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WINTER 1996

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT

**T**he academy has long provided most of the grist for the *Wilson Quarterly's* editorial mill. So it's appropriate, on the occasion of our 20th anniversary, that we devote our two clusters of articles to matters directly academic.

The first, our cover story, addresses what we believe is the single most important intellectual debate of the closing years of the century: the argument over human nature and the extent to which biology shapes our individual and social lives. It is, in some respects, this age's equivalent of the great medieval debate between the realists and the nominalists. Dividing the intellectual community into opposing tendencies (sometimes into warring camps), it establishes the terms for further argument and inquiry—and sometimes, as our authors report, for something more closely resembling unsupervised mud fights.

The authors of our second cluster look at the university itself, specifically America's great research universities. While such institutions are still the gems of our educational system, and recognized as such both at home and abroad, serious problems abound. Rising tuition, political correctness and curriculum controversies, uncertainties about the very purpose of higher education—these and other matters will become even more urgent in the years ahead. Our essays point out connections among the various disorders even while suggesting modest remedies.

The most obvious thing about this issue, as long-time subscribers no doubt have noted, is the new design. We are not so optimistic as to think that it will please all readers—no redesign ever does. But we hope most of you agree that Samuel Antupit has brought more order and elegance to our various editorial offerings.

Finally, this issue introduces a new department, "Findings," a selection of discoveries from the knowledge industry—variously amusing, alarming, and pleasing.

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### *The Big Gamble*

Your articles on gambling ["America's Gambling Fever," *WQ*, Autumn '95] would have benefited from a precise definition of the term.

Gambling, of the type that takes place on riverboats and in casinos, must be distinguished from other forms of risk taking. If the transaction itself creates the risk of loss, that is gambling. If the risk of loss exists independently of whether a bet is made, it is not gambling. When someone bets on a horse race or the turn of a card, that is gambling. There was no risk of loss before the bet was made.

The clients of a casino are gamblers. Its owners are not. They are taking a business risk. If they can attract enough people who will bet enough money, they will make a profit. If not, they will lose all or part of their investment. But the decision to build the casino is not a gamble. The money invested was not wagered but used to buy property and equipment.

Property, including real estate, stocks, bonds, and commodities, may be bought, sold, or held. To hold may result in more losses than selling. The risk of loss exists independently. The owners may be speculating, but they are not gambling.

By not making a distinction between gambling and other forms of risk taking, you have done your readers a disservice. The articles have romanticized gambling by comparing it to more productive activities that it in no way resembles. The articles will certainly not be criticized by lobbyists in the employ of the "gaming industry."

Charles A. McAlear  
New Orleans, La.

The recent growth of casino entertainment across the U.S. has shown that the economic benefits of the gaming industry—private capital investment, employment, public sector revenue, and tourism—are real, substantial, and measurable. The track record of the industry also shows that gaming can deliver such benefits without changing the character of host

communities or imposing significant social costs. That casino communities aren't punished with idiosyncratic social ills must disappoint those who cling to unsavory stereotypes about the industry perpetuated by Hollywood and the new, well-organized anti-gambling lobby.

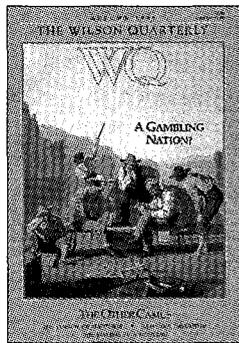
This lobby is well represented by Robert Goodman's essay. Goodman's advocacy research on gaming pays scant attention to most of the communities where casinos operate, presents precious little verifiable empirical data, and steadfastly ignores evidence that fails to support his position. After it evaluated his work, the New York State Senate questioned whether Goodman "was purposefully misleading or merely sloppy."

It's not surprising when some journalists, especially those not well versed in social science research methods, fail to recognize Goodnesque fabrication and hyperbole. After all, a hint of scandal sells papers. It is surprising, disappointing, and especially damaging when the *WQ*, which should know better, descends to crude polemic.

Phillip G. Satre  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Harrah's Entertainment, Inc.  
Memphis, Tenn.

Contrary to one editorial comment in your recent articles on gambling, authoritative criminal justice sources uniformly report that legalizing gambling activities definitely increase various categories of crimes.

In 1994, all of the various experts testifying before the U.S. House Committee on Small Business warned of the large costs that legalized gambling activities inflict upon the criminal justice system, the social welfare system, small businesses, and the U.S. economy. The use of legalized gambling as a strategy for economic development was thoroughly discredited. The field research throughout the nation indicates that for every dollar that the legalized-gambling interests indicate is being con-



tributed in taxes, the taxpayers are paying at least \$3—and higher numbers have been calculated.

As well as acting as a regressive tax on the poor and intensifying many pre-existing social problems, legalized gambling hurts education—both philosophically and fiscally. In states where gambling activities have been initiated allegedly to bolster tax revenues for education, the funding in real dollars has almost uniformly decreased, and this trend will continue as licensed gambling proliferates.

*John Warren Kindt*  
*University of Illinois*  
*Urbana, Ill.*

The downsides to gambling are certainly real, but they are far less measurable than Robert Goodman suggests. The social costs of casino-style gaming result from problem or pathological gambling, but to claim the ability to measure the cost per compulsive gambler at between \$13,200 and \$52,000 per annum is absurd. David Spanier offers a better assessment: "Gambling can so easily destroy people. It can encourage false hopes, undermine thrift, and lead to compulsive behavior. It must be prudently controlled."

In the long term, we must come to grips with the real public policy question surrounding gambling: what is the appropriate presence, availability, type, and promotion of commercial gaming in society? That we know so little about a controversial \$40 billion industry is both a shock and a challenge.

It is likely that the next few years will be quieter with regard to new authorizations for gaming jurisdictions. It would be good if at this time there will be an emergence of significant social science research that will provide much better guidelines on public policy toward gambling.

*William R. Eadington*  
*Director, Institute for the Study of Gambling*  
*and Commercial Gaming*  
*University of Nevada*  
*Reno, Nev.*

Experience in many states has demonstrated that gambling can be a positive factor in the economic and social life of host communities. Yet clearly, as Robert Goodman notes, commercial gaming has some serious downsides and is genuinely appropriate in relatively few areas. To argue that it is uniformly good or bad, however, is nonsense. Nothing in life is so

clear—unless one uses intellectually dishonest data to support key points.

The assertion, for example, that the "annual costs imposed by each problem gambler" range from \$13,200 to \$52,000 per problem gambler per year can be valid only if one is willing to accept a host of untenable assumptions. And to suggest that economic development has not worked in Atlantic City by noting that Atlantic City residents had a high unemployment rate in 1993 means nothing without acknowledging that anyone who can read and write and really wants a job in Atlantic City can find one. The problem of jobs in Atlantic City is a function of the culture of poverty, not casinos.

*W. Randolph Baker*  
*Harrah's Visiting Professor of Gaming Studies*  
*University of Nevada*  
*Reno, Nev.*

"The Global Gambling Experiment" asserts that casinos are illegal in both Japan and Taiwan. In addition to lotteries, though, there is a kind of quasi-legal gambling that does go on, at least in Japan.

The game is called *pachinko*, and huge, brightly lit halls exist in most neighborhoods. Gaudy outside, noisy and smoke filled inside, these halls feature a kind of pinball machine, vertical rather than horizontal. Players sit before the machines and watch little silver balls bounce around the playing surface, much as in video arcade games. Instead of tickets that can be exchanged for cheap prizes, balls come clattering out, just like a jackpot, sometimes accompanied by casino-style sirens or music. These balls are exchanged for prizes, usually cigarettes or lighters or other small items. That, at least, is the legal part of the game.

Outside and around the corner from most *pachinko* parlors comes the less than legal part. In a sealed-up door or window there is a small, barely noticeable slot. It's big enough for the cartons of cigarettes and other prizes to be slipped into. Money comes out in exchange.

The police are certainly aware of what is going on at *pachinko* parlors, but unless someone complains, there is little likelihood that they will do anything to interfere. This may be shortsighted. Beyond the question of gambling itself, it's widely believed in Japan that many *pachinko* parlors are run by the *yakuza*, Japan's organized-crime families. These are involved not only in drugs, racketeering, and prostitution but in the trade of handguns, which are banned in Japan.

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Congress established the Center in 1968 as an international institute for advanced study, "symbolizing and strengthening the fruitful relation between the world of learning and the world of public affairs." The Center opened in 1970 under its own presidentially appointed board of trustees, headed by former vice president Hubert H. Humphrey.

Chosen in open annual worldwide competitions, some 50 Fellows at the Center carry out advanced research, write books, and join in discussions with other scholars, public officials, journalists, and business and labor leaders. The Center is housed in the original Smithsonian "castle" on the Mall. Financing comes from both private sources and an annual congressional appropriation.

Whether the same situation applies to the less widespread *pachinko* parlor industry here in Taiwan, I have not been able to find out.

Monty Vierra  
Chutung, Taiwan

The contemporary explosion in commercial legalized gambling is clearly a result of a radical shift in government policies over the past three decades (at least since the 1964 New Hampshire lottery began the current transformation in our definitions of gambling as "just another form of play"). While David Spanier states that "Atlantic City . . . launched the gambling spree across the United States," it was the states' embrace of lotteries as a source of "painless" revenues that softened attitudes against casinos, riverboat gambling, and other gambling options. For almost a century before the present wave of legalization, gambling was largely proscribed by all of the states either by constitution or by statute. Today, the states are primary forces in the radical transformation of gambling from self-limiting indigenous "play" to profit-making ventures on a vast commercial scale. The operators of all commercial gambling games have a guaranteed advantage or edge. Upon this edge and the revenue interests of hardpressed state legislatures, an enormous institution has been created.

Vicki Abt  
Pennsylvania State University  
Abington, Pa.

*Music's Gifts*

Joseph Robinson's moving reminiscence about his musical training in a rural North Carolina high school ["What I Learned in the Lenoir High School Band," *WQ*, Autumn '95] made me recall my own early experiences in the arts—deciding to become a ballerina after seeing *Coppelia* as a youngster in Boston, later switching my allegiance to the theater when I was a hit as Long John Silver in a grade school production of *Treasure Island*. I share Mr. Robinson's belief in the fundamental importance of arts education, not only for those few who choose to pursue a professional career in the arts but more importantly for the vast majority of students.

Arts education has been an important part of the National Endowment for the Arts since I became chairman of that agency in October 1993. We worked with the Department of Education and with educators all over the country, for example, to develop national stan-

dards for content and achievement in the arts, specifically in dance, music, theater, and the visual arts. In a long-standing partnership with state arts agencies, we support arts education projects that reach more than three million schoolchildren every year. We also cosponsor a number of research projects designed to improve the quality and range of arts education.

The Arts Endowment will absorb almost a 40 percent cut in funding this year, forcing us to reorganize the agency around four broad thematic categories, but our commitment to arts education remains undiminished. Indeed, one of our new thematic categories, Education and Access, is directly concerned with arts education, and we will continue to foster nationwide the kind of thoroughgoing arts education that Mr. Robinson enjoyed as a youngster in Lenoir, North Carolina.

*Jane Alexander*

*Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts  
Washington, D.C.*

I would venture to say that most of us had elementary, middle school, and high school years that were filled, unselfconsciously, with music. Bands, orchestras, choruses—these were regular, “normal” components of our early education.

Today, new partnerships with the media, the schools, and music educators hold out some hope of re-educating us to what we as a culture knew 30 and 40 years ago: all those things so actively sought by teachers today (better language and math skills, improved attention spans, world cultural awareness) are easily and naturally attainable when music is a well-integrated part of the curriculum. Only when educators and administrators—and the taxpayers who fund the school systems—come to understand that music is a basic human activity, and that the passivity born of our electronic age can be deadening and dangerous, will music again be the lively, satisfying, engaging force that it has been virtually throughout history.

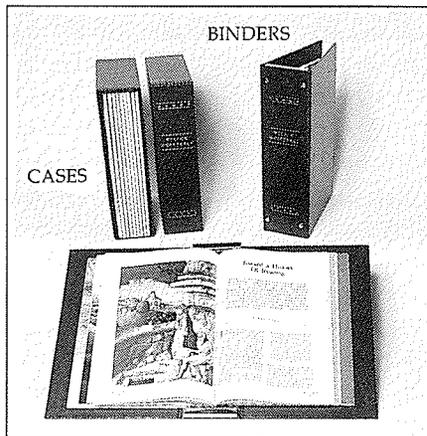
*Richard Ortner  
Tanglewood Music Center  
Lenox, Mass.*

I could not help but read into Joseph Robinson’s remarks a bit of concern on a topic of interest to nearly anyone associated with a professional orchestra. That is, where will our

*Continued on page 141*



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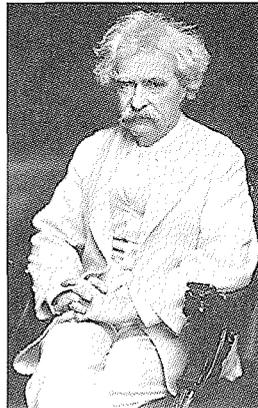
## FINDINGS

**IDYLL THEORY:** Weary of abstractions, college students and their teachers are said to be leaving theory-laden humanities departments and embracing a new and more hard-headed field called “environmental studies.” At least that’s the cheerful explanation for the shift English professor Jay Parini gives in the *New York Times Magazine* (Oct. 29, 1995). Environmental studies is attractive, he writes, because it “marks a reengagement with the actual universe of rocks, trees, and rivers that lies behind the wilderness of signs.” In the latest product of the field, *Uncommon Ground* (reviewed on p. 83), however, it’s hard to find a lot of dirt under the fingernails. “Biology is not the body itself, but a discourse on the body,” one contributor writes. “No natural object-world speaks its metaphor-free and story-free truth through the sober objectivity of culture-free and so universal science.” Maybe those migrating students and scholars have simply mined out the vein of Literature and are heading, their backpacks crammed with the picks and shovels of theory, for the mother lode of Nature.

**A HIGH-TALK ECONOMY:** People used to worry that the United States would be reduced to a nation of hamburger flippers. A nation of tongue wagger now seems more like it. Writing in last May’s issue of the *American Economic Review*, economists Donald McCloskey and Arjo Klamer estimate that talk accounts for about 25 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product. They are not referring to the garden-variety chatter involved in conveying information or orders but the persuasive “sweet talk” of the lawyers, teachers, professors, administrators, salespeople, and others who dominate the talk sector. Others, such as nurses, urban planners, natural scientists, and police, devote 25 to 50 percent of their time to word work. All told, that makes about \$1.5 trillion in talk, and McCloskey and Klamer say that the verbal share of the economy is growing. Is it time for a Producer Chat Index? A futures market in nouns and verbs?

There are good reasons to be cheered by the new value attached to words, but it’s hard not to worry too. Signs of speculative excess in the word market are appearing everywhere, from college English departments to radio talk shows.

**TWAIN’S TURN:** Okay, we all know that Hemingway was a repressed homosexual. Now we’re supposed to believe that Twain was too. Only not so repressed. The perpetrator of this literary “outing,” Andrew J. Hoffman, claims in the March 1995 issue of *American Literature* that “between 1862 and 1865 Clemens engaged in a series of romances with men. Further evidence suggests at least one connection of this sort during the years of his marriage.” The evidence, apart from Hoffman’s new reading of Twain’s work? That’s the interesting part. “Without *proof* of my hypothesis—and I must emphasize that there is none, though I regard the evidence as compelling—Twain scholars have only two choices: to disregard the possibility and go on with the old assumptions, or to enter new and unfamiliar territory.” Hoffman, it’s clear, has already lit out for the territory.



**IS THERE YET HOPE FOR LIT CRIT?:** Love or hate the new *New Yorker*, credit should go to Tina Brown for publishing some of the better criticism now being written. Case in point: Joan Acocella’s essay in the November 27 issue, “Cather and the Academy,” wherein the author relates how successive generations of the literary establishment have underrated one of America’s finest (and, to her critical misfortune, most popular) novelists. To the Hemingway hairy chests of the

1920s, Willa Cather was too much the sentimental "lady novelist." To the leftists of the '30s, she was too conservative. To the New Critics, her work lacked formal excellence. To recent feminists, she is a traitor, even an embarrassment. And most lesbians are put off by her secretiveness about her probable lesbianism.

A few critics do manage to rise above their political allegiances, Acocella says. One is lesbian novelist Joanna Russ, who praises Cather for not parading her sexual preferences, thereby bringing "completeness and richness" to her work. But Russ is a rare voice among contemporary literary critics, who, Acocella notes, disparage whatever doesn't suit the agenda:

This is the new political critics' revenge on the "liberal humanism" of the 1950s and '60s. It is terrible to imagine what the next generation's revenge on this generation will be. One is tempted to plead in advance for a little historical understanding—to point out, for example, that the cause of women, having been ignored for several thousand years, was urgently felt in our time, even to the point of such absurdities. But what historical understanding can these critics expect, who have shown none?

**THE VASTER WASTELAND:** Readers of the summer 1994 *WQ* were warned that the Internet might soon be dominated by junk. Paul Phillips, an enterprising employee of Primus, Inc., an Internet access provider, has now obligingly constructed a guide to the growing mountain of news you can't use: *The Useless World Wide Web Home Page* (<http://www.primus.com/Staff/paulp/useless.html>). It leads browsers to such gems as *The World's Largest Drum* (photograph and history of the Purdue Band's "Monster") and *A Disney Vacation* (a collection of somebody's vacation slides). Mental junkfood appears to be as popular as the edible variety: Phillips's site has already registered more than one million "hits," as individual site visits are called. Whether quality can fare as well on the Web is of more than theoretical concern to Michael Kinsley, of *CNN Crossfire* and *New Republic* fame. He will find out later this year when he and Microsoft

launch an on-line magazine of political and cultural commentary.

**ANOTHER MIRACLE OF THE MARKET-PLACE:** Encouraging news that American entrepreneurs have found a way to make even sloth pay: video rental stores, reports the *Economist* (Nov. 4, 1995), derive about one-third of their revenues from late fees.

**RESEARCH IN SERVICE TO THE OBVIOUS:** Just in case you thought it was safe to go back to the three-martini lunch, John Mullahy and Jody Sindelar, of the National Bureau of Economic Research, inform us in last November's *NBER Digest* that if "an individual is an alcoholic or a heavy drinker, he or she is more likely to have difficulty getting a job or keeping it."

**WHY WE MIGHT NEED SUCH RESEARCH:** In the Summer 1995 issue of the *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, Heather L. Hundley suggests that the late TV sitcom *Cheers*, set in a Boston bar, might have lured unsuspecting viewers to the bottle. "The absence of beer-related deaths, accidents, D.U.I.s, alcoholism, or other body dysfunctions and diseases invites viewers to disassociate the possible consequences of beer consumption from drinking and encourages them to instead associate only sociability and relaxation with beer drinking." Sobering scholarship, indeed.



**ACTION STEPS SUGGESTED:** With alarming frequency, ghastly new terms are rising from the black lagoon of bureaucracy and finding their way into otherwise respectable publications. Recently, for example, *Modern Maturity* (Nov.–Dec. 1995) allowed the term *action idea* into print. What is an action idea? Not to put too fine a point on it, it is an idea. *Action* is tacked on to conceal the author's belief that ideas

by themselves are not worth much or perhaps his fear that this particular idea is not going anywhere. *Action* is supposed to liven things up. In classic bureaucratic fashion, however, it produces the opposite effect from what was intended. No idea is deader than an action idea. Such terms make the skin crawl because they are unnatural; they are the living dead of the language. Why not dump them back in the lagoon?

**AMERICA THE ENTITLED:** The budget balancers have fixed their sights on the multibillion-dollar federal entitlement programs, such as Medicaid and Social Security. In his excellent new book, *The Good Life and Its Discontents: The American Dream in the Age of Entitlement, 1945–1995*, columnist Robert J. Samuelson casts his gaze at the sweeping sense of entitlement that Americans have developed since World War II—the ultimate source, he says, of many contemporary ills and discontents:

History matters. Each element in our postwar experience relates to the other. If we had not had the Depression and the Second World War, we might not have abandoned some of the social and political conventions of the first 150 years of our history. Until the 1930s, we were essentially a nation of small government and largely unregulated economic markets. The Depression and the world war that followed seemed to discredit these traditions; but without the early postwar boom, the drift toward bigger government and more regulation might not have continued. And without the faith that we could easily engineer ever greater wealth and economic well-being, we might not have made so many political promises. All these events combined to give us a sense of a limitless future, in which all possibilities, both for the nation and for individuals, were within our grasp. This is what I mean by entitlement: the conviction that we could completely control our economic, social, and political surroundings. Too sweeping, it was bound to disappoint, and we are now experiencing its bittersweet legacy.

**SLIMMING THE NEWS:** Thanks to skyrocketing paper prices—up some 30 to 40 percent during the last year—the page width

of the average broadsheet newspaper may soon be further reduced from the now standard 13.5 inches to 12.5 inches. (The *Wall Street Journal* may be unique in holding to the old standard of 15 inches.) As newspaper analyst John Morton worries in the November *American Journalism Review*, such an economy not only would reduce space for the news; it could drive away advertisers by forcing them to pay the same column-inch rate for less overall space. With the newspapers already engaged in extensive cost cutting, the worst thing they can do, Morton warns, “is to cut back on the quality of product and level of service.” Sound advice. But the mysteriously driven surge in paper prices around the world has taken an undeniable toll on all print media—with obvious consequences for well-informed electorates.

**PERILS OF PEDAGOGY:** Much has been said about the formulaic prose and poetry that issue from university creative writing programs. But how have such programs affected the teachers themselves? Scott Russell Sanders, in “The Writer in the University” (an essay in his recent book, *Writing from the Center*), reports on what he and other teachers have found: “Instead of reading the major works of predecessors and contemporaries, we read stacks of apprentice work. ‘The poet,’ Donald Hall cautions, ‘may prolong adolescence into retirement by dealing only with the products of infant brains.’ Although Theodore Roethke composed eloquent apologies for the teaching of creative writing, he also gave vent to this tirade:

Lord, I’m plumb tuckered out lugging these hunks of pork up the lower slopes of Parnassus, knowing all the time that as soon as I turn around, back they’ll slip to blurbanity, inanity, and the dearest, dullest people in the world. I’m tired of being a day-laborer on this canary-farm, a ladies’ maid in a seminary of small beasts, a midwife sweating to effect a most particular parturition: bringing forth little maimed ends of life, poems with all the charm (if they don’t lay eggs) of aborted salamanders.

‘I ask you,’ Roethke concludes, ‘is that the way for a grown man, and me past 35, to make a living?’ ”

## AT ISSUE

# Words' Worth

When a wrecker's ball divides the facade of an old building, or a switch is thrown to ignite efficient charges at its core, you see how the physical work of years can be undone instantly. There's less show to the death of a tradition. It's hard to fix the moment, or sequence of moments, at which breath goes out of it and decay takes hold of the remains.

Yet every so often you do get to watch a tradition disappear almost as expeditiously as a blown building. A recent article in the *Washington Post* describes what has happened to literature in post-Soviet Russia. "For more than a century," writes reporter David Hoffman, "Russian writers occupied a special place in society. Literature was at the forefront of opposition to power, and in the Soviet era totalitarian rulers went to great lengths to bend writers to their will." But writers resisted, risked prison and death, and fought back with words. For their words, their alternative prose visions of the society, there was a vast audience.

Now writers in Russia are free, and the good ones seem not to matter at all. The literary journals essential to cultural life a decade ago barely survive, their sales not a tenth of what they were. Capitalism's triumph has made them beside the point. Television owns the platform now, and visual sensation is still so novel to the Russians that they don't mind if it flickers to the rhythms of an elevator prose as nondescript as elevator music. "There is great literary prose, and there is junk," says one despondent Russian writer. "It's only junk that you can earn money from."

Sound familiar? The displacement of literature, the devaluation of the word, and mass indifference to nuance have been a longer time coming in the United States, and their insurgency can't be attributed to arriviste capitalism (commerce and literature worked out an arrangement, like part-

ners in a cold marriage who stay together for the sake of the furniture). Who can recall the last time the publication of a book that might reasonably be called literature—that aspired to more than an extended author's tour and a celluloid afterlife—raised the nation's hackles or lifted its spirits or shook its premises?

It's not that we lack words, Lord knows, or books for that matter, which can be bought in spaces the size of hangars.

WQ

Those aisles of books are mostly for burning, though a whole stack of them alight would not give off the heat of *Othello*. We don't expect enough of words anymore, that they be crafted, beautiful, purposeful, careful, true. The edge has gone off discrimination (it's on its way to becoming the "d" word), and fine judgment has flattened almost to the horizontal. We're losing the disposition to read closely, listen critically. Why so? An odd lot of suspects seems to have worked at the reduction, but there's no evidence of a conspiracy, and space to indict only a few.

Start with the media (irresistible: each now wears a neon "kick me" sign), with television, for example, the same television whose glow has enchanted the Russians and whose deeper infection they are yet to feel. On TV news shows, the standard patter is strictly anodyne, and the standard patters as individual as Pringles. Their words, the means through which tens of millions of citizens get a fix on the world, work like a narcotic on the memory of eloquence and complication. On midafternoon dramas, charmless actors prattle, strip, couple, and scatter farcically, but the truest confusion is often grammatical: "A selfish person who always expects to get their own way better not look to Dawne and I for favors." On talk shows—circuses that are all freaks and clowns and no acrobats—participants use

a common language of sentiments borrowed from psychos and psychotherapists. They have learned this language, these emotions, from the media, and they live for the opportunity to demonstrate what good students they are, to show-and-tell their constricted hopes and blasted dreams in homeroom. These shows insistently exploit race and class in America, yet there is in them none of the sometimes fierce poetry of the lived vernacular, flung straight as a weapon or a curse.

Our civic discourse is bland and evasive. "senior citizens," the verbal equivalent of a pat on the head for the family dog, gets the tone just right. Every wrenching issue invites a pulled punch, like this from a pro-choice advocate explaining a particularly grim abortion practice: "The foetus is demised" before its skull is cracked. We've recently seen a million-man march that wasn't quite, and we read daily of presidential hopefuls who seem neither.

The most high-minded culprits in the drive to sideline literature work at institutions that once knew better, our universities. We read (accurately?) of faculty members in literature classes who are there not to celebrate texts, let alone be in awe of them, but to unmask them, like so many yapping Totos pulling the curtain. Language is construct, snare, and subterfuge. Every text is just a text, to be eyed with suspicion, every sentence much as good as any other. You are taught not to love literature but to be wary of it. Words subvert the intention of their author, and they will trick readers too. The value of a work is not aesthetic but mechanical—artifice maybe, art surely not. This seems akin to ignoring a great building's breath-taking shape, elegant skin, and material audacity to study its elevator shaft. One does not wish to impinge on the freedom of these folk to give students the shaft, so long as they situate it in its proper place.

Have the universities engaged in a great leveling process in the presentation of literature, as in much else, and, by so doing, have they forsaken traditional notions of what a liberal education should be? Such an education has to be about discrimination, dismissive and embracing judgments,

differences calculated with an unclouded eye. Let technical vocational skills be uniformly imposed: the bridge should remain suspended, the tunnel unflooded, the spacecraft aloft, the ship afloat, the accounts in balance, the patient alive. Let liberal education champion value, disagreement, rank, all the elements celebrated by guileful Ulysses in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*: degree (not the same thing as a university's production-line piece of paper), priority, place, course, proportion, form, office, custom, in all line of order.

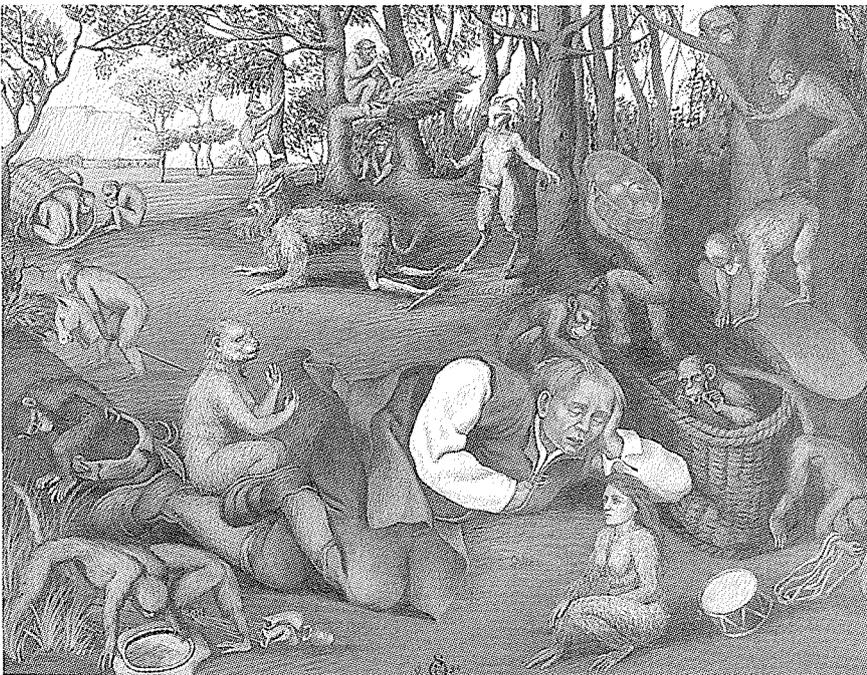
**T**he "canon," about whose hegemonic hold on curricula we have heard too much in recent years from those uneasy with degree, is really no more than an A-list of things to consider reading. Life is choice; you have  $x$  amount of time to spend reading, so apportion it wisely. If you're a serious reader, look here. It's a list both porous and expansive. What's canonical is so, by and large, because it has for some time satisfied minds and hearts, not because it has met some Noah's ark notion of inclusiveness. Those who scorn the very idea of a canon had better come up with a powerful alternative. It won't do to mandate that work be read because it represents the category of, say, hermaphrodite fiction—and right-handed hermaphrodite fiction at that, sinister hermaphrodite prose being a separately privileged genre. All literary texts are not created equal, and their worth is not in their provenance or their good intentions, just as their achievement is not to be gauged by their conformity to the moment's panethnic pansexual Panglossian social or political enthusiasms.

Imagine that in time the society will divide into readers, who want information and don't much attend to the form in which it comes, and Readers, who want music, implication, wit, transformation, resistance. You can guess who'll be in charge. The Readers will shrink to a circle as sealed as the Druids', and as irrelevant and doomed. At least the tree folk lost out to Rome and Christianity. Where's the glory in reading your fate on a pulsing blue screen, or in a friend's shrug and blank stare?

—James M. Morris

# THE RETURN OF HUMAN NATURE

Since World War II, the academy has been the site of more than a few heated intellectual debates. None has been more passionate than the one set off by efforts to apply the bio-evolutionary perspective to human behavior. Even while provoking vicious criticism, the new applications of Darwinian principles—whether called sociobiology, biosociology, or evolutionary psychology—have shed valuable, and appreciated, light on everything from violence to sexist practices. The debate, however, is far from over. The very notion of an underlying human nature flies in the face of contemporary postmodernist theories held dear by many intellectuals and artists. Here we offer a history of the modern human nature debate, as seen by two participants.



14 Lionel Tiger on his struggles in the human nature wars  
26 Frederick Turner on the new natural classicism in the arts

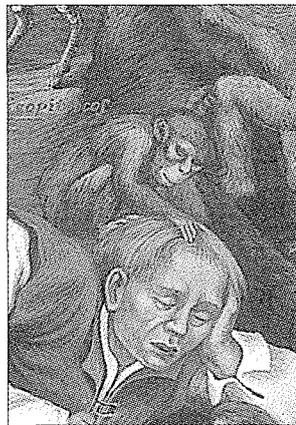
# My Life in the Human Nature Wars

by Lionel Tiger

For venturing to explore the role of biology in our social lives, I have had more than my share of interesting moments. In addition to slander and calumny—depressingly standard fare in the academy today—I have received bomb threats at lectures in Vancouver and Montreal and the promise of a “kneecapping” at the New School for Social Research in New York. I have been the object of a demonstration of angry male transvestites at the Royal Institution in London, and I have seen one of the books I co-authored, *The Imperial Animal*, compared to *Mein Kampf*! All in a day’s work, you might say, though some 35 years’ is closer to the truth.

If the toll exacted by my career has occasionally been steep, it has been well worth the price to be able to participate in the most consequential intellectual debate of our time, a debate that goes back at least to Charles Darwin and the mid-19th-century publication of his magnificent and scandal-provoking theory of natural selection.

The main antagonists then were scientists and clerics. The former thought Darwin’s theory explained a great deal about nature and possibly even human nature. The latter considered it a rebuke to stories of divine creation as well as a potential threat to their power to define reality. But in recent years, the argument over the influence of biology on human society has been far more raucous within



science itself, particularly within the social sciences.

The evolving “biosocial” view that I have helped pioneer poses a direct challenge to some of the premises of 20th-century social science—and by extension, the cherished beliefs of many intellectuals and reformers. Foremost among these is the assumption that human beings and their institutions have largely transcended the biological constraints that govern the animal world, and, accordingly, that humans are all but free to make the worlds they choose.

I had not originally set out for such contentious territory. In fact, I took only the most conventional (that is, biology-free) courses toward my first two degrees at McGill University in Montreal, where I had been born and raised in the Jewish quarter immortalized by Mordecai Richler’s novels. Perhaps the closest I came to biology in my childhood were the featured herring in my father’s small grocery. Their immodest aroma joined with the waxing and waning of items in the produce section to alert me to the facts of seasonality and the reality of genuine physical decay. The one biology course McGill demanded I take, complete with ritual dissection of frog limbs and organs, confirmed my lack of interest in nonhuman life forms. At the time (the late 1950s), my energies were far more strongly directed toward student journalism and the local literary and political scenes, which included such figures of later fame as Leonard

Cohen and Pierre Trudeau.

After completing my master's degree at McGill with a thesis on the links between scientists and administrators in a research institute, I enrolled at the London School of Economics and turned to doctoral work on decolonization in Africa, a process I had witnessed earlier on a summer fellowship to Ghana and Nigeria. The focus of my research in 1960—the colonial service of Ghana as it became the newly independent nation's civil service—came with a bonus: it allowed me to study the colorful Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president and a seminal figure in postcolonial African history.

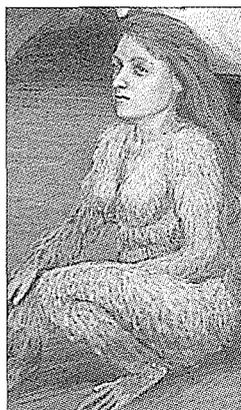
What I specifically wanted to determine was whether Max Weber's theory of the "routinization of charisma"—the process by which the almost magical power of the great leader is subtly but decisively transformed into the mechanisms of bureaucratic authority—applied to the political realities of newly independent Ghana. My research led me to a phrase in Weber's work that presumably reflected his desire to see sociology become an authoritative science. It is at the same time a surprising comment given the rest of his scholarship, and remains almost wholly ignored by those who mine his work. Weber wrote that charisma was especially difficult to understand and that "within the narrow limits of sociology" was comprehensible only "in its imperceptible transition to the biology."

Why, I wondered, was one of the founding fathers of sociology conceding so much ground to biology? I was intrigued for two reasons. First, the differences between Canadians and Ghanaians struck me as far less interesting and important than their similarities. Second, in West Africa in 1960–61, I became aware of the work of such figures as Raymond Dart and Louis Leakey then underway in southern Africa concerning hominid fossils and what they implied about our longevity as a species. It appeared we were a much older species than we had thought. Not only that, the breaking of the DNA codes in the early 1950s provided a way of understanding how very complex information about living systems could be passed from gener-

ation to generation.

Natural science seemed to be throwing up other teasing clues. Emergent long-term research in East Africa on primates in the wild revealed the complexity of their social systems. Just as William Foote Whyte in his extraordinary *Street Corner Society* (1943) had shown the previously overlooked intricacy of social life in an American working-class neighborhood, so primatologists such as John Crook and Jean and Stuart Altmann now identified rules and patterns behind primate hierarchies, matrilineal groups, socialization, and sexuality. And as primatologists became more sophisticated in their research techniques, they became increasingly aware of the importance of individual differences among animals of the same species. Suddenly, almost as if in a thrilling conspiracy, science was offering us an unexpected insight into nonhuman social complexity and the existence of "personality differences" among individual animals.

Here was a fundamental challenge to the accepted wisdom of social scientists. The dominant orthodoxy of the time was that only humans displayed ongoing and intelligent agency as opposed to the reflexive "instinctive" behavior of animals. Humans could fashion immensely variable and sophisticated social systems, but other species could sustain only relatively automatic patterns of group behavior. This remarkably rigid system of intellectual apartheid went almost completely unexamined. No major doctoral program in social science required or even encouraged its students to become familiar with the lives and systems of other species. To the contrary, the formal distinction between natural and social science was seen as self-evidently correct. And the implication was



that somehow social behavior was not natural and could not be analyzed with the same lens used to inspect other animals.

But new questions threatened the old boundaries. Was there a common human nature? Could we return to the concerns of the 19th century about that nature? What did it mean that there appeared to be a natural substrate, rooted in genetics, of complex animal social behavior? Did this substrate also extend to humans? Or did our kind of DNA, combined with the rich tapestry of our culture, secure us a fully distinct and privileged exemption from the rules governing the rest of nature?

A book that pulled much of this inquiry together in a lively but honest way was Robert Ardrey's *African Genesis* (1961), which I devoured when I laid hands on it in London in 1962. Ardrey was a Chicago-born playwright and screenwriter who, after a Broadway failure, sought solace in a *Life* magazine assignment that took him to southern Africa to learn about the archaeology and biology that was beginning to attract the attention of a few alert scientists. His path-breaking book influenced many people looking for new directions in biology and social science, and in their relationship. Ardrey's accomplishment, unique at the time, was to integrate findings in studies of human evolution, animal behavior, and the long archaeological and historical record. Not all readers were thrilled by the resulting synthesis. Some social scientists strongly objected to its emphasis on the role of aggression in evolution and its challenge to the then-orthodoxy that *Homo sapiens* originated in Asia. "Not in innocence, and not in Asia, was Man born" was Ardrey's defiant opening line.

Inspired by Ardrey's boldness and cogency, I finished my thesis on bureaucracy and charisma in Ghana and included Weber's note about charisma and biology in the concluding chapter. The members of my thesis committee, distinguished social scientists all, approved my thesis for publication on the condition that I remove

some "offensive" pages dealing with Weber's "lapse" about charisma and a few others in which I discussed primate political systems and the potential role of biology in social science. Though it was an unexpected irritation, the committee's censorship was a clue to something rotten in the state of scholarship.

What I had come up against, I later realized, was the hegemony of behaviorism. A doctrine with deep and varied roots, it goes back at least as far as John Locke's notion that human beings begin their mental lives as blank slates and are formed, morally and socially as well as intellectually, by the sum of all subsequent sense impressions. By this logic, environment, and environment alone, makes the human.

The doctrine acquired formal scholarly shape in the early 20th century, notably in the work of the French sociologist Émile Durkheim. His *Rules of Sociological Method* (published in English in 1938) established the unacceptability of using a biological or even a psychological explanation for social behavior when a sociological one would do. To violate this principle was to succumb to "reductionism," the supreme sin in Durkheim's catechism.

In the United States, the most forceful advocates of the doctrine were the social scientists Franz Boas and John T. Watson. Emphasizing the principle of cultural relativism, they pointed to the enormous variety of existing social patterns as proof that nearly any other social arrangement was possible as well. From his base at Columbia University, Franz Boas introduced a generation of anthropologists, including Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, to the orthodox view.

But the triumph of behaviorism was more than an intellectual matter. After Nazism tainted all efforts to bring genetics and other biological considerations into the study of human beings and their collective lives, the behaviorist position occupied the moral high ground as well. The ambient liberal progressivism of the academy in the early postwar period all but assured the dominance of the doctrine.

> LIONEL TIGER is Darwin Professor of Anthropology at Rutgers University. He is author, co-author, or editor of 10 books dealing with biosociology, the most recent of which is *The Pursuit of Pleasure* (1992). Copyright © 1996 by Lionel Tiger.

Despite my thesis committee's best efforts to keep me on the straight and narrow, my interest in the potential uses of the biological perspective did not wane when I took my first job, teaching political sociology at the University of British Columbia, in 1963. I was still eager to connect with that invisible college of scholars—Konrad Lorenz, Raymond Dart, and Sherwood Washburn, among others—to whose work Ardrey's book had alerted me.

In 1965, I had the opportunity to work directly with some of this college, including one of the brighter young lights, the anthropologist Robin Fox, who would become a close friend, colleague, and collaborator. The occasion was a symposium organized by Julian Huxley at the Zoological Society of London. I had been invited to be social scientist in residence by Desmond Morris, then still curator of mammals. Shortly after being introduced, Fox and I withdrew to his office at the

London School of Economics and, after a few days' discussion, penned a brief and impudent paper on the deadness of most social science and the vitality of contemporary biology. Our proposed solution to this state of affairs was to bring the disciplines together. "The Zoological Perspective in Social Science" appeared a few months later in *Man: Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. But a paper seemed inadequate to the severity and scope of the problem. We resolved one day to take up the subject in a book.

Back in British Columbia, I returned to a question that had earlier captured my attention: sex and politics. As a graduate student, I had read Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* (1953) and been completely convinced by its argument that inequalities between men and women were thoroughly entrenched throughout Western society. Turning to research in

my own field, I found the reigning theories on discrimination and antifemale bias only partly convincing.

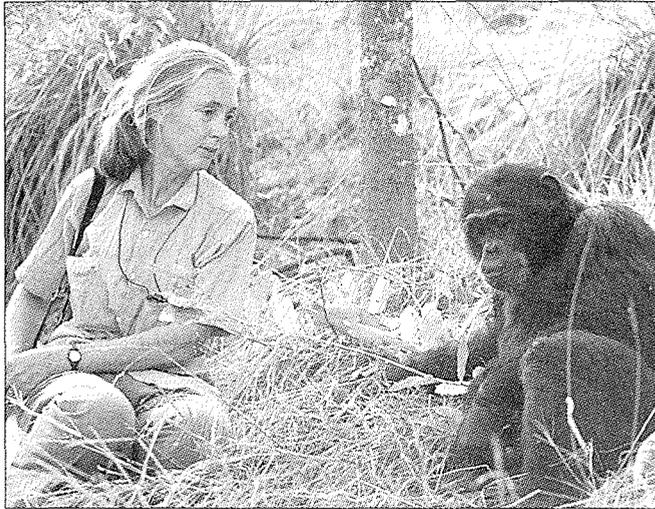
Far more promising, I thought, was the work of such scientists as Jane Goodall, Desmond Morris, and Irven DeVore, who were learning that other animals, including primates, had social and political systems marked by equally sharp distinctions between males and females. We knew, too, that primates sustained these divisions without benefit of the cultural conditioning considered the overwhelming cause of



Robin Fox (left) and Lionel Tiger at work on *The Imperial Animal*.

the human pattern. Primates had no magazines, no *Father Knows Best* on television, no cultural stereotypes, no patriarchal legal and religious systems. Furthermore, the human cross-cultural record was impressively consistent on the subject of male-female differences in political as well as other behavior. This was in fact precisely one of the major grievances expressed by early feminist writers. Did the primate data and the consistent human record suggest we had to look again for deeper causes of sexual politics?

By then I had some interest in the relatively simple matter of how human males related to each other in basic ways. Virtually no research had been done with humans on the subject, even though we already knew that other primates engaged in what I called "male bonding" and that the coalitions between males were as important for politics and defense as male-female bonds were for reproduction.



*Jane Goodall's work with chimpanzees helped to illuminate the complexity of primate societies—and to show that chimp behavior, both aggressive and cooperative, was not entirely different from that of humans.*



(Later we would learn from Jane Goodall, Jean Altmann, and others how important female-female bonds were for social integration and stability.)

In *Men in Groups* (1969), I put forth my hypothesis about the evolutionary basis of the cross-cultural regularity of male bonds and groups. At first, the work met with an open and even receptive response—and with sales that astonished no one more than its author. Having intended it to be an academic book, I had signed a contract to write a popular version for a series edited by Alex Comfort in England. That proved unnecessary. The book took off, first in Canada and then in the United States. It made the *New York Times* best-seller list for a brief moment, was translated into seven languages, and was hailed by Robert Ardrey in *Life* as “the most creative contribution to the social sciences since David Reisman’s *The Lonely Crowd*.”

But there were ominous developments as well. An anthropologist reviewing the book for *Science* compared my search for a

biological element in human behavior to the early Greeks’ enthusiasm for that ubiquitous all-purpose substance, phlogiston. Other reactions were more directly hostile. A near-riot broke out when I appeared on *The David Frost Show* in 1969 in New York, and angry feminists staged a noisy demonstration outside *Maclean’s Magazine* in Toronto when an article about *Men in Groups* appeared as the cover story of the June 1969 issue.

Despite the hue and cry, the phrase “male bonding” quickly passed into the popular discourse, possibly because it accounted for clearly observable patterns in male behavior, from weekly gatherings for bowling to Pall Mall clubs in London to the secret societies of Sierra Leone. Now it is hardly possible to read a review of a movie for the 18-to-24-year-old set without seeing the phrase, and I am told women use it to categorize irritating behavior of the men they know.

The anger left me troubled, though. I had been stunned by the sharp political reactions to the book, some delivered with almost lethal fury. Embracing a liberal

political stance very common among Canadian academics, I regarded myself as a feminist. It seemed to me that the firmness and pervasiveness of obstacles women faced in human communities were serious indeed. I thought I had identified the depth of the issue, even its possible basis in an elemental primate struggle for dominance. It seemed clear to me that unusually fundamental social changes such as quota systems and remedial legislation would be necessary to achieve sexual equity in what was obviously a rapidly changing industrial system. Robin Fox thought the main resistance to the book would come from men because I had revealed one hitherto concealed source of their hegemony, one of their precious trade secrets.

But the resistance was two-headed and different. Women thought I was advertising a version of the Freudian view that biology was destiny and that therefore they should accept a barefoot-and-pregnant image of female behavior. Social scientists had been burned before by the crude connection of biology to social policy. Now they saw any effort to introduce biology into social science as a perilous echo of Nazism and a goad to potentially genocidal racism. And the work of such towering anthropological figures as Bronislaw Malinowski, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead was a substantial contribution to our knowledge of human variety and a stimulus to a wholesome kind of cultural relativism that did not equate social value with economic might.

These were reasonably cautious responses to a rather large hypothesis with wide ramifications. They came from a far higher level of intellectual and scientific integrity than did the subsequent broad and vicious ideological attacks of assorted barons of politically correct and "progressive" science. The reasoned responses were the ones to which I tried to respond carefully and fairly. Above all, I tried to make clear in my teaching and writing that a diagnosis is not a recommendation and that because something "is," and is natural, is no reason that "ought" should follow. After all, my demonstration of how

male bonding works could be used very profitably by women who wanted not only to understand men's organizational behavior but also to build networks to promote their own political and economic advantage. And many women have done so.

My early failure to anticipate the errors and enormities that would be imputed to my work placed me in somewhat the same position E. O. Wilson found himself after his masterful *Sociobiology* (1975) appeared. Attacked by the Marxist Science for People group, whose ranks included his Harvard University colleagues Richard Lewontin and Stephen Jay Gould, Wilson saw his work pilloried as "a genetic justification of the status quo of existing privileges for certain groups according to class, race, or sex."

His and my situations were no doubt made more difficult by the passions stirred up by the Vietnam War, passions that had largely driven civil discourse from American public life, especially from university campuses. Virtually all controversies in those years—particularly those related in any way to science, technology, and the despised technocracy—partook of the almost demonic fury that had been unleashed by a surrealistically awful war.

One's own personal political convictions made no difference. In 1971 Warren Farrell, who then worked for the National Organization for Women, asked me to debate Kate Millett, author of *Sexual Politics* (1970). I declined on the grounds that I agreed with much of Millett's agenda, but I proposed instead that we participate in a discussion. She refused. Clearly a civil intellectual exchange was not what she wanted or even thought possible with someone so far beyond the culturalist pale as was I.

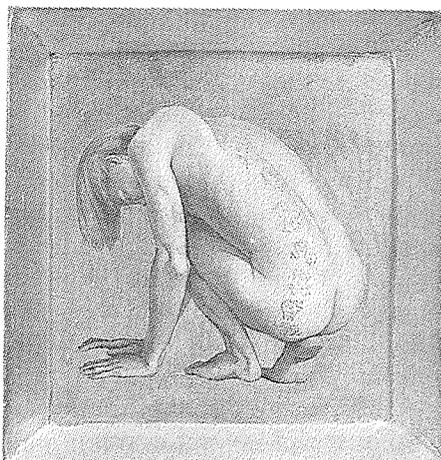
If the largely political responses to my biosocial assertions were shortsighted and even narrow-minded, they were nevertheless understandable as the heartfelt response of certain agitated citizens. What was not forgivable or even comprehensible was the view expressed by social and natural scientists that the introduction of biology into human social science was, *ab initio*, wrong.

Evidently the law of parsimony had been repealed. Finding ever more basic explanations of causality in nature is, of course, the glory of science. But not in social science, apparently. Anyone who tried to obey the law was clearly suspect, especially when it came to sexual issues.

Even before we became colleagues at Rutgers University in 1969, Robin Fox and I had agreed that this was a dangerous state of affairs, politically and scientifically. Working together in the newly created anthropology department that he chaired, we decided to start work on the book we had earlier contemplated. Fox would contribute his expertise on kinship, having written one of the classic books on the subject, *Kinship and Marriage* (1967), and I would bring in what I knew about state structures, bureaucracy, and the like.

While I can't speak for Fox, I think it is fair to characterize our approach in *The Imperial Animal* (1971) as aggressively synthetic and radical with respect to our own academic traditions. Essentially, we wanted to draw a plausible picture of human nature that accorded with materials from the study of evolution, other animals, human physiology and cognition, and the cross-cultural record.

Searching for an organizing framework, we came across Noam Chomsky's hypothesis of a "universal grammar" for language. Chomsky claimed that the necessary neural equipment for language and some of the core operating "hard-wiring" was part of the human genetic make-up. People might learn different languages, but they would do so using a common program for language with which all children are born. How else could inexperienced children acquire such phenomenal skill at such a demanding task? They could because they were born with the rules, a "universal grammar," in their heads.



Detail from *Atavism* (1994), by Suzanne Scherer and Pavel Ouporov

We called our behavioral grammar the "biogrammar." Before publication, we sent a description of the use of his concept to Chomsky, who remarked in a warm return letter that while we had misused his minor point about deep structure, he was in accord with our approach. Furthermore, he allowed that he viewed that

approach as "the only possible non-trivial approach to social science." And if language, again a relatively recent human characteristic, was linked to a biosocial substrate, it seemed all the more likely that earlier behaviors such as politics, sexuality, nurturance, and grooming were also anchored in a phylogenetic history to which the discovery of DNA had given a technical foundation.

The book was well reviewed, sold briskly, and found its way into eight other languages. (Konrad Lorenz's gratifyingly supportive introduction to the German edition was added to all subsequent editions.) Partly on its merits, Fox and I were asked by the H. F. Guggenheim Foundation to direct research support to people studying causes of violence and inequality. Because Guggenheim was almost unique among foundations in thinking such phenomena were biologically grounded, we were able to underwrite the efforts of a disparate but commonly driven group of scientists and scholars who otherwise would have gone wanting for support. It was a rewarding 12-year experience.

As exhilarating in another way was the nastiness the book occasioned. A rump assembly of radical anthropologists at its annual meeting debated the proposal of one of its constituent groups, the all-female Ruth Benedict Collective, that (1) there be no Stalinism in the women's movement and (2) that Fox and Tiger be

forbidden to speak at any American campus. In the *New Statesman* in London, Maureen Duffy made the famous comparison of our book to *Mein Kampf*. The *American Anthropologist*, having received a positive review, sought another from a known opponent of our position and ran both of them—the last review of any of my publications in that journal of anthropological record. Sir Edmund Leach of Cambridge University produced a characteristically inept assessment for the British journal *New Society* in which, among other things, he accused us not only of ignoring the work of someone who had been in our department for two years but also of overlooking a relevant thesis on kibbutz incest written (the ever-solipsistic Sir Edmund failed to register) by our first Rutgers doctoral student.

Understandably, Fox and I were largely unimpressed by the quality and balance of the response we had from many social scientists. We became more convinced than ever that the issue was not the book itself but its challenge to the jurisdictional boundaries of the academy—a new version of arguments about the soul and the body.

For all the attacks, however, the book and the science it reflected were now part of the international game. The intellectual discourse was changing. Opponents of our view were moving ever more firmly away from empirical natural science and toward the chilling nihilism of poststructuralism and deconstruction, where all descriptions of reality are held to be subjective, culturally biased, and politically motivated.

The opposition was determined not only to banish the notion of objectivity but to further isolate humankind from its connections with the natural order. As Alexander Argyros of the University of Texas shrewdly observed, such scholars were creationists of a special kind: they had no God, but they had an unshakable faith in radical human exceptionalism in the scheme of nature. That faith in turn supported much of their fuzzy utopian thinking.

The impulse behind utopianism and other forms of idealism is not a trivial mat-

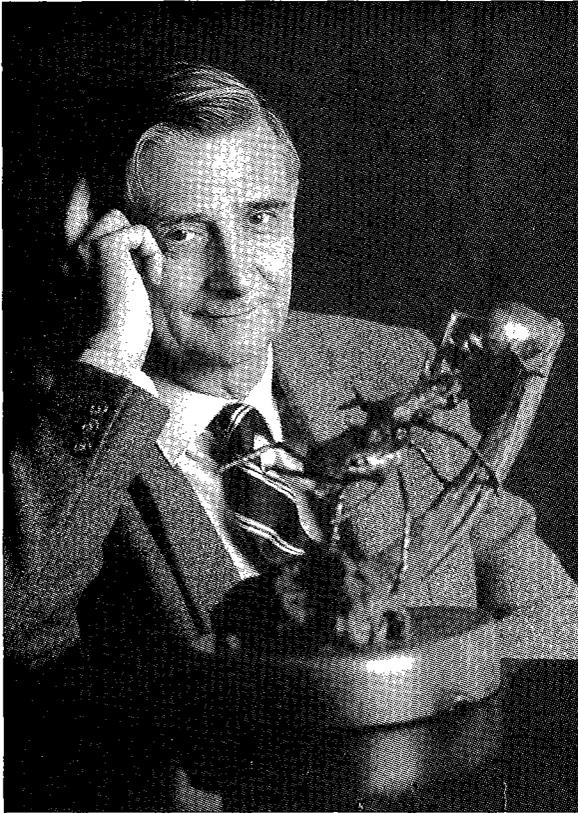
ter. I would treat it directly in a later book, *Optimism: The Biology of Hope* (1979). But I have long had a fascination with utopian schemes—a fascination tempered equally by sympathy and skepticism.

Back in my high school years in Montreal, I briefly belonged to a Labor Zionist organization that offered discussions of socialism and the building of new worlds. The group's ultimate goal was to recruit young people for collective settlements in Israel, where we would join in creating little socialist utopias far superior to our petit-bourgeois worlds. In my case, though, the proselytizing didn't take. I soon left the organization with neither drama nor regret.

Nevertheless, the kibbutz movement as a human experiment continued to intrigue me—so much so that I jumped at the chance to undertake a large-scale study of kibbutz women with Joseph Shepher of the University of Haifa, a former Rutgers doctoral student. Predicting that mammalian imperatives such as mother-infant bonding would overwhelm ideological purity, we studied three generations of men and women in two of the three federations of the kibbutz system—34,040 people in all. We possessed detailed census data on these subjects, and conducted interviews in four kibbutzim and detailed ethnography in two.

I couldn't imagine why someone had not taken on the subject before. It was the perfect venue for testing assumptions about human nature held dear by a range of ideologues. What would happen when men and women received the same income—that is, none at all? When everyone worked? When all decisions were taken by all men and women in public? When all children were raised in “children's houses” from six weeks on? When all food, laundry, and purchasing were handled by the community at large? In a word, what would happen when nearly all the fundamental conditions against which much contemporary feminist and political thought were struggling were absent?

The book that we published in 1975, *Women in the Kibbutz*, showed the division of labor by sex to be greater in the kib-



Edward O. Wilson, author of the groundbreaking and controversial *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (1975)

butz than in the rest of Israel. We found sharp differences in what men and women cared about in public life and in their choices of political and managerial behavior. Amusingly, we found a negative relationship between attitudes about sexual similarity and actual behavior. Each generation was more divided than the last—a clear rebuke to the role-model theory of behavior. And most important, we could see the beginnings of what has now become an almost total shift to family housing. Children began to live with their parents, a move overwhelmingly supported by women and their mothers who routinely outvoted the men of the communities. The men considered this move a reversion to bourgeois pathology and an expensive violation of the founding dream. At times, indeed, it seemed as though we had been studying two different communities, men and women.

There were some positive reviews of the book—by the respected Zionist writer Marie Syrkin in the *New Republic* and by many commentators in Israel itself. But in

something close to a kiss of death, the *New York Times Book Review* gave it to Juliet Mitchell, whose peculiarly convoluted psychofeminism we had criticized in the book. The only feminist journal that reviewed the book dismissed it on the grounds that the kibbutz experiment was itself impure because it was conducted by Jews who—don't forget—carried the patriarchal spirit in their blood. No matter that all the kibbutzim we studied were at least agnostic and some were aggressively atheistic.

The pettiness aside, Shepher and I were far more surprised that the crucial finding of the book—that deep, very long-range, and substantial social engineering had failed to change certain fundamental sex roles—had so little impact. That revelation, so salient to what was going on at the time, was almost swept away by a tide of studies of attitudes, scales of self-esteem, and gaseous seminars

about expressing human potential. Possibly the most depressing part of the adventure was the unwillingness of critics to accept that kibbutz women made conscious choices in a dignified and skillful manner. It was more comforting to attribute their behavior to patriarchal brainwashing.

Throughout the 1970s and early '80s, the opposition to the biosocial—or sociobiological—enterprise grew more heated. I felt a sense of almost physical apprehension, knowing how easily I could become the object of censure. At meetings of the American Anthropological Association, conversation would stop and people would stare when I entered an elevator and they saw my name tag. I wasn't alone. There was an unseemly ruckus over E. O. Wilson's further elaborations of his sociobiological insights, opponents going so far as to dump water on him when he made an appearance at the 1979 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington. The

American Anthropological Association tried to censure Napoleon Chagnon of the University of California for chronicling aggression among the Yanomani of Venezuela, as though he had caused it by describing it. The same association voted unanimously to support the "Seville Declaration," a sanctimonious assertion by a number of otherwise sensible scientists that any effort to explore human nature factors in human aggression was ethically wrong and scientifically inappropriate. As part of a series of seminars at the University of Chicago in the mid-1970s, a few of us who shared the biological perspective tried to invite Wilson and his colleague Richard Lewontin to discuss their differences over sociobiology. But Lewontin refused to be in the same room with the man who had been among those responsible for Harvard's hiring him in the first place. For their part, many radical feminists were convinced that anyone who disagreed with them was politically reactionary, pathological, or an agent of a devious male conspiracy.

Such ideological zealotry drew sustenance from major social changes that were already under way in the United States and Europe, stimulated in large measure by the "pill" and other birth control devices that had become widely available in the mid-1960s. There was surprisingly rapid abandonment of the conventional certainty that it was man's role to work and provide and woman's to bear children, raise them, and keep house. While we did not think that modifications of gender roles were impossible or undesirable, we did believe that they raised profound biological questions. But biological analysis was still largely kept out of the conventional national dialogue. One reason, no doubt, was that proponents of biological approaches, who confronted such issues as aggression, hierarchy, sexual differences, and xenophobia, were seen as bearers of bad news.

Nevertheless, Fox and I continued together and separately to play active roles in academic life, and in such practical precincts of government and business where biosocial perspectives and information were wanted. One project grew out of

an opinion I offered in *Men in Groups* to the effect that contraceptive pills would likely influence the sexual enthusiasms of men. Nature, being economical, surely would see to it that pregnant females would have less appeal to males seeking reproductive success. Since females taking the pill were chemically pregnant, we wondered whether nature's design would apply to them as well.

With a small amount of money from the Guggenheim Foundation and working with colleagues at Rutgers Medical School and other parts of the university, we administered the contraceptive drug Depo-Provera (the basis of Norplant) in injections effective for three months to monkeys in a colony we were able to establish on an island off Bermuda. The medicine completely extinguished hitherto robust sexual relations. When its effects had worn off, the original dating game resumed. We tried to publish the report in *Science* but were told we had no control group. We protested that we had produced an ethological record of a community over a year, under carefully controlled and evaluated conditions. But to no avail. And so subsequent publications appeared in more specialized journals.

Were the findings too controversial in the light of then-current sexual practices and beliefs? It appeared as though no one wanted to challenge a widely appreciated medical innovation—or even to see whether the primate pattern also applied to human communities where the pill was widely used.

It seemed to me then and does still that there had to be some discernible effect when a large percentage of women in a community were chemically pregnant. No other drug, until Prozac perhaps, had been given on a daily basis to healthy people. And the contraceptive pill affected nothing less than sexual selection, the core relationship at the heart of biological process and evolution itself.

It had no behavioral effect at all? Please.

Here was a case in which biosociology had direct policy relevance. Most tests of drugs by the Food and Drug Administration and equivalent agencies deal first

with clear physiological and systemic effects—your liver clogs, your eyebrows turn orange, there are carcinogens, and so on. Behavioral impacts are far less thoughtfully and substantially evaluated, even with drugs such as contraceptives or psychoactives explicitly designed to affect behavior. For example, it took the FDA years to realize what any biosocial scientist could have seen right away: that Valium and Librium (the widest-selling drugs in the world for a while) were not harmless social lubricants but powerful drugs with substantial addictive and cultural effects.

Unfortunately, the bias of the industrial system is to look for easily quantifiable technical factors and deal primarily with them. It does not emphasize the kind of sensitive full-life-cycle assessment that even mediocre zookeepers currently demand when they manage the routines and housing of their charges.

The prejudice against biological analysis did not immediately abate when I published *Optimism: The Biology of Hope*, but it was around that time that we began to witness some turning of the tide. In *Optimism*, I suggested that idealism and social vision, to say nothing of love affairs and feelings we have on the first day of school, are as much part of our nature as tribal antipathy and sexual ruckus.

“Hope springs internal,” I announced, because it seemed obvious to me that if neurophysical substances (about which more and more was being learned) were associated with depression and hence treatable with other substances, then there must be a comparable material basis of happiness and optimism. About halfway through my research on the subject, in the mid-1970s, endorphins were discovered. If not the elusive substance themselves, these were certainly signs of the the material neural basis of feelings of well-being.

I went further to speculate that any species with as large and fertile a thought factory as ours had somehow to discipline what it produced. There had to be a neurophysiological basis for our getting up in the morning and deciding it was a great day to trap an elephant or court a partner.

Human beings had surely evolved the capacity to plan ahead, to hope, to create, and to believe in the value of life itself.

Perhaps that evolved knack was even the basis of religious behavior, which is virtually ubiquitous in human communities. Was it not reassuring to think that human idealism and hopefulness had their roots in brain physiology and other mechanisms that supported our evolution?

Not until 1992, however, when I published *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, with its argument that pleasure was an evolutionary entitlement as important to our species as discipline and the goad of pain, did the formal recalcitrance change to a suspension of disbelief and distaste. Perhaps it was the failure of various utopian schemes, including industrial-strength Marxism, that made it easier to argue that human behaviors were related to human evolution and constrained by the particular pattern of species. But this need not be a gloomy conclusion, I argued.

To change a system, one must first understand it, and a knowledge of human biology can be as much a basis for idealism and action as for paralysis and despair.

In fact, in an earlier book, *The Manufacture of Evil: Ethics, Evolution, and the Industrial System* (1987), I had argued that

our species was still trying to make do with skills that it had slowly acquired for dealing with the social and ethical dilemmas of a hunter-gatherer existence in communities of between 25 and 200 souls. I pointed out the obvious: that such skills, products of lengthy evolutionary change, are ill-suited to the social and economic realities of modern mass industrial societies; and, furthermore, that our prevailing ethical systems, which arose during the adoption of agriculture and pastoralism, do little to address the incompatibilities.

Take for example the vexed issue of the growing chasm between the leaders and the led, the elite and the common folk, the winners and the losers in what is called our “winner-take-all” system. One of the bonds that used to tie leaders to their constituencies was kinship, a deeply biological tie.



Yet for the sake of justice, a noble ethos, modern legal strictures against nepotism discourage the exercise of such primal connections. One biologically predictable result is that our leaders feel less and less responsible for those beneath them. It is an unhappy biological reality, but our refusal to face it, and others like it, may actually aggravate social inequalities and tensions. The biosocial perspective I urged in this book clearly offers little easy reassurance to idealogues of either the right or left persuasions. But as anthropologist Melvin Konner noted in a review in *Science* magazine, the book's argument is "probably a far more radical critique of modern industrial capitalism than was Marx's and Engels's."

Today it is clear that the biological account has left its mark on the intellectual landscape. Even daily newspapers purvey information about behavior involving definitive brain images of sex differences in human cortical function. More importantly, there is now a sophisticated body of work that knits together the biological and social sciences. And there is every reason to expect that the expansion of the explanatory power of biosociology will continue. Developments in Darwinian medicine, neurophysiology, paleoanthropology, economics, and political science, and a host of other disciplines will continue to help sketch a picture of *Homo sapiens* rooted in nature, in history, and—critically—in prehistory. It is no longer heart-stopping to discuss human biology in the academic community, while among feminists there is at last a potentially productive dialogue between those who still regard all sex differences as social constructs and those prepared to see them as embedded in the nature of humanity.

However satisfied one might be with such developments, large areas of darkness remain in the intellectual community. In my own discipline, anthropology, the majority social-construction-of-reality

crowd has created a world of solipsistic relativism founded on a commitment to the notion that positive, objective science is an impossibility. Though they may have as much impact on international science as phrenologists, their impenetrable obfuscation of behavioral matters may cause physical anthropologists to drift away from the main association. They will continue to produce a barrier between the worlds their readers experience and the one the professors describe. As Robin Fox says, "If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and looks like a duck, it is a social construct of a duck." The most dispiriting feature of the delta of pressure toward political correctness is not its apparatchik banality but its scientific ludicrousness and its utter impracticality.

As I started these reflections on my service in the human nature wars, I recalled the quotation that I was required to supply for my college yearbook. The words were supposed to be self-epitomizing, and so I had chosen William Blake's "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's." For a moment, I shivered at the thought that my whole career amounted to a petulant and antisocial act of intellectual defiance.

But then I realized: no, I am firmly in Mr. Darwin's system. I love his commitment to the elegance of life's flow and the vast importance of individual decisions about whom to love, to hate, to play with, to avoid, to feed. I admire and applaud his precise awareness of the meld of physical form and behavior and his tutored bystander's appreciation of the artfulness, the color, and the intimate drama of animal life. This scientific community in which I found myself so unexpectedly has been no cruel master, no impediment to exploration. To the contrary, it has provided me passage to a world in which the marriage of precise perception and broad thought is celebrated, where open and inquiring minds are free to stride, wander, and wonder.



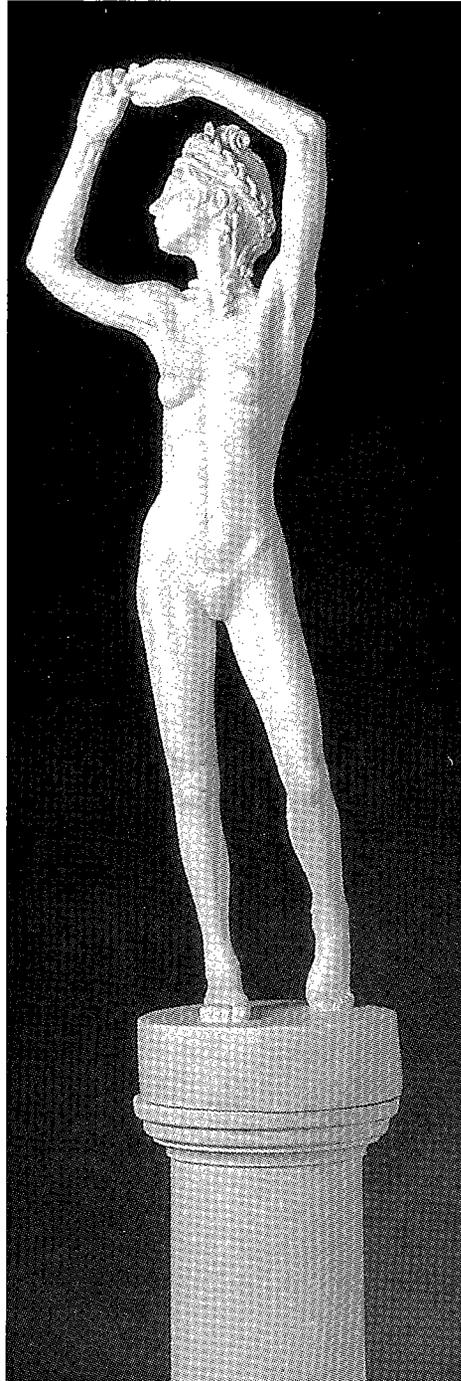
# The Birth of Natural Classicism

by Frederick Turner

The artists, poets, composers, and dramatists now reaching their maturity have lived through a time of crisis for the arts. Some of us are questioning the whole 200-year-old tradition of the avant-garde and rethinking our aesthetics from the ground up.

The moment we realized we had crossed the invisible boundary from one cultural era to another was surely different in each case; it was, especially at the beginning when we did not know that others were going through the same thing, an intensely individual and sometimes lonely experience. For some of us, it came when we first began asking the awkward questions; for others, it was when we saw with a shock that we had already been asking them for some time; for others, it was when we first recognized an alternative view of the world; and for yet others, it was when we met somebody else who shared the same heterodox opinions.

The late modernist inheritance we came into in the 1950s and '60s, despite its seductive surface of countercultural lifestyle and apocalyptic rhetoric, was even then hoary and stereotyped in its intellectual and spiritual provenance. There was little in its armory that did not derive ultimately from Romantic egoism, 19th-century political radicalism, and early-20th-century modernist movements such as Dada. Such indebtedness to the past would be harmless, indeed laudable, in an artistic movement whose theory and dynamic was one of the incorporation of the past into the present; but it was incon-



*The central figure in Audrey Flack's Sky Gateway Introducing Diana (1990)*

sistent in one that claimed the cachet of innovation, courageous nonconformity, and revolution.

In poetry, what we inherited was confessional free verse; in visual art, abstract expressionism and pop art; in music, 12-tone composition; in drama, the theater of the absurd, the theater of cruelty, and happenings. Avant-garde novels and films were plotless and autobiographical. The arts showed all the signs of decadence and exhaustion: the abandonment of technical discipline, the harking after unrealistic and potentially bloody schemes of social revolution, the extreme subjectivism, the studied ignorance of and hostility to scientific fact, the moral cynicism.

It seemed for a brief time that the emergence of postmodernism meant an end to the long, deadening twilight in the avant-garde arts. But in many ways it was a further descent. "Language poetry," visual and musical deconstructivism, political theater, and minimalist fiction seemed to have added little except a further element of self-congratulatory self-regard, while losing the late modernist emotionality that gave the avant-garde a semblance of life.

Instead of political utopianism, we got political correctness; instead of radical subjectivism, the deconstruction of the self. Instead of the subjective construction of reality, we ended up with the social construction of reality. Instead of scientific ignorance, we were given a wholesale attack on the possibility of any kind of knowledge at all. The cynicism remained.

The artistic origin of social construction can be found in modernism, in what at first was a glorious and defiant assertion of artistic freedom. The artist is free only if he (and "he" it usually was, for this was an intensely young male view of the world) can make up his own world and kick himself loose from nature. Painters broke the shackles of representation, fiction writers broke the shackles of naturalistic narrative, composers broke the shackles of melody and harmony, poets broke the shackles of meter. By fiat, they made up their own worlds. Artists were supported in this view by the philosopher J. L. Austin's theory of speech acts and "performatives," whereby

the very statement of something, such as a promise or the stipulation of a rule in an agreed context, could create a new reality without need for empirical verification. This, of course, meant that a world was something that could be made up, a point not lost on political interpreters, who, constitutionally suspicious, immediately began to ask: who gets to make up the world?

But the political correctness that resulted from asking this question was not the only problem that came out of the definition of art as freedom from nature. Another was the problem of critical judgment. How could one distinguish good from bad art? If nature was abandoned as a constraint, craftsmanship—which is a working with natural constraints—must disappear, and with it the virtuosity that is the excellence of craft.

Social construction became the perfect excuse for artistic incompetence. Any flaw could be pointed to in triumph as a subtle tour de force of deconstruction, a performative enactment of subversive delegitimation, or similar jabberwocky. Finally, the idea of artistic freedom as freedom from natural constraint had begun to come up against a tragically opposed principle: the desperate need, in this ecologically threatened world, to find ways of life for human beings that are not lethal to the ecosystem around us and to our own animal bodies. The heroic transcendence of nature can result in inhuman Bauhaus architecture, designer-drug addiction, AIDS suicide performance art, and bloated nuclear arsenals.

A countermovement of artists and poets, of whom I was one, began to seek ways to repair the damage we saw in our culture as the Cold War drew to an end and the great socialist ideals were shown either to be empty and destructive or disappointingly achieved and incorporated into the status quo. The problems bequeathed to us, as we saw them, were these:

§ The human person had been denatured; we had been taught to reject our animal nature, our sex, our genetic lineage.

§ As artists we were expected to dismiss the constraints of nature itself—this at a time when the planet urgently required human beings to accept their ecological responsibilities as part of a larger ecosystem not created by social fiat.

§ We had lost the great forms and disciplines of the arts, the biopsychic technologies of meter, representation, and melody, and were thus alienated from our own shamanic tradition.

§ The political separatism and cultural fragmentation that had been encouraged had dangerously attenuated that sense of human fellowship that is the womb of artistic creativity.

§ In a time of staggering and marvelous scientific discovery, when nonlinear dynamics and chaos theory were suggesting a vital rapprochement between the two cultures, avant-garde art and criticism were assailing science with a remarkable combination of malice and ignorance.

§ Hope, and all the other positive emotions that inspire the arts, were sneered at and dismissed; snideness and rage were the dominant signs of the artist.

Not surprisingly, the contemporary arts had lost contact with the general public; in some fields, such as poetry, publishers would no longer take the risk of producing collections of poems—and for good reason. The general reader, thrice burnt by boring, incomprehensible, and graceless verbal assaults, wisely avoided such collections. Worst of all, we found that as artists we were virtually expected to violate all standards of personal morality, as a sort of backhanded proof of our political morality.

It was not that all art and cultural criticism had succumbed to these tendencies; science fiction, for instance, and the biopsychological and sociobiological sciences, had continued to hold out visions of the human role in the world that might form the basis for true art. But these were enclaves of genuine nonconformity, marginalized by the official avant-garde.

It is hard, perhaps, for people who did not grow up within the milieu of the academic and artistic intelligentsia, to understand what an iron grip the tenets of avant-garde modernism (and later, postmodernism) could have on the mind of an artist or writer. My own moment of revelation was more painless than most. It was less a revulsion against the shoddiness and intellectual bankruptcy of the avant-garde than a blessed and amazing gift of happiness, an outpouring of creative energy, a sudden remembering of the whole human heritage, that made much of what I had been taught seem to be a dark dream from which I had awoken.

**I**t was 1977, the year I became a citizen of the United States. My wife was pregnant with our second child, and I was building an energy-efficient house in rural central Ohio. I had decided to renounce any ambitions I might have had as a public literary figure and to devote myself to my teaching at Kenyon College, to the happiness of those around me, and to a deeper and deeper meditation upon nature, science, philosophy, and the spiritual dimension of life. The critic George Steiner, whom I came to know later, wondered why I had, as he said, buried myself there. I didn't feel buried, except occasionally when I toiled in the garden that I had designed.

Out of these conditions of self-imposed exile, poems suddenly began to pour forth—poems of praise and love and celebration, mingled with aphorisms and little discourses that contained in embryo much of my subsequent thinking. The verse was increasingly shaped to the demands of rhyme and meter, until it sprouted a wild plumage of formal invention. Lyrics were superseded by a series of narrative poems, two of them of epic length, *The New World* (1985) and *Genesis* (1988). Without intending to, I had completely violated all the then-current rules of poetry, which stipulated the short free verse non-narra-

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Disparity Among the Children-I (1975) by Ruth Weisberg

tive existentialist confessional lyric in contemporary vocabulary as the paradigm for the publishable poem.

It was just as well that I had renounced my desire for fame and publication. The periodicals and publishers of record would have turned down my new poetry, even though I knew it was my best work. Though I had published several books of poetry earlier, including one in the prestigious Wesleyan Poetry Series, I was not sending my poems out anymore. The people I was writing for were no longer the official avant-garde literary/poetic establishment. I circulated my poems in typescript, though, and a growing circle of people began to make copies of them and send them to others.

One of these was a small press publisher, a classicist, who insisted on meeting me, and after months of argument by correspondence, persuaded me to start publishing again. He printed *The Garden* (1985) in a small edition. Meanwhile a few writers and publishers here and there who were prepared to go out on a limb were beginning to publish the poetry of others who had had the same experience,

of the scales falling from one's eyes, that I had. Among these various and talented voices were Robert McDowell, Richard Moore, Dick Allen, Jack Butler, John Gery, R. S. Gwynn, Charles Martin, Frederick Feirstein, Dana Gioia, Jane Greer, Timothy Steele, and Annie Finch. Julia Budenz's enormous poem, *The Gardens of Flora Baum*, a meditation on the great cultural tree of Rome, exemplifies the scope of the new poetry.

I became convinced of the civic duty of the artist to society, and with my colleague Ronald Sharp revived the *Kenyon Review* as a voice for the new movement. Miraculously I found presses, mostly mavericks that were not afraid to defy the consensus, that would print my own new work.

As soon as the "New Formalism" and the "New Narrative," as they were dubbed by their opponents, emerged into public view, they were attacked by some of the major publications of the avant-garde, including *Contemporary Literature Studies* and the *American Poetry Review*. Then, when it was realized that even negative



A Vision of the Virgin and Child (1972) by Peter Rogers

critical attention was drawing new converts to the movement, there was a studied and icy silence. But we survived. By now the Expansive Movement, as it has been called, is a large and vital force in American poetry, though still a distinctly minority one, and still disapproved of by the avant-garde establishment.

A similar transformation has been taking place in the other arts. The openings made in the modernist orthodoxy by such composers as George Crumb and Philip Glass have been exploited by the “holy minimalists” Arvo Part and Henryk Gorecki; more radically classical still are less known composers such as Stefania de Kenessey and Claudia Annis. Visual artists have formed artists’ groups, galleries, and periodicals to defy the party line. Classical realist painters such as David Ligare and Bruno Civitico illuminate a contemporary consciousness with ancient light. A remark-

able school of Los Angeles realist painters and sculptors has emerged, including Wes Christensen, John Frame, Jim Doolin, and Ruth Weisberg, and the old art of landscape painting is being put to new use by artists such as Cynthia Kriebel. Religious and civic sculpture is showing new vitality in the work of Frederick Hart, whose *Creation* group graces the façade of the National Cathedral and whose *Three Soldiers* adds resonance to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Mall. Figurative allegorical sculpture has been revived by Audrey Flack, and the bronze bas-relief by Athos Ongaro. And the power of myth and psychospiritual symbolism still runs strong in the paintings of Peter Rogers, Lani Irwin, and Alan Feltus, and in the sculpture of Michael Osbaldeston.

As these and other questioners have come together, often in the virtual world of the Internet, a sort of manifesto for

the new art of the 21st century has emerged. This program calls for an art that recognizes the infrangible bonds between human beings and the rest of nature, bonds that become evident in the creative capacities of our own bodies and nervous systems that we inherited from our evolutionary past as animals. Exponents of what I call natural classicism informally support the following broad principles:

§ Art should direct itself to the general public, and should grow from and speak to the common roots and universal principles of human nature in all cultures. Those members of the public who do not have the time, training, or inclination to craft and express their higher yearnings and intuitions rightly demand an artistic elite to be the culture's prophetic mouthpiece and mirror.

§ Art should deny the simplifications of the political Left and Right, and should refine and deepen the radical Center.

§ The use of art, and of cheap praise, to create self-esteem is a cynical betrayal of all human cultures. Excellence and standards are as real and universal in the arts as in competitive sports, even if they take more time and refined judgment to appreciate.

§ The function of art is to create beauty, and beauty is incomplete without moral beauty. True beauty is the condition of civilized society. We should restore reverence for the grace and beauty of human beings and of the rest of nature. There should be a renewal of the moral foundations of art as an instrument to civilize, ennoble, and inspire. Art recognizes the tragic and terrible costs of human civilization but does not abandon hope and faith in the civilizing process. Art must recover its connection with religion and ethics without becoming the propagandist of any dogmatic system. Beauty is the opposite of coercive political power: thus art should lead but not follow political morality.

§ High and low art, the avant-garde and the popular and commercial imagination, have been alienated from each other too long. In a healthy culture, popular and commercial art forms are the soil in which

high art grows. Theory describes art; art does not illustrate theory. Art is how a whole culture speaks to itself, and how cultures communicate with and marry each other.

§ High standards of craftsmanship and mastery of the instrument should be restored, hostility to virtuosity abandoned. Certain forms, genres, and techniques of art are culturally universal, natural, and classical. They are innate but require a cultural tradition to awaken them. They include such skills as visual representation, melody, storytelling, poetic meter, and dramatic mimesis. These forms, genres, and techniques are not limitations or constraints but enfranchising instruments and infinitely generative feedback systems.

§ The long enmity between emotion and intellectual depth needs to be ended. We do not need to abandon reason in the pursuit of artistic power; insanity is not a qualification for artistic validity. Art should come from and speak to what is whole in human beings. It is the product of passionate imaginative intelligence, not of psychological sickness and damage. Even when it deals, as it often should and must, with the terrifying, tragic, and grotesque, art should help heal the lesions within the self and the rifts in the self's relation to the world. The symbols of art are connected to the embodiment of the human person in a physical and social environment—thus, the human figure should not be avoided by visual artists, and the grand stories of birth, marriage, and death should not be avoided in literature or drama.

§ Art must be reunited with science. As the natural ally, interpreter, and guide of the sciences, art extends the creative evolution of nature on this planet and in the universe. The experience of truth is beautiful; thus, the artist's experience and the scientist's are at bottom profoundly akin. The recent deepening of our ecological understanding, which shows that radical change is just as natural as harmony and homeostasis, and that the human place in nature is as one of several species that accelerate natural change, suggests that art is the missing element in environmentalism. If aesthetics is recognized for what it is, an essential element of scientific understanding, we will be

able to redefine our environmental goals for a healthier planet.

§ Art can be reunited with physical science through such ideas as evolution and chaos theory; the reflectiveness of art can be partly understood through the study of nonlinear dynamical systems and their strange attractors in nature and mathematics. The human species itself emerged from the dynamical system generated by the mutual interaction of biological and cultural evolution: thus, our bodies and brains are adapted to and demand artistic performance and creation. Cultural evolution was partly driven by inventive play in artistic handicrafts and performance. We have a nature; that nature is cultural; that culture is classical, in the sense of the natural excellence striven after by all human cultures past and present.

§ The order of the universe is neither deterministic nor on the road to irreversible decay; instead, the universe is self-renewing, self-ordering, unpredictable, creative, and free. Thus, human beings do not need to labor miserably to despoil the world of its diminishing stockpile of order, and struggle with one another for possession of it, only to find that they have bound themselves into a mechanical and deterministic way of life. Instead, they can cooperate with nature's own artistic process and with each other in a free and open-ended play of value creation. Art looks with hope to the future: it seeks a closer union with the true progress of technology.

§ Art evokes the shared past of all human beings, that past which is the moral foundation of civilization. Sometimes the present creates the future by breaking the shackles of the past, but sometimes the past creates the future by breaking the shackles of the present. The

Enlightenment and modernism are examples of the former; the Renaissance, and perhaps our time, are examples of the latter. But in either case, no artist has completed his or her artistic journey until he or she has sojourned with and learned the wisdom of the dead artists who came before. The future will be more, not less, aware of and indebted to the past than we are, just as we are more aware of and indebted to the past than were our ancestors. The immortality of art goes both ways in time; it is only if we renew the lives of former artists and poets in our own lives that we will be renewed and remembered when we are dead.

These ideas, and others like them, have inspired a new generation of artists. We believe that we are the successors to postmodernism, and we can point to a growing body of exciting new artistic work. This work is not widely known, for the existing postmodern paradigm still dominates most venues of publication, performance, and exhibition. But it includes a renewal of the great tradition of landscape painting; science fiction composed in strict classical epic form; a new genre of heroic religious statuary; an outpouring of richly musical poetry in strict form; a new awakening in choral, operatic, and symphonic music; CD-ROM and Internet art and literature; a rebirth of mystical and allegorical painting; and remarkable collaborations among artists, poets, composers, and natural scientists.

The tradition of Homer, Dante, Leonardo, Shakespeare, Beethoven, and Goethe is not dead. It is growing up in the cracks of the postmodern concrete. Though it does not dominate the cultural landscape, it is there for the general public to find.

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# The First Contract with America

by James A. Henretta

*Budget cuts. Debt reduction. Smaller government. One hundred and fifty years ago, the state of New York fired the first shots in a nationwide political revolution strikingly similar to today's.*

Does history have anything to tell us about the potentially momentous political changes now being wrought by Newt Gingrich and his allies in Washington? It pays to be wary of “lessons of history,” but there is a compelling antecedent to Mr. Gingrich’s revolution, though it is not well known, probably not even to Gingrich himself. It is the constitutional revolution that swept the American states during the 1840s and ’50s.

During those two decades, a political order that had developed in most state governments since the 1790s was completely overturned. In nearly every state, popularly elected conventions were called to write new constitutions. Triumphant reformers clamped restrictions on the size of state government, required budgetary discipline, imposed severe limits on public debt, and brought fundamental changes in the judiciary, voting rights, and legislative apportionment. Gingrich’s predecessors created a new populist and democratic constitutional order on the state level, an order that forms a central part of our political heritage.

The spark for this 19th-century revolution was the Panic of 1837, which pitched many of the nation’s 26 state governments into bankruptcy or perilously close to it. Yet it was the democratic political ferment bred by Andrew Jackson’s presidency (1829–37) that lent the fiscal crisis its special volatility.

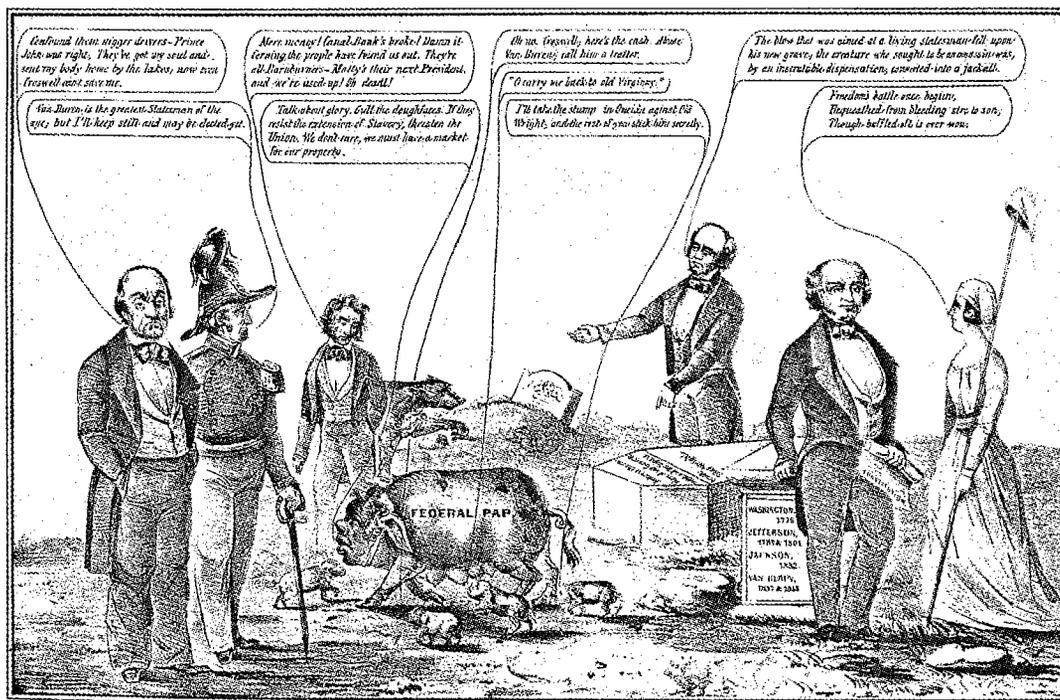
New York was the first state to travel through the cycle of crisis and reform, and its experience became the model for change in other states. Its leading reformer was Michael Hoffman, an acerbic, strong-minded upstater of deeply held Jeffersonian convictions, a career politician who held a variety of elected and appointive positions.

Hoffman’s ideologically charged program of imposing strict constitutional limits on the powers of state government and encouraging judicial activism to enforce them was quickly incorporated into the fundamental law of dozens of other states. “It is in the Constitution of Louisiana,” a fellow New Yorker noted in 1846, “where it amounts to almost a positive pro-

hibition to borrow any money. It is in the Constitution of Texas, of Iowa, of Missouri, of Michigan, and in every [recent] Constitution that has been adopted." By the time of the Civil War, Hoffman's conception of political economy had created a new type of state—known to historians and political scientists as the classical liberal laissez-faire state.

**H**offman was born in Saratoga County, New York, in 1787, the same year the federal constitution was drafted, and he spent his political life embroiled in the issues it raised, particularly those concerning the proper distribution of authority between the state and national governments. The son of an immigrant German father and a native-born Protestant Irish mother, he became a lawyer in Herkimer, a small town in east-central New York, where he was appointed district attorney in 1823. One of the new breed of lawyer-politicians who have since come to dominate American public life, Hoffman linked his fortunes to those of New York's leading Democratic politician, Martin Van Buren, and his Albany Regency. He served four terms in the U.S. House of Representatives during the 1820s and early '30s and sat in the New York State Assembly for three years in the 1840s. When out of elective office, Hoffman took his share of political patronage, accepting appointments as a judge of Herkimer County, New York State canal commissioner, register of a federal land office in Michigan, and, in the last years of his life, naval officer of New York City.

Yet Hoffman joined Van Buren for principle, not preferment. "Little Van" and his political allies were staunch Jeffersonians, and that, in the 1820s, meant commitment to Hoffman's values: the primacy of state rather than federal authority and an emphasis on fiscal restraint at all levels of government. This fiscal caution won votes not only from conservative men

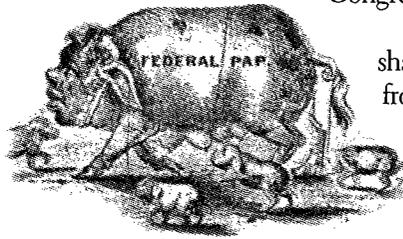


Many who opposed the use of public funds for canals and other dubious purposes rallied around Martin Van Buren. In this 1848 cartoon, he stands with Liberty as the Free Soil candidate for president; rivals Lewis Cass and Zachary Taylor stand near "Federal Pap."

of property but from ordinary farmers and mechanics, who feared speculation and taxation. In national politics, Van Buren and his allies opposed what Hoffman called “ultrafederalism,” the system of nationally managed economic development advocated by President John Quincy Adams during the late 1820s. “I have ever denied the power of the U.S. to make roads and canals,” declared Representative Hoffman.

Serving in Congress, though, Hoffman soon found himself enmeshed in the making of just the sort of national economic policy he opposed. Tariffs were not only the national government’s leading source of revenue but a powerful device for protecting jobs and profits in favored sectors of the economy. Hoffman was appalled by the pork-barrel politics that surrounded tariff legislation, but he was also a political realist, looking out for the interests of his New York constituents by maneuvering “to protect our Wool and Coarse grain by . . . duties on wool, spirits and Molasses.” In 1828, however, tariff politics spun out of control, producing rates so high that the legislation was condemned as the Tariff of Abominations. In the ensuing uproar, the state government of South Carolina threatened to “nullify” the legislation, and President Andrew Jackson was forced to threaten to use military force to uphold the law.

The experience left Hoffman thoroughly disillusioned, and the jaundiced view of politics that had always lurked in his correspondence now came to dominate his thinking. Most political leaders, he concluded, lacked “the wisdom or virtue” to govern wisely and would yield “to the murderous counsel of the passions.” In 1832, he decided to give up his seat in Congress and return to Herkimer.



Other Van Buren Democrats were no less shaken by these events. As a member of Congress from upstate New York, Silas Wright had played a central role in writing the tariff of 1828. To win the high tariff barriers against cheap foreign raw wool sought by New York’s sheep farmers, Wright supported the duties on

imported cloth and agricultural products demanded by New England textile manufacturers and western farmers. Southern planters objected that the South would bear the high costs of protection without receiving any of its benefits. To no avail. By the 1840s, however, Wright—who served in the U.S. Senate and as governor of New York, and who probably would have been the Democratic presidential nominee in 1848 (instead of Lewis Cass) had he lived—had come around to the southern position. High tariffs, he added, reflecting the arguments advanced by New York City workers, oppressed classes as well as regions. They increased the price of necessities without much improving the living standards of workers. Wright called upon his own state’s producers to accept low farm subsidies. As candidate for governor in 1844, he told an audience of farmers that prohibitive duties on wool would give them “a perfect monopoly of the market,” whereas he and the Democratic Party now stood for “fair and healthful competition in every trade and every thing.”

In the convergence of the views of Hoffman and Wright we see the merger of two ideological currents into a new political force. Hoffman represented the

> JAMES A. HENRETTA, a Wilson Center Fellow, is the Priscilla Alden Burke Professor of History at the University of Maryland, College Park. He is currently working on a book on law and the liberal state in America. Copyright © 1996 by James A. Henretta.

old Jeffersonian Republican philosophy of limited government, while Wright moved toward the same small-government position by espousing a new ideology, the classical liberal principles of political economy: equality of opportunity; no special privileges for individuals, groups, or corporations; and free trade in labor and goods in a market-driven economy. Hoffman, more than anyone, was responsible for melding these two sets of ideas into a reigning ideology.

**T**he resemblance of the 1840s to our present situation is more than superficial. Between 1790 and 1840, the national government had used the tariff and other subsidies to encourage economic development and thereby increase the “common-wealth” of the society. State governments had developed an even more comprehensive system of state mercantilism, awarding hundreds of charters, contracts, and subsidies to private enterprises. Turnpike companies were granted monopoly routes; bonds issued by canal companies were backed by the “full faith and credit” of the state; private railroads were awarded subsidies from the public treasury and granted the power of eminent domain so that they could acquire their rights-of-way at low cost. The list could easily be extended.

It was not accidental that the historians who first drew our attention to this early 19th-century “commonwealth” philosophy—Oscar and Mary Handlin, Louis Hartz, Carter Goodrich—wrote their books in the late 1940s, in the shadow of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, and, in some respects, as apologists for its philosophy of positive government. To say this is not to denigrate their scholarship, which has stood the test of time, but simply to note that it established a historical antecedent for the New Deal and lent it greater legitimacy. The activist welfare state of the 1930s could be seen not as a radical break in the history of American government but as the renewal of the commonwealth tradition. The undoing of that tradition may have lessons as well. And that brings us back to Michael Hoffman.

**W**hen he returned to New York and took his seat on the Canal Commission in 1833, Hoffman turned his critical eye on state finances. He began with the public sector: canals and taxes. Since 1827, the Albany legislature had pursued a low-tax policy while borrowing large sums to build an elaborate and uneconomical (but politically rewarding) system of “feeder” waterways to connect distant areas with the Erie Canal. Hoffman saw that the inevitable results were deficits, growing public debt, and, eventually “merciless taxation.”

If unsustainable debt was the main danger in the public sector, “banks and the rate of interest” seemed to be the looming problem in the private sector. “Bank dividends are higher than the fair profits in other business,” Hoffman declared. The cause of this imbalance was clear: “the banking power is granted as a monopoly to the *few*,” allowing them to charge exorbitant rates of interest. The policy choices were obvious: either “we must have a Usury law [as] . . . a restraint on Bank interest,” Hoffman said, or the legislature ought to remove “*all* restraints against Banking,” thus destroying the monopolists’ power. Today, we would say that it was a choice between bureaucratic regulation and a free market. One way or another, Hoffman wanted the state to eliminate the privileges it had bestowed on some at the expense of others. In the event, the state legislature split the difference, establishing “free banking” and mandatory bank contributions to finance insurance against bank failures—which served as

the model for the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation of the 1930s.

When it came to the public sector, however, the two political parties did not share Hoffman's zeal for reform. Democrats and Whigs alike continued building canals and pledging future canal tolls to pay for them, a strategy that would work only if revenues continued to increase. After the Panic of 1837 produced a recession, Governor William H. Seward and his pro-business Whig compatriots in the state legislature built even more canals, hoping to maintain employment and thereby capture political power from the Jacksonian Democrats. The generous application of favors and bribes even persuaded the legislators to vote a \$3 million subsidy to the New York and Erie Railroad. The state's finances slid into disarray. The value of a \$100 state canal bond dropped to \$75. "The folly of man," Hoffman wrote sorrowfully to Wright at the close of 1841, "has created *Impossibilities* and *Deficit*."

Over the next five years, these "impossibilities" split the Democratic Party. On one side stood the "Hunkers," status quo politicians who supported canal construction, albeit on a modest scale. Their critics charged that they "hunkered" after the spoils of office. Arrayed on the opposite side were Hoffman, now a state assemblyman, Wright, and their "Barnburner" friends, radical men whose policies, their opponents claimed, would destroy the state in the cause of reform (just as Dutch farmers, in an ethnically charged joke, were said to burn down their barns to kill the rats).

The Radicals' assault on the policies of the Whigs and the Hunkers played on several themes. From the Jeffersonian past came the admonition that each generation must be free to control its own destiny. A leading Barnburner reminded a Young Men's Association that American state governments had run up hundreds of millions in debts, appropriating "the toil of subsequent generations to glut the hungry cravings of this [one]; to eat the bread of unborn children." A residual puritanism also echoed in the Radicals' rhetoric. General John A. Dix of Albany condemned "the too great love of money" which had prompted the speculative binge of the 1830s (and, we might add, the 1980s) and which, "in all times and ages was . . . the certain forerunner of social and political degradation."

"What can save the State?" Hoffman asked. The first step, and to a Jeffersonian Republican the most obvious, was to "reform all useless offices—reduce salaries . . . cease expenditures." But paying off the state's debts would also require new income. Where would it come from? Congress was considering a scheme to distribute the proceeds of public lands to the states, but the Old Jeffersonian would have nothing to do with this egregious expansion of federal authority, which he considered "the worst assault ever made on the Constitution."

New York, insisted Hoffman, had to address the root cause of the problem: the misuse of power by political parties and legislators, men of a "poor cowardly pusillanimous spirit" who created debts without levying taxes to pay for them. As former governor William Marcy put it, the legislature had lost "a proper sense of dependency" on the will of the people. To Hoffman and his allies in what was called the Stop and Tax Movement, the course was clear: stop the building program and enact a "bearable" state tax to pay off the debt.

Hoffman recognized that taxes are not socially neutral. New York's excise and auction taxes on salt and other goods fell on the "necessities of

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life" consumed by the masses, he noted, and the direct property tax was levied on "land and personal effects," thus bearing especially hard on "the poor, the Mechanics, small farmers and small dealers." Totally exempt were the stocks, bonds, and other financial instruments owned by the wealthy. What was required to pay off the debt, Hoffman concluded, was "a suitable tax on the Luxuries of the rich."

**Y**et the Barnburners' social radicalism was limited. They viewed the world from the small-property-owner perspective of their farmer and artisan neighbors and constituents, and were willing to redress class inequities only to the extent that they stemmed from political abuses. However radical the Barnburners were on issues of debt and slavery (most of them joined the Free-Soil Party in 1848 and the new Republican Party in the 1850s), they opposed the redistribution of wealth—either to the rich or to the poor—by political means.

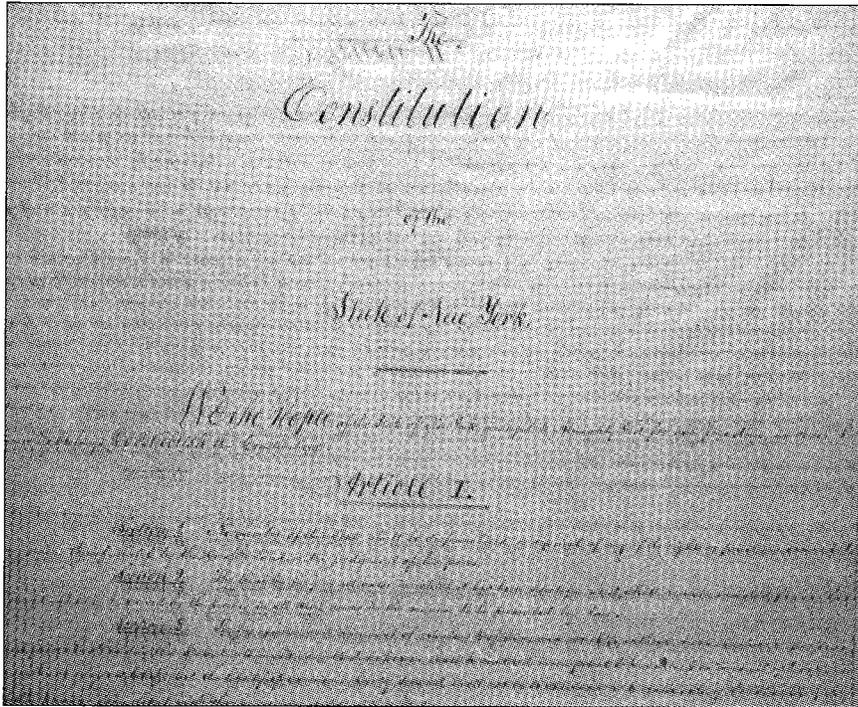
Prizing limited government and fiscal integrity more than social justice, the Barnburners did not insist on a tax policy directed against the rich, and in 1842 the legislature enacted a regressive tax on real estate and personal effects, earmarking the revenue for the general and canal funds. The result, however, was quick and dramatic: within six months, the state's bonds no longer sold at a discount.

The Whigs and Hunkers were not through, however. In the assembly, they rejected by a narrow margin a Hoffman-backed measure to require referendums on all new state borrowing. The rejection propelled the determined Hoffman into a three-year campaign to persuade the legislature to hold a referendum on "a [constitutional] convention of the people . . . to sit in judgment on the past and command the future."

**T**o judge the past and command the future! Hoffman and his colleagues went to the Albany convention in 1846 determined to write Radical principles into constitutional law. At the core of their agenda was the reduction of the state's debt. Hoffman rejected out of hand what he called the "British system" of funding the debt, paying only the interest each year. Such a system would "fasten on the limbs of your children the withering, blasting effects of . . . British eternal debt and taxation."

More serious, because they commanded more support, were Whig and Hunker schemes to divert a higher proportion of the new tax revenues to canal improvements, thereby delaying liquidation of the debt to 1883—well into the next generation. "Payment, prompt payment . . . is your only course," Hoffman lectured the convention, laying out a plan that would liquidate the debt by 1865.

The issue of future debts was yet more bitterly contested, for it raised questions of constitutional principle as well as fiscal responsibility. Hoffman's plan prohibited the state from extending its financial credit to private individuals or corporations and limited its debts to \$1 million, except as funded by specific taxes approved by referendum. Whigs strongly opposed these restrictions, both on practical and constitutional grounds. "If we adopt such a section," Alvah Worden, a leading Whig politician, told the convention (sounding very much like today's critics of the federal balanced budget amendment), "it would only be saying to the world . . . that the experiment of a republican, representative, responsible form of government, after a trial of more than 70 years, had proved a failure."



*New York State's Constitution of 1846 became a model for other states. But reforms such as the popular election of judges led to corruption and other abuses, and the reaction against them contributed to the rise of the progressive movement later in the century.*

The Radicals' reply to these questions articulated a new constitutional theory for the American states. At the time, the fundamental law of New York and other states gave unlimited authority to the legislature. It would be far better, Hoffman argued, no doubt with one eye on the U.S. Constitution, to grant limited powers to the legislature, keeping the rest as "the residuary, reserved powers of the people." In particular, Hoffman wanted to limit the legislature's taxing powers, for he knew from bitter experience "what the power of corrupt lobby black-legs could do. . . . We will not trust the legislature with the power of creating indefinite mortgages on the people's property."

In the end, Hoffman got virtually everything he asked for. The new constitution was overwhelmingly approved in a statewide referendum in November 1846. The Barnburners' revolution was complete.

**T**oday, most states have strict constitutional limitations of various kinds on public debt. They have worked in part because of another Radical innovation: a popularly elected state judiciary with a mandate to uphold the new constitution. The New York Constitution of 1846—and, by 1860, the constitutions of 21 of the 33 states—repudiated the old system, under which judges were appointed by the legislature. Popular election enhanced the authority of the judiciary by making it coequal with the legislature and the executive, "all of them springing directly from the people," said Churchill Chamberling, a Barnburner and former U.S. congressman.

Influential jurists such as John B. Gibson of Pennsylvania, who had once eschewed judicial review as an antirepublican intrusion on the powers of the people, now endorsed judicial activism. Lawyers increasingly tried cases in state courts on constitutional grounds, and judges responded

by enforcing debt limits and other provisions. By 1861, state judges had voided at least 150 laws as contrary to their state's fundamental law. The era of modern judicial activism had begun.

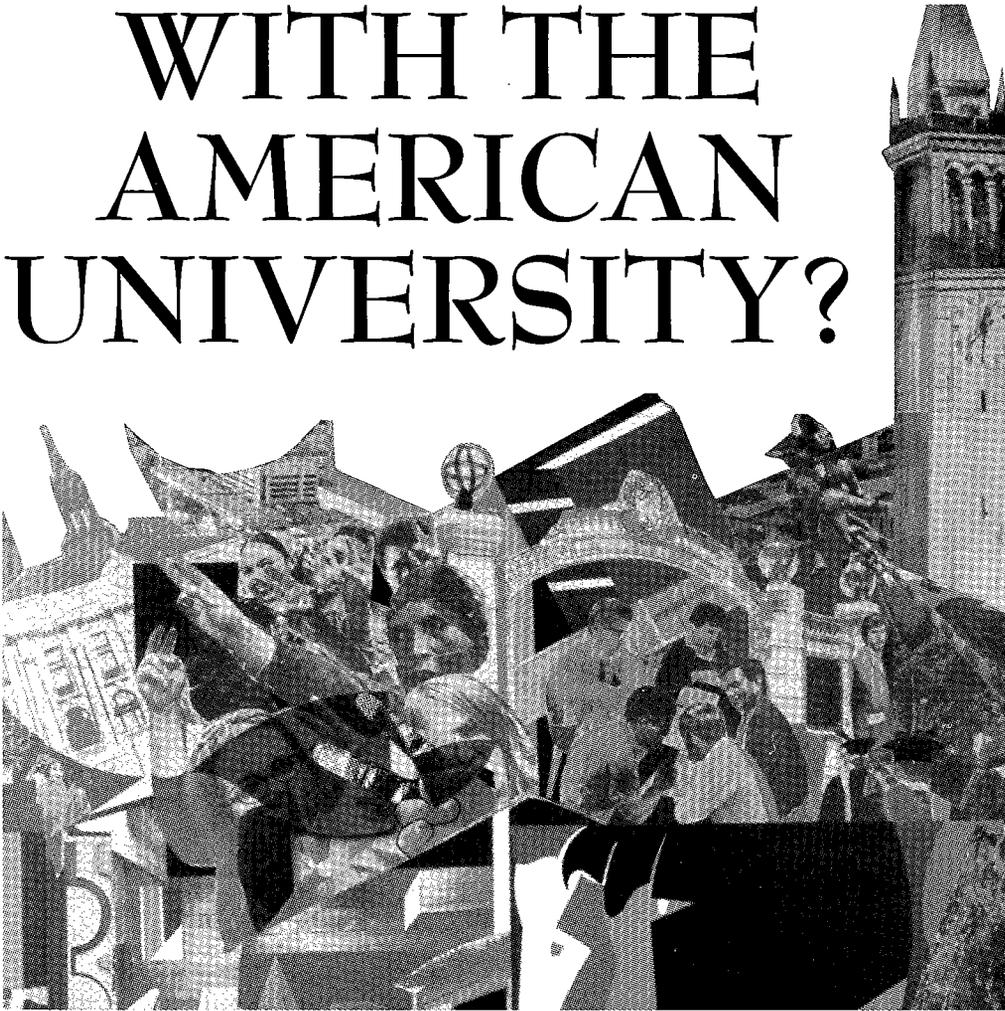
No revolution solves all problems, and the constitutional revolution of the 1840s was no exception. The vision of Hoffman and the Barnburners assumed a world dominated by small property owners who paid taxes, but that world was already vanishing, especially in New York City. By the 1850s, two-thirds of the city's labor force were wage earners, and only between one-third and one-half of the electorate paid property taxes. Class tensions ran high. During an economic downturn in 1857, Mayor Fernando Wood put jobless laborers to work in Central Park. "Those who produce everything get nothing," he declared, "and those who produce nothing get everything." John Van Buren, son of the former president and a prominent Barnburner, denounced Wood's statement as "a demagogical attempt to array the poor against the rich." It was a year of unrest in New York, already the nation's biggest city, requiring the dispatch of federal troops to protect the customhouse and armory.

To prevent outright class warfare, Democratic politicians had already resorted to fiscal shell games, issuing revenue-anticipation bonds to ease the tax burden imposed by an expanding municipal budget. (Such bonds allowed the city to borrow funds "in anticipation" of future tax revenues.) By 1856, these bonds covered no less than 47 percent of New York City's annual expenditures, taxes a mere 32 percent. Once an instrument for economic development and regional logrolling, deficit financing had become a device for muting class conflict—and so it has remained in the current century, as seen most recently in the District of Columbia's plight.

Michael Hoffman would have been only a little surprised by this turn of events. Before his death in 1848 he saw many portents. In the last years of his life, the federal government borrowed so much money to wage the Mexican War of 1846–48 without raising taxes that Treasury bonds fell dramatically in value. The battle for fiscal responsibility, largely won in the state capitals, would now have to be joined at the municipal and federal levels.

Which, of course, is just about where we stand now, a century and a half later. At this juncture in our national life, we have something to learn from the solutions proposed by Hoffman and his Barnburner colleagues. Spokesmen for the middle-class families of their time, they advocated limited government in order to strip special privileges from powerful corporations and rich individuals—then as now the main beneficiaries of an activist state in a capitalist society. As advocates of a liberal bourgeois ideology of equality of opportunity and individual achievement, they also opposed "class legislation," the politically driven redistribution of wealth or entitlements to the poor. And, with political courage all too rare in our own time, they wrote a constitution that limited expenditures and increased taxation to balance the budget and pay off the debt. No smoke and mirrors here. No manipulation of dedicated funds to disguise deficits. No pandering for votes with tax cuts, in the fashion of Newt Gingrich, or by maintaining existing Medicare and Medicaid subsidies, as proposed by President Bill Clinton. Instead, real cuts, shared sacrifice, a Contract with America that responsibly faced the problems of the day. Where is our Michael Hoffman?

# WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY?



*Collage by Romare Bearden, Council Chambers, City Hall, Berkeley, California*

To outward appearances, the American campus is a cauldron at perpetual boil. Student rebellion in the 1960s and '70s has been followed by debates over multiculturalism and political correctness today. Yet what is most remarkable about higher education during the past half century are the constants: the growth of its scale, scope, and prestige, the steady expansion of academic specialization, the relentless escalation of tuition. Now, our authors warn, this era is drawing to a close. Even as the university tests the limits of its economic and intellectual resources, it seems to have lost sight of its central purposes.

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# Behind the Curtain

by Chester E. Finn, Jr., and Bruno V. Manno

During the half-century since World War II, American colleges and universities have been education's Emerald City, not only for Americans but for millions of others who have followed the yellow brick road from abroad. No matter what ups and downs have afflicted the economy, no matter that the stunning mediocrity of our primary and secondary schools has been recognized as a national crisis—through all this and more, higher education has grown in scale, in wealth, in allure and, at least until the very recent past, in stature.

That growth has been a marvel to behold. Before World War II, 1,700 institutions enrolled 1.5 million students, employed 147,000 faculty, and spent \$675 million, or about \$450 per student per year. After the war, the GI Bill of 1944 underwrote a huge expansion, and the postwar economy's appetite for skilled labor placed an ever-greater premium on a college degree. Regional colleges went national. Community colleges—an American innovation—spread like the ivy that seldom graced their walls. Dozens of new (mostly state) campuses were opened.

No longer was the university merely a place of teaching and learning. Now it was an engine of economic growth and a source of technological and scientific progress. It was looked to for defense preparedness, cultural enrichment, and policy ideas about everything from poverty to air pollution. Corporate investment and high-tech jobs gravitated to communities with research facilities and a supply of educated people. By 1960, there were 2,000 institutions; by 1980, 3,150. Still the growth continued. Today, the United States is indisputably the world's postsecondary superpower. There are nearly

3,700 colleges and universities in the United States. They enroll 14.4 million people, about 22 percent of all "tertiary" students on the planet. (The student body includes some 440,000 citizens of other countries, an "export" that adds about \$7.1 billion to the plus side of our annual balance of payments.) The faculty has ballooned to 833,000. Higher education in America is a \$213 billion industry, roughly equal in size to the gross national product of Belgium.

But it is an increasingly troubled enterprise. Except at the top, it has grave quality problems. Nearly 50 percent of the freshmen in the California state university system are enrolled in remedial English and mathematics classes. Higher education's problems are beginning to receive the attention of government officials at the highest levels of power and influence. Speaker of the House (and ex-professor) Newt Gingrich writes that higher education "is out of control [and] increasingly out of touch with the rest of America."

The American public has always had mixed feelings about the university, sneering at the "ivory tower" life while according the professoriate an exaggerated respect. Now, however, a new combination of factors is tilting the balance of opinion against higher education. While among policymakers there is growing concern about the shoddy quality of much higher education, the broader public feels increasingly oppressed by soaring prices. During the 1980s, health care costs increased 117 percent and there was talk of a national crisis. The price of new cars rose 37 percent. But the average cost of attending a public college increased by 109 percent, and the price of an education at a private college jumped by 146 per-

cent. Every other major purveyor in the United States, from Bethlehem Steel to Wal-Mart, has been forced in recent years to hold down or even cut prices. But higher education has done practically nothing to end its decades-long spree of escalating charges and expenditures.

Today, annual tuition and fees at public four-year institutions equal nine percent of the median American family income; the proportion for private institutions is 38 percent. As recently as 1991, the comparable figures were six percent and 27 percent. (In 1980, they were four percent and 17 percent.) Obviously, this can't continue forever.

One saving grace of the "ivory tower" idea was always the public's sense that, however alien university life might seem to an outsider and however much it might cost, it was redeemed by the higher purposes that informed its existence. But the university is losing that precious public trust. There is a sense, in the mad proliferation of course offerings, the embarrassing deficiencies of many graduates, and higher education's embrace of political correctness and other politically inspired assaults on its own ideals, that perhaps the university has lost sight

of its higher purposes. Fifty-four percent of Americans believe that higher education in their state needs a "fundamental overhaul," according to a 1993 poll conducted by the Public Agenda Foundation. By margins of seven or eight to one, the public says that college is not a good value for the money—and is fast pricing itself out of reach.

It is impossible to underestimate the power of bad ideas, and certainly the looming crisis of the American university has a great deal to do with the institution's profound confusion over its own functions

and purposes. More mundane forces are also at work, however, and these have to do with the political economy of modern higher education.

The American university is a curiously inflexible institution. One of its chief peculiarities is that the only changes it can comfortably handle are tied to growth. Colleges and universities are subject neither to the discipline of a true market nor to any powerful internal constraints on spending. They are in a position to define what "higher education" is, and therefore what their costs and prices will be. Consumers have little choice but to pay.



"OH, HIM? HE'S SOME GUY FROM SOUTH BEND IN. LOOKING FOR A WAY TO PAY HIS KIDS' COLLEGE EDUCATION."

Meeting a new student yearning, accommodating a community request, luring a star professor, improving the football team, acceding to the faculty's yen for doctoral students (and reduced teaching loads), pursuing the latest developments in microbiology, strengthening the gender studies program, giving professors incentives for better teaching—you name it—all are treated as incremental costs of education.

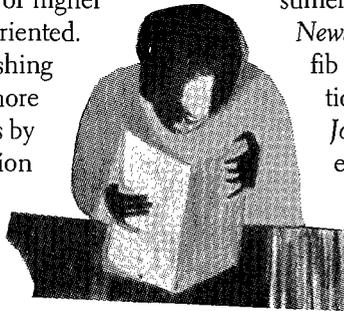
If it were a corporation (or even a government agency), the institution would fund many of these changes internally, by cutting back elsewhere. But universities

don't function that way. The combination of tenured faculty, unionized nonteaching staff, protest-prone students, nostalgic alumni, reverence for traditional practices, make-no-waves administrators, remote governing boards, and "collegial" decision making all block that sort of approach.

As a result, the culture of higher education is expansion oriented. Even in this time of crushing tuition costs, colleges are more apt to compete for students by adding elaborate recreation centers, dining options, cable television in the dorms, and all manner of new counseling and advising services, rather than by becoming leaner and cheaper. Some call this the "Chivas Regal strategy," boosting sales by marketing one's product as the premium brand.

Whatever it's called, the economics of higher education often seem surreal. The late Howard Bowen, perhaps the leading analyst of the economics of universities, concluded that these institutions simply spend all they can take in. They determine their own costs. They set their own prices—and sometimes collude over them. They are more likely to buff their appeal by raising prices than by slashing them. They aren't really answerable to anyone for their performance. Indeed, they have no clear goals or measurable indicators of effectiveness. They insist that what they teach cannot be tested by outsiders, demand that the work of scholars be evaluated only by their peers, and use academic freedom as a shield against scrutiny and accountability.

Thus constructed, higher education is a perpetual growth machine. Such a machine requires a steady flow of new revenues. Since enrollments produce the lion's share of income (except at a handful of research-centered campuses), attracting more students and charging more for each one are the surest ways to get it. Thus, the average U.S. postsecondary institution enrolled 535



more students in 1993 than in 1974.

Once a university grows, it must maintain its new base. Above all, it must keep its lecture halls and dorms full. Admissions offices today will do almost anything to attract enough students: discount tuition charges, scramble to boost the school's rank in consumer guides such as the annual *U.S. News and World Report* ratings, even fib about the quality of their institution's students. The *Wall Street Journal* recently reported, for example, that for years New College of the University of South Florida deliberately inflated the average SAT scores of its entering class by simply lopping off data on its poorest performers.

The imperative of keeping enrollments up is a powerful contributor to the quality problems that beset the American campus. Seen from afar, the Emerald City's tallest academic pinnacles still gleam. Nobody is really surprised that nearly half of the Nobel laureates in physics and medicine since World War II have been members of American faculties, as have two-thirds of those in economics. This distinction spills over into graduate education in the arts and sciences and extends to major professional schools such as medicine. But intellectual rigor can fall off drastically even at the postgraduate level. Upward of 90,000 master's degrees in education are awarded each year, for example, including 60 (in 1993) in driver education and 3,000 in physical education and coaching. These (and many of the 7,000 education doctorates conferred each year) have more to do with the credentialism of American public schools than with higher learning.

At the undergraduate level, the problems are much the same. While yuppie parents will do anything to get their offspring into Brown or Berkeley, their impulse has more to do with careerism and status than with academic quality. It is true that a

> CHESTER E. FINN, JR., a John M. Olin Fellow at the Hudson Institute, served as assistant secretary of education from 1985 to '88. His most recent book is *The New Promise of American Life* (1995), co-edited with Lamar Alexander. BRUNO V. MANNO is a Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute. He served as assistant secretary of education in the Bush administration. Copyright © 1996 by Chester E. Finn, Jr., and Bruno V. Manno.

degree from such an institution is a marketable asset; it is not altogether clear that students learn a lot—at least academically—during their time on campus. Thus the familiar joke about why Harvard is a great repository of knowledge: its students enter with so much and leave with so little.

Descending from the institutions whose names are household words to those attended by the great majority of American students, the deficiencies become painfully apparent. The recruitment and admission of ill-prepared students is common, though often justified in the name of diversity and social justice. Many schools try to “remediate” underperformers on campus. Others turn a blind eye and pass them along with a degree. Remedial courses in reading, writing, and math are offered on 75 percent of U.S. campuses, and 30 percent of entering students enroll in at least one such course. (Even at MIT, which has no shortage of attractive applicants, only 17 percent of freshmen passed the entry-level writing appraisal in 1995.)

Many degree recipients never get near a history, math, or literature course. More than half avoid instruction in foreign languages. As a result of student demand for vocational courses and institutions’ need to keep classrooms filled, the liberal arts are being pushed aside. Barely a third of 1993 bachelor’s degrees were in the arts and sciences. Degrees in home economics outnumbered those in mathematics; more baccalaureates were awarded in “protective services” than in the physical sciences, more in theater than in German and French combined.

Rather than add stimulating courses in math, literature, and other elements of a classic liberal education, administrators and faculty have pandered to some of the worst impulses of students, encouraging (and sometimes requiring) them to take “courses” that indulge the contemporary trend toward self-absorption. At the University of Maryland, freshmen earn credits for a “course” called “The Student and the University,” which examines such matters as date rape, cultural diversity, the use of highlighting pens, and fitting a career plan to the contours of one’s per-

sonality. At Florida A&M, there are seminars on dating relationships. “American higher education,” concludes the Wingspread Group, a panel chaired by former U.S. secretary of labor William Brock, “now offers a smorgasbord of fanciful courses in a fragmented curriculum that accords as much credit for ‘Introduction to Tennis’ . . . as it does for ‘Principles of English Composition,’ history or physics, thereby trivializing education—indeed, misleading students by implying that they are receiving the education they need for life when they are not.”

To keep the customers moving, moreover, U.S. colleges and universities have been willing to confer degrees on people who have not learned much. A 1993 federal survey found that few graduates of four-year campuses reached the highest level of literacy—which involved such things as interpreting a substantial news article. Only about half were capable of writing a brief letter explaining an error made on a credit card bill. Some of the particulars would be funny if they weren’t so alarming. As the Wingspread Group noted, “56.3 percent of American-born, four-year college graduates are unable consistently to perform simple tasks, such as calculating the change from \$3 after buying a 60-cent bowl of soup and a \$1.95 sandwich.”

Besides increasing the number of students, the obvious way to boost university revenues is to raise the fees collected from each of them. Every autumn brings word that tuition increases have again outpaced inflation. The 1995–96 school year brought with it a six percent increase—about double the inflation rate—at four-year schools, pushing tuition and fees to an average of \$2,860 at public campuses and \$12,432 at private ones. At Ivy League-style universities, the price of a bachelor’s degree (including room and board) approaches \$120,000. In most of the country, one can buy a substantial house for that kind of money.

It is important to note, however, that in the peculiar world of higher education finance, tuition charges both understate and overstate the actual cost of a college education. They understate it because vir-

## *The Digital Challenge*

The first reports from the front lines of higher education on the information superhighway are coming in. What will we do on the superhighway? What happens to higher education when every student has a link to a flood of words and images of every imaginable kind from around the world, and when every teacher and every student can reach out to each other at all hours of the day and night?

The tools are already in hand to make transformative change—and I would not have said that as recently as 1993. We can make some good surmises about technologies that are coming to help us further, but even if we have only the PC and the Internet, we have enough to revolutionize education. We can create teaching tools interactive enough to let students seek them out and work with them at their own pace. Imagine an on-line resource where the course lectures are available not in 50-minute chunks but in two-to-five-minute video segments closely matched to a paragraph of the textbook and a video of an expensive-to-duplicate demonstration, with problem sets right at hand. How much better to review the lecture from the professor's mouth as often as need be, rather than attempt to decipher scrawled and perhaps incomplete or inaccurate notes.

The same tactic can be used at an altogether different level. Infrequently taught ancient and medieval languages (e.g., ancient Syriac, medieval Occitan) are in danger of disappearing from study. Even where faculty have the skill to teach them, they are often not given the time to do so in their normal teaching load, while many institutions have no qualified faculty for many such languages. If self-paced interactive instruction, with abundant drills and exercises, were available on-line world-wide (there is no *technical* obstacle to such a thing today), a local faculty member could monitor a student's progress at the outset and spend face-to-face time six months or a year later taking the successful student to the next level—a luxury that few have today.

Such resource-based learning is especially powerful for "distance learners" of all kinds. I have taught Internet-based seminars on Augustine and on Boethius with hundreds of auditors from around the world and now even paying customers are getting credits from my university for rigorous work carried on far from Philadelphia.

There are special advantages for an arduous discipline such as classics. The secondary school Latin teachers of America work often with little contact with one another or with the academy, and they are too few and too scattered to justify classroom-based course work that can reach more than a fraction of them. But in the aggregate, the Latin teachers of America are more motivated and better qualified to take advanced work than our regular undergraduates. If we can deliver high quality instruction to them reliably via the electronic networks, we do ourselves a favor (more students), we do them a favor (re-energizing and re-directing their teaching), and so we do our profession a favor (building from the school level up), and whatever benefit the study of the ancient languages confers on society as a whole is measurably increased. And somehow—perhaps this is the most important point of all, the joy and the wonder of it all—the magic of education at its best spreads farther and deeper across the land.

To be sure, no one should try to substitute this kind of teaching for the old vision of Mark Hopkins on one end of the log and the student on the other. Technology can be dehumanizing and distancing. But we need to be more honest with ourselves in higher education than we customarily are about this.

tually every institution also draws substantial revenues from other sources. The average private campus now spends \$28,000 annually per (full-time equivalent) student, more than twice its posted charge for

an undergraduate education. Yet the tuition levels that make headlines also exaggerate what most students actually pay for higher education, particularly in the private sector. In a year (1989) when the

Too much of what transpires in higher education is already dehumanizing and distancing. Stringencies of economics and defects of human character already subject our students to huge lectures, novice teaching assistants, itinerant part-time lecturers, and other makeshifts. Where the ideal relationship between teacher and pupil exists, we might be tempted to think of strengthening it but should not try to supplant it. But there is more than enough imperfection in our endeavors to provide ample opportunity to apply our new tools to give education a more human face. (Can we imagine universities without lectures? Will we one day notice that the extended monologue is a form of discourse now practiced most often by professors and madmen?)

The professor is no longer what he was in the days when the university embodied all studies in a single location. The university was once a microcosm, a miniature world offering the whole of knowledge in a restricted arena. Every discipline represented had its professor, the supreme local authority on the subject. That supremacy faded long ago, and students found more ways to learn about their subject than to sit and listen to the local professor.

The real roles of the professor in an information-rich world will be not to provide information but to guide and encourage students wading through deep waters of the information flood. Professors in this environment will thrive as mentors. They will use the best skills they have now to nudge students through the educationally crucial tasks of *processing* information: problem-solving, analysis, and synthesis of ideas—the activities on

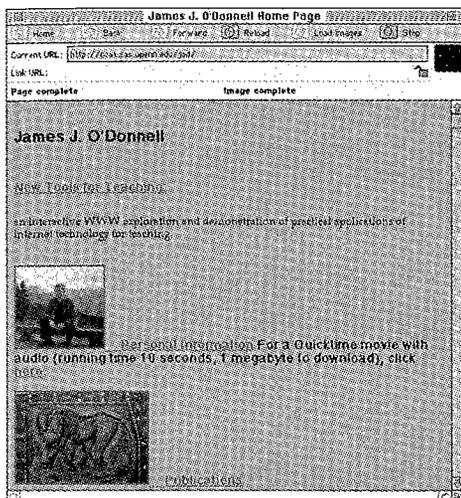
which our time can best be spent. The professor will also be a point of contact to the world beyond the campus, a kind of software “icon”—click on the professor and let him take you to the world that he knows. This may seem an absurd image, but it can take shape already on a screen of the World Wide Web.

There is no doubt that our future, like every future, will take as well as give. There are things we cherish about the face-to-face intimacy of our institutions that we will lose. But we regularly sacrifice intimacy to achieve freedom or power, and we have made such choices in one form or another for centuries. Every technology of the word from the invention of writing to the present has given those who use it new range and power and intimacy of one kind, but dissolved a little further the physical bonds of face-to-face community.

If we need a monument to error in facing new technologies, we need only look around us. If the railroads of the 1950s had known they were in the transportation business, the joke goes, more of them would still be in business. If we think we are in the 50-minute lecture business, we may still be in that business 40 years from now, but there will not be as many of us, the paint will be peeling from the walls, and the dormitories and lecture halls will be far quieter and more tranquil—not to say empty—places.

—James J. O'Donnell

> JAMES J. O'DONNELL is a professor of classical studies at the University of Pennsylvania. This is adapted from an essay in *Ideas* (No. 2, 1995).



average “sticker price” of U.S. private universities was \$11,735, tuition revenue per student averaged \$9,071, some 23 percent less. That difference represented widespread discounting, undertaken partly in

the name of equal opportunity but increasingly in an effort to draw in enough students to fill those classrooms and dorms. One veteran analyst of higher education finances compares the way colleges “sell”

student places to airline marketing practices—i.e. filling the available seats with people who pay sharply differing prices.

Tufts University, for example, which now charges \$21,000 annually for tuition and fees (and \$6,000 more for room and board), aids 40 percent of its students, with sums averaging \$15,000 each. The 60 percent who pay full price, of course, help underwrite this Robin Hood-style resource transfer. But the bazaar-style pricing policy breeds further unhappiness among consumers, both those forced to pay the full freight and those who sense they could have gotten a better “deal” if they had shopped longer or bargained harder.

Rising tuition and fees are still the overriding reality, and it is extraordinary how long they have been growing. Terry Hartle of the American Council on Education, higher education’s top Washington lobbyist, estimates that college charges have risen by an average of two percent more than inflation throughout the 20th century. Yet the demand for higher education has remained strong. Most of its appeal stems from the sizable economic payoff of a college education—although the opportunity it provides for a prolonged spell of unbridled hedonism ought not to be ignored. In the age group 25 to 34, men with college degrees earned \$12,000 more in 1994 than those who ended their education with a high school diploma. Women with degrees enjoyed an income premium of \$13,000.

Over the course of a career, according to U.S. Census Bureau projections, a person who graduated from college in 1992 can expect \$600,000 more income (in constant dollars) than a person of the same age with only a high school diploma. A master’s degree adds nearly \$200,000 more to lifetime earnings. And unemployment is much lower for college graduates.

Lately, however, a bit of the economic bloom seems to have faded. Real median earnings of young male college graduates actually dropped 4.4 percent from 1989 to ’93. Although the earnings of those with no college plunged further (13.7 percent), the “return” on an investment in college may have peaked, at least for men. (It continues to rise for women.)

In a country where high school diplomas mean next to nothing, it is possible that employers have been using the college degree as a simple screening device to identify people likely to possess at least minimal skills and work habits. As access to college becomes nearly universal, however, as low university standards are exposed, and as more radical school-reform strategies start to bear fruit at the secondary level, it is likely that the degree’s economic edge will narrow.

Amid all these growing signs of educational degradation, life on campus has grown more pleasant for those who live and work there. Between 1976 and 1991, a period when most other enterprises were slashing middle management and substituting technology for labor, the university continued to add poundage. By 1991, there were only 8.3 students per (professional) staff member, compared to 9.8 in 1976.

Salaries are comfortable. The average full professor at a state university earned \$62,000 in 1994–95 for what is typically an eight- or nine-month year. At private universities, full professors averaged \$73,160. Even at lower-status two-year colleges, the typical professor drew a salary of \$51,070. Moreover, some 64 percent of the nation’s full-time faculty enjoy the extraordinary job security that comes with tenure.

Course loads have fallen and school years have shrunk. Instruction now consumes only 40 percent of the average university budget. Senior faculty typically spend about 10 hours a week in the classroom and no more than eight hours advising students, according to a study by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. Michigan State’s 2,038 professors (a tenth of whom earn more than \$100,000 a year) spend an average of 5.5 hours a week in the classroom during the academic year. That presumably leaves ample time for research and writing. Yet the UCLA study also shows that, from 1991 to ’93, 41 percent of American professors published not a single word in professional journals. (Others are more prolific, raising the average output for full-time faculty to about one article, a third of a book review, and two “professional pre-

sentations" every year.)

Despite a hundred solemn studies urging that faculty pay be tied more to teaching and less to research, the "publish or perish" imperative endures. A federal survey found that professors' publications correlate positively with their earnings but that teaching has an *inverse* relationship. Faculty whose teaching made up less than half their total work load earned far more (\$62,000) in 1988 than those who spent most of their time in the classroom (\$41,000).



*On many campuses, political activism has yielded to politicization—of the curriculum, faculty hiring, and other university matters.*

The consequences are predictable: slipshod instruction, particularly of undergraduate students; constant pressure from faculty for less teaching and more time for research; and tons of research that serves the career needs of the professoriate (and bloats budgets) without significantly enlarging human knowledge. More than 400 new scholarly journals in modern languages and literature, most of them obscure and some bordering on the frivolous, were founded in the 1970s alone. Hundreds of so-called "electronic journals" are also appearing each year.

Many observers predicted that this peculiar industry would suffer a shakeout during the 1980s, but it escaped. National prosperity underwrote increases in enrollment, tuition, and subsidies from state governments. A vibrant stock market boosted endowment returns and encouraged alumni giving. And the federal government chipped in with the Middle Income Student Assistance Act of 1978, which broadened eligibility for federal grants and extended loans to students regardless of financial need. This led to unprecedented increases in student aid. Total aid (from all sources) ballooned to \$46.8 billion in 1994-95. The federal taxpayer supplied or—by

guaranteeing loans—backstopped three-quarters of this sum. Today, nearly half of all students pay for college and graduate school with Washington's help.

There are, however, several reasons to believe that higher education's day of reckoning can no longer be put off. First, there just are not many more students waiting to be recruited. Postsecondary institutions increased enrollments in the past by opening their doors to older students, encouraging people to return for additional training, and recruiting overseas. But like veins of coal that have been mined for decades, these "nontraditional" populations will eventually provide dwindling yields. There are now more students enrolled in colleges and universities than in high schools.

Moreover, there is widening recognition of the pernicious effects of "open admissions" at the postsecondary level on school standards and pupil performance in secondary schools. Only about 50 of the nation's 3,600 colleges and universities are highly selective, turning away more applicants than they accept. Perhaps 200 more campuses admit 50 to 90 percent of their applicants. The rest, desperate to fill their classrooms, welcome essentially anyone who applies, sometimes not even requiring a high school diploma. Young people there-

fore are well aware that they can get into college no matter what their transcripts and test scores look like. For them, the incentive to study hard in high school is virtually nonexistent. School reformers can talk about raising standards until they turn blue; rational 16-year-olds know that in their "real world" it simply doesn't matter.

This unpleasant reality is contributing to changes that may make life more difficult for universities. The California state university system is on the verge of barring entry by freshmen who cannot handle college-level math or English. (Three-fifths of new students now fail one or both of the tests.) The City University of New York and the state universities of Massachusetts are moving in the same direction.

Elected officials are also beginning to put pressure on state universities. "The higher education community thinks they're above it all. They don't like to be told what to do," says Ohio legislator Wayne Jones, a senior member of his state assembly's finance committee. "But if they want us to be their sugar daddy, there are going to be some rules." Jones has successfully pressed his colleagues to impose some. Ohio now requires professors in state-supported colleges to spend at least 10 percent more time teaching undergraduates than they did in 1990.

**M**ost ominous of all for universities, money is getting scarce—and consumers and taxpayers more cost conscious. Though state funds for higher education continue to increase in absolute terms, appropriations per student, adjusted for inflation, have dropped. Yet institutional spending is still rising faster than inflation, forcing state universities to increase tuition rapidly. The federal gravy train is no longer a reliable source of income, either. Washington supplied 15 percent of higher education revenues in 1980 and only 12 percent in 1993, and the drive to shrink the federal deficit, curb Uncle Sam's intrusiveness, devolve obligations to states, and make people shoulder greater responsibility for themselves has only begun.

Some of the least popular agencies in Washington—the Department of Education, the national endowments for the

arts and humanities—have been the spigots through which much of higher education's federal largesse has flowed. As their budgets are nipped and their programs curbed, universities will feel it. So will students. Budget savings now being exacted from federal loan programs, for example, will boost the cost of borrowing, thereby making hundreds of thousands of students even more keenly aware of—and harder pressed to afford—the price of higher education. The level of federal scientific research support is rising more slowly than inflation at many agencies. Even the reduction in defense spending—a goal dear to the ideological hearts of many academics—is apt to affect university budgets. (One large exception: federal dollars still gush into biomedical research.)

If neither state nor federal government will come to the academy's financial rescue, its one remaining large source of additional funding is, of course, its own students. But tuition payers are also growing more oppressed by—and resistant to—rising prices. Because many people nowadays simply cannot pay for college out of current income, the debt burden is mounting fast. Between 1992—when Congress invited even more middle- and upper-income students to obtain federally guaranteed loans—and 1994, borrowing under the federal loan programs rose 57 percent. Students typically emerge from college with a debt burden of \$8,000 or \$9,000, and horror stories—families that owe \$50,000 after putting two or three youngsters through school—are often heard. What is more, the prospect of hefty monthly payments after college intensifies the pressure on students to major in "practical" fields, thus exacerbating the vocationalism that already afflicts higher education.

**I**n response to all of these challenges, a little belt-tightening has begun. Mostly, administrators do the easy (sometimes shortsighted) things first. They hand out more tuition discounts to maintain enrollments. (On the margin, a student doesn't have to produce a great deal of net income in order to be more valuable to the institution than an empty slot.) They defer maintenance on aging buildings. They may meet new teach-

ing needs with untenured and low-paid part-time or “gypsy” faculty members.

State legislatures are forcing some changes through budget cuts and efforts to mold university behavior. Ohio’s mandatory increase in undergraduate teaching is being emulated by other states, as is Tennessee’s practice of tying a small portion of its campus funding formula to institutional performance. Signs of entrepreneurialism are also visible, at least in realms where the faculty is not directly affected. Colleges are contracting out the management of such things as bookstores, dormitories, and janitorial work. A few are even turning the Chivas Regal strategy on its head and offering bargains. The University of Rochester now gives an across-the-board \$5,000 discount to incoming freshmen from New York State.

Controlling costs—and prices—is plainly vital if American higher education is to get itself into shape, but a proper fitness regimen must go further. There is a long list of possibilities, from making campus amenities optional, so that budget-conscious students can buy the academic equivalent of “basic transportation” rather than the “fully-loaded” model, to imposing real assessments on students so that academic “value added” can be measured (and compared by quality-minded shoppers). The curricular smorgasbord needs to be edited and more “core” requirements instituted; faculties need better incentives to emphasize teaching rather than ersatz research. (How many of today’s 833,000 faculty will ever produce “new knowledge” of real significance? Ten percent?) This list could be extended.

But fiscal fitness is not all that U.S. higher education needs to work at. It must renew its moral authority. Particularly if the economic advantage of a degree shrinks, the university’s future stature and allure will have more to do with the intrinsic worth of what it does—as perceived by ordinary people, not just by academics—and less to do with the personal wealth to be reaped by enduring the process.

Moral capital is not easy to build. It seems to us that the most promising ways by which higher education can regain public trust are by committing itself to the principle of value

for money, demonstrating that a college degree truly denotes solid skills and knowledge, and curbing the excesses of political correctness and campus misbehavior.

Are these dreams like the Cowardly Lion’s wish for courage and Dorothy’s desire to get back to Kansas? Perhaps. But just as the lion and Dorothy turned out to contain within themselves the essential elements for realizing their hopes, so American higher education has residual strengths that it can tap in a quest for self-renewal.

There are on a few campuses trustees and presidents who are showing signs of reform leadership, and several reform-minded groups have been formed, including the Wingspread Group, the American Academy for Liberal Education (a new accrediting body), and the National Association of Scholars. Inner resources may not suffice, however, unless accompanied by an external shock. Perhaps this will be supplied by restive taxpayers, rebellious tuition payers, change-minded voters, and the demands of employers who need to hire truly educated people if their firms—and the nation’s economy—are to remain strong.

Will that be shock enough? We would have greater confidence if state and national leaders were to become as serious about the performance of universities as they are about that of the primary and secondary schools, where bold changes are finally being made in basic ground rules and operating assumptions. This has not yet happened at the tertiary level, but the new crew of legislators, members of Congress, and governors—people who do not share the hoary assumptions or political ties of their predecessors—do show signs that they are prepared to open the curtain and see what the higher education wizard really looks like.

There is risk, to be sure, that something of value may be lost in the process of reforming higher education. But leaving the enterprise as it is carries greater risks. The changes may not make all our wishes come true, but we might at least find American higher education pointed, like Dorothy and Toto, back to the real world.

# *The Feudal Culture of the Postmodern University*

by Alan Wolfe

The corporation is downsizing and going international. Government is being reinvented, even disinvented. Unions are disappearing. Churches are turning themselves into spiritual shopping malls, offering something for everyone. The family has fractured or recombined. Radical change is the order of the day in the life of American institutions—except in academia. While other institutions tangle with whirlwinds, the university seems to be sailing along, impervious to the forces buffeting the rest of society. The institution run by and for a group that has been dubbed the “tenured radicals” may be the most conservative institution in American society.

The last revolution to hit the American university was the one that brought the faculty to power half a century and more ago. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, note sociologists Christopher Jencks and David Riesman in *The Academic Revolution*, professors were pitted against university presidents and trustees in assorted campus battles over such matters as “the shape of the curriculum, the content of particular courses, or the use of particular books. The professors . . . lost most of the publicized battles, but they won the war.” Their victory was sealed in the aftermath of World War II by the rapid growth of federal research grants, which made faculty members independent revenue raisers.

As the faculty took control, they established their own criteria for how higher

education would operate: academic institutions would be meritocratic, national, secular, and professional. (The modern university, Jencks and Riesman add, also played a powerful role in spreading the meritocratic idea through the rest of American society.) Despite student protests, controversies over race-based admissions, efforts to rethink the role of religion in the public sphere, the tax revolt, and the shrinkage of the middle class, faculty control of the university has remained remarkably intact since Jencks and Riesman wrote their book.

To be sure, the higher education landscape is far from uniform. Faculty control varies with the status of the institution. Elite universities—the Ivies, the California Institute of Technology, Stanford, a few state universities, and about two dozen others—have little in common with Anne Arundel Community College, Hamline University, or Oklahoma Baptist University. When faculty members can make good on a threat to move elsewhere if their demands are ignored, they have considerably more power than when state legislators regard them as public employees little different from file clerks.

Some 833,000 people teach full or part-time at American institutions of higher learning, but only a minority enjoy the privilege of controlling their professional lives. Burton R. Clark, a higher education specialist at the University of California, Los Angeles, estimates in *Higher Learning in*



William Hogarth's *Scholars at a Lecture* (1736)

America that more than two-thirds of all professors teach in non-doctorate-granting institutions, including community colleges.

Still, at the top research universities virtually all challengers have withdrawn from the competition for control. Students, despite occasional flare-ups over political correctness and other matters, are politically quiescent, although one can hear rumblings around minority concerns. Trustees have demonstrated little interest in reasserting their authority. They believe that their obligation is to choose a president, give him or her occasional advice and money, and avoid “micromanagement” at all costs. Presidents, in the words

of Donald Kennedy, who held that post at Stanford University from 1980 to '92, “are running for office every day.” Needing to please everyone, they have scant incentive to confront faculty power, he notes in *Higher Education Under Fire*. The administration oversees admissions and erects buildings; the faculty retain authority over everything else that matters to them—tenure decisions, teaching loads, the lot.

Critics of the university have no doubt that faculty control is directly responsible for the institution's ills. During the 1960s, conservatives defended higher education against the attacks of the New Left. Now they delight in barbed criticism. Charles Sykes's *ProfScam* sums up the conservative

indictment. Professors are ripping off everyone else. They should teach more. Their English should be understandable. Their research should be less esoteric. They ought to spend more time with undergraduates. They should be in their offices more often. It is absurd that they get off one year in seven for sabbaticals. They should keep their politics out of the classroom and their hands off their students. (Yes, Sykes has three pages on sexual harassment, and they are charged with righteous feminist indignation.) “Almost single-handedly,” he declares, “the professors—working steadily and systematically—have destroyed the university as a center of learning and have desolated higher education.”

Many of Sykes’s complaints are echoed in *Impostors in the Temple* by Martin Anderson, an economist and former Reagan administration official who is now a Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution. He is especially fond of the word *corruption*. Professors are politically corrupt because they do not like Republicans. They are personally corrupt because they engage in hanky-panky with students. Administrators are corrupt because they exaggerate overhead costs and build expensive football facilities.

Conservatives are equally clear about who is responsible for the decline of the canon and what they see as the general degradation of the curriculum. Reviewing Stanford’s controversial decision in the spring of 1988 to drop a Western culture course requirement attacked as racist—Jesse Jackson joined a crowd chanting, “Hey hey, ho ho, Western culture’s got to go”—critic Roger Kimball writes in *Tenured Radicals* that “the faculty was, in the end, to blame for the demise of the Western culture course at Stanford.”

Even the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives has weighed in. “Campuses are run for the benefit of the faculty, not the students,” declares ex-professor Newt Gingrich. “College and university faculties have developed a game in which

they have lots of petty power with very little accountability.”

If the Right attacks, the Left must perforce defend. During the 1960s, the Left attacked the “multiversity” for its “irrelevance” and its impersonal “processing” of students. Now listen to Cary Nelson and Michael Bérubé, the editors of *Higher Education under Fire* and self-described “loyal, card carrying” leftists who teach English at the University of Illinois. Those mass lecture courses, once the target of the Left’s criticism, now “have their place even in the humanities.” As for criticisms of the esoteric theory so popular in English departments, “the public does not understand that knowledge in the humanities must be produced as well as transmitted.” Faculty stagnation? Nelson and Bérubé do admit—unlike some of their colleagues—that something is wrong. But they insist that it “is not the same thing as the so-called ‘deadwood’ problem.”

In the same volume, Ernest Benjamin, general secretary of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the professional organization of the American professoriate, brushes off several other challenges to the status quo. “Elimination of tenure . . . will not increase the number of available positions,” he writes. “Nor can we improve teaching by increasing teaching loads.”

The university’s defenders believe that the public has been fed inaccurate ideas about what goes on within its walls. The task is not to change the institution, writes AAUP president Linda Ray Platt, a professor of English at the University of Nebraska and another contributor to the Nelson and Bérubé book, but to “develop a new narrative of our own and find ways to carry it to the public.”

The university’s critics and defenders are both at least partly right. As Nelson and Bérubé suggest, there is nothing inherently wrong with the idea that faculty have a responsibility to uncover new knowledge and to convey the results of their

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findings to those few others who work at the margins of the knowable, even if the price is scholarship that is difficult for a lay person to understand. Students, especially motivated students interested in exploring uncharted territory, benefit when scholars undertake such work. Nor is there anything wrong in theory with the notion that the responsibility of uncovering new knowledge gives academics a greater stake in governing themselves than most other groups in American society have.

Yet precisely because academics have special obligations, their failure to govern

themselves *well* is special cause for concern. If we look at how faculties actually do act, as opposed to how they ought to, the Left's defense reveals as many weaknesses as the Right's attack.

Exactly which new "narrative" about what's actually occurring on campus, one wants to ask Linda Ray Platt, should be offered the public? Surely not the one given by one of her predecessors at the AAUP, University of Texas law professor Julius Getman. His account of faculty conduct in *In the Company of Scholars* is highly unflattering, and all the more damning

because Getman loves the academic life and has a clear-eyed appreciation of its promise. "Debate at faculty meetings," he writes, "often resembles one-on-one schoolyard basketball more than it does serious academic discussion." The gravest responsibilities seem to elicit the worst behavior. "On almost all faculties," Getman says, "the most competitive, emotion-laden, acrimonious, lengthy, and pretentious debates are about faculty appointments."

The problem, in short, is not that professors are free to run their own affairs. It is that they do so badly. Self-governance ought to encourage responsibility, but in practice self-governance often becomes nongovernance. Professors use the language of academic freedom to rationalize their inability to make hard decisions, take unpopular actions, or police their own conduct.

## II.

Two features of the American research university help explain the failures of faculty self-governance. The first is its highly decentralized structure. In *The Research University in a Time of Discontent*, Steven Muller, former president of Johns Hopkins University, calls this the "holding company governance" model. All units of the university—including the colleges and individual departments—are treated, as college presidents like to say, as tubs on their own bottom. This structure is a product of the rise of the financially autonomous professional schools in law, medicine, and engineering. In the swollen and ungovernable "mega-sized" research university, each division comes to resemble the professional school: it taps into a market, provides a service, and charges what the market will bear. Under this arrangement, Muller points out, the arts and sciences are no longer at the center of the university, either financially or intellectually. In fact, nothing is.

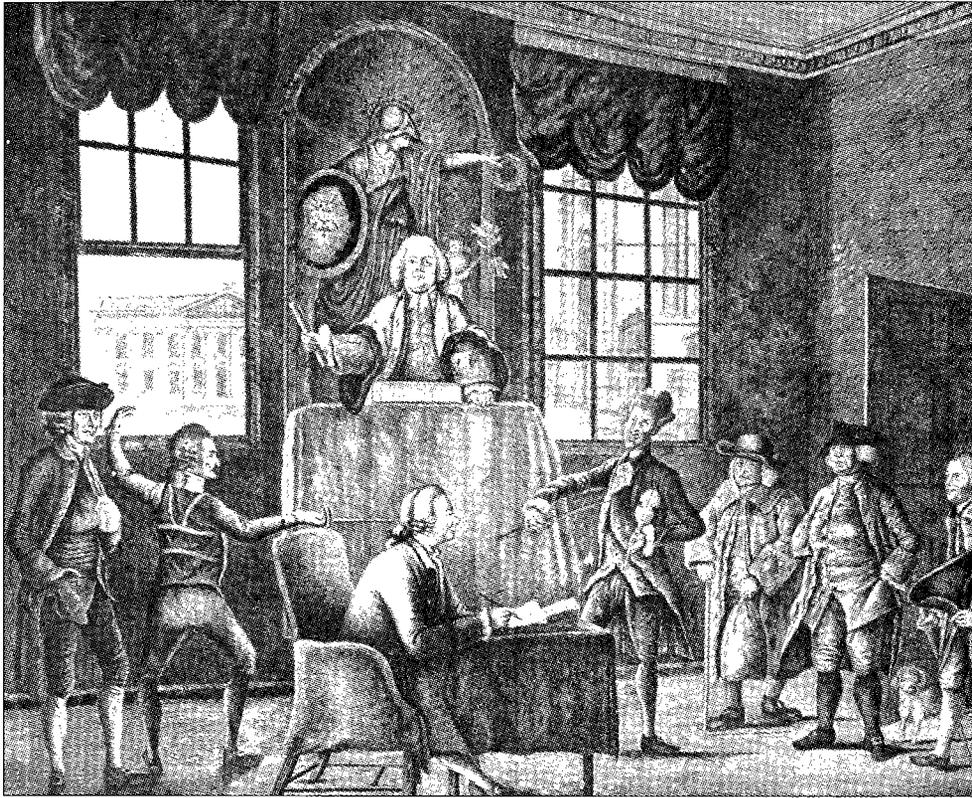
So organized, the university is not an entity with a common purpose, or at least organized around a system-defining core. It is a set of linked fiefdoms that find temporary advantage in belonging to a larger organization. Charles Anderson, a political sci-

entist at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, rightly says that it ought to be the purpose of the university "to prescribe a program for the life of the mind." But that is not the purpose of the university today. It is not too much to say that the late-20th-century university, as a corporate entity, has no purpose.

Even the fiefdoms that operate within it have limited power. Authority is concentrated not in the units of the system but in the hands of individuals. *Bureaucracy* is a word students frequently spit at the university, but as David Damrosch, a professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia University, points out in *We Scholars*, it is anything but that. A bureaucracy is rationally organized from top to bottom. In the university—in Columbia's case a \$1 billion enterprise—there is little power at the top, among the trustees and president, and even less among vice presidents, deans, and other middle managers. The very things they are expected to manage, such as the costs of hiring faculty or the rationale for the curriculum, are largely beyond their control.

Even departments, which organize the curriculum and hire the faculty, rarely operate as independent centers of authority. Authority flows all the way down to the professors, each of whom acts as an individual entrepreneur. Each chooses his own research agenda, develops his own teaching schedule, plans his own day, and decides his own level of involvement with the management of his institution.

This does not necessarily result in a lean central administration. At most universities, the administration has expanded greatly, in part to produce reports demanded by the federal government, but also because an antibureaucracy requires more, not fewer, checks and oversights from the center, particularly on students. Anarchy at the bottom is linked to autocracy at the top. Presidents try to gather power where they may. Damrosch quotes a study of the college presidency, *Leadership and Ambiguity*, which concludes that "the latent absurdity of being the executive leader of an organization that does not know what it is doing haunts the presiden-



*Bunbury of Clare's A School of Athens, after T. Orde (1773)*

tial role." Presidents fill their schedules with "frequent reminders of the fact that one *is* the president, the attention to minor things one *can* do."

Besides decentralization, the second distinctive feature of university organization is tenure—a privilege enjoyed by about two-thirds of full-time academics in the United States. The product of a long struggle to protect academic freedom, tenure in the form we know it—a seven-year apprenticeship, formal rules of candidacy, faculty origination of the case—was not solidly established until 1940. Tenure assumes an inevitable clash between the profane concerns of ordinary life (money, influence, political interests, getting by) and the sacred nature of intellectual inquiry. It operates on the theory that society needs the ideas that academics produce but cannot trust itself to allow academics to produce them.

Rather than enter into the separate debates over decentralization and tenure, it pays to consider how the two work at cross-purposes. Take a system organized as a series of turfs designed to maximize self-

interest, then add job protection for life, and the result can hardly help but be perverse. It has produced a faculty culture shaped not by anything like the "postmodernism" so vigorously championed in the university's humanities departments but by distinctly premodern norms and codes of behavior. The postmodern university has a feudal faculty culture, a system based on the principle of protecting the autonomy of independent guilds, surrounded by a consensus to do nothing lest the entire structure collapse.

There are other institutions that offer tenure. The civil service comes to mind. But civil service bureaucracies are just that: bureaucracies. There is job security, but there is also direction from the top and clear lines of authority. Other institutions combine decentralization and self-interested individualism. Mutual fund managers work for investment companies but operate within them as individual entrepreneurs. The modern corporation in general is rapidly copying this model. But such organizations have nothing resembling tenure. Only the prestigious research university

combines systems in which individuals have maximum freedom to shape their work *and* freedom from the ultimate consequence of bad decisions: unemployment.

Tenure works only when academics subordinate their self-interest to something else: the callings of their profession, the collective purposes of the university, the detailed work of actual self-governance. They never actually acted that way, to be sure, but when universities were smaller and more purposeful they at least kept such ideals in mind. Now that self-interest has become paramount, tenure becomes not a protection of academic freedom but an economic arrangement designed to limit competition—of both people and ideas.

Operating in a feudal organizational system, academics are quick to adopt a feudal code of conduct. Charles Anderson describes it succinctly: “If each leaves the other alone, then we can all do as we please.” Every college, every department, every *individual*, is a fiefdom. This is not, despite what some critics say, a “laissez faire” system. In that kind of system, individuals (or organizations) are concerned with what others do, obsessively so; they know that if a competitor offers a better, cheaper product than they do, they may go under. The operating rules of the university resemble a Mafia “honor” code more than a regime of laissez-faire: it’s best not to inquire too deeply into anyone else’s activities. If I ask the purpose of what you are doing, you will ask the same of me, and before long the rationale for the entire enterprise will begin to crumble.

### III.

Once we appreciate that the culture of the university is more feudal than capitalist, two features that draw the ire of critics—specialization and tenure—appear in a new light.

Specialization is the *bête noire* of the university’s conservative critics. This was as true in the 1950s and ’60s, when Jacques Barzun and William Arrowsmith led the charge, as it is now, when Charles Sykes ridicules obscure article titles (“Evolution of the Potholder: From Technology to Popular Art”) in scholarly journals.

It is not only conservatives who are exasperated by academic specialization. David Damrosch hearkens back to the idea of general education, “that last bastion of generalism, of which a healthy core curriculum should be the centerpiece.” During the 1920s and ’30s, the University of Chicago and Columbia University were swept by a “great books” movement that aimed to offer undergraduate students a common introduction to the world’s great ideas. It was not only students whose lives were changed by such courses. At Columbia, literary critic Lionel Trilling began writing about Freud and Marx (and all manner of other things beyond the normal purview of an English professor) because he taught them to undergraduates. “The triumph of specialization during the past several decades,” Damrosch writes, “has almost entirely eliminated such figures from the university.”

Now, he concludes, general education, much praised in theory, is avoided in practice. Today’s professors tend to see themselves more as members of their specialized discipline than of their university or even their department. The professional life of a professor of political science specializing in Indian politics, for example, has very little to do with anything that occurs on his or her campus. Such a professor writes for journals read by fellow specialists at other institutions, attends important conferences and professional meetings far from home, and seeks recognition from a community of scholars whose community is an intellectual rather than a geographical reality. Although paid by their universities, such specialists are essentially self-employed. Asked to choose between a time-consuming local service and a disciplinary obligation, they invariably choose the latter.

The triumph of specialization, the critics agree, works to the neglect of teaching. It represents the victory of graduate culture over undergraduate culture. Students (and their families) dig themselves into a dry well of tuition debt only to find themselves instructed by overworked graduate students while globe-trotting professors travel to professional conferences. And untenured assistant professors are poorly prepared for teaching. It would be an exaggeration to say that good teaching is punished in the uni-

## *The Making of the Megaversity*

*Before the 20th century, higher education was dominated by conservative colleges founded on religious principles and devoted chiefly to undergraduate instruction. In The Academic Revolution (1968), Harvard sociologists Christopher Jencks and David Riesman described its transformation.*

The rise of the university has been gradual rather than sudden. The first Ph.D. was awarded in 1861 by Yale. Cornell opened in 1868 with Andrew White as president. Charles Eliot was inaugurated as president of Harvard in 1869. Yet it was not until the 1880s that anything like a modern university really took shape in America. Perhaps the most important breakthroughs were the founding of Johns Hopkins and Clark as primarily graduate universities. Eliot's success in instituting the elective system at Harvard was also important, both in its own right and because it facilitated the assemblage of a more scholarly and specialized faculty.

The 1890s saw further progress, with the founding of Chicago, the reform of Columbia, and the tentative acceptance of graduate work as an important activity in the leading state universities. This was also the period when national learned societies and journals were founded and when knowledge was broken up into its present departmental categories ("physics," "biology," "history," "philosophy," and so forth), with the department emerging as the basic unit of academic administration. Medicine and law also became serious subjects of graduate study at this time, with Johns Hopkins leading the way in medicine and Harvard in law.

By World War I, two dozen major universities had emerged, and while the number has grown slightly since then, the changes have been slow. These universities have long been remarkably similar in what they encourage and value. They turn out Ph.D.s who, despite conspicuous exceptions, mostly have quite similar ideas about what their discipline covers, how it should be taught, and how its frontiers should be advanced. (This does not mean that there are no differences of opinion on these matters within the academic profession. It means only that when contrasted with trustees, administrators, parents, students, or the present authors, the outlook of Ph.D.s in a given discipline seems quite uniform.)

These men were not only likeminded at the outset, but they have established machinery for remaining like-minded. National and regional meetings for each academic discipline and subdiscipline are now annual affairs, national journals publish work in every specialized subject, and an informal national system of job placement and replacement has come into existence. The result is that large numbers of Ph.D.s now regard themselves almost as independent professionals like doctors or lawyers, responsible primarily to themselves and their colleagues rather than their employers, and committed to the advancement of knowledge rather than of any particular institution. . . .

These attitudes were greatly strengthened by World War II and its aftermath. Not only in the Manhattan Project but in other less glamorous ones, academic scientists helped contribute to the war effort, and for this and other reasons a dramatic increase in federal support for academic research ensued. . . . Unlike previous support for universities, these federal grants and contracts are for all practical purposes given to individual scholars or groups of scholars rather than to the institution where they happen to work. More often than not, if a man moves to a new institution his federal grants are transferred too. . . . The result has been further to enhance the status of the academician, who is now a prime fund raiser for his institution.

Since the amount of research support has grown much faster than the number of competent researchers, talented men have been in very short supply and command rapidly rising salaries. They are also increasingly free to set their own working conditions. The result has been a rapid decline in teaching loads for productive scholars, an increase in the ratio of graduate to undergraduate students at the institutions where scholars are concentrated, the gradual elimination of unscholarly undergraduates from these institutions, and the parallel elimination of unscholarly faculty.

versity, but it would not be going too far to say that when instructors devote a great deal of time and attention to preparing for classes their colleagues wonder if they aren't fleeing the demands of scholarship.

The critics also charge that specialization, by forcing institutions to offer competitive salaries and other inducements to attract specialists, drives up costs.

The imperatives of specialization flow from the priority given to research. As David W. Breneman, dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, writes in *Liberal Arts Colleges*, these forces are powerfully felt even at the nation's better liberal arts colleges, which, although they number only about 200 and account for only 260,000 enrollments (two percent of the total) have always defined a certain ideal of higher education.

At top colleges such as Williams and Amherst, teaching is still emphasized, but faculty publication at levels approximating those of the research university is expected. (To their credit, such institutions often try to reward types of publication more compatible with their teaching mission: books rather than specialized articles, literary works, even efforts that achieve what, in the eyes of university specialists, is the cardinal sin: popularity.) Such standards are required to attract the best scholarly talent. The top colleges also have to assume, moreover, that they will lose some of their outstanding junior faculty to the elite universities.

The effects of this arrangement trickle down to other institutions. Colleges just below the top 25, such as Skidmore or Franklin & Marshall, feel compelled to stay in the competition to recruit the best graduate students to their faculties. That means they have to pay for labs, leaves of absence, libraries, and other trappings of a research institution. Costs rise. (Tuition at the colleges is already in the neighborhood of \$15,000 to \$20,000.) And as Breneman notes, the likely shrinkage of the Ph.D. pool in the years ahead does not augur well for a slowdown.

Conservative critics of the university have also linked specialization to what they regard as the politicization of the academy. It is relatively easy, they point out, to trans-

late left-wing political complaints into an academic specialty. Feminist theory, gay and lesbian studies, and what is actually called subaltern studies (a form of postcolonial studies, which involves the examination of literature and everyday life in former European colonies) are now departments and programs at many universities, not just bodies of ideas. And once such programs are established, the conventions of academic life demand that no one scrutinize them too carefully.

Overall, the case against academic specialization is strong, but I for one do not fully buy into it. Yes, there are people who write meaningless, jargon-filled articles for no other purpose than to advance their careers. But the quality of work being done overall in the American university is far higher now than it was in, say, the 1950s. There may be fewer historians writing for a general audience, but there are many better works of history. Academic philosophy can generate technical treatises devoid of common sense, but it can also produce John Rawls's magisterial *Theory of Justice* (1971). My own field, sociology, no longer has a C. Wright Mills, but, to take just the subject of race, it has Christopher Jencks, William Julius Wilson, Elijah Anderson, Orlando Patterson, and Douglas Massey—not bad scholarship by anyone's standards.

An academic world with less specialization would be worse than anything that exists today. Some inkling of what it might look like is provided by Ernest Boyer in *Scholarship Reconsidered*. Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, argues for a broader conception of scholarship, embracing such things as "the scholarship of application" (applied work) and "the scholarship of teaching" (knowledge of pedagogy and communication of results) as well as the "scholarship of discovery" (specialized research).

Yet teaching is teaching and scholarship is scholarship; calling one the other sounds like one of those therapeutically inspired ways of enhancing the self-esteem of those who find themselves somewhere else than at the top. Let colleges and universities reward teaching if they want, but let them call it teaching.

One crucial aspect of “the scholarship of discovery” distinguishes it from all the ersatz forms of scholarship advocated by Boyer: it is harder to do. That does not necessarily make it good, but it does make it different. Specialized research plays a crucial role in decision making about tenure and promotion for the same reason that SAT scores play a role in college admissions; it stands there, an unambiguous reality, clearly differentiating some from others. A record of books and articles deemed worthy of publication by one’s peers may not be a perfect indicator of merit, but it is a tangible accomplishment. As long as some universities seek to distinguish the more accomplished from the rest, an emphasis on scholarly publication will be inevitable.

If the case against specialization itself is weak, the case against some of the forces driving it is very strong. What really stirs critics is not so much the pursuit of esoteric research in itself as the assumption of those who engage in it that they should be allowed to do whatever they want, whenever they want.

Alas, that argument is frequently heard, and nowhere more aggressively than among the postmodernists who have made such a comfortable home in the premodern university. Russell Jacoby’s *Dogmatic Wisdom*, for example, contains a catalogue of self-incriminating statements by leftist academics. Historian Joan W. Scott, of the Institute for Advanced Study, and English professor Judith Frank, of Amherst College, declare that their immersion in theory gives them access to knowledge that is simply beyond the comprehension of what Scott calls “marginal intellectuals,” let alone ordinary people.

A less impolitic expression of the same point of view comes from the six eminent authors of *Speaking for the Humanities*—a response to critics such as Lynne Cheney, former head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies. Unlike David Damrosch, these writers do not mourn the disappearance of broad-ranging academic intellectuals such as Lionel Trilling. To the contrary, they take the view that “belle lettrists” and advocates of the “gentlemanly

ideal” have no standing to contest the “competence of the best scholars in the humanities today,” which is “remarkable.” Humanistic thought “must be free to pursue questions as far as possible without knowing what general use or relevance the answers might prove to have,” they write, as they “assert the value not just of specialization but of professionalization also.”

The addition of that word “professionalization” is significant. In *Professing Literature*, his history of the English department, Gerald Graff argues that professionals are not those who have the best ideas but those who win temporary control over the way English is taught. We have our own institutions now, the defenders of professionalism seem to be saying, and we don’t want you, the non-professionals, to interfere with them.

Five of the six authors of *Speaking for the Humanities* were directors of academic centers for the humanities when they wrote their report. Not surprisingly, they conclude that the existence of such centers “answers most directly to negative criticisms and most fully expresses the range and importance of the humanities.” Like the academic Left, they confuse the genuine need for specialization with the spurious effort to protect the institutions and practices of faculty privilege.

Academics are deluding themselves if they think that they can have autonomy without accountability. The privileged always live at the sufferance of others. Faculty status is a privilege; the salaries may not be great (although they are not bad), but tenure alone can, in an uncertain economy, be priceless. And the sheer joy of being able to explore ideas is a privilege as rarely given as it is exercised. To suggest that no one has the right to poke into the business of such a privileged group is a remarkably insensitive slap in the face—and a stupid one at that. Consumers have a right to be furious.

And they are making themselves heard. Even as debate continues, it is clear that the high point of specialization is already in the past. (And it is important to note that only a minority of academics, mostly at the prestige institutions, undertake specialized research.)

Especially at the universities most dependent on tuition revenues, pressures for a renewed emphasis on teaching are building. Administrators have begun to sponsor centers for teaching excellence. Core curricula are making a comeback. The State University of New York at Stony Brook has taken out ads in the *New York Times* trumpeting its renewed focus on teaching. There is even talk, and even at research-oriented universities, of the need for departments to hire “public intellectuals,” academics who speak to a broader audience.

In areas where they have some leeway—for example, in filling endowed chairs standing outside departments—university presidents now tend to search for generalists, not specialists, academics whose name recognition among the general public will draw students.

It would be a shame if consumer anger,

properly addressed at the faculty’s demand for complete autonomy, were to spill over into a campaign against academic specialization. Taxpayers and consumers might, if talked to seriously, come to understand why specialized research is important. But they will never be persuaded of what is patently untrue—that the university should be organized on the principle that faculty have some special status that renders them immune from public scrutiny and criticism.

#### IV.

If consumers are angry about specialization, academic administrators worry about tenure. Their concern has a very practical edge. In 1993 Congress refused to renew higher education’s exemption from the abolition of mandatory retirement rules, raising the prospect of a faculty full of tenured and aging professors, with little or no turnover. Tenure has been abolished at some institutions and is under attack by state legislators. If the opinion pages of the academics’ trade publication, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, are any guide, even some tenured faculty have concluded that the whole system has become little more than an excuse for irresponsibly self-interested behavior.

The reform of tenure will take much longer, and will be far more difficult, than the reform of specialization. The move back toward general education and an emphasis on teaching is made possible by the fact that consumers have as much power in this realm as faculty. But tenure is kept in place, at least in the elite universities, by the fact that no self-respecting academic “star” would accept a position without it. An institution seeking to remain in



Frontispiece to the “Humours of Oxford” (1730) by G. Vandergucht, after engraving by William Hogarth

the first rank will have no choice but to offer it. What can and must be changed is the way in which tenure is awarded.

When academics choose who will join them for life, they have to ask questions about what others are doing that faculty culture normally forbids. People who rarely can be bothered to comment on what others teach or know are suddenly called on to determine whether another person will enjoy absolute job security until she dies. A jump of this magnitude is bound to leave everyone a little dizzy. Academics could respond with thoughtful self-reflection, strict adherence to their own standards, and responsibility to their institution and their vocation. Unfortunately, they don't.

Occasionally, when a candidate who has been rejected claims that he has been the victim of politics, sexism, or some other form of bias, a tenure fight spills into public view. But the larger scandal is that rejection is exceedingly rare.

Tenure decisions today are shaped by one overriding paradox. Scarce goods usually command higher prices, but as tenured slots have become more valuable, faculty members have become more willing to give them away. During the 1950s and '60s, when tenured posts were plentiful, academics were more likely to say no to candidates. Today they are more likely to say yes. At the University of Massachusetts, 96 percent of those recommended for tenure between 1990 and '93 received it, a fact brought to light when the trustees caused an uproar last summer by actually saying no to three candidates. (Saying no, in the culture of academe, does not necessarily mean losing one's job; they can come up again.) UMass is not typical. At the main campus at Amherst, 86 percent of the faculty are tenured, compared to a nationwide average of 65 percent. Still, the proportion of academics with tenure is creeping up.

Why don't the elementary laws of supply and demand apply? Part of the reason is that many of those making tenure decisions are products of the 1960s who hold values that make it almost impossible to say no.

To claim that one person merits tenure while another does not suggests that there are standards, a position many academics deny in their writings. The 1960s also taught that individuals count more than institutions. Nobody wants to ask if granting tenure to a person will serve the institution's interest. It's easier to ask simply, "Has the candidate done enough to warrant it?"

Most important of all, however, academics generally do not like the market, and tenure allows them to avoid a market in faculty talent. The seven-year apprenticeship rule brings individuals along under a paternalistic system. They are subject to frequent loyalty tests, ritual baptisms, and other rites of the academic way of life. At the end of the apprenticeship at least this much can be said about the candidate: we know her. Having spent seven years with another person does not guarantee that she will be an acceptable colleague for life, but compared to selecting someone we do not know at all, the gamble may be worth taking.

Faculty are more comfortable cultivating someone from within because the relationships thus produced are more feudalistic than capitalistic. This is not a system in which institutions bid for the best talent. Having participated in tenure decisions at three institutions over the course of more than three decades, I have heard the word *fit* much more often than the word *merit*.

True, outside opinions are sought. As few as 10 and as many as 20 scholars in the candidate's field will be asked for their views on his academic qualifications. But since academics tend to favor tenure abroad as well as at home, in most of their letters they bend over backward to find words of praise for the candidate. Surely he would be tenured at my own institution, says the expert from an Ivy League university. His reputation is worldwide, his book a work of great significance. He would easily be ranked among the very top people in his field, without question. No one believes such hyperbole, but no one is expected to. The general rule is: say something positive or say nothing at all.

There is one interesting exception to the tenure-for-all tendency: it is far more common to say no to senior “stars” being recruited (often under pressure from administrators) from other universities than to candidates from within. Outside recruitment comes about as close to a market in talent as the academic world can—which is no doubt why faculty are so suspicious of it. The rules governing academic success are the obverse of capitalist values: the more one has published, the more vulnerable one is to attack; the better one is connected, the greater the likelihood that one has enemies; the more one has succeeded in attracting grant money, the greater the anxieties of the grantless. Some departments deal with the market issue by simply refusing to hire any senior people.

One can detect inside academia the beginnings of an effort to reform, if not eliminate, tenure. A study by the American Association of Higher Education exploring the post-tenure review of faculty members and the highly (and negatively) publicized efforts by the board of Bennington College in 1994 to replace faculty who had “presumptive” tenure (long service but no formal job security) are just two examples. Tenure is, in fact, quite vulnerable. Whatever its attractions (especially to those who have it), no one should have as much power as those who hand out job security for life—and no one should have as little power as those who seek it. It is difficult to imagine that tenure as we know it can continue: at the very least, tenured faculty will find themselves having to justify to everyone else why they should have job security when no one else does.

Does all this mean that tenure should be abolished? Not necessarily. What is untenable is a system in which faculty want the power to determine who joins them but not the responsibility of passing judgment. Change that aspect of faculty

culture, and tenure will likely remain. Keep the current culture, however, and tenure will (and should) be doomed.

## V.

All institutions have cultures. Just a few years ago, it was common to speak of corporate cultures—the ways in which, say, the paternalism of IBM differed from the youthful entrepreneurialism of Apple. Anthropologists tell us that cultures come in strong and weak forms. Some societies are so deeply stamped by a particular culture that when a colonial power arrives, its culture is changed more than that of the occupied. Other cultures are so weak that the moment they come into contact with foreign ideas, they disappear.

Although corporations have more power in America than universities, the culture of the university is stronger than corporate cultures. Once the market turned against it, the paternalistic ethos of IBM did not last long. Faculty culture is, for better and for worse, far more durable. Regardless of field, irrespective of geography, independent of academic status—the mere fact of being a faculty member predisposes an individual to think and act in particular ways. Faculty culture trumps every other kind of culture: no matter what the original country, gender, or ethnicity of an academic, once someone becomes a member of a faculty, that person is irrevocably stamped as a member of his profession.

This culture’s imperviousness to change owes much to faculty’s suspicion of the market, which is the major agent of change in modern society, and to their ability to resist it through the maintenance of a feudal order. Yet feudalism did finally go under. So, one feels confident to predict, will the feudal culture of the postmodern university. The question facing the American university is not whether it will change, but how—whether professors will reform themselves or be reformed by forces beyond their control.

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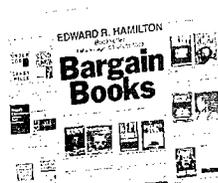
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# QUEBEC'S *Soul City*

*In last autumn's barely defeated referendum, supporters of sovereignty for Québec claimed a "distinct society" as the strongest justification for severing most ties with the rest of Canada. The author explores that difference in the character of Québec City.*

*by Clark Blaise*

**T**oday, on a bright mid-September afternoon, I'm watching dozens of cars flash down the Grande-Allée, Québec City's major boulevard of the *haute ville*, the upper town, each car with its headlights on. It's not a cortège, not the funeral of a powerful Mafioso—it's the law. In Québec, running lights are wired to the ignition; they stay on despite the bright sun and long summer. No exceptions. It's safer that way, more responsible, *mon ami*. It's like, say, Sweden—Catholic, communal Sweden.

I started coming to la Québec (the city) in 1960, a 20-year-old hitchhiking up from Pittsburgh, looking for something he'd lost. My parents were Canadian, one French, one English, and they'd raised me everywhere except for my father's French Canada. After their violent divorce, I wanted to master all that I felt he'd denied me—his language, my identity. Québec City became his surrogate. Learning its habits, I began to understand him, and, slowly, to forgive. After a while, le Québec (the province) became an addiction. I thought I could become my father, replace him as the person he could have been if he'd had my chances. I brought my young family to Montréal and we lived there a dozen years. It didn't work, of course, but something rubbed off.

Nineteen-sixty was also the most significant year in modern Québec history. The election that year marked the birth of this reasonably tolerant, democratic, secular, outward-looking (almost Scandinavian) society that keeps its headlights on in the daytime, after centuries of autocratic, obscurantist, Jansenist Catholicism. I was witness to the so-called "quiet revolution" without even knowing it. A North American society with which I had passing acquaintance—and on which I even had some claim—had transformed itself overnight, without violence. What overwhelmed me then was the energy released in every direction. It seemed stirringly French, the equal of all the



Québec's famed Chateau Frontenac

Godard and Sartre I'd been watching and reading, and it was happening to people with my name just 50 miles over the border from Eisenhower's America.

In those early years, concerts and plays were staged in open lots and the great *chansonniers* who would go on to stardom in the French-speaking world, Félix Leclerc, Jean-Pierre Ferland, and Gilles Vigneault, were singing for pittance in small bistros, coffee houses, or theaters just about every night. During the student riots in Paris in 1968, I heard the songs of Québec echoing through the cobbled streets of the Latin Quarter. I had the private satisfaction, a little smug, of knowing that the *québécois* had been there first, more completely and more modestly.

Every city has its perfect season—Paris in April, Italy and Greece in May—and for Québec City it has to be mid-September, when the angled light seems to wash the air as it passes through. The college kids have nearly all departed, leaving only Europeans off their tour boats. The days are warm, the nights cool; sweaters in the morning, tweeds at night. Like the gloomy cities of Normandy from where the landless second sons and a few adventurers of the ancien régime waved their good-byes to Europe 350 years ago, Québec appears carved from a single block of gray granite, potentially the New World's most somber city. But on a bright day in the right season, dimensions rise in the grain of wood, nubbinness on the sleekest surface; fissures etch themselves on the granite blocks, adding a dignified levity to everything the light splashes against.

It feels good to be back in Québec. My old fire to find a place for myself in

the world is gone, partially satisfied in Iowa, partially surrendered to age and reality; I can speak French and enjoy the pleasures a second identity bestows, but I can never be French, or feel French, in the way a new generation demands. I left in 1980, amid the first wave of nationalism that peaked in the following year's referendum. I thought the dream of independence had peaked then as well. But that was 15 years ago. This city now turns up new surprises. My friends at Laval University, most of them geographers, have given me names, new doors to knock on. Those years I spent trying to blend in (and always failing) have finally worked. My name gets me a hearing: that is, literally my name, my good French name, not any reputation. It's still my father, dead these many years, opening the doors.

Human geography, a speciality at Laval, is the study of the relationship between space and habitation. One author, Dean Louder, traces the shadow society in America left by old French parishes throughout the United States. Another, Luc Bureau, writes about "the geography of the night," the world of dissolved topographies and cartographic uncertainties. Shadows, memories, traces, might-have-beens: if Wolfe hadn't scaled the cliffs of Québec in 1759 and defeated Montcalm, if the Acadians hadn't been expelled to Louisiana, if Napoleon hadn't sold half the continent, if the church hadn't seized control of the French-Canadian soul—this, and comedy about it, is the stuff of Québec's wistfulness and irony, its music and art.

**W**ithin an hour of settling in my room, I'm in the office of Dr. (in geography, of course) Hugues Morrissette, the director of the St. Lawrence Development Project. I say office, but it's an unrenovated old house on the Grande-Allée serving as a government building. The furniture is pure summer cottage; the air hangs blue with everyone's smoke. The hours are long but unfixed. Québec is a personalized bureaucracy. In a former dining room, a meeting is going on in English for a group of city-councillors from Great Lakes ports. I had never before considered the intimacy of trade links between Toledo and Québec.

Hugues ducks out of one meeting in order to test, in a jocular way, my knowledge of recent Québec writers and music, the new Québec rapper, Richard Desjardins, whom he wants me to hear. He suggests my week's dinners and bars.

In an American context, one would hold Hugues's weight and cigarettes against him as a kind of lack of discipline, but in upper-town Québec there's a puckishness, even rascality, to the *pur laine* personality that acts as a filter against easy assumptions.

I may spend time on my NordicTrack trying to banish stress and paunchiness, and he probably spends it listening to jazz under a cloud of smoke. Stress and strain must be part of his job, but comfort and confidence are what come through. "I tell you, I have known many men like your dad, my friend," he laughs. "They were tough guys, eh?" A gray-haired but youngish man in a T-shirt and denim jacket comes down the stairs, and before he can exit, Hugues waves him over. As the man approaches, Hugues says to me, "Léonce is a very interesting man. Knowing him will enrich you."

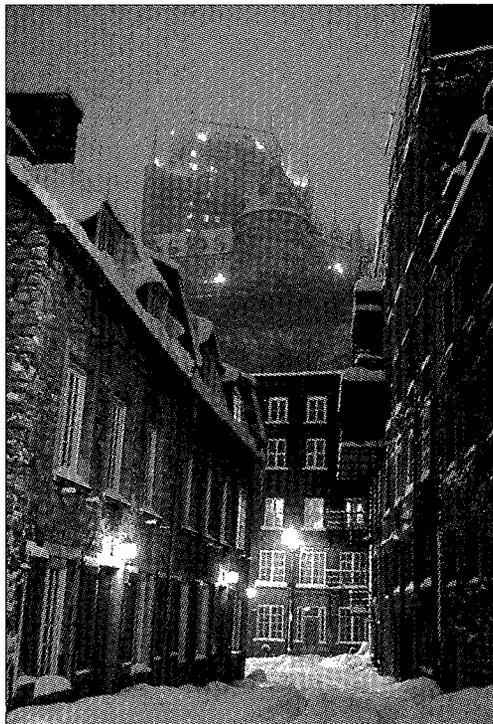
"Alors, Léonce," I ask, shaking his hand and knowing nothing about him, "where are we going?"

> CLARK BLAISE is director of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. His latest book, about his French-Canadian origins, is *I Had a Father: A Post-Modern Autobiography* (1993).

And so we exit to the Grand-Allée, past the new government high-rises and the hotel towers, and the long walk past the National Assembly building with its statue of Maurice Duplessis out front—Duplessis, the Huey Long of Québec history, the architect of its stagnant, profascist, predemocratic provincialism (startlingly revised by a new generation of Parti Québécois *independentistes* as committed Québec nationalism), whose death launched the quiet revolution—up to the old city gate and down the corkscrew of Côte de la Montagne to the *basse ville*, the lower town, and Léonce’s favorite bar.

The bourgeois *haute ville*, with its administrative, religious, and managerial fortresses—big, stony, and defensive, the old monasteries and forts and parliamentary offices—was always a stuffy place unless you had a proper pedigree, which in the past I never did. That left me the proletarian lower town, disreputable and a little dangerous back then, which Léonce—a kind of public philosopher with a geography degree—knows quite well. Now, of course, Québec has cleaned itself up. The *basse ville* is mainlining tourist dollars, gentrifying its old housing stock, pouring new funds into old hotels, converting warehouses to lofts. Even old-time, tubercular, working-class areas like Limoilou are getting gentrified; Hugues had given me tips on restaurants in what I remembered as very questionable neighborhoods.

Québec was always two distinct cities: an upper and a lower, convenient divisions for the European and Catholic mind. Row housing on the Grande-Allée is classic 19th-century brownstone on the New York model, except that the stones are pocked and gray, with long, mournful windows. Le Corbusier, the great architect, had called the Grande-Allée “the loveliest street in America,” and I too can think of none finer. But he was describing a Grande-Allée even older than that of my first impressions, before the conversion of every graystone into a hotel and every front yard into an indifferent courtyard restaurant with plastic chairs under umbrellas.



Nighttime in the basse ville

Once you enter the old city behind the wall, you lose a century or even two. When the Grande-Allée narrows and changes its name to St. Louis, comparison with anything on this continent becomes irrelevant. These blocky brick structures, three and four stories high with their outer walls plastered over and their painted metal roofs, are examples of 18th- or even 17th-century residences, built with the expectation of a fortified wall to protect them. They look inward, to courtyards hidden from the street.

By urban American standards they are buildings without a sense of their own importance, without announced fronts, as though every street including St. Louis were an obscure side street and no building dare prevail on any block. They are set tightly against a narrow sidewalk, in a way reminiscent of



Benjamin West's Death of Wolfe (1770)

country towns in France. Life goes on behind small windows with minimal gauze curtains, the smudged blur of the TV's eye announcing a presence within, six inches from the pedestrian flow.

If the upper town belonged to businessmen, priests, and politicians, the lower town was home to sailors, whores, and wanderers of no fixed country.

The cliffs separating the two towns were deemed unscalable, God's quarantine, an *idée reçue* that lulled the French general Montcalm into complacency and challenged the British general, James Wolfe, to climb it one mid-September night (that mid-September light makes heroes of us all) in 1759 and, by morning, on the Plains of Abraham, to end French rule in Canada for all time.

And to create, with one fatal bullet to Montcalm's gentlemanly breast, a situation. Doubtless, the British gave little thought to the future of the rump, popish civilization they had conquered. It would disappear in a generation or two, follow its priests west or south or back to France. The British embarked on their ethnic cleansing of the Maritime Provinces, creating the Cajun culture of Louisiana, but the Québec population clung to its land and towns. Despite the English dominance of Montréal and even of Québec for most of its history, the French-Canadians continued to breed, to nourish their roots, to keep a low, tenacious profile.

*Québecuicité*—what I'll call Québecness—is a kind of collective seduction. Women are beautiful (and famously, hold your gaze); men are puckish, phrasing their thoughts with wit and irony. Charm is a self-conscious commodity in Québec. Rhetoric—that legacy of legal and religious study—is cultivated and respected here, much as it is in African American politics. It's all on display at Léonce's favorite bar in the Hotel Belley, located on a slim slice of St. Paul where it meets the Boulevard Charest in the lower town.

For Léonce, Belley is a place where everyone gathers, yet it doesn't seem crowded. He knows someone at each table, an artist, a writer, a journalist, an actor, a public philosopher like himself, attached to the government but also free floating. He phones his ex-wife, who might want to join us, and who often stops by, but she isn't in. There's nothing odd here that isn't replicated elsewhere, yet the texture is somehow more benign, more at ease, than that of any American city I know. The mix of art and government, of working class and artists, the complicated pasts they all seem to share, and the sense I have of my acceptance in various circles: all of that would mark this as an exceptional bar. One sentence describes it all: *québécois* are a tribe.

**T**hat first evening, Léonce and I walked back to the upper city on Rue de la Canoterie. "Take your time on this street," he said, not because of steepness but for the beauty. Even the deep-dyed *québécois* Léonce paused to take it all in: a big Italian cruise ship in the harbor, the row of mewlike housing behind St. Paul Street, the drying clothes flapping over an alleyway. At the top of the street, the ancient buildings loom like monstrous boulders. These are pre-Louis Sullivan, pre-steel, pre-plate glass structures.

Windows are tiny, walls are thick; six months of the year night is long and the light is frail.

When I first started coming to Québec, I could feel centuries of stored-up penury and denial in those stones. The visual clichés of old Québec were still in evidence: black-hatted *curés*, eyes cast downward, fingers laced against their bellies, ran their mysterious errands, barely nodding at the greetings of their parishioners. Uniformed convent girls wound their way down the streets, behind the nuns. I used to sit and read in the garden of the Ursuline convent, one of the quiet, undisturbed, urban places in the world. Now, those populations, that piety, are gone.

Hotels and restaurants have been carved from former residences. The churches have become quiet museums. Laval University has moved to the suburbs. In the rooms where I once stayed, the walls were hung with crosses and sacred hearts and portraits of the suffering Jesus; now the paintings are of Québec landscapes and smiling, seductive women. Today, the church is a threatened institution, the supply of nuns and priests, which had seemed endless, is now augmented by importation from the Third World.

Québec is the center of independence, the articulator of a call to action. The enemy of Québec, in the eyes of ardent nationalists, is not Toronto, or New York, or even Ottawa; it is Montréal. Montréal is the modern metropolis, the center of immigration, English dominance, crime and squalor. Québec is dangerously drawn (it seems to me) to the politicization of its purity, the elevation of its charm and artificially maintained exquisiteness to a kind of dangerous, nationalist fantasy agenda of governance.

I was taken to the Belley bar on another day by a geography post-doc at Laval, out to show me all the neighborhoods of Québec. To Louis, Belley is a “Proustian” bar, where you can drink all day, all weekend, without getting drunk. It’s a place to experience an essential bar-ness, with a red wine in hand, slowly sipped. Everything pleases, nothing compels. One part of the hotel is chopped into the cliff-face; bare rocks line the stairwell. He calls its rooms Proustian rooms, where you can make love all weekend without actually having sex. Americans, he fears, might not understand.

Québec City played a central role in Louis’s life, some 20 years after it had flared so brightly in mine. His first visit to Québec convinced him that he was not a “French-Canadian” like his father, or like the philosopher-king Pierre-Elliott Trudeau, or the politician from his hometown who has become the current prime minister of Canada, Jean Chrétien. Those guys were embodiments of the Montréal and Ottawa reality, where all the grit and grime of the continent—industrialization, immigration, compromise with the English, even having to speak English in order to survive and prosper—is an essential part of the bargain. Louis’s English is excellent; he’s married to an American and has taught in Indiana. Like many a *québécois*, he loves the United States and loves English; the difference is one of choice. He chooses—English doesn’t use or choose him.

The Proustian point is its pointlessness. Non-*québécois* drink to get drunk, do other things in order to win. Québec is more elastic, less structured. It’s the Latin American streak, evident in its Argentine-style office hours, and in lunches and dinners that stretch into drowsiness. In many ways, that’s the best thing one can say about Québec: it is to be savored for its own sake, because it has survived, because it lost its only war, because it’s still here.

“It’s a city that talks,” said Remy d’Anjou, director of the Medieval Festival,

over a long, Falstaffian lunch a couple of days later at his favorite *basse ville* restaurant. "Even the stones have stories."

He's a big man, for 20 years the Bonhomme de Neige of Carnival, Québec's Mardi Gras celebration, which takes place in midwinter ice and snow. Now he's created something for the summer, a biennial celebration of something Québec never was but should have been—a medieval city. A million visitors are expected in August, when Québec is turned over to period musicians, theater, costumes, armaments, food and art, when every aspect of the city steps back 300 or 400 years from even its ancient origins, to celebrate the European connection.

**W**hen you leave the company of a showman such as Remy d'Anjou, your eyes are freshly aware of the ruined walls of the lower town, the historic plaques attached to the most modest buildings. We'd been eating on rue du Sault-au-Matelot, half a block from the back wall of the old Québec fort where the American upstart, Benedict Arnold, had spent the winter of 1775 trying to do to the British what Wolfe had done to the French. On the last day of the year, after severe losses from cold and disease, Arnold lifted his siege and went upriver, sacking the lesser fort of Montréal and going back to New York to receive his expected tribute from George Washington and a grateful Congress. That never happened, and American history knows the result. Even the stones have stories to tell.

The big difference between the Québec of my youth and that of today is the revitalization of the lower city. In many ways, it's inevitable, and healthy. The economic balance between governmental and tourist services, which together drive the economy of the upper town, appears to me to have gone a little off-kilter, forcing the upper town to live off its tourist dollars. The museumlike, immaculate quality of the *haute ville* can also be an inhibiting factor. Entrepreneurial energy is flowing to the lower prices and available space of the *basse ville*, and the tourists are following, not leading.

Very little of the continent's grit and grime or its social conflicts touches Québec. Street crime, assaults, rape, and discrimination are practically unknown. Within the tribe of *québécois*, relations are open, equal and tolerant. Louis took me through the St.-Jean-Baptiste quarter, where Québec's gays and artists tend to cluster, and which features the best bookstores, fine bars, and restaurants—new services for new populations.

Sometimes the casual equality, the tolerance, the Europeanness of Québec even surprises (and charms) a frequent visitor. On the fourth day of my visit I was using the men's room in one of Laval's academic buildings when, without warning or the usual rattling of mops, a young woman of student age entered. She methodically filled the towel racks, the toilet paper dispensers, cleaned, swabbed, and polished the porcelain, as a steady stream of young men entered and used the facilities. No backing off, no embarrassment, no problem. In Québec, intimacy is common, but privacy is never invaded.

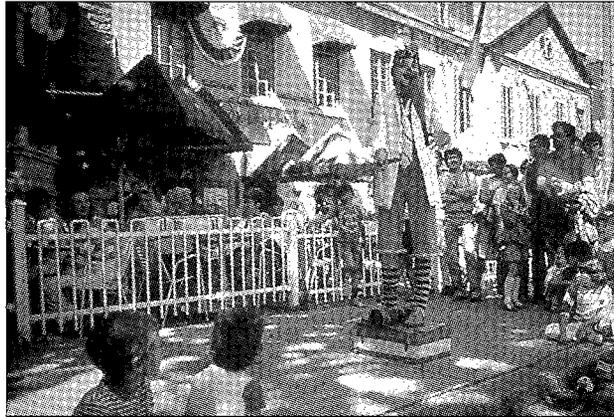
Like my Laval friends (it's no accident), I was a geographer in college, drawn to the suspicion that something larger—call it geography, even God—influences our collective destiny. No place in America feeds that speculation more richly than Québec City, maritime Europe's first port of call, American shipping's last farewell. Québec is North America's most European city, an old imperial capital reduced to provincial status but still dreaming national dreams. The recent defeated referendum that nonetheless revealed francophone Québec's democratic desire to separate from Canada can be read in many

ways, from sincere to calculating, but everyone would agree that it means a determination to implant Québec's special status, unique identity, and singular history and achievement on the Canadian consciousness. Québec is different, but it is not holy. The danger is that too long a dismissal of the first claim results in the vindication of the second. Then, there is no turning back. Québec right now is on the edge; I hope (and predict) that Québec's future will be a continuation of, not a break with, its history.

Québec's location, so remote on the chilly longitudes of North America, confers centrality on the watery latitudes between Europe and Chicago, Rotterdam and Duluth. Take a string and loop it from Duluth, the westernmost port opened up by the St. Lawrence Seaway, across Lake Superior and down to Chicago, then back to Flint and Saginaw and Detroit, down to Toledo and Sandusky and Cleveland, to Buffalo and Toronto and Montréal, and end it at Québec. Then stretch it across the Atlantic to the eastern port of Rotterdam. Québec is no longer so remote. Whatever its political status, Québec's economic future is tied to shipping and to tourism, to being the natural commercial and cultural link between Great Lakes America and the European Union.

Québec means "where the waters narrow," thanks to the presence of Île d'Orléans, which squeezes the widening river into two narrow channels. One can stand on the *terrasse* behind the landmark Chateau Frontenac Hotel, look downriver, and see the past and future of Québec mingle. Nothing passes upstream to Montréal, the seaway, and the Great Lakes, or downstream to Le Havre and Rotterdam, without Québec's knowledge, approval, and margin of profit.

Québec is the total historical, social, cultural, and political package. If Québec City were uninhabited, a monument to vanished imperial vanity like India's Fatehpur-Sikri, or the Incas' Cuzco, it would still be a treasure. But by remaining a living culture, surviving numerical odds that have swamped nearly every other non-English civilization north of the Rio Grande, it is a miracle. It's that combination of convenient modernity and stubborn retentiveness that accounts for all that's attractive in Québec culture, all that's touristic, and all that's politically problematic today and for the foreseeable future.



*A juggler entertains the café crowd on Québec's Rue St. Joseph.*

## CURRENT BOOKS

# *A Millennium on the Margins*

BURY ME STANDING:

*The Gypsies and Their Journey*

By Isabel Fonseca. Knopf. 322 pp. \$25

by William McPherson

The experience is familiar to any traveler in Eastern Europe, and increasingly in Western Europe as well. Darting from nowhere, it seems, and keening plaintively, a small, colorfully dressed woman in plaited hair and flaring skirt, a smudged, tightly swaddled baby cradled in her arms and with a couple of children dancing by her side, paws at the visitor's sleeve. The visitor, of course—subtly or not so subtly, but certainly advisedly—puts his hand firmly on his wallet and walks a little more briskly on. Or, on the periphery of one of the expensive hotels catering to the foreign visitor, a nattily dressed young man approaches, an engaging smile on his face: "Change money? Change money?" Many Western visitors to the capitals of Eastern Europe get seduced once by the surprisingly attractive exchange rate and the smile, mocking in retrospect. Few do so twice.

The begging mother, the money-changer, the thief (as well as the admired violinist) make up today's Gypsy stereotypes, caricatures but real nonetheless. More often than not, the stereotypes are the only Gypsies the visitor is aware of meeting—though in fact most of the resident beggars and black-marketeters are not Gypsies at all but unabashed nationals of their countries of origin who would vehemently resent the label "Gypsy." In addition to being "fabled, feared, romanticized and reviled" for their otherness, as the jacket of Isabel Fonseca's very good and very unsentimental book proclaims, the Gypsies are "perhaps the least understood people on earth," a lamentable condition to which Fonseca goes some way toward ameliorating.

Hers was not an easy book to write. Gypsy communities are famously difficult for outsiders to enter, yet Fonseca—a sophisticated young woman educated at Columbia and Oxford, a former assistant editor at the *Times Literary Supplement*—managed to spend most of one summer living and becoming friends with an extended family in the grotesquely named Kinostudio (Movieland) quarter on the edge of Tiranë, Albania. There were none of the amenities of running water and privacy taken for granted in the West. There were precious few amenities at all. The anarchic world of the Gypsies—or Rom, as many of them prefer to be called today—is, in fact, alien and virtually inaccessible to their more settled fellow Central and Eastern Europeans. That world is doubly alien to most visitors from the West, who regard it either with fear and suspicion or through the aura imparted by such romantic fables as *Golden Earrings*, the Marlene Dietrich film of the late 1940s. It is a tribute to the author's powers of empathy and persuasion that she marched right in and managed to become friends with and be trusted by Rom not only in Albania but in Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech and Slovak republics, Hungary, Poland, and even Germany.

Even so, there were limits to this trust. As Fonseca makes clear, distrust of the non-Gypsy, or *gadje*, is one of the group's more deeply embedded traits. After a thousand years in residence, and numbering now some 12 million, the Gypsies remain the largest minority in Eastern and Central Europe, as well as the one minority safely despised by all others, by educated and uneducated, by



minorities and majorities alike: the single universally accepted scapegoat in the fetid brew of violence and nationalism that has erupted to varying degrees throughout the region in the wake of communism's demise.

Not that the Gypsies were generally admired before. As early as 1686, they were forbidden trade or shelter in Brandenburg. By 1711, they could be shot for resisting arrest in Saxony. Three years later, they could be executed without trial in Mainz. By 1725, all male Gypsies over the age of 18 could be hanged without trial in Prussia. Nine years later, the age had been lowered to 14 in some provinces. In the principalities of Wallachia and Moldova, Gypsies were kept as slaves until 1856. The terrible story goes on until, by February 1943, the first transports carrying German Gypsies had arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where eventually half a million perished in what the Rom term "the Devouring."

**T**he travails do not stop there. Since 1990 in Romania and elsewhere, Gypsy houses have been burned with impunity while the police stood by; Gypsies have been murdered, wrongfully accused and imprisoned, or blamed for the crimes of others. Many rushed to Germany because it was the richest

country most easily within reach, only to face further harassment and misery before being deported to Romania, where the "Gypsy problem" in this difficult period of social transition is perceived as acute. Many Romanians say, and many more firmly believe, that had the wartime dictator and Nazi collaborator Marshal Antonescu survived another year, there would be no "Gypsy problem" in Romania today; they would all have been deported to camps across the Dniester River and thence to Auschwitz, like the Jews.

**U**nlike the Jews, however, the Rom retain no homeland in their imaginations, and until recently no written language and therefore no history, no literature, no institutional memory beyond the memory of the oldest living member of the community. Although their ancestors probably migrated from India a millennium ago—their language is related to Sanskrit and Hindi—there exists for them no promised land, either in an Edenic past or a hopeful future. Without a known past, the idea of a future doesn't extend much beyond tomorrow. Today's Rom live, by necessity and by habit, in the parlous present, taking on to a degree the religion and customs of whatever country they find themselves in while remaining determinedly unassimi-

lated and seemingly immune to force or persuasion. And their present, which Fonseca so ably describes in her part-historical, part-scholarly, and part-journalistic narrative, is thus far a miserable journey from nowhere to nowhere, from pariah-hood here to pariah-hood there and back again.

**W**hy? What can account for such a history of horrors? The Gypsies are visible, for one thing. And visibly different—like the Amish but with far more problematic values. They are generally darker in complexion than Europeans. They speak among themselves a little-understood language. They are sometimes menacing. Gypsy behavior is normally (and, from the outsider's point of view, often correctly) perceived as anti-social, criminal. No longer nomadic, they do not appear to be quite settled either, and even the grandest of the new Gypsy palaces have an air of impermanence about them, as if they were not real houses but a kind of longer-term bivouac with the campfire burning in the courtyard.

The more flagrant excesses of some of their brethren—the 1992 kidnapping in Romania of a famous Gypsy sociologist to face a *kris*, a trial outside Romanian law, for example—and some of their putative leaders, the so-called Gypsy kings, are not easily kept from public notice or public ridicule. The self-proclaimed King Cioba in Romania, who never learned to read or write but holds a doctorate from Texas America University, wears more gold at a sitting (some of it in his teeth) than the queen of England, as does his cousin and rival, the Emperor Iulian. Cioba was the first in Sibiu to own a television, to drive a Mercedes. He travels, he reigns, but he does not provide any real political leadership (something rare in Gypsy society). His people appear to their more traditional neighbors to be in a sense free: as unfettered and evanescent as their exquisite music, defiantly unassimilated

and a bit envied for that and for the wealth they are widely believed to hold and which some few of them in fact do hold. The source of their riches is often unclear—as is the source of almost all the new fortunes in the postcommunist world, where the greatest thieves are not impoverished Gypsies but those either in or associated with the former *nomenclatura* and the present governments. The Gypsies, however, like to display their wealth, not pile it up discreetly in numbered accounts abroad. It is easier to make such people scapegoats for the ills of a society than, say, the former minister of defense or the minister of finance.

**B***ury Me Standing* includes an annotated bibliography but unfortunately lacks source notes, and the index is inadequate. Some of the population statistics, notoriously hard to come by on this subject, may be questioned, and it is possible to find minor errors here and there. (The road from Bucharest to Bulgaria does not pass near Bolintin Deal, to cite an example, and the opposition newspaper *Romania Libera* has not yet been “subverted by tenacious nationalist political forces.”) Nonetheless, Isabel Fonseca has written an indispensable, clear-eyed book, more descriptive than prescriptive, on the Rom and their terrible journey, both brilliantly rendered. It may not be so hard to explain why the Rom have become pariahs and scapegoats; it is harder to know what to do about it, and Fonseca makes no recommendations. Or perhaps the recommendation is implicit in Vaclav Havel's remark, which she quotes: “The Gypsies are a litmus test not of democracy but of a civil society.” In its treatment of the Gypsies, the world has not yet passed that test.

> WILLIAM MCPHERSON, a former Wilson Center Guest Scholar, is a novelist and journalist who is now writing a book about Romania.

# A Proverb Among All Nations

ANCIENT ZIONISM

*The Biblical Origins of the National Idea.*

By Avi Erlich. The Free Press. 277 pp. \$23

by Andrew J. Bacevich

The fervor of true nationalism finds few defenders today. Among the West's self-consciously cosmopolitan elites, the very concept of nationalism, once deemed perfectly respectable, has been sharply devalued since World War II. In fin de siècle America, the term *nationalistic* gets applied to the sort of people who plant billboards on the outskirts of small towns denouncing the United Nations or calling for a constitutional amendment against flagburning. In short, those understood to be part of the wacko fringe.

Nor is the problem confined to our own wackos. A truism of the present day—affirmed of late in the Balkans—is that the vestiges of nationalism are the bane of international politics: the source of perennial mischief, the inspiration for bloody rebellions and pointless wars, the cause of untold suffering.

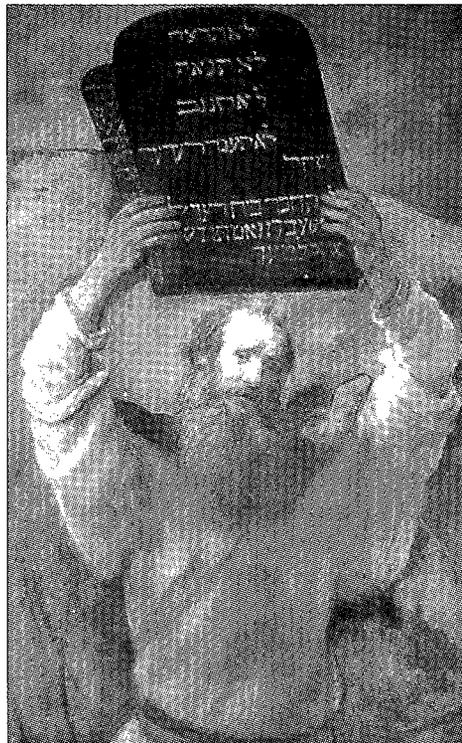
For all these reasons, received wisdom now considers the eradication of nationalism the chief prerequisite to ending the compulsive political maneuvering and grotesque militarism that have made the present century such a disaster. Diversity, tolerance, pluralism, and cooperation are the designated principles for organizing the politics of the future. The path to world harmony will be through institutions and instruments of power that are *multilateral, multinational, multiethnic, multicultural*.

The singular achievement of *Ancient Zionism* is to cast doubt on this received wisdom. In tracing the origins of the Zionist idea among the ancient Hebrews, Erlich, a literature professor turned neurologist, enlarges our understanding of nationalism, particularly its cultural and moral dimensions.

For Erlich, nationalism is not merely chauvinism touched up to lend it a semblance of legitimacy. Rather, he distinguishes authentic nationalism—what he calls “intellectual nationalism”—from a number

of counterfeits, both ancient and modern. Instead of being based on nature worship, simple possession, or imperial conquest, intellectual nationalism is based on the achieved unity of a particular territory with a particular idea of civilization.

Erlich traces this concept back to the historical experience of Abraham and his descendants, as recorded in the Authorized Version of the King James translation of the



Old Testament. His reading of that text—as essential to Western civilization as it is terse, elliptical, and poetic—is subtle and imaginative. On occasion, Erlich sees distinct shapes where others may see only shadows. But, taken as a whole, his argument is impressively solid.

Abraham himself is the principal hero of the story, praised for two

achievements of vast historical importance. The first was monotheism: the assertion of a "radical distinction between an everlasting creator and the mortals of His creation." Acknowledging the existence of a God who both precedes and transcends creation liberated the ancient Hebrews from idolatry, "mindless magic," and "the pretense that in death they might become gods." This rejection of "insensate materialism" was of decisive cultural significance. However fitful, the Hebrews' abandonment of false gods and human sacrifice (in Erlich's view, biblical shorthand for barbarism in general) became the cornerstone of a new civilization based on the values of "literacy, intellect, law, ritual, and poetry."

Abraham's second great achievement was the concept of "the Land"—the imbuing of a specific place with a specific cultural meaning. Promised by God to Abraham's descendants, Canaan became more than simply an abode. It became Zion, a symbol "chosen by God to represent the idea of God." Both dwelling place and unifying idea, Zion signified the covenant between God and the Hebrew people. As such, it also signified the introspective and imaginative culture to which that people aspired.

That the Hebrews often failed to live up to that high aspiration is well known to anyone familiar with the Scriptures—a point reaffirmed by Erlich's recounting of their ordeals. Yet his purpose is not to judge success or failure; it is to evoke the richness of the original Zionist ideal.

Properly understood, that ideal was, and is, "explicitly anti-imperialist." By investing the Land with cultural significance, Abraham recast the very definition of greatness. He rendered obsolete the "literal-minded materialism" that regards territorial expansion as the sole measure of greatness. "Once the Hebrews grasped the intellectual use of land," writes Erlich, "they understood the idea of empire as a destroyer of intellect."

Thus, in its earliest Zionist formula-

tion, nationalism neither inspires nor legitimizes conquest. The boundaries of a nation founded on true Zionist principles do not cramp or confine. Rather, they provide the security and protection that "enlightened nations" need in order to "build civilizations rather than empires."

Having developed his argument, Erlich does not shrink from applying it to the modern world. His discussion of the prospects for peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, especially the Palestinians, is both principled and provocative. The reader need not agree with Erlich's position on this hotly disputed issue to find it a stimulus to thought.

Moreover, Erlich's argument has applications beyond the specific situation in the Middle East. His larger point is that, far from being the enemy of enlightenment, nationalism in its benign variants has fostered the conditions necessary for the creation of enlightened values. Viewed in the context of monotheistic religion and its transcendent moral imperatives, ancient Zionism made an essential contribution to humanity's precarious escape from barbarism.

Of course, the thoroughly secularized proponents of what today passes for advanced thinking are hell-bent on jettisoning that context. They view it as antiquated and insufficiently respectful of the autonomy of the individual. Yet to replace the absolute sovereignty of God with the absolute sovereignty of the individual may recreate a world in which human aspirations reach no higher than conquest, luxury, and tyranny. Provocative in the best sense, Erlich's book asks whether contemporary "enlightenment" offers hope for civilization, or whether it presages a return to the primitive state from which Abraham in his shrewd bargain with God once purchased humanity's release.

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# *The First Angry White Man*

*THE POLITICS OF RAGE:*

*George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism,  
and the Transformation of American Politics.*

By Dan T. Carter. Simon & Schuster. 572 pp. \$30

by Robert Dallek

In time (to paraphrase Emerson), every scoundrel becomes a hero—or at least a sympathetic figure. George Wallace, five-term governor of Alabama and four-time presidential candidate, is a case in point. As Carter, a professor of history at Emory University, admits in this fine biography, Wallace has gained historical redemption of sorts. Thirty years after he preached “Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!”, Wallace has won grudging respect as the prophet of the antigovernment, antiliberal politics of the 1980s and ’90s.

Wallace’s redemption also rests on the assassination attempt that occurred during his 1972 presidential campaign. By leaving him permanently disabled—indeed, consigned to a life of unrelenting misery—this blow encouraged public forgiveness of the mean-spirited words and actions that had animated his political career.

Wallace aided the cause by begging the pardon of those he had once attacked: African Americans and white southern moderates who had urged accommodation to the changes wrought by the civil rights movement. Many of these people have been willing to forgive, if not entirely forget. Others, such as Frank Johnson, a white federal district judge who attempted to enforce the law, cannot put aside the personal injuries he and his family suffered at the hands of Wallace, an old college friend. “I sent him a message,” Johnson told Carter, “that if he wanted forgiveness, he’d have to get it from the Lord.”

About the broader impact of Wallace on American politics, Carter leaves no doubt that this was a man who “recognized the political capital to be made in a society shaken by social upheaval and economic uncertainty.” The key question, in evaluat-



ing Wallace's political legacy, is whether the concerns and passions he exploited were in any way legitimate.

Foremost among these concerns, of course, is race. In this crucial area, Carter is unforgiving: "As the conservative revolution reached high tide, it was no accident that the groups singled out for relentless abuse and condemnation were welfare mothers and aliens, groups that are both powerless and, by virtue of color and nationality, outsiders. The politics of rage that George Wallace had made his own had moved to center stage."

Leaving aside the fact that "aliens," or immigrants, have only recently come under conservative attack, this is a difficult claim to refute. As Carter makes clear, Wallace was an up-by-the-bootstraps character whose driving political ambition was unimpeded by legal and moral principle, never mind the suffering of the disadvantaged.

Starting out as a moderate who refused to play the race card, Wallace suffered a crushing defeat in 1958—after which he embarked upon a hugely successful political career replete with racial abuse. His vow to resist "illegal" federal court orders by "standing in the schoolhouse door" won him election to the Alabama State House in 1962. Describing this dramatic change of course, he told a reporter: "I started off talking about schools and highways and prisons and taxes—and I couldn't make them listen. Then I began talking about niggers—and they stomped the floor."

For the bloodshed of the civil rights era, Wallace refused to blame his fellow segregationists. On the contrary, he blamed the federal government, which he reviled for trampling on local rights. But that doesn't make Wallace an apostle of nonviolence. On the contrary, Carter quotes his 1963 remark that "what this country needs is a few first-class funerals, and some political funerals, too." Conceding that this "off-hand comment was made in the heat of rhetorical combat," Carter nonetheless sees it as "a horrific monument to George Wallace's insensitivity to the implications of his words and deeds."

As the 1960s wore on, Wallace ham-

mered away on other, ostensibly nonracial themes: notably, traditional values and the indifference of the federal government to the concerns of ordinary Americans—the group Richard Nixon called "the Silent Majority." Today, when these themes are routinely sounded across the political spectrum, their relationship to the race issue remains cloudy.

Does this biography clear up the clouds? Not really. In some passages, such as the one quoted earlier, Carter seems to regard "the new conservatism" as nothing more than an elaborately coded white backlash. Yet elsewhere he grants more legitimacy to another dimension of Wallace's legacy: "The genius of George Wallace lay in his ability to link traditional conservatism to an earthy language that voiced powerful cultural beliefs and symbols with a much broader appeal to millions of Americans: the sanctity of the traditional family, the centrality of overt religious beliefs, the importance of hard work and self-restraint, the celebration of the autonomy of the local community."

In 1965, when Wallace met with Lyndon Johnson at the White House to discuss voting rights for blacks, LBJ asked him: "What do you want left after you when you die? Do you want a . . . marble monument that reads, 'George Wallace—He Built'? . . . Or do you want a little piece of scrawny pine board lying across that harsh, caliche soil, that reads, 'George Wallace—He Hated'?"

For the 24 years of his active political career, Wallace chose the latter. Whatever his regrets at having chosen so unwisely, total absolution seems unlikely. Carter's biography will stand as the principal Wallace study for a long time: it will provide a forceful reminder of Wallace's political opportunism and disservice not only to African Americans struggling to attain equality in the 1960s but to an entire nation all too often roiled by racial divisions.

>ROBERT DALLEK is professor of history at the University of California at Los Angeles and the author of several books, including *Hail to the Chief: The Making and Unmaking of American Presidents*, to be published by Hyperion in September 1996.

# Contemporary Affairs

## VOICE AND EQUALITY:

### *Civic Voluntarism in American Politics.*

By Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady.

Harvard Univ. Press. 662 pp. \$39.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper

Is American citizenship in crisis? Yes, say most pundits, not to mention most scholars of contemporary political life. A more nuanced reply appears in this comprehensive study, based on a massive survey of more than 15,000 Americans.

Having conducted their investigation at the end of the 1980s, a decade fraught with fractious single-issue politics and virulent partisan combat, political scientists Verba, Schlozman, and Brady report evidence that somewhat contradicts the stereotype of mounting public cynicism toward political institutions. Indeed, they find that voluntary participation is prevalent; that political activity aims (as much as possible) at the "common good"; and that the decline of voting is not matched by an erosion of more active forms of engagement, such as contacting officials on policy matters and giving money to campaigns.

Admittedly, these findings support the commonplace observation that political parties are getting weaker, interest groups stronger. Yet the authors make the more interesting point that political parties and interest groups are also changing. As they note, "Nationalization and professionalization have redefined the role of the citizen activist as, increasingly, a writer of checks and letters."

Verba and his colleagues find this change troubling. The reduction of civic voluntarism to insubstantial "check book" politics neither cultivates social responsibility nor leaves "activists feeling satisfied." It also gives disproportionate influence to those bankrolling the new pressure groups. Back in the 1960s, California Assembly Speaker Jesse Unruh remarked that "money is the mother's milk of politics." With the decline of other forms of political participation (such as community-based organizations) comes the prospect of even less solid nourishment for racial minorities and other economically disadvantaged groups. Such "representation distortion" means greater activism among the haves,

greater apathy among the have-nots.

Thus, *Voice and Equality* presents a challenging paradox. On the one hand, the discourse of class is becoming less salient—in a political regime that has never been heavily imbued with the rhetoric of economic inequality. On the other, the state of political participation in America is now such that "class matters profoundly."

About the causes and consequences of this paradox, the reader is left to speculate. One key to understanding the puzzle might be the decline of progressivism. Born of a moral crusade against economic and political injustice at the turn of the century, progressivism had by the 1970s degenerated into a politics of entitlement that corroded political associations and collective responsibility. In the wake of this "rights revolution," religious institutions have become more pivotal in representing the rank and file's moral concerns.

Yet as *Voice and Equality* reveals, religiosity no longer animates progressive principles. Rather, the authors note, "the center of gravity of the religious agenda in politics currently is a conservative concern with social issues, with a particular focus on the advocacy of pro-life views on abortion." However important, this exclusive focus on abortion draws religiously oriented activists away from other, equally grave issues. As concerned as Americans are about abortion, they are just as worried about the moral decay they perceive in their children's schools, their places of work, and their governing institutions. When it comes to representing and addressing these abiding concerns, neither rights-based groups nor religious associations provide an adequate substitute for genuine civic attachment—what Tocqueville called "the art of *political* association."

—Sidney M. Milkis

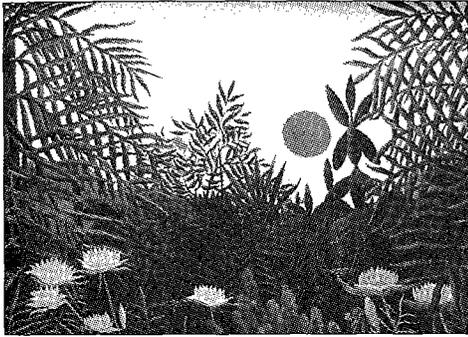
## UNCOMMON GROUND:

### *Toward Reinventing Nature.*

Edited by William Cronon.

Norton. 561 pp. \$29.95

*Pristine, balanced, wild.* These are some of the terms we apply to the natural world. Yet there is nothing *natural* about our use of such terms, according to the 14 essays col-



lected in this volume. Both Cronon, an historian at the University of Wisconsin, and his contributors assert that our ideas about nature are “culturally constructed.”

Several essays are illuminating forays into what might be called “construction sites”—the Amazon rain forest, Sea World, Central Park—where popular ideas about nature are formed. Cronon, Candace Slater, and other contributors point out that the notion of an Edenic natural world, unsullied by human presence, is a myth that fosters unrealistic environmental policies.

Yet these strong points are undermined by the tendency of many contributors to treat *nature* as a mere linguistic bauble whose meaning can be constructed—and deconstructed—at will. More useful than some of these essays would have been a serious discussion of the new, and presumably more accurate, “constructions” of nature now being developed by science.

—Steven Lagerfeld

#### **AN UNQUIET MIND:**

##### *A Memoir of Moods and Madness.*

By Kay Redfield Jamison.

Knopf. 224 pp. \$22

Memoir is deceptive. On the surface, it appears to be the easiest of genres. No research, no footnotes, no argument. Just write down what happened. But in the depths, where the motley ingredients of a life bubble together, memoir becomes a witch's brew difficult to stir.

In this memoir, Jamison, a distinguished psychiatrist specializing in manic-depressive illness, peers into the cauldron of her own prolonged struggle with the disease. “It has been a fascinating, albeit deadly, enemy and companion,” she writes. “I have found it to be seductively complicated, a distillation both of what is finest in our natures, and of what is most dangerous.”

Jamison confesses to the difficulty of speaking as both patient and doctor. Unfortunately, this does not prevent her from interrupting the flow of her narrative to engage in professional shoptalk or (worse) to share the details of her curriculum vitae. Nevertheless, this is a brave book. At its best, it makes vivid not only the pain of manic-depressive illness but also—most strikingly—its pleasure:

“How could one, should one, recapture . . . the gliding through starfields and dancing along the rings of Saturn, the zany manic enthusiasms? How can one ever bring back the long summer days of passion, the remembrance of lilacs, ecstasy, and gin fizzes that spilled down over a garden wall, and the peals of riotous laughter that lasted until the sun came up or the police arrived?”

—Martha Bayles

#### **AGING AND OLD AGE.**

By Richard A. Posner. Univ. of Chicago Press. 363 pp. \$29.95

Francis Bacon once wrote: “Age is best in four things—old wood best to burn, old wine to drink, old friends to trust, and old authors to read.” What about our understanding of age itself? Should we rely on old ideas—or new? Posner, a federal judge, legal scholar, and economist, evaluates the contentious issues surrounding age through the (relatively) new discipline of rational-choice theory. Though his wide-ranging study draws upon such diverse fields as medicine, psychology, and philosophy, Posner admits that “economics wields the baton of my multidisciplinary orchestra.”

As an overture, Posner asserts that aging is real—not, as some activists propose, a social construct that gathers otherwise unrelated mental and physical illnesses under an unnecessarily demeaning rubric. He also speculates, in an armchair evolutionary argument, on why human beings are built to break down: eventually our resource consumption becomes a drag on the reproductive capacities of the young.

Yet while aging is real, people often behave as though it were not. Among the many topics addressed by this book is social security. Posner admits that most mandatory retirement savings systems are justified by the fact that young people tend not to save for retirement, even though they have every reasonable expectation of living long past

their working years. One might think that people don't plan for old age simply because they don't like to think about it. Yet Posner finds this explanation unacceptable. Invoking rational-choice theory, he probes for the logic behind the fact that young people act like grasshoppers when they should be acting like ants.

What he comes up with is an ingenious theory of "multiple selves," in which the economist's rational self-interested individual is replaced by a *series* of rational self-interested individuals—overlapping with each other and capable, to some degree, of assuming responsibility for each other. In Posner's view, this theory explains why social security is not a form of "paternalism," based on the notion that "government knows best." Instead, it construes the young working

"self" as a trustee, occupying a body that will later be occupied by the older retired "self." Since the interests of both "selves" must be respected, the law imposes a limited fiduciary obligation on the younger.

However ingenious, such a theory has too little explanatory power to justify its bizarre disassembling of the person. This is model building for its own sake, and it becomes even less satisfying as Posner tackles such vexing issues as age discrimination and euthanasia. Despite the occasional quotation from Aristotle or Mill, Posner's approach does little to illuminate the moral dilemmas involved. Indeed, superficial borrowings from philosophy only serve as reminders that, for examining some areas of life, the older disciplines are best.

—Joseph Brinley

## History

### *GOD'S CHINESE SON: The Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan.*

By Jonathan D. Spence.  
Norton. 400 pp. \$27.50

Spence's many admirers will be delighted with his newest work, a history of the Taiping Rebellion that, characteristically, reveals a whole new way of seeing a familiar story. Spence, a professor of history at Yale University, has always displayed a knack for lively detail. Minutiae and epic scope are brilliantly blended in this tragic portrait of Hong Xiuquan (1814–64), the religious visionary whose popular rebellion almost toppled the Qing dynasty in the mid-19th century.

The rich ground of China's greatest revolt has been worked before, but Spence brings both new material and a new approach. The material consists of two texts published in the 1860s by the Taipings themselves, recently rediscovered in the British Museum. The approach is to get inside the Taiping movement, not just analyzing the social, political, and economic causes but evoking its religious and psychological dimensions.



The immediacy of Spence's writing, including his bold use of the present tense, may seem a bit shocking at first. But it enlivens the story without sacrificing scholarly precision. The "you are there" quality adds vividness to the book's account of the lives of Western missionaries living in China, its sketch of Chinese religious traditions, and its recreation of the cosmological conflicts faced by Hong Xiuquan and his compatriots.

Spence concentrates on Hong, the man who believed himself to be "God's Chinese son." We follow him as he assiduously studies the Confucian classics for the all-important examinations. We learn how his repeated failures almost destroy him and how a fever dream carries him up to heaven to meet his father and elder brother. With time, that dream becomes a revelation: Hong believes that his father is the Christian God, and his elder brother Jesus. Convinced of his own divinity, and of his mission to save the world from "demon-devils," he builds the fierce, puritanical movement that will shake traditional China to its foundations.

Using Hong Xiuquan's life to explore the Taiping Rebellion, Spence draws implicit parallels to more recent events. The record of infighting and Hong's assumption of imperial prerogatives (including sexual ones, denied on religious grounds to his followers) are reminiscent of Mao Zedong. Spence's insights into Hong's theology also conjure up thoughts of David Koresh and Shoko Asahara. Yet it is a measure of Spence's accomplishment that his account of this frightening, fascinating crusade is fresher than last week's headlines.

—Benjamin L. Self

**KEEPING TOGETHER IN TIME:  
*Dance and Drill in Human History.***

By William H. McNeill.

Harvard Univ. Press. 198 pp. \$22

The emergence, development, and maintenance of human society has been significantly shaped by "keeping together in time," that is, by coordinating people's bodily movements in such activities as collective labor, social and ritual dancing, and military drill.

So proposes McNeill, professor emeritus of history at the University of Chicago. In this intriguing if highly speculative book, he argues that human community emerges "whenever an indefinite number of individuals start to move their muscles rhythmically, establish a regular beat, and continue doing so for long enough to arouse euphoric excitement shared by all participants." The effects of this "muscular bonding" have been far-ranging, from generating cooperation among prehistoric human beings to creating group cohesion among soldiers in battle.

Like a dancer doing a warm-up number before finding his feet, McNeill starts weak before gaining strength. Discussing evolution, he extrapolates an ambitious theory from skimpy fossil evidence and inconclusive behavioral studies of wild chimpanzees. It is entirely plausible that when bands of *Homo erectus* learned to "get together in time," they fostered emotional bonds that in turn facilitated the hunting and sharing of food. But this kind of deductive gyration is trickier to perform than the Flying Lindy. Even McNeill acknowledges that his caveman hypothesis "lacks learned support."

McNeill is on firmer ground when he notes that in primitive communities, rhythmic movements are used to make work more

efficient and bearable, and to make dance a conduit for shared religious ecstasy.

The same was true in ancient times, McNeill argues. The early Hebrew prophets "danced and sang to induce divine frenzy"; Saul and David "danced before the Lord"; and the early Christians "understood that departed Christian souls joined the angels in a perpetual dance around the throne of God." Islam, too, has its ecstatic tradition of whirling dervishes, and it expects all believers to make the same prayer movements five times a day.

Building upon a personal reminiscence of drilling as a recruit in World War II, McNeill explores how the ties forged in close-order drill helped the armies of ancient times, whether Chinese or Greek, fight more effectively. Drill's role in actual fighting became less decisive as weaponry became more powerful. But even after the Industrial Revolution, it retained a vital role in bolstering solidarity—as was evident among the precision-drilled troops of Nazi Germany.

McNeill ends with the claim that "repugnance against Hitlerism" has led to a widespread and persistent "distrust" of muscular bonding in the West. But this claim is instantly undermined by the fact that a very different kind of muscular bonding—swing dancing—was extraordinarily popular during the war. Indeed, *Keeping Together in Time* would be a better book if it considered that, for the generation that defeated Hitler, the vigorous movements associated with swing provided a liberating counterpart to the Nazi goose step. As recalled by the Czech writer (and former swing musician) Josef Skvorecky: "Our sweet, wild music . . . was a sharp thorn in the sides of the power-hungry men."

—Mark Gauvreau Judge

**INTIMACY AND TERROR:  
*Soviet Diaries of the 1930s.***

Edited by Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen.  
New Press. 394 pp. \$27.50

Can a totalitarian regime forcibly deprive human beings of their memory? Not without bizarre consequences. Or so it would appear from this impressive collection of personal diaries written in the Soviet Union during the harshest years of Joseph Stalin's rule.

Discovered in public and private archives around Russia, the 10 diaries included here reveal drastically different strategies of remembering—and forgetting.

Some diarists found memory a deadly foe: one imprisoned farmer completed an embittered recollection of life in a labor camp, only to be shot by a firing squad a week later. Others found it easier to forget, including the simple disciple who ended with the ded-

ication, “Stalin, you is dear to us all.” Still others took refuge in the prosaic: one collective farmer recorded nothing but the daily weather and every item requisitioned, bought, or traded. Most eloquent, though, is the diary in which a year of the writer’s life is simply missing—“crossed out like an unnecessary page.” No doubt, such silences contain the loudest memories.

—Ji Park

## Arts & Letters

### A COMPANION TO AMERICAN THOUGHT.

Edited by Richard Wightman Fox and James T. Kloppenberg. Blackwell. 804 pp. \$39.95

The appearance of this book is a welcome sign that intellectual history is making a comeback in the academy—and not a moment too soon. For more than two decades, the arbiters of scholarly fashion have all but written it off. While themselves writing in the most exquisitely impenetrable jargon, social historians, pop culture enthusiasts, identity politicians, and theory-ridden ideologues have derided intellectual history as an “elitist” preoccupation that unjustly “privileges” the articulate, literate, and educated.

Yet such oddly self-contradictory criticism has never quite carried the day. During the same period, the disciplined study of intellectual history has continued to grow, attracting many of the most talented younger scholars—including the editors of this volume.

This is a work of ambitious scope, with entries on a dizzying array of subjects, from “abstract expressionism,” to “evangelicalism,” “legal realism” to “youth.” Many are long interpretive essays, contributed by eminent scholars, falling into one of three categories: individuals (Ralph Waldo Emerson, Richard Rorty); events (the Armory Show of 1913, the American Revolution); or concepts (freedom, modernism, citizenship). At its best, the book combines the factual handiness of, say, *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* with the reflectiveness of works such as the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* or Raymond Williams’s *Keywords*.

The *Companion* is not without its flaws. To borrow a comparison from the world of mag-

azines, this is a writer’s encyclopedia, not an editor’s encyclopedia. Rather than assemble a tightly edited, tucked-canvas view of American culture, Fox and Kloppenberg have contracted with notable writers, then turned them loose. Such a characteristically “post-modern” choice is not without justification. But predictably, the result is a volume as full of crosscurrents as a turbulent ocean. The question: is this a fair reflection of the contemporary academy, or does it betray a concession to esoteric concerns that is undesirable in a general reference work?

The answer is: both. Many of the essays are masterfully done, precisely because they go beyond the conventional wisdom-mongering typical of encyclopedias. For example, Thomas Haskell’s essay on academic freedom is an elegantly concise goad to serious reflection. Likewise Christopher Lasch on guilt, Robert Westbrook on John Dewey, Dorothy Ross on liberalism, David Blight on Frederick Douglass, Jean Bethke Elshtain on Jane Addams, and many others.

But other essays, such as the entry on “body,” spin jargon to the point of parody: “The violences and pleasures induced by the unstable arrangements of possession, mechanics, and mediation are the landmarks of corporeality in our culture.” Similarly, the essay on virtue treats that venerable concept as little more than a battleground for gender issues—a worthwhile perspective, perhaps, but should it dominate here?

Still other essays get entangled in the scholarly disputes of the day. For instance, it is strange to see the Great Awakening discussed by a scholar vehemently committed to the position that such a religious revival never occurred. Equally odd is a treatment

of republicanism that views the concept as a retrospective invention of today's historians. Though expertly done, these insider pieces will be of limited use to readers who are not members of the guild.

In fairness to the editors, they did not create the lapses, lacunae, and lunacies of contemporary "American thought." However regrettable, the enormous gap between academic and democratic discourse is real, and this book could not help but reflect it. At the same time, the many outstanding essays collected in this volume—examples of intellectual history at its best—offer hope that the gap may yet be closed.

—Wilfred M. McClay

**LEWIS CARROLL:**

*A Biography.*

By Morton N. Cohen.

Knopf. 577 pp. \$35

Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, 1832–98) was a stammering Oxford don, a brilliant mathematician, a superb photographer, a gifted nonsense poet, an indefatigable essayist and correspondent, and the author of some 300 published works. He also wrote two children's classics, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), which for many years dwarfed all his other achievements.



Now Carroll's fame as author of the Alice books seems dwarfed by another kind of fame—as a borderline pedophile who idolized little girls, such as Alice Liddell, the daughter of his Christ Church dean and the inspiration for his beloved heroine. Even in staid Victorian England, Carroll persuaded dozens of mothers to let him photograph their daughters—in company and alone, clothed and in the nude.

Cohen, emeritus professor of English at the City University of New York, probes these shadows judiciously, without making too much of them. Did Carroll ever molest? Cohen gives him the benefit of the doubt, suggesting that the eccentric

don's "suppressed and diverted sexual energies caused him unspeakable torments." Cohen also points out that Carroll is remembered not for suffering sexual torments (anyone can do that) but for sublimating them: "They were in all probability the source of those exceptional flashes of genius that gave the world his creative works."

—James Carman

**NOT ENTITLED:**

*A Memoir.*

By Frank Kermode.

Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 263 pp. \$23

Frank Kermode is too fine a critic to write an ordinary volume of reminiscence. Even as he locates himself at a remove from his life, the better to see its contours, he cannot help distancing himself from his written text, and cautioning readers about the truth they can expect from autobiographers: "The percentage of truth we leave out may after all show through somewhere, even if we fake the record."

To start with the plain facts: Kermode was born on the Isle of Man in 1919 to a family of modest means. He attended Liverpool University, served in the British navy during World War II, and taught literature for the next four decades—at Durham, Reading, Manchester, Bristol, University College (London), and Cambridge, as well as other institutions abroad. He worked as a journalist, became literary editor of *Encounter*, and was wounded in the heated public skirmish that saw the revelation of CIA funding of that journal.

He was wounded too in the critical wars over the ascendancy of "the new French approaches" to the study of literature. About these innovations, he is entirely sober: "The academy has long preferred ways of studying literature which actually permit or enjoin the study of something else in its place, and the success of the new French approaches has in many quarters come close to eliminating the study of literature altogether."

He won great fame as an astute reader of literature and was knighted for his achievement in 1991. The fame is only glancingly conveyed, and the knighthood goes unmentioned in the book.

Upon these plain facts, Kermode's memory and imagination work their magic. "The action of memory," he writes, "depends on the

cooperation of fantasy." A life is remade by words, self-consciously, in a way that may not accord with events and persons and circumstances in their primary reality. No matter; that reality is lost anyway.

The first two of the six chapters constitute more than half of the book's length but take the author only to age 26. A reader may be tempted to scan the title page to see whether something was missed, whether this is just the first of several intended volumes. But no. Kermode's childhood on the Isle of Man in the shaping presence of his parents, his naval service in the uneasy company of eccentrics comic and tragic, his first years in academic life—these decades receive his sustained and bemused attention. In them, he was made.

For the later life of honors and recognition, to which, as to much else, he worries that he is "not entitled," there is less regard. He admits to being at times a reckless, self-destructive man ("The story of a life must, insofar as it is truthful, be at least in part a story of loss and desertion inflicted and received"), but of his personal adult life he provides few details, and they are likely to appear within the protective confines of parentheses.

One of Kermode's best-known books, on narrative technique, is entitled *The Sense of an Ending*. Over this memoir there looms an ending of a different sort. Kermode recalls Prospero's remark that, once he left his island and returned to Milan, every third thought would be his grave. "I have often written about imagined or fictive endings and said they are all images of the real one. Fall and cease. The third thought is much less alarming than it was: it makes sense of everything, even if one would prefer a different kind of sense." For so civilized a voice, one wishes an ending long deferred.

—James Morris

**THE MAGICIAN'S DOUBTS:  
*Nabokov and the Risks of Fiction.***

By Michael Wood. Princeton Univ. Press. 252 pp. \$24.95

"Some day a sagacious professor will write about my absolutely tragic situation," Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977) once quipped to a friend. Wood, who teaches English at Princeton University, may well be that professor. Nabokov's prediction was intended as an ironic comment on his linguistic exile as a Russian-born master of

English. But Wood is wise enough to go beyond the irony to locate the genuinely tragic side of the man he calls the "great, doubting magician."

Probing his conjurer's layered puns, freighted allusions, and sly ambiguities, Wood ranks Nabokov as one of the few writers whose work rewards every variety of close textual scrutiny. Accordingly, he chases linguistic bread crumbs, ferreting out "deep truths in the alphabet," unraveling acrostics, and translating bilingual puns. At the same time, Wood judges some of Nabokov's word play to be "sheer glitter," and he chides the master for expecting readers to catch every trick.

Ultimately, though, Wood sees Nabokov's flashy cerebrations as secondary to his achievement as a "theorist of pain." From his father's assassination to his family's exile from revolutionary Russia, Nabokov was ever the poet of memory and loss—loss gripped in language. "Nabokov came to understand deprivation, marginality, and helplessness as well as he did through his abandonment of Russian as a literary language," writes Wood.

Beyond grief and exile, the specific loss that preoccupies the critic is the loss of innocence. Wood addresses the moral dimension of Nabokov's obsession with immature sexuality, incest, and unnatural death without succumbing either to misguided sentimentalism or to facile cynicism. Instead (in an echo of Lionel Trilling's defense of Nabokov's most famous novel), Wood writes: "It is morally obtuse to think that *Lolita* is an immoral book." Admitting that *Lolita* does not contain a "paraphraseable moral," Wood nevertheless shows how the tormented children who populate Nabokov's fiction are a plumb line into the depths of human cruelty. He concludes: "The suffering of the innocent is what unsettles all comforts for Nabokov."

Compared with biographer Brian Boyd's two-volume behemoth, *The Magician's Doubts* is slim. That is because Wood ignores the "mandarin" Nabokov—that "highly stylized, highly visible" creature whom he finds "dull and narrow"—in favor of the "(real) person I guess at but who keeps himself pretty well hidden." To Wood, this Nabokov is "not only tender and observant but also diffident, even scared, worried about almost everything the mandarin so airily dismisses." This is criticism with heart: a critic not afraid to bring an author back to life.

—Genevieve Abravanel

## Religion & Philosophy

### *THE DEFEAT OF THE MIND.*

By Alain Finkielkraut. Translated by Judith Friedlander. Columbia Univ. Press. 165 pp. \$22.95

To most Americans, the current quarrel over "cultures" seems to be the product of unfortunate developments in U.S. society during the last few decades. Movements such as Afrocentrism and multiculturalism have arisen in this country, according to their proponents, in response to the continuing evils of racism or to the illegitimate claims to dominance of white America in particular or Western culture in general.

As Allan Bloom argued in *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), these particularistic claims have been especially successful in American higher education because widespread relativism has undermined the defense of culture in Matthew Arnold's sense as "the best that has been thought and said." "Cultures" have trumped "culture." This complaint was once considered conservative. But by the early 1990s, even such certified liberals as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., were decrying the cavalier deprecation of our real, if unfinished, achievements in civil rights and human dignity in favor of the disuniting of America.

Finkielkraut, a French intellectual of distinction and growing reputation, argues in this recently translated book that, *hélas*, the quarrel between civilization and cultures goes back at least to the 18th century. When Enlightenment Reason (initially French) and the universal rights of the French Revolution threatened the very existence of alternatives, they elicited a reaction. In Germany, Herder and the Romantics proposed national *Kultur* and the *Volksgeist* as humane counterweights to the powerful but abstract civilization of France.

Finkielkraut notes that these national characteristics quickly became complicated and intermixed. In Germany, Kant and Hegel accepted and further developed universalism. In France, a reactionary such as Joseph DeMaistre could invoke the French *peuple* against the universalism of the French revolutionaries. *Universal* and *particular* were not simply French or German, liberal or conservative, but could be used for

various purposes. Some figures, such as Goethe, switched sides: Goethe began as a Romantic but evolved into a proponent of universal human values and *Weltliteratur*.

As Finkielkraut points out, particularisms have a nasty history in the 20th century. From the anti-Dreyfusards in France to the contemporary advocates of *tercermundismo*, they have justified the crushing of individual rights and critical judgment. (Marxism, in Finkielkraut's view, was an antirational particularism of the proletariat despite its Hegelian underpinnings.) Ironically, says Finkielkraut, some of the very institutions created to prevent such movements from recurring soon began promoting them. UNESCO, for instance, was founded after World War II to spread universal principles after the lessons of Hitler. But it quickly fell prey to Claude Lévi-Strauss's anthropological reading of human history, which, out of honorable motives, refused to make judgments among different cultures.

Postmodernists relish such relativism because it underwrites a freedom in which what Michel Foucault called "absolute divergence" of thought reigns. Toward that end, no cultural or social practice can be "higher" than any other. Great works of art or thought, by definition, cannot exist. There can only be folkways and folklore in which, say, modes of shopping are as significant as serious music.

"Once hating culture becomes cultural in itself, the life of the mind loses all significance," the author warns. Worse yet, he finds that the "defeat of the mind" is already largely achieved. Without a successful counter action, Europe's (and, we might add, America's) only remaining attraction will be prosperity.

—Robert Royal

### *ARGUING EUTHANASIA: The Controversy over Mercy Killing, Assisted Suicide, and the "Right to Die."*

Edited by Jonathan D. Moreno.  
Touchstone/Simon & Schuster.  
251 pp. \$11

In November 1994, the voters of Oregon overturned two millennia of medical tradi-

tion by allowing terminally ill patients to ask their physicians for "medication" to end life. If Ballot Measure 16 withstands all court challenges, Oregon will go beyond the precedent set by the Netherlands, where doctors may assist death with impunity (under guidelines) but without explicit legal sanction.

Among the 18 pointed essays collected here, readers will find fair and intelligent representation of both sides in the debate over assisted suicide and other forms of euthanasia. A few contributors, such as legal

theorist Ronald Dworkin, try to straddle the issue. (After asserting the sacredness of human life, he defends "choice" in interpreting what that means.)

But the thrust of this volume, whose contributors include physicians, medical ethicists, philosophers, and columnists, will not bring great comfort to supporters of the Hemlock Society. As Dr. Richard Selzer shows in a disturbing personal essay, the patient who begs for a lethal injection one day may ask for his life to be prolonged on the next.

—Jay Tolson

## Science & Technology

### *ENGINEERS OF DREAMS: Great Bridge Builders and the Spanning of America.*

By Henry Petroski.

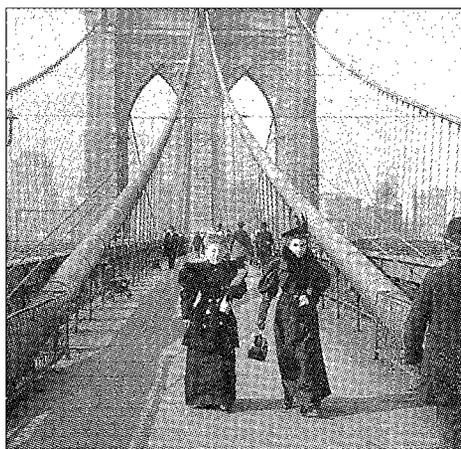
Knopf. 479 pp. \$30

"Structural art" is what Petroski calls bridge design, and here he offers a spirited account of the lives and work of some of its leading practitioners. To earlier generations, the builders of great public structures were technological heroes, literally forging the unity of the nation. Petroski, a professor of engineering at Duke University, combines this half-forgotten sense of wonder with a keen analysis of the aesthetic, scientific, economic, and political choices facing his predecessors.

Focusing on five master engineers—James Eads, Theodore Cooper, Gustav Lindenthal, Othmar Ammann, and David Steinman—Petroski demonstrates that behind successful bridges lie both aesthetic vision and gritty financial and political skills. Unlike even the most ambitious buildings, bridges require agreements among municipal, state, and even national governments. For every site, there may be several plausible technologies. New designs appear, more attractive or economical, but not necessarily more durable. The imponderables include earthquake risk, future loads, and long-term maintenance. There are ugly surprises, such as the sudden collapse, in 1967, of the eye-bar suspension bridge in Point Pleasant, Ohio. And there are also unanticipated delights, including the lasting beauty, utility, and profitability of San Francisco's Golden Gate.

If graceful and economical design assured success, then bridge architecture would be a search for Platonic forms. Unfortunately, as Petroski shows, some solutions can be too elegant for their own good. Thanks to the deflection theory of the Latvian-born engineer Leon Moisseiff, the builder of the George Washington Bridge (Othmar Ammann) saved millions of dollars on steel. Yet the same slender-deck design has caused bridges to sway in crosswinds. In some cases, such as the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge, the only damage was to trusses, which ultimately had to be replaced. In others, such as the Tacoma-Narrows Bridge, the swaying caused the bridge to twist apart spectacularly.

Petroski cites research suggesting that bridge disasters occur in 30-year cycles. Each collapse promotes a new dominant design, which in turn encourages a new cadre of professionals, complete with interlocking consultantships, to grow in confidence and boldness until they lose touch



with their predecessors' insights. These innovators may prize the forms of older bridges, but they never read the fine print involved in their creation. Accordingly, Petroski suggests that we may be due for another debacle by the end of this century, as today's engineering elite keeps building ever-longer versions of cable-stayed bridges.

Despite its technical depth, this book is not just for admirers and protectors of our great bridges. It is also for men and women in every profession. By linking the widely publicized needs of the "physical infrastructure"—the ravages of neglect and deferred maintenance—with the more subtle but equally urgent demands of the "engineering-design infrastructure," Petroski shows how "neglected patterns from the past become unconscious patterns for the future." To engineers, the message is that they are "reinventing, albeit with faster and more powerful tools, the bridges of the past and of different cultures." To the general reader, it is that technological sophistication can promote a fatal illusion of discontinuity with the past. The profound contribution of *Engineers of Dreams* is to remind us that communication across generations may be the most important bridge of all.

—Edward Tenner

#### **THE SAME AND NOT THE SAME.**

By Roald Hoffmann. Columbia Univ. Press. 294 pp. \$34.95

Goethe modeled his novel *Elective Affinities* (1809) on a theory about the spiritual origins of chemistry. In a similar vein, Hoffmann—chemist, poet, and Nobel laureate—wishes to show how the activities of molecules "parallel deep avenues in our psyche."

The book's allure is based on metaphor, as Hoffmann draws a parallel between the oppositional properties of molecules and the dualities of human relationships: bonding and separation, continuity and change, the natural and the unnatural. Playfully, he explores the fact that some molecules are mirror images of one another, "the same and not the same," like the molecules creating the smells of spearmint and caraway. More ominously, the disastrous sedative thalidomide is deceptively similar to two other successful compounds.

Hoffmann's evident ambition is to make a

case for chemistry to supplant physics as the philosophical model for all the sciences. His arguments are that chemistry is creative as well as analytic, and that, compared with physics, chemistry deals more interestingly with conflict and ambiguity.

Evident also is the author's hope that his book will do for chemistry what Stephen Hawking's wildly successful *Brief History of Time* did for astronomy. But Hawking's book, for all its difficulties, has a clear narrative line leading from the early development of astronomy to its later achievements and ultimate speculations.

Hoffmann's book, by contrast, mixes lucid explication with a great many fragmentary jottings that lead nowhere. Such open-endedness may be helpful when examining molecules, but in writing it defeats coherence.

—Susan Ginsburg

#### **LIFE ON THE SCREEN:**

##### ***Identity in the Age of the Internet.***

By Sherry Turkle. Simon & Schuster. 347 pp. \$25

The wonders of cyberspace have made a believer of Turkle, a social scientist at MIT and a practicing psychotherapist. Yet despite her affinity for the net-surfing world view, she has lost neither her "real-life bias" nor her ability to communicate with those too uninformed, or skeptical, to take life at interface value.

In nontechnical language, she describes how the Internet has transformed the computer screen into a gateway, a beckoning path to virtual worlds in which people may play at identity, freely altering their personality, status, vocation, and sex.

For Turkle, the promise of such "Internet experiences" is that they can "help us to develop models of psychological well-being." "Like the anthropologist returning home from a foreign culture," she writes, "the voyager in virtuality can return home to a real world better equipped to understand its artifices."

Yet Turkle also describes the danger: that the boundary between real life and simulation will be blurred or erased. Her book is a Baedeker less to the bizarre electronic landscapes of cyberspace than to the minds of those who wander through them. As such, it is instructive, amusing, and chilling.

—James Morris

## POETRY

### *Seamus Heaney*

*Selected and introduced by Helen Vendler*

In October 1995, Seamus Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, a gesture that recognized the remarkable international appeal of his writing, which originates in that small subsection of Europe called Northern Ireland. Although Heaney, born in 1939, has lived in the Republic of Ireland since 1972, the conflicts in the North (only recently brought to a precarious cease-fire) continue to make up one of the themes of his work— most recently in a sequence called “Mycenae Wavelengths,” which will appear in his forthcoming volume *The Spirit Level*. Yet Heaney’s poetry— though it may be best known for its profound meditations on political strife— began with Wordsworthian and Keatsian lyrics about his rural childhood. As his parents’ eldest son, Heaney stood to inherit the family farm, and in the first poem of his first book, “Digging,” he struggled to reconcile his calling as a writer with his family’s expectations. His grandfather dug turf, his father digs potatoes. And himself?

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap  
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge  
Through living roots awaken in my head.  
But I’ve no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I’ll dig with it.

Heaney has dug far with his pen, deep into his own soul and the soul of his nation. The titles of his books offer a quick review of his concerns. *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) showed the young country boy coming into adolescent knowledge of sexuality, of Catholic-minority status in the Protestant-majority North, and of a poetic calling; *Door into the Dark* (1969) continued the exploration of Ireland from a more speculative and objective standpoint; *Wintering Out* (1972) pulled away, in part, from autobiographical scenes into a fiercely inward exploration of Irish English— its sounds, its place-names, its rhythms. *Wintering Out* also investigated minority status itself— not only in the religious terms in which it was usually described in the North, but also in a servant, an unwed mother, or a child kept out of sight for years in a henhouse. In *North* (1975), one of the greatest volumes of poetry of the 20th century, the inner storm that had been brewing in Heaney since 1968 (when British troops quelled Catholic civil-rights marchers, setting off 25 years of killings ) burst into voice. Seeing ritually murdered medieval bodies found in bogs in Ireland and Jutland as evidence of a chthonic drive to violence, Heaney became the most articulate witness to the tragic history of the North.

In *Field Work* (1979), Heaney reflected on his move to Wicklow, south of Dublin, (where he supported his young family as a free-lance writer, since

he had left his lectureship in English at Queen's University, Belfast, when he made the move). He entered a lacerating period of political and artistic self-scrutiny in the long title poem of *Station Island* (1984), a Dantesque set of encounters with crucial figures from the past, including the writers William Carleton and James Joyce as well as family members and teachers. In 1984, Heaney also published *Sweeney Astray*. This translation of a medieval Irish poem gave Heaney a new persona, and, in a sequence called "Sweeney Redivivus," Heaney "became" that king who was transformed into a bird, able to comment on his earlier life and his fellow scribes.

In confronting political issues, Heaney was drawn to such Eastern European writers as Osip Mandelstam, Czeslaw Milosz, Zbigniew Herbert, and Miroslav Holub. Their influence is visible in *The Haw Lantern* (1987), a series of memorable parables such as "From the Frontier of Writing" in which Heaney considers the predicament of the lyric poet under political pressure. In *Seeing Things* (1991), Heaney included a 48-poem sequence called "Squarings," in which many of his former concerns are sketched in quick, elusive glimpses grounded in natural settings—watercolors, one could say, rather than oils. *The Spirit-Level* (1996) casts a retrospective look, by analogy to the Trojan War, at the undeclared war that has so devastated Northern Ireland, and includes many unsparing stock taking poems of the poet in his fifties.

**T**his formidable set of books—including four volumes of occasional prose—has compelled the attention of the world from Japan to Finland, from Germany to Australia. The poems above all attest to a range of powers—of description, of social analysis, of intellectual momentum, of moral reflection, of architectonic construction, of phonetic rasp and lull. These powers have been spent always with extraordinary conscience. Heaney put in James Joyce's mouth (in "Station Island") the most internal command of the writers's ethic as he is beleaguered by fellow countrymen demanding poems of victimage and political propaganda. Joyce says to the poet (who is participating as a non-believer in the Irish pilgrimage to Station Island at Lough Derg) the following bracing words:

You lose more of yourself than you redeem  
doing the decent thing. Keep at a tangent.  
When they make the circle wide, it's time to swim

out on your own and fill the element  
with signatures on your own frequency,  
echo-soundings, searches, probes, allurements,

elver-gleams in the dark of the whole sea.

Joyce's impatient counsel is only one of the voices besieging the poet, but it is one the poet has heeded. Heaney has never forgotten that poetry must be a thing of allurements as much as searches, gleams as much as probes. The texture of his poems is a constantly changing fabric: not content to rest in the rich pentameter orchestration of his early work, he invented (drawing on poetry written in Irish) a "thinner" music and thin stanzas to convey the bleak evidence of the preserved bog corpses he had seen in photographs.

The masterpiece among the bog poems is “The Grauballe Man,” in which Heaney reacts angrily to those who would denominate a dead human being by the crudely denotative words “corpse” or “body”:

Who will say ‘corpse’  
to his vivid cast?  
Who will say ‘body’  
to his opaque repose?

In a violent wish to be true to the majesty and horror of human death, Heaney writes his magisterial succession of descriptions of the Grauballe Man—but admits that art cannot equal, in its too-strict compassing of death into the stylizations of form, the “actual weight / of each hooded victim, / slashed and dumped.” In its anguished look at the final insufficiency of art to atrocity, Heaney’s poem speaks to the predicament of every artist daunted by the grimmest onslaughts of experience.

**Y**et Heaney’s poetry offers many concerns other than political ones. There are poems about family (including “Clearances,” the notable sonnet sequence in memory of his mother), about marriage and children, and about intellectual growth. One of these, “Terminus,” explains the formation of Heaney’s own mind, which, he realizes, is never satisfied with one side of any question: “Is it any wonder when I thought / I would have second thoughts?” As Heaney said in an interview with the critic Neil Corcoran, “I seemed always to be a little displaced; being in between was a kind of condition, from the start.”

“Terminus” extends that in-betweenness to its ultimate description, as the boy grows up between the rural and the industrial, Aesopian prudence and Christian asceticism, rigidity and fluidity, farm bounty and mercantile trade, secular baronies and Catholic parishes. In the last image of the poem, the boy replays the crucial scene of the “Flight of the Earls” to France in the 18th century, when the civil compact between English invaders and indigenous Irish landowners broke down for good. In the boy’s fantasy, there might still have been room for negotiation, and he pauses, midstream, in earshot of his peers, still parleying with the English. Though the end of the poem has political implications, the import of the whole is intellectual and psychological: how is it that some people tend to see both sides of a question, and are inclined to negotiation, while others of equal intelligence and sincerity attach themselves fiercely to one side? To be brought up in in-betweenness is both rewarding and isolating, and the poem presents, in its tight couplets, and their inner division, a form matching its binocular gaze.

**A**nother such exploration of mind arises in Heaney’s Harvard Phi Beta Kappa poem “Alphabets”: it is concerned to show how successive languages—from English to Latin, from Latin to Irish, from Irish to Greek—expand the child’s understanding of the world. Eventually, the Irish youth becomes a professor, lecturing in a replica of Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre:

The globe has spun. He stands in a wooden O.  
He alludes to Shakespeare. He alludes to Graves.

The poet's model for expansion of knowledge becomes the Renaissance necromancer who hung a globe in his house so that he would think of the whole universe and "not just single things." Intellectually speaking, the poem suggests, we can all be the astronaut who sees

all he has sprung from,  
The risen, aqueous, singular, lucent O  
Like a magnified and buoyant ovum—

while, at the same time, not forgetting our origins (the poet recalls watching, as a small child just learning the alphabet, the family name spelled on the gable by the plasterer, "letter by strange letter"). Because Heaney's poetry ranges from the local to the global, and from origins to ends, it has wide appeal; but though readers may not always realize it, they are fundamentally drawn to his accounts of experience by the "assonance and wood-notes" that drew him too, as he says in "Alphabets," to poetry.

**H**eaney has shown exemplary stamina in facing up to the unrelenting demands of poetry for personal and social accuracy. Many of the poems recount episodes of faltering, dryness, self-doubt—not least "Exposure," the most stricken of the poems following his move to the Republic. There he weighs the pros and cons of his self-exile from the North, and wonders whether by moving his young family away from violence he has evaded his responsibility as an artist, missing "The once-in-a-lifetime portent, / The comet's pulsing rose." In another such poem ("On the Road") in which "the dumbfounded spirit" cannot see where to turn, the poet finally flies to the most primitive source of art in the West, the cave paintings of Lascaux:

There a drinking deer  
is cut into rock,  
its haunch and neck  
rise with the contours,

the incised outline  
curves to a strained  
expectant muzzle  
and a nostril flared

at a dried-up source.

The very first artist, the poet realizes, knew what it was to strain at a dried-up source. Heaney has persisted, as all major writers do, in seeking new sources—from the sonnet to terza rima, from James Kavanagh to Czeslaw Milosz, from the Dordogne to Mycenae. No one of his volumes replicates a past one: in each, effort and ease balance and critique each other. No other poet sounds remotely like Heaney; his harmonies and dissonances are his own. It is this stylistic originality and aesthetic stamina, as well as the crucial ethical concerns of his poetry, that the Nobel Prize has recognized and rewarded.

## *Digging*

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound  
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:  
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds  
Bends low, comes up twenty years away  
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills  
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft  
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.  
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep  
To scatter new potatoes that we picked  
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.  
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day  
Than any other man on Toner's bog.  
Once I carried him milk in a bottle  
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up  
To drink it, then fell to right away  
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods  
Over his shoulder, going down and down  
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap  
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge  
Through living roots awaken in my head.  
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I'll dig with it.



*"Digging," "The Grauballe Man," part XIII from "Station Island" and other excerpts from Selected Poems, 1966-1987 by Seamus Heaney. Copyright © 1990 by Seamus Heaney. Part XXIV from "Settings" from Seeing Things by Seamus Heaney. Copyright © 1991 by Seamus Heaney. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc. All rights reserved.*

## *The Grauballe Man*

As if he had been poured  
in tar, he lies  
on a pillow of turf  
and seems to weep

the black river of himself.  
The grain of his wrists  
is like bog oak,  
the ball of his heel

like a basalt egg.  
His instep has shrunk  
cold as a swan's foot  
or a wet swamp root.

His hips are the ridge  
and purse of a mussel,  
his spine an eel arrested  
under a glisten of mud.

The head lifts,  
the chin is a visor  
raised above the vent  
of his slashed throat

that has tanned and toughened.  
The cured wound  
opens inwards to a dark  
elderberry place.

Who will say 'corpse'  
to his vivid cast?  
Who will say 'body'  
to his opaque repose?

And his rusted hair,  
a mat unlikely  
as a foetus's.  
I first saw his twisted face

in a photograph,  
a head and shoulder  
out of the peat,  
bruised like a forceps baby,

but now he lies  
perfected in my memory,  
down to the red horn  
of his nails,

hung in the scales  
with beauty and atrocity:  
with the Dying Gaul  
too strictly compassed

on his shield,  
with the actual weight  
of each hooded victim,  
slashed and dumped.

## From *Station Island*

*xii*

Like a convalescent, I took the hand  
stretched down from the jetty, sensed again  
an alien comfort as I stepped on ground

to find the helping hand still gripping mine,  
fish-cold and bony, but whether to guide  
or to be guided I could not be certain

for the tall man in step at my side  
seemed blind, though he walked straight as a rush  
upon his ash plant, his eyes fixed straight ahead.

Then I knew him in the flesh  
out there on the tarmac among the cars,  
wintered hard and sharp as a blackthorn bush.

His voice eddying with the vowels of all rivers  
came back to me, though he did not speak yet,  
a voice like a prosecutor's or a singer's,

cunning, narcotic, mimic, definite  
as a steel nib's downstroke, quick and clean,  
and suddenly he hit a litter basket

with his stick, saying, 'Your obligation  
is not discharged by any common rite.  
What you do you must do on your own.'

The main thing is to write  
for the joy of it. Cultivate a work-lust  
that imagines its haven like your hands at night

dreaming the sun in the sunspot of a breast.  
You are fasted now, light-headed, dangerous.  
Take off from here. And don't be so earnest,

so ready for the sackcloth and the ashes.  
Let go, let fly, forget.  
You've listened long enough. Now strike your note.'

It was as if I had stepped free into space  
alone with nothing that I had not known  
already. Raindrops blew in my face

as I came to and heard the harangue and jeers  
going on and on: 'The English language  
belongs to us. You are raking at dead fires,

rehearsing the old whinges at your age.  
That subject people stuff is a cod's game,  
infantile, like this peasant pilgrimage.

You lose more of yourself than you redeem  
doing the decent thing. Keep at a tangent.  
When they make the circle wide, it's time to swim

out on your own and fill the element  
with signatures on your own frequency,  
echo-soundings, searches, probes, allurements,

elver-gleams in the dark of the whole sea.'  
The shower broke in a cloudburst, the tarmac  
fumed and sizzled. As he moved off quickly

the downpour loosed its screens round his straight walk.



## From *Settings*

xxiv

Deserted harbour stillness. Every stone  
Clarified and dormant under water,  
The harbour wall a masonry of silence.

Fullness. Shimmer. Laden high Atlantic  
The moorings barely stirred in, very slight  
Clucking of the swell against boat boards.

Perfected vision: cockle minarets  
Consigned down there with green-slicked bottle glass,  
Shell-debris and a reddened bud of sandstone.

Air and ocean known as antecedents  
Of each other. In apposition with  
Omnipresence, equilibrium, brim.

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# Edmund Wilson And the Public Intellectuals

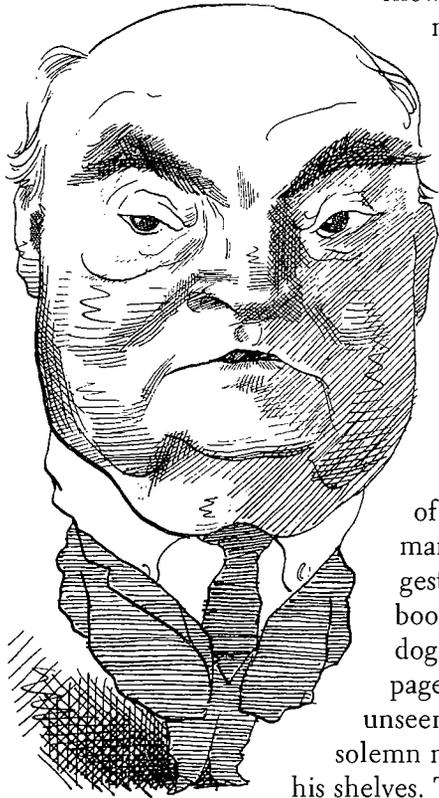
by David Samuels

It is hard to think of a phrase whose revival in the language was as welcome, and whose subsequent history has proved quite so disappointing, as “public intellectual.” In 1990, Russell Jacoby’s *Last Intellectuals* gave a name and an appealingly scrappy history—the rise of the *Partisan Review* crowd in the 1940s and ’50s—to the declining practice of literate criticism of politics, history, and the arts. What followed was a time of great if borrowed nostalgia, as restive academics and magazine editors celebrated the passions of the City College cafeteria and imagined themselves outdrinking the Rahvs in the heat of a vanished Greenwich Village.

In contrast to their mythic predecessors, however, the newest generation of public intellectuals exercise their talents not in the writing of poetry, fiction, history or essays but in the fabrication of up-to-the-minute opinions for the op-ed page of the *New York Times*, or—at best—in high-toned book reviews for the *New Republic* and the *New York Review of Books*. The most public of the new intellectuals—Cornel West, Stanley Fish, Camille Paglia, William Bennett, Dinesh D’Souza—appear less occupied by ideas and books than by the opportunity to haul ammunition and fire off the canons for their respective parties in the culture wars. If Russell Jacoby’s heroes were intellectuals whose ideas gained them some measure of public significance, the order now is abruptly reversed: the public intellectuals have become personalities, gifted with the talent of reducing ideas to sound-bites neatly packaged for the producers of *Nightline* and *Charlie Rose*.

Edmund Wilson, the centennial of whose birth was celebrated last year with a biography by the prolific Jeffrey Meyers, an ongoing lecture series at the New York Humanities Center, and a major conference at Princeton University, his alma mater, would have relished the moment, or at least been amused. If Wilson, whose literary criticism, histories, essays, and reporting shaped American literary culture from the early 1920s to his death in 1972, detested academics, he loved performers and performance. He loved the vaudeville acts of his youth, burlesque shows, the French chanteuse Yvette Guilbert. Most of all he admired Harry Houdini, “an audacious and independent being” who declared at an early age “I am Houdini!” and, as Wilson wrote in an admiring early essay, collected in *The Shores of Light* (1952), worked hard all his life to “perfect himself in the pursuit of his chosen work.”

A photograph of Wilson, reproduced on the jacket of *A Piece of My Mind* (1956), alludes as well to his lifelong love of magic, and it is tempting to analyze the image as the critic Wilson might have done. It



shows a heavyset man with appraising, melancholy eyes, his eyebrows slightly raised, suggesting a willingness to suspend for the moment his native state of disbelief. He is dressed in the three-piece suit of a lawyer or banker of his father's generation, a gesture toward his love for the past and the professional security which he attained only late in life. Between broad, workmanlike fingers he balances a deck of cards. The card facing us, the eight of hearts, reminds us of Wilson's reputation as a ladies' man, despite a demeanor that suggests—in less flattering portraits—a boozy salesman being chased by a dog or an angry husband. Manuscript pages sprawl across his desk toward an unseen deadline, in counterpoint to the solemn march of bound volumes across his shelves. The author of more than 40 published books, Wilson worked all his life to

transform his own sensibility—divided between his formal attentiveness as a critic and his feel for individual psychology and the grand movements of history—into prose that could be read with pleasure by a literate audience.

**A**s a critic, Wilson was the founder of the vital modernist tradition in American literary criticism that began with his early essays and reviews—in *Vanity Fair*, the *Dial*, and the *New Republic*—and that attained its first mature expression in *Axel's Castle* (1931). Despite his formal acuity, Wilson was at heart a literary historian, whose love of good writing and of independent minds kept him from reducing the writers he loved—Eliot or Yeats, Proust or Joyce, Marx or Michelet—to textbook illustrations of historical forces. And though he inaugurated the psychological method that rules what remains of the practice of literary criticism outside academe, the breadth and humanity of his approach sets it far apart from the reductive trivialities of pathography.

Most of all, what distinguishes Edmund Wilson's writing is the voice, rich with the unresolved tensions of an adult personality, pulled between the opposite poles of literature and history, artistic form and lived experience. "The fiction writer in Wilson was real," writes John Updike—one of our few working critics who shares Wilson's need to present the strengths and the weaknesses of writers as individuals making moral choices, as craftsmen working their craft—"and his displacement was a real loss." Yet

to see Edmund Wilson as a failed novelist, an unsuccessful Updike, is unjust. In the best of his writing, we can witness the transformation of critical skill and historical scholarship, the familiar provinces of the academic, into art.

Wilson was always tempted, if never overcome, by the alluring promise that literary art could somehow be explained by the patient accumulation of commonplace detail about the writer, his or her family, childhood, and later experiences. If Wilson lacked the attachment, or the patience, required to pursue this program in the form of a full-dress biography of any of the writers he admired, he was consistently, and extraordinarily, interested in himself. And so, from his early autobiographical essays to the thinly disguised erotic autobiography, *Memoirs of Hecate County* (1946), to his posthumously published diaries, he left us as complete a record of his life as we could require, seen through his own eyes, in retrospect, and set down as it happened, documentary style.

From Wilson's autobiographical writings, we know that the critic was born in Red Bank, New Jersey in 1895 to an erratically protective mother and a distant father, a former state attorney general and intimate of Woodrow Wilson who suffered greatly, as did his son, from depression. Educated at the Hill School and at Princeton, where he became a disciple of the bohemian professor Christian Gauss and a friend of John Dos Passos and F. Scott Fitzgerald, Wilson served in Europe during World War I. Moving to New York, he worked as managing editor of *Vanity Fair*, later supporting himself—hard to imagine—as a free-lance literary critic and then as an editor of the *New Republic*. He married often and unhappily. His first marriage was to the actress Mary Blair, a great favorite of the playwright Eugene O'Neill; the most famous of Wilson's marriages was to Mary McCarthy, whose acid portraits of Wilson as brutish husband have unfairly if predictably overshadowed his literary reputation. Wilson's great and stormy friendship with Vladimir Nabokov has left us with a wonderful collected correspondence in which Nabokov's inventive genius shines through, though Wilson's own voice is strangely muted. During the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, he reached a broad audience as the literary critic of the *New Yorker* while writing some of the better reportage of his time. He married Elena Thornton in 1946, and lived happily with her, through middle age, and despite several affairs, until his death in 1972.

A more revealing self-portrait of Edmund Wilson can be found in his mature writing, which begins with *Axel's Castle*. In that book, his first as a critic, the 35-year-old Wilson used his formal knowledge as a poet, the skills he had sharpened at the *New Republic*, and his own inclination toward historical narrative to give a lucid and sweeping account of the "symbolist movement" in modern literature. *Axel's Castle* begins with the French poet Baudelaire's reading of Edgar Allan Poe; individual chapters trace the development of

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symbolist art in the work of leading writers, including Yeats, Eliot, Valéry, Proust, and Joyce, whose books the critic had championed throughout the 1920s. Wilson illuminates symbolist art through the working out of an analogy between imagery in prose and the notes and chords of the leading art of the romantics: music. Proust's great novel was constructed as a symphonic structure rather than a narrative in the ordinary sense. The shifting images of the symbolist poets, Wilson explains, were transformed by Proust into "characters, situations, places, vivid moments, obsessive emotions, recurrent patterns of behavior." Joyce's *Ulysses* is also a symphony, whose themes are the minds of individual Dubliners.

What marks *Axel's Castle* as the beginning of Wilson's mature criticism, however, is the critic's insistence on the tensions and ambiguities contained within his elegantly appointed metaphor. The prose-music of the symbolists was not only an exercise in form, Wilson writes, "but an attempt by carefully studied means . . . to communicate unique personal feelings." Yet form and feeling were opposing and hostile pursuits. If the artist in Wilson identified with Eliot and Yeats, with Proust and Joyce, there was also something in him that recoiled. He took the title of his book from Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's "Axel," a young man who inhabits a half-Gothic, half-Wagnerian castle in the Black Forest, where he gives himself up to the isolated study of alchemy and prepares to receive the mysteries of the Rosicrucian order. A beautiful assassin, Sara, is sent to kill Axel. They fall passionately in love, and, rejecting his bride's pleas for a night of wedded bliss, Axel persuades her instead to join him in suicide. At the heart of the symbolist art Wilson admired, inherent in the relentless pursuit of the self, was something pale and splintered, neurotic and deadly, that could be neither successfully embraced nor avoided. The pursuit of experience was no less sterile. The poet Arthur Rimbaud, who fled Paris for the life of a gunrunner in the African deserts, would die a meaningless death at 24.

**W**ilson's once-original conclusions have by now been thoroughly absorbed into the critical literature on modernism. But what gives *Axel's Castle* its enduring force is the critic's ability to project his own psychological tensions so directly and honestly onto the page. In response to the conflict within himself, Wilson saw modern literature as divided into two opposing camps. There is that of Rimbaud, whose influence can be felt in "D. H. Lawrence's mornings in Mexico and his explorations of Santa Fe," in "Blaise Cendrars's negro anthology," and in "the fascination for white New Yorkers of Harlem." Against Rimbaud's pursuit of raw experience, Wilson set the inward-looking spirit of Axel, which lives on "in Proust's hypochondriac ailments and his fretting self-centered prolixities; in Yeats's astrology and spirit-tappings and in the 17th-century cadence which half puts to sleep his liveliest prose; in the meagerness of the poetic output of Paul Valéry and T. S. Eliot contrasted with their incessant speculations as to precisely what constitutes poetry." Neither will do. At a time when American writers and critics were alternately enthralled and appalled by the new literature, Wilson stood alone in his ability to see the strength of the modernist art and to feel its limitations with equal ferocity, as representative of a violent struggle within himself. The task

Wilson set himself was to find a way out.

The social and economic chaos of the Great Depression impelled Wilson, and an entire generation of American intellectuals, away from modernism and toward a search for historical causes and explanations that led many to the work of Karl Marx. If Wilson was drawn to Marx, the path he chose did little to endear him to the Marxist faithful. What interested Wilson in *To The Finland Station* (1940)—“A Study in the Writing and Acting of History”—were not the scientific laws of Marxist history but the promise that modernist methods of introspection, in the hands of historians, could have a lasting impact on human lives. History was made not by abstract forces but by the combination of social circumstances with the inner lives of great historians as expressed through their art.

Wilson's determined focus on his own inner life, rather than on the topical concerns of contemporary Marxist thinkers, allowed him to produce a history that transcends the period in which it was written and that prefigures the psychologically attuned scholarship of present-day historians such as Simon Schama and Jonathan Spence. The forces that animate *To The Finland Station* are not capital and labor but the historians Michelet and Marx, writers who—like Wilson—use their art to realize their own psychological tensions in the stories they tell. “The great rooms of Fountainebleau and Versailles seem to get colder and larger and the figures smaller and more alone,” Wilson writes of Jules Michelet's *Revolution* (1852):

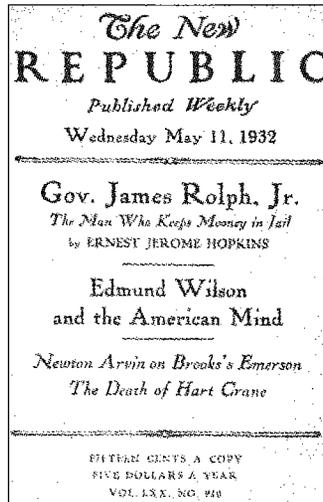
They are not usually made odious so much as wretched—Michelet remembered the poor queer relics of the sanitarium in which he had lived; and we are finally startled but not surprised to find Louis the Sun King himself eclipsed in his windowless inside room, bored with the old and deaf Madame de Maintenon, nagged by the quarrels of the monks. . . . To give us a final symbol for the monarchy, Michelet has only to describe without comment the expense and clumsy complication of the great waterworks at Marly which make the Versailles fountains play and which fill the air for miles around with their agonized creakings and groanings.

Michelet's art was the history of France, created through an exercise of a literary talent that could punch through the hardened crust of tradition to reveal the living historical forces that shaped the lives of his readers.

If history was meaningful art, the methods by which it was produced bore little relation to the scientific pursuit of fact or to the strategic pronouncements of Marxist intellectuals. The historian's art was the product of a passionate, modernist attention to the inner music of the self.

“Massacred at the Abbaye,” Michelet writes to a friend, “I am on my way to the revolutionary tribunal, that is to say, to the guillotine.” The lasting influence of Michelet's history was not as politics but art. In Michelet's conclusion to the fifth book of the *Revolution*, “History is time,” Wilson glimpses the origins of the sensibility of the French historian's truest heir, Marcel Proust.

Nowhere was the dominance of the artist over history more apparent than in Wilson's portrait of Marx, the historian whose style was most con-



genial to his own. Showing little patience with the tenets of Marxist historical science, Wilson was the first critic to read *Capital* (1867) as literature. Marx's masterwork was the historian's *Ulysses*, "a welding together of . . . diverse points of view," of "distinct techniques of thought . . . a treatise on economics, a history of industrial development and an inspired tract for the times," a morality "no more self-consistent than the economics is constantly scientific." Outside this immense structure, "dark and strong like the old Trier basilica . . . swim the mists and the septentrional lights of German metaphysics."

What began as an attempt to escape from the self-consciousness of modernist literature into the solid world of history ends with a triumphant affirmation of modernist technique, the inward-looking exploration of the self. The violence and the prophetic anger of *Capital* came not from a scientist's insight into history but from the miserable and oppressive circumstances of Marx's own labor. The historian's "grim parading of the afflictions of the poor," Wilson wrote, was not the product of historical science but of his outraged conviction of the injustice of his poverty and his bad conscience at having inflicted that fate on others—on his wife Jenny, their children, and his friend and collaborator, Friedrich Engels. The Marx of *Capital* is "not only the victim, the dispossessed proletariat," Wilson writes, "he is also the exploiting employer." Unlike the art of the modernists, however, Marx's ability to project himself into the writing of history would have far-reaching effects: through the agency of Lenin and Trotsky, the inner life of the historian Karl Marx would transform the world.

In *The Wound and the Bow* (1941), Wilson's most influential work of criticism, the critic returned to literature with a newfound faith and purpose. In essays on Dickens, Kipling and Hemingway, and the Philoctetes myth, Wilson pioneered the psychological criticism that drives our ever-expanding biographical interest in literature. The creative effort of the writer, Wilson concluded, was an attempt to explain and to transcend the original trauma that impelled him to write. Charles Dickens's father

was shut up in a debtors' prison, his 12-year-old son sent to work in a blacking factory. The success of Dickens's art was the product not only of his formal mastery but of his ability to use the novel to explain how and why his childhood was disrupted, and to give a coherent and tolerable picture of the England in which such injuries were inflicted on a child.

**W**hat separates Wilson's psychological approach from the biographical criticism that prevails today is not only the critic's characteristic refusal of the doctrinaire language of Freud but also his intense concentration on the quality of the writing itself. If art begins with trauma, trauma was hardly a recipe for art. Nowhere was this distinction clearer than in Wilson's essay on Rudyard Kipling, in which the critic created a compressed and terrifying image of the six years the author spent with his guardians—as depicted in Kipling's early story "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep"—walking to school with a placard between his shoulders reading "Liar"; enduring a nervous breakdown accompanied by partial blindness; punished by separation from his sister, and by hallucinations in which a thick mist separated him from the world and in which he imagined "blowing curtains were specters or that a coat on a nail was an enormous black bird ready to swoop down on him."

In a close reading of Kipling's work, Wilson convincingly asserted Kipling's skill as a craftsman. Yet Kipling's art, he concludes, was finally a failure, because he could not—as Dickens did—give a morally convincing account of himself and his place in the world. "The bitter animus so deeply implanted by the six years of his childhood," Wilson writes of Kipling's later work, "has now become almost entirely dissociated from the objects by which it was originally aroused. It has turned into a generalized hatred of those nations, groups and tendencies, precisely, which stand towards the dominating authority in the relationship of challengers or victims." Kipling's failure—it must be noted—came not because he sympathized with British colonialists instead of with the colonial peoples of India: it was the result of having "resisted his own sense of life and discarded his own moral intelligence in favor of the point of view of a dominant political party."

Wilson's distinction between Kipling's moral failure—unforgivable in fiction—and his failure to champion some political cause—irrelevant, if not destructive to art—is underlined again in his essay on Hemingway, whom the critic introduced to American readers in 1924. "We can see clearly what an error of the politics it was to accuse him of an indifference to society," Wilson wrote, responding to charges that Hemingway's concentration on the personal lives of apolitical characters was politically irresponsible. "His whole work is a criticism of society: he has responded to every pressure of the moral atmosphere of the time, as it is felt at the roots of human relations, with a sensitivity almost unrivaled."

**F**ifty years later, in an age of unrivaled interest in the personal lives of artists, and a corresponding lack of attention to the formal qualities of their work, it may be useful and natural to rebel against the idea that genius and disease are inextricably bound up together. Wilson's criticism provides an instructive alternative to the pathology that characterizes so many of our published lives of artists. Wilson's psychology

was the instrument of a profoundly moral imagination, whose object was to find meaning in art and in human suffering, to envision a personal art with a high moral purpose. Philoctetes, with his suppurating wound, is inseparable from his powerful bow; the critic, Wilson, is Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, who brings the wounded man back to Athens against the orders of his chief: "Only by the intervention of one who is guileless enough and human enough to treat him, not as a monster, nor yet as a magical property . . . but simply as another man, whose sufferings elicit his sympathy and whose courage and pride he admires."

It was a lesson that Wilson—often difficult in personal relationships—would try his best to take to heart. In Wilson's published diary, *The Fifties*, we see—through the eyes of the diaries' editor, Leon Edel—the critic sitting at a seminar table at Princeton, as the young John Berryman recites from work in progress: "What struck me was the way in which EW, not usually given to this kind of empathy, helped the poet over highly emotional passages by feeding back, in quiet even tones, lines Berryman's personal shyness or anguish tended to obscure and mumble."

**I**n the years to come, Wilson would apply his skills as a critic and historian to the making of a formally complex and highly individual art of his own, work that might take its place alongside that of Joyce and Proust. Yet his attempts to express himself through the more conventional forms—poems, plays, stories, and novels—were failures. *Memoirs of Hecate County*, Wilson's one commercial success in fiction, was dismissed by Raymond Chandler as having "made fornication as dull as a railroad timetable." Pronounced Vladimir Nabokov, "I would have soon as tried to open a sardine can with my penis."

Wilson did succeed, however, in writing some of the better nonfiction of the postwar period, as a contributor to the *New Yorker*. *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea* (1955), a light but enduring intellectual detective story, was a popular success. *Europe without Baedeker* (1947), Wilson's reporting on the aftermath of World War II, is suffused with a doughty Yankee disdain for English snobberies, balanced by his apprehensive vision of a doe-eyed America caught in the oncoming headlights of imperial power. Sentence by sentence, the book is proof of the practical merits of Wilson's decades-long efforts to marry his developed literary style to his feel for history, culture, and psychology. "Monelli," Wilson wrote of a then-prominent Italian novelist,

in spite of his journalist's slang, is still enmeshed in the ancient rhetoric of festooned sentences that go on for pages, show-pieces of literary vocabulary that accumulate adjectives and nouns with a minimum of "functional" effectiveness, convolutions of statements that grow up inside statements, like the whorls of a navel orange, and that give the impression at once of exasperating deliberation and of eyebrow-heaving vehemence (there is in a single sentence of *Roma 1943* one parenthesis two pages long that contains a subordinate parenthesis of over a hundred words).

What makes the sentence exciting to read is not only the perfect weighting of Wilson's own subordinate clauses but the dawning realization that it is both a parody and a lesson in craft. Wilson is unwilling, however, to end

with a display of superior skill. "This is a style one associates most readily with the intrigues of a Renaissance court or the maneuvers of the Council of Trent," he continues, shifting his ground from the quality of the writing to the more general subject of style as an expression of national culture, "But then, as one reads on, one has to accept the fact that modern Italy is still partly like this." If parts of *Europe* read like his diaries—from which they were drawn—the style they reveal was the perfect instrument for his thought—witty, sharp-edged, shifting easily from literature to history and back, with a structure that balanced but never struggled to contain the protean movements of his mind: the critic in Wilson had become identical with the writer.

**P***atriotic Gore* (1962), Wilson's baggy masterpiece, is the culmination of his work as a critic, historian, and stylist, the expression in prose of his highly individual mind. More than 800 pages long, the book is composed of 30 essays on the writers of the Civil War—Stowe, Lincoln, Grant, Sherman, Frederick Law Olmsted, Mary Chesnut, Sidney Lanier, George W. Cable, Ambrose Bierce, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. His Lincoln—the unacknowledged inspiration for Garry Wills's *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (1992)—is the first and still unrivaled attempt to see the president as a writer who self-consciously employs his craft in the service of his political ends. Tracing the development of the president's prose, Wilson quotes from an early letter from Lincoln to a friend (italics are Wilson's): "The second is, the *absence of all business and conversation of friends*, which might divert your mind, and give it occasional rest from that *intensity* of thought, which will sometimes wear the sweetest idea threadbare and turn it to the bitterness of death." Even in his private letters, we can see the writer in Lincoln at work, "the balance of vowels and consonants, the assonance and alliteration, the progression from the long 'e's' of 'sweetest idea,' over which one would want to linger, to the short and closed vowels of 'bitterness of death,' which chill the lyrical rhythm and bite it off at the end—all this shows a training of the literary ear that is not often taught in modern schools."

Wilson's attention to literary style, which we now find unusual in a historian, was the foundation of a larger conception of Lincoln that could have come only from Wilson himself. In the figure of Lincoln, the inspiration of Marx and the purposefulness of his Lenin, the two warring sides of Wilson's own personality, are dramatically combined. "With nothing of the deliberate histrionics of the Roosevelts or of the evangelical mask of Wilson," the critic concludes, "he created himself as a poetic figure and he thus imposed himself upon the nation." The force of Wilson's own image is the product of his successful and highly individual synthesis of literature and history, of attention to form and to social circumstance, allowing him to see the writer and the politician in Lincoln as one and the same. Like Gore Vidal, a contemporary essayist of Wilsonian verve, Edmund Wilson imagined historical actors through their prose. Beneath the abstract play of the historical forces so dear to modern historians Wilson sees individuals, mastering their worlds just as we attempt to master our own. The reliance on the prose of his characters is not the product of a narrow application of critical skills—or of its alternative, exhaustive academic research—but of Edmund Wilson's broad and encompassing mind, able to move with ease

from his own experience to that of his historical subjects, urging them triumphantly into life.

**I**f Abraham Lincoln is the author of the North, the South was the literary creation of Sir Walter Scott. “He did measureless harm,” writes Wilson, quoting Mark Twain, “more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote. . . . Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in a great measure responsible for the war.”

In the art of the southern writers of the Civil War, Wilson sees a many-voiced and doomed rebellion against the chivalric romance, the literary form that offered moral justification for the slave society. “There was no irony whatever in Sidney Lanier,” Wilson writes of one of his favorite subjects, “a rapturous young man from Georgia.” Lanier sought refuge from the romance of the South in the heady abstractions of German romanticism; the result was a superheated version of the chivalric formula, “inflated and irised, made to drip with the dews of idealism, to a degree that is rather startling even to one who has become familiar with its earlier manifestations.” Yet if Sidney Lanier is “limited, sometimes a little stupid,” Wilson writes, he is also a poet of talent, and his passion for his art “commands our respect, even our admiration.”

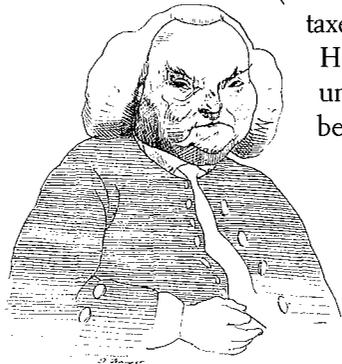
By taking the writers of North and South—rather than abstract historical forces—as his subject, Wilson creates characters that speak to us with a directness lacking in contemporary histories that, filled with numbers, tables, and abstruse methods, seem to have more in common with algebra than with literature. If Wilson’s method has its uses as art, it is also the reflection of a broader approach, of his dedication to the individual perceptions of his subjects, a technique that allows him to make hard moral judgments without the easy taking of sides.

**T**hough the individual essays sparkle with wit and critical acuity, they are all finally subordinated to the overarching movement of the author’s curious mind. The effect is that of the modernist novels Wilson loved, of hundreds of conversations overheard while traveling from North to South in a railway car crowded with poets, novelists, politicians, generals, diarists, and historians. The criticisms most often repeated about *Patriotic Gore*—that the book lacks a thesis, that the whole is diffuse—ignore the note of moral urgency with which Wilson begins his book, and with which he concludes in his essay on Oliver Wendell Holmes. “If we would grasp the significance of the Civil War in relation to the history of our time,” Wilson writes in his preface, “we should consider Abraham Lincoln in connection with the other leaders who have been engaged in similar tasks, Bismarck and Lenin, together with Lincoln the founders of the great modern powers of the Twentieth Century.” Our national unwillingness to see the drive for power at the heart of our history, Wilson fears, will result in a new, unselfconscious form of imperialism, as “the American dream,” “the American way of life,” and “the defense of the free world” are added to the historical dictionary of “warlike cant.”

If Wilson’s fears reflect those of many intellectuals on the Left, the impulse behind them has less to do with politics than it does with the life of the mind. The Roman figure of Oliver Wendell Holmes, with whom

Wilson concludes, embodies the endangered republican virtues of his time, and, by extension, our own. Never corrupted, never discouraged or broken by the conditions of the war, Holmes is able to retain the independence of his mind while all around him his contemporaries, North and South, are losing theirs. The question of how Holmes managed to preserve his independence under such alien conditions is the question that *Patriotic Gore* is designed to answer.

The answer Wilson finds, in the past and the present, is not the pursuit of political controversy or the hermeticism of scholastic debate, but a profound dedication to the direction of one's own thought. The public intellectuals of Wilson's imagination would follow their thoughts wherever they led, and cultivate the skills necessary to keep their fellow citizens informed. This was not an easy thing to do. In his diaries, and in *The Cold War and the Income Tax* (1963), Wilson would wonder again and again at the pressures exerted on the American imagination by officially propagated fear, by the bureaucratization of knowledge in government departments and universities, by the Internal Revenue Service (whose wrath he incurred by neglecting to pay his taxes), and by the Modern Language Association.



He warned of "the crowding of an often unavowed constraint," the tacit understanding between intelligent people that certain subjects and opinions should be avoided, a pressure that we feel today, in the strictures of the politically correct, and in the pressure from so-called "intellectuals" on the Right to ban books and movies or to teach "creation science" to children in school.

If Wilson was a determined opponent of the imperial American politics of his day, he was also, and above all, an American writer, whose championing of the individual subjectivity belonged to a self-consciously American tradition. What he missed, most of all, was the patriotic freedom enjoyed by the writers of the Civil War "to weave fantasies out of their dreams; to reflect upon human life, upon man's relation to Nature, to God and the Universe; to speculate philosophically or euphorically, to burst into impetuous prophecy on the meaning and the promise of the United States."

The promise Wilson sought, of a public literature that would combine the personal and the political, the formal achievements of the modernists with his own interest in history, is still before us. Endless reasons have been advanced for the decline of our intellectual life, from the rise of rents in Manhattan, to the shallowness of the press, to political correctness inside the academy. Edmund Wilson's lifework, produced under circumstances that were never easy, suggests yet another explanation: a failure of ambition on the part of intellectuals. Now that we have celebrated the centennial of Wilson's birth, we might all profit from the example of his work, and look forward to its revival.

# THE PERIODICAL OBSERVER

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

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## Thirty Years in the Public Interest

A Survey of Recent Articles

The public interest," Walter Lippmann once wrote, "may be presumed to be what men would choose if they saw clearly, thought rationally, acted disinterestedly and benevolently." Thirty years ago, Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell, with the assistance of fellow liberals Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Nathan Glazer, James Q. Wilson, and others, launched a quarterly journal devoted to the pursuit of the elusive thing Lippmann had described. They called the journal, naturally enough, the *Public Interest*.

Starting in the fall of 1965, Kristol and his friends served up analytical articles that were grounded in the social sciences but were clearly written and relatively free of jargon. From the outset, Kristol recalls in the 30th anniversary issue of the *Public Interest* (Fall 1995), the tone "was skeptical, pragmatic, meliorist. We were especially provoked by the widespread acceptance of left-wing sociological ideas that were incorporated in the War on Poverty." The journal served as an incubator for many of the ideas that now dominate the public agenda.

The founding fathers of the *Public Interest* were not then conservatives. They regarded the conservatism of William F. Buckley's *National Review* (founded 10 years earlier) as too anti-intellectual, too strident, and too hostile to the New Deal and the welfare state. "We were all children of the depression," Kristol writes, "most of us from lower-middle-class or working-class families, a significant number of us urban Jews for whom the 1930s had been years of desperation, and we felt a measure of loyalty to the spirit of the New Deal if not to all its programs and policies."

Even as their disenchantment with Pres-

ident Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs grew, the student rebellion and emerging counterculture of the 1960s made the *Public Interest* intellectuals feel, and seem, more conservative than they had anticipated. Michael Harrington, the socialist author of *The Other America* (1962), contemptuously branded Kristol and his ilk "neoconservatives," and the label stuck. Kristol embraced it; others, such as Daniel Bell (who considers himself "a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture"), did not. (Bell departed the *Public Interest* 10 years after its founding, and was succeeded as Kristol's coeditor by Nathan Glazer.)

Initially, a "neoconservative" was distinguished from a "conservative" mainly by the former's attachment to the traditional welfare state. In time, however, as that attachment eroded, so did the distinction. Both traditional conservatives and many neoconservatives backed Ronald Reagan for the presidency in 1980, and, after his election, a merger began to take place. They are all, or almost all, "conservatives" now. (And the *Public Interest* is in Washington, D.C., having moved from New York in 1987.) In the 30th anniversary issue, Kristol and other of the journal's stalwarts look back, around, and ahead.

Not only no longer inclined to defend the traditional welfare state, most of the *Public Interest* intellectuals now seem to regard it, in columnist Charles Krauthammer's words, as "a primary cause of the decline of society's mediating institutions," especially the family. Even more striking is how many of the contributors to this eminent public policy journal are now concerned with culture, and even religion.

Reining in the welfare state, Krauthammer says, is only a first step. The “degraded” mass culture is another source of decay.

Kristol, noting that religious conservatism has become an active political force, writes: “We have lived through a century of ever more extreme hedonism, antinomianism, personal and sexual individualism, licentiousness . . . and no one who has bothered to read a bit of history ought to be surprised if it culminates in some kind of aggressive religious awakening.”

Krauthammer, however, is doubtful that, in an age of science and material abundance, the religious revival now under way can prevail. If not, he says, revitalizing civil society will require “the more coercive and less reliable agency of politics.”

Some key tenets of the *Public Interest* thinkers have been vindicated by the experience of the last 30 years. Writes James Q. Wilson, author of *Thinking about Crime* (1975) and many other books: “Except for a handful of American professors, everyone here and abroad now recognizes that capitalism produces greater material abundance for more people than any other economic system ever invented. The evidence is not in dispute. A series of natural experiments were conducted on a scale that every social scientist must envy: Several nations—China, Germany, Korea, and Vietnam—were sawed in two, and capitalism was installed in one part and ‘socialism’ in the other. In every case, the capitalist part outproduced, by a vast margin, the noncapitalist one.” Capitalism also, he adds, seems to be a necessary (but not sufficient) precondition for democracy.

Capitalism does have costs, he admits. “For people worried about inequality or environmental degradation, the question is not whether capitalism has consequences but whether its consequences are better or worse than those of some *feasible* economic alternative.” It’s not fair to measure capitalist reality against socialist (or communitarian or cooperative) ideals, Wilson says. And the costs of capitalism must be weighed against its benefits.

Honest socialists who make those calculations may discover, with Nathan Glazer, that “nothing . . . concentrates the mind on an issue more sharply than discovering one has been wrong about it.” He is referring to his

own conviction 20 years ago that, thanks to the civil-rights revolution, residential integration of black and white Americans would naturally take place as the economic circumstances of blacks improved and their political power increased. “The sharp decline in the racist sentiments of the American population in the past 30 years . . . has done remarkably little to change the overall pattern of black concentration, of black isolation from the rest of the population,” he notes. Can anything be done? “The history of policy efforts to integrate neighborhoods and communities has been one of many schemes, and extended and endless litigation, and very small successes.” Massive government programs are still not the answer, he concludes. Residential integration will have to come about through “individual and voluntaristic” efforts.

Another *Public Interest* contributor, Glenn C. Loury, a professor of economics at Boston University, similarly finds that “race-conscious public action” is not the right answer to persistent racial inequality. “I submit . . . that establishing the color-blind principle is the *only* way to secure lasting civic equality for the descendants of slaves,” he writes.

Charles Murray, author of *Losing Ground* (1984) and co-author of *The Bell Curve* (1994), has written much about the underclass but this time offers what he considers good news for many Americans outside the underclass, including those in what has been called the “overclass.” Intellectual and cultural hostility to marriage has diminished; it is more acceptable for a woman to stay at home with her young children, and secondary education has become more demanding. In the near future, the aging tenured radicals in the universities will increasingly become figures of fun, and the postmodernism there probably will pass out of fashion. The baby boomers soon will be entering their fifties, and they are likely to become more religious as they grow older.

For these and other reasons, Murray believes, there is in the works nothing less than “the restoration of a culture in which family, parenthood, the life of the mind, morality, and the virtues are all perceived and valued in ways that our grandparents would find familiar.” Somehow, he says, the rest of the country, too, must eventually come to take part in this restoration. The public interest requires it.

## POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

### *Mum's the Word*

"The Strange Silence of Political Theory" by Jeffrey C. Isaac, in *Political Theory* (Nov. 1995), SAGE Publications, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, Calif. 91320.

You might think that certain events of the recent past—the revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe, the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the triumph of Western liberalism—would catch the attention of professional political theorists. Apparently not. Their response, complains Isaac, a political scientist at Indiana University, has been "a deafening silence."

Between 1989 and '93, *Political Theory*, "the premier journal of American political theory," published 108 full-length articles. Only one had anything to do with the events of 1989. *Polity*, "the most important American political science journal regularly publishing political theory," ran 61 articles in the field, with only one lonely review-essay about 1989. The *American Political Science Review*, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, and *Ethics* did not muster a single article among them. In all, Isaac says, political theorists wrote 384 articles during the four years, and only two dealt with these

world-transforming events.

What accounts for this "shocking" failure? he asks. "How can a form of inquiry that claims to be the heir of Plato, Machiavelli, Tocqueville, and Marx, thinkers profoundly caught up in the events of their day, be so oblivious to what is going on around it?"

Too many political theorists, Isaac believes, are lost in an insular world, using esoteric jargon, speaking only to one another, and preoccupied with the writings of other, earlier or fashionable, thinkers. Instead of dealing directly with a subject such as constitutionalism, they prefer to think and write about "Locke on Constitutional Government" or "Constitutionalism in Habermas." Unlike the eminent political thinkers of the past, Isaac laments, today's theorists seem content to be mere "puzzle solvers of the problems of others, focusing on approved topics, following academic conventions."

### *The Other Lincoln*

"Lincoln's First Love" by Mark E. Neely, Jr., in *Civil War Times* (Nov.–Dec. 1995), P.O. Box 8200, Harrisburg, Pa. 17105-8200.

If there is one president whose political career marks him as ever calculating, overly ambitious, suspicious, and willing at times to resort to "dirty tricks," it is, of course, Richard M. Nixon. And seeming to stand in saintly contrast is the first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln. Historians don't like to admit it, contends Neely, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian at St. Louis University, but there was more than a little Nixon in Honest Abe.

Politics was Lincoln's "first love," Neely asserts. His ambition, as his law partner once said, was "a little engine that knew no rest." He served one term (1847–49) in the U.S. House of Representatives, ran

unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate in 1855, and tried again three years later.

His famous debates with Democratic senator Stephen A. Douglas, the last of them on October 15, 1858, are often cited among the great moments in American political history. But they were only part of his hard-fought campaign as the Republican candidate for the Senate. He spent most of the next two weeks giving speeches, greeting voters, and writing letters. In those days when state legislatures, not the voting populace, chose U.S. senators, Lincoln was trying to help enough



*Lincoln, pictured in 1857, "lived the life of a professional politician."*

## *How to Fix Government*

Sargent Shriver, the first director (1961–66) of the Peace Corps, ought to be a role model for government's reinventors, contends Charles Peters, editor of the *Washington Monthly* (Dec. 1995).

*Although he later went on to perform many other assignments with distinction, it was at the Peace Corps that he made the administrative innovations that should earn him canonization as the man who showed us how to make government work. In the present time, when many despair whether government can do anything right, what he did to make the Peace Corps a success could not be more relevant.*

*What he understood was, first, the importance of selecting the right people to staff the organization and of getting rid of those who didn't work out, and second, the importance of knowing better than anyone else what was happening where the rubber met the road for his agency, which in the case of the Peace Corps was what the volunteers were doing in the field. . . .*

*And just as Shriver did not hesitate to fire staff members who didn't work out, as many as a third of a volunteer group would be dropped from a training program if it appeared they could not do the job overseas.*

*Other government administrators do not have the power over personnel that Shriver exercised. Shouldn't we give it to them if we are truly serious about making government work?*

Republican legislative candidates win to ensure his own election. When, on arriving in the west-central part of the state, he noticed clusters of itinerant Irish laborers around the railroad station, he became worried, Neely says. "Irish-Americans always worried Republicans, for these Catholic newcomers to the country were notorious for their allegiance to the Democratic party and for their footloose ways." Since there was no voter registration then and election laws were lax, voting fraud was easily accomplished.

In a letter to a Republican operative, Lincoln offered "a bare suggestion": "When there is a known body of these voters, could not a true man, of the 'detective' class, be introduced among them in disguise, who

could, at the nick of time, control their votes? Think it over. It would be a great thing, when this trick is attempted upon us, to have the saddle come up on the other horse. I have talked, more fully than I can write, to Mr. [John Locke] Scripps, and he will talk to you. If we can head off the fraudulent votes we shall carry the day."

Neely does not say (perhaps it is unknown) whether Lincoln's plan was carried out, but, in any case, he failed to unseat Douglas. Curiously, Neely observes, the indiscrete letter is seldom included in Lincoln anthologies. The sooner historians stop trying to keep this supreme politician free from the "taint" of politics, he concludes, "the closer we will come to understanding him."

## *Adventures of a Bureaucrat*

"Adventures in Wonderland: A Scholar in Washington" by Diane Ravitch, in *The American Scholar* (Autumn 1995), Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

In July 1991, during the Bush administration, Ravitch, the noted education historian and author, was sworn into office as an assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. She was put in charge of the Office of Educational Research and

Improvement (OERI) and given a grand office with a full view of the Capitol. During the next 18 months, she writes, she found herself "constantly amazed or angered by the ways things worked."

OERI, her \$450 million domain, had

some 500 employees, including 130 who worked for the respected National Center for Education Statistics. (Like every other bureaucracy, hers was rife with acronyms. OERI was a POC—"principal operating component"—and Ravitch herself, as she "discovered to my alarm," was a "POC-head.") OERI also was in charge of, among other things, dozens of miscellaneous small programs, many of dubious worth but, as she soon learned, virtually all sacrosanct.

Ravitch and her deputy managed to get the ordinarily sluggish bureaucracy to produce "a steady stream of publications," but it took "constant pressure and nagging." Many career employees "worked very hard and very effectively," Ravitch says, but others, some of them making as much as \$110,000 a year, "did nothing at all, ever, and it was impossible either to remove them or to get them to do any work."

Ravitch's worst problems, however, were on Capitol Hill, where Democrats then controlled both houses of Congress. While

the senators and their staffs "were always cordial and straightforward," House Democrats and their staffs, after 40 years in the majority, "exhibited the arrogance of uncontested power." Their attitude was that they alone "decided every educational issue and the department did their bidding." Anything the department did that was not to their liking was "politicization," she notes, "but nothing that they themselves did—like directing federal funds to their favorite causes or harassing administration officials—ever amounted to 'politicization.'"

With the advent of the Clinton administration in 1993, Ravitch left public service. Among the lessons she took away with her: "The federal government is run by Congress, especially by the House of Representatives, which controls the budget and decides how much money will be spent, who will receive it, and what they may or may not spend it on." Another lesson: turnover in public office is a good thing.

## *The Motor Voter Surprise*

"Motor Trouble for Democrats" by Geoff Earle, in *Governing* (Aug. 1995),  
2300 N St. N.W., Ste. 760, Washington, D.C. 20037.

Fearing it could only hurt Republicans and help Democrats, GOP leaders in Congress and elsewhere dug in their heels against the 1994 "motor voter" law, which lets citizens register to vote when they renew their driver's licenses. Democrats, for their part, expected to sign up millions of "natural" Democrats—the poor, the young, the mobile—dissuaded from enrolling in the traditional ways. In California, GOP governor Pete Wilson called the law "flatly unconstitutional" and refused to enforce it (until a federal court last June made him); a handful of other Republican governors similarly resisted. As it turns out, however, reports Earle, an editor at *Congressional Quarterly*, it seems that if anyone should be worried, it's the Democrats.

In the first three months after the legislation took effect at the start of 1995 (later in some states), it produced two million new registrants, Earle says, including "a large new crop of independents—many of them in areas where Democrats might have

expected to reap motor voter dividends." In Kentucky, for example, where only three percent of voters were registered as independents in 1992, about 25 percent of the new voters registered as independents. Registration rose fastest in the increasingly Republican South. In Florida, 250,000 people registered under the new law. In both states, the two parties lost ground to the fast-growing independents, but the Democrats lost much more than the Republicans.

In the end, though, the motor voter law may not much hurt or help either party, Earle says. Young people and people who recently moved are prominent among motor voter registrants, and when it comes to voting, neither group acts much differently from their neighbors. If everybody who might have registered and voted in the last election had done so, Berkeley political scientist Raymond Wolfinger says, "the outcome . . . would have been about the same."

## *A Turn to the (New) Left?*

"Toward an Appropriate Politics" by Charles Siegel, in *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Fall 1995), 10951 W. Pico Blvd., Third Floor, Los Angeles, Calif. 90064.

An air of exhaustion hangs over the Left these days. Siegel has a tonic he thinks would revive it: a return to certain themes of the New Left, which "wanted people to consume less, do more for themselves, and live as much as possible outside of the economic system."

During the 1980s, in reaction to the Reagan administration's efforts to curb the welfare state, the Left "retreated to older progressive ideas about social issues" and let the Right have the issue of empowerment, says Siegel, transportation chair of the Sierra Club and author of *The Preservationist Manifesto* (forthcoming). "The New Left of the 1960s wanted to break up bureaucracies to give people control over decisions that affect their lives. But now the Left just demands more bureaucratic social services"—and as a consequence, it has become increasingly irrelevant.

Most people, for example, see clearly that—with the landscape littered with broken families and both parents in most intact

families working—there exists a "parenting deficit" in America today. Yet the Left, Siegel says, "ignores this new problem" and pushes early-20th-century progressive measures (e.g., more money for day care and for schooling) in whose efficacy even it no longer really believes. Leftists back these programs to help children and working mothers cope but "have no vision at all of a better future," he asserts.

Conservatives, meanwhile, defend the traditional family but "cannot get at the root of the problem," Siegel argues, because of their belief in economic growth. They "promote the growth of a consumer economy that leaves people with no time for their families and that takes over most responsibilities of individuals."

If it would stop its outmoded demands for more government services and focus "on humanizing our society by limiting both big government and big business," Siegel believes, the Left "could dominate the political debate."

## FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

### *How to Treat an Awakening Giant*

"A New China Strategy" by Kenneth Lieberthal, in *Foreign Affairs* (Nov.-Dec. 1995), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Its economy is surging, its military power is growing, and it is increasingly assertive in international affairs. China is finally claiming the role of a great power. Yet the United States, says Lieberthal, a professor of political science and business administration at the University of Michigan, has no coherent response.

Some American analysts hope that China will experience a Soviet-style meltdown leading to a more cooperative, democratic government. But it is far more likely, Lieberthal says, that a weakened China would cause even bigger problems for the world than a strong one: civil war, famine, migration, and possibly nuclear mischief. Other American analysts favor a policy of containment. But that, writes Lieberthal, would only divide Asia, strengthen China's nationalists and militarists, and reduce the region's prosperity.

The Clinton administration talks of "comprehensive engagement" with China, but that is just an empty phrase, Lieberthal charges. U.S. policy is ad hoc, uncoordinated, and driven by politics and emotion. Washington "thrashes China for human rights violations" with one hand while offering friendship with the other. Last year, the administration privately assured Beijing that it would not issue a visa to Taiwanese president Lee Teng-hui, but then, yielding to pressure at home, did so anyway, thus humiliating the Chinese officials who had accepted Washington's assurances.

In Beijing, Lieberthal sees a volatile mixture of cockiness and insecurity. Rapid change has made China more difficult to govern. Deng Xiaoping, who has insisted on a "basically cooperative" relationship with the United States, is in his last days, and a succes-

sion struggle is imminent. The temptation to play the nationalist card will grow. Many in Beijing detect a new reluctance in international councils such as the World Bank to make allowances for what Beijing calls "Chinese characteristics" in areas such as human rights and economics. They argue that China should take a hard line "and push hard for the world to accept it on its own terms," Lieberthal says.

The United States needs to encourage positive developments within China, he says. It also needs to rally other countries (notably Japan) "to articulate and convey to China's leaders the conduct expected of major powers" and to stand with Washington. The best that can be hoped for from a good policy is modest success, Lieberthal concludes. And in the absence of *any* policy, the worst is not too much to fear.

## *Kennan and the Cold War*

"From World War to Cold War" by George F. Kennan and John Lukacs, in *American Heritage* (Dec. 1995), 60 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10011.

Revisionist historians have portrayed America's decision in 1947 to oppose the Soviet Union with a policy of "containment" as premature and provocative. Kennan contends, in an epistolary interview conducted by noted historian Lukacs, that, on the contrary, it took Americans too long to come to a realistic view of Joseph Stalin's regime.

When Kennan arrived in Moscow in 1944 after a seven-year absence to serve as deputy to U.S. ambassador Averell Harriman, he realized with some shock that the Soviet regime "was still indistinguishable from the one that had opposed in every way our policies of the pre-war period, that had entered into the cyni-

cal nonaggression pact with the Germans in 1939, and that had shown itself capable of abominable cruelties, little short of genocide," in areas under its control. Kennan did not dispute the need to keep giving the Soviet forces military support, but he saw no reason for "such elaborate courting of Soviet favor as was then going on, or for encouraging our public to look with such high hopes for successful collaboration with the Soviet regime after the war."

The failure of Stalin's regime to come to the aid of the Poles who rose up against the German occupiers in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising should have prompted the United

## *See No Evil*

Fifty years ago, on March 5, 1946, Winston Churchill delivered his famous "iron curtain" speech in Fulton, Missouri. Spencer Warren, head of a Washington public policy seminar program, recalls in the *National Interest* (Winter 1995-96) the torrent of criticism that greeted Churchill's warning.

*In retrospect, it appears that [President Harry] Truman was using Churchill—with the latter's understanding—to crystallize opinion on behalf of a new American policy already taking effect. . . .*

*But Churchill's harsh and somber tone, and the breadth and detail with which he made his case—the first strong criticisms of Russia by a Western leader since the Nazi invasion of Russia in June 1941—brought down on him a torrent of criticism, thus restoring him temporarily to the position in which he had spent most of his career. . . .*

*Leading liberal newspapers and magazines . . . attacked Churchill for relying on the old power politics, endangering the UN, and wrongly blaming the Russians. . . .*

*For their part, conservative critics were more agitated by Churchill's proposal of a peacetime Anglo-American alliance than by his attacks on Soviet policy. Senator Taft (R-Ohio) agreed with much of Churchill's criticism of Russia, but opposed his proposed solution, maintaining that "it would be very unfortunate for the U.S. to enter into any military alliance with England, Russia, or any other country in time of peace."*

States to make “a thoroughgoing exploration of Soviet intentions” in Europe, Kennan says. But President Franklin D. Roosevelt was reluctant to risk undermining Allied wartime unity.



Americans were given a rosy view of their wartime ally

FDR seems to have believed that Stalin would be swayed by his personal charm to collaborate in the creation of a new postwar Europe, Kennan notes.

Senior U.S. military commanders also had an unrealistically upbeat

view. At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, Roosevelt futilely tried “to assure democratic independence for the Eastern European peoples by accepting, and trying in good faith

to meet, what he took to be Stalin’s demand for ‘friendly governments’ in that part of the world.” The Americans were still trying to preserve amity at the Potsdam Conference of mid-summer 1945. In vain.

Kennan’s famous 8,000-word “Long Telegram,” sent from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow on February 22, 1946, spelled out what he called the “Kremlin’s neurotic view of world affairs.” Moscow, while deaf to reason, he wrote then, was “highly sensitive to logic of force” and usually withdrew when it encountered “strong resistance . . . at any point.” Washington’s reaction to his analysis was “nothing less than sensational”; it became the basis of U.S. containment policy. Later, in July 1947, Kennan published his even more famous “X” article in *Foreign Affairs*.

“What happened in 1946,” Lukacs comments, “was that finally those in charge of this country’s world policy were catching up with [Kennan], and then, by and large, political and public opinion followed in 1947.”

## A Greening of National Security?

“Is the Environment a National Security Issue?” by Marc A. Levy, in *International Security* (Fall 1995), Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Univ., 79 John F. Kennedy St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

It’s been argued by some that global environmental problems ought to be considered matters of U.S. national security. Jessica Tuchman Mathews, a Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, and Norman Myers, author of *Ultimate Security* (1993), believe that biodiversity loss, soil erosion, and other such problems ought to be treated with the same seriousness as Bosnia and Saddam Hussein. Levy, an instructor of politics and international affairs at Princeton University, is skeptical.

Some global environmental problems have no connection to any vital national interest. Acid rain, for example, “would have to rank very far down on the list of threats to national security because the values threatened—trees, sports fishing, and so on—are far from vital,” Levy writes.

Two environmental problems come closest, in Levy’s view, to being direct threats to U.S. security: ozone depletion in the stratosphere and the possibility of catastrophic global warming. But even in these cases, he says, applying the “national security” tag may not make sense. It wouldn’t change the analysis

of the problem, or the remedy. Indeed, the security alarm might draw more public and congressional attention not only to the problem but to the costs of taking action—and so make it harder to deal with the problem. One reason that the U.S. response in the late 1980s to the danger of ozone depletion was so effective, Levy believes, may have been that it was seen not as a “security” threat but as a straightforward “public health and chemical hazard problem.”

Why are Mathews, Myers, and others so eager to make environmental degradation a national security matter? Because, Levy suggests, they want “to whip up greater support for global environmental protection.” But this strategy could easily backfire, he says. Public perception of the relative seriousness of various environmental risks bears little relation to reality, as a 1987 Environmental Protection Agency study showed. A public convinced “that any problem that is international and ecological” is a matter of national security, Levy warns, would likely force policymakers to gallop off in pursuit of the wrong enemies.

## ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

### *Does Trade Hurt Workers?*

"Are Your Wages Set in Beijing?" by Richard B. Freeman, "Income Inequality and Trade: How to Think, What to Conclude" by J. David Richardson, and "How Trade Hurt Unskilled Workers" by Adrian Wood, in *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* (Summer 1995), American Economic Assn., 2014 Broadway, Ste. 305, Nashville, Tenn. 37203-2418.

Is there a connection between the rising tide of cheap imports and the unhappy condition of less-skilled workers in the United States and Europe? American and European economists generally disagree—with each other.

In a survey of the debate, Harvard economist Freeman says that American economists—including Richardson, of Syracuse University—generally assign trade minimal blame, while European economists—such as Wood, of the University of Sussex—generally indict it.

About the plight of the less skilled, there is little debate: demand for their labor is falling. In the United States, the result has been stagnant or declining wages; in Europe, where wages are propped up by law and labor unions, the result has been rising unemployment.

Several recent studies, Freeman notes, have found that not "all that many" less-skilled American workers have lost manufacturing jobs as a result of increased trade. The reason is simple: only about 15 percent of such people are now employed in manufacturing. Most are in retail trade and services. They aren't competing with Indonesian garment workers and Chinese toy makers. Other factors—including technological change and the decline of unions—have been more important, he believes. Trade, by economists' most com-

mon method of calculation, accounts for only 10 to 20 percent of the overall fall in demand for unskilled labor.

Wood, however, maintains that this method understates trade's impact. It assumes that, say, low-tech toys imported from China displace high-tech U.S. toys. Since the high-tech toys require less labor to make, relatively few jobs are lost. But Wood argues that economists should base their job-loss estimates on the assumption that the labor-intensive low-tech toys would have been made in the United States.

Moreover, Wood says, developing countries are increasing exports of services in such "low-skill-intensive" areas as shipping, tourism, and computer keypunching. And growing trade stimulates technological progress throughout developed economies, encouraging all firms to reduce unskilled labor. In the developed countries, he believes, trade and trade-induced technological change account for about half of the decline in demand for unskilled labor.

Wood, like most economists, does not favor protectionist policies. Better, he writes, for government to help the unskilled obtain education and training. He also favors government subsidies of various sorts to ease the plight of unskilled workers on both sides of the Atlantic.

### *The Air Bag Peril*

"Are Drivers of Air-Bag Equipped Cars More Aggressive? A Test of the Offsetting Behavior Hypothesis" by Steven Peterson, George Hoffer, and Edward Millner, in *The Journal of Law & Economics* (Oct. 1995), Univ. of Chicago Press, P.O. Box 37005, Chicago, Ill. 60637.

Anybody who doubts that people are strange ought to consider the research on car safety measures. There are conflicting findings, of course, but one line of research strongly suggests that people react to new safety devices, from seat belts to studded snow tires, by driving with greater abandon. In the curiously apt jargon of the economist, they are said to increase their "driving intensity." So much so, apparently, that they may totally

negate the worth of the safety measure.

That is precisely what Peterson, Hoffer, and Millner, all of Virginia Commonwealth University, find in their study of the effects of air bags (which will be required for both front-seat occupants in 1998 autos). They made a list of the car models (excluding station wagons) to which air bags were added between 1989 and '93, then checked insurance industry records of personal injury

claims. Sure enough, claims for the air bag models rose “significantly.” (Interestingly, however, claims dropped for models that were “upsized.”)

The authors then looked at data on the 207 fatal car crashes in Virginia during 1993 that involved late-model cars. “Of the 62 crashes involving cars equipped with air bags, 53 were . . . initiated by the driver of the air-bag equipped car.” That’s strong evidence, the authors say, that the reassuring presence of air bags promotes hot-dogging on the road.

It gets worse. There were 33 crashes in which the driver was the sole fatality, and 16

of these drivers were protected by an air bag. This is further evidence, the authors say, that protection offered by the air bags is offset by a new recklessness.

Even worse, drivers protected by air bags seem to be a danger to passengers. There were 13 single-car crashes in which a passenger was killed but the driver was not. In nine of these, the driver had an air bag.

The authors leave readers to draw their own conclusions. (It’s important to note that traffic fatalities have been declining for decades.) One obvious possibility is that cars ought to be equipped with air bags for everybody but the driver.

## Supply-Side Stories

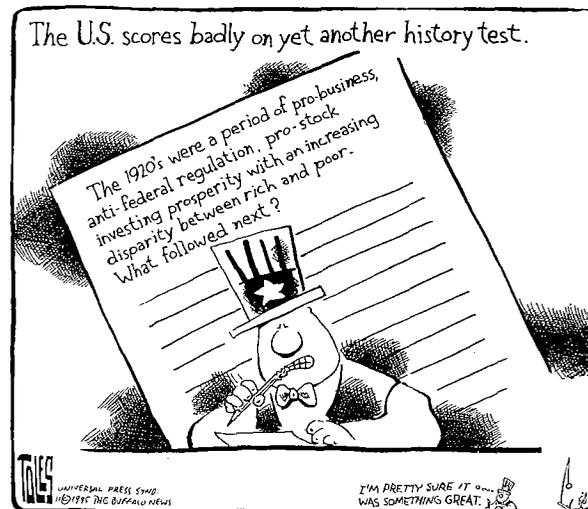
“Federal Personal Income Tax Policy in the 1920s” by Gene Smiley and Richard H. Keehn, in *The Journal of Economic History* (June 1995), 302 Thayer St., Box 1981, Brown Univ., Providence, R.I. 02912; “Tax Projections and the Budget: Lessons from the 1980s” by Alan J. Auerbach, “Behavioral Responses to Tax Rates: Evidence from the Tax Reform Act of 1986” by Martin Feldstein, and “Income Creation or Income Shifting? Behavioral Responses to the Tax Reform Act of 1986” by Joel Slemrod, in *American Economic Review* (May 1995), American Economic Assn., 2014 Broadway, Ste. 305, Nashville, Tenn. 37203.

In the recent history of the “dismal science,” few theories have received a worse press than supply-side economics. Yet more than a decade after Ronald Reagan made it a household term, economists hotly debate the doctrine’s validity. While the crude tax-cuts-pay-for-themselves version finds little support, there seems to be a growing sense that conventional economics has missed some important points about taxation.

A recent study of the federal tax cuts of the 1920s by economists Smiley, of Marquette University, and Keehn, of the University of Wisconsin, Parkside, is a case in point. With World War I over, there was broad agreement that federal income tax rates were too high. In the upper brackets, marginal tax rates (the amount taxed on each additional dollar of income) exceeded 70 percent, and tax avoidance, especially the purchase of tax-exempt government bonds, was common. In 1921, ’24, and ’26, Washington cut the marginal tax rates dramatically, especially for the rich.

Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon, who served under Presidents Harding,

Coolidge, and Hoover, argued that such cuts could keep tax receipts almost the same while shifting more of the overall tax burden



Supply-side economics even gets blamed for the Depression.

to higher-income individuals. Smiley and Keehn say that is what happened. The decrease in tax avoidance, along with economic growth, led to a rise in tax receipts after 1923. The share of all federal income taxes paid by taxpayers with net incomes of \$100,000 or more jumped from 35 percent in 1922 to 65 percent seven years later.

Although the consequences of the tax cuts of 1981 and the tax reforms of 1986 remain murky, some essentials seem clear. The 1986 legislation reduced the marginal tax rate for high-income taxpayers from 50 percent to 28 percent. To the surprise of all but supply-side economists, the reported pre-tax income of these wealthy folk rose rapidly. The top one-half percent of U.S. taxpayers, who received 7.7 percent of all adjusted gross income in 1985, got 9.2 percent in 1986, and 12.1 percent two years later.

Just what sort of change in behavior this reflected remains unclear. Are people working harder because they get to keep more of their pay, as ardent supply-siders would have it? Feldstein, a Harvard economist, says that, as yet at least, there is not much evidence for this proposition—except in the special case of married women. But Feldstein notes that people did clearly respond to the higher cap-

ital gains taxes in the 1986 legislation: reported capital gains fell by nearly 40 percent in real terms between 1988 and '92.

The reduced marginal tax rates do appear to have lessened avoidance of the personal income tax. Top earners took less of their pay in fringe benefits and other nontaxable forms, and more in cash. But Slemrod, of the University of Michigan, says that tax return data for 1984 and 1990 show that the biggest part of the increase in the real income of the affluent was the result merely of shifting income from forms subject to higher corporate income taxes to forms (e.g., Subchapter-S corporations) subject to personal income taxes.

The complexity of the economy may well preclude an unequivocal verdict on supply-side arguments, but one thing at least is clear: taxation has little-understood effects on the economy.

## SOCIETY

### *The Small World of Academic History*

"Who Killed History? An Academic Autopsy" by William Craig Rice, in *The Virginia Quarterly Review* (Autumn 1995), One West Range, Charlottesville, Va. 22903.

If America is becoming "a nation of historical illiterates," as independent historian David McCullough and others fear, then academic historians deserve much of the blame. So argues Rice, who teaches expository writing at Harvard University.

"Academic historians have followed the trajectory of professionalization so far," he maintains, "that, like poets in creative writing workshops, they now produce more writers than readers, a veritable literature without an audience." Very few of the roughly 2,000 books annually "noted" by the *American Historical Review*, the journal of the 18,000-member American Historical Association, are aimed at the general reader, Rice points out. The tomes tend to be "extraordinarily arcane," "politically trendy," or both (e.g., *Fleeting Opportunities: Women Shipyard Workers in Portland and Vancouver during World War II*).

The books also tend to be poorly written, Rice observes. Academic writing's "flattened verbs, incessant abstractions, disregard for rhythm and sentence balance, expert-oriented asides, and occasional political tenden-

tiousness all serve to drive away a general audience just as surely as they identify the author as one of the elect." Worst of all, he says, most academic historians have abandoned the narrative tradition that runs from Herodotus to Shelby Foote.

In the hundreds of college and university history departments across the land, Rice points out, "a talent for writing for a broad audience is considered secondary at best, a mark of intellectual deficiency at worst." Many academic historians sneer at writers such as David McCullough, William Manchester, and Barbara Tuchman as "nonprofessionals" and mere "popularizers."

The decline of history, Rice contends, is a result of "an unfree intellectual economy within academia, an economy which binds the feet of talented scholars even as it confers advanced degrees, lifelong employment, and subsidized publication." On politically sensitive subjects, the young academics "may be shackled by New Left notions of acceptable lines of inquiry." And in the "closed shop" of academic history, they "are cut off from 'nonprofessionals,' 'amateurs,'

and 'journalist-historians.' " It is time, Rice believes, to open up that shop, and to encourage academic historians "to write for

the educated public, to become freely functioning intellectual citizens, [and] to be teachers in [an] expansive sense."

## *'Pro-Choicers' and the Fact of Life*

"Our Bodies, Our Souls" by Naomi Wolf, in *The New Republic* (Oct. 16, 1995),  
1220 19th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

In a recent *Atlantic Monthly* essay, George McKenna, a political scientist at City College of New York, urged that foes of abortion take "an unequivocally pro-life" position that is also "effectively pro-choice": namely, recognize the legal status of abortion and "grudgingly tolerate" it but at the same time seek to restrict and discourage it (see "The Periodical Observer," *WQ*, Autumn '95, pp. 115-16). Now, from the other side of the barricades, Wolf, a noted feminist writer, argues that abortion rights advocates should abandon their euphemistic rhetoric and admit, to themselves and others, that "the death of a fetus is a real death," and that "this country's high rate of abortion—which ends more than a quarter of all pregnancies—can only be rightly understood as what Dr. Henry Foster was brave enough to call it: 'a failure.'"

By clinging to the pretense that there is

no life and no death involved in abortion, Wolf contends, the pro-choice movement forfeits the backing of "the millions of Americans who want to support abortion as a legal right but still need to condemn it as a moral iniquity." More important, she says, "choice" proponents "entangle our beliefs in a series of self-delusions, fibs, and evasions. And we risk becoming precisely what our critics charge us with being: callous, selfish, and casually destructive men and women who share a cheapened view of human life."

Making an analogy to war, Wolf writes that abortion should remain legal and is sometimes necessary. "Only if we uphold abortion rights within a matrix of individual conscience, atonement, and responsibility," she says, "can we both correct the logical and ethical absurdity in our position—and consolidate the support of the center."

## *Gotham's Anticrime Wave*

"How to Run a Police Department" by George L. Kelling, in *City Journal* (Autumn 1995),  
Manhattan Institute, 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017; "Giuliani: Start Spreading the News" by David Brooks, in *The Weekly Standard* (Nov. 13, 1995),  
1150 17th St. N.W., Ste. 505, Washington, D.C. 20036-4617.

New York City's crime rate plummeted in 1994, with murder down an astonishing 32 percent and robbery down 22 percent. In the first nine months of 1995, the murder rate fell an additional 30 percent. "New York is now the safest city in America with a population over one million," declares Brooks, a senior editor at the *Weekly Standard*. The chief reason for this, he and Kelling, a criminologist at Northeastern University, contend, is the militant anticrime strategy adopted by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Police Commissioner William Bratton since they took office in early 1994.

Their approach draws on the "Broken Windows" thesis that Kelling and political scientist James Q. Wilson advanced more than a decade ago: that disorder and petty

crimes, if ignored, make decent citizens fearful and put a neighborhood on the skids, and eventually lead to an upsurge in serious crime. Hence, writes Kelling, "the best way to prevent major crimes and urban decay is to target minor crimes—panhandling, youths taking over parks, prostitution, public drinking, and public urination."

This runs counter to the traditional view that serious crime is the only proper business of the police. But the Giuliani-Bratton strategy seems to be working (even if the two men have feuded over who deserves the credit). "The streets and parks are cleaner," Brooks notes. "Aggressive panhandling has been curtailed. The homeless now tend to spend their days sitting on park benches, whereas before they were likely to be found sleeping on the sidewalk. . . . New York [is

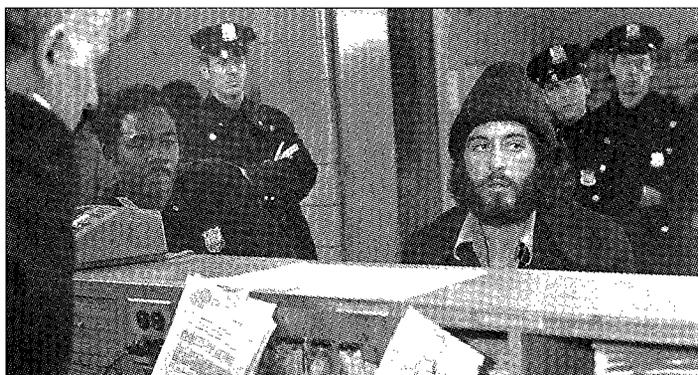
now] a more civil place.”

Bratton is also taking an unorthodox approach to controlling police corruption, Kelling notes, and his effort should be helped by the new war on crime. For decades, police and political leaders have relied on “a rigidly hierarchical command structure” to police the police. But most officers work the streets alone or in pairs. They come to believe that they are doing “society’s dirty work” with little support from the public or their self-serving superiors. They are, in other words, ripe for corruption.

Bratton believes, with Kelling, that the only effective strategy is to focus *not* on controlling police but on the main mission: preventing crime and keeping order. “Most police officers will find success so gratifying that their own self-image, their pride in being

part of a winning organization, will serve as an internal bar to misbehavior,” Kelling says.

Unfortunately, he observes, state legisla-



Efforts to prevent police corruption—a problem vividly portrayed in *Serpico* (1973)—have shaped the way police departments are organized.

tors and judges have failed to grasp the Giuliani-Bratton reform logic. The state legislature, prodded by the jurists, who wanted to avoid “trivial dirty work,” has made minor offenses against public order administrative rather than criminal matters, which has, Bratton told Kelling, “the potential to undermine the whole effort.”

## Your Name or Mine?

“What’s Your Name?” by Amy A. Kass and Leon R. Kass, in *First Things* (Nov. 1995), Institute on Religion and Public Life, 156 Fifth Ave., Ste. 400, New York, N.Y. 10010.

As if modern marriage were not already sailing in troubled waters, Americans have added yet another small ripple by making it an open question whether a woman will take her husband’s name. Mr. and Mrs. Kass, who both teach at the University of Chicago, have no doubt about their own view: “If marriage is, as we believe, a new estate, in fact changing the identities of both partners, there is good reason to have this changed identity reflected in some change of surname.”

Individuals entering marriage who refuse to bear a common name, the authors contend, are, though perhaps not by intent, “symbolically holding themselves back from the full meaning of the union.” They also are creating “in advance a confused identity” for their future children. A “common name identifies the child securely within its nest of origin and rearing, and symbolically points to the ties of parental affection and responsibility that

are needed for its healthy growth and well-being,” the Kasses say.

How about a hyphenated or newly invented name? Hyphenated family names “are simply impractical beyond one or at most two generations,” the authors point out. A totally new surname sunders all ties to the past.

But why should it be the woman who surrenders the surname? Because, the Kasses maintain, “the mother is the ‘more natural’ parent, that is, the parent *by birth*,” while the father, whose role in the birth is “minuscule and invisible,” is a parent “more by choice and agreement than by nature.” In giving his surname to his bride, the husband is offering “a pledge of (among other things) loyal and responsible fatherhood for her children. A woman who refuses this gift is, whether she knows it or not, tacitly refusing the promised devotion or, worse, expressing her suspicions about her groom’s trustworthiness as a husband and prospective father.

"Patrilineal surnames," the Kasses conclude, "are, in truth, less a sign of paternal prerogative than of paternal duty and professed commitment, reinforced psychologi-

cally by gratifying the father's vanity in the perpetuation of his name and by offering this nominal incentive to do his duty both to mother and child."

## PRESS & MEDIA

### *Race in the Newsroom*

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

In September 1994, the *Washington Post* ran a gripping series of articles about a black Washington grandmother and her family. The daughter of North Carolina sharecroppers, Rosa Lee Cunningham along with six of her eight children had become mired in drug addiction and crime, while her other two offspring had not. In his intimately detailed articles, veteran reporter Leon Dash sought to understand how it was that these "children and grandchildren from migrant families" could take such divergent paths.

His brilliant reporting won Dash a Pulitzer Prize. But inside the *Post*, according to Ruth Shalit, an associate editor at the *New Republic* (Oct. 2, 1995), Dash's series dismayed many other black reporters, who worried that it tarnished the image of "the black community." They ostracized Dash.

Shalit's cover story about race at the *Post* created a sensation in the national news media. That was not surprising, perhaps, since, as she writes, newspapers across the nation in recent years have also embarked upon "a course of 'compensatory' or preferential minority hiring." The effort to be "inclusive" at some papers includes requirements for racial and ethnic "diversity" in the sources quoted in a story (see the *American Journalism Review*, Oct. 1995).

Shalit contends that the *Post's* determined affirmative action efforts in hiring have fanned racial tensions in the newsroom. An internal 1993 report stated that many black reporters complain that they have to work harder than whites to get "good stories or challenging beats." Meanwhile, she says, many white staffers allege that affirmative action has resulted in the hiring of some incompetent reporters.

In her lengthy article, Shalit also contends that *Post* editors—in their search for "racially balanced news coverage"—have

compromised the traditional journalistic ideal of fearless truth-telling. "Aggressive coverage of the social pathologies at the heart of Washington's black underclass . . . has increasingly given way to human-interest puffery," she claims. And because of racial oversensitivity on the part of editors, she charges, the *Post* has pulled its punches on various stories.

Shalit also argues that the *Post's* affirmative action effort "to mirror the 32.3 percent of blacks and Hispanics in metropolitan Washington itself seems flamboyantly unrealistic." (Eighteen percent of the staff today are minorities.) After all, she observes, blacks and Hispanics make up only 10.6 percent of "the available pool" of college graduates, and only a fraction of even that small group goes into journalism.

In a subsequent issue of the *New Republic* (Oct. 16, 1995), *Post* executive editor Leonard Downie Jr. and publisher Donald Graham emit howls of outrage. "We have not adjusted standards in any way in our hiring of dozens of talented journalists of color who do distinguished work," Downie insists. The *Post's* goal for nine years, he says, has been to have half of its new "hires" be women, and one-fourth minorities, "consistent with filling every vacancy with the best-qualified person possible." Since that goal was set, he says, the *Post* has hired 330 journalists, of whom 46 percent were women, 29.6 percent were minorities—and 37 percent were white men.

Shalit's piece contains a good many errors, some trivial, some not (she wrongly said an aide to a local political figure had served time in prison). Downie also notes that accusations of plagiarism (honest mistakes, she says) have been lodged against her in the recent past.

"At 25, just a few years out of Princeton,

and without a single daily newspaper story under her belt," observes John Cloud, editor of the *Washington City Paper* (Oct. 20, 1995), Shalit is writing major stories for national publications. That fact, he notes, seems to reflect "the current mores of magazine journalism, which is often more interested in forceful wording and fluid writing than spick-and-span reporting."

Despite Shalit's mistakes, it is apparent she struck a nerve. Are there enough minority journalists to satisfy industry-wide affirmative action plans without sacrificing qual-

ity? "That's hard to tell," Downie says, in an interview with Alicia C. Shepard, a contributing writer for the *American Journalism Review* (Dec. 1995), though for the *Post*, standing "at the top of the food chain," talent is not a problem.

The controversy sparked by Shalit's article does, however, lend support to one of her points: "By focusing obsessively on the ideals and the instruments of diversity, by exhorting its staff to reflect endlessly on their own resentments, the *Post* is ensuring that the resentments will never be transcended."

## Who Lost Vietnam?

"Vietnam in Retrospect" by Peter Braestrup, in *Forbes MediaCritic* (Fall 1995), P.O. Box 762, Bedminster, N.J. 07921.

For nearly three decades, many critics—and many champions—of the press have insisted that the news media, particularly TV news, turned Americans against the Vietnam War. Not so, contends Braestrup, a former Saigon bureau chief for the *Washington Post* and author of *Big Story* (rev. ed., 1994), a study of Vietnam news coverage.

"TV folk saw their nightly, two-minute reports as the ultimate act of truth-telling," bringing the grisly reality of war into the nation's living rooms, he notes. But a study by media specialist Lawrence Lichty of Northwestern University found that out of more than 2,300 network evening news reports from Vietnam between August 1965 and August 1970, only 76 showed heavy fighting, with dead or wounded visible.

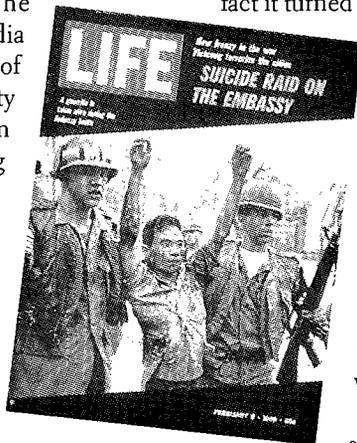
For two years after the U.S. troop build-up began in 1965, according to Lichty's analysis, network TV reporting was, on the whole, favorable to the American effort. "After that, coverage began to shift," Braestrup says—a change that reflected the "growing political discord at home." News reports increasingly questioned whether the U.S. venture would ultimately succeed.

But scholars have found no convincing evidence that TV war coverage had any spe-

cial impact on public opinion at home, Braestrup points out. In the 1950-53 Korean War, there was press censorship and no TV coverage, yet the slow decline in public support that occurred then, apparently in response to lengthening casualty lists, was roughly the same as the falloff in mass support over a comparable period during the Vietnam War.

Television portrayed Hanoi's surprise Tet offensive in January 1968 as a calamity for the U.S.-South Vietnamese side, when in fact it turned into a grave military setback for Hanoi. But "the 'disaster' portrait painted by television, and too slowly corrected by print, did not cause the disarray in Washington," Braestrup says. "In the absence of presidential leadership and after years of White House ambiguity and claims of 'progress,' LBJ's political crisis was a self-inflicted wound."

Indeed, during Hanoi's massive tank-led Easter offensive four years later, there was "no quick rush to judgment" by correspondents. President Richard Nixon, "no media favorite, responded with decisive actions—sending ships and aircraft, mining Haiphong harbor, bombing North Vietnam, making a new conditional peace offer. He took charge and gave shape to the story." It was the nation's political leaders, not the press, who wrote the U.S. script during America's longest war.



## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

### *A Farewell to Faith*

"The Decline of Religious Beliefs in Western Europe" by Mattei Dogan, in *International Social Science Journal* (Sept. 1995), UNESCO, 1 rue Miollis, 75732 Paris, Cedex 15, France.

*Do you believe in God?* To that simple question, most Western Europeans still answer yes. But over the past three decades, observes Dogan, director of research at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris, Europeans have become much less religious.

It is well known, he notes, that Catholics' attendance at Mass, along with the number of baptisms, marriages, and religious burials, has generally declined in recent decades. Among West German Catholics under 30, for example, 52 percent in 1963 were churchgoers, but only 18 percent of their counterparts in 1982 were. With the general decline in religious practice, Dogan maintains, has come an erosion in fundamental religious beliefs, although international survey researchers have only recently sought to measure it.

One such survey in 1990–91 found that outside of Ireland (50 percent) and Poland (73 percent), only a minority of believers rates God as very important in their lives. In

France, for example, of the 62 percent professing belief, only 13 percent consider God very important in their lives; in Britain, the corresponding figures are 78 percent and 19 percent. In the United States, 89 percent say they believe, and of them, 58 percent rate God's role in their lives as very significant.

When people say they believe in God, moreover, they may or may not have the personal God of the Jewish and Christian Bible in mind. Given some other choices, the biblical God won an absolute majority in only five countries: Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and the United States. "Some sort of spirit or life force" was preferred by 34 percent in France, 41 percent in Britain, 45 percent in western Germany, and 46 percent in Sweden.

Few Europeans declare themselves atheists, Dogan says. Most who lose their faith are not hostile toward religion, but indifferent. Dogan does not seem worried about the fate of morality. "The philosophy of the Ten Commandments, the prophets, and the apos-

### *God and the Sexes*

Evelyn Birge Vitz, a professor of French and comparative literature at New York University and a contributing editor to the Catholic magazine *Crisis* (Sept. 1995), ponders the fact that Christ chose no women as Apostles.

*Can it be that Jesus couldn't choose women because of the low status of women at his time? This argument has always struck me as ridiculous. Or rather, and quite simply, only those who do not believe that Jesus is God can hold such a view. . . . Are we really to believe that Jesus—God—did not, could not do something he wanted to do—pick women to be Apostles—because he was worried about what people would think?*

*If he did all these things, it must be because that was precisely what he, as the Son of God—as God himself—intended to do. No other view is even seriously worth consideration. Since women as priestesses were common in other religions of the time, it can hardly have failed to dawn on God that this was a possibility.*

*It has been charged that, at some point, Christianity got onto the wrong foot about the way in which power is assigned differentially to the sexes. But, in fact, this is the foot on which Christ started his religion. Certain fundamental roles of active leadership, of power in this world, were assigned to men, and not to women. . . .*

*Should we women be offended? . . . It seems safe to assume that, since [God] foresaw how he was going to assign power relations on earth, he designed his creatures to find satisfaction in this arrangement.*

ties is embodied in the civil legislation of the whole of Europe. . . . Decline in religious values by no means implies moral decadence if

those values are replaced by a non-metaphysical ethic. But no doubt the fear of divine punishment tends to make us better people.”

## A New View of Peter Abelard

“The Debate on Universals before Peter Abelard” by Augustine Thompson, O.P., in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (July 1995), P.O. Box 24580, Los Angeles, Calif. 90024.

In the late 11th and early 12th centuries, early medieval philosophers engaged in a sometimes bitter debate about “universals.” Historians have portrayed this as a two-sided argument. “Nominalists” considered universals such as “goodness” and “justice” mere words. One could use a word such as *humanity*, but that did not mean that such an entity existed. “Realists” regarded universals as real things. Their arguments went on fruitlessly, according to the traditional historical view, until the genius Peter Abelard (1079–1142) hammered out a synthesis.

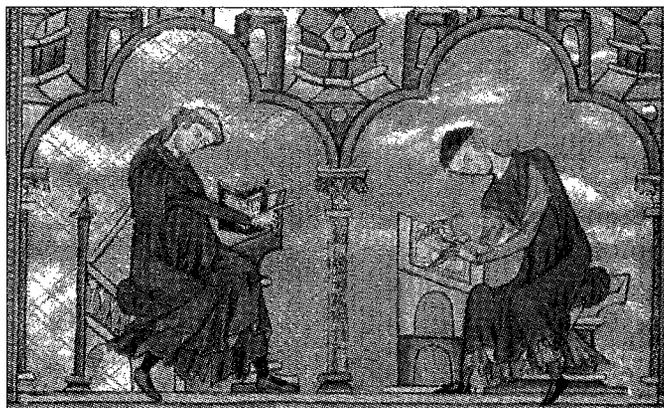
Recent scholarship has cast doubt on this account. It now appears that Abelard was “a far less pivotal thinker” than most historians once believed, writes Thompson, a professor of religious studies at the University of Oregon.

Between 1080 and 1120, the most influential writers and teachers of Western Christendom were “realists.” In his proofs for the existence of God, St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) seems to have assumed that universals such as goodness exist independent of good men or any other particular good objects. He defended universals “as pure and absolute,” Thompson says, because he wanted “to identify them with the highest pure absolute, that is, with God.” Although Anselm was chiefly a theologian, later thinkers focused on philosophical questions: how universals relate to particulars, and how particulars became different from one another.

In the traditional version of what happened before Abelard, historians identified four or five competing “schools” or “theories” and divided these between nominalists and realists. This scheme, Thompson says, rests mostly on Abelard’s own writings and those of his pupil, John of Salisbury (d.

1180)—and their testimony, it now seems, is not trustworthy.

The most celebrated nominalist was Roscelin of Compiègne, who, according to a contemporary, taught “the theory that a universal was a verbal utterance [*sententiam vocum*].” Anselm branded Roscelin a “heretic of dialectic.” Abelard, who was Roscelin’s student, also portrayed him “as an incompetent logician.” The theories advanced by such earlier thinkers appeared, in the standard account, to be



A French cleric instructs his pupil. In Abelard’s day, the Catholic Church sustained the Western intellectual tradition.

fragmentary and incoherent, until Abelard made his great contribution in *Logica Ingredientibus*, proposing that a word could be both a verbal utterance (*vox*) and a significant term (*sermo*). But the discovery of new texts and more careful readings of long-known ones, Thompson says, have changed this picture. Even the famed nominalist Roscalin, it now seems, wanted to identify the realities to which the *voces* referred and “believed that every *vox* tagged some thing in the world.”

That and other evidence suggest, Thompson says, that before Abelard there was “a movement toward a coherent rethinking of universals along antirealist lines.” To dispel the confusion that persisted required “a clever technician,” not a greatly original thinker. Abelard filled the bill.

## SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

### *A Quantum Jump for Computers?*

"The Best Computer in All Possible Worlds" by Tim Folger, in *Discover* (Oct. 1995), 114 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10011-5690; "A Quantum Leap for Computers?" and "Computer Scientists Rethink Their Discipline's Foundations" by James Glanz, in *Science* (July 7 and Sept. 8, 1995), American Assn. for the Advancement of Science, 1333 H St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

Computers are getting faster and more powerful all the time. They are also approaching their design limits. Shrinking circuits to make them run faster, explains Glanz, a staff writer for *Science*, also makes it harder to connect components, and increases the heat generated by electrical resistance. A different sort of obstacle may appear in the form of quantum mechanics. "At very small scales," Glanz says, "electrons behave not as point particles but as waves. And that makes them hard to handle."

Will computing then have become all that it can ever be? Not necessarily. Physicists and computer scientists recently have begun to explore the possibility that quantum mechanics, instead of being an obstacle, could be a way of taking computing into a new realm, one far removed from transistors, resistors, and wires.

By the strange laws of quantum mechanics, Folger, a senior editor at *Discover*, notes, an electron, proton, or other subatomic particle is "in more than one place at a time," because individual particles behave like waves. Ten years ago, Folger writes, David Deutsch, a physicist at Oxford University, argued that it may be possible to build an extremely powerful computer based on this peculiar reality. In

1994, Peter Shor, a mathematician at AT&T Bell Laboratories in New Jersey, proved that, in theory at least, a full-blown quantum computer could factor even the largest numbers in seconds—an accomplishment impossible for even the fastest conventional computer.

Several scientists are now trying to build a quantum computer. "In conventional computers, the presence or absence of electric charge on a circuit element like a transistor stands for a zero or a one in binary code," Folger notes. "At its simplest level, a computer works by storing or changing these binary numbers as it carries out its calculations." One approach of the quantum mechanics researchers is to use lasers to make the ions in an electromagnetic field jump between two quantum energy states. "The excited state represents a one in binary code," Folger explains, while "the ground, or lower, energy level is a zero."

The quantum computer is only one of the unconventional possibilities that researchers are now exploring. Another is a biochemical computer based on DNA. It's all enough to make even a computer scientist's head spin. "It's going to be a while," comments Richard Lipton of Princeton University, "before we know what a computer is again."

### *The Silicone Disaster*

"Are Breast Implants Actually OK?" by Marcia Angell, in *The New Republic* (Sept. 11, 1995), 1220 19th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036; "A Confederacy of Boobs" by Michael Fumento, in *Reason* (Oct. 1995), 3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Ste. 400, Los Angeles, Calif. 90034-6064; "Anti-Medicine Man" by Henry Miller and "Implanting Fear" by B. D. Daniel and Michael Weiss, in *National Review* (Oct. 9, 1995), 150 E. 35th St., New York, N.Y. 10016.

When in 1992 Food and Drug Administration (FDA) commissioner David Kessler banned silicone breast implants because they had not been proven safe, he set off a stampede of alarmed women and lawyers. In the next two years, some 1,000 attorneys filed more than 16,000 lawsuits on behalf of women with breast implants. Dow Corning and the other major manufacturers, maintaining that the devices were safe but fearful of ruin, agreed in 1994 to a \$4.25 billion class-action settlement (with the attorneys getting

one-third). More than 440,000 women registered for the settlement, of whom roughly 70,000 said they were ill. The anti-implant crusade may expand to include various other medical implants, such as the contraceptive Norplant, which also makes use of silicone.

Angell, the executive editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, is only one of the most prominent of those who say that the crusade is misbegotten: when Kessler made his decision, there was little or no scientific evidence of any link between silicone breast

implants and disease.

Two FDA advisory panels had pointed out the absence of scientific evidence, but the FDA chief ignored their advice. Since then, studies have begun to pile up (including a major one of nearly 90,000 nurses) showing, in Angell's words, "that any risk of connective tissue [or autoimmune] disease from implants is so small that it has been impossible to detect."

Why did Kessler impose the ban? Angell says that, like some feminists, he "seemed disdainful of women who wanted breast implants for purely cosmetic reasons," and so may have held the devices to "an impossibly high standard: since there are no benefits, there should be no risks." But before the FDA ban, surveys indicated that the vast majority of women who had had breast implants were pleased with the results, notes Angell.

The effect of the accumulating scientific evidence on the legal situation is unclear. Dow Corning had agreed to pay half of the \$4.25 billion class-action settlement, but subsequently went bankrupt, and the settlement collapsed. Dow Chemical Company never made, tested, or sold the breast implants—but because it was one of Dow Corning's parent firms, it is a defendant in more than 13,000 breast-implant lawsuits. In October, a Nevada jury ordered Dow Chemical to pay \$14.1 million in damages to a breast-implant plaintiff.

The consequences of all the litigation set off by the FDA ban may be far-reaching, the authors say. If fearful manufacturers of other medical devices, with or without silicone, pull out of the business, warns Fumento, a science journalist, "the future health of millions of Americans" may be threatened.

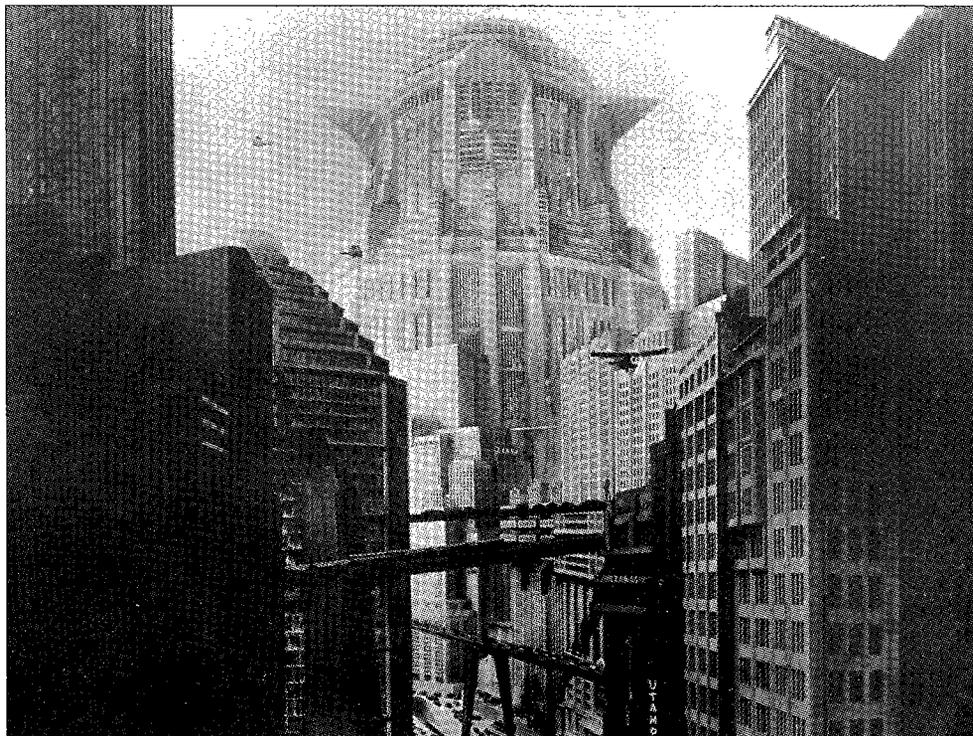
## *Toward the High-Tech City*

"Bring Back the Urban Visionaries" by David Gelernter, in *City Journal* (Summer 1995),  
Manhattan Institute, 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

In 1940, an express train could speed passengers from New Haven, Connecticut, to Grand Central Station in Manhattan in 90 minutes. In the 55 years since then, not only has no progress been made in reducing that time, but there is no express train—and the

trip takes an hour and 41 minutes. Gelernter, a computer scientist at Yale University, blames such failures to advance on the absence of urban visionaries.

Technology could improve transportation and otherwise make city life better, Gelernter



*A vision of the city in the year 2000, from Fritz Lang's Metropolis, a 1926 German film.*

ter contends, but imaginative proposals are not forthcoming, chiefly because "today's technology visionaries know little and care less about the mundane problems of daily urban life." To an earlier generation of thinkers, including Norman Bel Geddes and others, these were central concerns. To contemporary thinkers such as George Gilder, George Keyworth, and Esther Dyson, using powerful computers and the information highway to telecommute and teleconference is more important than mere physical transportation.

To improve city life, Gelernter argues, visionaries should be tackling such everyday problems as how to cut the New Haven-to-Grand Central commute to an hour or less.

The conventional wisdom is that better tracks and fancy new trains, perhaps magnetic-levitation models, are needed. Gelernter instead proposes paving over the tracks and running buses on the right-of-way. "Suppose they ran on two-lane busroads, the outer lane for high-speed express travel and the inner for station stops." Not only would such buses be faster, they could—with the aid of central computers that swiftly responded to requests from riders—be scheduled more flexibly.

Such ideas might or might not prove economically practical, Gelernter argues, but they certainly are worth considering—and that, he says, is precisely the problem: they are not even being put on the public agenda.

## ARTS & LETTERS

### *Abstract Art's Mystical Heart*

"Mondrian & Mysticism: 'My Long Search Is Over'" by Hilton Kramer, in *The New Criterion* (Sept. 1995), 850 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10019.

Art historians who revere abstract art tend to tiptoe around the role that mysticism played in its genesis. Occult beliefs were so common among abstract art's pioneers, such as the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), that it was "a basic component of their vision," argues Kramer, editor of the *New Criterion*.

Mondrian and the Russians Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) and Kazimir Malevich (1878–1935) were very heavily influenced by theosophy. The mystical philosophy's high priestess, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), claimed that the conflict between science and religion could be resolved by applying evolutionary theory to the "spiritual" aspects of existence. The soul was born and reborn countless times until it achieved earthly perfection.

Mondrian was a working artist before he turned to the occult, Kramer notes, "but it was as a dedicated theosophist that he created his first abstractions." The influence is clear in the notebooks he began to keep in 1914. "To approach the spiritual in art," Mondrian wrote, "one will make as little use as possible of reality, because reality is opposed to the spiritual. Thus the use of elementary forms is logically accounted for. These forms being abstract, we find ourselves in the presence of an abstract art."

The influential avant-garde movement called De Stijl (the Style) that Mondrian and other artists founded in 1917 was more than an art movement, Kramer points out. "Its ambition was to redesign the world by imposing straight lines, primary colors, and geometric form—and thus an ideal of impersonal order and rationality—upon the production of every man-made object essential to the modern human environment. Rejecting tradition, it envisioned the rebirth of the world as a kind of technological Eden from which all trace of individualism and the conflicts it generates would be permanently banished."

Where did these ambitious ideas come from? Chiefly, says Kramer, from the Dutch writer and mystic M. H. J. Schoenmaekers. Kramer says that Schoenmaekers even "specified the nature of the forms (rectilinear structures of the horizontal and the vertical) and the colors (the primaries: red, yellow, and blue) to be used in this artistic quest for the absolute."

The evolution of art was part of the larger evolution of the spirit, Mondrian and the others in the De Stijl group believed. In their abstract art, they were determined to get ever closer to what the mystic Schoenmaekers described as an "earthly heaven."

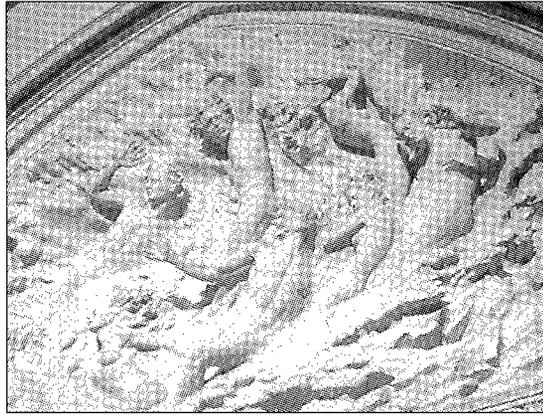
## *The Shame of the Critics*

Tom Wolfe chronicles in the *Weekly Standard* (Oct. 2, 1995) the brilliant career and strange neglect of representational sculptor Frederick Hart. Hart's works include the popular *Three Soldiers* at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

[Hart] was discovered . . . by a stone carver from Italy, Roger Morigi. As Morigi's apprentice, Hart learned to conceive of form in stone from the carver's perspective, from the inside out.

By day Morigi and Hart carved stone for Washington National Cathedral, an enormous structure in the Middle English Gothic style. By night Hart began sculpting on his own, and by the age of 25 he was pulling human forms out of clay and stone with a breathtaking facility. In 1971 he learned that the cathedral would be looking for a sculptor to adorn the entire west facade.

The theme was to be the Creation, with the *pièce de résistance* a two-story-high, 21-ft.-wide stone bas-relief above the main entrance. Morigi urged Hart to enter the competition. The young would-be sculptor spent three years conceiving and preparing a series of scale models. In 1974, at the age of



31, a complete unknown, a stone carver by trade, Hart won what would turn out to be the most monumental commission for religious sculpture in the United States in the 20th century. He spent 10 years creating the full-size models in clay and overseeing Morigi and his men as they carved *Ex Nihilo*, depicting mankind emerging from the swirling rush of chaos.

Hart was now at the same point in his career as Giotto when Giotto did his first great painting, the Virgin Mary trembling before the Archangel Gabriel, for the high altar of the Abbey of Florence in 1301. From that time on, Giotto's life was an uninterrupted ascension to wealth, the company and patronage of the rich and powerful, surpassing fame, and the universal admiration of his fellow artists. For Hart, the more earthly rewards came soon enough. . . . One thing was missing: the artistic atmosphere of 14th-century Florence, not to mention a Vasari or two to chronicle his success.

Just what this meant Hart found out in the very first week after the dedication of *Ex Nihilo* in 1982 (two years before the completion of the entire facade). In the press, even the local press, there was nothing, save a single rather slighting remark in passing in the Style section of the *Washington Post*. In the art press in the weeks and months and years that followed—nothing, not even so much as a one-paragraph review. Thirteen years at work on the most important American religious commission of the 20th century, and—nihil, a hollow silence. It was as if the west side of Washington National Cathedral, the seventh-largest cathedral in the world, were invisible.

## *Interactive Lit. 101*

"Writing for the New Millennium: The Birth of Electronic Literature" by Robert Kendall, in *Poets & Writers Magazine* (Nov.-Dec. 1995), 72 Spring St., New York, N.Y. 10012.

Someone reading Stuart Moulthrop's novel *Victory Garden* (1991) on a computer encounters a man named Harley and a waitress named Veronica flirting in a bar. If the

reader hits the "Enter" key, the story continues with Harley and a friend resuming their conversation as Veronica leaves. But if the reader instead selects certain words highlighted in the text—for instance, "another table"—the story takes a different path, following Veronica as she goes to wait on another customer. Or if the reader chooses "Veronica," the narrative leads to a bedroom scene between Veronica and Harley.

*Victory Garden* is a "hypertext novel," part of a growing new genre called "interactive literature." Kendall, who teaches interactive poetry and fiction at the New School for Social Research in New York, says that more and more writers, including some established ones such as Thomas M. Disch and Robert Pinsky, have been trying their hands at interactivity.

"The new electronic literature breaks the bonds of linearity and stasis imposed by paper," Kendall contends. "In digital form a story can draw readers into its world by giving them a role in shaping it, letting them choose which narrative thread to follow, which new situation or character to explore. Within a 'page' of poetry on screen, words of lines can change continually as the reader watches, making the text resonate with shifting shades of meaning. Written work can 'improvise,' altering its own content every time it's read. With its power to mix text, graphics, sound, and video, the PC can

extend the ancient interdisciplinary traditions of writing."

Electronic publishing is currently a booming field, Kendall notes, with hundreds of novels, stories, and poems available on CD-ROM. The vast majority of these works originally appeared in print, but interactive literature is growing. Many locations on the Internet's World Wide Web, he says, now contain hypertext fiction and poetry.

The writer "who really opened up the electronic frontier to serious writing," Kendall says, was Michael Joyce. His hypertext novel, *Afternoon, a Story* (1990), "requires the reader to unravel interwoven strands of narrative to make sense of the story. The reader's efforts parallel the struggle of the story's main character to learn whether his son and estranged wife have been killed in a car accident." The *Washington Post Book World* called Joyce's work "a noteworthy piece of recent American fiction, genre considerations aside."

Electronic literature has not yet been widely accepted by the reading public, Kendall concedes. But that may change, he believes, when "an inexpensive paperback-sized computer with a screen that matches the readability of the printed page" arrives on the scene. "Then," he predicts, "the electronic publishing boom will begin in earnest."

## *Stephen Foster's High Art*

"Sound and Sentimentality: Nostalgia in the Songs of Stephen Foster" by Susan Key, in *American Music* (Summer 1995), Sonneck Society for American Music, P.O. Box 476, Canton, Mass. 02021.

Stephen Foster's many immensely popular songs, from "Beautiful Dreamer" to "My Old Kentucky Home," are rarely considered much more than sentimental, albeit artfully constructed, crowd-pleasers. In Foster's day, however, argues Key, a graduate student in musicology and ethnomusicology at the University of Maryland, College Park, no rigid barriers separated high and low culture, and Foster's ballads were much esteemed in refined circles.

In the first half of the 19th century, improvements in transportation and manufacturing stimulated the growth of a sheet music industry. By the Civil War, publisher

Oliver Ditson boasted thousands of popular ballads, instrumentalized for voice and piano.

Inspired by the strongly egalitarian sentiments of the day, many American parlor music composers "sought to provide music for everyone," Key says. Their favorite device was "the portrayal of bittersweet emotions stimulated by the contemplation of something lost." Most often, as in Foster's "Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair," an idealized past was juxtaposed with an alien present; but sometimes, as in "Old Folks at Home," an idealized "far" and an alien "near," or, as in "Beautiful Dreamer," an idealized night and the "rude world" of the

day, were used.

For Americans in the throes of change—first with the advent of Jacksonian democracy, then with the westward expansion and sectional conflict that led to war—the nostalgic songs of Foster (1826–64) and others were a tonic. But they were “cultivated” as well as popular, Key points out.

“The romantic notion that music could transcend earthly limitations and lead to a better world,” she writes, “was conflated with the sentimental notion that people who bought and sang this ‘better’ class of music could somehow acquire more refinement, taste, and gentility. For one short historical moment, mass appeal was seen as complementary to moral



elevation.” Reformers used the sentimental ballad to advance such causes as abolition and temperance.

Gradually, however, “absolute instrumental music from the European symphonic repertory” came to be most highly valued, Key says. By the end of the century, “music’s aura of idealism and moral improvement was dispensed from above—in the highest achievements of fine-art music—and from abroad, principally Ger-

many.” As an 1891 contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly* lamented, “Song-singing finds it hard to stand its ground against the musical culture which insists upon the highest artistic excellence or nothing at all.”

## OTHER NATIONS

### *Russia and China, Partners Again?*

“Russia and the Far East: Working toward a Serious Partnership with China” by Peter Ferdinand, in *Transition* (Sept. 1995), Open Media Research Institute, 1201 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia pursued a pro-Western foreign policy, and its relations with China cooled. Lately, however, there has been a noticeable warming, reports Ferdinand, director of the Centre for Studies in Democratisation at Britain’s Warwick University.

At first, he notes, Chinese leaders scorned Russian president Boris Yeltsin as the “gravedigger” of communism. And Yeltsin “acted as if Japan were Russia’s highest priority in the Far East.” Courting the Japanese and their money, he tried to resolve the Russo-Japanese dispute over the Kuril Islands, which the Soviet Union had seized after World War II.

By 1993, however, Moscow and Beijing were in a new mood, Ferdinand says. The West’s failure to provide Russia with what it considered adequate economic aid prompted it to reconsider its westward tilt. At the same time, “the revival of Russian nationalism among State Duma deputies undermined Yeltsin’s attempts to secure better relations with Japan,” the analyst writes,

because it impeded a resolution of the Kuril Islands dispute.

Beijing, meanwhile, had come to terms with the end of communism in the former Soviet Union. Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese leaders were reassured by the Yeltsin government’s willingness to abide by the Soviet Union’s border agreements. The collapse of the Soviet Union, Ferdinand observes, “shifted the balance of forces across the Sino-Russian frontier to China’s favor, with the People’s Liberation Army nearly twice as big as the Russian army.” Russia no longer can confront China with military pressure “from the north, the south (Vietnam), and the southwest (India), as the Soviet Union attempted to do in the 1970s.”

In 1993, Russia and China signed five-year agreements on military cooperation and technology. Hundreds of Russian scientists have since moved to China to work in the Ministry of Aeronautics. Russian sales of weapons and equipment to China have increased, reaching a reported \$2–\$3 billion in 1994.

As China’s strategic importance to the West

## *'The Gramophone Mind'*

*New Statesman & Society* (Aug. 18, 1995) recently reprinted a forgotten essay by George Orwell. He wrote it in 1944 as a preface to *Animal Farm* after the novel had been rejected on political grounds by at least two large publishing houses.

*The sinister fact about literary censorship is that it is largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban. . . .*

*At this moment what is demanded by the prevailing orthodoxy is an uncritical admiration of Soviet Russia. Everyone knows this, nearly everyone acts on it. Any serious criticism of the Soviet regime, any disclosure of facts which the Soviet government would prefer to keep hidden, is next door to unprintable. And this nation-wide conspiracy to flatter our ally takes place, curiously enough, against a background of genuine intellectual tolerance. For though you are not allowed to criticize the Soviet government, at least you are reasonably free to criticize our own. Hardly anyone will print an attack on Stalin, but it is quite safe to attack Churchill, at any rate in books and periodicals. . . .*

*For all I know, by the time this book is published my view of the Soviet regime may be the generally accepted one. But what use would that be in itself? To exchange one orthodoxy for another is not necessarily an advance. The enemy is the gramophone mind, whether or not one agrees with the record that is being played at the moment.*

diminished after the Cold War, friction with the West over trade and human rights increased. Russia, too, once felt obliged "to talk frankly with Beijing" about human rights, Ferdinand says. It no longer does.

Russia and China "began to see an interest . . . in building up each other's general international status," Ferdinand says. "In this way, they could weaken the West's hegemony and create more opportunities for themselves." At the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva last March, Russia, to the surprise of the West, voted against a

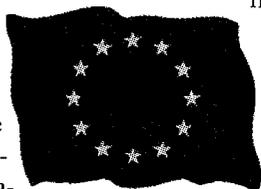
motion to condemn China for human rights abuses, providing Beijing's margin of victory. Beijing has voiced implicit support for Moscow's military campaign in Chechnya; in return, Moscow has opposed Taiwan's entry into the UN.

But the developing Russian-Chinese "partnership," Ferdinand concludes, is not like the extremely close Sino-Soviet relationship of the 1950s. Moscow today, he says, simply wants "a partnership rather than an alliance, a counterbalance of equal weight to the West, to gain greater room for diplomatic maneuvering."

## *Europe's Missing Ingredient*

"Democracy or Technocracy? European Integration and the Problem of Popular Consent"  
by William Wallace and Julie Smith, in *West European Politics* (July 1995), Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 900 Eastern Ave., London IG2 7HH, England.

After World War II, Jean Monnet and the other founding fathers of what is now the European Union took what might be called a *Field of Dreams* approach: "If we build it, they will come." Once new European institutions were established, they believed, popular support for political integration would grow as the public came to appreciate the economic benefits of a united Europe. That shift has yet to hap-



pen—and further enlargement of the European Union will make it even less likely, contend Wallace, a professor of international studies at the Central European University in Prague, and Smith, a lecturer in politics at Oxford University.

The technocratic approach informed both the 1951 Treaty of Paris, which created the European Coal and Steel Community, and the 1957 Treaties of Rome, which gave birth to the

Common Market. When French president Charles de Gaulle attacked the pretensions of the unelected European Commission in 1960 and called for a European referendum to legitimize the new structure, the Common Market countries decided instead to transform the European Parliament into a directly elected body. Yet with four elections held since 1979, Wallace and Smith observe, the 626-member parliament, based in Strasbourg, France, still has only weakly engaged the allegiance of the European public.

Signs of popular discontent began appearing with the rejection of the Maastricht Treaty on European Union by the Danes in 1992. Reactions elsewhere were "only slightly more positive," the authors note.

As the 12-member European Union expands, moving toward a "community" of as many as 25 member states, Wallace and Smith say, fostering "a sufficiently strong sense of community to provide popular consent" for a more integrated union will become increasingly difficult. Also, the prods of American leadership and the need to unite against the Soviet threat are gone. If popular consent for further integration is to be obtained, Wallace and Smith believe, the directly elected European Parliament will have to be given "both greater visibility and greater authority."

## *Above the Fray*

Every country requires its politicians to clothe their ambitions in different garb. The French requirements, writes Adam Gopnik in the *New Yorker* (November 13, 1995), are characteristically stylish.

*Like all ambitious French politicians, [Prime Minister Alain] Juppé chooses to present himself as a literary man. He has actually written a book of reflections entitled La Tentation de Venise—"The Venetian Temptation." Juppé's Venetian temptation was to retire to a house there, where he could escape from political life, admire Giorgione's "Tempesta," drink Bellinis in the twilight, and think long, deep thoughts. La Tentation was regarded as a fighting campaign manifesto, since it is . . . necessary for an ambitious French politician to write a book explaining why he never likes to think of politics. . . . Juppé, ahead of the pack, had written a book asserting not only that he would rather be doing something else but that he would like to be doing it in a completely different country. . . . Among French politicians, in fact, ostentatious displays of detachment are something of a competitive sport. After being succeeded as president by [Jacques] Chirac, François Mitterrand gave an interview to Christine Ockrent, the editor of L'Express, simply to announce that he was now taking long walks in Paris and looking at the sky. It was understood as his way of keeping his hand in. Not long ago, the former prime minister, Édouard Balladur, who had been so busy looking detached from politics that he forgot to campaign for the presidency this time around, sneaked an item into L'Express announcing that he, too, was taking walks and looking at the sky. It was the start of his comeback.*

## *A New German Exceptionalism?*

"Historians and Nation-Building in Germany after Reunification" by Stefan Berger, in *Past and Present* (Aug. 1995), 175 Banbury Rd., Oxford OX2 7AW, England.

Since reunification in 1990, the world of left-liberal German historians has been in upheaval. Having written off the German nation-state as an aberration and a source of evil, they are now confronted with an uncomfortable reality. Berger, a historian at the University of Wales, fears that his German colleagues may be returning to

"the narrow concern with 'national history' and 'national identity' that long characterized German history writing.

During Germany's only previous existence as a unified nation-state, between 1870 and 1945, history writing was, in the words of the Swiss historian Jakob Burckhardt, "imbued with German tri-

umphalism." Although the defeat of Nazi Germany put an end to that, most West German historians came to see Adolf Hitler's National Socialism not as a logical outgrowth of peculiarly German traditions but as a German variant of a larger phenomenon, totalitarianism. Dissenters, notably Fritz Fischer, argued that the longing to dominate Europe and the world had been an enduring feature of German foreign policy, from the reign of Emperor Wilhelm II (1888–1918) to Hitler.

A generation of post-1960s left-liberal "critical historians" built on such dissent. They argued that the history of the unified German nation-state that existed between 1870 and 1945 was an aberration (*ein deutscher Sonderweg*) in the context of Western European history. In Germany, "the overwhelming influence of Prussia [had] strengthened traditions of authoritarianism, illiberalism, and unpredictable aggressiveness in its foreign relations."

Rejecting this disastrous episode of German exceptionalism, later critical historians, Berger notes, turned their attention away from the nation-state and diplomatic and political history. They began to write "social history from below or gender history," focusing on "the experiences of individ-

uals or small groups within local or regional frameworks." Questions of German national identity, these scholars suggested, were not what really mattered in German history.

Then, in 1989, came the fall of the Berlin Wall. Many critical historians, fearful of a revived German nationalism, at first opposed reunification. Now, some critical historians—such as Heinrich August Winkler and Peter Brandt (son of the late chancellor Willy Brandt)—are paying renewed attention to terms such as *nation* and *patriotism*, hoping to reclaim the idea of the nation for the political Left.

With reunification, the critical historians' *Sonderweg* interpretation of German national history has been "severely shaken," Berger notes—and most seem to be slowly abandoning it. They continue to oppose any use of history writing to bolster national identity, Berger says. They look to "a mixture of regionalism and pan-Europeanism [to] prevent destructive nationalism from raising its ugly head again." Lothar Gall, the current chairman of the German Historians' Association, dismisses this danger as a left-wing fantasy. But both the critical historians and their academic critics are at the center of a debate about the meaning of German nationhood that has embroiled all of modern Germany.

## India Tunes In

"Transforming Television in India" by Sevanti Ninan, in *Media Studies Journal* (Summer 1995), Columbia Univ., 2950 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10027.

Until 1991, channel surfers in India lived desperate lives: there were only two channels, both broadcast by the government-controlled network, Doordarshan. The censored news broadcasts ranged from dull to extremely dull. Today, reports Ninan, television critic for the *Hindu* in New Delhi, viewers can choose from more than a dozen channels (including CNN, the BBC, and MTV). And while Doordarshan news is still dull, there are now three independently produced alternatives (one of them carried on Doordarshan itself).

The transformation, Ninan says, is the result of two major developments: the economic reforms begun by Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao's government in 1991, which opened up India's nominally socialist economy to competition and the outside world; and the advent that same year of

transnational satellite television broadcasting in Asia with the launching of Star TV, a private television network based in Hong Kong and largely owned by Rupert Murdoch. The fare was mostly recycled American programs, Ninan says, "but to Indian television audiences . . . it was like manna from Hollywood, if not heaven."

Satellite television is costly and "still largely an urban middle-class phenomenon." Satellite TV reaches 10 million households, compared with Doordarshan's 40 million. And educated Indians in New Delhi and other cities have long relied on the country's feisty newspapers rather than TV news, Ninan points out. But with the populace 45 percent illiterate, and mostly rural, uncensored television news may eventually make a profound difference in the Indian future.

## RESEARCH REPORTS

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

### *"The True State of the Planet."*

The Free Press, 1230 Ave. of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10020. 472 pp. \$15

Editor: Ronald Bailey

For a quarter-century, the environmental movement has marched to the loud, clanging sounds of alarm bells. The human population is growing too large, too fast. Scarce natural resources are being recklessly depleted. Biodiversity is endangered. Forests are being destroyed. The oceans are being overfished. Global warming threatens the planet. Apocalypse, in short, is just around the corner, unless humanity acts—and acts now—to thwart it.

In what is packaged as an "alternative" from the Competitive Enterprise Institute to the highly publicized "State of the World" reports issued annually by the Worldwatch Institute, Bailey, the author of *Eco-Scam: The False Prophets of Ecological Apocalypse* (1993), and 11 environmental researchers offer some strong arguments and a great deal of data to counter the conventional doomsday wisdom.

Bailey acknowledges that since Earth Day 1970, when the environmental movement was launched, it has achieved much good. In the developed world of the West, thanks to environmentalists, "air and water are much cleaner; automobiles are far cleaner to operate; belching smokestacks are far fewer and generally more efficient than ever before." But—fortunately—environmentalists have also been "spectacularly wrong" in many of their dire prophecies. "For example," he writes, "the global famines expected to occur in the 1970s never happened. Fears that the United States and Europe would cut down all of their forests have been belied by increases in forest area. Global warming, despite so many continuing reports, does not appear to be a major problem. And it turns out that the damage to human health and the natural world caused by pesticides is far less than Rachel Carson feared it would be when she wrote *Silent Spring* in 1962."

The gloomy Malthusian concerns about "overpopulation" that seem to be recycled from generation to generation (formulated lately in terms of "carrying capacity" and "sustainable development") ignore much of the available evidence, contends Nicholas

Eberstadt, a Visiting Fellow at Harvard's Center for Population Studies. The tremendous explosion of world population (5.3 billion, currently) in this century "has not plunged humanity into penury and deprivation," he notes. "Quite the contrary, the global population boom has coincided with an explosion of health, and of productivity, around the world. On average, the human population today lives longer, eats better, produces more, and consumes more than at any other time in the past."

To be sure, Eberstadt notes, within living memory, parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America have suffered economic reversals or declines, harvest failures, and other disasters. But demographic forces are not the main culprit. For the most part, he says, the misfortunes "can be traced directly to the policies or practices" of the presiding regimes. For example, during the 1980s, "mass starvation erupted in Ethiopia . . . after its communist government inflicted a series of harsh and injurious policies on a population whose living standard was typically only slightly above the subsistence level."

For most of the world's people today, fortunately, the threat of famine is a thing of the past, writes Dennis Avery, director for global food issues at the Hudson Institute. "Never before in history has food been as abundant and as cheap as it is today. Although millions remain inadequately nourished, the good news is that advances in agriculture will eliminate the remaining pockets of hunger early in the next century." Many environmentalists, such as Lester R. Brown, head of the Worldwatch Institute, worry that with the global population projected to double to more than 10 billion by 2050, the world's farmers will not be able to keep up. Most agricultural researchers, Avery says, disagree. Paul Waggoner, former director of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, recently calculated that 10 billion people could be fed a sufficient, if minimal, diet *today*, if land and water already in farm pro-

duction were used at full efficiency.

Meeting the growing global demand for better diets, Avery says, will require continued research in plant breeding, fertilization, pest control, and other "high-yield" agricultural techniques, as well as "free trade in farm products so we can use the world's best and safest land to meet food needs with fewer acres and less soil erosion." High-yield farming, he points out, will also preserve biodiversity. "The main threat to the world's wildlife is the destruction of habitat. Continued dependence on low-yield farming in the developing nations would mean the plowing of additional acres of wildlife habitat to grow food for their increasing populations. A more populous world that also wants room for wildlife has no room for low-yield farming."

Turning to the much publicized threat of global warming, thought to be caused in part by the continued buildup of greenhouse gases, Robert C. Balling, Jr., director of the Office of Climatology at Arizona State University, says that the catastrophic projections come from sophisticated computer simulations of climate that are still far from perfect. As the models improve, he expects the "threat" to diminish. Meanwhile, highly accurate satellite-based measurements show that the earth's atmosphere has actually cooled by 0.13° C since 1979. (Even allowing for the cooling effect of volcanic eruptions, researchers found only a slight, statistically insignificant warming). Perhaps it's time now for some environmentalists to cool off a bit, too.

*"The Growing Importance of Cognitive Skills in Wage Determination."*

National Bureau of Economic Research, 1050 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, Mass. 02138. 46 pp. \$5

Authors: Richard J. Murnane, John B. Willett, and Frank Levy

It is well known that the wage gap between high school and college graduates has widened in recent decades. The average 24-year-old male high school graduate, for example, took home 16.5 percent less real pay in 1986 than in 1978. A male college graduate of the same age saw his earnings fall only one percent. (Female college graduates, however, saw a slight increase.) That is not the whole story, however.

For high school graduates, say Murnane and Willett, of Harvard's Graduate School of Education, and Levy, of MIT's Urban Studies and Planning Department, how much they earn later is increasingly affected by whether they possess basic cognitive skills.

Murnane and his colleagues found that six years after getting their diplomas in 1980, men who had strong basic math skills, as measured by tests given in their senior year, earned 53 cents an hour more (in constant 1988 dollars) than those with average skills. Moreover, the relative value of solid cognitive skills seems to have jumped during the 1980s. Among 1972 graduates, the differential was only 24 cents. The pattern was much the same for women: a 74-cent differential among 1980 high school graduates after six years, and a 39-cent differential among 1972 graduates.

The rising demand for cognitive skills

reflects changes taking place within occupations, the authors say. Employers need people who can "work smarter." People at all educational levels are feeling the effects. The premium on mental ability partly explains a 30 percent increase since 1970 in wage variation among individuals with the same amount of formal education.

The bad news is that while smarter 1980 high school graduates earn more than their peers, they earn much less than 1972 graduates—even those with weak math skills—did at a similar point in their careers.

For recent high school graduates, the picture six years after graduation is grim. For 1980 graduates with weak math skills, the average hourly wage was \$7.40. That is equivalent to \$12,950 (in 1988 dollars) annually—just above the 1988 poverty line for a family of three. Their higher-scoring classmates, by contrast, earned \$8.49 per hour.

The economic payoff for cognitive skills does not show up right away, the authors note. Two years after graduation, there is no wage differential among males and only a modest one among females. It takes longer, perhaps six years, to get a bigger paycheck. The delay means that the higher pay will serve as an incentive to work hard in school only for those high school students who are looking to their future.

Continued from page 7

audiences come from over the next couple of generations? Perhaps this is a lesser concern in New York City, but it is a huge problem in nearly every other city or town in America.

Like Robinson's, my high school band was led by a superb, dedicated musician, A. E. Raspillaire. We had our share of successes, too, including the principal clarinetist in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Larry Combs, and 32 years of consecutive "superior" ratings at the concert festival. (Not bad for the small town of South Charleston, West Virginia.) I share Robinson's appreciation for the music education I received as a youngster, as well as his concern that far too few students will have anything close to the opportunities we had.

John Locke  
Director of Bands  
University of North Carolina  
Greensboro, N.C.

#### Pursuing Happiness

I was surprised that Robert Darnton ["The Pursuit of Happiness," *WQ*, Autumn '95] dated the death of Augustine of Hippo to "604 A.D." That date surely refers to the death of the other Saint Augustine—"the Apostle of the English." Augustine of Hippo's death is usually given as 430 A.D.

Moreover, the suggestion that "the classical revival was snuffed out in Florence by

Savonarola's bonfire of vanities in 1497" is of dubious historicity. Certainly Michelangelo's *David* (1501–04) more than amply suggests the vitality of the classical impulse after Savonarola. Whether or not Hobbes's pithy characterization of the "state of nature" is really applicable to the Middle Ages might also be pondered.

Robert Cahn  
New York, N.Y.

Robert Darnton finds no happiness worth pursuing in the medieval millennium. The hoary stereotypes of the "vale of tears" and of peasants working "the fields in a state of semi-slavery" are dredged up despite a century of scholarship by historians such as Marc Bloch and Joseph Strayer. The former credited the Middle Ages with *abolishing* slavery if only by the invention of that labor-saving device, the windmill. Yes, the medieval fathers did have a philosophy of suffering: only by accepting that inevitable aspect of human existence could one be happy. They wrote a good deal on happiness, not least of which is Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*. But Augustine's words on the subject are probably the best loved: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

The American version of the Enlightenment dream, as Darnton points out, seems to have turned away from homestead, which is unfortunately no longer universally available, to "hot tubs, 'perfect' waves, 'deep' massage,

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fat farms, love clinics, and therapy of every conceivable kind." It is hard to cultivate one's garden when there is no garden to cultivate.

Crime, the breakdown of the family, drugs, and suicide aren't mentioned, although they may be equally strong indicators of the failure of this dream among American youth. Might not Emile Durkheim have been right when he called one of the results of modernization "anomie"—rootlessness, a lack of sense of belonging to the old centers of community: church, commune, village, or family? It seems that we have a suffering here which must be accepted at least for the time being. The failure of the American Dream may spring from the fact that it promises something it cannot deliver, and, even if it could, would not fully satisfy our longings.

*Emmet Kennedy  
The George Washington University  
Washington, D.C.*

#### *Taking McNamara to Task*

Your "At Issue" column ["Listening—and Deciding," WQ, Autumn '95] properly takes Robert S. McNamara to task for alleging there were no Southeast Asia specialists in the U.S. government to whom the top policy makers could turn for intelligence on Vietnamese history, culture, and politics. There were several in government service during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and quite a few outside the government. At least one was within walking distance of the White House. He was Professor Bernard B. Fall, who was on the faculty of Howard University in the nation's capital. Dr. Fall, a Frenchman whose penetrating scholarship on Vietnam drew extensively from his several research missions to that country, ultimately met death there in February 1967, when he tripped a Viet Cong mine while on one of those missions.

In the early weeks of 1961, I remember calling McGeorge Bundy at the White House from my consulting post at the Senate Committee on Commerce to urge consultation with Dr. Fall regarding some crisis in Saigon. I was told they knew of Dr. Fall, but I have reason to believe they never contacted him. Maybe, in their eyes, his French citizenship made him less reliable for objective judgment on that former French colony where France had suffered a massive military defeat before withdrawing in 1954. I am sure lower echelons in the U.S. government consulted

Dr. Fall and other outsiders. It is doubtful if the top policymakers ever did. Quoted in the WQ article, Roger Hilsman (an assistant secretary of state in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations) has referred to the fruitless flow of expert memoranda from the government's Asia specialists to its top policy echelons.

Failure to make the most of scholarly expertise on Vietnam occurred even under earlier administrations. In 1955, I chaired a Washington-based research team preparing a comprehensive study of Vietnam for the army under a private contract. When the year-long study was completed, I proposed to my superiors that the six-man team, including Dr. Fall, be sent to Vietnam to test the validity of our conclusions. Nothing ever came of this proposal.

Disappointment over the government's failure to make the most of a high-quality research effort in which government funds had been invested still lingers in my recollection of that worthy project. I wonder about the extent of other government failures to make the most of government-financed research—possibly with life-and-death implications for American military personnel.

*David J. Steinberg  
Alexandria, Va.*

#### *Setting Historical Standards*

It is probably dangerous for a nonhistorian to comment on the recent survey on history standards ["The Periodical Observer," WQ, Autumn '95], particularly since I did not know such standards existed. However, as you see, that hasn't deterred me.

My comment concerns Walter McDougall's quote on "spin." Perhaps Europeans didn't go to the New World to kill and displace Native Americans; perhaps they did not intend to deny human rights or rape the environment and keep workers in misery. *But that is what they did.*

An earlier paragraph referred to the ideological thread of feminism as a negative. Let us remember that women are *still* struggling for equality.

Since the philosopher is the product of his milieu, I must note that the undersigned is a patriotic WASP male from the deep South whose ancestors owned slaves and were Confederate soldiers. Also the undersigned believes in democratic capitalism with compassionate government regulation.

*Thomas L. Harmon, Jr.  
Greensboro, N.C.*

Continued from page 144

some seriousness important ideas expressed on the printed page. I am haunted by the memory of a television commercial I recently saw in which viewers were told that a rich vocabulary is essential to success, and that thanks to some marvelous new device they could now increase their vocabulary markedly without having to read!

The second uncertainty is technological: whether fiber optics, satellite communications, CD-ROMs, computers, and other devices yet to be invented will leave a niche for those who prefer to sit in a comfortable chair turning the pages of a book or journal. Indeed, even the Wilson Center, thanks to the voluntary and devoted efforts of a few of its more sophisticated staff members, made

its appearance on the World Wide Web last November. Recently Michael Kinsley, one of the country's most gifted political columnists, announced that he will launch a new magazine that will exist only in cyberspace. This is almost beyond the comprehension of those of us who are wedded to print on page. I can only wish him well and say that I shall miss reading him.

A wise man once said that he could predict anything except the future. But one can say that so long as intelligent readers remain, and so long as they continue to appreciate the very special value and delight unique to words printed on pages, the *WQ* will seek to serve them with the same high distinction in the future that it has in the past.

Charles Blitzer  
Director

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Kathy Read, Publisher

## FROM THE CENTER

With this issue, modestly and tastefully redesigned for the occasion, the *WQ* celebrates its 20th anniversary. Over the past two decades, it has been the Woodrow Wilson Center's most effective means of communicating regularly and in depth with the public, bringing to some 65,000 subscribers—and perhaps 200,000 readers—a rich variety of information and opinion. Sharing the Center's commitment, and indeed Woodrow Wilson's, to the unity of knowledge, it has ranged over the social sciences, the sciences, the humanities, and the arts. It seeks to inform, occasionally to amuse, and always to stimulate the interest and curiosity that will lead its readers to further exploration.

Success has many parents, and this is a good occasion to thank some of those whose contributions have been especially noteworthy. The first must inevitably be Peter Braestrup, who invented the *WQ* and edited it for its first 13 years. Now at the Library of Congress, he retains a lively and welcome interest in the journal he founded. I must also express heartfelt thanks to the late James Scripps, of Del Mar, California, whose great generosity has helped sustain both the magazine and the Wilson Center.

Just as I arrived at the Center some years ago, a combination of circumstances threatened the financial viability of the *WQ*. I was fortunate enough to discover the extraordinary Warren Syer, who devised a plan to put the magazine on a sound footing and then, in an act of pure supererogation, volunteered to implement it as the magazine's first publisher. Happily, he continues to be its publishing director, giving me both a comforting sense of security and an occasion to discuss our shared passion for opera. One of his greatest contributions was persuading Kathy Read to join us as publisher, thus continuing seamlessly the professionalism that is so important to such a complex and specialized operation.

A special word of thanks is due to Jay

Tolson, who as editor has somehow managed simultaneously to maintain the traditions established by Peter Braestrup and to put his own stamp on the magazine. A mean man with the editor's pencil, as I know from personal experience, he combines an extraordinary breadth of interests

and openness to ideas with rigorous standards of quality. On one occasion, I telephoned him to report what I thought was something of a coup on my

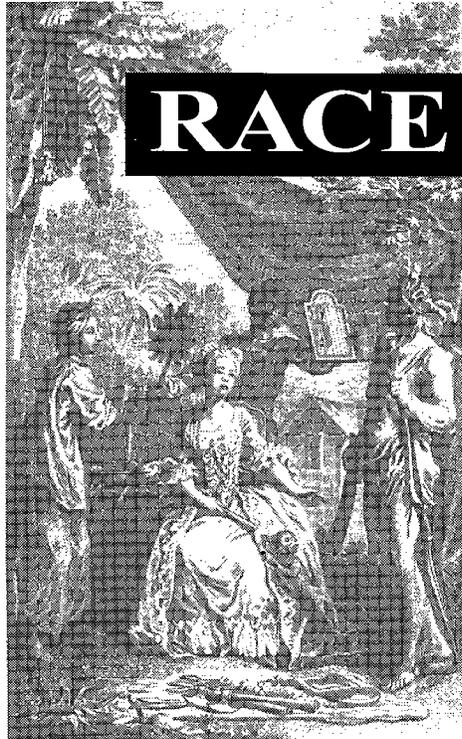
part: the opportunity to publish the text of an address given at the Center by the chief justice of the United States to mark the bicentennial of the Bill of Rights. I felt a bit crestfallen at his response, which I have since learned is utterly characteristic of him: have him send it over and we'll decide whether it's worth publishing.

In singling out these individuals, I do not wish to slight the contributions of their colleagues. The success of the *WQ* is emphatically the result of the efforts of a gifted team—and, I might add, a remarkably small one. We pride ourselves on the extraordinary leanness of all the operations of the Wilson Center, and a glance at the masthead—keeping in mind that “editorial advisers” are not staff members—will show that the *WQ* is no exception.

While I have the greatest faith in those who are in charge of the *WQ*, and equally great faith that my successors will share my devotion to it, there are extrinsic reasons to wonder what the next decade or two may hold in store for it. One uncertainty is whether there will continue to be a sufficiently large audience for a publication as serious and intellectually demanding as this. While I am a trifle awed by the realization that nearly one American in 1,000 reads the *WQ*, what I read and hear about the state of literacy and education in this country leads me to wonder whether (or for how long) a substantial number of Americans will be willing or even able to put forth the effort required to explore in some depth and with



*Continued on page 143*



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