm Cowley, Franz Kline.

In contrast with poems, plays, novels, and essays, a diary provides the writer with occasions for natural braggadocio, whining, and spleen venting. Elsewhere, such indulgences might be faults; here, they are pith. Besides, Dawn Powell is incapable of writing a clumsy sentence. She sparkles, hungry for experience, inhaling deeply the oxygen of laughter, yet also noting, "I learned early that the best way to be alone with your thoughts is to be funny. Laughter is a curtain behind which you can live your own life and think as you please—sort of a sound barrier."

Powell loved New York, and her work reflects an affectionate but unflinching view of the city. Sociable, yet craving solitude, she wrote: "People call you up till finally they stop and then you call them." Her fiction is peopled with hard-drinking men and women, many of them lonely, not knowing where their next meal is

coming from or whether they will be evicted onto the street—like Powell herself. With all the borrowing and lending going on, Polonius would not have been tolerated in this crowd. Yet, like Powell, these characters are gallant and dignified, never too broke to help a friend or relative in need.

Powell's friends and acquaintances were legion, and each is given a portrait, whether warmly compassionate or crackling with electricity. Truman Capote is of "the Southern Trash and crème de menthe school as against the mint julep school." Edmund Wilson "appears to ask questions . . . but pays no attention to the answers, though later they emerge. Now that his mind has enlarged into such a vast organization, it's as if conversation had to wait in the lobby till the message has been routed through the proper department. Sometimes it has to come back Monday." Stella Adler's "precise features are . . . chiseled by a dozen plastic surgeons . . . not one fold of fat drips carelessly over the photogenic silhouette"; the "Artless Blue" of her eyes is "now diluted with years of venom, so that . . . a flash of flame darts out when the vanity is hurt."

Most affecting are the entries that pertain to Powell's only child, her son, JoJo. From early childhood, JoJo was profoundly ill with what was diagnosed as schizophrenia; grown to manhood, he was permanently hospitalized. Yet even here, Powell leavens her sorrow with acute observation and brave humor—as when she fetches JoJo for an outing, and he makes a comically stilted little speech: "I feel the need of something hot—some substantial refreshment." It is typical of Powell to record his exact words, so that the moment, in all its tenderness and quirkiness, is not lost. Thanks to her precision, compassion, and verve—and to the meticulous editing of Tim Page—a lifetime of such moments may now be kept for good.

> RICHARD SELZER is a former professor of surgery at Yale University and the author, most recently, of *Raising the Dead* (1994).

# History

## *BLACK ATHENA REVISITED.*

Mary R. Lefkowitz and Guy MacLean Rogers, eds. Univ. of North Carolina Press. 544 pp. \$55 cloth, \$19.95 paper

According to the Italian historian Mario Liverani, "*Black Athena* must be the most discussed book on the ancient history of the Mediterranean world since the Bible." But if Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (Vol. I, 1987; Vol. II, 1991) has captured the imagination of the public, it has earned the author the enmity of many of his fellow scholars.

Bernal is the half-Jewish grandson of the eminent Egyptologist Sir Alan Gardner, and a Cornell University political scientist whose specialty is China. As Bernal tells it, *Black Athena* began in a search for his own ethnic and intellectual roots. That query brought him up against what he regards as the systematic anti-Semitic and racist bias of 18th- and 19th-century historiography. Hence his crusade, in *Black Athena*, "to lessen European cultural arrogance" by radically revising ancient history.

Lefkowitz, the co-editor of *Black Athena Revisited* and a professor of humanities at Wellesley College, has written another critique of Bernal's work called *Not Out of Africa*. But the present volume contains the assembled commentaries of leading classicists, Egyptologists, historians, archeologists, and physical anthropologists. At stake are two vital questions: First, is there any truth to Bernal's bold claim that the real cradle of Western civilization was not classical Greece but Africa? And second, what is the standard of truth by which such scholarly (some would say pseudoscholarly) claims can be measured?

Fired by a sense of injustice, Bernal pronounces on the modern—and historically irrelevant—concept of biological race. With a certain cynicism, he agreed to title his book *Black Athena* rather than *African Athena*, knowing that it would stir up controversy. He makes the misleading assertion that "many of the most powerful Egyptian dynasties . . . were made up of pharaohs whom one can usefully call black." This combustible topic gets cool-headed treatment from C. Loring Brace and a team of biological anthropologists at the University

of Michigan. Having compared Egyptian human remains statistically for a variety of traits, they find that Egyptians have changed very little since Predynastic times. No wonder a baffled Egyptian official, confronted recently by the peculiar racial politics surrounding the American discussion of ancient Egypt, felt obliged to protest that "Ramses II was neither black nor white but Egyptian."

Bernal also claims that Egyptians twice colonized Greece, citing not archeological evidence (none has ever been found) but "massive" linguistic borrowings. Cornell professors Jay H. Jasanoff and Alan Nussbaum (a linguist and a classicist, respectively) demonstrate that most of Bernal's proposed etymologies are based on no more than surface similarities. At one point, faced with Bernal's notion that the Greek *labúrinthos* comes from the Egyptian *Ny-m<sup>e</sup> t-R<sup>e</sup> ntr*, the authors throw up their hands: "We confess to finding this derivation wildly far-fetched even by Bernal's standards."

Bernal has injected new life into a field too frequently dry and arcane. But his scholarship, imposing though it might appear to the nonexpert, is highly dubious. As a professor at a great university and the grandson of a great scholar, he should know better. *Black Athena Revisited* will make it possible for others to know better as well.

—Elizabeth Sherman

## *A TWILIGHT STRUGGLE: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977–1990.*

By Robert Kagan. Free Press. 903 pp.  
\$37.50

Robert Kagan served as assistant secretary of state for Latin American affairs during the Reagan administration, and he regards U.S. support for the contras as essential to the eventual triumph of democracy in Nicaragua in 1990. But this book is more than an apologia for that policy. An insider's unvarnished account, it recalls the adage that if one likes sausage, one should not inquire too closely about how it is made. Kagan argues persuasively that the decision-making process was "chaotic, lurching, changeable, and often

inherently contradictory.”

Initially, Kagan writes, Reagan’s policy-makers were no more eager to “get tough” with the Sandinistas than Jimmy Carter had been. They decided with some reluctance to support the contras only after several diplomatic overtures had failed. At first, their goal was limited to pressuring the regime not to aid the rebels in El Salvador. But as the contras grew in number and strength, an incipient split within the administration widened between the “conservatives,” who saw the contras as a force for expelling the Sandinistas, and the “pragmatists,” who insisted that the contras were a political liability. During this battle, which lasted until well into Reagan’s second term, the Sandinistas learned to their frustration that the policy’s only durable element was agreement between the White House and a shifting congressional majority that the contra option should be retained as insurance that the Sandinistas would keep promises made at the negotiating table.

Kagan regards this policy of limited aid to the contras as a necessary but not sufficient condition for the Sandinistas’ eventual demise. Military pressure alone would not have sufficed either to topple them or to force them into elections. But combined with other factors—the Sandinistas’ mismanagement of the Nicaraguan economy, growing diplomatic isolation, and doubts about sustained Soviet support—contra aid sharply narrowed the regime’s options. By 1989, the Sandinistas came to see free elections as the only way they could keep power, but by then it was too late. Throughout the 1980s they had passed up too many opportunities to make peace on terms that would have saved their revolution. In the end, Kagan notes, they were “their own executioners.”

Regrettably, several hundred pages of unnecessary detail make *A Twilight Struggle* one of those books that would have been twice as good at half the length. And it is curious to see this former Reagan administration official use certain phrases without

apparent irony—such as “North American aggression” and (for U.S. encouragement of democratic elections) “hegemony.” Nevertheless, this is an impressive achievement that will surely become the standard work on a troubled chapter in U.S. foreign policy.

—Timothy Goodman

**MOTHERS OF INVENTION:  
*Women of the Slaveholding South in  
the American Civil War.***

By Drew Gilpin Faust. Univ. of North Carolina Press. 344 pp. \$29.95

“The surface of society, like a great ocean, is upheaved, and all relations of life are disturbed and out of joint.” So announced the

*Montgomery Daily Advertiser* in

July 1864. For Faust, a histori-

an at the University of

Pennsylvania, the key

word in this passage

would be “all.” Ob-

viously, the Civil

War disturbed the

relations between

blacks and whites.

But it also dis-

turbed those be-

tween men and

women. Faust ad-

mits that “histori-

ans’ use of the ana-

lytic categories of

race, class, and gen-

der has moved from

being regarded, first, as

innovative, then as fash-

ionable, to, recently, verging

on the banal.” But she does not

apologize for using these categories

herself, and for good reason. As her book

makes clear, “these were the categories by

which women of the South’s slaveholding

classes consciously identified themselves.”

Drawing on the letters, diaries, memoirs,

poetry, and fiction of 500 women belonging

to “the privileged and educated slaveowning

class,” *Mothers of Invention* tracks the myri-

ad ways these women were forced by war to

redefine their social role—even as they

struggled to preserve it. When their menfolk

departed for the front, delicate ladies were

thrust into positions as heads of households

accustomed to male authority backed up by

physical force. For example, many women

were terrified to punish their increasingly



restive slaves—and terrified not to. As one Texas wife, Lizzie Neblett, wrote to her husband, “I am so sick of trying to do a man’s business.”

Overcoming squeamish stomachs, these wives, sisters, and mothers also tended to the sick and wounded and buried the dead. Over time, their efforts to fill men’s shoes led them into the public sphere. Breaking with a tradition that had excluded them from public life, they joined together to lead prayer meetings, organize relief drives, teach school, and occasionally engage in espionage. But despite their commitment to slave society, Faust finds, the women’s enthusiasm for the Confederate cause waned as the war—and the casualty lists—lengthened. Some openly resisted the conscription of their remaining men. As one mother wrote to Jefferson Davis, “I need not tell you of my devotion to my country, of the sacrifices I have made, and of the many more I am willing to make. . . . But I want

my oldest boy at home.” Other women went further, expressing pacifist sentiments and encouraging their men to desert. Still others indulged in a “season of reckless frivolity,” throwing lavish parties that, according to the *Richmond Examiner*, turned the winter of 1864 into “a carnival of unhallowed pleasure” and made “a mockery of the misery and desolation that covers the land.”

Faust makes a convincing case that the Civil War forced a particular class of women to rethink the social and domestic order that had long undergirded their world. But, unlike their former slaves, who rejoiced at the changes wrought by war, these women derived a “new sense of self” from “desperation” and “the fundamental need simply to survive.” As Faust concludes, “‘Necessity’ . . . was in this sense truly ‘the mother of invention’; only ‘necessity,’ as Julia Davidson wrote her husband, John, ‘could make a different woman of me.’”

—Martha Bayles

## Science & Technology

### *THE ENCHANTED WORLD OF SLEEP.*

By Peretz Lavie. Translated by Anthony Berris. Yale Univ. Press. 288 pp. \$27.50

### *SLEEP THIEVES:*

*An Eye-Opening Exploration Into the Science & Mysteries of Sleep.*

By Stanley Coren. Free Press. 304 pp. \$24

“The only way to make money is to be awake all the time.” Sleep is a waste of time, according to this busy manager of a mutual fund quoted in *Sleep Thieves* by Stanley Coren, professor of psychology at the University of British Columbia. Both Coren and Peretz Lavie, the author of *The Enchanted World of Sleep*, dispute the proposition that we should sleep less. In their complementary books, they argue persuasively that we are a sleep-deprived society. Attempts to save time by not sleeping result in a continuum of disturbances ranging from daytime drowsiness to mental illness.

Both books provide excellent overviews of what we know and need to know about sleep. Lavie, dean of the Faculty of

Medicine and director of the Sleep Laboratory at Technion-Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa, takes a more scholarly approach. He stresses the biological aspect of sleep and reports on a number of fascinating experiments. One of the most remarkable is his own 1991 sleep laboratory study of Holocaust survivors.

Lavie studied the sleep of three groups: survivors with good family and occupational adjustments; survivors with poor adjustments; and a control group of native-born Israelis. Not surprisingly, the well-adjusted survivors resembled the control group in falling asleep easily and displaying the rapid eye movement (REM) that indicates dreaming. But when awakened during REM sleep, the well-adjusted survivors could recall only 33 percent of their dreams—the lowest figure ever reported. (The control group recalled 78 percent, the poorly adjusted survivors 55 percent.) This suggests a striking—and unexpected—continuity between the mental processes of dreaming and the psychological defenses that protect the waking mind against traumatic thoughts and memories.

Coren’s chief concern is with sleep deprivation. The natural pattern of human behav-

ior, he argues, is work during the day, recreation during the evening, and sleep at night. So ingrained is this pattern that fully 20 percent of shift workers voluntarily give up their jobs rather than suffer the physical and mental consequences of having their “normal sleep-wakefulness cycle” disrupted.

Sleep deprivation leads to problems beyond loss of employment. Each spring, when we lose an hour of sleep changing to daylight-saving time, the death rate from automobile accidents in the United States jumps seven percent. In the fall, when we gain an hour, the pattern is reversed. Observes Coren: “As a society we must be running a fairly heavy sleep debt if the loss of one hour more of sleep can make it seven percent more likely that we will have a mishap on the road.”

On how much sleep we actually need, the authors differ. Lavie states that five or six hours is enough if the individual “is alert and energetic during the day, and does not feel either chronic fatigue or a strong desire to sleep.” Coren disagrees. He finds that “our normal efficiency, alertness, and creativity is not as good with eight hours of sleep as it is with 10.”

Thus we face a conundrum: like the mutual fund manager, we want to use our time most efficiently. Yet to function at an optimal level, we need to invest more time in a reputedly inefficient, self-indulgent activity. “It is truly an odd feature of our society that short sleepers are idolized,” writes Coren. “Today the person who runs on little sleep is seen as mentally tough, ambitious, and admirable.” It’s hard to imagine a successful person in any field advising a junior counterpart to get more sleep. Yet that may be just the right prescription. Both of these books underscore the point made by Aldous Huxley: “That we are not much sicker and much madder than we are is due exclusively to that most blessed and blessing of all natural graces, sleep.”

—Richard Restak

**THE INTERNET &  
WORLD WIDE WEB:  
The Rough Guide.**

By Angus J. Kennedy. Rough Guides.  
224 pp. \$8

According to the futurists, we are on the verge of living in an electronic, paperless Information Age. But the paradox of this age

is that most of us learn about the new on-line world by reading books—a medium the “digerati” would have us believe is all but obsolete.

Among the dozens of volumes available, there are books about etiquette (*Rules of the Net: Online Operating Instructions for Human Beings*, by Thomas Mandel and Gerard Van der Leun), books about where to go in cyberspace (*Netchick: A Smart-Girl Guide to the Wired World*, by Carla Sinclair), books offering the vicarious experience of cyberspace for people still making up their minds (*Networld!: What People Are Really Doing on the Internet and What It Means to You*, by David H. Rothman), and books about falling in love on-line (*Throbbing Modems: How to Find Romance and Adventure on Your Personal Computer*, by Joshua Bagby).

Now the Rough Guide series of travel books has come up with *The Internet & World Wide Web*. It’s hip-pocket- (or purse-) sized, which seems a conceit; this is armchair traveling, not real adventuring. That quibble aside, Kennedy’s guide is a useful introduction to the arcana of getting connected to the various components that make up the Internet.

For starters, the author discusses the difference between on-line services such as CompuServe and Internet Service Providers (ISPs). He outlines the basics of making an initial connection and lists the software that would-be Net surfers will need (though anyone who has ever tried to install Internet software will testify that it can be pointlessly frustrating). Helpfully, Kennedy lists 15 questions to ask a prospective ISP. For example, he advises inquiring when the ISP is busiest, whether it charges a flat fee, and (this is important) whether it will supply the connection software and walk the customer through the installation.

Elsewhere, Kennedy explains Internet services such as e-mail, newsgroups (electronic bulletin boards to which people post messages), list-serves (electronic mailing lists), file transfers, and the World Wide Web (what most people think of when they think of the Internet). He also lists selected newsgroups and World Wide Web sites, as well as a glossary of terms and an introduction to “Net Language.” And finally, a list of ISPs in the United States, Great Britain, Europe, Asia, and Australia is offered.

Just as it is paradoxical to learn about the

Internet from a book, so it is absurd to spend too much time reading about Net surfing. The knowledge needed to log on is not that complex, and once you've logged on, you

learn at the keyboard, not by turning pages. That said, this Rough Guide has the virtues of concision and thoroughness.

—David Nicholson

## Arts & Letters

**CHARLES IVES:**

*A Life with Music.*

By Jan Swafford. W. W. Norton. 450 pp. \$27.50

Why, after being discovered, rediscovered, revived, and celebrated for three-quarters of a century, is Charles Ives's music still new and challenging? Perhaps because of its contradictions. Of all expressions by an American in any field of the arts, it is at once the most backward looking and the most forward looking, the most concrete and the most abstract, the most rooted and the most soaring. Even more than Walt Whitman or Winslow Homer, Ives is the quintessential American artist, as elusive in character as the country itself.

Until now, that is. Benefiting from a generation of first-rate Ives scholarship, both historical and musicological, composer and writer Jan Swafford has produced a striking biography that meets the toughest challenge facing any biographer of an artist: elucidating the links between the life and the work without trivializing either.

Here is a vivid depiction of the commercial and musical world of Danbury, Connecticut, where Ives (1874–1954) was raised. His eccentric father, George, director of the municipal band, appears playing his echo cornet and experimenting with half-tone scales—a radical experiment for the time, inspired both by his boundless imagination and, it turns out, by his reading of the work of the German acoustician Hermann von Helmholtz. Here also is an affecting portrait of Harmony Ives, one of history's most devoted artistic spouses. And, of course, Ives himself: a jock at Yale, a superb church organist, an innovator in the field of estate planning (which won him a fortune in the insurance business), a campaigner on behalf of the League of Nations and other lost causes, and, finally, an irasci-

ble old man spending a small part of that fortune promoting his music.

During Ives's early career, Americans were too swept up in the automobile, the radio, and the other accouterments of progress to focus on the music of this radical who dwelt on the past. One exception was Gustav Mahler, who chanced upon a score of Ives's Third Symphony in 1911. Mahler, then winding up an unhappy stint at the New York Philharmonic, recognized a kindred spirit in the Yankee composer

and took the score back with him to

Europe. It might have been Ives's

big break, but it was not to

be. Within months, Mahler was

dead, and 35 more years were to

pass before the Third

Symphony was first per-

formed in public. Ives

received a Pulitzer Prize for

it in 1947.

Swafford does an admirable job of discussing Ives's work, especially the programmatically rich Concord Sonata (his first success) and the Fourth Symphony, which drew upon his entire life's work. Free of technical jargon, Swafford's text demands nothing from the reader but curiosity and willing ears.

Like his would-be champion Mahler, Ives used music to express a complex vision of loss and transcendence. Both composers used commonplace sounds to create extraordinary new landscapes of sound. But there the similarity ends. With Ives, the "found sounds" of daily life were unscrubbed and raw, at times wildly dissonant. And the musical quotations included such drastic departures from approved European models as camp meeting spirituals, brass band marches, turn-of-the-century croon songs, and ragtime.

Here is the essence of Ives's Americanism. His taste was omnivorous, and he possessed a keen ear for the authentic and passionate in all types of music. Yet he refused

to arrange his musical source material in neat hierarchies. Instead, he treated all music that expressed genuine human emotions as equal, applying the principles of Progressive-era democracy to sound in a way that harks back to Louis Moreau Gottschalk and looks forward to Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, and Gunther Schuller.

Like the American horizon, Ives's oeuvre remains open, unfinished, though not unexplored. Thanks to Swafford's skillful retelling, we can better understand why Ives's music remains so fresh. Its jagged juxtapositions, shifting moods, and eclectic references may have baffled Ives's contemporaries. But they speak to an adventurous, inclusive conception of art that is widely felt, and much disputed, a century after his greatest works were composed.

—S. Frederick Starr

#### **SOUL SAYS:**

##### *On Recent Poetry.*

By Helen Vendler. Harvard Univ. Press.  
256 pp. \$24.95

#### **THE GIVEN AND THE MADE:**

##### *Strategies of Poetic Redefinition.*

By Helen Vendler. Harvard Univ. Press.  
160 pp. \$29.95 cloth; \$14 paper

#### **THE BREAKING OF STYLE:**

##### *Hopkins, Heaney, Graham.*

By Helen Vendler. Harvard Univ. Press.  
160 pp. \$29.95 cloth, \$14 paper

When Helen Vendler describes the act of reading poetry, she makes it seem as straightforward as understanding the newspaper or humming a favorite tune: "The senses and the imagination together furnish rhymes for the poet. The rhythms of the poet translate themselves back, in the mind of the reader, into the senses and the imagination."

But nowadays the space between poet and reader is often too clouded for such clear passage. The contemporary reader at ease with Whitman but at sea with his successors may, in distress, look to the contemporary critic for a compass. Alas, most criticism written today in the academy, by critics whose proprietary interest in literature has yielded to a proprietary interest in self, will cause readers to jump ship and take their chances with the sharks.

Vendler's criticism is a saving exception. A university professor at Harvard, she responds generously to the workings of the poetic imag-

ination, in our time and across centuries: "The purpose of lyric, as a genre, is to represent an inner life in such a manner that it is assumable by others." Her singular talent as a reader is to assume the inner life of poet after poet, and to write precisely and eloquently about this merger of sensibilities.

When Vendler was 17, lyric poetry seemed to her "the voice of the soul itself." It still does, by the evidence of her three latest books: a volume of review essays and two volumes of thematic lectures. The essays on 20 contemporary poets in *Soul Says* date from the late 1980s and early 1990s, and generally mark the appearances of each author's newest work. But time and again, a brief topical essay is a map to the larger world of the poet's achievement.

*The Given and the Made* (the 1993 T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures at the University of Kent) considers how "an unmasked-for *donnée*" shaped the work of four poets. Robert Lowell's *donnée*, given by his famous family, was history. John Berryman's, given by his alcoholic manic-depression, was the Freudian concept of the id. Rita Dove's, given by birth, is her identity as a black American woman. Jorie Graham's, given by her trilingual upbringing, is the arbitrary attachment of word to thing, and the corresponding relation of an invisible to a material world.

*The Breaking of Style* (the 1994 Richard Ellman Lectures in Modern Literature at Emory University) traces the process by which three poets—Gerard Manley Hopkins, Seamus Heaney, and (again) Jorie Graham—shed an old style for a new: the equivalent, for Vendler, of casting off a material body. These transformations permit Vendler to explore the essential connection between style and substance in poetry, and to argue (against interpretive fashion) for "the human perceptual, aesthetic, and moral signals conveyed . . . by such elements as prosody, grammar, and lineation." Hers is a method of steady engagement with the poetry—with line length, with images, with odd detail, and overarching argument. There is a soul in the body of a poet's successful disposition of words.

Not every page of these books is equally persuasive, and there is some repetition among the volumes—especially when the same poets, and poems, are discussed. The books are best read not straight through but with time out to sample the poetry. Of living

poets, Vendler's favorites seem to be Heaney and Graham; you will no sooner finish her essays about them than make your way to a bookstore.

And that may be the great achievement of all Vendler's criticism: its ease, assurance, and clarity, set in a bedrock of careful scholarship, persuade diffident readers to tease out the soul's sense beneath a poem's surface puzzle.

—James Morris

### EMERSON AMONG THE ECCENTRICS:

#### *A Group Portrait.*

By Carlos Baker. Introduction and epilogue by James R. Mellow. Viking. 672 pp. \$34.95

Ralph Waldo Emerson was a stern critic of preachers. After hearing Barzillai Frost, the junior associate of Ezra Ripley at the First Church at Concord, preach an interminable, abstract sermon during a snowstorm in March 1838, Emerson wrote in his journal: "He had no one word intimating that ever he had laughed or wept, was married or enamoured, had been cheated, or voted for, or chagrined. If he had ever lived or acted we were none the wiser for it." It was in response to the aptly named Reverend Frost that Emerson declared that "the true preacher deals out to the people his life,—life passed through the fire of thought." This was also Emerson's standard for the writer, the teacher, the scholar, and the politician. He expected the same immediacy and vividness from his intercourse with friends—even when it took the inspiring form of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "hospitable silence."

In this posthumous biography, the late Carlos Baker, professor of English at Princeton University, brings the "fire of thought" to life through Emerson's pursuit of friendship. Despite an occasional cranky misanthropy and a persistent resistance to intimacy, Emerson over and over embraced friendship's risk and vulnerability as the necessary companion to solitude.

*Emerson Among the Eccentrics* (an unfortunate title that condescends to its subject) puts Emerson at the center of the lives of the

prominent men and women of letters and ideas of the period 1830–80. Baker's potentially dreary decade-by-decade organization is relieved, at times brilliantly, by bringing Emerson's friends to the forefront. This is a biography of intertwined lives: Emerson and Margaret Fuller Ossoli, Bronson Alcott, Nathaniel and Sophie Hawthorne, Jones Very, Henry David Thoreau, Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, and, in the farther reaches of the circle, Walt Whitman, John Brown, and even Abraham Lincoln. These and other figures in the 19th-century pantheon maintain vital connections, if not always friendship, through thick and thin, agreement and disagreement, proximity and distance, joy and sorrow.

Baker's narrative shows how Emerson's presence and correspondence, those twin complements to his lectures and essays, held this informal congregation together. Reviewing Emerson's second book of essays for Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*, Margaret Fuller wrote: "History will inscribe his name as a father of his country, for he is one who pleads her cause against herself." As this tribute suggests, Emerson sought to discern the singular

American nature of his fellow citizens' shared language and technology (the railroad is a theme running through this biography), as well as their ideals and compromises—whether personal, aesthetic, political, or moral. Emerson admired Lincoln as an apotheosis of the vernacular American, a man who "grew according to the need." Like Lincoln's, Emerson's struggle for union and unity was both

private and public: toward the end of his life, when mind and memory were failing, the lecture platform was as much home to him as his study.

Carlos Baker died in 1987, before he could write an introduction pondering "Emerson's philosophy of friendship." According to James R. Mellow, a biographer in his own right and the author of the book's introduction and epilogue, death also prevented Baker from writing " 'Exuent Omnes,' presumably a summary closure to the lives of the remaining cast of characters." Notwithstanding Baker's origi-



nal slant on Emerson and his friends, there is a diminished quality about the book's waning chapters, all the more poignant because they describe Emerson's waning powers. The book also contains some regrettable errors: "Come live with me, and be my love" is Christopher Marlowe's line, not John Donne's. And the opening chapters on Emerson's family seem flat and out of kilter with the rest. A more

active editorial hand, and a more ambitious epilogue, would have helped. Nonetheless, *Emerson Among the Eccentrics* will be an essential book. Its inspired reconfiguration of oft-quoted materials and anecdotes shows that friendship was the compost for the New England soil from which sprang Emerson's contribution to American life and letters.

—John F. Callahan

## Contemporary Affairs

### *THE BAMBOO NETWORK: How Expatriate Chinese Entrepreneurs Are Creating a New Economic Superpower in Asia.*

By Murray Weidenbaum and Samuel Hughes. Free Press. 264 pp. \$24

Numbering roughly 40 million, the ethnic Chinese of Asia who live outside China—in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia—produce some \$600 billion in goods and services. This would be a respectable gross national product for a nation with that population. But the overseas Chinese are not a nation; they are a diverse diaspora. So their future role, both within the region and internationally, is bound to be complex. These ethnic Chinese are at ease neither in their countries of residence nor in China. To survive, they have adapted and yielded—like the proverbial bamboo, which “bends but does not break.”

The authors of this study are specialists in business and economics: Weidenbaum (the first chairman of President Reagan's Council of Economic Advisors) is professor of economics and director of the Center for the Study of American Business at Washington University in St. Louis; Hughes is a research fellow at the center. So, not surprisingly, most of their attention is devoted to the overseas Chinese as economic actors. Histories of some of the great Chinese fortunes are presented in excellent profiles, from Li Kashing's Cheung Kong Group in Hong Kong to the Chia family's Charoen Pokphand in Thailand. The authors show how each group has acquired certain traits in response to the overseas environment: complex corporate structures that ensure secrecy and conceal assets, fam-

ily dominance and close informal bonds of trust with other Chinese, and careful adjustment to political realities. The last includes cooperation with powerful non-Chinese—notably in Indonesia, where members of the military regularly front for Chinese entrepreneurs.

Now that mainland China is emerging as a field of economic activity, one might expect the overseas Chinese to have an easier time of it there. But, ironically, their adaptive skills are also needed in their “homeland.” Most of the Asian states where they now live are far more advanced than China in constitutional government, rule of law, and sanctity of person (in China, extortions and kidnappings of overseas Chinese businessmen are not uncommon). In these respects, the environment of China is quite similar to that of the entrepreneurs' adopted countries 30 years ago.

Yet, by the same token, the experience of the overseas Chinese gives them an advantage over other would-be entrepreneurs now entering China. The overseas Chinese provide more than three-quarters of all foreign direct investment, not to mention skills, technologies, and access to financial and marketing networks. Some believe that the eventual result of these relationships will be the knitting together of an economic and cultural “Greater China” out of China proper plus Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The question is whether such economic integration can occur unhindered by the deep political divisions that cut through the Chinese world. After all, since the Qing dynasty, the overseas Chinese have introduced political trouble into Chinese regimes as often as they have introduced know-how and wealth. Weidenbaum and

Hughes touch on politics only in passing—and wisely so, because their book's real strength lies in the competence and lack of sensationalism of its economically focused approach. But to their credit, the authors acknowledge that the emergence of "Greater China"—like that of industrial Europe in the 19th century—may as plausibly be accompanied by conflict as by peace and prosperity.

—Arthur Waldron

### *TRUE STORIES OF THE KOREAN COMFORT WOMEN.*

Edited by Keith Howard. Cassell. 192 pp. \$60 cloth, \$16.95 paper

"The shame of a woman [is] the shame of her whole family." Hence the long silence of the more than 200,000 Korean women forced into prostitution by the Japanese military between 1933 and 1945. Only recently has the passage of time softened the stigma and allowed a number of these former "comfort women" to step forward. This compilation of 19 of their stories was first published in 1993 by the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. It appeared against the backdrop of increased international scrutiny of Japan's war crimes, and the Japanese government's blan-

ket apology to the women involved. The present volume, edited and introduced by Keith Howard (a Korean studies lecturer at the University of London), coincides with a recent UN recommendation of a full formal apology, reparations, and criminal prosecutions.

This can be a painful book to read. The stories follow a similar pattern, and soon their impact fades through sheer repetition. But a few details stand out. For example, Okpun Yi recalls looking out from the Taiwan school building where she was confined and seeing lines of Japanese soldiers that were so long, "the ends of the queues were sometimes invisible." Perhaps most compelling are the current lives of these 19 women. In a society that insists on marriage, all but five attempted some sort of union. Most ended in failure. Fifteen of the women now live alone under harsh conditions, and many suffer from recurring diseases. Some are involved in the campaign for reparation; others seem content with the emotional catharsis of finally sharing their terrible secret. Most would agree with the 65-year-old Turi Yun, who said simply, "They ruined my life. . . . I will not be able to forget what happened even after I die."

—Debbie Lim

## *Religion & Philosophy*

### *MACHIAVELLI'S VIRTUE.*

By Harvey C. Mansfield. Univ. of Chicago Press. 387 pp. \$29.95

"Machiavelli as the principal character in his own thought," the author begins boldly, "that is the theme of this collection of articles and essays." But this is no "postmodernist gloss or deconstruction." Far from it. To Mansfield, professor of government at Harvard University, there is only one true reading of the text. Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) himself wishes to be the prince: "He will be the mastermind behind the operation, mastering future generations through his mind." So much for the urbane, skeptical,

humanistic but realistic, republican Machiavelli read by most scholars. The true Machiavelli was—how shall one paraphrase?—a kind of superknowledgeable proto-political scientist, contemptuous of the ineptitude of princes, jealous of their power, and certain that he could do better.

So a close reading of Machiavelli leaves no doubt of his ambition, or that he was (as many of his first readers thought) an unashamed teacher of evil, of no-holds-barred ruthlessness in the pursuit of any power, not just in the defense of a republic (as a superficial reading of the *Discourses* has suggested to others). But Mansfield goes



further. He does Machiavelli the high scholarly honor of treating him as a wholly consistent political philosopher (rather than a speculative writer and provocative essayist) who was consciously at odds with Aristotle at all times, and whose texts are as tight and logical as those of Thomas Hobbes.

Even in Machiavelli's contradictions—for example, his rejection of Christian virtue as inimical to the Roman *virtu* of state formation and preservation, versus his refusal to deny the Christian conception of evil—Mansfield finds a covert consistency. This is because (as we know already, if we have read the works of Mansfield's intellectual exemplar, Leo Strauss) all political philosophers writing in troubled times hid their real meaning. Indeed, they hid it so successfully, the esoteric message behind the exoteric facade is only unlocked in our own time. Mansfield acknowledges the master: "Every time I have been thrown upon an uninhabited island I thought might be unexplored, I have come across a small sign saying 'please deposit coin.' After I comply, a large sign flashes in neon lights that would have been visible from afar, with this message: Leo Strauss was here." Ah, to have been in Chicago in the old days!

Mansfield gives short shrift to the dominant school of contextualist intellectual history—what one might call "the Cambridge school" because so many of the books are published by Cambridge University Press. This school blends empirical history with analytic philosophy. Its practitioners establish the meaning of a political text from the political and intellectual contexts, and from a knowledge of how key concepts were used in the discourse of the day. As it were: "the text, the context, then back to the text." From that text, some draw only meaning, others occasional truths for our time.

But not *the* truth, according to the Straussians. For them, the contextualist school misses the real truth, always beneath the surface, and reduces the great debate about the ends of politics and life to carping relativities—in the case of other studies of Machiavelli, "a reluctance to face the problem of evil." Thus, Mansfield declares: "In this book I do not adopt the historicist view that Machiavelli's thought was useful only in its time or for what it

prepared (much as it did prepare). Those who take this view do not have a sufficient motive to study Machiavelli's political science, since they believe it to be inadequate before they begin."

Let us not make a meal of it. This counterattack is a good example of medieval logic's fallacy, "the excluded middle." Suppose that *all* accounts are, to some degree, inadequate, and suppose that *some* of Machiavelli's maxims have universal relevance, others relevance only for his time, and still others not much use or sense then or now. And suppose that Machiavelli was a great political *writer*, with a flair for drama and melodrama. To make him a philosopher, diligently to dig for a logically consistent subtext veiled in apparent mistakes, contradictions, and (even) numerology, is not to interrogate the text; it is to torture it.

Mansfield's method yields a hundred different subtle readings, many of them impressive and provoking even to the reader who is intimate with the texts. But these are forced into a pattern, indeed a sermon on how realism violates natural law, and how politics is not the conciliation of differing views of conscience but should be the implementation of true conscience, derived from natural-rights philosophy and unclouded by historicist relativism, expediency, and contingency.

But if Machiavelli was an essayist, an intellectual adventurer, even at times an ironist with a sense of play and humor who may not always have known what he was going to say next, except that it would be something arresting, penetrating, intuitive, or speculative, then his contradictions need only be noted, not explained away. Moreover, we may share the most profound of them: that some things done in politics are morally detestable, but may have to be done if the polity is to survive its enemies. Friedrich Meinecke famously spoke of Machiavelli as "a sword which was plunged into the flank of the body politic of Western humanity, causing it to cry out and struggle with itself."

Searching for lost arks is learned fun, but better to hold to a dull old rule of textual interpretation against both Straussians and postmodernists: even after Marx and Freud, a text should be presumed to mean what it appears to mean, unless there is some clear external evidence to the contrary.

—Bernard Crick

*THE CHURCH VISIBLE:  
The Ceremonial Life and Protocol of the  
Roman Catholic Church.*

By James-Charles Noonan, Jr. Viking.  
554 pp. \$34.95

For all our affluence, we live today amid slovenly speech, slovenly dress, and slovenly manners. Remarks, costumes, and behavior that most middle-class grandparents would regard as unthinkable are now displayed daily at the highest altitudes of society. Some regard this as the triumph of genuine populist egalitarianism over false aristocratic pomp. But a good case can be made that the apotheosis of the once uncouth has made life less interesting, colorful, and . . . well, civilized. Moreover, the most hard hit are, as usual, those on the bottom of the social scale.

Viewed as an exercise in the history of manners, *The Church Visible* reminds one of nothing so much as William F. Buckley's famous 1955 statement that his newly launched *National Review* would stand athwart the course of history, yelling "Stop!" Noonan, a professional protocolist, believes that the post-Vatican II Catholic Church has succumbed to the siren-songs of the vulgarians. (A Sunday morning visit to almost any Catholic parish would, unhappily, confirm this belief.) By providing the first comprehensive study in decades of the church's liturgical and diplomatic protocol, as well as of its system of honors, vesture, and insignia, Noonan seems to imagine that he can inspire his fellow Catholics (including a few backsliding bishops and cardinals) to recover the more formally stylized personal and professional manner that characterized life within the pre-Vatican II church.

It seems a long shot. This book is not, as the publisher claims in an overly exuberant dust-jacket encomium, "the ideal complement to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*." But by assembling a vast amount of research into the origins, history, theological and political meaning, and current official status of Catholic offices, ceremonies, etiquette, and dress, Noonan has done a service to anyone interested in the church—

and for that matter, anyone interested in the social history of the West in the past several centuries.

Noonan has a prescriptive, as well as descriptive, bent. He tells you exactly how wide a prelate's sash must be, and adds that its "stitching should not be obvious." He explicates the precise difference between a *mantelletta* and a *mantellone*, chiding ignorant (and perhaps vulgarly egalitarian?) hierarchs for not realizing that "the great cape known as the *cappa magna* has never been abolished."

More provocative (and important) is Noonan's veiled displeasure at Pope John Paul I's 1978 decision to forswear a papal coronation with the traditional triple crown, or tiara, in favor of a simple "installation"—symbolized by the imposition of the metropolitan archbishop's pallium, a humble vest-

ment without regal connotations. Too bad Noonan seems unaware that this revision of papal rituals was less a concession to vulgar leveling than a liturgical acknowledgment of a crucial theological point: that the ministry of the bishop of Rome is

essentially pastoral in character.

Noonan does not always wear his erudition lightly; at times, he slips into a didactic mode that will irritate some readers while doubtless heartening others as an example of good old-fashioned clericalism. What is more, for an author who has by his own testimony spent countless hours in the Vatican archives, Noonan seems curiously misinformed on the current status, in international law and diplomacy, of the Holy See as distinguished from Vatican City.

But for all that, *The Church Visible* opens a window on a fascinating world. Appropriately enough for a volume affirming that there is a right way to do things, *The Church Visible* is an elegant piece of bookmaking and contains many useful illustrations and photographs. Who knows? Perhaps through sheer conviction and example, it will stop Catholicism in the United States from slipping any farther down the slope of slovenliness.

—George Weigel



## POETRY

### *Carl Dennis*

*Selected and introduced by Anthony Hecht*

If John Donne, when he wishes to (“At the round earth’s imagin’d corners, blow/ Your trumpets, Angels”), can sound like the fanfare of a brass choir, if Robert Lowell, in his early “Lord Weary’s Castle,” could sound like an Old Testament prophet revived as a 17th-century homilist, if Milton in *Paradise Lost* can sound like the diapason of a five-banked, 20-bellowed organ, then the poetry of Carl Dennis—modest, unassertive, wry, self-deprecating, witty, Chekhovian—must sound like light summer rain on the roof of a porch: gentle, almost unnoticed, but calmly reassuring.

In a period that has seen the birth, spread, and nearly the calcification of “confessional poetry,” of virtually shameless self-exposure, the work, the literary persona of Dennis, is astonishingly evasive, for what I think are sound aesthetic reasons. The most he has allowed his publishers to reveal about him is that he was born in St. Louis in 1939, attended schools in the Midwest and California, and has been for many years a professor at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Something about this native reticence may be represented by his poem called “*Strada Felice*.” It’s about Gogol’s long residence in Rome, during which he wrote his mordantly comic and distinctly Russian novel, *Dead Souls*. The choice of Gogol and his expatriate life is significant. Formalist critic Yury Tynyanov observed, “One of Gogol’s basic devices in his portraiture of people is that of the mask.” Gogol began his literary career pseudonymously, and was never to exhibit a more purely “Russian” quality than in a work written at a distance in time and space from his native grounds. And this serves as a serious parable about the literary artist. Aswoon in the first fine rapture of love, a poet may not be best situated to write love poetry. It may be that “distancing” is a valuable artistic technique, and that a persuasive vividness, an authenticity of detail, is best secured by imaginative re-creation rather than by instantaneous diary entry. The distance of an author from his work is also an element of his tact, a quality important to the work of both Gogol and Dennis, as well as that of Flaubert, Henry James, Dickens, Keats, and Stevens.

This “distancing” has its wryly amused obverse in the poet’s licensed daydream as described in “Readers.” If poets were truly what Shelley called them, “the unacknowledged legislators of the world,” they would be a force so powerfully subversive of all the Great Powers as to be in constant danger of arrest and imprisonment, for “originality” is by definition anti-establishment. But the glamour of this view of poets as heroic criminals in a furtive underground, while still seriously entertained in some quarters, is derisively delusional from another point of view, and the notion of the literary underground may be not so much an elected one as one quite simply imposed by the utter neglect and disregard of the public at large, and therefore required by the poets to maintain their self-respect. (The completeness of this disregard needs little attestation, but I recently reported

with glee to an Irish acquaintance that Seamus Heaney had won the Nobel Prize in literature, to which the response was a blank stare and the silence of indifference.) But as though to correct the ironies of delusional grandeurs implied in “Readers,” Dennis has written what amounts to a companion poem in “Listeners,” a truly touching poem in its essential modesty which, at the same time, urges us to recall that the slightest of our words, the most casual of our assertions, have consequences that reverberate, for good or for ill, far beyond our awareness or intentions.

Finally, Dennis’s genuine concern with the kinds of aesthetic problems I have mentioned is beautifully evidenced by such quietly brilliant poems as “Igor” and “To Be Continued,” in which the cunning intermingling of literature with what we habitually regard as “reality” becomes a seamless, sometimes heart-breaking fabric in which poetry lives and has its being.

Dennis’s six collections of poetry—*A House of My Own* (1974), *Climbing Down* (1976), *Signs and Wonders* (1979), *The Near World* (1985), *The Outskirts of Troy* (1988), and *Meetings with Time* (1992)—are uniform in their excellence, if in nothing else whatever. This poet is distinguished by the variety as well as the originality of his imagination, and he deserves a far larger audience than he has yet attained.

## Strada Felice

*for Burton Weber*

April in Rome and Gogol rises from his desk  
And looks down awhile from his balcony. The lamps are  
lit.  
A cart rattles by on the cobblestones. Forty years old  
And now, on this far street, the endless parade of towns  
Of shapeless Mother Russia assembles in his head;  
The lists of details stuffed in his trunk seem usable.  
Now two servant girls outside Kostroma, their skirts tucked  
up,  
Can wade in the pond with their nets, arguing,  
And the farmhand can sleep off his vodka in the shade of  
the fence  
As the hero’s carriage totters up. It’s go-getter Chichikov,  
Jumping out in the dust with his calling card.  
Any dead serfs for sale, he wonders, counting the huts.  
Any names for his paper estate? A few dozen more  
Should suffice to impress the mother of the rich girl.  
Here’s a ruble for the ghost of Peter the tinner,  
For Stephen mender of sleds. Now back to the inn,  
Past the clerks returning from their walks,  
Past the women of the town in red skirts and furs, loitering,  
None of whom are noticed by Chichikov, none described  
In the letter not sent to a friend.

How strange his hurry seems to Gogol in Rome  
Who holds these figures in his mind's light  
So purely, as if sharpened by the miles.  
Could they shine like this in Russia?  
Wouldn't he lose them in the trees or the snow  
If he started home, unless he brought Rome with him  
And lugged its side streets and seven hills  
Up the stairs on Great Meschanskaya Street  
To the room beneath the rafters?  
Then the books on Russia, piled on the floor,  
Foreign so far, might sound, as he read them, like his own,  
The lists of madmen and saints merely the names  
Of his own moods writ large,  
And he'd wonder why he waited so long  
Before he ordered the Tsar to free the serfs,  
Why he allows the pogroms to go on.

## *Readers*

In my dream my books are banned by the Great Powers.  
Brave men smuggle them across the borders  
Stashed in the motors of tractors,  
In food cartons, in hats,  
Defying the ban on illicit poetry.  
The pages are worn quickly from the greedy hands  
Of underground lovers.  
Everyone tries to say what they mean.  
No one agrees on the many readings  
But they love each one.

In my own cellar my muse arrives  
With her limp cured,  
Her face finally free of bruises.  
For hours we write instructions to all our friends  
For avoiding capture.  
We write in a code too tough for wit,  
But all our far-flung true believers,  
Hearing the word, can decipher it.

## *Listeners*

After midnight, when I phone up a far-off friend  
To describe my chills or a blister by the heart  
That won't wait, I can hear the breath of the operator  
As she listens in, lonely among the night wires.  
They all do it, breaking the rules.  
In the morning she takes home my story to her  
    husband, her friends.

A sad burden. No useful wisdom yet.  
No advice about selling the house, the move to Florida,  
The right neighborhood for the boys.

It's getting harder to tell where the words go.  
You send them off with instructions not to stop on the  
road,  
Not to speak to strangers, but as they run they spill  
over.

Even on a bare bench when you whisper to yourself,  
Sigh softly how the world has let you down,  
From the bench in back you can hear a breath.  
Your thoughts have entered the far world;  
They have changed to stones,  
And someone walks round them as he climbs.

### *Flowers on Your Birthday*

I'd have been here sooner, believe me,  
If the short cut across Jefferson Bridge  
Hadn't been clogged by a funeral  
And I hadn't counted the cars,  
More than a hundred, most filled,  
It seemed, with official followers,  
Paying their respects to power.  
Then, on the long way round, by the armory,  
A burning house packed all the side streets  
With fire-watchers. Half the city, it seemed,  
Had nothing important enough to work on  
That it couldn't be set aside for a fire.  
And I watched it for a while, stared as a fireman  
Scrambled to the third floor  
To carry a girl down, and noticed that her dress  
Was fringed like one of yours. And she looked like you,  
A younger sister, smaller and more frail.  
From there I drove straight here, bringing you  
These flowers. See how fresh they are.  
The black spots are merely soot from the fire,  
Not symbols of anything, and will rinse away.  
The afternoon, scattered with flowers,  
Is all yours, wherever it leads.  
And this evening we can go to an old movie,  
A romance from the war, where the girl's wooed  
By three brave officers, English, Russian, American.  
It doesn't matter which she decides on.  
They're all fighting on the same side. Her tears  
Aren't an old woman's tears for a life that's spoiled,  
Thrown away on a clod, but the tears of the young  
Shed because she can only choose one  
Of the dear, beleaguered lives held out before her.

## *Igor*

How can I be the character I hate most  
In the great novels, a Cyril or an Igor  
Who visits his aging friend for a week  
At Christmas, in the icy provinces,  
And talks only of himself, and ignores the daughter  
As she watches with clear eyes?

On departure day she hands him his coat,  
Newly brushed, and looks down,  
Pale and grave, rubbing her hands.

He pretends not to notice and tells lies.  
“Sonia, they don’t give me a moment’s rest  
In my job for the Czar, inspecting sheds.  
Their spies have offices in the smallest towns.”

Silent, she stares at the big roses  
Woven in the rug, or turns to the window,  
The view of the white field, the snow-bleached  
Ice-hung cowfence tumbled down.

“Sonia, it’s not your fondness for me,  
It’s your hatred for this farm—who can blame you—  
That makes you long for the great world  
With me as your guide, though my bad moods,  
Hidden by my manners now, would spoil your fun.

“And why should a girl so young and strong  
Need me to tell her every morning  
If she’s happy or sad, a charity case,  
When now she supplies her sorrow, her joy?”

Then the coachman blows his horn.  
Igor runs out, throws up his box,  
Shouts something, and is off,  
Wound in his scarves.  
He doesn’t look back.

And already it’s too late. The girl’s gone  
And the house, and the village,  
All vanished over the hills to a place  
Where Igor is fiction, a paper name  
Left on the seat of the carriage  
When they climb out  
Home.

## *To Be Continued*

Whoever we are when we finish the novel  
Won’t remember the details that are fresh now,  
And if they can guess how much they’ve lost  
They’ll never write their review  
And the characters will drift off unjudged.

Best to judge them now while beads of sweat  
Are strung on Helen's forehead, after her ride  
Around the lake. At thirty-four she's returned  
To her father's farm—her brother's now—  
A widow, determined to live in the past  
No longer than she must, with no self-pity,  
No remorse. It would be an act of ingratitude  
To be sad by the lake of her childhood  
Here in Chapter One, boating with nieces and nephews,  
Docking on the island for a moonlight swim.

If we can trust her as we know we should,  
She'll do us proud in every chapter to come.  
We won't be outdone if our passion is compared  
To the passion of the farmer across the road  
Who's seen her only once, and from far off,  
And has lost his heart already, and made a vow.

Hard to tell if he deserves her.  
All we've been given so far  
Is a single, unpromising paragraph.  
At forty-five he's a drinker with a run-down farm.  
Has love changed him enough?  
Is the fever he runs in Chapter Two a dividing line?  
Many chapters remain. Any one of them  
Could drag him out of bed, back to the old plot,  
Though he clings to the bannister.

We want to withhold our opinion till more facts are in,  
But here he comes, stepping across the lawn  
With scruffy flowers destined to impress her,  
Given her large heart,  
Which fills any blank with what it brings.

Nothing can stop the action. It's spring,  
And the lilac is lavishing all it has  
In smell and color on the empty air.

Only a minute to sit in judgment  
On the pages read through so far  
So the future that breaks in  
Can prove us right or wrong,  
Not merely older.



*"Strada Felice," "Flowers on Your Birthday," and "To Be Continued," are reprinted from The Near World (1985), by Carl Dennis. "Readers" is from Climbing Down (1976) by Carl Dennis. All poems are reproduced by permission of the author.*

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# America's Forgotten War

*A century and a half after it began, the Mexican War has become a footnote to American history. When not forgotten, it has been misinterpreted—as America's first imperial venture or its first unpopular war. The truth about the conflict, and its effect on the nation, is far more interesting.*

by Robert W. Johannsen

Long after we are dead," wrote the popular mid-19th-century novelist George Lippard, "History will tell the children of ages yet to come, how the hosts gathered for the Crusade, in the year 1846."

One hundred and fifty years ago, the United States took up arms against Mexico, engaging in a war fought wholly on foreign soil for the first time in its history. It was a conflict fraught with significance for both nations. Yet for all its importance (and despite Lippard's confident prediction), the war with Mexico has become America's forgotten war. Few today can recite its causes. Few Americans even recall the battlefield triumphs. If remembered at all, it is thought of, wrongly, as an unpopular war, in large part because certain luminaries of the day, including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, inveighed so eloquently against it.

To be sure, wars often create more problems than they settle, and the Mexican War was no exception. A bitter and divisive sec-



tional struggle over the issue of slavery's expansion into the territories gained from Mexico was an unintended consequence of the conflict. Many Americans were later convinced, as was Ulysses S. Grant (himself a participant in the war), that "the Southern rebellion was largely an outgrowth of the Mexican War." Writing 40 years after the fact, failing in health, the old general influenced much subsequent thinking about the war when he charged that it was "one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation." The Civil War, he declared, was "our punishment." The war with Mexico, when it was viewed at all, was considered within the context of the struggle over slavery and as a precursor to what Grant called "the most sanguinary and expensive war of modern times."

But the Mexican War had importance far beyond its contributions to the outbreak of the Civil War—and in its day was viewed far more favorably than subsequent opinion would have us think. The first major national crisis faced during a period



*In the largest amphibious operation in its time, the forces of General Winfield Scott land at Veracruz on March 27, 1847.*

of unprecedented economic and social change, it came at a crucial moment in the young life of the United States. Rapid commercial and industrial expansion, with new opportunities for material advancement, was changing people's lives. Social reformers, utopian visionaries, political theorists, and religious enthusiasts were offering a host of projects and schemes in their quest for individual improvement. Questions were being raised about the true nature and purpose of republican government, as older values of patriotism and civic virtue—the heart of classical republicanism—seemed to be giving way before the new “spirit of gain.”

The United States at midcentury was a nation in search of itself, and the war with Mexico became an important step toward self-definition. For a time and for some people, the war offered reassurance, giving new meaning to patriotism, providing a new arena for heroism, and reinforcing popular convictions regarding the superiority of republican government. The war

was seen as a test of democratic institutions, as legitimizing America's mission as the world's “model republic.”

The outbreak of the Mexican War had a long and complex background in years of uneasy relations between the two countries. To many Americans, the frequency of revolutions in Mexico rendered that country's republican government more a sham than a reality. The United States had lodged claims against Mexico for losses incurred by American citizens during the revolutions, but even though the claims were arbitrated in 1842 at Mexico's request, they remained unpaid.

Yet for all the moments of irritation and tension, the cause of the Mexican War might be simply stated in a single word—Texas. The United States wanted Texas, and Mexico did not mean for the Americans to have it. From the moment Texas gained its independence from Mexico in 1836, Mexico blamed the United States for its loss and nurtured hopes for its recapture. The boundary with the United States, as far as Mexico was concerned, continued to be the Sabine River, which separated Louisiana and Texas. For the United States, it was the Rio Grande, the “traditional” line claimed in the 1803 treaty with France, which suggested that Texas was a part of the Louisiana Purchase, and confirmed by John Quincy Adams in his 1819 negotiations with Spain. The land between the two rivers—the Sabine and the Rio Grande—was the disputed territory.

Sentiment in support of the annexation of Texas to the United States gained strength as it was linked with questions of western settlement and territorial expansion. John L. O'Sullivan, outspoken New York journalist and editor of the *Democratic Review*, reflecting the romantic idealism of the time, placed the issue in broader perspective (and unwittingly coined a phrase that soon became a popular American idiom) when he asserted that America's claim to Texas was “by right of our manifest destiny to overspread and possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self government.”

Any action by the United States aimed at acquiring Texas, Mexican authorities repeatedly warned, would be regarded as a declaration of war against Mexico. When Congress passed a joint resolution annexing Texas, on March 1, 1845, Mexico broke diplomatic relations with the United States. As he left Washington, the Mexican minister angrily denounced annexation as an act of aggression against Mexico, “the most unjust which can be found recorded in the annals of modern history.”

The ensuing year was marked by the rapid breakdown of relations, by threats and ultimatums, by military movements and countermovements, by bellicose invective and futile peace feelers. Mexico’s repeated threats of invasion, the mobilization of its armed forces, the massing of Mexican troops on the south bank of the Rio Grande, and the appeals from Austin for protection following the official acceptance of annexation prompted President James K. Polk to order General Zachary Taylor’s army into Texas. Taylor’s force crossed the Sabine River and by late August 1845 was camped near the village of Corpus Christi.

The outbreak of hostilities now appeared certain. In a last-ditch effort to avert war, Polk dispatched John Slidell to Mexico City with authority to negotiate the differences between the two countries, a futile gesture that only inflamed anti-American feeling. Slidell was rebuffed, and a short time later Mexico’s government was toppled by a revolution led by military hardliners who pledged to defend Mexican territory as far east as the Sabine River.

The admission of Texas to statehood in December 1845 raised the stakes. When news of Slidell’s failure reached Washington shortly afterward, an impatient President Polk ordered General Taylor to move his army to the Rio Grande. By the end of March 1846, the troops were in position on the river opposite the Mexican town of Matamoros. Taylor had been instructed not to treat Mexico as an enemy unless its

forces committed an “open act of hostility.”

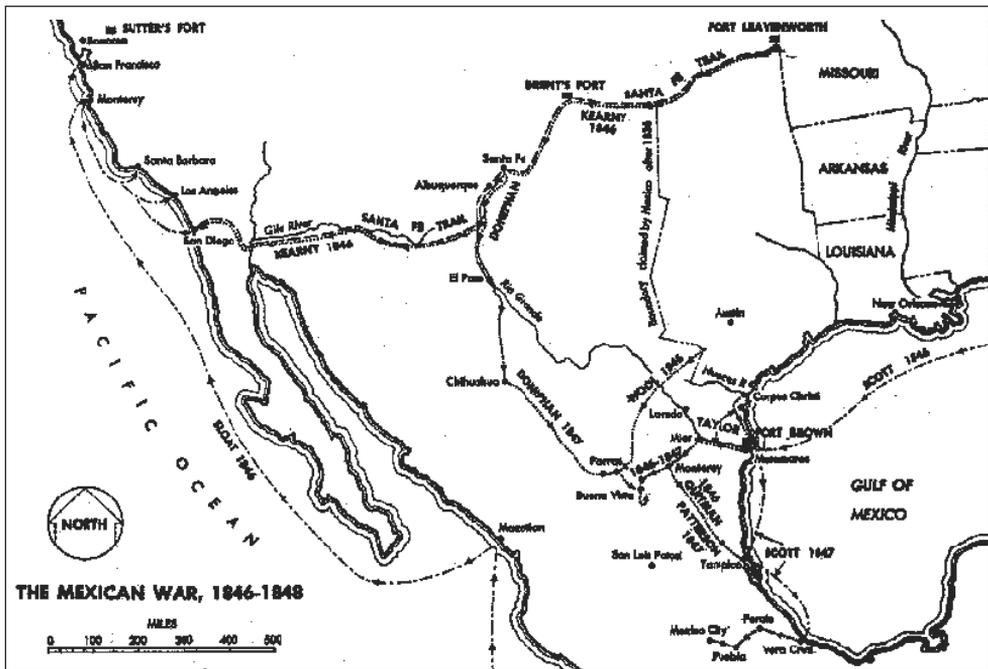
Within weeks of Taylor’s movement, the new Mexican president, General Mariano Paredes, declared a “defensive war” against the United States, and the Mexican commander on the Rio Grande informed Taylor that hostilities had commenced. A Mexican force crossed the Rio Grande and ambushed a detachment of American dragoons on a reconnaissance mission, killing and wounding a number of them in the process. When Polk received the news on May 9, he summoned his cabinet into an emergency meeting. On May 11, he submitted his war message to Congress. Within two days, both houses had concurred, authorizing the president to raise 50,000 volunteers and appropriating \$10 million to meet the expenses.

What neither Polk nor Congress could know was that the Mexican army had already crossed the Rio Grande in force and had engaged Taylor’s army in the first major battles of the war, Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, in and near the present city of Brownsville. In both engagements, Taylor’s outnumbered soldiers sent the invaders reeling in disorganized retreat back across the river.

The call for volunteers coincided with the news reports of the victories on the Rio Grande. The response was electric. Quotas, initially assigned to those states nearest the scene of operations, were quickly oversubscribed. Thousands of young men had to be turned back; Illinois provided enough men for 14 regiments when only four were called. The rush of volunteers, according to one writer, confirmed the superior nature of republican government: “We had to show the Mexicans that a people without being military, may be *warlike*.”

The volunteers came from all walks of life. Individuals from the upper ranks of society—sons of Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, a descendant of John Marshall, and Edward Everett’s nephew, as well as scions of families with proud Revolutionary

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War connections—mixed with farmers, merchants, lawyers, journalists, members of fire companies, students, recent immigrants, and even a sprinkling of American Indians. As one Illinois volunteer looked about him at a rendezvous where recruits had gathered, he noted “lead-miners from Galena; wharf rats and dock loafers from Chicago; farmers on unpurchased lands from the interior; small pattern politicians, emulous of popularity; village statesmen, pregnant with undeveloped greatness, and anxious to enlarge the sphere of their influence by a military *accouchement*; briefless lawyers and patientless physicians; and a liberal allowance of honest, hard-fisted ‘Suckers.’ ” Whatever their background or occupation, the volunteers were united by a spirit of adventure, eagerly anticipating a “grand jubilee in the halls of the Montezumas.” It was an army of democracy, and the citizen soldier became an honored symbol of the republic.

Many of the volunteers had military experience, in the War of 1812 or the Seminole wars in Florida, and a large number of them had spent time at West Point. One-third of the volunteer regiments were commanded by West Pointers, and well over a third of the field officers had had at least some West Point training.

Everywhere they went, the volunteers

attracted crowds of well-wishers. Residents of the towns and farms along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers gathered on the riverbanks to shout their encouragement, waving flags and handkerchiefs, as the volunteers passed on their way down river to New Orleans. There, they camped on the Chalmette battlefield, where Andrew Jackson had humbled a proud British army only 31 years before. At what they called Camp Jackson, they awaited transportation by sea to the mouth of the Rio Grande.

The Civil War has customarily been regarded as America’s first literate war, that is, the first war in which significant numbers of literate individuals served as soldiers. Although statistics are sketchy or nonexistent, a good case for possession of this distinction might be made for the Mexican War. Numbered among the volunteers were many men of education, including college graduates and products of the country’s common-school systems. They were avid letterwriters, corresponding with their families and friends and often serving as special correspondents for their hometown newspapers. Following the hard-fought battle for the northern Mexican city of Monterrey in September 1846, the volume of letters that passed through the New Orleans post office from the men in Taylor’s

## Mexico's War of 1847

As the specter of war loomed over Mexico during the spring of 1846, its leaders pondered the prospect of an armed conflict with the United States. The outlook was not promising. Only 25 years before, after a destructive 11-year war to win its independence from Spain, the new nation had begun a long and largely unsuccessful struggle to achieve social, economic, and political stability. But apart from a widespread determination to preserve Mexico's honor and its territorial integrity, little unified the bankrupt and divided nation in the mid-1840s.

The lack of domestic solidarity was largely the result of Mexico's failure to establish a durable political arrangement. Since independence, the nation had experimented with an empire, a federal republic, and various forms of centralized rule, but none of these had lasted. By midcentury, most of the country's roughly seven million inhabitants were ill-assimilated Indians who performed manual labor, while anti-Spanish sentiment had long driven off many of Mexico's better-trained elites. To make matters worse, the nation had little industry, a poor transportation network, and almost no government revenue apart from import tariffs.

On the eve of the war, the Catholic church and the military (whose chief strongman was General Antonio López de Santa Anna) were firmly established as the country's most powerful institutions. Separate entities within the state, they had their own courts and privileges, and any effort by reformers to curb their power ignited political disputes, including one that pitted three powerful factions against one another during the 1840s.

Led by Valentín Gómez Farías, the radicals (or *puros*) wanted to eradicate all vestiges of traditionalism by limiting the Church's economic and political privileges and by establishing a volunteer civic militia to break the regular army's power. Enlisting the support of the lower classes, the radicals hoped to bring back the federal form of government (set forth in the 1824 constitution), believing that it would give Mexico the strength and unity to regain Texas.

Like the *puros*, the moderates, led by Manuel Gómez Pedraza, favored putting restraints on the regular army and the Church, though only gradually in the case of the latter. Wary of the lower classes, the *moderados* wanted only property owners to

army doubled in number to more than 14,000 pieces.

Reading materials—books and newspapers—were also in heavy demand and short supply. That many of the soldiers were exceptionally well-read was evident from the literary and historical allusions that filled their letters and diaries. European travelers to the United States had observed that the Americans were a “reading people,” and the volunteers confirmed this judgment. Soldiers carried books in their knapsacks, received books in the mail from their families (often asking for specific titles), and sought out booksellers in the Mexican towns they occupied. Still, there were never enough books available to satisfy the demand. Newspapers were even more scarce. Some of the eastern metropolitan

dailies established papers in the larger Mexican cities, the so-called “Anglo-Saxon press,” but this effort did not meet the needs of the troops.

The volunteer system was at the heart of America's vision of responsible republican government, the principal means of defense during times of national crisis. Although President Polk called for a modest increase in the size of the regular army and later authorized 10 additional regiments, he shared the popular bias against a large professional military force. A standing army, he declared, was “contrary to the genius of our free institutions, would impose heavy burdens on the people and be dangerous to public liberty.” Reliance, he insisted, must be on “our citizen soldiers.” From the beginning of the war,

serve in the civic militias. While preferring a constitutional monarchy, in 1845 they supported efforts to reform the centralist constitution of 1843. In foreign affairs, they stood almost alone in hoping to reach an amicable accord with the United States on the Texas question.

For their part, conservatives such as Lucas Alamán sought to salvage those elements of the Spanish colonial state that had benefited them. They wanted a strong centralized government, preferably a monarchy, built upon an alliance between the church and the regular army, and only limited citizenship for the lower classes. Finding it impossible to resist the prowar atmosphere, they reluctantly took up the jingoistic banner against the United States.

The episode that best illuminates Mexico's crippling political divisiveness is the February 1847 "rebellion of the *polkos*." On January 11 of that year, then-vice president Gómez Farías, the acting chief executive, issued a decree authorizing the government to raise 15 million pesos by mortgaging or selling ecclesiastical property. Designed to finance the war against the United States, the law set off a furor.

*Moderado* politicians, senior army chiefs, and high-ranking clerical leaders plotted to overthrow Farías, relying on civic militia battalions (known as the *polkos* because the polka had become the most popular dance of elite society) organized during the fall of 1846 by Mexico City's well-to-do. The revolt, which erupted just a few days before General Winfield Scott's expeditionary army landed in Veracruz, prevented the Mexican government from coming to the defense of the port city.

Eventual defeat in what Mexicans called the War of 1847 did not bring unity to the nation. A new generation of *puro* and *moderado* thinkers concluded that Mexico's main problem had been the failure to extirpate the Spanish colonial legacy, while conservatives argued that monarchy was the best means of restoring national well-being. Debate grew increasingly rancorous and turned to open conflict in 1854. Only in 1867, after overcoming yet another round of civil war and foreign intervention by Napoleon III, who in 1862 installed Maximilian of Hapsburg as emperor, did the *pueros* manage to establish a new republic and greater national consensus.

—Pedro Santoni

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there was no love lost between the regulars and the volunteers. To the volunteers, the regular soldier was a "drilled automaton," while the regulars, resentful of all the attention given to the volunteers, viewed them as little better than an untrained and undisciplined rabble, useless as fighting men and ignorant of even the basic rules of survival in the field.

General Winfield Scott, who commanded large numbers of volunteers, complained that they knew nothing of camp discipline, cleanliness, sanitation, and proper diet. Scott and his fellow officers had reason for concern. More than 6,000 volunteers died from exposure and disease, principally dysentery and chronic diarrhea, about 10 times the number killed in action, though regulars hardly

fared much better.

Although there were numerous examples of friendly relations between the soldiers and Mexican civilians, including instances of the U.S. Army's defense of Mexican towns against marauding Indians and bandits, breaches of discipline among the soldiers were not uncommon, especially during long periods of inactivity. Individual acts of violence against the lives and property of civilians, often retaliatory in nature, generally went unpunished. Only rarely did large bodies of men engage in such acts. Following the destruction by Mexican irregulars of a three-mile-long supply train bound for Taylor's army in which the teamsters were slaughtered, a passing

group of volunteers, said to be Texas Rangers whose thirst for vengeance against Mexicans was widely feared, avenged the massacre by murdering up to 40 inhabitants of a nearby village.

More widely publicized and condemned was the murder by Arkansas cavalry, “wild and reckless fellows” known as Rackensackers, of 30 Mexican men, women, and children who had sought safety in a mountain cave following the murder of one of the Arkansas officers. Taylor was outraged, and the incident was reported in gory detail in the American press, arousing an immediate popular reaction. The massacre was denounced as behavior inconsistent with “one of the most enlightened and civilized nations of the globe.” “Let us no longer complain of Mexican barbarity.”

In spite of what regulars said about them, the volunteers proved their mettle as combat soldiers, fighting with courage and tenacity. Their role in each of the three areas of military operation was crucial to the ultimate success of American arms. Victory owed much to the superior organization and efficiency of the regulars and to the high quality of training offered by West Point, but in many respects the Mexican War was a volunteers’ war.

Following his early victories at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, Taylor moved his army into northern Mexico, his first target the “stronghold of northern Mexico,” the fortified city of Monterrey. Anticipated by the volunteers with exhilaration, the battle for Monterrey in late September 1846 proved to be a costly struggle, marked by bloody, desperate street and house-to-house fighting before the city was secured. Taylor’s campaign culminated the following February in the Battle of Buena Vista, fought in a narrow pass between mountain ranges south of the city of Saltillo against a larger force commanded by General Santa Anna. Except for about 200 dragoons and three batteries of artillery, Taylor’s men were volunteers, all but a few facing enemy fire for the first time. It was another hard-fought engagement, one the volunteers were not sure they could win.

Exhaustion turned to rejoicing when Santa Anna withdrew his army under cover of darkness and began a long retreat southward, his force diminished by heavy casualties and mounting desertions.

A second army, commanded by General Stephen Watts Kearny, moved westward from Missouri along the Santa Fe Trail, occupying New Mexico without a shot, and, in conjunction with naval forces, going on to take possession of California.

A third front was opened in March 1847, after months of planning that required the careful coordination of military and naval operations and the collection of vast amounts of ordnance and quartermaster stores. General Scott, in the greatest amphibious operation to that time, landed 9,000 men on the beach south of Veracruz in five hours without suffering a single casualty. In addition to regular troops transferred from Taylor’s command, Scott’s army included volunteer regiments from Pennsylvania, New York, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Illinois. By the end of March, Veracruz had fallen to the Americans, and Scott began his march inland toward Mexico City, on the route followed by Cortés in the 16th century. Santa Anna’s army blocked his path in Cerro Gordo, a wild, mountainous region, but by unexpectedly following a treacherous mountain path and scaling peaks under fire, Scott’s force flanked an apparently impregnable Mexican position, sending the enemy’s soldiers into headlong retreat. After several sharp engagements in the vicinity of Mexico City—at Contreras, Churubusco, Molino del Rey, and Chapultepec—Scott occupied the Mexican capital in September 1847. With the occupation of Mexico City the fighting came to an end, except for sporadic guerrilla raids along the lines of supply.

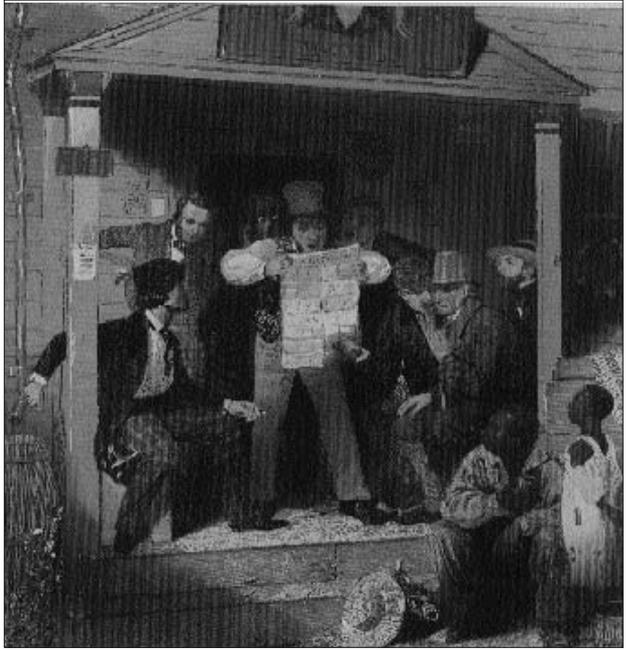
The logistical problems faced by Polk in directing the war were enormous and unprecedented. Large numbers of troops had to be raised in a short time, trained and equipped, and moved quickly over long distances to the scenes of the fighting. That the problems were met was a tribute to Polk’s single-minded dedica-

tion to what he conceived to be the responsibilities of presidential leadership in time of war.

Polk was the first president to give full definition to the role of commander in chief. “Polk gave the country its first demonstration of the *administrative* capacities of the presidency as a war agency,” historian Leonard D. White has written. “He proved that a president could run a war.” He not only placed the nation on a wartime footing almost overnight, but he also involved himself directly in all the countless details that sprang from prosecuting a war in a distant, and, to a large extent, unknown land. He took the initiative in securing war legislation and finance, made many of the tactical decisions that were conveyed to the armies by the War Department, appointed generals and drafted their instructions, and coordinated the work of the various bureaus and cabinet departments. Polk was, as one author has written, “the center on which all else depended.” Later, dealing with his own crisis, Abraham Lincoln devoted careful study to Polk’s management of the war.

Anticipating a short conflict, Polk undertook negotiations to end the war almost from the moment it began. The terms of the treaty that finally concluded the war were Polk’s terms from the beginning. Signed in early February 1848 in a suburb of Mexico City, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo recognized the Rio Grande boundary and provided for the cession of New Mexico and California to the United States. The United States canceled its long-standing claims against Mexico and agreed to pay Mexico \$15 million. The two countries further agreed to submit all future disputes to arbitration.

The Mexican War provided combat experience and valuable military lessons for many young officers who would later



War News from Mexico: An engraving after the painting by Richard Caton Woodville

become leaders in the Civil War. But the war had consequences far beyond the battlefield. It touched the lives of Americans more intimately and with greater immediacy than any major event to that time. Coinciding with the “print explosion” of the mid-19th century, of which the penny press was one manifestation, the war was reported in more detail than any previous conflict. Fast, steam-powered presses, innovative techniques in news gathering, the employment of war correspondents for the first time, the use of the new magnetic telegraph, and the rapid proliferation of books and periodicals all combined to carry the war into the lives of Americans on an unprecedented scale.

The first news of the war was greeted by an outburst of enthusiasm from one end of the country to the other: public demonstrations, bonfires, and illuminations, war rallies from Massachusetts to Illinois. “A military ardor pervades all ranks,” wrote Herman Melville from his New York home. “Nothing is talked of but the ‘Halls of the Montezuma.’”

How to explain the outburst of public support and the sudden rush of volunteers to the colors? How to account for what one newspaper called “this sublime

spectacle of military preparations”? One explanation was found in America’s commitment to a republican form of government. Where the people were the rulers, the security of the country in times of crisis was in the hands of its citizens.

There is no doubt that the war awakened a latent spirit of patriotism among Americans, but there were other, less lofty reasons for the rush of volunteers. It was a time when Americans were “reaching out” beyond their borders; the expansion of commerce, the increase in travel made possible by improvements in transportation, and the exploration by government-sponsored expeditions of remote areas in Africa, the Middle East, and South America all stimulated a romantic interest in other lands and other peoples. For the volunteers, the war offered a first exposure to a strange and ancient land they had only imagined before. “To revel among the intoxicating perfumes and flowery plains,” exulted an Ohio volunteer, “to gaze upon the magnificent scenery and wonderful exhibitions of Aztec civilization . . . to plant the flag of our young republic upon the capital reared centuries ago above the ruins of Montezuma’s palaces! What prospect more captivating to the youthful imagination?” Filled with the spirit of adventure, the volunteers shared their experiences with the folks back home in their letters, diaries, and the many published accounts of their campaigns, travel narratives in their own right.

The war entered the stream of American popular culture in a myriad of ways. It was celebrated in poetry and song, in paintings and lithographs, and in great “national dramas” performed on the stage in the nation’s theaters. Music publishers were quick to exploit the popular interest, and the chronology of the war could be told in the titles they issued. Piano arrangements in sheet music form, embellished with imaginative engravings depicting the war’s events, evoked the conflict in such pieces as *General Taylor’s Encampment Quickstep* and in the “elegant pianistic effects” of Stephen Foster’s *Santa Anna’s Retreat from Buena Vista*.

The Mexican War was dramatized even before the facts were known, but authentic-

ty of detail was never a concern for playwrights and producers who sought to re-enact the war’s events on the stage. Capacity audiences thrilled to such stage creations as *The Siege of Monterey, or, The Triumph of Rough and Ready*, which was so successful in New York that it went on tour, giving people the opportunity (according to its advertisement) “to exult in the triumph of American arms.”

Book publishers met the popular demand with a flood of romantic tales with Mexican War settings. Bound in bright yellow covers, illustrated with crude woodcuts, printed on rough paper in double columns, they became America’s first popular paperbacks. With such titles as *The Mexican Spy, or, The Bride of Buena Vista*, they combined all the popular Gothic elements—romance, intrigue, mystery, and suspense. The stories they told were strikingly similar—chivalric American volunteers displaying generosity to the vanquished foe, rescuing *senoritas* from the clutches of cruel Mexican guerrillas or corrupt priests, capturing these ladies’ hearts and not infrequently carrying them back to Kentucky or Illinois as war brides. Published in editions of as many as 100,000 copies, these books are almost impossible to find today. Passed around from hand to hand among soldiers as well as civilians, they were literally used up!

Not all the publications were such “catch-penny affairs.” James Fenimore Cooper, disappointed that the navy did not play a greater role in the war, made up for it by writing a novel of the Mexican War at sea, *Jack Tier, or, The Florida Reef* (1848), in which he imagined encounters between the United States and Mexican navies. For Cooper, America had embarked on a mission to break the “crust” that enclosed Mexico in bigotry and ignorance, and to bring the “blessings of real liberty” to the Mexican people. From his Brooklyn editorial office, Walt Whitman wrote eloquently of the victories in Mexico, viewing the war in terms of America’s great democratic mission to “elevate the *true* self-respect of the American people.”

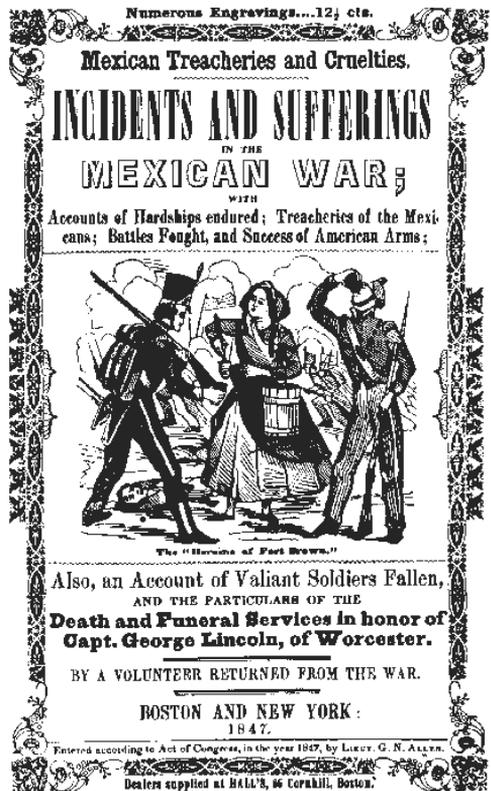
No single individual did as much to kindle the war-spirit as the prominent historian and chronicler of the 16th-century Spanish

conquest of Mexico, William Hickling Prescott. It was an ironic distinction, for Prescott was a dedicated antislavery New England Whig, strongly opposed to what he termed this “mad and unprincipled” war. The immense popularity of his *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843), published just two and a half years before the war, turned public attention toward Mexico, familiarizing countless Americans with the titanic struggle between Cortés and Montezuma. Prescott deplored the “dare-devil war spirit” following the first battles in May 1846, but what he did not realize was that his own work had much to do with provoking that spirit. By describing “the past Conquest of Mexico” so vividly, it was said, Prescott had in fact “foretold the future one.”

The war heightened the popularity of Prescott’s *History*, and his publisher brought out new editions to meet the demand. Volunteers read and re-read it, and many of them carried copies of the book with them into Mexico. One Indiana volunteer was so captivated by Prescott’s history that he joined the war hoping to relive some of its episodes. For the soldiers in Winfield Scott’s army, the book served as a guidebook along the route to the Mexican capital.

In spite of his antiwar attitude, Prescott expressed an admiration for the nation’s citizen soldiers. Without conceding that the war was either just or necessary, he judged the American campaigns to be as brilliant as those of the great 16th-century Spaniard himself. To some, it was only logical that Prescott should become the historian of the Second Conquest of Mexico, as he had of the First, and a number of people, including General Scott, appealed to the historian to consider the task. Prescott was tempted but in the end rejected the proposal.

Prescott’s attitude toward the war reflected the ambivalence of many of those who opposed the conflict. Members of the American Peace Society, for example, deplored the outburst of war spirit yet seemed more concerned with averting war with Great Britain over the Oregon country than with denouncing the war with Mexico. When the crisis with the British was settled amicably, a leader of the movement declared 1846 to be “an era in the Peace cause,” in spite of the fact that the Mexican



War was already under way. Others believed that the prestige of victory over Mexico would prevent Europeans from complaining that American peace advocates supported the outlawing of war only because their country was too weak to fight one.

Although many members of the Whig Party defended the war and took an active part in it, others charged the war with being unjust, immoral, and unnecessary, and held President Polk and his Democratic Party responsible for provoking it. Very few, however, assumed the extreme position of Senator Thomas Corwin of Ohio, who characterized the war as organized thievery and counseled the Mexicans to greet the volunteers “with bloody hands” and to welcome them “to hospitable graves.” Whig officers in the field were furious, charging that Corwin’s words bordered on treason, while Ohio volunteers burned the senator in effigy. Even while opposing “Mr. Polk’s war,” however, Whigs were advised that patriotism as well as the discipline of an ordered society demanded that every citizen support it. The fact that both the commanding generals, Scott and Taylor, were Whigs was not

lost on the party.

Outspoken and uncompromising in their opposition to the Mexican War were the abolitionists, whose leader set the tone of their protest a few days after Polk sent his war message to Congress. The war, proclaimed William Lloyd Garrison, was one “of aggression, of invasion, of conquest, and rapine—marked by ruffianism, perfidy, and every other feature of national depravity.” To the abolitionists, the war was waged solely to extend and perpetuate the institution of slavery, a mistaken assumption but one that confirmed the charge that a slave-power plot was afoot to strengthen the hated institution. Some abolitionists were unwilling to follow Garrison’s lead. The editor of a Cincinnati antislavery paper announced that he would not print antiwar articles for fear they would endanger the safety of American soldiers in Mexico. There was strong feeling that the shrill condemnations by such men as Corwin and Garrison played a part in delaying the peace negotiations and prolonging the war.

Eighty-seven-year-old Albert Gallatin brought the perspective of five decades of public service, as a diplomat, fiscal expert, and presidential adviser, to bear on the Mexican War. His concern was two-sided. The founder, in 1842, of the American Ethnological Society, he had just published a scholarly study of Mexican and Central American antiquities. He recognized that the war would advance his own ethnological research, and to this end he maintained a correspondence with officers in the army, asking for information on the native peoples of New Mexico and Arizona and urging them to collect books and documents relating to Mexico’s ancient civilization. At the same time, he was profoundly disturbed by the war’s impact upon the integrity of America’s republican government.

The people, Gallatin believed, were blinded by the “romantic successes” of their armies in Mexico; their minds were captured by an “enthusiastic and exclusive love of military glory.” More important, they had forgotten the mission God had assigned them, the mission to improve the “state of the world” and to demonstrate that republican government was attended by the “high-

est standard of private and political virtue and morality.” Instead, he argued, Americans had abandoned the lofty position of their fathers and had carried patriotism to excess.

Gallatin’s statement had little effect on public opinion in spite of its sincerity and uplifting tone. Its publication coincided with the signing of the peace treaty; the war was over and Gallatin’s views seemed no longer relevant. Of more importance in shaping popular perceptions of the war were those who saw the conflict in terms of the duties and responsibilities of citizens in a republic. While they agreed that war was alien to the true purpose of a republic, they also maintained that there were some wars that even republics had to fight. “In what way,” asked New England reformer Nahum Capen, “could the evils of Mexico be reached, unless by the strong hand of war?” As the world’s leading republic, the United States had a duty to rescue its benighted neighbor and see that justice be done its people.

Through all the talk of American superiority, of America’s providential destiny, and of its republican mission, there ran this theme of regeneration, or renewal. While some scholars have doubted the sincerity of those who argued the reform character of the Mexican War, the belief that it was America’s duty to redeem the Mexican people was too widespread to be dismissed as nothing more than an attempt to mask ulterior desires for power and gain. People from all walks of life, including the soldiers in Mexico, echoed the belief that it was their mission to bring Mexico into the 19th century. Critics of the war such as Prescott and Gallatin might scoff at the exaggerated rhetoric of the war’s supporters, but they too shared the view that America’s role in Mexico was a regenerative one.

General Scott gave official sanction to the theme of regeneration in his first proclamation to the Mexican nation, issued from Jalapa on May 11, 1847, three weeks after the bloody engagement at Cerro Gordo. The war, he declared, was an evil. Nations, however, “have sacred duties to perform, from which they cannot swerve.” Mexican republicanism had become the “sport of private

ambition” and cried out for rescue. Scott admonished the Mexican people to throw off their old colonial habits and to “learn to be truly free—truly republican.” It is doubtful whether Scott’s proclamation reached many Mexicans, but it had a deep effect on the men in his army. When the troops moved into Puebla later in the summer, one of the Mexican residents noted that the soldiers “talk of nothing but fraternity between the two republics, and say they have only come to save the democratic principle.”

When President Polk reviewed the results of the Mexican War in his annual message to Congress in December 1848, he found its meaning in the nation’s demonstration that a democracy could successfully prosecute a foreign war “with all the vigor” normally associated with “more arbitrary forms of government.” Critics, he noted, had long charged republics with an inherent lack “of that unity, concentration of purpose, and vigor of execution” that characterized authoritarian governments. A popularly elected representative government with a volunteer army of citizen-soldiers had bested a military dictatorship. No more persuasive argument for the strength and superiority of the republican system, he felt, could be advanced.

Polk’s view was widely shared. The United States was yet a young and fragile nation, and its people were sensitive to the fact that in the eyes of the world theirs was still an unproven experiment in popular government. Europeans had scoffed at America’s national pretensions, its bluster and spread-eagle rhetoric, ridiculed its romantic faith in the popular voice, and magnified the weakness of its institutions. Their opinions had been confirmed by a host of travelers, including Charles Dickens, who had toured the country four years before the war and found the “model republic” wanting in almost every respect. As for waging an offensive war, it was said that the country would surely collapse into disunity and paralysis at the very thought.

Americans responded with a defensiveness that bordered on paranoia. The Mexican War, they were convinced, would

silence the scoffers, for they had shown the world that a people devoted to the “arts of peace” could vanquish a “military people, governed by military despots.” The prestige of victory, moreover, would not be without its influence overseas. When in the very month the treaty of peace was signed, on February 22 (the symbolism of the date, George Washington’s birthday, was not lost on the Americans), revolution broke out in France against the monarchy and in favor of constitutional government, the connection with the Mexican War seemed obvious. James Fenimore Cooper reflected popular opinion when he exulted that the guns that had filled “the valley of the Aztecs with their thunder” were heard “in echoes on the other side of the Atlantic.”

The victorious conclusion of the Mexican War and its repercussions in Europe seemed to herald the dawn of a new and golden age for the “model republic”—golden in fact, for gold was discovered in California at the very moment California became part of the United States. Expansion to the Pacific Ocean in California and Oregon (the latter by an 1846 treaty with Great Britain) was celebrated as the fulfillment of the nation’s manifest destiny. “The far-reaching, the boundless future,” John L. O’Sullivan proudly proclaimed, “will be the era of American greatness.”

Yet, for all the lofty rhetoric and soaring predictions, clouds had begun to gather in the bright morning skies of the republic (as one writer put it). Some Americans feared that the Mexican War would result in a militarism that was antithetical to the purposes of the republic. Others saw an even greater danger in the revival of the troublesome question of slavery’s expansion into new territories. Probably most Americans felt that the clouds would quickly dispel. Mutual concession and compromise had settled such questions before, and would surely do so again. With the new prestige and strength gained from victory over Mexico, the republic appeared indestructible. As well attempt to dissolve the solar system, declared Polk’s treasury secretary Robert J. Walker, as to sever the ties that “must forever bind together the American Union.”

# Our Enemy, The State?

*“Civil society” has become the talisman of the post–Cold War era, invoked by everybody from Vaclav Havel to Patrick Buchanan. While associations and volunteer groups are indeed essential to a society’s health, our author reminds us that a civilized society cannot exist without the civilizing authority of the state.*

*by John Lukacs*

**O**ur *Enemy, the State* is the title of a book by the American essayist Albert Jay Nock, first published in 1935 and reprinted three times since, most recently in 1983. Nock was a very intelligent thinker, an individualist of much learning, strong prejudices, and profound convictions. He was also a good writer, whose aphoristic style—of which the following instances are typical—amounted to more than superficial brilliance:

“Bureaucracy is ineradicable as a cancer, when once it gets well-rooted.”

“Probably not many realize how the rapid centralization of government in America has fostered a kind of organized pauperism.”

“The present state of public affairs shows clearly enough that the State is the poorest instrument imaginable for improving human society, and that confidence in political institutions and political nostrums is ludicrously misplaced.”

“The State is no proper agency for human welfare.”

Most of these notions were set down in the 1930s. Nock had nothing but contempt for the New Deal. Except for a few judicious readers, he was not appreciated

during his lifetime (he died in 1945), but among the recent generation of conservative (conservative, rather than neoconservative) intellectuals his reputation has risen; several of his books, in addition to *Our Enemy, the State*, have been reprinted, and there even exists a Nockian Society.

Nock was an idiosyncratic and extremely individualistic thinker, but his enmity for the bureaucratic (and imperialist) state was not singular. Unique as in many ways he was, he may after all be listed among such antistatist writers as Herbert Spencer, Hilaire Belloc, G. K. Chesterton (all English writers before World War I); Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek (Viennese liberals after World War I); and the Viennese neoliberal Karl Popper (after World War II)—except for Spencer, all of them heroes of present conservative intellectuals. While Spencer was an atheist, Belloc and Chesterton were Catholic anti-capitalists, which the Viennese were not, while Nock was an intellectual aristocrat of sorts. There were, thus, deep differences among their arguments, as there are contradictions within the antistate and anti-government ideologies of the present conservatives.

## II

But, then, Alexis de Tocqueville (in the second, and originally less appreciated, volume of *Democracy in America*) had already foreseen the probable evolution of democratic government into a bureaucratic one. He did not use the words “bureaucracy” or “welfare,” but he was, as almost always, crystal clear. The principle of equality, he feared, would become more powerful than the principle of liberty, and the ideal of equality might sooner or later make people accept the practice of government extending itself to rule very large areas of their lives.

This was, of course, what happened. Fifty or 60 years after Tocqueville, liberals and progressives, especially in the English-speaking countries, were compelled to advocate government intervention to correct the vast (and sometimes brutal) injustices flowing from untrammelled capitalism and industrialism. This tendency led to government institutions, laws, and assorted affirmations of all kinds of material (and other) equalities, and to the eventual appearance of the “welfare” or “provider” state. This kind of government intervention was, for a long time, supported not only by its beneficiaries but by large majorities—until relatively recently, when the rise of “conservatism” led to a rather predictable popular reaction against some of the excesses (and sometimes against the very principles) of government policies and regulations.

This popular reaction has not been confined to the United States or to other English-speaking countries. Its symptoms have appeared in Scandinavia, Holland, Germany, Austria, Spain—in some places under a neoconservative label, in others under a neoliberal one.

The fuzziness of such labels is not the only problem in our political lexicon. There is, for instance, a difference between government and state. Tocqueville, who was

anxious about the future of governments entirely dependent on popular sovereignty, wrote about government and not the state. Indeed, in the 1830s he thought that the authority of the state in the United States was too indistinct and weak, rather than definite and strong.

By contrast, Albert Jay Nock’s enemy was not government but the state—a distinction that he would make at times. He wished that society would “deprive the State of power to make positive coercions upon the individual at any point in his economic and social life; for then *the State* will go out of existence, and what remains is *government*.” He was in favor of this, as behooves an old-fashioned individualist. Yet this is not one of Nock’s clearer obiter dicta. Nor did it occur to him that while the Declaration of Independence was a reaction against the exactions of the English government, the great achievement of the Constitution and of George Washington was the establishment of the





*Horatio Greenough's George Washington*

American state. It was in the defense of the state that Washington chose to suppress the antigovernment populists of the Whiskey Rebellion. (Would Nock have been in favor of the Whiskey Rebellion? We do not know.) But now, 60 years after Nock, and 200 years after the Whiskey Rebellion and Washington, we have conservatives who show sympathy for militias, armed cultists, and all kinds of rebels against the government—people who, in reality, are defying not merely the interferences of government but the civil authority of the state.

Whether a distinction between government and state is unduly philosophic is arguable. What is not arguable is that to the present American critics of government, this distinction does not exist. The objects of their indignation, whether of the government or of the state, are selectively chosen. The same people who say that the enemy is government are in favor of every kind of armament or defense expenditure as well as of other imperial institutions of the state. During the antigovernment Reagan era, the White House staff was six times larger than Franklin Roosevelt's at the peak of World War II. Consider then

that the White House or the Pentagon or the CIA or "Star Wars" are government too; or that not only liberals but also conservatives are inclined, on numerous occasions, to legislate morality or to support gigantic boondoggles such as the Supercollider. Nor does the conservative exaltation of the so-called market economy mean its independence from government. Few conservative Republicans objected to the government bailout of aircraft manufacturers such as Lockheed. As Nock noted more than 60 years ago, "The simple truth is that our businessmen do not want a government that will let business alone. They want a government that they can use."

That may be as true of postcommunist Russia as it is of the United States, whether before or after the New Deal—or now.

### III

The most corrupting lies, wrote Georges Bernanos more than 50 years ago, are problems wrongly stated. One—though only one—factor in such misstatements is that our political designations "liberal" and "conservative" are so outdated as to have become almost entirely useless. During the 19th century, liberals fought against all kinds of state regulations, ranging from censorship to restraints on trade. They wished to restrict and diminish the stringent authority of the state. Conservatives believed that the power and the authority of the state (including even its authority over religion) must not be weakened to a dangerous extent. About 100 years ago there came a change. Liberals—mostly because of their unquestioning belief in progress and in evolution—began to promote state intervention in economic life, to protect and insure more people—except when it came to the preservation of traditional morals. Conservatives (and please note that "conservative," as a political adjective, was unacceptable in the United States until about 40 years ago), unlike their putative ancestors, began to

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argue and campaign for the restriction of government—except when it came to the military and police powers of the state. Do not think that these are recent developments, results of the Reagan or Gingrich “revolutions.” In 1956, Section Nine of the Republican election platform called for “the establishment of American air and naval bases *all around the world.*” (The italics are mine.) These were people whom liberals at that time still called isolationists—only God knew why. Or consider a statement by the eloquent Christian conservative and Republican spokeswoman Mrs. Phyllis Schlafly in 1980: “God gave America the atom bomb.” Mrs. Schlafly! It was not God; it was Franklin Roosevelt.

During the 19th century, liberalism was young, representing reform, while conservatism was old, representing tradition; but we live now at the end of a century when most liberals have become senile, while most conservatives are puerile.

#### IV

The labels “liberal” and “conservative” did not become outdated only because their meanings changed. Nor did the liberal-conservative antithesis of the 19th century become superseded by a kind of Hegelian synthesis. More than 100 years ago, two great new movements arose in the world: nationalism and socialism. Their combination—and not that of liberalism and conservatism—has marked most of the history of the 20th century, continuing into the present. The most radical and extreme formula of this combination was Adolf Hitler; but the anathema of German National Socialism ought not obscure the recognition that we are, all, national socialists now, in one way or another. In 1996, there is not one government in the world that has not accepted some of the practices of the national welfare state. In the United States, the difference between Republicans and Democrats—and between conservatives and liberals—may be properly summed up by saying that the former are more nationalist than

socialist, and the latter more socialist than nationalist. The combination of nationalism and socialism has become universal. The ratio of its components may vary from country to country, but it exists everywhere; and of the two components, it is nationalism that often has the more powerful appeal to the masses.

Another gradual but profound change began a little more than 100 years ago, with the emergence of Populism. Of course, the Constitution of the United States established checks and balances against the unlimited sovereignty of popular majorities. (It is less known that many of the French radical republicans of the 1790s also expressed their doubts about popular sovereignty.) But the Populist movement in the United States, rising in the 1890s against capitalism and for radical government intervention in finance, economics, and education, demanded popular sovereignty without limits—in sum, more democracy, not less. For a while, Populists and Progressives were allied. Then, in the 1930s, came their hostile separation: the former were, by and large, nationalists, while the latter were not. By the 1950s, the formerly antipopulist (or at least nonpopulist) Republicans became more and more populist—with the result that now Republicans and “conservatives” argue that it is they who stand for “genuine popular sovereignty”<sup>\*</sup>—conveniently ignoring the checks and balances of the American constitution. (But then, our present “conservatives” oppose the conservation of land, too.)

Yet most of their rhetoric and many of their political advocacies are popular. The majority of the American people are tired of the excesses of the welfare state. Whether they want less government or not is yet to be seen. Whether they want the weakening of the state is at least

<sup>\*</sup>As, for example, William F. Buckley, Jr., in a manifesto of an article (*National Review*, Dec. 11, 1995) entitled “After History’s Detour.” (Subtitle: “In 1914, History took a wrong turn toward totalitarianism, statism, and moral liberalism.”) Of course “history” does not take wrong turns. People do. Because of their minds.

doubtful, but this is what they seem to think they want.

## V

We ought to understand that populism is inevitably nationalist. That was recognized by Hitler, who was most explicit about it. He said, on many occasions, that the state was but a framework, and an altogether antiquated one. “First came the *Volks!*” he said, “and only then the state.” He distrusted both the military and the administrative bureaucracy of Germany: “The state is the instrument of the people.”

We ought as well to rethink the imprecise and incorrect term “totalitarianism,” meaning the total tyranny of the state. To begin with the obvious: total rule of a state is impossible. Even at the peak and at the maximum extent of a modern dictator’s rule, there remain people and islands of life that are surprisingly untouched by the police rule of the state. The “totalitarian” adjective may be acceptable in one sense only—when it refers to the intention of a tyrant to exercise total state control over the inhabitants, even when such total control is in practice unmanageable. Sooner or later the successors to the tyrant recognize this (as at times tyrants themselves do). The result is an often arbitrary, illogical, and unpredictable reduction of police interference in certain areas of life. This was what happened—erratically, and not necessarily as the product of benevolence or good will—in the Soviet Union after the death of Joseph Stalin. After 1953, the Soviet Union became less of a “totalitarian” than an “authoritarian” state—even though such designations are never leakproof, and to some extent may overlap. Then, after 1985, the rule of the Communist Party and of the government (of which the former constituted a large part of its apparatus) was intentionally reduced by Mikhail Gorbachev, until (and it is to be doubted that he had foreseen this with all of its consequence) the weakening authority of the Soviet government debouched into the partial col-

lapse of the authority and of the actual control of the state.

Five or six years after these great changes in the former Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe, there can be no doubt that the greatest danger not only for these regions’ populations but also for the world resides in the weakness of the authority of the Russian state: the opposite of the Evil Empire syndrome that all the conservative or neoconservative ideologues talked about. The enfeebled authority of the central government of the Russian state threatens the living conditions of an entire population, while it affects Russia’s neighbors as well as far-away powers such as the United States. We are now witnessing the inability of the Russian state to maintain the security of its borders, leading to intermittent warfare along the edges; the inability of the government to enforce its laws and regulations; the inability of its police authority to maintain the necessary minimum of law and order—in sum, the inability to protect its people, which is, and must remain, the essential purpose of a state. From this failure (or is it unwillingness?) arises that opportunity for criminal or at least semicriminal elements not only to prosper materially but to enforce their own rule by their own means—in other words, to establish their own authority. It was thus that a new kind of barbaric rulership emerged after the total collapse of Roman imperial authority. Even during most of the Middle Ages, men were regularly enlisted to fight on behalf of their local overlords, though not for a cause so vague as their state. Something like this may soon happen again. While history does not repeat itself, a new kind of feudalism may be the prospect not only before Russia but also before much that remains of the so-called civilized world.

## VI

An instructive example of what happens when the authority of the state is weak may now be apparent in Italy, a country whose society and history are



A detail from Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Allegory of Good Government* (1338–39)

profoundly different from those of Russia. Recently, the majority of Italian voters turned against the ruling political parties not only because of revelations of their large-scale corruption but also because the Christian Democratic governments proved unable to control the Mafia and, in some instances, to be in collusion with it. In other words, the corruption of the government was complemented, indeed enhanced, by the feebleness of the authority of the Italian state.

The difference between Italy and Russia derives, of course, from the historical differences in the characteristics of the two very different societies. “Civil society” in Italy has always existed because of the strong private bonds of the Italian family, with its humane (and often opportunistic) features. But while civil (or, more precisely, private) society in Italy has existed for a long time, the united Italian state did not exist until 1870.\* And

\*Consider now not only the difference between Italy and Russia but, alas, between Italy and the United States. In June 1992, a vast crowd of Sicilians demonstrated in Palermo *for* the enforcement of the laws, against the Mafia, and against the weakness of the Italian government in fighting it. In New York at the same time, a smaller but more violent crowd of Italian-Americans demonstrated in favor of the convicted Mafioso and assassin John Gotti, *against* the enforcement of the law, and against the authority of the state that prosecuted and convicted him. (Another difference: the Italian-American demonstrators in New York, all Republicans now, waved American flags, convinced as they were that they represented true American nationalism.)

here the example of Italy may be instructive, for it was in Italy that not only our “modern” civilization but the very idea and experience of the modern state began, five or six hundred years ago.

The concept, and the practice, of the modern state as we know it arose among the Italian city-states of the Renaissance (together with many other things, such as modern political theory and the practice of modern diplomacy). Despite ancient precedents, this concept was new and extraordinary then; the great historian Jakob Burckhardt, author of *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, entitled one of his famous chapters, “The State as a Work of Art.” The formulation of the ideal of the state and its implementation at the city level did not lead to the unification of Italian-speaking people into a single state; that idea and that achievement lay far in the future. Nor were the Medicis, Sforzas, and Estes liberal democrats. But the Italian-spawned concept of the sovereign state soon spread to Western Europe, as did other achievements of the Renaissance. The first Bourbons of France and the first Tudor king of England were no liberal democrats either, but the concept and the practice of the modern state were indissolubly bound to the rise of the sovereign (and, thus, in many ways absolute) monarch.

That rise of powerful monarchies included—strange as it may seem—a democratic element. It was, to a large extent,



*"I am the state," declared Louis XIV.*

propelled by a popular reaction against the aristocratic feudalism of the Middle Ages, with its capricious wars and exactions by feudal lords. The new monarchs were supported by the rising middle classes, whom they had seemed to protect. It is not wholly ascertainable whether Louis XIV really said, "L'état c'est moi." What is ascertainable is that he was less the incarnation than the principal representative of the state, the king being the first servant of the state rather than the state being the servant of the king. And then, a century or two later, came another change. The centralization of state power in the court of a king was becoming less and less efficient and less and less tolerable for the same middle and upper-middle classes whose ancestors had once welcomed the protection issuing from the untrammelled powers of a king. Some kings were condemned to death; other were rejected; still others were constrained to rule according to constitutions.

The supreme and unquestionable authority of monarchs was gone. But the supreme and unquestionable authority of the state was not. The American state was born and baptized not in 1776 but in 1789, after the ratification of a constitution was followed by

the inauguration of an elected president. He was supposed to represent the monarchical element in a constitution that had been composed to represent the checks and balances of a "Mixed Government," including (in the classical Greek meaning of the terms) monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic elements, all for serving the best possible purposes of the American state.

Presidential government, especially in the United States, amounts to a constitutional elective monarchy. In other states, especially in Western Europe, constitutional hereditary monarchies have continued to exist, together with elected governments with liberal and democratic practices not altogether different from those of the United States. That the actual powers of these hereditary monarchies have greatly diminished is obvious. Somewhat less diminished—though this varies from country to country—is the popular respect accorded to traditional heads of families representing the first servants of the state. So is the respect due to the father or mother of a family inseparable from his or her function as its first servitor. A family will not prosper under the absolute tyranny of a parent; but then, a family cannot really be said to exist if governed by the sovereign principle of populism. The restoration of the liberal and democratic states of Western Europe after World War II included the restoration of their constitutional monarchies, in Holland, Belgium, Denmark, and Norway, for example; the American acceptance of the continuance of the monarchy in Japan made the swift ending of the war possible; Franco's acceptance of the grandson of the last king of Spain as his successor has provided an element of stability, too. Thus it is regrettable that the restoration of a constitutional monarch as head of state was eschewed by the governments in Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, perhaps even Russia, during the period of anarchy that followed the collapse of their former authoritarian or totalitarian governments. But it is not my purpose to set forth the virtues of hereditary—and constitutional—monarchies. It is to suggest

that the authority of the state, like the authority of a family, is inseparable from the very idea, and practice, of civilization.

## VII

Note now the title of Burckhardt's great work: *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. It should suggest something that has been greatly obscured: that the concept of civilization is something older than the modern concept of "culture," and that the former appeared about the same time as the modern institution of the state. During the last 100 years we have, by and large, come to accept an idea of German provenance: that culture is something higher than mere civilization. This was a romantic notion. Civilization meant a certain material and governmental order, a bourgeois ideal. Culture meant the higher things of the mind—and of the soul. The English, said Germans both before and during World War I, were a nation of shopkeepers, civilized, yes, but without much *Kultur*. The Germans were a *Kulturvolk*. We know where this exaltation of *Kultur* over *Zivilisation* got them. But elsewhere, too, this positing of the superiority of culture took root: among American intellectuals who lamented the inadequacy of American culture (while richly profiting from American civilization).

This belief in the superiority of culture to civilization is a dangerous one. The Greeks had no word for culture. They had other concepts and words: "civic" and "civility," which, like "polis" and "politic" (wherefrom many of our words such as "city," "citizen," "urbane," and "urbanity" derive) were the opposites of barbarity and barbarism. Culture

in English and other European languages originally referred to cultivation. For a long time it was inseparable from agriculture; then it was applied metaphorically to the cultivation of minds. "Civilize," in English, appears first in 1601: "to make civil; to bring out of a state of barbarism; to instruct in the arts of life; to enlighten and refine." In other words, the notions of civilization and civility preceded the later, and still present, notion of culture. Culture depends on civilization—not the other way around.

There are reasons to think that the chasm dividing conservatives and liberals in this country now is cultural—that is, deeper than the differences over taxes and welfare. But again: the problem is



*Celebrating cultural roots: The model of a Viking boat is part of the pageantry on the Nazi-inspired Day of German Art in 1939.*

wrongly stated. Those who—in my opinion, rightly—are worried about "multiculturalism" do not see that the real problem is, rather, multicivilization: the breaking up of standards of civilization that in a state must be sufficiently unitary. Culture may be tribal. Civilization is not.

So now we face something new in the long history of mankind. We can now have culture without civilization. With this achievement, the progressive notion of the great chain of evolution—from primitiveness to civilization to culture—has become absurd and laughable.

Yes, you cannot have civilization without some culture. But when civilization breathes and lives and is strong, culture

will arise; it will take care of itself. Must government promote culture at all? That is at least arguable. What is not arguable is that government must protect civilization. When it fails to do so, government as we know it dissolves, with first anarchy and then barbaric tyranny succeeding it.

When a civilization functions, so do its public institutions. One hundred years ago, American public schools, public hospitals, public parks, and other public facilities and services were among the best in the world. Since that time, the very sense of what is “public” has decayed: our public schools, public hospitals, and public transportation are shunned by many people. (Notice only the debasing suggestion of the license plates of buses in many states: MASS TRANSIT). What the “privatization” of these institutions has meant is nothing but the replacement of one bureaucracy by another—and, almost always, the latter is of an inferior nature. (The same applies to the relationship of federal to state bureaucracies.) There is absolutely no guarantee that the bureaucracy of a health insurance company will be more humane, or even more efficient, than the federal civil servant looking over your Medicare records, or that the Nevada Department of Revenue will be more accurate, or considerate, in computing your taxable income than the Internal Revenue Service.

The purpose of government includes the protection of domesticity and privacy through the maintenance of sufficient law

and order to guarantee the safety of citizens so that they can prosper freely. But we have long forgotten that it is more difficult to be free than not to be free. Liberals as well as conservatives have contributed to this kind of amnesia. The former have been taking civilization, and its progress, for granted; the latter seem not to understand that freedom is not the root of civilization but its fruit, and that civilization means the restriction of many a freedom. Primitivism, pornography, and multiculturalism have been promoted, or at least defended, by many liberals. But we face another phenomenon, too: barbarism promoted by people who call themselves conservatives. Emerson wrote that “The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language.” The reverse is true; and the much vaunted Information Explosion may accelerate the corruption.

The danger that threatens us—yes, here in the United States—is the breakdown not of culture but of civilization itself—which, in turn, depends on the proper authority of the state and on the proper practices of government. These practices may be bureaucratic rather than democratic, exaggerated as well as constraining, abstractly humanitarian yet in reality inhuman. Still our enemy is not the state, and not even government itself. It is the misconception of such terms as Progress and Freedom—confusing masses of people in the name of an antigovernment populism, leading to anarchy first and to tyranny afterwards, or to a future novel mixture of both.

# THE PERIODICAL OBSERVER

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

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## North Korea's Nuclear 'Threat'

A Survey of Recent Articles

In October 1994, building on the free-lance diplomacy of former president Jimmy Carter, the United States struck a deal with communist North Korea, which had seemed on the verge of becoming a nuclear power. Although it blunted the immediate risk of a military confrontation, critics condemned the accord as "appeasement." Under the so-called Agreed Framework, North Korea is to receive two light-water reactors, a free supply of fuel oil while the reactors are being built, and various other inducements, in return for freezing its current nuclear program and eventually permitting "special" (on-demand) international inspections of its nuclear waste sites. The agreement has not proven easy to implement. Pyongyang has repeatedly made new demands and put up new obstacles. But for all the deal's shortcomings, and the further difficulties and dangers ahead, it now appears to some analysts that "appeasement"—up to a point—may well be the best way to limit the spread of nuclear weapons in cases such as this one.

When push finally came to shove in 1994, the Clinton administration backed away from the president's firm statement in November 1993 that North Korea "cannot be allowed to develop a nuclear bomb." "The costs, in terms of the other major U.S. and allied interests, were simply too high," Michael J. Mazarr, editor of the *Washington Quarterly*, contends in a 30-page analysis in *International Security* (Fall 1995). "To have enforced nonproliferation in a strict sense would have risked war in Korea, the failure of the South's evolving democracy, the collapse of North Korea and a costly and violent unification, and new tensions between the

United States and Japan, Russia, and China."

Moreover, tougher U.S. approaches probably would not have worked, Mazarr maintains. China, South Korea, Russia, and Japan did not want war or the rapid disintegration of North Korea, and all were reluctant to cooperate in imposing economic sanctions. Nor were "surgical" air strikes against North Korea's nuclear facilities in Yongbyon feasible. "Even if the U.S. military had known what to hit," Mazarr says, "the North Koreans had been digging shelters deep into hard rock, impervious to most precision weapons." And the target—the alleged cache of plutonium, illegally taken from its nuclear reactor—"was small enough to fit inside a football, and U.S. officials had no idea whatsoever where it might be."

Estimates vary as to how many, if any, nuclear weapons North Korea has produced, notes Brian Bridges, a senior lecturer at Lingnan College, Hong Kong, in the *World Today* (June 1995). The defecting son-in-law of the regime's prime minister claimed in mid-1994 that the North had manufactured five bombs. But U.S. intelligence sources believe "one or two crude models" is more likely, Bridges says. Japanese defense officials are still skeptical as to whether even one crude bomb has been made.

The Korean peninsula is often called a powder keg. Neither North Korea nor South Korea is satisfied with the division that has been in place since the 1953 armistice ending the Korean War. Yet political scientist David C. Kang points out in *Asian Survey* (Mar. 1995) that despite minor incidents, the Korean situation has been stable

for more than four decades. North Korea, it is often noted, is a highly militarized society with an estimated one million men under arms, compared with South Korea's 600,000. But the South's forces are better trained and have superior equipment and logistical support, Kang points out.

"The U.S. deployment [of 34,700 troops] in South Korea makes deterrence robust and the chances of war on the peninsula are remote. North Korea, for all its bluster regarding the South, has never challenged the U.S.-ROK [Republic of Korea] deterrent," Kang notes. The threat of U.S. nuclear reprisals against North Korea makes that deterrent all the more effective.



North Korean nuclear weapons would not significantly change the balance of power on the Korean peninsula, Kang contends. "North Korea cannot hope to win a war against the United States, and stability is thus maintained; if the U.S. commitment to the South remains strong, the likelihood of war on the peninsula is slight."

Henry Sokolski, executive director of the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, agrees. The real danger from a nuclear-armed North Korea, he writes in *Comparative Strategy* (Oct.-Dec. 1995), is that it "can use coercive nuclear diplomacy on its neighbors and adversaries."

Indeed, notes Brian Bridges, North Korea already "has been able to play the 'nuclear card' very effectively," not only to get the agreement in 1994 but since. Pyongyang has repeatedly balked at implementing the agreement—demanding additional aid, refusing at first to accept light-water reactors built by South Korea, obstructing regular international inspections, and threatening to resume its nuclear program—all in hopes of extracting new U.S. concessions or disrupt-

ing the U.S.-Japanese-South Korean alliance. At the moment, the various obstacles have apparently been overcome, but it is likely that more obstacles will arise in the future.

There comes a point where "appeasement" must stop, the analysts agree. "Washington and Seoul cannot become so wedded" to the 1994 agreement, Michael Mazarr writes, "that they allow North Korean provocations to go unpunished." The risk of war would only increase.

"North Korea has worked toward a nuclear capability," observes Moon Young (Michael) Park, special aide to the defense attaché in the Republic of Korea's Washington embassy, expressing his personal views in *Foreign Policy* (Winter 1994-95), "primarily because that capability is its sole source of diplomatic power. . . . Given that North Korea's actual use of nuclear weapons is out of the question, the international community should take its nuclear development not as a threat but rather as a bluff. We should not allow the communists in Pyongyang to continue manipulating us. The regime will fall sooner or later, despite its nuclear capability; having the bomb will not save it, as was amply demonstrated by the collapse of the Soviet Union."

With its Soviet patron gone, North Korea is isolated and in bad shape economically. Food shortages and small-scale food riots have been reported. The death in 1994 of Kim Il Sung, who had ruled the People's Democratic Republic of Korea since its founding in 1948, marks, Brian Bridges believes, the beginning of the end for the regime. Kim's son and chosen successor, Kim Jong Il, has made few public appearances since his father's death and has yet to be named president and party general secretary.

Some have charged that the 1994 agreement is only propping up the moribund communist regime. But Mazarr points out that Washington and Seoul are agreed that "some sort of a softer landing" would be better than a sudden collapse leading to "a rapid and unstable unification." Until that "landing," soft or not, occurs, however, it appears that the problem of North Korea's nuclear "threat" will continue to exist.

## POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

### *Time for a Third Party?*

“Alternative Politics” by Michael Kazin, in *Dissent* (Winter 1996), 521 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

From TR in 1912 to Ross Perot 80 years later, there have been quite a few serious independent presidential candidates. But there has not been a national third party with sustained appeal since the populist People’s Party of the 1890s. On the Left today, there are “three notable efforts” being made to change that—but Kazin, a historian at American University, argues for a different way “to get us moving forward again.”

One group with third-party aspirations is the Green Politics Network of radical environmentalists, feminists, and others. At a national conference in Washington last June, some 100 delegates representing 40 tiny organizations issued what Kazin says “amounts to a dream list of the post-’60s Left.” Currently, Green parties exist in 17 states but have access to the ballot in only five. Kazin doubts they will get much further. Nor is the outlook more promising for Labor Party Advocates, founded by a band of left-wing unionists in 1990. “Half a decade later, only three small international unions . . . and a scattering of citywide labor councils have signed on.” The party’s first national conference is scheduled for June.

That leaves the four-year-old New Party, “a racially diverse, feminist, reform-mind-

ed, Green and unapologetically pro-working-people and pro-consumer party,” according to its organizers, who claim a membership of 6,000. “Its strategy,” Kazin notes, “is to build up from strong local chapters that keep their electoral options open,” running its own candidates in some cases, urging votes on its line for major-party candidates in others. To date, the party has run or endorsed candidates in about 115 races, mostly at the city or county level, and 77 have won.

“For all its practical planning, the New Party shares a familiar and critical flaw with its utopian left cousins,” Kazin writes. “All believe they have a natural base among millions of nonvoters” who supposedly would flock “to a third party that spoke to their needs.” This is “an old tune,” Kazin points out, and, unfortunately, there is no evidence to support it.

He urges pragmatic leftists to look instead to an institution that they may too quickly write off: the Democratic Party. “As Ralph Reed and his [Christian Coalition] troops have mobilized within the GOP,” Kazin says, “left activists and intellectuals could work within the other major party to develop and gather strength for a politics of class justice, racial tolerance, and cultural decency.”

### *‘Bowling Alone’: Frame II*

“The Strange Disappearance of Civic America” by Robert D. Putnam, in *The American Prospect* (Winter 1996), P.O. Box 383080, Cambridge, Mass. 02238; “Tuning in, Tuning Out:

The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America” by Robert D. Putnam, in *PS: Political Science & Politics* (Dec. 1995), American Political Science Assn., 1527 New Hampshire Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

If more Americans these days are “bowling alone,” then what is the cause? In a much-discussed article last year [see “The Periodical Observer,” *WQ*, Spring ‘95, p. 137], Putnam, the director of Harvard’s Center for International Affairs, mustered mounds of data to argue that American civil society has dangerously decayed. He captured the trend in one powerful image: even as that all-American communal institution, the bowling league, has been fast declining, Americans are bowling more than ever

before—alone.

“Americans today are significantly less engaged with their communities than was true a generation ago,” he maintains. There have been major declines in membership in groups such as the PTA and in “social trust” (as measured by poll respondents who agree that “most people can be trusted”). This civic decay has occurred despite a massive rise in educational levels; in general, “well-educated people are much more likely to be joiners and

trusters.”

To solve the mystery, Putnam first discounts some obvious suspects:

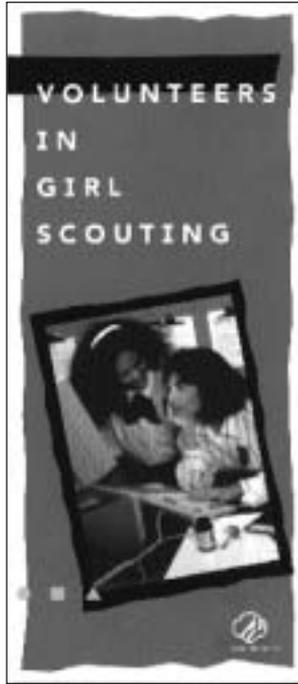
- *Mobility and consequent rootlessness.* Census data show “that rates of residential mobility have been remarkably constant over the last half century.”

- *“Overwork” by Americans.* While the proportion of those telling pollsters they feel “always rushed” has jumped in recent decades, studies indicate that average Americans have actually *gained* free time. In any event, workaholics seem *more* involved in the community than others, not less.

- *The movement of women into the paid labor force.* Working women belong to slightly *more* voluntary organizations than housewives do—albeit to different sorts (more professional associations, fewer PTAs). Moreover, housewives have reduced their civic engagement more than working women have. However, civic engagement has fallen far more steeply among women than men. Putnam’s interim verdict: not proven.

- *The decline of marriage.* True, married men and women are about a third more “trusting” and belong to as many as 25 percent more groups than comparable single folk. But the decline of marriage is probably only “an accessory to the crime . . . not the major villain,” Putnam says.

A very significant clue, he contends, is this: “Americans who came of age during the



*Not all the news about civic involvement is bad. One success story: the Girl Scouts, with 827,000 adult volunteers in 1993, up from 674,000 in 1970.*

Depression and World War II have been far more deeply engaged in the life of their communities than the generations that have followed them.” They belong to many more civic associations, are far more likely to trust people, vote at a higher rate, and read newspapers more often. “It is as though the postwar generations were exposed to some mysterious X-ray that permanently and increasingly rendered them less likely to con-

nect with the community,” he observes.

That mysterious force—and the main cause of America’s civic rot—is television, the social scientist–detective concludes. An analysis of data on people who are similar in virtually every other respect—education, income, age, sex, etc.—shows one factor to be strongly linked with lower levels of social trust and membership in groups: spending lots of time in front of the television. Heavy TV viewers (unlike omnivorous readers) tend to be loners, not joiners, and also to be “unusually skeptical about the benevolence of other people.” With the average American now watching the tube about four hours a day, it is perhaps not so surprising that so many are inclined to go bowling alone.

## *Finding Religion on the Left*

“Why We Need a Religious Left” by Amy Waldman, in *The Washington Monthly* (Dec. 1995), 1611 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

When liberals fought for civil rights or against the Vietnam War, religious figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Berrigan brothers were important leaders. What a difference a few decades make.

“As conservatives have successfully used religion to make political inroads, liberals have become increasingly antagonistic to mixing religion and politics,” notes Waldman, an editor at the *Washington Monthly*.

Many liberals think religious leaders should remain silent on political issues. They associate religion with intolerance and hypocritical evangelism, and resent the Catholic Church’s opposition to abortion (while ignoring Pope John Paul II’s “liberal” stands on the death penalty, materialism, and helping the poor).

But the estrangement from religion is not entirely the secular liberals’ fault.

During the 1980s, Protestant and Catholic clergy and laity passionately opposed U.S. aid to the Nicaraguan contras and the repressive government of El Salvador—and their campaign had an impact on Capitol Hill. But the churches, Waldman notes, have not fired up “the same passion about issues confronting Americans at home,” such as conditions in America’s inner cities. Domestic policy, observes Sister Maureen Fieldler of the Quixote Center, a Catholic social action organization in Maryland, “doesn’t hold the glamour of Central America. You can’t go on a dele-

gation to the inner city.” Some members of the religious Left are involved in helping the inner-city poor—so deeply involved that they simply have no energy left over for political activism.

Secular liberals, Waldman argues, should help the religious Left to raise its voice again. The fact is, she says, that many of liberalism’s central values—“whether help for the downtrodden or support for peace—derive from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Liberals who disdain religion are inadvertently acting like embarrassed adolescents who shun their own parents.”

## FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

### *Foreign Policy as Social Work*

“Foreign Policy as Social Work” by Michael Mandelbaum, in *Foreign Affairs* (Jan.–Feb. 1996); “In Defense of Mother Teresa: Morality in Foreign Policy” by Stanley Hoffmann, in *Foreign Affairs* (Mar.–Apr. 1996), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y.

The Clinton administration took office in 1993 with a distinctive vision of post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy: that its purpose should be to promote American values by saving lives in such places as Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti. Instead of basing foreign policy on American national interests and spelling out clearly what those interests now are, the administration tried “to turn American foreign policy into a branch of social work,” contends Mandelbaum, a professor at Johns Hopkins’ Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (and a 1992 Clinton supporter).

Three “failed military interventions” in the administration’s first nine months “set the tone and established much of the agenda” for Clinton’s foreign policy, Mandelbaum says. The plan “to lift the arms embargo against Bosnia’s Muslims and bomb the Bosnian Serbs” failed. In Somalia, an effort at nation building was abandoned when 18 U.S. Army Rangers died at the hands of a mob in Mogadishu. Then a U.S. ship carrying military trainers to Haiti turned back in response to demonstrations in Port-au-Prince.

Each of these abortive interventions, Mandelbaum notes, “involved small, poor, weak countries far from the crucial centers that had dominated foreign policy during the Cold War.” The goals were noble, but their connection to U.S. interests was

strained at best. The American public simply would not support them. (The public might, however, have been persuaded to back intervention in Haiti, he says, had it been presented simply as a U.S. “good deed in the neighborhood at manageable cost.”)

Despite occasional administration claims to the contrary, Mandelbaum argues, it remains possible to clearly define America’s national interests after the Cold War: maintain the military balance in Europe and in the Asia-Pacific region, prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, and encourage free trade—“the one [goal] the administration [has] best promoted and explained.”

Hoffmann, a Harvard historian, is also critical of the Clinton administration but disputes Mandelbaum’s central argument. The distinction between interests and values “is largely fallacious,” Hoffmann maintains. A great power has “an ‘interest’ in world order that goes beyond strict national security concerns,” and its “values” largely shape its definition of “order.” Unfortunately, he says, the Clinton administration “has been much too timid in defining and defending a foreign policy based on values and other requirements of world order,” in Haiti and elsewhere.

Some “carefully selected interventions in foreign domestic crises” are justified, Hoffmann contends. When there is a chance of stopping “genocide or war crimes on a colos-

## *The Illusion of Progress*

William Pfaff, a columnist for the *International Herald Tribune*, writing in *World Policy Journal* (Winter 1995–96), criticizes the rhetoric of progress in foreign policy.

National Security Adviser Anthony Lake has said that the United States must struggle against nationalists, “tribalists, terrorists, organized criminals, coup plotters, rogue states, and all those who would return newly free states to the intolerant ways of the past.”

Note that intolerance is of the past. It is the common argument of both Right and Left in Washington that international society is moving toward greater democracy (Freedom House keeping annual account of successes and slippages). Inevitability is imputed to this progress, and a foreign policy of promoting democracy is seen as not only an expression of America’s own values, which it is, but also as practical cooperation with a major historical trend with a security pay-off: political science has “discovered” that democracies do not fight one another. . . .

There is a moral and implicitly theological aspect to this, since in modern times the assumption that man is going someplace—which is to say, he will become better than he is now—has more often than not been the implied corollary to a belief that history is progress. . . .

Fundamental to the Enlightenment’s faith in human progress, as to the Western religious faith it largely replaced, has been a conviction that the forces shaping historical existence are essentially benign. . . . Those who threw themselves into the work of religion, reform, or revolution believed they were cooperating with history’s dominant forces and that eventually there would be a happy ending. . . .

I would myself propose that not only does no evidence exist of man’s collective moral progress but that none is to be expected. That a moral continuity has existed among men and women since the times of the Magdalenian cave painters and the Attic tragedians seems to me cause for a certain confidence. Our ancestors, the classical Greeks, identified humanity’s moral undertakings as Sisyphean—as they remain today, even if in this century we have attempted to deny it.

Some certainly may find in this view a counsel of despair, since if there is a moral constancy among men and women, through time, then the immense sacrifices that have gone into the effort to improve society might seem to have been a waste. I would argue that civilization has indeed progressed, for example, by installing and enlarging certain norms of disinterested international and national behavior (standards of human rights, law, and a structure of international law), but has done so without man’s essential change and without any automaticity in the historical process or security in what has been accomplished. The “retrogression” of the 20th century to barbarism in war and in the practices of totalitarian governments was not in fact retrogression, but discrete phenomena that may recur. Intolerance is not of the past.

sal scale,” there is a “moral duty” to act, and certain “political, economic, and social

breakdowns [are] too dangerous to world order to be ignored.”

## *Isolationism Forever?*

“Early Isolationism Revisited: Neutrality and Beyond in the 1790s” by Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, in *Journal of American Studies* (Aug. 1995), Cambridge Univ. Press, Journals Dept., 40 W. 20th St., New York, N.Y. 10011–4211.

“Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our

peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest,

humor, or caprice?” asked President George Washington in his Farewell Address of 1796. Was he, as many isolationists have since claimed, enunciating eternal principles of isolationism, of peace and neutrality toward all nations? Not at all, maintains Rossignol, a professor of English and American studies at the Université Paris VII-Denis Diderot.

True, she says, Washington did urge his countrymen to adopt this “great rule of conduct” toward foreign nations: “in extending our commercial relations to have with them as little *political* connection as possible.” But he was not laying down a timeless standard, just being realistic, she argues.

The United States was then a small nation of four million people whose army two years before had only barely defeated the Northwestern Indians after five years of violent clashes. Aided somewhat by Britain and Spain, Indians remained a significant threat in the South.



And the United States was also just recovering from a severe economic crisis. At the time, Rossignol says, it “made good economic and military sense” to avoid European entanglements. That did not preclude U.S. military action when vital interests were at stake, she notes.

“The United States had its own frontline in the 1790s; it was on the [western] frontier, not on

*An edict for all time?*

European battlegrounds, that its soldiers fought.”

Indeed, Rossignol observes, Washington himself did not rule out America’s participation in European conflicts at some time in the future: “If we remain one people, under an efficient government,” the president said in his Farewell Address, “the period is not far off when . . . we may choose peace or war, as our interest, guided by justice, shall counsel.”

## ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

### *The Not-So-Miraculous ‘Asian Miracle’*

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

For years, Asia’s economic “miracles” have preyed on the American mind. First it was Japan, then it was the East Asian “tigers,” and now it’s China. The Chinese economy has been in overdrive for a decade, leading the world with annual growth rates of up to 14 percent. America’s trade deficit with China hit \$33.8 billion last year, while the U.S.-Japan trade gap was \$59.3 billion. All of this has fed the American suspicion that inimitable “Asian values” are at work—and that the 21st century may be a long and unpleasant one for the United States.

Lately, however, a number of economists have sharply questioned the conventional view of Asia’s economic successes. In the *Brookings Review* (Winter 1996), for example, Nicholas R. Lardy, a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, points

out that the lion’s share of China’s increased exports is being produced by foreign firms.

From only \$320 million in 1985, barely more than one percent of total exports, the country’s exports of goods assembled from foreign components, such as machinery, electronic products, and clothing, soared to about \$35 billion in 1994. China’s inefficient state-owned firms, which in 1986-87 accounted for more than four-fifths of export growth, in 1991-92 accounted for only one-fifth. “Reliance on foreign firms is not a problem per se,” Lardy says, “but, combined with the protection provided to state-owned industries, it has inhibited productivity growth.”

Veteran Asia correspondent Robert Elegant seconds Lardy, emphasizing in *National Review* (Nov. 27, 1995) the

importance of skills and capital provided by overseas Chinese. "As was early-20th-century Shanghai, late-20th-century coastal China is in large part a foreign creation," Elegant writes.

Unless there is a restructuring of Chinese industry, Lardy concludes, "the phenomenal growth of trade and investment is likely to slow, leaving China to lag behind the high-performing economies of East Asia."

Yet even the spectacular growth of those economies may be destined to slow down, argues Paul Krugman, an economist at Stanford University, in a controversial *Foreign Affairs* (Nov.–Dec. 1994) article. Like the Soviet Union of the 1950s, the East Asian "tigers" (Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea) "have achieved rapid growth in large part through an astonishing mobilization" of labor and capital. Efficiency gains, which are essential to long-term growth, have played only a minor role in the countries' success. (Japan, says Krugman, is an exception: large gains in productivity helped fuel its early growth. But even its "miraculous" growth has slowed down.) Between 1966 and 1990, for example, Singapore's economy grew 8.5 percent a year, three times as fast as the U.S. economy. But, Krugman says, "Singapore's growth has been based largely on one-time changes in behavior that cannot be repeated." The employed share of the population almost doubled, from 27 to 51 percent, and education levels of ordinary

workers rose. The country made "an awesome investment in physical capital: investment as a share of output rose from 11 to more than 40 percent." Singapore's case, Krugman acknowledges, is the extreme one, but "the basic conclusion" also applies to the other "tigers": "There is startlingly little evidence of improvements in efficiency."

"Nothing could be further from the facts," asserts Frank Gibney, president of the Pacific Basin Institute, in one of several rejoinders to Krugman in *Foreign Affairs* (Mar.–Apr. 1995). World Bank economists calculate that one-third of the growth of "high-performing Asian economies" (which include Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan, and the four "tigers") is due to increased productivity.

Krugman is unrepentant. Even the World Bank's 1993 study, *The East Asia Miracle*, he says, "does not remotely support the almost universally held view that the newly industrializing Asian nations are rapidly converging on Western levels of efficiency." Indeed, he is quoted in the *Economist* (Dec. 9, 1995) as saying, raising efficiency is much harder than increasing "inputs"—"and there is no evidence that Asian countries know how." If such views have not made the professor very popular in certain Asian lands, the magazine observes, they may help allay Western fears about the Asian "miracle" and, by doing so, ease the pressure for protectionism.

## Take This Check, Please

"Trends in Unemployment Insurance Benefits" by Daniel P. McMurrer and Amy B. Chasanov, in *Monthly Labor Review* (Sept. 1995), Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

Suppose the government had money to give away, but hardly anybody took it.

Unbelievable as it may seem, that is an accurate description of the nation's unemployment insurance system. Since the 1940s, the proportion of jobless people who receive unemployment benefits has dropped from about 50 percent to roughly 30 percent—even though unemployment coverage was extended to more than 90 percent of the population.

McMurrer and Chasanov, both policy

analysts at the Advisory Council on Unemployment Compensation, say that demographic changes provide much of the explanation. Beginning in the 1960s, the labor force was swollen by youths and women—groups historically less likely to file for benefits. And people in two-earner households, another rapidly increasing group, also seem to feel less urgency about filing. Another factor: the decline of manufacturing and of labor unions, which help members claim benefits.

## *The Future of the Welfare State*

Is the era of Big Government over? In an interview in *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Winter 1996), economist John Kenneth Galbraith offers his view.

*Certainly, the welfare state doesn't inspire the enthusiasm and sense of achievement it did 50 years ago in the days of the New Deal. But there should be no doubt the welfare state is here to stay. So is some element of government support of the economy in times of high unemployment and depression. These things are not a result of the invention of liberals like Galbraith, but part of the thrust of history.*

*Let us take health care as an example. The struggle over public health care doesn't result from the fact that some people want it and some don't. It arises from the fact that surgery and medical care have so advanced at such enormous cost that the question must now be faced as to whether people ought to die for lack of money. This is something that no civilized country can accept. Medical care provided by the state is therefore inevitable.*

A big dip in the share of the jobless drawing unemployment checks occurred between 1980 and 1984. The authors cite two key causes: the states tightened eligibility standards and benefits became partially subject to federal income taxes in 1979 (and fully taxable in 1986).

Why worry? There is a reason beyond

the fact that the unemployed are entitled to benefits, the authors say. Unemployment insurance was designed to function as an economic stabilizer, pumping money into the economy when times are tough. (Total outlays in 1993 were \$22 billion.) That won't work if the jobless don't draw checks.

## *The Rise of Management Consultants*

"The Origins of Modern Management Consulting" by Christopher D. McKenna, in *Business and Economic History* (Fall 1995), Dept. of Economics, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va. 23187.

Management consultants are to the corporate world what big-name athletes are to professional sports: sometimes loved, sometimes hated, but always very well compensated. In 1993, AT&T paid out more to management consultants than it spent on research and development. While it's generally assumed that management consulting grew directly out of the "scientific management" movement fathered by Frederick W. Taylor (1856–1915), its origins were quite different, argues McKenna, a historian at Johns Hopkins University.

By the late 19th century, American big business had grown large enough to require outside advice. Most of this advice came from major banks, which enjoyed far more intimate contact with their corporate clients than today's banks do. They owned

stock, lent money, and often took an active role in management—sometimes including a seat on the board of directors. The banks began to draw in the specialized consultants: chemical engineers such as Arthur D. Little for engineering advice, accounting firms such as Arthur Anderson and Ernst & Ernst for outside audits and financial advice, and large corporate law firms.

But the Glass-Steagall Act of 1933 and the establishment of the Securities and Exchange Commission in 1934 ended all that, forcing banks to choose between commercial and investment banking and to sever their close ties with their corporate customers.

"The new institutional arrangements in banking opened up a vacuum into which firms of management consultants rushed,"

McKenna writes. From about 100 independent “management engineering” firms (as they were called then) in 1930, the number grew to 400 a decade later. Firms also expanded in size. In 1926, after a dozen years in business, Edwin Booz employed only one other management engineer; a decade later, Booz-Allen & Hamilton had 11 consultants on staff.

“Since the 1930s,” McKenna writes, “management consultants have reorga-

nized the largest and most important organizations in the world.” McKinsey and Company, for example, during the 1960s and ’70s, decentralized some 25 of Great Britain’s largest companies. “Whether reorganizing the Bank of England, Royal Dutch Shell, the government of Tanzania, or even the World Bank, management consultants disseminated American management techniques throughout the world.”

## *Mismeasuring Inflation*

“Measuring Inflation in a High-Tech Age” by Leonard I. Nakamura, in *Business Review* (Nov.–Dec. 1995), Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, Dept. of Research and Statistics, 10 Independence Mall, Philadelphia, Pa. 19106-1574.

Assessments of the economic state of the Union almost always revolve around the “fact” that Americans’ wages, corrected for inflation, have declined, falling from an average of more than \$8 an hour (in 1982 dollars) in 1975 to less than \$7.50 last July. Nakamura, an economic adviser in the research department of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, contends that the decline is, in all likelihood, an illusion.

The culprit, he contends, is the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which measures changes in the cost of living by tracking the price of a fixed “basket” of goods. The CPI basket currently holds items selected in the early 1980s. But today’s actual consumer basket is different. Improvements in the quality of goods (e.g., personal computers and cars) and services (e.g., cable television and medical care) increase the standard of living yet are largely missed by the CPI. The result: at least a half-point overestimate of annual inflation.

There are other problems with the measure. If clothes go up in price, for example, while computer supplies go down, the consumer may buy more of the latter and fewer articles of clothing. The consumer is better off, but, again, the CPI, with its fixed basket, takes no notice, distorting the index further by two-tenths of a percentage point.

New products, such as CD-ROMs, that have come out since the basket’s contents were fixed, are largely ignored. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, which collects

the basic data for the CPI, tries to keep abreast of new products by gradually fitting them into an existing category of goods and rotating part of the sample of stores and goods it surveys each year. But that procedure not only fails to capture all the improvements in the standard of living, Nakamura maintains; it itself pushes the inflation index further upward—by an estimated two-tenths to three-tenths of a percentage point a year. The reason: it gives greater weight to goods whose prices are likely to rise after their initial “sale price” introduction on the market.

All in all, Nakamura calculates, the CPI probably has been overstating inflation by more than one percent a year. If the index is revised downward by that amount, the post-1975 decline in real wages becomes an increase (to about \$9.50, in 1982 dollars). If Nakamura is right about this politically charged subject—which leaves economists, as usual, divided—then other items tied to the CPI, including Social Security payments and personal income tax brackets, have also been distorted.

Rapid advances in computers and telecommunications are responsible for many of the quality-of-life improvements that go unmeasured by the CPI. But such new technologies may also be part of the solution. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (which, it should be noted, has been taking steps to improve the measurement of inflation) still does its work the old-fashioned way, sending people out to stores to gather data. If the bureau instead could electronically tap into the detailed infor-

mation on sales that many retailers, wholesalers, and manufacturers now routinely

collect, a more accurate picture of inflation might emerge.

## SOCIETY

### *Financial Aid for Whom?*

“Scholarships: Need or Merit?” by Herschel Grossman, in *Cato Journal* (Winter 1995), Cato Institute, 1000 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001–5403.

Professional baseball’s exemption from federal antitrust laws has sparked controversy for years, but when America’s colleges and universities received a similar exemption two years ago, hardly anybody noticed. Students, argues Grossman, a Brown University economist, are being shortchanged.

For decades, he notes, Brown and the seven other Ivy League schools joined with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in “a cartel to limit competition for desirable undergraduate students.” The institutions agreed to award scholarships on the basis of “need,” not “merit.” (And they defined need in a narrow way.) At an

annual meeting called “Overlap,” representatives of the universities even jointly decided on how much aid they would offer to specific individual applicants. By not awarding “merit” scholarships, Grossman maintains, the institutions avoided costly bidding wars over talented students.

Need-based aid, especially when joined with so-called need-blind admission policies (admissions decided without regard to students’ financial situation), gives families less incentive to save for college, since the more they save, the less aid they will get. A study last year found that the prospect of need-based aid prompted the typical middle-class family with two chil-

### *Mixed Blessings*

The American woman’s situation today is difficult, Midge Decter observes in *The Women’s Quarterly* (Winter 1996), not because she is in chains, but because she is free—free in an entirely new way, thanks to “the fateful and as yet not fully fathomed separation of sex and procreation.”

*A woman must now decide everything essential to her. Whether to be serious about work or not—a decision which does not afflict any but the richest of men and which afflicts many of them with alcoholism and other forms of despair. Whether to sleep with this man or that man or none—again, a decision which afflicts few men in relation to women, for sexual revolution or no sexual revolution, few men can even now count themselves on the choosing end of this particular transaction. Whether to marry (a question which once offered her only the alternative of a pinched and barren spinsterhood) and whom to marry and when to marry—a form of freedom heretofore enjoyed, or possibly not enjoyed, only by men. Concomitant with this last freedom has come the freedom to divorce—if she thinks she ought to or even if she merely wants to.*

*In short, a woman must make up her mind in every major area of her life about what to do, whether to do, and how to be. Thus with the exception of unhappy accidents or unavoidable misfortunes, her satisfaction and contentment are in her own hands—to a degree possibly unprecedented in the history of mankind, a degree experienced by her as bordering on the intolerable. The question “What does woman want?” has become for her the question “What do I want?” It is a question none of us has the spiritual wherewithal to answer on one’s own. Yet on her own is what the modern enlightened woman now is.*

dren not yet in college to reduce its annual savings by about half.

The colleges and universities have justified the ban on “merit” scholarships on equity grounds. If they awarded merit-based assistance, they claim, they would have to cut aid to needy students. But Grossman points out that the richest Ivy League schools—Harvard, Yale, and Princeton—devote a smaller proportion of their gross revenues to financial aid than many of the poorer ones do. Moreover, Grossman says, there’s a lot of fat in higher education—in the form of lavish pay for light teaching loads, substantial support for research projects and graduate students, and time for professors to earn extra income as consultants.

When the U.S. Department of Justice brought an antitrust action in 1991, the Ivies quickly agreed to terminate Overlap; MIT agreed to a separate settlement later. The colleges continued to claim that they were offering aid based only on need. But

Grossman says that they seemed to start competing for talented students by stretching their definition of “need” and adjusting their aid offers according to “merit.” Over time, he believes, this competition probably would have intensified, to the point where a substantial amount of assistance was being awarded on the basis of merit, more students were getting aid, and the aid packages were larger. Unfortunately, Grossman concludes, this now seems unlikely.

Congress, “in the face of intense lobbying by the educational establishment,” enacted legislation in October 1994 that explicitly allows colleges to agree to give only need-based aid, to adopt a common definition of “need,” and to exchange any information about the income and assets of prospective students and their families necessary to make their agreement work. In short, he says, all private colleges in the United States now have carte blanche “to collude to limit financial aid in any way they choose.”

## *Why Women’s Colleges Work*

“Women-Only Colleges” by Mikyong Kim and Rodolfo Alvarez, in *The Journal of Higher Education* (Nov.–Dec. 1995), Ohio State University Press, 1070 Carmack Rd., Columbus, Ohio 43210.

The rise of the modern feminist movement in the 1960s almost rang the death knell for the traditional women’s college. Rejected as separate but patently unequal by feminists of the 1960s and ’70s, these schools saw their number shrink from 300 in 1960 to 84 (including 71 four-year institutions) today. Now, much research suggests that young women get certain benefits from female-only colleges that they don’t get at coed institutions, report Kim and Alvarez, a doctoral candidate and sociology professor, respectively, at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Examining data from surveys in the fall of 1987 and the summer of 1991 of 387 students from 34 women’s colleges and 3,249 women from 274 coed institutions, the authors find larger improvements in academic ability at



*Though they had no male classmates, these 1995 Wellesley College seniors were all smiles at their commencement.*

the women’s colleges, at least as measured by how the women themselves judge their capacities. After four years at the coed institutions, 76.7 percent of the women rated their academic ability as either “above average” or in “the highest 10 percent”—a 4.5-point increase over the 1987 figure. At the women’s

colleges, meanwhile, there was an 11.1-point increase. The women's colleges also did better in raising social self-confidence, according to the authors' analysis. However, "having a high proportion of female faculty in an institution was not a significant predictor of women students' self-reported ability," Kim and Alvarez note.

The students at women's colleges, they suggest, have fewer distractions from academi-

ic study and more opportunities to become "actively involved in student organizations [and] to exercise leadership." While women at the coed colleges seem to have acquired more "practical, job-related skills" (the women's schools stress the liberal arts), that advantage may be insignificant in the long run. Graduates of women's colleges, the authors note, continue to outnumber their sisters in *Who's Who of American Women*.

## *The Perils of Success*

"The Effect of Employment and Training Programs on Entry and Exit from the Welfare Caseload"  
by Robert A. Moffitt, in *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (Winter 1996), Univ. of Pennsylvania, 3620 Locust Walk, Ste. 3100, Philadelphia, Pa. 19104-6372.

Conservatives have delighted for years in pointing out the unanticipated consequences of liberal social programs. Now, it appears that some measures dear to conservative hearts might have some unanticipated consequences of their own. Take the most dearly held conviction of the new consensus on welfare policy: that job training programs will move the poor off welfare and into private-sector jobs, thus shrinking the welfare rolls.

What few of the experts seem to have considered, argues Moffitt, an economist at Johns Hopkins University, is that the more such efforts succeed, the more poor people likely will be attracted to welfare. That would be fine if the main object is to help poor people improve their skills and get jobs,

but not if it is simply to shrink the welfare rolls. Ironically, the best way to discourage welfare might be to require recipients to participate in job training efforts that are ineffective. Moffitt uses a simulation model of welfare participation to illustrate the various possibilities.

The last major federal overhaul of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1988 required the states to set up so-called Job Opportunities and Basic Skills programs, but set only modest goals for participation. More than half of adult AFDC recipients are ordinarily exempt from job-training requirements for various reasons. The more hard-nosed approach now favored by many political leaders might produce surprising results.

## PRESS & MEDIA

### *Assessing 'Public Journalism'*

"From the Citizen Up" by Mark Jurkowitz, in *Forbes MediaCritic* (Winter 1996), P.O. Box 762, Bedminster, N.J. 07921.

"Public journalism" is the latest fad in the newspaper business. No one is quite sure what the phrase means, but a good many editors are trying to put it into practice anyway, apparently hoping to win over disenchanting readers with an upbeat display of journalistic good citizenship.

Proponents such as Jay Rosen, director of New York University's Project on Public Life and the Press, believe that public journalism can "improve democracy," while critics such as Max Frankel, the former executive editor of the *New York Times*, worry that the press could end up

compromising its traditional mission and itself. Jurkowitz, ombudsman for the *Boston Globe*, examines four of the roughly 200 "public journalism" projects launched in recent years.

- The *San Jose Mercury News* published a lengthy investigative series last year on corruption in the California State Assembly. Then it "formed a brigade of about 30 activists who visited Sacramento, grilled state legislators, attended lobbying training seminars, and tracked bills and campaign contributions." Jurkowitz lauds the reporting, but questions the second

step, which took the paper over “the line from objectivity to advocacy.”

- The 39,000-circulation *Grand Forks* (N.D.) *Herald* “embarked on a ‘Community Conversation’ with its readers via coffee klatches, focus groups, and polls,” and even lent an editor to the local Chamber of Commerce to work on its similar project. “By opening lines of communication, the *Herald* benefited both citizens and the community,” Jurkowitz writes, but the paper should have kept the business group at arm’s length.

- The *Spokane Spokesman-Review* “offered free pizza to the 1,500 residents who gathered in backyards to discuss what they liked and didn’t like about where they lived,” then hired a consultant to turn their ideas into a lengthy report on the future of eastern Washington. To finance the \$75,000 project, the newspaper contributed \$30,000 and, in the words of a top editor, “went out, hat in hand to the banks, the movers and the shakers,” to raise the rest. This, observes Jurkowitz, “put the newspaper in the awkward position of having local, downtown powers finance a

newspaper project that directly affects their interests.”

- After two police officers in Charlotte, North Carolina, were shot while pursuing a suspect, the *Charlotte Observer* launched Taking Back Our Neighborhoods, an ongoing project that in a series of articles took an in-depth look at the city’s most crime-ridden areas. Reporters produced “some of the most unflinching, detailed urban reporting in recent memory,” Jurkowitz says. The *Observer* also formed a partnership with United Way of the Central Carolinas, which funneled hundreds of volunteers into the blighted areas. City hall and some private businesses also took some actions. “The paper’s effort fell within the bounds of legitimate, if rare, newspaper advocacy and philanthropy,” Jurkowitz says, noting the *New York Times*’ annual Yuletide appeal in behalf of the city’s neediest. The *Observer*’s project “galvanized an entire city and fueled the effort to improve blighted urban areas”—the kind of response, he concludes, that “provides the most persuasive argument for encouraging public journalism.”

## Anything for a Buck

“The TV Tabs’ New Tone” by Frank Houston, in *Columbia Journalism Review* (Jan.-Feb. 1996), 700 Journalism Bldg., Columbia University, New York, N.Y. 10027.

Something almost as strange as an Elvis sighting has been happening at TV’s sleazy “tabloid” news programs, reports Houston, an editor at *Columbia Journalism Review*. As a recent commercial for *A Current Affair*—showing a dump truck rumbling through a suburban neighborhood, then plunging off a cliff—explains, “We took out the trash.”

Syndicated shows such as *A Current Affair*, *American Journal*, and *Inside Edition* have shifted their focus from gossip to investigative journalism, Houston says. While Hollywood gossip is still doled out by *Extra* and *Entertainment Tonight*, and Viacom’s top-rated *Hard Copy* is sticking with its entertainment-and-sensation recipe, the other TV tabloids have begun “digging up consumer fraud and rooting out political misdeeds with the same zeal they once applied to stories about topless donut shops and Joey Buttafuoco.” *A Current Affair*, which is a decade old and the original TV tab, has lured a new anchor away from

*Dateline NBC*, established a Washington bureau, hired 20 new investigative staff members, and (television being television) launched a \$4 million marketing campaign to introduce its new look. King World’s *Inside Edition*, begun in 1988, always presented some investigative pieces, but in recent years it has had a lot more of them, and some—notably a series about a flaw in the rear-door latch of Chrysler minivans—have had an impact.

The shift to investigative reporting, Houston says, has to do with ratings and demographics. *A Current Affair* began remaking its image after finishing a distant third in the ratings race last year. The syndicated TV tabloids are seen by an estimated audience of more than 20 million people, but advertisers, who want to target affluent viewers likely to purchase their products, “are increasingly looking beyond pure ratings numbers.” So—for the moment at least—the TV tabs have found “religion.”

## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

### *The Anglicans of Central Europe*

“The Strange Fate of Czech Utraquism: The Second Century, 1517–1621” by Zdenek V. David,  
in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (Oct. 1995), Robinson College,  
Cambridge University CB3 9AN England.

Although derided by partisan historians and little known to the general public, the 16th-century Czech Utraquist Church deserves respect and even admiration “for its steadfastness, moderation, and patriotism” as it steered a middle course between Lutheranism and the Roman Catholic Church, argues David, the librarian of the Woodrow Wilson Center.

The Utraquist Church—which emerged after Bohemian religious reformer Jan Hus was convicted of heresy and burned at the stake in 1415—bears a strong resemblance to the Church of England, David says, in that it was a national church that preserved much of traditional religious orthodoxy without “the ultra-bureaucratic and imperial style” of the early modern Papacy. The name *Utraquist* derived from the Latin phrase *sub utraque specie* (under each of two kinds), referring to the church’s belief that the laity must receive the Eucharist in the form of both bread and wine (whereas Rome believed that the form of bread alone was sufficient). Utraquists also believed that communion should be given to all baptized members of the church, including young children and infants.

Unlike the extremist Taborites, who were also followers of Hus, the Utraquists were moderates who did not reject the Papacy in principle. Like the Anglican Church, David says, the Utraquist Church defended the Bible, Aristotelian rationalism (in its Christian form), and ecclesiastical tradition. Rome recognized the legitimacy of Utraquism in 1436

at the Council of Basel, but 26 years later, Pope Pius II—acting “on questionable grounds”—revoked the recognition, leaving relations in “a perpetually unsettled state,” David notes.

After Martin Luther issued his 95 theses in 1517, the Utraquist Church found itself, David says, in “double jeopardy”—on one side from the radical appeal of German Lutheranism, on the other from Rome and the Hapsburgs (who assumed the throne of Bohemia in 1526). “While rebuffing Lutheran overtures,” he writes, the Utraquist Church also fended off “schemes for an eventual direct and unconditional fusion with the Roman Church.”

In a way, David points out, the two opposing challengers to Utraquism checked each other, “because each side considered the continued existence of the Utraquist Church a ‘lesser evil’ than its absorption by the other side.” Utraquism remained popular in Bohemia into the 17th century. But after the Catholic League (of princes) vanquished Bohemian Protestants in the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620, during the Thirty Years’ War, the fate of Protestantism in Hapsburg lands was sealed. In 1621, the Utraquist Church “was summarily suppressed and unconditionally absorbed by the Roman Church.” Utraquism’s “judicious moderation” may live on, however, David says, in Czech political culture’s oft-noted tolerant liberalism.

### *A Philosophical Paternity Case*

“Whose Idea Is It, Anyway? A Philosophers’ Feud” by Jim Holt, in *Lingua Franca* (Jan.-Feb. 1996),  
22 W. 38th St., New York, N.Y. 10018.

The lectures that 29-year-old Saul A. Kripke gave at Princeton University in 1970 (published a decade later in *Naming and Necessity*) turned analytic philosophy upside down. They “gave rise to what came to be called the New Theory of Reference, revolutionizing the way philosophers of language thought about issues of meaning and truth,”

writes Holt, a book columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*. The talks also helped win Kripke, a professor at Princeton, a reputation as “a modern philosophical genius.” Now, however, it appears that Kripke and the (largely male) philosophical community may have slighted the contribution of a Yale professor named Ruth Barcan Marcus to his

groundbreaking achievement.

The New Theory of Reference draws on “modal logic, the formal study of the different modes of truth—necessity and possibility—that a statement can possess,” Holt explains. First pondered by Aristotle, and a significant concern of medieval scholars, modal logic was largely neglected by later thinkers. In the 1940s, Marcus, then a graduate student, “added new formal features” to modal logic, “greatly enlarging its philosophical implications,” Holt says. A decade later, teenage prodigy Kripke “supplied it with something it had hitherto lacked: an interpretation, a semantics.” Taking the German philosopher Leibniz’s conceit that the actual world is just one of a large number of possible ones, Kripke “characterized a proposition as “*necessarily* true if it holds in every possible world, and *possibly* true if it holds in some possible world.”

In 1962, Kripke attended a talk by Marcus in which she defended modal logic and expatiated upon the relationship between a proper name and the object to which it refers. The traditional theory was that every proper name (e.g., “Aristotle”) was associated with a cluster of descriptions (“teacher of Alexander the Great,” “author of the *Metaphysics*,” etc.), and these constituted its meaning. Marcus, however, argued that whereas a statement such as “Aristotle is Aristotle” is necessarily true, the statement “Aristotle is the author of the *Metaphysics*” is not, since it is possible to imagine circumstances in which the historical Aristotle did not become a philosopher.

“Marcus’ use of modal reasoning to undermine the traditional theory of the meaning of names,” Holt notes, “was a step toward the New Theory of Reference—a theory that emerged full-blown from Kripke’s Princeton lectures a decade later.” This theory holds that proper names are what he calls “rigid designators” (referring to the same individual in every possible world); that many common nouns, such as “gold” and “tiger,” are “natural kind” terms that work in the same way as proper names; and that terms such as “Aristotle” and “gold” are connected to the things to which they refer, not by the meanings in people’s heads but by “causal chains” stretching back to the first application of the term to the object.

In late 1994, Quentin Smith, a professor at Western Michigan University, stirred up a ruckus among philosophers that has still not died down, Holt reports. Smith concedes that the “natural kind” and “causal chains” features of Kripke’s theory were “genuinely new,” but contends that the concept behind Kripke’s term “rigid designator” was really Marcus’s. Kripke responds that some of the ideas he later developed “were present . . . in a sketchy way” in Marcus’s 1962 talk, “but there was a real paucity of argumentation on natural language. Almost everything she was saying [then] was already familiar to me at the time.” Marcus has declined to discuss the matter.

“It is easy to tell when someone has borrowed the prose of another,” Holt comments, but ideas “are rather trickier to identify.”

## *Onward, Christian Soldiers*

“Reinterpreting the Crusades: Religious Warriors” by Jonathan Riley-Smith, in *The Economist* (Dec. 23, 1995–Jan. 5, 1996), 25 St. James’s St., London SW1A 1HG, England.

The Christian crusades are scorched in the modern mind as repulsive adventures in brutality and bigotry. Historians since the late 19th century have argued that it was greed, in one form or another, that motivated the crusaders. Lately, however, writes Riley-Smith, a professor of ecclesiastical history at Cambridge University, an older interpretation has been gaining favor.

The crusades were not, as many historians have maintained, a venture in imperialism, he says. The First Crusade, launched by Pope Urban II in 1095, “certainly began the

process of European conquest and settlement in the eastern Mediterranean,” but that was not the original intent. “The Christian knights assumed they would be joining a larger force that would drive back Muslim Turks who had recently invaded Asia Minor, and restore Jerusalem, lost for 350 years, to the Byzantine empire.” It was only after Byzantine Greeks failed to join in with much enthusiasm that the knights struck out on their own.

More recent economic interpretations of the crusades hold up no better, Riley-Smith

avers. Documents show that “most nobles and knights” were far more preoccupied with the costs of taking part in the Crusades than they were with visions of riches to be won in the Holy Land.

Historians who opted for an economic interpretation “forgot how intellectually respectable the Christian theory of holy war once was,” Riley-Smith contends. In the decades leading up to the First Crusade, “a group of brilliant intellectuals [was] anthologizing and reviving St. Augustine’s ideas” of just war, including “the idea of a war at Christ’s command mediated by the pope as his agent on earth.”

In one respect, however, crusading was an exceptional form of holy war: it was enjoined as a means of doing penance for one’s sins. This notion, which put combat on the same meritorious plane as prayer, works of mercy, and fasting, had never been entertained by Christians before the late 11th century. While it came to be diluted over the centuries with the rise of the chivalric ideal of knighthood, the idea of combat as penance nevertheless “remained at the heart of the crusading ethos.”

There is no escaping the fact that the crusades, stretching over hundreds of years, were full of horrors and atrocities (equaled on the Muslim side), Riley-Smith says. But the crusaders should be seen as they were, religious warriors “pursuing an ideal that, however alien it seemed



*Religious warriors taking part in the First Crusade wrest the city of Nicaea in Asia Minor from the Turks in 1097.*

to later generations of historians, was enthusiastically supported at the time by such heavyweights as St. Bernard of Clairvaux and St. Thomas Aquinas.”

## SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

### *The IQ Controversy*

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

That strength, beauty, and intelligence are not equally distributed among human beings is an obvious fact—but one that we Americans, with our democratic passion for equality, would rather ignore. We, or at least many of us, prefer to dwell mentally in Garrison Keillor’s Lake Wobegon,

where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average.

Linda S. Gottfredson, who teaches in the College of Education at the University of Delaware, writes in the *American Scholar* (Winter 1996) that research that shows dif-

ferences in intelligence among individuals, and among races and social classes, is frequently condemned today as “ideologically motivated,” or worse. The temperature of the political climate surrounding these issues soared in 1994 with the publication of *The Bell Curve* by Charles Murray and the late Richard Herrnstein, who argued that such differences exist and are important. Ironically, Gottfredson observes, most researchers who study intelligence would very much like to take the Lake Wobegon side of the argument—but find, alas, that they cannot. “If the world were as I would like it to be,” psychologist Nathan Brody wrote in his 1992 textbook, *Intelligence*, “what I think I have learned about intelligence would not be true.”

Most “mainstream” researchers, Gottfredson says, have concluded that there is such a thing as general intelligence, that individuals do differ in intelligence (as do races and social classes), that the differences can be accurately measured, and that they are important in school, work, and other aspects of life. The differences in intelligence among individuals are known to be the result of both environmental and genetic factors, and the differences between racial groups are suspected to be. But, in both cases, how environments might be manipulated to cause a permanent increase in IQ remains a mystery.

There remains, however, a long-running debate about intelligence and the IQ tests that purport to measure it, Nicholas Lemann, a national correspondent for the *Atlantic Monthly* (Aug. & Sept. 1995), observes in a two-part series on the rise of the Educational Testing Service and how standardized testing has come to play so large—and, in his view, questionable—a part in American life. “The overall results of intelligence tests,” Lemann asserts, “have always produced a kind of photograph of the existing class structure, in which the better-off economic and ethnic groups are found to be more intelligent and the worse-off are found to be less so.” While Jews as a group score high on intelligence tests today, he points out, in 1923, when most American Jews were recent immigrants, Carl Brigham, a psychometrician, reported that “our figures . . . would rather tend to disprove the popular belief that the Jew is highly intelligent.”

“IQ is enormously affected by normal environmental variation, and in ways that are not well understood,” observes Ned Block, a professor of philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in the course of a lengthy *Boston Review* (Dec.–Jan. 1995–96) essay criticizing *The Bell Curve*’s argument. “As Herrnstein and Murray concede,” Block writes, “children from very low socio-economic status backgrounds who are adopted into high socio-economic status backgrounds have IQs dramatically higher than their parents.” (Murray and Herrnstein say it is possible, although improbable, that the persistent racial gap in average scores is entirely a result of environmental influences.) Worldwide, IQs have been rising by about three points every 10 years. “Since World War II, IQ in many countries has gone up 15 points, about the same as the gap separating blacks and whites in this country.”

Strong currents have been running against the emphasis on environment. The discipline of psychology has been transformed, notes staff writer Lawrence Wright in the *New Yorker* (Aug. 7, 1995), by “the broad movement from environmental determinism to behavioral genetics,” which is built on heritability estimates. (Heritability is the fraction of the observed variation in a population that is caused by differences in heredity.) In the last decade alone, Wright says, there has been “a tidal wave” of studies of human twins challenging some traditional, and strongly held, views of human development.

Twins present “a statistical opportunity” for researchers, Wright explains, because identical twins share all the same genes, while fraternal twins share, on average, only 50 percent of their genes. In theory, a trait that is highly heritable will approach 100 percent concordance in identical twins and 50 percent in fraternal ones. Behaviors as diverse as smoking, insomnia, choice of careers and hobbies, and suicide, he writes, “have been found to have far higher rates of concordance for identical than for fraternal twins—a finding that suggests these traits to be more influenced by genes than was previously suspected.”

Much of the angry debate over individual and group differences in intelligence, Wright says, “draws upon the fact that there

is a closer correlation between IQ-test scores of identical twins than between those of fraternal twins—the difference being an indication of how much of what we call intelligence is inherited.” Yet much is unknown. A striking finding by one researcher Wright cites is that the IQ scores of black inner-city

fraternal twins she tested, instead of ranging widely, were quite similar—as turned out to be the case for white children in a similarly deprived environment. Could it be that these youngsters have the genes for a higher intelligence than their environment permits them to express? The debate goes on.

## *The Odd Path of Early Environmentalism*

“Whatever Happened to Industrial Waste?: Reform, Compromise, and Science in Nineteenth Century Southern New England” by John T. Cumbler, in *Journal of Social History* (Fall 1995), Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pa. 15213.

A century before the birth of the modern environmental movement, New England reformers waged a now largely forgotten war to regulate air and water pollution. The course of their crusade, writes Cumbler, a historian at the University of Louisville, had lasting consequences for American environmentalism.

After the Civil War, environmentally minded doctors and other professionals from privileged Yankee families in Massachusetts and Connecticut persuaded state and local governments to establish boards of health to investigate pollution. The reformers embraced an environmental theory of disease which held that foul air and brown, discolored water were a threat to physical and

mental health. Polluted waters were thought to emit a “miasma” of noxious gasses. “The agency of foul and putrid air . . . in causing disease, is a very recent discovery, yet nothing is better established,” declared an 1872 Massachusetts report. An 1875 state board of health report in Connecticut warned that pollution “brutalizes and dwarfs the intellect, corrupts the morals, breeds intemperance and sensuality, and is ever recruiting the ranks of the vile and the dangerous.”

The activists won some important early victories. In 1878, the Massachusetts legislature passed “An Act Relative to the Pollution of Rivers, Streams, and Ponds” limiting the dumping of sewage and industrial waste. But Massachusetts industrialists quickly struck



*The sewer basin on Moon Island in Boston Harbor during the 1880s, a time when a general concern with foul water gave way to a focus on the control of sewage.*

back by, for example, persuading the government to appoint members more sympathetic to their views to the board of health.

A more important cause of the environmentalists' undoing was the new germ theory of disease developed by Louis Pasteur and other European scientists during the 1870s and '80s. The discovery that germs are the main source of disease focused attention on sewage and reduced the pressure to regulate industrial pollutants. Indeed, the effluent from New England's wool and paper mills, tanneries, iron works, and other manufactur-

ing works took on a whole new character. In the late 1880s, the Connecticut Board of Health concluded that "inorganic chemicals [are] harmless, or positively beneficial in counteracting the organic matter [sewage]."

All was not lost. Over the following decades, efforts were made in many states to bring sewage dumping under control. Perhaps the most important impact of germ theory, however, was the displacement of the reformers' broad view by a new and more narrowly technical view of the impact of environmental degradation.

## *Mammal Mommie Dearests*

"Natural-Born Mothers" by Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, in *Natural History* (Dec. 1995), American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th St., New York, N.Y. 10024.

Despite Medea and other, more recent murderous moms, nothing is more synonymous with nurturing than motherhood. But researchers who study mammal mothers of various species now take a much more expansive view, reports Hrdy, an anthropologist at the University of California at Davis. Motherly behavior that just a few decades ago would have been looked upon as deviant is now thought to be as "natural" as tender loving care.

Motherhood, Hrdy writes, "is not as straightforward a matter as just turning on the milk. Mothers have to factor in recurring food shortages, predators, and social exploitation by members of their own species. Faced with poor conditions, a mother must weigh babies in hand against her own well-being, long-term survival, and—most important—the possibility of breeding again under better circumstances."

Take the cotton-top tamarins of South America, for example. These pint-sized monkeys can give birth as often as twice a year to twins whose combined weight adds up to one-fifth of the mother's. Only with the

help of fathers, older offspring, or transient adults, who carry the babies when the mother is not suckling them, can the mothers cope. A researcher at the New England Primate Center found that 57 percent of cotton-top mothers without such help abandoned their young.

Abandonment is but one strategy. A pregnant house mouse that encounters a strange male likely to pose a threat to her offspring "may reabsorb her budding embryos," Hrdy says. Among the langur monkeys of India, a young mother with many fertile years ahead of her may, under persistent assault from strange males, "simply stop defending her infant, leaving more intrepid kin—usually old females that have not reproduced for years—to intervene."

Other mammals stretch the meaning of motherhood even further. A biologist who monitored a population of black-tailed prairie dogs in South Dakota found that low-weight mothers sometimes abandoned their litters, letting other prairie dogs eat the pups and occasionally even joining in the feast themselves.

## *Newton's Solitary Genius*

"Presiding Genius" by Peter Richards, in *CAM* (Michaelmas Term, 1995), Univ. of Cambridge Development Office, 10 Trumpington St., Cambridge, England CB2 1QA.

Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727), the greatest mathematician who ever lived, spent 35 years at Trinity College, University of

Cambridge. But he "was too much his own man for Trinity to recognize his genius straightaway," writes Richards, editor of

CAM, the university's alumni magazine.

Newton's solitary nature was at least partly a result of his personal history. His father, a yeoman farmer, died before Newton was born. When the boy was three, his mother married a wealthy clergyman, leaving her son in the care of his grandmother. Newton endured "eight years of apparently loveless isolation," Richards notes, until his hated stepfather died and he went off to Grantham Free School.

Remembered later as "a sober, silent, thinking lad," Newton at Grantham was forever experimenting, Richards says, building wooden clocks driven by weights and other devices. Returning home at 17, Newton kept on experimenting, to his mother's dismay. "He was so surly that after nine months his mother finally gave up. Newton was packed off to Cambridge," with even the servants saying he was fit for nothing else.

Because his wealthy but barely literate mother refused to pay, Newton entered Cambridge in 1661 as a poor "subsizar," who earned his way by waiting on the Fellows and better-off students, until 1664, when he was elected to a scholarship.

Two years after entering Cambridge, Newton came upon René Descartes's *Geometry* (1637). "Thereafter," Richards says, "he immersed himself, learning 'of his

owne inclination, and by his owne industry without a teacher.' " He received his bachelor's degree in January 1665 and threw himself into research. By the end of the next year, he had invented calculus, discovered that light was "a confused aggregate of Rays" which exhibit different colors, and, after noticing an apple fall to the ground at the family farm, began to conceptualize his theory of universal gravitation.

Yet Newton's astounding discoveries remained known only to him for some years to come. Indeed, although he stayed on at Trinity as a mathematics professor, it was more than two decades before Cambridge and the world came to appreciate how great a genius was in their midst. That occurred with the publication of *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687), in which he detailed his theory of universal gravitation and his laws of motion.

Suddenly, the reclusive bachelor, now in his mid-forties, was the toast of Cambridge and London, and he seemed to enjoy it. He left the university for a government sinecure in London in 1696, and became the first scientist ever knighted. At his funeral in Westminster Abbey in 1727, Voltaire recalled Newton's reply when asked how he discovered the law of universal gravitation: "By thinking on it continually."

## ARTS & LETTERS

### *The Two Faces of Literary Stardom*

"The Author as a Brand Name: American Literary Figures and the *Time* Cover Story"  
by Joe Moran, in *Journal of American Studies* (Dec. 1995), Cambridge Univ. Press,  
Journals Dept., 40 W. 20th St., New York, N.Y. 10011-4211.

In *Time* magazine's heyday, to appear on its cover seemed the height of American fame, especially for such obscure folk as novelists, poets, and playwrights. For five decades after its debut issue appeared in 1923, *Time* made "serious" writers from Sinclair Lewis to John Updike seem as important, in their way, as all the politicians, business executives, and popular entertainers who usually graced the cover. All well and good, perhaps, but the authors themselves, maintains Moran, a doctoral student at the University of Sussex, were often not so happy about it. The sedate painted portraits or sketches on the cover were flattering, as

were the stories inside. *Time*, in those days, was seldom "intrusive" toward its cover subjects. But inclusion in publisher Henry Luce's steadily expanding gallery of culture heroes had other drawbacks.

The authors often feared—rightly—that the stories would reduce them to stereotypes, Moran says. *Time* turned Ernest Hemingway into "the man's man," William Faulkner into "the farmer," John Cheever into "the country gentleman," and J. D. Salinger into "the hermit." Readers unfamiliar with the work of the authors could thus have the illusion of knowing them. But for an author "trying to unpack his heart through the devices

of fiction,” John Updike explained, it is distressing to learn that “what really counts is the aggrandizement of himself as a figure, a celebrity, a name brand.”

In keeping with Luce’s notion of America’s special place in the world, American authors who appeared on *Time*’s cover “tended to be defined as quintessentially [American] in their personality or subject matter,” Moran says. *Time* lauded Thornton Wilder, for example, for his ability to reproduce “authentic Americana,” and approvingly noted that John Dos Passos “attempts to organize [America’s] chaotic, high-pressure life into an understandable artistic pattern.” In addition, Moran says, the cover stories showed “an almost obsessive interest in the details of the writer’s popular commercial success,” with nary a hint that artistic excellence might sometimes go com-

mercially unrewarded.

Authors sometimes did say no. In 1954, Faulkner’s publisher urged him to agree to a new cover story in order to boost sales of *The Fable*. Faulkner, who had been “honored” in this way by *Time* once before, responded by asking for an estimate of “what a refusal would cost Random House,” saying he would gladly write his publisher a check to avoid the “distinction.”

*Time* had the “initially admirable” belief that culture was as much “news” as political and social events were, Moran says. But its cover stories “helped to create a kind of literary ‘star system,’” a forerunner of today’s blockbuster-oriented publishing scene in which a few “celebrity authors” receive vast amounts of money and publicity, while many “serious” authors find it hard even to get their books commercially published.

## Rembrandt or Not?

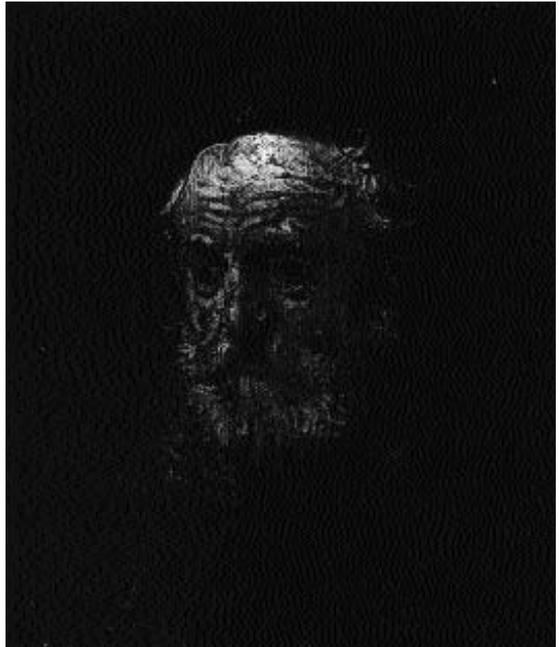
“Truth in Labeling” by Gary Schwartz, in *Art in America* (Dec. 1995),  
575 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012.

To call a painting a Rembrandt is to count it among the most prized creations of humankind. Until the mid-1960s, about 620 paintings possessed that distinction, with scholars, collectors, and museum curators agreeing that Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) had created them. Then a great purge began. Today, only about 300 paintings are considered indisputably genuine “Rembrandts.” Some 50 more are still in dispute.

The “Rembrandt/Not Rembrandt” exhibition last fall at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art highlighted the unsettling situation. It showcased 42 works once attributed to Rembrandt, of which only 18 are still unquestionably genuine. The Met’s curator of northern European paintings and its chief conservator disagreed so deeply about the other 24 that the museum took the unusual step of publishing two catalogues for the same exhibition.

The purge of ersatz Rembrandts began during the 1960s, explains Schwartz, a visiting professor of art history at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the author of *Rembrandt: His Life,*

*His Paintings* (1985). New analytical techniques, such as X-radiography, which can reveal previously painted areas beneath the surface layer, and pigment analysis, in which



Study Head of an Old Man was “definitely” an 18th- or 19th-century imitation—until tests showed the wooden panel was from c. 1630. It may be a genuine Rembrandt.

minuscule samples of paint are studied to learn their chemical composition, fueled the change.

In hopes of resolving the controversy, the Dutch government established the Rembrandt Research Project in 1969. Its experts would rule on authenticity and publish a corpus that everyone could agree on. But many curators—including the Met’s—rejected the verdicts, partly because the experts themselves were often divided.

Rembrandt’s own work habits and contemporaries complicate the authenticity problem. He painted in a range of genres and styles, he often supervised students who completed significant portions of his work, and his success inspired many excel-

lent imitations. Indeed, from the ashes of discredited Rembrandts, previously obscure painters such as Govert Flinck and Willem Drost have emerged and gained new appreciation.

Given all the uncertainties, Schwartz favors more honest labeling for the still-disputed Rembrandts. Don’t call them Rembrandts; label them instead with what is known of their provenance. Schwartz confesses that the “initial effect of such a change might be to stun auction houses, art dealers, collectors and teachers who have banked on” authenticity, but ultimately, he believes, they will come to recognize that a painting’s inherent quality depends on more than just the signature on it.

## Do Critics Create?

“Richard Rorty Lays Down the Law” by Leon Surette, in *Philosophy and Literature* (Oct. 1995), Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, Journals Division, 2715 N. Charles St., Baltimore, Md. 21218–4319.

Among today’s literary critics, philosopher Richard Rorty has many admirers. A self-described “Deweyan pragmatist,” he thinks philosophers should abandon not only traditional metaphysics but also the early American pragmatists’ enthusiasm for the natural sciences, and instead adopt literary criticism’s “ironic” and “conversational” practices. While “enormously flattering” to literary critics, argues Surette, a professor of English at the University of Western Ontario, this proposal rests on a “highly selective” notion of literary criticism.

“For centuries,” Surette says, “it has been considered a moral duty for criticism to concede dominance and privilege to the object texts—the poems, plays, and novels.” This was true, for example, of the so-called New Critics of the mid-20th century, who eschewed virtually all knowledge of the author’s life and times and “prided themselves on being sensitive recording instruments whose readings were” free of “distortions” from outside the text. More traditional critics steeped themselves in the history and culture of the period in which the work was written in order to recover its original sense. In recent decades, however, theorists such as Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault have rejected this modesty and sought to put critical commentary on a par with imaginative creations, and critics on a par with artists. “Rorty buys into this cur-

rent trend—without, so far as I can make out, much *arrière pensée* [afterthought],” Surette says.

Literary critics have long seen their work as “the reinterpretation or redescription” of imaginative works, Surette notes. Rorty instead describes literary criticism as “the attempt to play off vocabularies against one another”—with each text and each critic in possession of a separate vocabulary. Rorty is not suggesting that critics “paraphrase the unfamiliar vocabulary of the artist into a familiar vocabulary,” Surette writes, because he believes that the sense of a text cannot be separated from its language. He sees the literary critic as a playful ironist, a kind of master of ceremonies. His ability to juggle different vocabularies finally enables him to create his own parallel discourses.

Rorty and the postmodern literary theorists he admires are trying to turn Plato on his head, Surette contends. In Plato’s *Ion*, Socrates asks Ion, a minstrel who recites epic poetry, “to choose between admitting on the one hand that he was an artist inventing what he only pretended to discover in Homer (and therefore a fraud), or on the other hand that he was out of his mind, possessed by Homer.

“Ion rather lightly chose to be considered out of his mind,” Surette writes, “and literary criticism has seconded his choice many times since.” Rorty and the current theorists,

## Vermeer's Mission

Why did the 21 paintings by Johannes Vermeer (1632–75) recently exhibited at Washington's National Gallery of Art excite so much enthusiasm? James F. Cooper, editor of *American Arts Quarterly* (Fall 1995), offers an explanation.

*It is possible, of course, to enjoy Vermeer's art purely on the aesthetic level. . . . But, ultimately, what one takes away from a Vermeer painting is a sense of the artist's sincere, humble desire to reconnect with the sacred, expressed fiercely on canvas without consideration of profit, career, or reputation. The small output of work during Vermeer's lifetime (only 36 known canvases), his reluctance to show them to potential clients who might not appreciate their spirituality, his dedication to craft and excellence, all attest to his mission.*

*This mission Vermeer discovered only through trial and error. He began as a painter of historical and religious pictures in the grand manner, only to discover that the spiritual and aesthetic qualities he sought in his work were to be found in commonplace objects within the Dutch home. View of Delft (c. 1661) depicts Vermeer's home town bathed in a translucent glow. Girl with a Red Hat (c. 1665) is one of the great portraits of Western art, rightly world famous through a myriad of reproductions. Even the most sensitive reproduction, published on the finest European presses, however, cannot fully capture the mysterious spiritual essence of Woman Holding a Balance [c. 1664]. No reproduction to date has captured the quality of light that shafts gently through the darkness of this humble Dutch interior, illuminating the frame of the window with a touch of gold that resembles part of a cross, and transfiguring the figure of a woman lost in thought as she holds a small weighing scale in her hand. This light, filtering through a window curtain, transforms a Dutch housewife into an archetypal figure of the Virgin Mary. A reproduction of The Last Judgment above her (a work owned by Vermeer, who supplemented his income as an art dealer) reinforces the religious allegory to weighing souls at the Last Judgment. A simple scene of a woman weighing pearls has been transformed by Vermeer's hand into one of profound, spiritual significance.*

however, have simply chosen the other horn of Socrates' dilemma. They insist that the critics are artists, but, at the same time, they say they remain critics, whose works somehow arise from Homer, Dante, or Shakespeare. This having it both ways may not

bother postmodernists, but it does worry other sorts of literary critics, Surette notes—and Rorty has not shown them a way out of the dilemma. Instead, Surette warns, the much-admired philosopher is simply trying “to lay down the law” for literature.

## OTHER NATIONS

### *Turkey's TV Revolution*

“Packaging Islam: Cultural Politics on the Landscape of Turkish Commercial Television”  
by Ayşe Öncü, in *Public Culture* (Fall 1995), 124 Wieboldt Hall, Univ. of Chicago,  
1010 E. 59th St., Chicago, Ill. 60637.

For most of the 20th century, official Turkey has resolutely kept Islam in the closet. On state-controlled TV, evidence of the faith was seen only in weekly 15-minute homilies delivered by a state official in secular garb, and in limited mosque broadcasts

on officially designated holidays. The overall impression from what was shown (and not shown) by the Turkish Television and Radio Authority (TRT), reports Öncü, a sociologist at Bogaziçi University in Istanbul, was that Islam remained “a primordial force” requir-

ing vigilance “lest its dark face reappear.”

All of that began to change with the advent of commercial broadcasting in 1990 and a clever 1991 TV ad campaign by Turkey’s long-standing Islamist political party. The Refah (Welfare) Party had been seen as a marginal religious organization representing cranky traditionalists, especially backward small-town shopkeepers. The ads, however, Öncü says, put a new face on the Islamist movement, one that was “urban, literate, middle class.” Quotations from the Koran were scarce, and Refah’s constituents, she observes, “were not the turbaned women and bearded dark men of the imagination, but everyday people.” The only woman wearing a turban was a student who told the viewers she had been expelled from her university for wearing a headscarf. A voice-over promised that when Refah was in power, no one would face discrimination because of

her beliefs and practices.

Today, Öncü says, Islam is everywhere on Turkish TV, “part of the issue-saturated culture of commercial television.” (Seven private channels now compete among themselves and with TRT.) Islamic spokesmen appear in TV forums to present “the Islamist viewpoint.” News commentators, politicians, and other secular figures advert to ominous global religio-political conspiracies involving Saudi finance capital or Iranian fundamentalism.

Islam is now seen, Öncü says, as “a problem that demands public awareness, encouraging audiences to clarify their own positions and take a stand.” Although not the sole factor, Islam’s TV presence undoubtedly contributed to the Refah Party’s stunning showing in last December’s elections: it won 158 seats in the 550-member parliament, more than any other party.

## *The Suicide of Cambodian Democracy*

“Cambodia’s Fading Hopes” by Julio A. Jeldres, in *Journal of Democracy* (Jan. 1996), 1101 15th St. N.W., Ste. 802, Washington, D.C. 20005.

After almost two decades of terror, repression, and genocide, Cambodia held United Nations-supervised elections in 1993 that were supposed to be a landmark on the road to democracy. Nearly three years later, that destination still seems very far off, reports Jeldres, an Australian who served on the staff of Prince (now King) Norodom Sihanouk from 1981 to 1991.

In the May 1993 elections, the royalist FUNCINPEC party—founded by Sihanouk in 1981 to fight the country’s Vietnamese conquerors and now led by one of his sons, Prince Norodom Ranariddh—promised national reconciliation and a battle against corruption, and it scored a major victory. The party won 45 percent of the vote and 58 of the 120 Constituent Assembly seats. The Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), successor to the party created by Vietnam’s communist regime to rule as its proxy in

Cambodia after the 1978 Vietnamese invasion, finished only a strong second. A new constitution subsequently restored the monarchy.

But the CPP, by threatening civil war, “strong-armed” Ranariddh into a coalition government, with the prince as “first prime minister” and CPP leader Hun Sen as “second prime minister.” Much of FUNC-



*Reconstruction efforts are under way in Phnom Penh; these Buddha statues have been made for use in rebuilt temples.*

INPEC's public support has since vanished.

The "marriage of convenience" (as the prince described it to his shocked supporters) "played right into the hands of the CPP's hard-bitten cadres, who control most of the governmental apparatus to this day," Jeldres points out. The "marriage" keeps international aid flowing to the government and gives it international recognition.

In "postcommunist" Cambodia, graft and corruption are barely concealed, Jeldres says. Prince Ranariddh himself reportedly received a \$1.8-million small plane from a Sino-Thai businessman suspected of drug trafficking. Many FUNCINPEC officials have learned to imitate the CPP style, mak-

ing "heavy-handed efforts to stifle critics in the press, parliament, and civil society." Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge—the anti-Vietnamese communists who killed two to three million Cambodians between 1975 and '78, when they ruled the country—have set up a government-in-exile in western Cambodia and are continuing to wage a guerrilla war.

Jeldres is encouraged by the rise of prodemocracy "groups of students, women, [and] human rights activists." Local elections are scheduled this year and parliamentary balloting is set for 1998. But the Phnom Penh government's performance has been so poor that Jeldres fears that "a crisis of legitimacy may be brewing."

## *The Gulag Accounts*

"Forced Labour under Stalin: The Archive Revelations" by R. W. Davies, in *New Left Review* (Nov.–Dec. 1995), 6 Meard St., London, England W1V 3HR.

Ever since the early 1930s, Western Sovietologists have been trying to estimate the number of people imprisoned in the labor camps and colonies of Joseph Stalin's Gulag (the Russian acronym for the labor-camp system), as well as the number of "excess deaths" in the country resulting from famine, abnormal levels of disease, and executions. Robert Conquest, author of *The Great Terror* (1968), calculated that nine million people (excluding criminals) were confined in Soviet labor camps and colonies at the end of 1938. He estimated that, between 1930 and '38, there were 17 million "excess deaths," seven million of them due to the 1933 famine in the Ukraine (which resulted from Stalin's forced collectivization of the farms and seizure of the grain produced). Estimates by other scholars varied, with Jerry Hough of Duke University going so far as to claim that the deaths in the Great Purge of 1937–39 were "only" in "the 75,000–200,000 range."

The debate is politically loaded. Whether the gruesome numbers are high or low bears on such questions as whether Stalin was more, or less, of a murderous tyrant than Adolf Hitler, and whether American Cold Warriors exaggerated Stalin's crimes in order to "demonize" the Soviet Union.

R. W. Davies, author of *Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution* (1989), contends that data made available from the Soviet

archives in recent years demonstrate that Hough's figures "are far too low," but also show that Conquest's overall figures for the 1930s "are far too high."

It appears from the new archival data, Davies says, that some 10–11 million people were killed in the 1930s, directly or indirectly, by the Communists, with the famine of 1933 being the largest single cause. But there is still disagreement, he notes, about how many died in that disaster. On the basis of newly released Soviet data on birth and death registrations, one specialist puts the famine deaths at four to five million. Other scholars, in the belief that many infants were born and died outside the official recognition system, contend that the famine toll may have been as high as eight million.

A "reasonably comprehensive" picture of the Stalinist forced-labor system, with its prisons, labor camps, labor colonies (for those with lesser sentences), and special settlements (for exiles), can now be drawn, Davies writes. The total number of prisoners, he says, was about 2.5 million in 1933, 2.9 million in 1939, 3.3 million in 1941, and nearly 5.5 million in 1953. After Stalin's death that year, the system began to be dismantled. By 1954, the number in the Gulag had been reduced to four million, and, by 1959, to fewer than one million. Stalinism, if not communism, had begun to come to an end.

*Continued from page 5*

### *Troubled Universities*

As a former geography professor who became disenchanted with academe many years ago, I must say that the two articles under “What’s Wrong with the American University?” [WQ, Winter ’96] are more than poignant. They should be made required reading for all university administrators and professors.

*John Duncklee  
Oracle, Ariz.*

So former education bureaucrats Chester Finn and Bruno Manno say American universities have too many unworthy students who could be taught more creatively. This kind of finding predates Knute Rockne’s first winning season. But if Finn and Manno truly think that the rightward-leaning foundations (which support their studies) and their business-oriented clienteles want the universities they denigrate to de-emphasize careerism in favor of more selective admissions, great books, and critical thinking, they are being astonishingly naive. More diverse student populations notwithstanding, current practices in higher education reflect the wishes of upper- middle-class suburban parents rather than the inclinations of an allegedly radical professoriate.

*Alan Posner  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, Mich.*

### *Revisiting the Barnburners*

James Henretta has written an interesting and informative essay [“The First Contract with America,” WQ, Winter ’96] on the augmentation of federalism that took place after the Panic of 1837. The reform of state governments which took place in those years involved principles that our state governments today could well learn from. But to identify Michael Hoffman and the Barnburners Revolution as a precedent for Newt Gingrich and his Contract with America does a disservice to the Barnburners and elevates the Gingrich contract to a level it does not deserve.

The Jacksonian era established a precedent for public involvement in reform that the Barnburners carried on. By contrast, 62 percent of Americans of voting age did not vote in the 1994 midterm election, which was supposed to have centered on Gingrich and his contract. Of the 38 percent minority who cast their ballots, only 51 percent voted Republican. Of those who voted

Republican, 83 percent had never heard of the Contract with America. So much for the propaganda that Gingrich is the voice of the people.

*N. B. (Tad) Martin  
Visalia, Calif.*

James A. Henretta suggests that the Barnburners of the 1840s demonstrated a “political courage all too rare in our own time.” When the Panic of 1837 forced some state governments into bankruptcy, the Barnburners managed to produce a new constitution for New York by 1846, one that required the state to “balance the budget and pay off the debt.” The work of these believers in the “Jeffersonian Republican philosophy of limited government” set an example that is wholly applicable to the budgetary battles now engulfing the federal government.

Without exploring the Barnburner arguments that Henretta seemingly approves (the federal government should not be permitted to build roads and canals; the debt burden must be removed from future generations), I mention two pieces of history that should be considered:

1. Henretta fails to mention that the Panic of 1837, one of the six major depressions of U.S. history, immediately followed a systematic 99.7 percent reduction in the national debt over 14 consecutive years (1823–36). Indeed, Andrew Jackson often is praised these days for having wiped out the debt (technically, it was \$38,000). In referring to another downturn, in 1857, one that encouraged hidden state deficit spending, Henretta says nothing about the fact that this major depression had also been immediately preceded by a 59 percent national debt reduction, 1852 through 1857. The four other major collapses (1819, 1873, 1893, 1929) also followed periods of sustained debt reductions. The batting average is perfect: six sustained periods of debt reductions, six major depressions. There has been no new depression since the Great Depression, the longest such period in history and a period of chronic deficit spending. This pattern doubtless appears wholly coincidental to many analysts, but this is not a good enough reason to keep quiet about it.

2. In Jefferson's time, Virginia had 200,000 or more slaves, more than double the number in any other state, and about 40 percent of the state's total population. Understandably, slave-owners had a vested interest in preventing the formation of a national government that might become interested in how slaves were treated. There is no need to condemn

Jefferson for his espousal of "limited government," but his position should not be treated as wholly abstract and completely divorced from the politics of the time.

*Frederick C. Thayer*

*The George Washington University  
Washington, D.C.*

### *Setting the Record Straight*

As the *Wilson Quarterly* celebrates its 20th year by getting better and better, it is worth noting that the magazine's basic concept was shaped in 1975–76 by James H. Billington, then the Wilson Center's director and now the Librarian of Congress. The *WQ*, he said, was to be a magazine edited by journalists to bring scholars' new ideas and information to a wider audience of intelligent lay readers. Billington's decision to launch the *WQ* was backed by the Wilson Center's board and, notably, by its chairman, the late William J. Baroody, Sr. Both men helped to raise the necessary start-up funds. S. Dillon Ripley, the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, gave his blessing, and *Smithsonian* magazine generously lent its mailing list and its considerable business talent to the new enterprise. Such strong support made all else possible.

*Peter Braestrup*

*Founding Editor, Wilson Quarterly  
Washington, D.C.*

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