

25th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

WQ

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AUTUMN 2007

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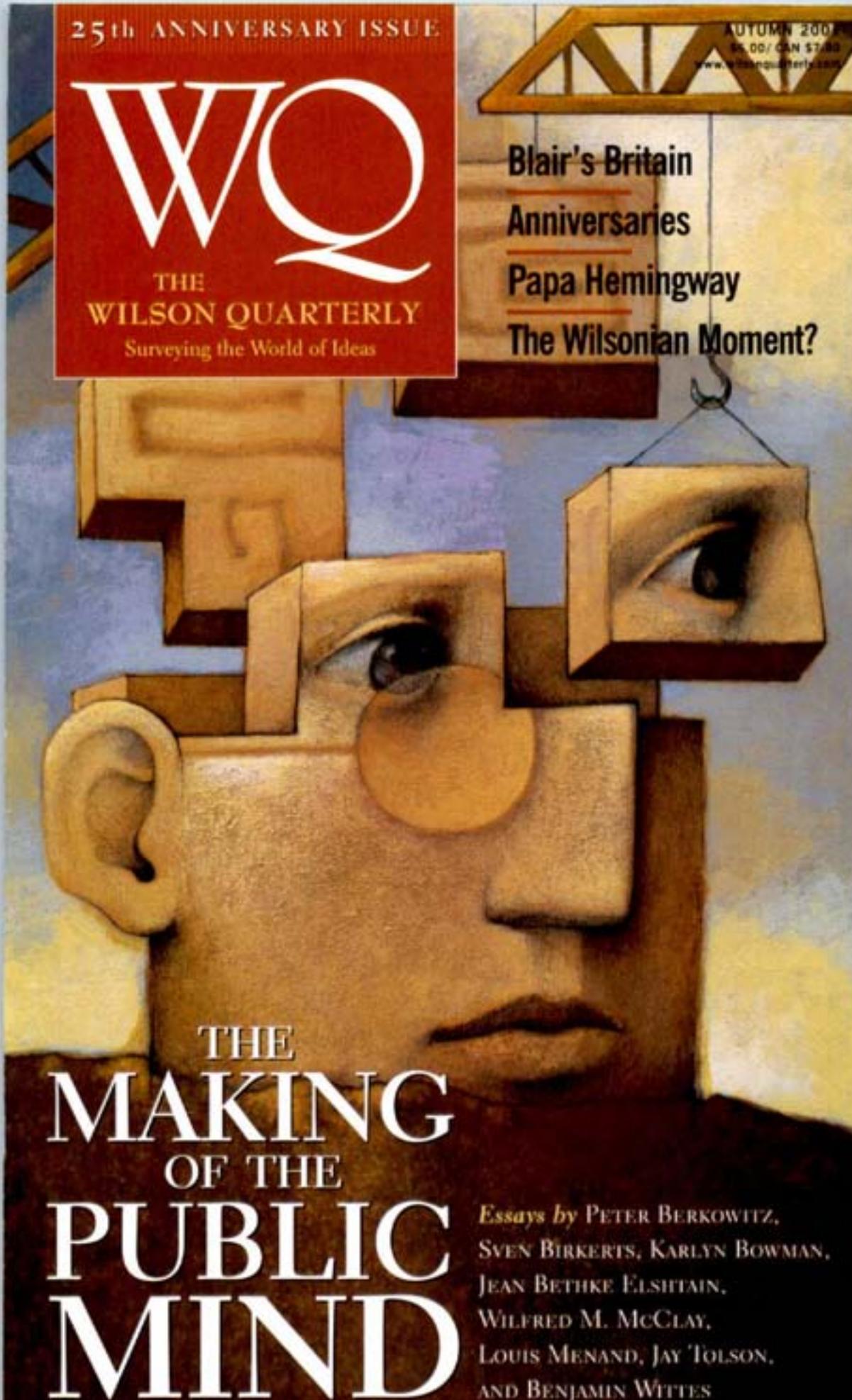
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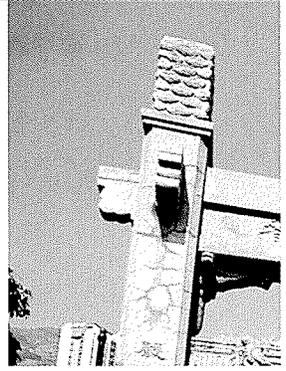
The Wilsonian Moment?



THE  
MAKING  
OF THE  
PUBLIC  
MIND

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SVEN BIRKERIS, KARLYN BOWMAN,  
JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN,  
WILFRED M. McCLAY,  
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AND BENJAMIN WITTES

LINKING CURRENT ISSUES TO FUTURE CHALLENGES



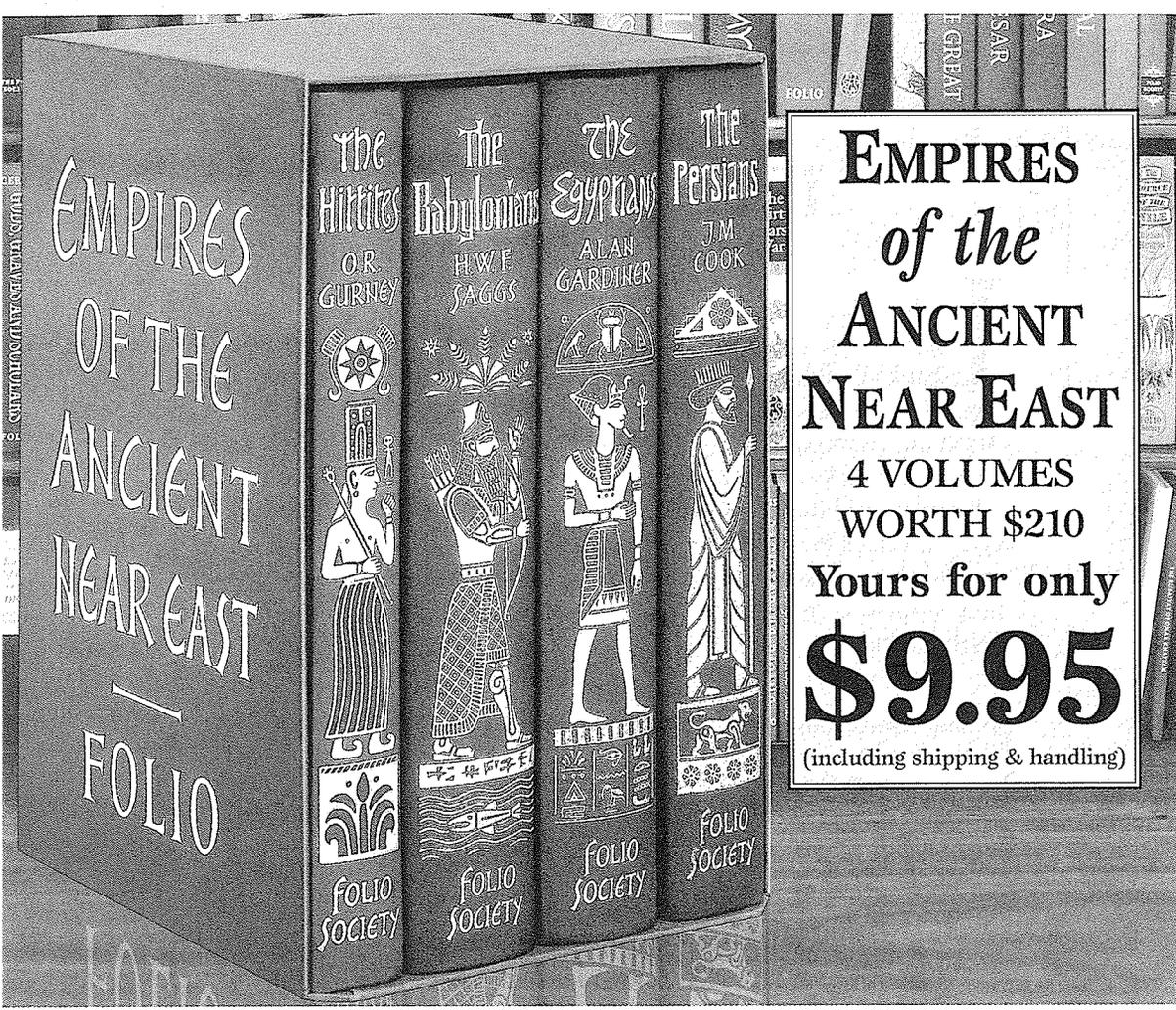
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# Editor's Comment

In the course of 25 years, the *WQ* has amassed more debts of gratitude than we can possibly enumerate. The editors would especially like to thank all of those at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars—the Board of Trustees, the Wilson Council, Director Lee H. Hamilton, visiting scholars, and the entire staff—for the collegiality and support that make our work possible.

It's often said that a magazine can be no better than its writers, and we have hundreds to thank for making the *WQ* what it is. Above all, we're grateful to our readers, the tens of thousands of curious, engaged, and often surprising people who have made this 25-year conversation one worth having.

The staff of the *Wilson Quarterly* joins in mourning those who perished in the September 11 terrorist attack on the United States, which occurred as we went to press.

What was once largely a war of ideas now becomes a contest of arms. Yet more than ever this contest requires Americans to define and clarify the ideas—about the shape of the good society, about the makings of a peaceful international order—that we have committed our lives to defend.

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# THE WILSON QUARTERLY

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COVER: *Original artwork by Matthew Trueman. Design by David Herbick.*

The views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

## TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

It takes audacity to launch any new magazine, but it took a special sort of spirit to launch a magazine like the *Wilson Quarterly* in 1976. Beneath the glow of that year's bicentennial celebrations, the nation bore a sickly pallor, and it was not merely coincidental that for the serious general-interest magazine it was a time of unusual peril. Many of the great names in the field—*Harper's*, the *New Yorker*—were bound for hard times, and at least one, *Saturday Review*, would not survive.

The plight of these magazines wasn't only a result of changing business conditions; it was a symptom of a certain kind of cultural exhaustion. After Vietnam, Watergate, and the other traumas of the era, there was a feeling in the air that perhaps we Americans could no longer speak to one another about important public questions in civil and dispassionate terms. There was a feeling, too, that in an age marked by the headlong specialization of knowledge, a larger view of the intellectual landscape was increasingly beyond the grasp of even many educated people. The old ideal of an informed citizenry—a bedrock democratic principle—was much in doubt.

Twenty-five years later, one is struck by the confidence of founding editor Peter Braestrup (1929–97) and James Billington, then director of the Wilson Center, in the importance and vitality of the principles that to others seemed so uncertain. Their goal was to create a magazine that would reach into every precinct of the world of ideas, striving to make the most important work of scholars and thinkers intelligible to others. In a time that questioned whether real debate—indeed, truth itself—was possible, the magazine was to be nonpartisan and disinterested. Most of all, against the growing pessimism that the ideal of an enlightened public could any longer exist, the *WQ* was to serve a general audience.

Many of the doubts of that time are still with us, and the world (as well as the *WQ*)

has changed in many ways since then, yet this fundamental confidence remains a hallmark of the magazine. The *WQ*'s 25th anniversary is in that sense a testament to the continuing vitality of those original principles.

One reason for the *WQ*'s steady course is the unusual dedication and continuity of its editorial staff. Braestrup's immediate successor, Jay Tolson (editor from 1989 to 1999), and I both worked under the founding editor, as did managing editor James Carman and senior editor Robert Landers. All of the magazine's editors over the years have shared the founding ethos, keeping the magazine true to its core commitments.

"Think of the Reader!" Braestrup often growled at his young editors. The injunction applied to the largest intellectual questions and the most excruciatingly minute details. It made us cringe to insert information we thought an educated audience ought already to know—that NATO is the acronym for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, that T. S. Eliot was a poet—but we came to understand that such details went to the heart of the magazine's mission. The *WQ* was to help readers know what they ought to know ("What do I need to know?" was another Braestrupian refrain). The last thing its editors could allow in the magazine's pages was a tone suggesting that the world of ideas was closed to those who did not possess a certain kind of intellectual pedigree. The *WQ* was to be inclusive, democratic, public spirited. While other intellectual periodicals served an academic discipline or an ideological cause, the *WQ* was to serve the Reader—which meant, in essence, the American public.

The son of an émigré Danish scientist who worked on the Manhattan Project, Braestrup had a profound appreciation of the openness and freedom of American society, as well as an acute awareness of the delicate mechanisms that keep it going. A product of the U.S.

Marine Corps (he was wounded in the Korean War) and a veteran of the *New York Times* and other top news organizations, he was a fellow at the Wilson Center when Billington, then the Center's director, invited him to start a magazine that would find a broad public. They were a complementary pair, the gruff, ruffled former newsman and the scholar (now Librarian of Congress) whose own historical studies had demonstrated that the very best scholarship could also be supremely inviting to the general reader.

The *WQ* debuted in the fall of 1976, 160 pages pressed between plain, ivory-colored covers with modest red-and-black lettering. It was an immediate success. (And there were many who had helped make it so, notably, our friends at *Smithsonian*.) "Our aim is to provide an authoritative overview of current ideas and research on matters of public policy and general intellectual interest," Braestrup wrote in his Editor's Comment. He continued:

As a group, of course, scholars have no monopoly on wisdom or even rational analysis. But the better scholars have something special to say to all of us. They refresh our thinking, surprise us with new data, occasionally remind us of old truths and new paradoxes lost in the daily hubbub of the press and television. Their more powerful ideas eventually help shape our perceptions, our politics, and our lives.

That first issue boasted the bylines of some of the leading thinkers and writers of the day—from Dennis L. Meadows and Walt W. Rostow to Robert Nisbet and Merrill D. Peterson—on subjects ranging from "the limits to growth" to the American

Revolution. The "cluster" of articles on a single subject quickly became a signature feature of the magazine. There also appeared in the first issue the patented (and much imitated) feature we now call the Periodical Observer, with its roundup of significant articles from learned journals and other specialized publications.

The magazine's second editor, Jay Tolson, raised the *WQ* to a new level of intellectual excellence. Long before they became the stuff of newsmagazine cover stories, public issues such as fatherhood, the New Urbanism, and civility were the subjects of thoughtful *WQ* essays. Tolson, who is also the biographer of Walker Percy, led the magazine in new directions, creating a feature devoted to the redis-



*Founding editor Peter Braestrup*

covery of poetry and publishing essays on subjects as various as Confucius, Central Asia, and the decline of America's passenger railroads. He recruited leading scholars to examine some of the deeper forces shaping world events, from Islam and Hinduism to nationalism. In 1998, Harvard University's E. O. Wilson, the father of sociobiology, chose the *WQ* as the place to preview his ideas about the "consilience" of all fields of human inquiry.

Upon taking the editor's chair in 1989, Tolson saluted his predecessor as "an editor of vision and a committed citizen." Those words apply with equal justice to Tolson himself. He remains a valued friend and contributor (see his essay on the state of academic prose on p. 60).

In this issue, we return to one of the *WQ*'s founding concerns, with seven essays on "The Making of the Public Mind." Our contributors find much to criticize in the way Americans consider public questions—but much more, I think, to justify the profound sense of hope and confidence that inspired the magazine's founding a quarter-century ago.

*Steven Lagerfeld*  
Editor

Few things have given me more satisfaction than launching the *Wilson Quarterly* and watching its continuing achievements.

When I became director of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in 1973, I saw our priority tasks as both intensifying the scholarly work at the Center and sharing key findings of scholarship with a much broader audience. I was bothered by the decreasing ability, and even inclination, of many scholars to communicate with the public. What seemed needed was a digest or review of recent important scholarship written by journalists who could describe that scholarship authentically for the general public. There had earlier been a magazine called *Intellectual Digest*, and I spoke to foundation representatives, without much success, about starting a journal that would once again serve its function. They pointed to a long list of intellectual quarterlies that they had launched, only to see them collapse within a very short time. When I studied those examples, I noted that in almost every instance they were simply outlets for scholarly or literary esoterica, written for a limited audience.

The critical factors that led to the establishment of the *Wilson Quarterly* were two fortunate discoveries I made in Washington. The first discovery was that many members of Congress sought an impartial mediation of the scholarly, public-policy, and advocacy publications that were flooding their offices. I remember sitting with one of the congressional leaders, who pointed to a three-foot-high pile on his desk and said, “Those are the reports from just the past two weeks that my staff feels I should read. There’s no way I can check out even their tables of contents. If somebody could tell me what’s really important in them, I’d be tremendously grateful.” Representative Ralph Regula (R.-Ohio), a member at that time of the House Appropriations subcommittee that oversaw the Wilson Center, and in recent years that subcommittee’s chairman, suggested that if we were to begin a journal, he would want us to be able “to justify it to the worker in my district who carries a lunch pail to work each day.” His comment strengthened our commitment to readily understandable prose—

and inspired us to make the *WQ* a size that would, in fact, fit into a lunch pail.

The second, and more decisive, factor in launching the journal was my discovery of a great editor, Peter Braestrup. As a marine, Peter had been wounded in Korea. As a reporter, he had covered the Algerian War for the *New York Times* and the Vietnam War for the *Times* and, subsequently, the *Washington Post*. As a Wilson Center fellow, he had written *Big Story* (1977), a searching study of news media coverage of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam. His willingness to serve as editor of the *WQ* made the journal possible.

Peter believed that the broad questions underlying the political and public-policy issues of the day could be packed into a journal concise and readable enough to attract an abiding audience and become a viable enterprise. He proposed a format that would feature clusters of articles on a given subject, thereby allowing Wilson Center fellows and members of the academic community to present ideas in greater depth and variety than they could in publications that were focused increasingly on personalities and bite-sized pieces. Peter tested the *WQ*’s format for a year, raised money for the journal, and launched it as a successful mix of original scholarly articles and digests of other scholarly work—with every page subjected to rigorous editing for the sake of clarity.

Peter’s successors have admirably sustained that original format. In fact, both subsequent editors of the *WQ* worked at one time for Peter, and they have carried on his driving work ethic and the quiet patriotism that underlies the journal’s basic desire to improve as well as to inform the nation. Moral seriousness without moralizing pomposity has been characteristic of the *WQ* from the start.

For a quarter of a century, Wilson Center Boards of Trustees, Wilson Council members, Center fellows, contributors, and subscribers have made the *WQ* a hallmark for high-quality journalism. The *Wilson Quarterly* opens to the American people a rich store of our nation’s ranging intellectual activity. I am happy to salute all those responsible for its enduring success.

James H. Billington  
*Librarian of Congress*

The 25th anniversary of the *Wilson Quarterly* is an occasion to celebrate a unique magazine. The *WQ* is the only prominent scholarly publication of ideas and public affairs that is directed to a broad, nonacademic audience. Some 60,000 subscribers (and many additional readers) are devoted to the magazine because it puts in their hands, in an accessible and imaginative format, the best research and writing on issues of contemporary concern.

In many ways, the *WQ* wonderfully reflects the mission of the Wilson Center itself, which opened its door just a few years before the first issue of the magazine appeared. The Center, the nation's living memorial to Woodrow Wilson, bridges the world of ideas and the world of policy by bringing together on its premises thinkers and doers, in the confident hope that from their conversation will emerge clearer understanding and wiser policy.

The individuals who participate in the work of the Wilson Center and those who contribute to the *WQ* are not narrow specialists or ideologues but scholars, policy-makers, and journalists with expansive interests, who let the facts guide their reflections and conclusions. These remarkable individuals share intellectual curiosity, a passion for creative thought, and an ability to convey clearly what they know. Their work has lifted the quality of scholarship in many fields and affected the direction of public discourse.

The uniqueness of the Wilson Center and the *WQ* derives from the special character of Woodrow Wilson, who was president of Princeton University, governor of New Jersey, president of the United States, and a leading scholar of government. He remains the only American president to have earned a Ph.D. Wilson believed passionately that the scholar and the policymaker are engaged in a common enterprise, and that each should draw upon the knowledge and experience of the other.

America today is awash in TV programs, magazines, Web sites, and other media outlets that generate an endless stream of information and much sound and fury. And

today's Washington is overpopulated with think tanks and special-interest groups pushing their views and advocating their policies on every conceivable matter, from aircraft to zygotes. The Wilson Center and the *WQ*, I like to think, stand apart from that agitated crowd. Subject to no political pressures and in thrall to no intellectual fads, they strive to separate the important from the inconsequential, to stretch our imaginations, to broaden our sympathies, and to foster new insights into fundamental critical issues that should claim the attention of the nation and the world.

To make representative democracy work in a country as vast and diverse as the United States is an immensely difficult task. The *WQ* and the Wilson Center offer a model of how public discourse should proceed in a democracy. They promote the free trade and competition of ideas through civil, serious, and informed discussion, out of a conviction that the exploration of different points of view enriches our lives and strengthens the nation. The burning issues of tomorrow will almost certainly be different from those that heat the debate today. Yet I am confident that, in those new circumstances too, the Wilson Center and the *WQ*, by providing a precious intellectual stability, will continue to help the nation find its way safely across difficult terrain.

I am grateful to the many people who have helped to make the Wilson Center and the *WQ* successful and vibrant over the years: the distinguished members of the Center's Board of Trustees, including chairmen Hubert H. Humphrey, William J. Baroody, Sr., Max M. Kampelman, William J. Baroody, Jr., Joseph H. Flom, and Joseph A. Cari, Jr.; former Wilson Center directors Benjamin H. Read, James H. Billington, and Charles Blitzer; *WQ* editors Peter Braestrup, Jay Tolson, and Steven Lagerfeld; the excellent staff of the *WQ* and the Center; and the corporations, foundations, individuals, and members of Congress whose critical support is essential to our work.

*Lee H. Hamilton*  
*Director, Wilson Center*

# Correspondence

Letters may be mailed to One Woodrow Wilson Plaza, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004-3027, or sent via facsimile, to (202) 691-4036, or e-mail, to wq@wwic.si.edu.

The writer's telephone number and postal address should be included. For reasons of space, letters are usually edited for publication. Some letters are received in response to the editors' requests for comment.

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## *Popular Culture's Turf Wars*

Martha Bayles's commentary on obscenity ["The Perverse in the Popular," *WQ*, Summer '01] is very revealing, but I disagree with her pessimistic assertion that the "rest of us" are suffering in the war between envelope-pushing artists and their moralizing antagonists. The battles that her article mentions—most prominently the controversy over the 1999 *Sensation* exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art—are mostly no more than personal, narrow "turf wars" that make for good print in the tabloids and have little national impact. Even 2 Live Crew's farcical standoff with authorities was restricted mainly to Florida, when the infamous "F\_\_\_ Martinez" track blasting a judge became more of an issue than the group's chauvinist/misogynist rants themselves.

These grudge matches are secondary to the fact that never before have Americans had access to so many different entertainment sources. Our free-market economy and constitutional rights allow for a multitude of media to succeed. At the same time, these freedoms grant us two valuable weapons: our wallets and the power buttons on our televisions, radios, and computers.

If I can go to a bookstore, pick up both a British variety magazine and a Spanish-language CD, listen to country music in my Jeep on the way home, and choose among Fox News, PBS, and American Movie Classics on my television while checking movie reviews on Yahoo!, where exactly lies the predicament? That people gravitate toward obscenity speaks more about individuals' tastes than about the artists who promote obscenity with their work. We are not helpless bystanders in all of this; we are active participants in the formulation and presentation of popular culture.

Lorenzo R. Cortes  
Alexandria, Va.

Paul A. Cantor ["The Art in the Popular," *WQ*, Summer '01] presents a coherent thesis about the indiscriminate commingling of "wheat and chaff" in the public poetry of ancient Athens. But he weakens his case by taking Plato out of the histor-

ical context of three important developments in Athenian life that occurred about 400 B.C. It was probably Plato himself rather than Socrates who made the shift from science to sociology, from the cosmos to the common, because scientists had failed to explain celestial mechanics—notably the retrograde motion of the planets—and make the physical universe comprehensible. (That monumental "cop out" was not rectified until Isaac Newton did so more than 2,000 years later.)

The first of these developments was that traditional Greek religion no longer met the spiritual needs of the people, who turned increasingly to the occult in the form of Eastern and "mystery" religions. The second was that Plato's mentor, Socrates, willingly paid the supreme price—death—for having failed to improve the system (the common culture?) by questioning all things and by urging his students to do the same. Finally, Athenian democracy—unique in the ancient world—succumbed to a military dictatorship, which, in the people's desperation to win the Peloponnesian War, failed. The golden age of Greek science, politics, and culture went into decline (and was not to be revived until the Italian Renaissance).

Contrary to *common* popular belief, history does not repeat itself, but neither does human nature change. Though contemporary democracy and science are exceedingly healthy, the "perverse modernism" of communications theory à la Marshall McLuhan attempts, as Martha Bayles explains, to make the technological medium a pop panacea, especially in the classroom. Other superficial modernists turn to the occult—to the psychics, astrologers, and such so widely advertised in the electronic media.

As an optimist, I have to agree with what both Cantor and Bayles imply—that out of the vast ocean of pop culture mediocrity, excellence will inexorably emerge. Not the quantity of the mere messages but the quality of the great ideas will be the true measure.

Clark G. Reynolds  
Distinguished Professor in History  
College of Charleston  
Charleston, S.C.

## Santayana's Enduring Legacy

It is a source of distinct satisfaction to read Wilfred M. McClay's essay "Remembering Santayana" [WQ, Summer '01]. Only so much can be written on so rich a subject as Santayana in a brief article, but McClay accomplishes his work superbly.

Although it is accurate to say that Santayana is little known today, it should also be noted that a firm undercurrent of interest in the philosopher and many of his works has maintained its force since his death in 1952. That said, one reason for Santayana's faded popularity is that he never sought popularity. He was not zealous, and he refused to engage in the philosophical skirmishes that produce followers.

McClay lists many eminent men whom Santayana taught at Harvard, and he implies a universal approval of his teaching. But T. S. Eliot, for one, did not approve. He found Santayana's lectures "soporific." Santayana, for his part, thought Eliot's promotion of Ezra Pound inexplicable; he remarked that "the thought of T. S. Eliot is subterranean without being profound."

A central question in my mind arises when McClay claims "there was a strain of irresponsibility in Santayana's naturalism," and adds that Santayana failed to regard his conclusions as "rules by which we should all live." Of course he did not so regard them. To have done so would have violated his nature utterly. The fullest statement and the most compelling exposition of his naturalism lie in *Scepticism and Animal Faith: Introduction to a System of Philosophy* (1923), and they are far from irresponsible. (Santayana assuredly was irresponsible about the Jews and about Mussolini; his asides in approval of the Soviets were ironic and playful.)

I also question McClay's interpretation of Santayana's Catholicism. I am baffled, for instance, by his allusion to the philosopher's reverence for "the rich pageant of Spanish Catholicism." If Santayana revered anything about Spanish or any other form of Catholicism, he did so only out of his aesthetic appreciation of ritual and décor. About the rest of it, he was steely eyed. He would not even allow the Blue Nuns to place on the altar of the hospital's chapel the flowers sent him each Christmas; they were his gift to the nuns, not to the church.

I find McClay too hard on Santayana dur-

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ing his last decade in Rome during the war. The philosopher was old, he was cold, he was deaf. He spent the harsh winter days in bed and wrote while wearing mittens, no mean feat. I suspect he knew that his world was over. He never complained. As he lay dying, his friends and the nuns urged him to confess his sins and die in the Church. He refused. According to Daniel Cory, his friend and onetime assistant, his final words were, "My only pain is physical."

*John McCormick*

*York, England*

*Author of George Santayana: A Biography*

Apparently Wilfred McClay was condemned to forget at least one small bit of the past. My enjoyment of his article "Remembering Santayana" was marred by reading his words, "culminating in the Germans' murder of Mussolini and his mistress." It was a bit of a shock to me that the writer blamed the Germans for the acts of anti-German partisans, a lesser shock that he seemed to push the execution ahead of the Allied entry into Rome. It bothered me that no one at the WQ caught the error. Still, it is just a small and irrelevant error in an otherwise enlightening article and magazine. It will not deter me from the pursuit of more of George Santayana's writings, which the article inspired.

*Jerry Steiger*

*Corvallis, Oregon*

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### *Promoting Democracy*

In his article "Democracy Inc." [WQ, Summer '01], Eric Bjornlund convincingly identifies some of the problems that have hampered recent international efforts to promote democracy. Specifically, the lessons he derives from the Cambodian election of 1998 and the Indonesian election of 1999 are instructive: Many donor organizations were too willing to ignore the fundamental flaws afflicting the former, and too eager to dump money and directives on local nongovernmental organizations monitoring the latter. In both cases, the mistakes committed by donors undercut the efforts of indigenous democrats.

Bjornlund also correctly observes that

donor governments often do not apply democratic standards in a uniform manner. I take issue, however, with his assertion that advanced democratic governments will be unable to achieve such uniformity until they “break the link between the promotion of democracy and other foreign-policy goals.” I would propose the opposite solution: that donor governments more tightly integrate the concepts of freedom, security, and prosperity that inform their diplomacy.

If the governments of advanced industrial democracies view the spread of democracy as a “value” of great but ultimately secondary importance compared with the “interests” of wealth and peace, then the value will no doubt usually be trumped by the interests. But if the leaders of these same governments are made to understand exactly how democratization can support economic development, the resolution of domestic strife, and international cooperation, then the promotion of democracy in the developing world will be viewed as intrinsic to the pursuit of security and prosperity by the developed world.

Thus, rather than ask the advanced democracies to ascetically elevate their values above their interests, supporters of Democracy Inc. must create compelling connections among all foreign-policy goals, connections befitting a globalized era in which money, technology, and democratic freedoms are linked in theory and practice more closely than ever before.

David W. Yang

Director, The Institute for Global Democracy  
The Henry L. Stimson Center  
Washington, D.C.

### *The Meaning of “Earnest”*

In your last issue, you gave an account of an article on Longfellow by Rochelle Gurstein [“The Periodical Observer,” *WQ*, Summer ’01], in which the poet’s line from “A Psalm of Life,” “Life is real! Life is earnest!” is quoted, and followed by the observation: “By the time of Oscar Wilde’s *Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), however, earnestness had become a term of derision, Gurstein observes. ‘And by the time of the centenary celebration of Longfellow’s birth in 1907, the revolt against gentility and classicism was in full bloom.’”



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I suspect that there was more to the matter than simple derisiveness about “earnestness” in Wilde’s use of the word. In *Our Age* (1991), his account of English intellectuals between the World Wars, Noel Annan reports:

[Timothy] D’Arch suggests that one of the versifiers among the pedophiles, John Gambriel Nicholson, in his sequence of fifty sonnets entitled *Love in Earnest*, gave Wilde the play upon words for his one undisputed work of genius.

My little Prince, love’s mystic spell  
Lights all the letters of your name  
And you, if no one else, can tell  
Why Ernest sets my heart on flame.

In the 1890s, one member of the fraternity might ask another “Is he musical?” or “Is he earnest?”—as much code words for *homosexual* as “gay” is today.

Anthony Hecht  
Washington, D.C.

# Findings

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## Nationette

The Principality of Sealand consists in its entirety of a 6,000-square-foot World War II anti-aircraft fortress situated six miles off England's eastern coast. It may not look like much, but Sealand is a bona fide nation-state. "Prince" Roy Bates, who occupied the abandoned gun platform in 1967 and then proclaimed its sovereignty, is currently using Sealand's independence to create the first regulation-free Internet data link. The link provides clients with complete privacy and no pesky government interference in online financial transactions, e-mails, and Web sites. The Associated Press has reported that Haven-Co, the Antigua-based company that is responsible for the enterprise, will allow customers to host servers on Sealand at prices ranging from \$3,000 to \$10,000. They'll be allowed to use their servers for any purpose, other than to send junk e-mail or child pornography or to hack into other computer systems with malicious intent (and presumably not for fun either).

As if the legalities of running a regulation-free Internet operation were not cloudy enough for Sealand, there exists the separate vexing legal issue of its asserted sovereignty. Though Sealand issues its own currency, stamps, and passports, the United Kingdom insists that the upstart platform is still within UK territory and has no legitimate claim to independence. Sealand argues the contrary, and cites a 1968 court decision in which a British judge ruled that the court had no jurisdiction over Sealand because it was located just outside British territorial waters. The British responded by extending their territorial waters. Since then, they've shown little interest in the place. According to Sealand's Web site ([www.sealandgov.com](http://www.sealandgov.com)), other nations, including Germany (which sent a diplomat "to negotiate the release of a German prisoner held captive in a Sealand prison"), have been less indifferent. They've given the statelet some form of recognition.

Resist the urge to make Sealand your next vacation getaway. Access is restricted to the "techies" who live there, Prince Roy and his wife, Princess Joan (whose face is on the currency), and other government-sanctioned officials. Even customers cannot come on board uninvited. Still, citizenship isn't an impossible goal. According to another "official" Web site ([www.principality-sealand.net](http://www.principality-sealand.net)), Sealand, as of September 1998, had a citizen population of 160,000 (and a national surface area an eighth the size of a football field). Most of the citizens are business-people, and all of them reside elsewhere. The only requirement for citizenship? Be prepared to "use [your] talents to establish and boost the acceptance of an emerging state." At the least, Sealand can claim to be keeping its head above water.

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## The Place of Place

In *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (2001), Mary Ann Caws collects more than 200 artistic and cultural statements by visionaries of every persuasion who, between the late 19th and late 20th centuries, threw down a glove for their beliefs. None of the urgent voices is more appealing than that of the



Eudora Welty in 1992

writer Eudora Welty, who died this past summer. Here Welty speaks about the importance of place — of creating a world — in fiction:

Place is one of the lesser angels that watch over the racing hand of fiction, perhaps the one that gazes benignly enough from off to one side, while others, like character, plot, symbolic meaning, and so on, are doing a good deal of wing-beating about her chair. . . .

It may be going too far to say that the exactness and concreteness and solidity of the real world achieved in a story correspond to the intensity of feeling in the author's mind and to the very turn of his heart; but there lies the secret of our confidence in him.

Making reality real is art's responsibility. It is a practical assignment, then, a self-assignment: to achieve, by a cultivated sensitivity for observing life, a capacity for receiving its impressions, a lonely, unremitting, unaided, unaidable vision, and transferring this vision without distortion to it onto the pages of a novel, where, if the reader is so persuaded, it will turn into the reader's illusion. How bent on this peculiar joy we are, reader and writer, willingly to practice, willingly to undergo, this alchemy for it!

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## The New Astronomy

Duke University Press recently published a book titled *Gay Fandom and Crossover Stardom: James Dean, Mel Gibson, and Keanu Reeves*. The ad copy notes that it is “an important contribution to star studies.”

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## For Good Measure

Richard Porter needed something to do during retirement, so he began to collect thermometers. The former science teacher's Cape Cod home soon began to overflow with thermometers of every sort,



Richard Porter, at the World's Only Thermometer Museum

from the pill-sized instruments that John Glenn swallowed for his trip on the space shuttle *Discovery* in 1998 to devices in the shape of teddy bears. “The World's Only Thermometer Museum” is now set for a place in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

The recognition comes at a propitious moment in the history of thermometry: the 300th anniversary of the birth of the Swedish scientist Anders Celsius. Celsius's eponymous measurement scale, most likely formulated in 1741, never caught on in the United States, though it's the standard for most of the globe.

It's impossible to compare temperature readings without establishing a universal temperature scale, and scientists fought for centuries about what that scale should be. By the late 1600s, there were dozens of alternatives. As a result, thermometers were sometimes made with more than 10 scales pasted on a board behind the vial, in a clumsy attempt to allow comparisons.

Today's reference points, the boiling point of water (100° C) and the melting point of ice (0° C), were by no means as obvious in the past as they now seem. Enlightenment scientists and philosophers who sought to come up with standard measures flirted with the boiling point of wine, the melting point of butter, and the constant cold of the Parisian catacombs. And the two principal reference points for hot and cold were not the only variants from scale to scale: The number of degrees scientists chose to put between them varied as well. It might be 80, as in the Réaumur scale devised in 1730 that prevailed for at least a century in France (and still survives in pockets of that

## Findings

country, Germany, and Argentina), or 180, as in our Fahrenheit scheme.

Celsius chose a centigrade scale, in which 100 degrees lay between the two fixed points. That elegant solution has long since persuaded most of the world, but it stands as much chance of being adopted in the United States as, well, the metric system.

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## Capitalism without Tears

“Treasures from a Bygone Era” runs the line on the catalogue cover, above a color photo of three seated lead-cast figurines: Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill, facing off at the 1943 Tehran Conference. The three-inch figurines are a hot item in the summer 2001 catalogue for the Sovietski Collection, a mail-order enterprise in California that offers items both original and lovingly recreated from the golden days of Soviet totalitarianism.

Maybe you had to be there to appreciate the catalogue copy: “We had lots of disappointed folks when our supply of unissued control clocks for launching nukes sold out a couple of years ago. So we were thrilled to get more, straight from decommissioned Tupolev long-range bombers.” In the interim, those disappointed folks had lots in the catalogue to soften their regret: giant border-guard observation binoculars; East German Stasi “come-alongs” (“high-tensile alloy submission cuffs, used to subdue ‘troublemakers’ by ‘non-lethal’ means”); authentic holsters for the famous Makarov pistol; titanium shovels and garden trowels (“tunneling under walls and embassies was never so easy”); East German AK-47 bayonets (“a cutting-edge piece of Cold War history”); and demilitarized armor-piercing missiles. The last are called “the world’s most unusual paperweights.” No argument there.

*Sovietski.com* had better watch its rear. Can *thereichstuff.com* be far behind?

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## Always

In his final dispatch from America this past August, Martin Kettle, a Washington-based reporter for the British *Guardian* newspaper, proposed a new definition of hell: “When

Americans say that they’re available 24/7, they say it with pride and with a breezy confidence that it’s exactly the sort of thing that you ought to be glad to hear. But the more often I hear the phrase, the more I think there is madness afoot. To me, 24/7 is a shorthand way of describing a living hell.”

That once-heroic commitment to 16 hours of service a day now looks like a wimpy cop-out on the front of every 7-Eleven. Kettle cites a report in *USA Today* “that 237 Home Depot stores are open around the clock across the U.S., along with 1,298 Wal-Marts and thousands of 7-Eleven and Safeway food supermarkets, from San Diego up to Maine.” Restless Americans are trading their old-fashioned nightmares for the new nightmare of regrouting bathroom tile by moonlight—Big Gulps to the ready.

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## Do Your Worst. Please.

Plumbers or clerks just can’t compete: When it comes to horrific behavior, kings, queens, princes, tsars, popes, emperors, and their assorted hangers-on sweep the field. That’s the clear message of Michael Farquhar’s *A Treasury of Royal Scandals* (2001), a compendium of two millennia of hanky-panky among the highly placed. The book’s cover even promises a “bonus chapter on unholy popes!”—and the breathy mark of punctuation is an essential part of the come-on.

With Farquhar, you pick a century and choose your reprobate. Don Carlos, the troubled son of Spain’s 16th-century king Philip II, was the subject of a poetic tragedy by the German dramatist Schiller, and Verdi set the man’s woes to noble music. Farquhar’s



The Infante Don Carlos (1564), by Alonso Sanchez Coello

Carlos—“hunchbacked and pigeon breasted, with his entire right side less developed than his left”—isn’t within shouting distance of art’s saving grace: “As a child, Don Carlos enjoyed watching rabbits roasted alive and, for kicks, once blinded all the horses in the royal stable. Things got even worse when doctors removed part of his skull to drain built-up fluids after a head injury Don Carlos sustained when he was sixteen. Half-flobotomized, he took to roaming the streets of Madrid, assaulting young girls and hurling obscenities at respectable women. That conk on the head made him even more ornery than he was before. Once, when a bootmaker delivered the wrong size, Don Carlos ordered the footwear cut into pieces, stewed, and then force-fed to the unfortunate man.” It goes without saying that Carlos died raving in confinement.

All the gossip is delicious but not necessarily good for you. It’s potato chips for the mind. And a good portion of the chatter is probably not just caloric but false. The lurid stuff about Roman emperors, for example—Tiberius (imperial pedophile), Caligula (incestuous divinity), Claudius (paranoid cuckold), Nero (momma’s boy), Vitellius (indiscriminate glutton)—repeats the malice of ancient partisans without attending to its often questionable sources. The great are never so reduced as when we fit them to whispers—and never, perhaps, more necessary. Their comeuppance is balm in an unjust world.

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## Falling Silent

There are more languages in the world today than the nonlinguist might suspect. By current measures of evaluation (which involve having to decide, for example, what’s an independent language and what’s a dialect), the number is somewhere between 6,000 and 7,000, though perhaps a quarter of the languages are spoken by no more than 1,000 people. In *Language Death* (2000), David Crystal argues that it “cannot be very far from the truth” that perhaps 50 percent of the world’s 6,000 languages will not survive the next 100 years.

The reasons he cites are complex and varied—catastrophic natural causes that

immediately end lives and ways of life; political, economic, and cultural factors that work their changes over time. But the outcome is the same: “If you are the last speaker of a language, your language—viewed as a tool of communication—is already dead. For a language is really alive only as long as there is someone to speak it to. When you are the only one left, your knowledge of your language is like a repository, or archive, of your people’s spoken linguistic past. . . . But, unlike the normal idea of an archive, which continues to exist long after the archivist is dead, the moment the last speaker of an unwritten or unrecorded language dies, the archive disappears forever. When a language dies which has never been recorded in some way, it is as if it has never been.”

The overwhelming majority (96 percent) of the world’s 6 billion people speak just a tiny minority (four percent) of the world’s languages: “The eight languages over 100 million (Mandarin, Spanish, English, Bengali, Hindi, Portuguese, Russian, and Japanese) have nearly 2.4 billion speakers between them; and if we extend the count to include just the top 20 languages, we find a total of 3.2 billion—over half the world’s population.”

How many languages have there been on earth since human beings developed a faculty for language? That’s impossible to know for sure, though some linguists have attempted an estimate: as many as 600,000, or as few as 31,000. The lower figure, or one considerably smaller, would still mean that dead languages far outnumber the living. If language death has been so common—a fact of life, so to speak—why should we care that thousands more languages may be doomed?

Crystal doesn’t quote John Donne, but the spirit of the poet-preacher (“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main”) informs his alarm: Every language is a human response to the world, a way of ordering in communicable sounds what a particular group of individuals perceive as reality. When a language dies and silence replaces the solace of daily human sound, we’re all diminished.

# Blair's Britain

Tony Blair is dismantling the British state as it has existed since the 18th century. Is his new Britain a fair trade for the old?

by Martin Walker

Britain has been scourged this year by a series of natural disasters and plagues of almost biblical proportions. The worst floods ever recorded and a series of fatal rail crashes embarrassed the world's oldest railway network and led to disruptions and the imposition of speed restrictions. At snail's pace, a traveler could lurch past flooded fields to more somber landscapes, where the pall of the funeral pyres of some three million slaughtered cattle drifted dark against the lowering skies. The slaughter was not the result of mad cow disease, by which Britain had been uniquely ravaged, but of the more prosaic foot-and-mouth disease. In an effort to stamp it out, national parks and ancient footpaths and rights of way were closed across the country.

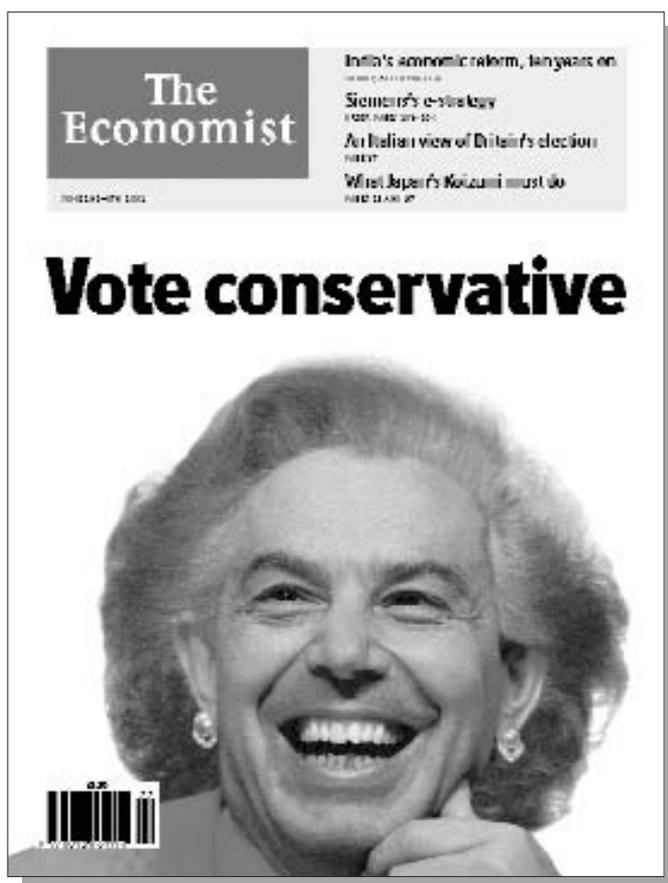
Heading north, the traveler might have seen a different kind of smoke drifting across the sky, from burning cars and looted shops, as a sudden wave of race riots swept across the old textile-mill towns of Burnley, Leeds, and Oldham. These pockets of industrial depression made fertile ground for the neo-Nazi agitators of the new British National Party, whose campaigns for the repatriation of immigrants won them 16 percent of the vote in those areas in the general election in June.

Yet all these events took place in a country that could plausibly claim to be the most prosperous and dynamic in Europe. Almost 20 years have gone by since *il surpasso*, that moment when the gross domestic product (GDP) of Italy overtook that of

Britain, and Italy became the third-largest economy in Europe, after Germany and France. A symbolic moment in Britain's long postwar travail of relative decline, *il surpasso* was dismissed in the Fleet Street press as the effect of recalculating Italy's national income statistics to include estimates of the contributions of the untaxed underground economy. Nonetheless, at a time when Britain was being widely described as "the sick man of Europe," it hurt.

The transformation in Britain since then has been dramatic. Italy's GDP was surpassed a decade ago. Late last year, with some help from the declining euro, Europe's new single currency, and from the strength of the still proudly independent pound, Britain's GDP surged past that of France for the first time in 30 years. Britain became Europe's second-largest economy, with a tantalizing if distant chance of catching the leader, Germany, in another decade or so.

Talk of a historic recovery, even of a British economic miracle, began in the mid-1980s, the high point of the Thatcher years, and some of the current statistics seem to confirm the good news. Inflation and interest rates are low. The British are far more likely than other Europeans to invest in stocks, and they are unique in Europe in not fearing the coming demographic shock. They breed more than other Europeans and accept more immigrants, and because they have largely privatized their pensions, unlike the French



*The Thatcher-Blair eras blend none too prettily on an Economist cover.*

and Germans, the government will not have to grab another five to 10 percent of GDP to finance care for the soaring numbers of the elderly. Unemployment, at just under five percent, is around half the rates of France and Germany, and in this year of global flirtation with recession, Britain looks set to have the best growth rate of any of the main economies in Europe. Its consumer boom is untamed, its City of London dominates the global exchange markets, and its investments pour out across the globe in a way not seen since the halcyon years before 1914.

Britain's international corporations—BP in energy, Vodafone in telecommunications, GlaxoSmithKline in pharmaceuticals, BAe in defense and aerospace, Tesco in retailing—are world leaders. And the rest of the world plainly recognizes the new British vigor: The United Kingdom attracts almost half of all foreign direct investment in the European community.

Indeed, one of the strongest arguments in favor of Britain's adoption of the euro is that it will maintain the United Kingdom's attractiveness to American and Japanese capital as the favored springboard for the vast European market.

So there was little surprise in the historic second election victory by Tony Blair's "New" Labor Party in June, the first time any Labor government has been elected to a full second term in office. On the surface, the election seemed a reward for good management. It was also perhaps a recognition that the Conservative opposition had still not recovered from the heroic but exhausting efforts of their four successive election victories between 1979 and 1992, three of them under the redoubtable Margaret Thatcher. Her brusque free-market reforms and defeat of the labor unions may have done much to promote the nation's economic transformation. But why vote Conservative when

## Whither Britain?

Blair delivers the same economic polices wrapped in a less disciplinarian package? The degree to which Blair has become Thatcher's true heir was captured during the election campaign by a cover of the *Economist* that framed his face with her hair.

But though reelected and respected, Blair is not popular. The almost sublime identification with the national mood that he achieved at the time of Princess Diana's death has gone. His tendency to preach and his sanctimonious streak inspired jeers and slow handclaps from that most accommodating of audiences, the conference of the Women's Institutes; no other speaker in history has managed to offend the massed ranks of the nation's grannies. The hit play of London's current season is Alistair Beaton's *Feelgood*, a vicious satire of Blair, his spin-doctors, and the centrist anti-ideology of the Third Way that Blair learned from Bill Clinton. Blair is thinly disguised in the play as DL, the Divine Leader, protected by a ruthless palace guard that is prepared to murder critics in the media to keep power.

On closer examination, Blair's second election victory was far from impressive. He won just 40.8 percent of the vote, but thanks to Britain's winner-take-all electoral system, his party secured nearly twice as many seats in Parliament as the Conservatives and Liberal-Democrats combined, even though their total share of the vote was just over 50 percent. The unusually low turnout of voters (below 60 percent) reflected a widespread political apathy; Blair won the support of only one potential voter in four, well below the 32 percent of the potential vote that Margaret Thatcher won in her 1983 landslide. These are dismal figures, and a far less imposing mandate than the commanding masses of Labor members of Parliament would suggest.

Yet Blair relies on this dubious mandate

for the fulfillment of his grand project to modernize Britain. That project has very little to do with the avowed priority of his second term, which is to improve public services—from health to education, policing to public transportation—by making up for those long years of poverty and stringency that followed the three postwar decades of anemic growth, industrial unrest, imperial surrender, and national decline. Hints emerging from think tanks close to Labor suggest that the changes will involve the increasing deployment of private capital to sustain services hitherto dependent largely on taxpayer funds.

Many traditional Labor supporters, from labor unions to former ministers such as Roy Hattersley, suspect a betrayal of their traditional principles. Hattersley, once a deputy party leader, has a name for his fellow traditionalists. He refers to them as “the old contemptibles of egalitarian socialism,” a phrase with a pungent echo in British history. After the Kaiser called the small but professional British army of the years before 1914 “a contemptibly little army,” those brave few helped defeat the German masses at the Battle of the Marne; they themselves were then virtually destroyed stopping the final thrust of the 1914 assault at the Battle of Ypres. The survivors proudly called themselves “the old contemptibles.” Hattersley's phrase deliberately suggests a defiant assurance that old Labor will in the end prevail over Blair's image-conscious modernizers. Indeed, a battle over the financing of the future of London Transport has already been joined with “Red Ken” Livingstone, an “old contemptible” leftist who, in the teeth of Blair's opposition, became London's first-ever elected mayor.

Yet to focus on the battles between old Labor and new, as the British media and many observers have understandably done, is to miss the deeper point. The importance of Red Ken's challenge is not simply that he represents a kind of opposi-

> MARTIN WALKER, a former bureau chief in Moscow, Washington, and Brussels for Britain's *Guardian* newspaper and a former Wilson Center public policy fellow, is the author, most recently, of *America Reborn: A Twentieth-Century Narrative in Twenty-Six Lives* (2000). His novel, *The Caves of Perigord*, is to be published next spring by Simon & Schuster. Copyright © 2001 by Martin Walker.



*In May 1999, Scottish nationalists wearing ancient dress and holding a saltire flag and a broadsword celebrated the swearing in of Scotland's first newly elected parliament in nearly 300 years.*

tion that the dispirited Conservatives are unable to deploy, or that he offers an alternative model of financing public goods and services. It's that he has been empowered by a Blairite revolution that has a considerable way to go.

As a British-born citizen who has been out of the country working as a foreign correspondent and writer for the past two decades, I find that the perspective of distance (interspersed with frequent visits home) imposes a view that the old country is going through three separate revolu-

tions. One of them, the economic revival and the decisive shift in the balance of social power from labor to capital, was Thatcher's, loyally sustained, and even extended, by Blair. The two other revolutions have received much less attention, and yet they promise to change the country more profoundly. The first—to resolve, finally, Britain's hesitant relationship with the Europe of which it has been a grumpy member since 1973, and to participate fully in the movement toward political and economic union—will transform the

## *Whither Britain?*

traditional concept of one of the world's oldest and proudest nations. The second—to democratize what had become under Thatcher the most centralized and authoritarian, and the least democratic, state in Western Europe—will forever change the traditional notion of the British state. Indeed, the revolution has already begun: The abolition of the hereditary right of peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords, the upper chamber of Parliament, and the establishment of separate elected assemblies for Scotland and Wales are the clear signs.

**B**ritish democracy has always rested upon the sovereignty of Parliament, not on any written constitution (for there is none), and not on an independent judiciary (for judges are appointed by the government of the day). The power of a prime minister backed by a strong and loyal majority is that of “an elective dictatorship,” in the pungent phrase of Lord

Hailsham, a recent lord chancellor. The quaint nature of British democracy (no other “democracy” worth the name accepts an unelected second chamber) and the strength of its long tradition are illustrated by the way in which the lord chancellor, the nation's chief law officer, is seated in the House of Lords—usually, these days, after being ennobled and appointed by the government of which he (no woman has had the post thus far) is always a senior member. The House of Lords, which retains significant powers to amend and delay legislation, is no longer dominated numerically by the undemocratic principle of aristocratic inheritance. Its composition today is defined by the prime minister's choices for elevation to the peerage, which is a post now held for life rather than in perpetuity through the generations. Having reformed the hereditary principle by decimating to a rump 93 the number of hereditary peers with the right to vote, the Blair government has



*In a Sunday Telegraph cartoon (Jan. 31, 1999), Blair makes no secret of an infatuation.*

removed one palpably undemocratic flaw. But by turning the old watchdog House of Lords into the prime minister's poodle, he has transformed it into a beast equally grotesque.

**T**he distortion at the top of the British democratic structure is matched by another at the bottom, where the traditional powers and authority of local government were comprehensively dismantled during the Thatcher years. The Greater London Council, the elected body for the capital, was bluntly abolished, because under the chairmanship of Red Ken Livingston it had become a highly visible center of opposition, flaunting, for example, the latest unemployment figures on a large banner outside its headquarters, just across the Thames from the houses of Parliament. As control of the purse was centralized in Whitehall (the seat of the national government and administration), elected councils effectively lost the power to set their own taxing and spending priorities. A series of measures to centralize control over education, traditionally run by local education authorities, were deployed—partly because so many councils were controlled by the Labor opposition, partly for blunter reasons of ideology—and the main capital stock of local governments across the country was put up for sale to sitting tenants. The sale of the council-owned homes was part of a broader and, on the whole, popular strategy (which included the privatization of other state-owned assets) to promote private property. As Mrs. Thatcher wrote in her memoirs, *The Downing Street Years* (1993), “The state in the form of local authorities had frequently proved an insensitive, incompetent, and corrupt landlord.”

As power shifted to London, a great deal of the energy and self-reliance—and a considerable share of the talent—of the provinces went with it. The economic imbalance between greater London and its environs, known dismissively in the city as “Roseland,” for “rest of the southeast,” became striking. If one puts the per capita GDP of the United Kingdom as a whole at 100, London's GDP is 130. London's envi-

rons in the southeast and East Anglia each score 116. The GDP of the northeast, by contrast, is 77.3, and that of the rest of England languishes in the 80s and 90s.

Tony Blair knows this very well, as the member of Parliament for the northeast seat of Sedgefield, a former coal-mining community in the poorest part of the country. Blair's government depends overwhelmingly on votes from regions in England whose per capita GDP is below the national average, and on the traditionally loyal votes of Scotland and Wales. The important role of the Celtic fringe was reflected in Blair's first government, in which Scots held almost all the grandest cabinet posts.

So the signal commitment of Blair's second term is to offer all the English regions a referendum on whether they want to follow the example of Scotland and Wales and have their own elected assemblies. They are to be offered powers over transportation policies, including those for roads, airports, and public transportation; over land use and development planning; and over economic development, with a yet-to-be-defined authority to raise taxes for local investments. The formal proposal is still being drafted at this writing, but rough calculations suggest that the national government, which currently spends some 40 percent of GDP, will surrender a 2.5 to five percent share of GDP to the new regional assemblies.

Blair is not proposing simply to turn back the clock to the pre-Thatcher years. The English provinces have not enjoyed powers such as these since the great days of Victorian Britain, when the flourishing industrial cities of the north built their palatial town halls, when Glasgow and Manchester vied for the title of second city of the empire, and when to be lord mayor of Birmingham was to aspire, like Joseph Chamberlain, to be prime minister and to raise a grand political dynasty. The provincial powers were eroded, first, by the pre-1914 welfare state, with its high taxes to finance old-age pensions and unemployment insurance, and then by the extraordinary centralizing effect of two world wars. To begin redressing the balance of

## Whither Britain?

power from London to the regions is to reverse what seemed an implacable trend of the 20th century. But to return the powers of self-government and home rule to Scotland and Wales, with even the limited powers to tax so far entrusted to the Scottish Assembly, is to begin dismantling the British state as it has existed since the dawn of the 18th century.

In her groundbreaking book *Britons* (1992), the historian Linda Colley analyzes the way that a new, militant, Protestant British patriotism was deliberately forged in the 18th century after the 1707 Act of Union with Scotland. She suggests that the current processes of democratic devolution reflect the way that “God has ceased to be British and Providence no longer smiles. . . . Whether Great Britain will break down into separate Welsh, Scottish, and English states or whether, as is more likely, a more federal Britain will emerge as part of an increasingly federal Europe, remains to be seen. What seems indisputable is that a substantial rethinking of what it means to be British can no longer be evaded.”

Blair made it known that he had read Colley's book with profit and attention. He shares her view that almost every question about the future of Britain hinges on the development of its relations with Europe. Europe—or, rather, the backlash within the Conservative Party against her anti-Europe campaigns—destroyed the political career of Margaret Thatcher. Divisions over Europe then broke the government of her successor, John Major. The British Parliament has already surrendered a great deal of its sovereignty, including the power to legislate, to European institutions. The European Court of Justice is, for most practical purposes, Britain's Supreme Court. Having deliberately avoided a written constitution for centuries, Britain has now incorporated the European Charter of Human Rights into the national law. British foreign policy, accustomed since 1941 to functioning within the context of the transatlantic alliance, has now also to accommodate the constraints of Europe's new Common Foreign and Security Policy.

The great political question of the next five years of Blair's government is whether Britain, by embracing the euro, will go on to surrender its sovereignty over the economy and entrust to the European Central Bank the power to set interest rates and determine the money supply. The powers to declare war and peace and to regulate the coinage have traditionally defined sovereignty. The process of European integration is now far enough advanced to have encroached mightily on both.

Blair has promised a referendum within the next two years on whether to abandon the pound and adopt the euro. He suggests that the choice should be made essentially on the economic merits of the case. But the arguments cut both ways. The British economy has done remarkably well of late while remaining outside the euro zone; that the new currency, as managed by the European Central Bank, has lost some 30 percent of its value against the dollar over the past 18 months is hardly reassuring. And yet, 60 percent of British exports now go to the other 14 members of the European Union. The Union's imminent enlargement to some 26 or more members through the incorporation of Central and Eastern Europe will create a single market of 520 million consumers in the world's largest economic bloc. That adds to the attraction of the euro, and to the suspicion that the impending change may represent an opportunity Britain cannot afford to miss.

But to couch the argument solely in economic terms is willfully to miss the point, and Blair is suspected of doing so because he remains so nervous about the constitutional questions. By forcing a resolution, the referendum on the euro will end half a century of vacillation over Europe. It is not a choice Britain relishes having to make. The referendum is also an intensely high-risk course for Blair to adopt, since opinion polls show a consistent majority of two to one against the euro. Blair knows that he is playing with psychological fire: The British nation's identity was born in opposition to Europe. The most treasured national myths, from the defeat of the Spanish

Armada in 1588 to the defiance of Hitler in 1940, from “Britannia Rules the Waves” to the “Thin Red Line,” celebrate achievements against other European powers. Building a worldwide empire was itself an act of turning the national back on Europe. The wider world beyond Europe still beckons, and the instinctive sense that Britain has more in common with its reliable American ally remains strong.

Still, given Blair’s political skills and his gift for careful preparation, only the boldest pundit would bet against his success. The opinion polls suggest that almost as large a majority thinks adopting the euro to be inevitable as says it intends to vote no. Scare stories quote foreign businessmen warning that Japanese and American investments will shun an isolated Britain. At London dinner tables there is endless gossip about the deals Blair will make, from backing Rupert Murdoch’s expansion into lucrative European broadcasting to privatizing the BBC to secure the support of media barons. Opponents warn darkly of the vast sums the City of London and French and German corporations are prepared to pour into pro-euro propaganda. American diplomats in the salons and on talk shows argue that a Britain fully engaged in a united Europe will have far more influence in Washington than an isolated offshore island ever could.

**T**he role of the powerful Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, is much debated. He is credited with checking Blair’s instinct to hold the referendum on the euro back in the prime minister’s first honeymoon period, in 1997, and his ambition to succeed Blair burns hot to the touch. Blair’s own ambitions, given that he is a young 50, provoke intense speculation. Some claim to have heard Bill Clinton’s private prediction that Blair will step down after winning the referendum and go to Brussels to replace Romano Prodi as president of the European Commission. A victory on the euro would be a nice prize to bring along. Others close to Blair say he intends to match Thatcher by winning a third election. Nobody really knows, which is half the fun. The next two years of

British politics promise to be riveting psychodrama, a feverish prologue to the historic referendum.

The referendum campaign will also see a personal duel between the two most gifted and compelling British politicians of the last half-century, Thatcher and Blair, a battle without quarter between the two great modernizers of the British state. It promises to be an almost oedipal encounter, between the woman who restored the national fortunes and the national pride, and the heir who knew what he wanted to do with the transformed nation she had bequeathed him. Blair’s twin projects, to decentralize Britain and to Europeanize it, are anathema to Thatcher. Yet the striking feature of the past 20 years in Britain is how much the Thatcher-Blair years dovetail into each other and become a single tumultuous period of wholesale change that has swept aside the old postwar Britain of welfare state and decolonization, “One Nation” and creeping decline.

**B**ritain is not just a different country now; it is three or four or five different countries. Scotland and Wales have become far more than nostalgic names on maps, and provincial England is poised to follow their path toward home rule. London, with its elected mayor, has become one of the great city-states of the global economy, a thrilling and polyglot place where one goes from the world’s finest theater to a late-night café and club culture. Enlivened by vast communities of American bankers and French and Asian entrepreneurs, it is Europe’s fastest market for champagne and Ecstasy and heroin, with a higher burglary rate than New York’s. Each weekend, the Eurotunnel train terminal at Waterloo pours hordes of young Europeans into the rave clubs and gay bars. Meanwhile, rural England quietly buries its dead livestock, files for bankruptcy, and braces for Blair’s next assault on its traditions—a ban on fox hunters, with their red coats, thundering hooves, and cries of “Tallyho!” Margaret Thatcher has said that at times she hardly recognizes the place. For better or for worse, Blair does. And that’s the difference. □

# The Old Man

Papa Hemingway was a star. He gambled on fame and mostly won. But the old American fear that luck might run out caught up to him, too, in the end.

by Michael Malone

*“Well, I don’t feel good never to have even visited the tomb of my grandfather.”*

*“We’ll have to go,” Nick said. “I can see we’ll have to go.”*

—“Fathers and Sons,”  
Ernest Hemingway

On a Fourth of July I found myself at Ernest Hemingway’s grave in Ketchum, Idaho, near Sun Valley. Decades earlier, in 1961, Hemingway had killed himself with a shotgun, two days before the Fourth, first morning back home away from psychiatrists. He’d come home to that resort in the Sawtooth Mountains where he and Gary Cooper had once leaned their long handsome heights on skis and laughed like stars into the photographs. He’d said that’s enough, and died.

Four tall spruce trees stand guard around Hemingway’s grave, but the marble slab lies on the ground flat as a big door and has nothing to tell us except

ERNEST MILLER HEMINGWAY  
JULY 21, 1898—JULY 2, 1961

So much was he a creator of, creature of, our culture that he was born and he died in the month of America’s birthday. So much was he a hero that there are dozens of pennies lying on his grave, as if he still had the power to make wishes come true. His grave lies beside Highway 93 in the small meadow of Ketchum’s town cemetery, near Hailey, where his onetime friend Ezra Pound was born but didn’t stay. (The Pound house is still

there, small and scruffy and unidentified.)

Hemingway grew up hunting and fishing in the Midwest, worshiping the most popular writer in America, good-looking journalist and novelist Richard Harding Davis, whose name has since faded like old bestseller lists. A war correspondent, Davis covered the Spanish-American War in Cuba with Stephen Crane, and that’s all anyone remembers about him today. If you saw his picture (he was a model for Charles Dana Gibson), you’d say the big handsome celebrity looked a lot like Hemingway.

It was not my particular plan to be at Hemingway’s grave on Independence Day. I was on a national pilgrimage that summer, paying homage at the homes of fictional fathers, visiting the birthplaces and resting places of famous writers (if not famous, who would know where to find the graves on which to leave fresh flowers, generation after generation?). It’s a little less true now, but there were in past centuries, like the 20th, novelists who were such celebrities that the country wept when they died. I was traveling down a landscape of their cemeteries. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Louisa May Alcott all together in Concord, Massachusetts. James Fenimore Cooper in Cooperstown, New York. Walt Whitman in New Jersey, with the great stone rolled away from his temple of a tomb, as if the Christ of Camden had risen and walked off. Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald under one gravestone in Rockville, Maryland, there beside the noisy beltway.



*Hemingway's Idaho grave, shaded by four spruce trees and topped by an empty bottle of Spanish wine.*

I headed west from Asheville, North Carolina, where I had paid tribute to two fellow Tarheels: Thomas Wolfe did go home again, and is buried close to O. Henry.

#### BELOVED WRITER

Wolfe's mother had engraved on his tomb.

#### LUKE OF LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL

says his brother's stone beside him, testifying to fiction's power.

I followed writers all the way across the land, stopped at the Pacific—in Salinas, California, where Dos Equis bottles with roses in them paid tribute on John Steinbeck's flat grave—and then headed back east. Coming over the Donner Pass to the old mining town of Nevada City, I spent the night there at the National Hotel, all gaudy red velvet and gilded chandeliers, because that's where Bret Harte and Jack London (Hemingway's fathers, and stars like him) had stayed, performing at the theater, signing autographs for the gold miners. And I decided to head for Hemingway's grave.

In Nevada's Great Basin, the rivers flow no place: They sink back in on themselves and evaporate. Off the highway, cheap casinos rise

in the dust like cement tombs over the carcasses of deserted boomtowns. Their builders, silver-and-gold-mad men like Mark Twain, left the towns behind, kept hurrying west to find the Big Bonanza. Here civilization could get no foothold, and today the empty earth stretches level and chalky forever. Speed is useless against the distance. The West is just too big. The sun slides down to the slot of the horizon endlessly, never slipping in.

I thought that after paying my respects to Hemingway in Ketchum, I'd head on east through Idaho into Wyoming and Buffalo Bill's town of Cody. I'd sleep at the Irma Hotel, the showplace he named for his daughter, with the "\$100,000 Bar" of carved cherrywood that Queen Victoria had given him. Buffalo Bill was a Hemingway hero, a national treasure. He killed 6,570 buffalo in 18 months with a shotgun he called "Lucretia Borgia." After Bill, there was nothing left for the Indians to do but go perform in his rodeo. Bill tamed the Wild West and turned it into show business.

Hemingway used a shotgun too. Shot a lot of animals. Shot himself right between his eyes. "One of the simplest things and the most fundamental is violent death," he told us. No news to fast-shooting Buffalo Bill:





*Hemingway, Gary Cooper, and a Sun Valley tour guide relax during a successful bird shoot in 1942.*

the Great Depression, Averell Harriman and the Union Pacific built Sun Valley to get America skiing. They used celebrities as bait. (The resort is still showcasing celebrities; a few years ago, when I went skiing there, Bruce Willis and Demi Moore looped down the slopes beside me. They had bought real estate in the area; they had big plans.) Hemingway, literary superstar, let himself be photographed for Sun Valley's publicity campaign. He and his newest wife were given gratis the fanciest suite at the Lodge, number 206, where he wrote the snowy parts of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. In those days there were casinos in Sun Valley, and he liked to gamble. He called his Sun Valley suite "Hemingstein's Mixed Vicing and Dicing Establishment." At night he shot craps in the suite with the coterie of pals and idolaters that always encircled him. During the day he shot pheasants, ducks, elk, deer. He shot coyotes out of a Piper Cub. It was part of his stardom that he was a sportsman and a hard-living cosmopolitan, that he was a good shot and a powerful drinker.

He believed in luck, carried lucky pieces with him, and was a lucky gambler,

unlike the hapless Dostoyevsky, who was an addict. Dostoyevsky once jumped off the train on his way to Paris and won the equivalent of \$10,000 at roulette in Wiesbaden; after that, he couldn't keep away from the tables, borrowing even from Turgenev, whom he despised, abandoning his pregnant wife in a foreign hotel room to go pawn her earrings to place another bet: "*Anna, Anna, you must understand I am a man devoured by the passion for gambling.*" Dostoyevsky couldn't stop losing. Fitzgerald understood, but couldn't stop drinking. "*I lost everything in the boom,*" he told us in "Babylon Revisited." Hemingway understood too. *Winner Take Nothing* he called one of his books. But he went to the racetrack and the casinos anyhow. He loved to win. When he was no longer the Champ, he shot himself. Grace under pressure deserted him. Maybe he convinced himself there was grace in bowing out.

Our admiration goes to winners in this country—to champions, survivors, millionaires, number ones, gold medals, triple crowns. But twisted in our puritan

## Ernest Hemingway

hearts is a need to think that the winners deserve their prizes. And our certainty that the losers deserve their fates too, because anyone who tries hard enough *can* win, can be rich and famous. So those who fail—well, if they starve, it's their own damn fault. America, itself one big gamble with destiny, from freezing Pilgrims to ragtag revolutionaries to starving pioneers, has always pretended that the destiny is manifest. Such a belief makes Americans ambivalent about games of chance—which is why there are so few places in America to gamble. Hemingway would have loved the irony that Indians own so many of them, are now making billions from casinos on the little strips of land we left them as we made our destiny manifest from Atlantic to Pacific.

Idaho long ago shut down any legalized gambling in the state, so I had to start my tribute to Papa's love of the game before I crossed the line out of Nevada. In the bright morning, passing under the arch that boasted "Reno, the Biggest Little City in the World," the razzle-dazzle caught me just right. I loved Reno's look of naive merriment, like a night at the Hollywood Bowl. Under the blue hemisphere of sky, white Cadillacs parked in front of tawdry pawnshops. Everybody was out in cowboy hats at eight in the morning to strike it rich. Everybody wanted to look like a cowboy, an outlaw hero, a gunslinging star—Buffalo Bill, Gary Cooper, Hemingway.

*Jesus*

*he was a handsome man  
and what i want to know is  
how do you like your blueeyed boy  
Mister Death  
—"Buffalo Bill's," e.e. cummings*

Harrah's, Sahara, Horseshoe—all the Reno casinos chinked their money as loudly as they could, boasting they had the loo-est slots in town. Come in and win! With whoops and bells and colored lights blinking, out rolled rivers of coins, to be scooped up and plunked back into the machines and, like the rivers on the endless empty land, to evaporate. It seemed a fine enter-

tainment to be playing poker with a noisy machine, to be cool and crowded and out of the hot beige stretch of highway between me and Idaho. As you looked down from the balcony of a place where the walls held thousands of the guns that won the West, young waitresses, dressed like Marilyn Monroe in *River of No Return*, offered free drinks at eight in the morning. All you had to do to get them was keep dropping silver dollars into the slots. Or even quarters. The house knows you're going to lose, but everybody pretends otherwise. At the slot machine next to me, a woman of 60 or 80, tanned leathery as a saddle, advised without removing the cigarette stuck to her lipstick, "Dump the ace, honey, go for the straight." She talked in a gravelly rumble, like John Wayne.

After I went for that straight and a few more and lost my money, I drove 90 miles an hour across the empty desert, no air conditioning, wind buzzing at my ear, 110° air beating down on me, thinking I would make Sun Valley in one push. But along the way they keep the casinos like ice water, and they keep them open all night, advertising insomnia ("Typically Nevada, Winnemucca never sleeps"). There are no days and nights in the Silver State, just as there are no seasons in Golden California. The bright cool lights are finally impossible to resist. I stopped at Winnemucca, where Butch Cassidy and his Wild Bunch, outlaw stars, broke the bank by robbing it. I stayed at Winners Casino till nearly dawn.



**M**y father loved the stylishness of gambling—poker and roulette. Counting out even stacks of the red, white, and blue chips, he taught us young to play earnest hands of draw and stud, which he considered (a student of the culture's rules) the only real and manly games. My father, Irish lapsed Catholic from Pennsylvania coal mines, had beauty on his side, and a fine, if thin, feel for grace in this world. He got himself to college and graduate school and medical school and wanted to change the world, but in an innocent, grandiose kind of way, like Gatsby. Long before Ralph

Lauren and Martha Stewart were there to do it for us, my father trained himself in the accessories of stylish class, and he wanted his children to learn them too, so that we would do and know all things with ease, the way stars know and do them on the screen. He grilled us on the rules of bridge, recipes for cocktails, dance steps, song lyrics. A well-known psychiatrist back when psychiatrists made money, he bought us the culture's popular upscale skills, made us ride horses, play tennis and golf, dive from high boards, and dance after dinner at the club.

It was an awful grief to disappoint my father, to belly-flop, double-fault, falter in grace under the pressure, not of his criticism, which was never spoken, but of his desire for that incorruptible dream of perfection begun in Gatsby's notebook. "*Baseball and sports. . . 4.30–5.00 p.m. Practice elocution, poise and how to attain it. . . 5.00–6.00 p.m.*"

Style was only the visible sign of what my father wanted for us, which was nothing less than greatness. The night Robert Kennedy died, we drove, one brother and I, from Chapel Hill down to our heartbroken father in Atlanta. In his robe, Dad wandered the dark house, scotch in hand. "It's all right," he told us. "Bobby made a dent in the world. That's what's asked for. That's what's asked of us all." Well, it certainly was asked for by Bobby's father, certainly asked for by mine. Win, and make it look easy. Be a star. Change the world. Heavy burden, that. Impossible dream, the American Dream. If you fail, you have no one to blame but yourself. Fearing failure, Hemingway left us.

Like Hemingway, my father was never easy, despite the beautiful smile. It was from my mother's easy-going and going-nowhere southern family that I learned the game was play, all games were equal, there were no losers. (Regular five-card stud bored them. Their favorite poker game was Night Baseball. "Roll your own, threes and nines are wild, an extra card for a four, match the pot for a red three showing.") From these southerners, long ago defeated and complacently unvanquished, my siblings and I inherited an utterly unsupported sanguinity that made life feel lucky and

triumphs likely. All was possible: Someday the stranger would knock at the door with the big check, the committee would call with the great prize, the arrow would find its mark at the very center of the bull's-eye.

My realistic daughter was only five years old when she warned me that none of the soda bottle caps we were prying open was likely to announce that we'd won the touted \$100 prize. My realistic wife, a westerner, warned me before I set off to Nevada: "You know how you are. Watch out." Her doctor father had gambled, called Las Vegas "Lost Wages," left at his death a secret horde of casino silver dollars hidden in a crawlspace.

"What if I win?" I said.

"You won't," she told me. "But it could take a long time to lose."



Winnemucca, Nevada, was a one-street gambling town. A town for Doc Holliday and for Wild Bill Hickok, the star of Buffalo Bill's rodeo, who was shot in the back holding aces over eights, the dead man's hand. My motel, Winners, gave out at the desk a free roll of coins and a free dollar chip. My room, sage and orange with '50s white lamps, was clean and remarkably cheap. Through its door I could hear the clank and buzz of money. I put on new cowboy boots and a new cowboy shirt with little stars above the pocket flaps and joined in. A dozen people stood silently side by side dropping in their money, hoping the slots would give it back and more. I joined the line, lost my free roll and another \$40. On the sly, we all watched our neighbors' slots, where cherries and plums and watermelons seemed to be always popping into place and luck pouring out. As soon as their machines were emptied, we'd fill them back up, rewarded only by monotonous patterns of loud sounds. Nobody really expected to win. Nobody expected to turn into Hemingway or James Bond in his tux, effortlessly, inevitably lucky.

The street, just a highway through town, was empty when I walked to another casino, this one deserted, unfortunate in business. In a cage by the door stood a stuffed grizzly bear,

## Ernest Hemingway

mammoth, reared erect, a Civil War cap touching the high roof of his cage. His snout was pulled open to show his huge teeth, and in his long claws was a warning: "He tried to leave without paying his bill." I thought of Faulkner's masterpiece, *The Bear*, with its hero, the Indian hunter Sam Fathers, the good father, teacher of honorable skills. Impossible to imagine Sam Fathers killing himself like Hemingway, or drinking himself to death the way Faulkner did. And Fitzgerald. And my own father. So many of our American fathers. Bowing out.

At the Winners motel, I swam in the pool that nobody else was using. I called my wife. "Aren't casinos the saddest places?" she said to me.

"Listen, it's fun," I told her.

But it wasn't. It was as sad as despair.

I went back to the casino, down the long, orange-rug corridor curving through a hall of mirrors that made the place look crowded. I saw the same people at the slots who'd been there hours earlier. I joined them and began putting coins in machines I didn't even like, the ones with the drab black bars instead of bright fruits. The bartender watched us, listless. He had a cold eye for me, and I moved away to watch the craps table, where the croupier was in love with the art of his

hands, fanning out chips, pouring them through his long fingers like water. I wanted to take the dice and feel as sure of my luck as Hemingway felt swooping past the bull horns in Pamplona, wanted to feel so certain of grace that I would toss on the green felt all the money I owned and then roll seven after seven. But I didn't know the rules of the fast-moving game, not one my father had taught me, and so I just stood watching the shooters win and lose.

A friend of mine, child of a big Hollywood star, told me that John Wayne had once walked past her in a casino when she, teenaged, was standing beside a slot machine, waiting for her parents. Wayne stopped beside her, dropped in a silver dollar, told her to pull the handle. The bells and lights went off. Coins by the hundreds shot out of the machine, clattering to the floor. Wayne, the Ringo Kid, grinned at her. "There you go, honey," and he walked on. "It was," my friend said, "like he already knew it was going to happen." Like he could make wishes come true. That's it, the magic of stardom, the grace and luck of it. For someone like Hemingway, with so many gifts of art and nature, how scary when the gifts were



*Like a cross atop a church, the outsized rifle crowns a sports store in Cody, Wyoming.*

gone, evaporated. How scary the crackup or the crash, the shock treatments (they gave Hemingway plenty of them), the drying-out they tried on Fitzgerald and Faulkner, old age, eclipse.

For no reason except a sudden swelling in me of the *lacrimae rerum*, I bought a pack of cigarettes and started to smoke after having quit for almost three years. I got in the car and drove toward Hemingway's grave, hung-over and sleepless and sad at heart. I made one last stop. He had liked a town called Jackpot, right on the border. So I pulled into a stucco and neon casino there, with a jackpot glittering on a high pole outside, in the middle of nowhere. Gritty and dull with the heat, I went inside to win a fortune. It got sadder and sadder.



When I drove through Hailey, Idaho, the Fourth of July flags were out. There was a parade and a shoot-out in the streets called "Days of the Old West." Ezra Pound's dad had run the land office in Hailey. Hard to imagine Ezra growing up in such a place. "Ezra thought fishing was a joke," wrote Hemingway, incredulous. But in Paris, the two young expatriates liked each other. And Pound was a generous friend, a steppingstone. "He taught me how to write, and I taught him how to box." In the end, Pound was locked up in an insane asylum, and Hemingway, in his red Emperor robe, tripped both triggers of a Boss shotgun pressed above his eyebrows into his brain.

The Hemingway house, in nearby Ketchum, is a hillside chalet, big, poured concrete, with large windows for looking out at the aspens and the bends of the Big Wood River where the trout wait. It's not far from the cemetery. Driving toward the grave, I was stopped by a big deer standing right in the middle of the highway. It was an indisputable big deer with antlers, and a brave or foolhardy one too. It just stood there. I laughed out loud and yelled out the car window, "Come on! I just want to look at your grave!" The deer shook his head at me, then flung away into the woods.

I saw no one else in the cemetery, and

although it was small and opened flat as a book, at first I couldn't find Hemingway's grave among the bland markers. As I searched, the sprinkler system suddenly shot on, lashing high-arching water from side to side, idiotically Freudian. "Come ON!" I said, laughing, soaked wet. I ran from the spray, and then there he was, under the four big spruce trees. Fresh flowers, dozens of coins on his name, ERNEST MILLER HEMINGWAY.

I didn't have much to say, but that was all right. He also thought it better not to talk about things. I left him a piece of gravel I'd carried from Faulkner's grave, a dandelion from Fitzgerald's.

Late in his life he was asked, "Herr Hemingway, can you sum up your feelings about death?" "Just another whore," he said.

*"Don't worry, darling," Catherine said. "I'm not a bit afraid. It's just a dirty trick."*



The big event that night, the Fourth of July, at the Elkhorn Lodge in Sun Valley, was, I saw on placards, "José Feliciano, Live at the Saloon." ("When the Sun Goes Down in Sun Valley, the Stars Come Out at Elkhorn.") The show was almost over when I asked the bouncer standing guard at the door whether I could go inside for a drink. He told me with great solemnity that he was going to let me in for free. "I hope you realize how lucky you are, because everybody in there but you paid \$20 to hear José. So listen, I'm going to put it to you like this, you leave that bartender a big tip, you hear me? Real big."

"I hear you," I said. But, suspicious, he came over to me again at the bar with a reminder. "And I mean big," he whispered, staring into my eyes like a gunslinger or a gangster, like John Wayne. "Real big." I gave him my word.

Longhaired, small, sweaty, blind, the star José Feliciano was running down his hits for the audience, who applauded as soon as they recognized each song. He grinned, reaching out to them with his tilted chin, like a flower turning to a sun of sound. "Oh say can you see," he sang, "with two plastic eyes?" Everybody laughed. He talked about the Fourth of July. How he had come to America with his father,

and how his father had taught him that America was the biggest and bravest and richest country in the world, the luckiest of countries, and how it certainly had been lucky for him and had made him a star. “I want you to remember,” he told the audience, “how lucky you are to be Americans.” Then he started singing “My Country ’Tis of Thee,” and asked us to join in. When he finished, a few of the women stood to clap and tried to pull their escorts up with them, but mostly they failed. The bouncer who had let me in for free bounded onto the little stage and led Mr. Feliciano away till the next show.

Outside my hotel, buzz bombs and bursts of red and blue stars shot across the big western sky. In my room, Gary Cooper was on the late show, doing what a man has to do. When Coop learned he was dying of cancer, he made a wager with Hemingway. “Bet I beat you out to the barn,” he said. And so he did, though only by months. Two earlier stars of ours, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, both died on the Fourth of July, only hours apart, each asking whether the other was alive or dead. All our fathers, founding nations, writing dreams, failing us by leaving.

“We owe God a death,” the white hunter tells the luckless Francis Macomber in Hemingway’s famous story. When I saw the film—Hemingway was always being filmed—it struck me as odd how much the star, Robert Preston, who played Macomber, resembled Hemingway himself, even to the cut of the moustache. But then, Hemingway always looked like a movie star.

His own father had the same handsome moustache and chose the same suicidal death.

“Is dying hard, Daddy?”

“No, I think it’s pretty easy, Nick. It all depends.”



My father didn’t recognize me when I sat with him the day he died. But he asked me for a scotch and clapped his hands when I said I’d just finished a new novel, and told me that his eldest son was a fine novelist. In the end, everything falls away but the love.

His father, Pop, a tiny, hard-drinking Irish immigrant, unsuccessful, gentle-hearted, and dreamy, couldn’t bear to punish my dad, the bad boy of four sons, a fighter flailing to get out of his way whatever was between him and the green light at the end of the dock. My dad’s mother would send her meek husband off to beat the wildness out of him, but each time Pop would try to trick her by slapping his belt against the bed, whispering to my father to cry out as if in pain. My father told me that Pop once took him out into their backyard, a cramped square of dirt on a dark gray street. Pop knelt down, fumbled off my father’s shoes, and began in the cold dark to press earth with soft pats around his son’s feet until he covered them. My father, only 10, was horrified to have his own father groveling at his feet and asked him to stop what he was doing.

“And your grandfather said to me, ‘No. I’m planting your feet here in the earth so you’ll grow. You stay here, son, and grow in the earth. This is American earth. You stand here and you grow tall.’”

I imagine my father and his father now grown into forests, my grandfather buried in the Catholic cemetery of the little Pennsylvania coal town, my father’s ashes feeding Georgia pines. I remember Fitzgerald’s cool wet tombstone in the soft rain, the warmth of Faulkner’s marble in the Mississippi sun. I look westward from North Carolina on this summer’s night and I see Hemingway’s ghost smiling his large beautiful grin beneath the four spruces in the hills of Idaho.

I imagine Hemingway grinning tonight at the news that the original manuscript of *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, one of his long-dead sons, was just auctioned at Christie’s for \$2.43 million, a new world record for the sale of a literary work. James Irsay, owner of the Indianapolis Colts football team, bought the 120-foot-long roll of paper filled with what Truman Capote called “typing, not writing.” Mr. Irsay hopes to display the manuscript in a case right next to the Vince Lombardi Trophy, that famous symbol of victory in the Super Bowl.

Winners take all, and nothing. □

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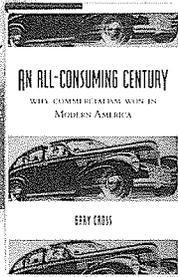
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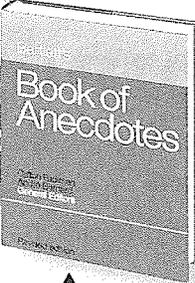
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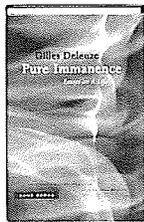
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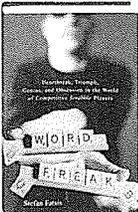
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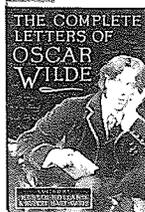
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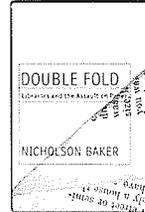
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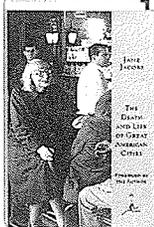
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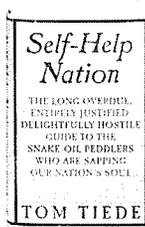
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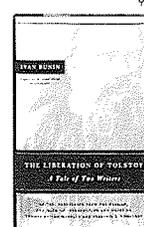
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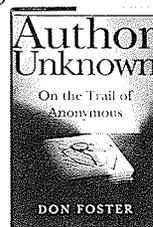
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# The Wilsonian Moment?

How are we to balance the principle of national sovereignty and fundamental issues of human rights when the two are in conflict? The debate began in earnest after World War I and continues to this day.

*by James Chace*

Walter Lippmann, 27 years old and one of the brightest young men in Washington, was working in the War Department in 1917. A crusading progressive journalist at the *New Republic*, Lippmann had once been enamored of Theodore Roosevelt but had become an avid supporter of Woodrow Wilson. He joined the office of Secretary of War Newton Baker in an advisory group that included the future Supreme Court justice Felix Frankfurter and Eugene Meyer, later the publisher of the *Washington Post*. Lippmann established himself in the department as a standard-bearer for liberal causes, in particular that of protecting the press from arbitrary censorship. Using Wilsonian language, he reminded Wilson's éminence grise, Edward House, "We are fighting not so much to beat an enemy, as to make a world that is safe for democracy." Though he was not, in his own words, a "sentimental liberal," he recognized that liberals were vital constituents in Wilson's search for consensus.

Lippmann's toughness recommended itself to the president and to House (who liked to be called "Colonel," an honorary Texas title). One day in September, six months after the United States had entered the Great War, Colonel House asked to see

Lippmann on a secret matter: Wilson wanted to assemble a group of experts who would draw up material for an eventual peace conference. Lippmann was to be general secretary to the group, which would meet in New York under the rubric of "The Inquiry." Burying themselves in the offices of the American Geographical Society at 155th Street and Broadway, the members of The Inquiry pored over books and maps that would be critical to redrawing the frontiers of Europe. Lippmann did not exaggerate when he called the group's work "huge, superabundant, and overflowing."

As Ronald Steel recounts in his biography of Lippmann, the effort to apportion territory was seriously compromised by top-secret documents that Secretary Baker revealed to Lippmann one October afternoon at the War Department. The sheaf of agreements, which the Allies had signed with one another, spelled out how Britain, France, Italy, Russia, and Japan planned to compensate themselves once Germany was beaten. To Lippmann, a war that had already cost the antagonists millions of casualties now seemed to have been fought for reparations and territories. That hardly embodied the ideals to which Wilson was





*Tumultuous crowds greeted President Woodrow Wilson in Europe in 1919.*

committed. France was to recover Alsace and Lorraine, the two provinces it had lost to Germany in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71, as well as parts of the Saarland. Great Britain was to get African colonies. Italy would be awarded the Austrian-held territories of Istria and Dalmatia. Japan would get the Shandong Peninsula of China. Wilson knew of these treaties, but he believed, as he told Colonel House, that when the war was over, the Allies could be brought around to his way of thinking, “because then, among other things, they will be dependent on us financially.”

With that inducement in reserve, Wilson and House went to work drafting and redrafting the contents of the memorandum Lippmann gave them. What had emerged from weeks of discussion by The Inquiry was the rough basis for

eight of the 14 points Wilson would present in a speech in January 1918 as the foundation of an enduring peace. The first five points and the fourteenth—dealing with open covenants openly arrived at, freedom of the seas, lower tariffs, disarmament, respect for colonial peoples, and, last but hardly least in Wilson’s schema, a League of Nations—the president added himself.

Points six through 13 took up the territorial provisions that had been the concern of The Inquiry. Wilson struggled to resolve the provisions’ inherent contradictions. He wanted to grant all peoples the right of self-determination and to acknowledge the legitimacy of their national aspirations, for he believed that to deny the legitimacy of nationalism by drawing boundaries that reflected dynastic claims would almost surely lead to conflict. Had not the war broken out because a Serbian nationalist



Walter Lippmann

killed the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, a rickety empire that imposed its rule over a congeries of peoples who were neither Austrian nor Hungarian? At the same time, Wilson and House were aware of the danger of creating states whose populations did not share a common culture.

They called for restoration of Belgium as a neutral nation and the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France (but not for French annexation of Germany's Saar region). Re-establishing the status quo in those two cases was relatively easy. But their other attempts to grant the principle of self-determination—while recognizing the need for large states to provide a measure of stability in Europe—foundered. What did it mean to redraw the Italian frontiers “along clearly recognizable lines” when the lines were by no means clear? Even more difficult to fulfill was their promise that the peoples of Austria-Hungary would be accorded “the freest opportunity of autonomous development.” Because Wilson and House did not intend to destroy the Austro-Hungarian Empire, some definition of what was meant by

autonomy for peoples who would presumably continue to live within it should have been provided. But it was not. Serbia was supposed to have frontiers that rested on national, economic, and historical rights. But what about those non-Serbian peoples who lived among the Serbs? How were their national and historical rights to be satisfied? Finally, a restored Poland was to have access to the sea, which meant that Poland would have to include lands that were inhabited predominantly by ethnic Germans.

The effort to fulfill Wilson's dictum that ethnic self-determination be the bedrock rule was a noble one. But more often than not, both the Americans who worked at The Inquiry and Wilson himself, who adopted many of their recommendations, pretended that the inherent conflict between ethnic and economic boundaries did not exist. If a relatively homogenous state were created to fulfill the requirements of cultural homogeneity, it might not have the economic wherewithal to prosper. But an empire or other large supranational grouping that offered a common market for states not otherwise economically viable, and that provided overall security for its subject peoples, might well violate the principle of self-determination. And yet, was the alternative—breaking up the empire—likely to offer more stability?

In a message to Congress a month after he set forth his Fourteen Points, Wilson appeared to recognize the danger that any blanket promise of self-determination might pose for European stability. He declared that “all well-defined national aspirations shall be accorded the utmost satisfaction that can be accorded them without introducing new or perpetuating old elements of discord and antagonism that would be likely in time to break the peace of Europe and consequently of the world.” But although Wilson seemed to understand the danger that self-determination

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posed, he never faced the implications of the issue. Much the same dilemma confronts the European Union and the United States today as they attempt to reconcile demands for self-determination by the disparate peoples of former Yugoslavia with the need to create states that are viable in both their political and economic dimensions.

Despite the hard examination of maps and ethnic peoples that The Inquiry had undertaken, Wilson was woefully unprepared to deal with the other victorious powers at Versailles. While sailing to Europe on the ocean liner *George Washington*, he was telling Assistant Secretary of State William Bullitt about the plan to merge Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia into Tomas Masaryk's Czechoslovakia. "Bohemia will be a part of Czechoslovakia," Wilson explained. Bullitt, taken aback, responded, "But Mr. President, there are three million Germans in Bohemia." Wilson looked puzzled: "President Masaryk never told me that."

When it became clear that there was no way to satisfy the strict requirements for self-determination, Wilson simply fell back on his proposal for a League of Nations. The League would resolve disputes and make whatever settlements needed to be made. But how to ensure against aggression the territorial integrity of the European nations, both old and new? Wilson argued that "the only method by which we can achieve this end lies in our having confidence in the good faith of the nations who belong to the League." He promised that "when danger comes, we [i.e., America] too will come, and we will help you, but you must trust us." Trust is hardly the common currency of nations. But the essential factor, Wilson believed, was that international misunderstandings would be subject, through the League, to "the moral force of public opinion in the world."

At Versailles, Wilson insisted that Britain's prime minister, Lloyd George, and France's premier, Georges Clemenceau, demonstrate to him that what they wanted—territorial settlements based on the power realities of Europe, no matter what the fate of minorities—would conform to his lofty pronouncements. That

gave rise, in the words of John Maynard Keynes, then a young official in the British Treasury who was at Versailles, to "the weaving of that web of sophistry and Jesuitical exegesis that was finally to clothe with insincerity the language and substance of the whole Treaty."

Even many of his most devoted admirers have admitted that Wilson was overwhelmed at Versailles by the machinations of the European statesmen—in a Jamesian sense, by the very corruptions of Europe that he had sought to exorcise. At home, the U.S. Senate subsequently defeated his hopes for American membership in the League, a defeat born largely of his own intransigence. He absolutely refused to accept any part of the reservations proposed by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In essence, the committee asserted that America would assume no obligation to preserve the territorial integrity or political independence of any country unless authorized to do so by Congress. Asked by the French ambassador whether he would accept the senatorial restrictions, Wilson retorted: "I shall consent to nothing. The Senate must take its medicine." The Senate refused. So the map of Europe was redrawn at Versailles, but the League, which was to implement Wilson's idealistic vision, was born an empty shell.

Wilson's ghost (the words provide the title of a recent book by former secretary of defense Robert McNamara and Brown University professor James Blight) has come to haunt the would-be peacemakers of the 21st century. McNamara and Blight acknowledge that Wilson "inadvertently set the 20th century on its chaotic and violent course of communal killing by failing to grapple successfully with problems of self-determination and ethnic and religious conflict." But they note as well that Wilson "believed in the power of human beings to change the course of history for the better," and thought that "the world's peace ought to be disturbed if the fundamental rights of humanity are invaded." His vision survives because it tapped into a deep strain of America's sense of itself: The United States

## Wilson's Moment?

was ordained for a special role in the world. In Wilson's words, "America was established in order to indicate, at any rate in one government, the fundamental rights of man. America must hereafter be ready as a member of the family of nations to exert her whole force, moral and physical, to the assertion of those rights throughout the round globe."

Wilson understood that Americans are, after all, most comfortable with a foreign policy imbued with moral purpose. Even when the pursuit of justice has led to unintended consequences, even when our ideals have concealed, from ourselves and from others, motivations of a darker and more complex nature, we have preferred a policy based, at least rhetorically, on moral purpose rather than on self-interest. This vision of America as the redeemer nation was perfectly expressed by John Adams when he wrote in his diary, 11 years before the Declaration of Independence, "I always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scene in Providence for the illumination of the ignorant, and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth."

Wilson himself might have written those words. But Adams's paean to American exceptionalism should be set against the cautionary but no less eloquent words of Alexander Hamilton, who warned Americans to reject "idle theories which have amused us with promises of an exception from the imperfections, weaknesses, and evils incident to society in every shape." In *The Federalist* 6, Hamilton asked, "Is it not time to awaken from the deceitful dream of a golden age and to adopt as a practical maxim for the direction of our political conduct that we, as well as the other inhabitants of the globe, are yet remote from the happy empire of perfect wisdom and perfect virtue?"

Hamilton went unheeded. The Wilsonian assertion that America's role in World War I reflected divine will was a resonant echo of American exceptionalism: "It was of this that we dreamed at our birth. America shall in truth show the way." After World War I, after World War II, and after the Cold

War, America proclaimed a new world order by applying its stated domestic values to the world beyond its shores.

With the Cold War over, Wilson's view that the worldwide spread of democratic institutions is the key to peace has been adopted by both major American political parties. His appeal to American exceptionalism resonates in the triumphalist era that has marked the emergence of the United States as the most powerful imperium since ancient Rome. But the problem of reconciling a respect for sovereignty with intervention in states that scorn any commitment to democracy and violate fundamental norms of human rights remains as knotty as ever. What, in fact, are the American canons for intervention?

Some interventions can be defended easily on realist grounds, as matters of national interest. Thus, the United States would surely intervene to protect its national territory or its dependencies—for example, Puerto Rico or Guam. It would also honor its commitments to allies in the Atlantic Alliance and to Japan. And trouble in other countries closely aligned with the United States, such as South Korea and Israel, would likely trigger some form of intervention.

Additional situations might also bring intervention by the United States and other powers, whether under the rubric of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the European Union, or simply as a coalition of the willing: (1) aggression that threatens regional stability, or (2) massive or systemic violations of human rights. Such situations force us to confront the central issue of sovereignty—that any intervention by one (or more than one) nation necessarily involves violation of the sovereignty of another. The principle of sovereignty remains as problematic as it was in Wilson's day. So under what principle is the violation of other nations' sovereignty to be justified?

The global economy provides strong incentives for states to limit their sovereignty. But intervention to prevent a nation's withdrawal from, say, the World Trade Organization is highly unlikely. If a country such as Myanmar (the former

Burma) chooses to isolate itself from global economic and political organizations, no one will mount an invasion to force the government to end its isolation. But if Myanmar were to attack Thailand, intervention by other powers to curb the aggression would be a distinct possibility.

Political economist Stephen Krasner has pointed out that “the struggle to establish international rules that compel leaders to treat their subjects in a certain way has been going on for a long time.” The Congress of Vienna in 1815 guaranteed religious toleration for Catholics in the Netherlands. Successor states of the Ottoman Empire, beginning with Greece in 1832, had to accept civic and political equality for religious minorities as a condition for international recognition. Peace settlements after World War I included extensive provisions for the protection of minorities, but because those provisions were not backed by a credible threat of force, many of them failed. During the post-World War II period, the United Nations endorsed both human rights and the principle of sovereignty. Yet, as we have seen in the former Yugoslavia, human rights violations ceased there only when an external authority controlled the domestic structures of the states, as in Bosnia, or when a state became a virtual protectorate, as with Kosovo, many of whose affairs are overseen by NATO. Therefore, we should not only examine the conditions under which great powers intervene but evaluate the means by which a military intervention can succeed. When UN peacekeepers were first sent into Bosnia, they were ineffective because their guns were muzzled. Unable to fire first or credibly threaten to fire to repel an attack, they suffered numerous casualties without bringing peace to the



A 1915 poster solicited American dollars to aid the Serbian cause.

region. Only when the United States joined the conflict was peace restored. Similarly, in Kosovo, NATO was able to operate without shackles on its use of firepower.

The essential preconditions for any humanitarian intervention must be that it is the last feasible option to stop mass slaughter and that the intervention is likely to do more good than harm. Kenneth Roth, the director of Human Rights Watch, acknowledges that “in war some unintentional killing of noncombatants may be unavoidable. Humanitarian law provides the best standard we have for distinguishing unfortunate but unintentional loss of civilian life from the deliberate targeting of civilians or their killing through indiscriminate warfare.” But even if that standard applies, no major power today will countenance any violation of its own sovereignty—although a Wilsonian appeal



A 1920 cartoon evokes Americans' ambivalence about the effectiveness of the League of Nations.

to world public opinion, amplified by international media attention, might persuade a great power to modify its policies and curb its persistent and excessive violations of human rights. And if the major power is a nuclear power—as is, for example, Russia, committing atrocities in Chechnya—there is a risk that the use of military force would, in Roth's words, “trigger accelerated or broader killing that the intervenor is unable or unwilling to prevent.”

Are the humanitarian criteria for intervention nonetheless so compelling that the great powers will act even when action involves a clear violation of the sovereignty of others? Great powers that habitually vio-

late human rights, such as China and (in Chechnya, at least) Russia, can hardly be expected to endorse interventions elsewhere that might help to legitimize the practice of compromising sovereignty in the name of human rights. Nor can one imagine that the United States would accept any violation of its own sovereignty, including the sphere-of-influence sovereignty it holds in the Caribbean-Mexican-Central American region.

If it should prove impossible to assemble a coalition of the willing, would the consequence be an America whose hegemony allows it to act as it chooses? And would we then see, in the new century,

the exercise of American unilateralism linked to and justified in the name of human rights—a neo-Wilsonian attempt “to make the world safe for democracy”? Implementing Wilsonian goals at a time when the United States enjoys such a preponderance of power will almost certainly prove a near-impossible task, for a hegemonic power such as America is bound to be resented. Other big powers, such as Russia and China, are unlikely to endorse the view, put forward by America, that the principle of sovereignty can be violated in the name of humanitarian goals as defined by Washington.

No less difficult to implement will be the doctrine (which Wilson would have endorsed) that international politics should be submitted to extranational judicial procedures, such as the workings of the International Criminal Court, and that some crimes, such as genocide, are so heinous that their perpetrators should not be able to escape justice simply by invoking the sacred principle of sovereignty. The concern is that enforcing the doctrine would lead to a global gendarmerie headed by the United States—even as the United States insisted on being exempt from any prosecution by an international judicial body on the grounds that it would never commit such heinous crimes. But there is little reason to believe that a global police force will come into being. A more realistic scenario would have America, and the other great powers, applying pressure on countries that shelter war criminals. That was done successfully when the United States used economic coercion to persuade the new Serbian government to surrender Slobodan Milosevic to the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague.

If the United States still harbors Wilsonian dreams, it would do well to muzzle its unilateralism and conduct its foreign policy in concert with other powers. In a sense, that has already occurred. The recent interventions in the former Yugoslavia and the Horn of Africa have been mounted under the banner of multilateralism. But as political scientist Tony

Smith, one of the most eloquent spokesmen for neo-Wilsonianism, has observed, “‘Multilateralism’ may be little more than a polite way of camouflaging what in practice is unilateralism with allies. The degree of U.S. power is so great relative to that of America’s often disunited allies that we should not be misled by labels.” The United States should continue to seek a concert of powers whose shared values—the practice of democracy and the integrity of the judicial system—will permit coalitions of the willing to intervene across borders to call to order those states that violate any reasonable norms of human rights. In the pursuit of justice, America will simply have to pretend that it is only first among equals, its ideals tightly fastened to the realities of power among nations.

Wilsonian ideals are being invoked by Europeans with renewed enthusiasm at the dawning of the 21st century, but in the United States at least, the Wilsonian moment has not arrived. The Bush administration has refused to adhere to an array of agreements that its closest allies have approved. It has refused to seek ratification of a treaty that would require industrialized nations to cut emissions of gases linked to global warming. It has refused to endorse a draft accord to ban biological weapons. It will not become a member of the International Criminal Court. It will not send back to the Senate for reconsideration the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty.

Though the United States guards its sovereignty these days to a degree that would have horrified Wilson, the Wilsonian vision of a more just world has not evaporated. The individuals who made up The Inquiry in 1917 struggled to acknowledge the legitimacy of a people’s need for national identity, even as they demanded loyalty to a higher standard than the national interest narrowly defined. The issue is as paramount today as it was then. The new inquiry into these matters may well have to take place without government sanction, but in time its findings will almost surely be reflected in American foreign policy. □

# THE MAKING OF THE PUBLIC MIND



“Learned Institutions ought to be favorite objects with every free people,” wrote James Madison. “They throw that light over the public mind which is the best security against crafty & dangerous encroachments on the public liberty.” Those words could well be the motto of the *Wilson Quarterly*. To mark the magazine’s 25th anniversary, the editors posed a question to several writers: What quality of light do scholars and other thinkers throw on the public mind today?

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# Why Public Intellectuals?

by *Jean Bethke Elshtain*

**S**ome time ago I spent a year at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, where one of the pleasures is the opportunity to exchange ideas with scholars from other countries. One evening, a particularly animated member of an informal discussion group I had joined began to lament the sorry state of public intellectualism in the United States—this by contrast to her native France, and particularly Paris, with its dizzying clash of opinions. I remember being somewhat stung by her comments, and joined the others in shaking my head at the lackluster state of our public intellectual life. Why couldn't Americans be more like Parisians?

The moment passed rather quickly, at least in my case. I recalled just how thoroughly the French intellectual class—except for the rare dissenters, such as the estimable, brave, and lonely Albert Camus—had capitulated to the seductions of totalitarian logic, opposing fascism only to become apologists for what Camus called “the socialism of the gallows.”

French political life would have been much healthier had France embraced Camus and his few compatriots rather than Jean-Paul Sartre and the many others of his kind who wore the mantle of the public intellectual. When Camus spoke in a political voice, he spoke as a citizen who understood politics to be a process that involves debate and compromise, not as an ideologue seeking to make politics conform to an overarching vision. In the end, Camus insisted, the ideologue's vision effectively destroys politics.

Perhaps, I reflected, America's peculiar blend of rough-and-ready pragmatism and a tendency to fret about the moral dimensions of public life—unsystematic and, from the viewpoint of lofty ideology, unsophisticated as this combination might be—was a better guarantor of constitutionalism and a healthy civil society than were intellectuals of the sort my French interlocutor favored. Historically, public intellectuals in America were, in fact, members of a wider public. They shared with other Americans access to religious and civic idioms that pressed the moral questions embedded in political debate; they were prepared to live, at least most of the time, with the give-and-take of political life, and they favored practical results over systems.

The American temperament invites wariness toward intellectuals. Because they are generally better at living in their heads than at keeping their feet on the ground, intellectuals are more vulnerable than others to the seductions of power that come with possessing a worldview whose logic promises to explain everything, and perhaps, in some glorious future, control and manage everything. The 20th

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century is littered with the disastrous consequences of such seductions, many of them spearheaded and defined by intellectuals who found themselves superseded, or even destroyed, by ruthless men of action once they were no longer needed as apologists, provocateurs, and publicists. The definitive crackup since 1989 of the political utopianism that enthralled so many 20th-century public intellectuals in the West prompts several important questions: Who, exactly, are the public intellectuals in contemporary America? Do we need them? And if we do, what should be their job description?

**L**et us not understand these questions too narrowly. Every country's history is different. Many critics who bemoan the paucity of public intellectuals in America today have a constricted view of them—as a group of independent thinkers who, nonetheless, seem to think remarkably alike. In most accounts, they are left-wing, seek the overthrow of bourgeois convention, and spend endless hours (or at least did so once-upon-a-time) talking late into the night in smoke-filled cafés and Greenwich Village lofts. We owe this vision not only to the self-promotion of members of the group but to films such as Warren Beatty's *Reds*. But such accounts distort our understanding of American intellectual life. There was a life of the mind west of the Hudson River, too, as Louis Menand shows in his recent book, *The Metaphysical Club*. American intellectuals have come in a number of modes and have embraced a variety of approaches.

But even Menand pays too little attention to an important part of the American ferment. American public intellectual life is unintelligible if one ignores the extraordinary role once played by the Protestant clergy and similar thinkers, from Jonathan Edwards in the 18th century through Reinhold Niebuhr in the 20th. The entire Social Gospel movement, from its late-19th-century origins through its heyday about the time of World War I, was an attempt by the intellectuals in America's clergy and seminaries to define an American civil religion and to bring a vision of something akin to the Peaceable Kingdom to fruition on earth, or at least in North America.

As universities became prominent homes for intellectual life, university-based intellectuals entered this already-established public discourse. They did so as generalists rather than as spokesmen for a discipline. In the minds of thinkers such as William James, George Herbert Mead, and John Dewey, there was no way to separate intellectual and political issues from larger moral concerns. Outside the university proper during the last decades of the 19th century and early decades of the 20th, there arose extraordinary figures such as Jane Addams and Randolph Bourne. These thinkers and social activists combined moral urgency and political engagement in their work. None trafficked in a totalizing ideology on the Marxist model of so many European intellectuals.

Addams, for example, insisted that the settlement house movement she pioneered in Chicago remain open, flexible, and experimental—a communal home for what might be called organic intellectual life. Responding to the

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*Anarchist, writer, and agitator Emma Goldman, shown here in New York in 1916, was one of the figures who created a new image of the public intellectual as antibourgeois radical.*

clash of the social classes that dominated the public life of her day, she spoke of the need for the classes to engage in “mutual interpretation,” and for this to be done person to person. Addams stoutly resisted the lure of ideology—she told droll stories about the utopianism that was sometimes voiced in the Working Man’s Social Science Club at Hull-House.

Addams saw in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story “Ethan Brand” an object lesson for intellectuals. Ethan Brand is a lime burner who leaves his village to search for the “Unpardonable Sin.” And he finds it: an “intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man and reverence for God, and sacrificed everything to its mighty claims!” This pride of intellect, operating in public life, tries to force life to conform to an abstract model. Addams used the lesson of Ethan Brand in replying to the socialists who claimed that she refused to convert to their point of view because she was “caught in the coils of capitalism.” In responding to her critics, Addams once described an exchange in one of the weekly Hull-House drawing room discussions. An ardent socialist proclaimed that “socialism

will cure the toothache.” A second fellow upped the ante by insisting that when every child’s teeth were systematically cared for from birth, toothaches would disappear from the face of the earth. Addams, of course, knew that we would always have toothaches.

Addams, James, Dewey, and, later, Niebuhr shared a strong sense of living in a distinctly Protestant civic culture. That culture was assumed, whether one was a religious believer or not, and from the days of abolitionism through the struggle for women’s suffrage and down to the civil rights movement of the 1960s, public intellectuals could appeal to its values. But Protestant civic culture thinned out with the rise of groups that had been excluded from the consensus (Catholics, Jews, Evangelical Christians), with the triumph of a generally secular, consumerist worldview, and with mainline Protestantism’s abandonment of much of its own intellectual tradition in favor of a therapeutic ethos.

**T**he consequence, for better and for worse, is that there is no longer a unified intellectual culture to address—or to rebel against. Pundits of one sort or another often attempt to recreate such a culture rhetorically and to stoke old fears, as if we were fighting theocrats in the Massachusetts Bay Colony all over again. Raising the stakes in this way promotes a sense of self-importance by exaggerating what one is ostensibly up against. During the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, for example, those who were critical of the president’s dubious use of the Oval Office were often accused of trying to resurrect the morality of Old Salem. A simple click of your television remote gives the lie to all such talk of a Puritan restoration: The screen is crowded with popular soft-core pornography packaged as confessional talk shows or self-help programs.

The specter of Old Salem is invoked in part because it provides, at least temporarily, a clear target for counterargument and gives television’s talking heads an issue that seems to justify their existence. But the truth is that there are no grand, clear-cut issues around which public intellectuals, whether self-described media hounds or scholars yearning to break out of university-defined disciplinary boundaries, now rally. The overriding issues of three or four decades ago on which an unambiguous position was possible—above all, segregation and war—have given way to matters that are complex and murky. We now see in shades of gray rather than black and white. It is difficult to build a grand intellectual argument around how best to reform welfare, structure a tax cut, or protect the environment. Even many of our broader civic problems do not lend themselves to the sorts of thematic and cultural generalizations that have historically been the stuff of most public intellectual discourse.

My point is not that the issues Americans now face raise no major ethical or conceptual concerns; rather, these concerns are so complex, and the arguments from all sides often so compelling, that each side seems to have some part of the truth. That is why those who treat every issue as if it fit within the narrative of moral goodness on one side and venality and inequity on the other become so wearying. Most of us, whether or not we are part of what one wag rather uncharitably dubbed “the chattering classes,” realize that matters are not so simple. That is one reason we often turn to expert researchers, who do not fit the historical profile of the public intellectual as omniscient generalist.

For example, well before today's mountains of empirical evidence came in, a number of intellectuals were writing about what appeared to be Americans' powerful disaffection from public life and from the work of civil society. Political theorists like me could speak to widespread discontents, but it was finally the empirical evidence presented by, among others, political scientist Robert Putman in his famous 1995 "Bowling Alone" essay that won these concerns a broad public hearing. In this instance, one finds disciplinary expertise put to the service of a public intellectual enterprise. That cuts against the grain of the culturally enshrined view of the public intellectual as a bold, lone intellect. Empirical researchers work in teams. They often have hordes of assistants. Their data are complex and must be translated for public consumption. Their work is very much the task of universities and think tanks, not of the public intellectual as heroic dissenter.

Yet it would be a mistake simply to let the experts take over. A case in point is the current debate over stem cell research and embryonic cloning for the purpose of "harvesting" stem cells. Anyone aware of the history of technological advance and the power of an insatiable desire for profit understands that such harvesting is a first step toward cloning, and that irresponsible individuals and companies are already moving in that direction. But because the debate is conducted in highly technical terms, it is very difficult

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for the generalist, or any nonspecialist, to find a point of entry. If you are not prepared to state an authoritative view on whether adult stem cells have the "pluripotent" potential of embryonic stem cells, you may as well keep your mouth shut. The technical debate excludes most citizens and limits the involvement of nonscientists who think about the long-range political implications of projects that bear a distinct eugenics cast.

Genetic "enhancement," as it is euphemistically called, will eventually become a eugenics project, meant to perfect the genetic composition of the human race. But our public life is so dominated by short-term considerations that someone who brings to the current genetic debate such a *historical* understanding sounds merely alarmist. This kind of understanding does not sit well with the can-do, upbeat American temperament. Americans are generally relieved to have moral and political urgency swamped by technicalities. This is hardly new. During the Cold War, debators who had at their fingertips the latest data on missile throwweights could trump the person who was not *that* sort of expert—but who wasn't a naif either, who had read her Thucydides, and who thought there were alternatives to mutually assured destruction.

**A**mericans prefer cheerleaders to naysayers. We tend to concentrate on the positive side of the ledger and refuse to conjure with the negative features—whether actual or potential—of social reform or technological innovation. Americans notoriously lack a sense of tragedy, or even, as Reinhold Niebuhr insisted, a recognition of the ironies of our own his-

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tory. By naysayers I do not refer to those who, at the drop of a hat, issue a pre-fabricated condemnation of more-or-less anything going on in American politics and popular culture. I mean those who recognize that there are *always* losers when there are winners, and that it has never been the case in the history of any society that the benefits of a change or innovation fall evenly on all groups.

**W**henever I heard the wonders of the “information superhighway” extolled during America’s years of high-tech infatuation, my mind turned to the people who would inevitably be found sitting in antiquated jalopies in the breakdown lane. It isn’t easy to get Americans to think about such things. One evening, on a nightly news show, I debated a dot.com millionaire who proclaimed that the enormous wealth and expertise being amassed by rich techno-whiz kids would soon allow us to realize a cure for cancer, the end of urban gridlock, and world peace. World peace would follow naturally from market globalization. Having the right designer label on your jeans would be the glue that held people together, from here to Beijing. When I suggested that this was pretty thin civic glue, the gentleman in question looked at me as if I were a member of some extinct species. It was clear that he found such opinions not only retrograde but nearly unintelligible.

The dot.com millionaire’s attitude exemplified a larger American problem: the dangers of an excess of pride, not just for individuals but for the culture as a whole. It isn’t easy in our public intellectual life, or in our church life, for that matter, to get Americans to think about anything to do with sin, the focus of much public intellectual discourse in America from Edwards to Niebuhr. We are comfortable with “syndromes.” The word has a soothing, therapeutic sound. But



*A rooted intellectual: Jane Addams at Hull-House in the 1930s*

the sin of pride, in the form of a triumphalist stance that recognizes no limits to human striving, is another matter.

The moral voices—the Jane Addamses and Reinhold Niebuhrs—that once had real public clout and that warned us against our tendency toward cultural pride and triumphalism seem no longer to exist, or at least to claim an audience anywhere near the size they once did. There are a few such voices in our era, but they tend not to be American. I think of President Václav Havel of the Czech Republic, who has written unabashedly against what happens when human beings, in his words, forget that they are not God or godlike. Here is Havel, in a lecture reprinted in the journal *First Things* (March 1995):

The relativization of all moral norms, the crisis of authority, the reduction of life to the pursuit of immediate material gain without regard for its general consequences—the very things Western democracy is most criticized for—do not originate in democracy but in that which modern man has lost: his transcendental anchor, and along with it the only genuine source of his responsibility and self-respect. Given its fatal incorrigibility, humanity probably will have to go through many more Rwandas and Chernobyls before it understands how unbelievably shortsighted a human being can be who has forgotten that he is not God.

Our era is one of forgetting. If there is a role for the public intellectual, it is to insist that we *remember*, and that remembering is a moral act requiring the greatest intellectual and moral clarity. In learning to remember the Holocaust, we have achieved a significant (and lonely) success. Yet to the extent that we now see genocide as a historical anomaly unique to a particular regime or people, or, alternatively, as a historical commonplace that allows us to brand every instance of political killing a holocaust, we have failed to achieve clarity. The truth lies somewhere between.

Where techno-enthusiasm and utopia are concerned, we are far gone on the path of forgetting. One already sees newspaper ads offering huge financial rewards to young egg donors *if* they have SAT scores of at least 1400 or above, stand at least 5'10" tall, and are athletic. The “designer genes” of the future are talked about in matter-of-fact tones. Runaway technological utopianism, because it presents itself to us with the imprimatur of science, has an automatic authority in American culture that ethical thinkers, intellectual generalists, the clergy, and those with a sense of historic irony and tragedy no longer enjoy. The lay Catholic magazine *Commonweal* may editorialize against our newfangled modes of trading in human flesh—against what amounts to a “world where persons carry a price tag, and where the cash value of some persons is far greater than that of others.” But the arguments seem to reach only those who are already persuaded. Critics on the environmental left and the social-conservative right who question techno-triumphalism fare no better. Instead of being seen as an early warning system—speaking unwelcome truths and reminding us what happens when people are equated with their genetic potential—the doubters are dismissed as a rear guard standing in the way of progress.

So this is our situation. Many of our pressing contemporary issues—issues that are not often construed as intrinsically political but on which politics has great

bearing—raise daunting moral concerns. The concerns cannot be dealt with adequately without a strong ethical framework, a historical sensibility, and an awareness of human limits and tragedies. But such qualities are in short supply in an era of specialization and technological triumphalism. Those who seize the microphone and can bring the almost automatic authority of science to their side are mostly apologists for the coming new order. Those who warn about this new order's possible baneful effects and consequences can be marginalized as people who refuse, stubbornly, to march in time, or who illegitimately seek to import to the public arena concerns that derive from religion.

We are so easily dazzled. We are so proud. If we *can* do it, we *must* do it. We must be first in all things—and if we become serious about bringing ethical restraint to bear on certain technologies, we may fall behind country X or country Y. And that seems un-American. The role for public intellectuals under such circumstances is to step back and issue thoughtful warnings. But where is the venue for this kind of discourse? Where is the training ground for what political theorist Michael Walzer calls “connected critics,” thinkers who identify strongly with their culture, who do not traffic in facile denunciations of the sort we hear every night on television (along with equally facile cheerleading), but who speak to politics in a moral voice that is not narrowly moralizing?

That question underlies much of the debate about the state of civil society that occurred during the past decade. The writers and thinkers who warned about the decline of American civil society were concerned about finding not just more effective ways to reach desirable ends in public policy but about finding ways to stem the rushing tide of consumerism, of privatization and civic withdrawal, of public apathy and disengagement. We will not stem that tide without social structures and institutions that promote a fuller public conversation about the questions that confront us.

**W**henever I speak about the quality of our public life before civic groups, I find a real hunger for public places like Hull-House. Americans yearn for forums where they can engage and interpret the public questions of our time, and where a life of the mind can emerge and grow communally, free of the fetters of overspecialization. Without an engaged public, there can be no true public conversations, and no true public intellectuals. At Hull-House, Jane Addams spoke in a civic and ethical idiom shaped and shared by her fellow citizens. The voices of the Hull-House public served as a check on narrow, specialized, and monolithic points of view. It was from this rich venue that Addams launched herself into the public debates of her time. Where are the institutions for such discussion today? How might we create them? It is one of the many ironies of their vocation that contemporary public intellectuals can no longer presume a public.

Intellectuals and others who speak in a public moral voice do not carry a card that says “Have Ideology, Will Talk.” Instead, they embrace Hannah Arendt’s description of the task of the political theorist as one who helps us to *think* about what we are doing. In a culture that is always doing, the responsibility to think is too often evaded. Things move much too fast. The role for public intellectuals today is to bestir the quiet voice of ethically engaged reason. □

# Undisciplined

by *Louis Menand*

**A**lmost everyone agrees that American academic culture has changed dramatically in the past 25 years. Some people (mostly inside the academy) talk about those changes in terms of accessibility, diversity, increased public engagement, and so on. Others (mostly outside the academy) talk about them in terms of political correctness, affirmative action, the “death of literature,” the rise of “grievance studies,” and so on. In general, the differences between the two groups are framed as a debate over consciously held views: People with bad (or good) ideas seized control of higher education and drove out the good (or bad) ideas of the previous generation. To frame the debate so is not wrong: If changes in academic culture, where people are paid to think, are not driven in part by consciously held ideas, what changes are? But ideas are often driven, in turn, by long-term structural movements, and it is useful to step back from the debate over academic politics and values to see the evolution of the culture of higher education from a more impersonal perspective. One place to watch the change occurring is in the demise of the traditional academic disciplines.

Traditionally, an academic discipline was a paradigm inhabiting an institutional structure. “Anthropology” or “English” was both the name of an academic department and a discrete, largely autonomous program of inquiry. If, 30 or 40 years ago, you asked a dozen anthropology professors what anthropology’s program of inquiry was—what anthropology professors did that distinguished them from other professors—you might have gotten different, and possibly contradictory, answers, because academic fields have always had rival schools in them. But, by and large, the professors would have had little trouble filling in the blank in the sentence, “Anthropology is \_\_\_\_.” (And if they did not have a ready definition—for anthropology has gone through periods of identity crisis in the past—they would not have boasted about the fact.) Today, you would be likely to get two types of definitions, neither one terribly specific, or even terribly useful. One type might be called the critical definition: “Anthropology is the study of its own assumptions.” The other type could be called the pragmatic definition: “Anthropology is whatever people in anthropology departments do.”

Not every liberal arts discipline is in the condition of anthropology, of course, but that only heightens the sense of confusion. It tends to set people in fields in which identification with a paradigm remains fairly tight, such as philosophy, against people in fields in which virtually anything goes, such as English. Philosophy professors (to caricature the situation slightly) tend to think that the work done by English professors lacks rigor, and English professors tend to think that the work of philosophy professors is introverted and irrelevant.

The dissociation of academic work from traditional departments has become so expected in the humanities that it is a common topic of both conferences and



jokes. During a recent conference (titled “Have the Humanistic Disciplines Collapsed?”) at the Stanford Humanities Center, one of the center’s directors, to demonstrate the general dissipation of scholarly focus, read the titles of projects submitted by applicants for fellowships and asked the audience to guess each applicant’s field. The audience was right only once—when it guessed that an applicant whose project was about politics must be from an English department.

The usual response to the problem of “the collapse of the disciplines” has been to promote interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship. But interdisciplinarity is not only completely consistent with disciplinarity—the concept that each academic field has its own distinctive program of inquiry—it actually depends on that concept. More and more colleges are offering more and more interdisciplinary classes, and even interdisciplinary majors, but increased interdisciplinarity is not what is new, and it is not the cause of today’s confusion. What the academy is now experiencing is postdisciplinarity—not a joining of disciplines, but an escape from disciplines.

**H**ow did this come about? The most common way of explaining paradigm loss has been to tie it to the demographic shift that has occurred in higher education since 1945. That shift has certainly been dramatic. In 1947, 71 percent of college students in the United States were men; today, a minority of college students, 44 percent, are men. As late as 1965, 94 percent of American college students were classified as white; today, the figure (for non-Hispanic whites) is 73 percent. Most of the change has occurred

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*Landscape (1994), by Mark Tansey*

in the past 25 years. A single statistic tells the story: In the decade between 1984 and 1994, the total enrollment in American colleges and universities increased by two million, but not one of those two million new students was a white American man. They were all nonwhites, women, and foreign students.

Faculty demographics altered in the same way, and so far as the change in the status of the disciplines is concerned, that is probably the more relevant shift. Current full-time American faculty who were hired before 1985 are 28 percent female and about 11 percent nonwhite or Hispanic. Full-time faculty who have

been hired since 1985—individuals who, for the most part, entered graduate school after 1975—are half again as female (40 percent) and more than half again as nonwhite (18 percent). And these figures are for full-time professors only; they do not include part-time faculty, who now constitute 40 percent of the teaching force in American higher education, and who are more likely to be female than are full-time faculty. In 1997, there were 45,394 doctoral degrees conferred in the United States; 40 percent of the recipients were women (in the arts and humanities, just under 50 percent were women), and only 63 percent were classified as white American citizens. The other 37 percent were nonwhite Americans and foreign students.

The arrival of those new populations just happens to have coincided with the period of the so-called culture wars—a time, beginning around 1987, the year of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, when higher education came under intense outside criticism for radicalism and elitism. This coincidence has made it natural to assume a connection between the new faces on campus and the “collapse” (or the “redefinition”) of the disciplines. There are two ways of explaining the connection. One is to suggest that many nonwhite and female students and professors understood the disciplines as rigid and exclusionary abstractions, and brought a new spirit of transgressiveness and play (things not associated with the culture of white men) into the academy. That interpretation is a little too similar to its evil twin—the view that many women and nonwhites lack the temperament for rigorous scholarship and pedagogy. A less perilous explanation is that the new populations inevitably created a demand for new subject matter, a demand to which university departments, among the most sluggish and conservative institutions in America, were slow to respond. The sluggishness produced a

backlash: When women and nonwhites began arriving at universities in significant numbers after 1975, what happened was a kind of antidisciplinarity. Academic activity began flowing toward paradigms that essentially defined themselves in antagonism to the traditional disciplines.

Women's studies departments, for example, came into being not because female professors wished to be separate, but because English and history and sociology departments were at first not terribly interested in incorporating gender-based courses into their curricula. The older generation of professors, whatever their politics personally, in most cases did not recognize gender or ethnic identity as valid rubrics for teaching or scholarship. So outside the discipline became a good place for feminist scholars to be. Indeed, there was a period, beginning in the late 1970s, when almost all the academic stars were people who talked about the failures and omissions of their own fields.

That was especially the case in English literature, where there was (allegedly) a "canon" of institutionally prescribed texts available to question. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) was about the scholarly bias against non-Western cultures; Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) was about the exclusion and misinterpretation of work by women; Jane Tompkins's *Sensational Designs* (1985) was about the exclusion of popular literature; and so on. Scholarly works such as those did not simply criticize their own disciplines; they simultaneously opened up and legitimated new areas of research and teaching. And when departments were slow to adopt the new areas, centers were happy to take up the slack. The period since 1975 has been the era of the center—for women's studies, postcolonial studies, African American studies, gay and lesbian studies, science studies, cultural studies. And every university seems either to have or to be busy creating its very own humanities center. Few of the centers grant degrees—they lack the institutional power of the departments. But they are interdisciplinary by definition (they are made up of professors from a variety of disciplines) and antidisciplinary in temper (they were established to compensate for some perceived inadequacy in the existing departments).

**B**ut the era of antidisciplinarity is essentially over, for the simple reason that the traditional disciplines have by now almost all been co-opted. Virtually no one in the university today believes that gender or ethnic identity (or any of the other areas of research associated with the centers) is not a valid rubric for research or teaching. People in English departments and anthropology departments do exactly what people used to have to go to women's studies and cultural studies centers to do. The arrival of new populations, in other words, helps to explain the emergence of the critical definition of the discipline—that "anthropology (or English or history) is the study of its own assumptions." That formulation is a holdover from the days of antidisciplinarity. But the influx doesn't really explain the pragmatic definition—that "anthropology (and the rest) is whatever anthropology professors do." Merely adding new areas of study (women's history, postcolonial writers, and so on) doesn't threaten the integrity of a discipline, even

if it entails (as it often does) rethinking traditional standards and practices. Postdisciplinarity is a different phenomenon, and it has a distinct etiology.

**T**he contemporary American university is an institution shaped by the Cold War. It was first drawn into the business of government-related scientific research during World War II, by men such as James Bryant Conant, who was the president of Harvard University and civilian overseer of scientific research during the war, and Vannevar Bush, who was a former vice president and dean of engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and director of the federal Office of Scientific Research and Development. At the time of the First World War, scientific research for military purposes had been carried out by military personnel, so-called soldier-scientists. It was Bush's idea to contract this work out instead to research universities, scientific institutes, and independent private laboratories. In 1945 he oversaw publication of the report *Science: The Endless Frontier*, which became the standard argument for government subvention of basic science in peacetime and launched the collaboration between American universities and the national government.

WHAT THE ACADEMY IS NOW  
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Then came Sputnik, in 1957. Sputnik stirred up a panic in the United States, and among the political responses was the passage of the National Defense Education Act of 1958. The legislation put the federal government, for the first time, in the business of subsidizing higher education directly, rather than through government contracts for specific research. This was also the period when economists such as Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz introduced the concept of "human capital," which, by counting educated citizens as a strategic resource, offered a further national security rationale for increased government investment in higher education. In the words of the enabling legislation for the National Defense Education Act: "The security of the Nation requires the fullest development of the mental resources and technical skills of its young men and women. . . . We must increase our efforts to identify and educate more of the talent of our Nation. This requires programs that will give assurance that no students of ability will be denied an opportunity for higher education because of financial need."

The national financial commitment to higher education was accompanied by the arrival of the baby-boom generation of college students. Between 1955 and 1970, the number of 18-to-24-year-olds in America grew from 15 million to 25 million. The result was a tremendous expansion of the higher education system. In 1945, 15 percent of all Americans attended college; today, 50 percent attend college at some point in their lives. In 1949 there were about 1,800 institutions of higher education in the United States, enrolling just under two and a half million students; today, there are just over 4,000 American colleges and

## *The Making of the Public Mind*

universities, and they enroll more than 14 million students, about 5 percent of the population. Current public expenditure on higher education is the equivalent of 5.6 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). To put those numbers in perspective: In the United Kingdom, 14.7 percent of the population goes on to university, and public expenditure on higher education (in a country where almost all universities are public) is 4.1 percent of GDP.

The expansion undoubtedly accounts for some of the decay disciplinary paradigms have undergone. In a system of (essentially) mass higher education, a much smaller proportion of students is interested in pursuing traditional academic work. That is not why they choose to go to college. Only a third of bachelor's degrees awarded in the United States each year are in liberal arts fields (which include the natural and social sciences), and less than a third of those are in the humanities. It is not surprising that a sense of being squeezed onto the margins of a system increasingly obsessed with other things should generate uncertainty and self-doubt among people in the humanities.

You can see the effects in college catalogues. At Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, for example, the philosophy department's announcement says: "A good philosopher should know at least a little something about everything." The department then recommends the study of a foreign language, but only because it "encourages the habit of careful attention to a text." It recommends a "broad understanding of modern science," but suggests that "any good science course . . . is suitable." It recommends courses in history, literature, and the arts, but advises that students generally select courses in these fields according to the amount of reading assigned (the more reading, the more desirable). It ends by saying what was already clear enough: "We require no particular non-departmental courses as part of the major." The next section of the announcement, titled "Introductory Courses," begins, "There is no single best way to be introduced to philosophy." That is not a confession of uselessness; it is an effort to conceive of philosophy as continuous with all other areas of thought—the "philosophy is whatever philosophers do" approach. (Still, it is unusual to find a philosophy department knocking down its own disciplinary fences with such abandon.)

Expansion was only one of the effects Cold War educational policies had on the university. There was a more insidious effect as well. The historian Thomas Bender has suggested, in his contribution to the illuminating volume *American Academic Culture in Transformation* (1997), that the new availability of state monies affected the tenor of academic research. Scholars in the early Cold War era tended to eschew political commitments because they wished not to offend their granting agencies. The idea that academics, particularly in the social sciences, could provide the state with neutral research results on which public policies could be based was an animating idea in the 1950s university. It explains why the dominant paradigms of academic work were scientific, and stressed values such as objectivity, value neutrality, and rigor.

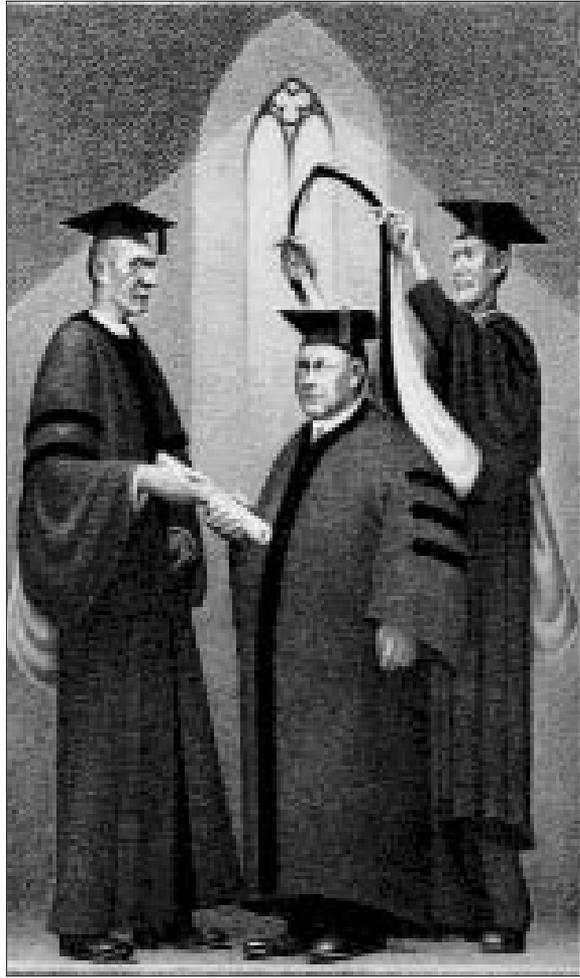
In the sciences, the idea of neutrality led to what Talcott Parsons called the ethos of cognitive rationality. In fields such as history, it led to the consensus approach. In sociology, it produced what Robert Merton called theories of the middle range—an emphasis on the formulation of limited hypotheses subject to empirical verification. Behaviorism and rational choice theory became dom-

inant paradigms in psychology and political science. In literature, even when the mindset was antiscientific, as in the case of the New Criticism and structuralism, the ethos was still scientific: Literary theorists aspired to analytic precision. Boundaries were respected and methodologies were codified. Discipline reigned in the disciplines. Scholars in the 1950s who looked back on their prewar educations tended to be appalled by what they now regarded as a lack of rigor and focus.

Because public money was being pumped into the system at the high end—into the large research universities—the effect of the Cold War was to make the research professor the type of the professor generally. In

1968, Christopher Jencks and David Riesman referred to the phenomenon as “the academic revolution”: For the first time in the history of American higher education, research, rather than teaching or service, defined the work of the professor, not just in the doctoral institutions but all the way down the institutional ladder. (That is why, today, even junior professors at teaching-intensive liberal arts colleges are often obliged to produce two books to qualify for tenure.) The academic revolution strengthened the grip of the disciplines on scholarly and pedagogical practice. Distinctions among different types of institutions, so far as the professoriate was concerned, began to be sanded down. The Cold War homogenized the academic profession.

If you compare the values of the early Cold War university with the values of the 21st-century university, you find an almost complete reversal of terms. A vocabulary of “disinterestedness,” “objectivity,” “reason,” and “knowledge,” and talk about such things as “the scientific method,” “the canon of great books,” and “the fact-value distinction,” have been replaced, in many fields, by talk about “interpretations” (rather than “facts”), “perspective” (rather than “objectivity”), and “understanding” (rather than “reason” or “analysis”). An emphasis on universalism and “greatness” has yielded to an emphasis on diver-



*Honorary Degree (1938), by Grant Wood*

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sity and difference; the scientific norms that once prevailed in many of the “soft” disciplines are viewed with skepticism; context and contingency are continually emphasized; attention to “objects” has given way to attention to “representations”; there has been a turn to “personal criticism.”

The trend is essentially a backlash against the scientism and the excessive respect for disciplinarity of the Cold War university. We cannot attribute it solely to demographic diversification because most of the people one would name as its theorists are white men, and because the seeds of the undoing of the old disciplinary models were already present within the disciplines themselves. The people whose work is most closely associated with the demise of faith in disciplinary autonomy were, in fact, working entirely within the traditions in which they had been trained in the 1950s and early 1960s—people such as Clifford Geertz, Paul De Man, Hayden White, Stanley Fish, and Richard Rorty. The principal source of the “critical definition” of disciplines, Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), was in itself a perfectly traditional exercise in the philosophy and history of science. (Kuhn’s mentor, to whom the book is dedicated, was James Conant.) But Kuhn’s argument that “progress” in scientific knowl-

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edge can be explained in large part as the substitution of new paradigms for old proved infectious in disciplines far removed from the philosophy of science. Kuhn’s book was not a work of science studies. He was not trying to explain science as displaced biography or sociology. He was only trying to describe how science opens up new paths of inquiry, and for the rest

of his career he resisted the suggestion that his theory of paradigm change implied that scientific knowledge was relativistic or socially constructed. Still, he set the analytic template for people in many other fields.

Richard Rorty, for example, has always cited Kuhn as a key influence on his own effort to debunk (or to transcend) the tradition of analytic philosophy. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), Rorty’s landmark work, constructed its attack on the claims of analytic philosophy entirely from within the discipline itself—from arguments advanced by mainstream analytic philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Wilfred Sellars, W. V. O. Quine, Nelson Goodman, and Hilary Putnam. Rorty’s point was not that analytic philosophy was a mere academic formalism, or the politically objectionable artifact of a mandarin intellectual class (the sort of argument, in other words, one could imagine from a person outside the discipline). His point was that analytic philosophy had refuted itself on its own terms.

The scholar who most successfully adopted Kuhn’s conception of the progress of knowledge as a series of paradigm shifts was Stanley Fish. Whatever the problems Kuhn’s theory posed for scientists, many people in English departments saw developments within their own field as precisely a succession of

largely ungrounded paradigm shifts. Since 1945, the discipline had been dominated by, in turn, New Criticism, structuralism, and deconstruction—each theoretical dispensation claiming to have unlocked the true nature of literary language, which its predecessor had misunderstood. Fish interpreted the shifts as a succession of “communities of inquiry,” whose norms and values set the boundaries for what was professionally acceptable and what was not. Once this interpretation was grasped, the belief that “English” represented any single way of approaching literature came to seem naive. Thus the pragmatic definition: The study of English is whatever people within the community of inquiry known as “the English department” happen to count as the study of English. There is no objective referent, such as “the nature of literary language,” to use as an arbiter among approaches. The foundation has not shifted—it has vanished.

**T**he story of paradigm loss is the story of many converging trends—which is a good reason for concluding that the loss is not likely to be reversed anytime soon. One can ask, though, whether postdisciplinarity is a good place to be. My own view, for what it is worth, is that the academy is well rid of the disciplinary hubris of the early Cold War university, but that it is at some risk of sliding into a predictable and aimless eclecticism (as opposed to an imaginative and dynamic eclecticism, which I support). In a perfect world, which is to say in a fully funded world, the intellectual uncertainties caused by the collapse of the disciplines would eventually shake themselves out. The good ideas would drive out the bad, and people would find a way to separate what is worth studying and teaching from what is trendy or meretricious. But the world is not fully funded. Disciplines do not have an infinite amount of time to sort out their rationales. When they have a hard time explaining what they are about, they are in danger of losing out in the competition.

What is the chief obstacle to a productive resolution of the current disciplinary confusion? Doctoral education is the sphere of the American educational system most resistant to reform. It remains bound to a disciplinary structure first put in place 100 years ago—even though the curriculum of the liberal arts college, the demographic composition of student bodies, and the status of knowledge itself in the global economy have all been transformed. Graduate students still specialize in a small subfield within a traditional department, still become disciples of senior specialists for eight or 10 or sometimes 12 years, still produce a scholarly monograph to secure a degree that will license them to teach. All the buzz of academic intellectual life is happening in sex and gender studies, cultural studies, American studies, postcolonial studies, and so on, but all the credentialing goes on in departments of English, history, sociology, philosophy, and the rest of the traditional liberal arts fields. The academic establishment has become so overinvested in the notion that a Ph.D. in one of those fields stands for something immutably real and valuable that it cannot imagine reproducing itself other than by putting the next generation over exactly the same hurdles. Once a device for professional self-control, the doctoral degree has become a fetish of the academic culture. There must be other ways to train college teachers. There must be other ways to pursue scholarly inquiry. □

# Wittgenstein's Curse

by Jay Tolson

It's easy to go on about how bad most academic writing is these days, and how it became so during the past 30 or 40 years. Curmudgeonly journalists have been pouncing on prof-prose at least since the days of H. L. Mencken. But now high sport is made of the subject even within the academy. One academic journal awards annual prizes in a Bad Writing Contest, causing pain and sometimes anger among the unwitting winners. Scholars agonize about the problem, too. Russell Jacoby, for one, links it to the disappearance of the great public intellectuals who once enriched the larger culture. And it seems clear that the decline of scholarly writing has widened the eternal divide between the world of scholars and the public realm, to the impoverishment of both. Just as bad, the pursuit of truth and knowledge—an activity that should be charged with passion and engagement—now appears to the larger public to be an exercise in nonsensical irrelevance.

Perhaps nothing brought the whole sorry matter to a more dramatic head than the parodic gibberish-and-jargon-filled article that New York University physicist Alan Sokal tricked the scholarly journal *Social Text* into publishing in 1996. Titled “Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity,” the essay argued that scientific knowledge was socially constructed, an argument very much in line with the journal's postmodernist agenda. What the editors failed to see, though, is that the piece was packed with illogic, non sequiturs, and nonsense, including an unargued rejection of the “dogma” that asserts the existence of “an external world, whose properties are independent of any human being and indeed of humanity as a whole.”

On the day the article was published, Sokal let the world know that it had been a hoax, and an uproar ensued. Many of the more interesting contributions to that controversy were published last year in a book, *The Sokal Hoax*—and not all of them were critical of the journal's editors. In fact, literary scholar Stanley Fish made a plausible defense of the argument that Sokal had parodied: “What sociologists of science say,” Fish wrote, “is that of course the world is real and independent of our observations but that accounts of the world are produced by observers and are therefore relative to their capacities, education, training, etc. It is not the world or its properties but the vocabularies in whose terms we know them that are socially constructed—fashioned by human beings—which is why our understanding of those properties is continually changing.”

That is true and sensible and clearly put. Unfortunately, it's not a distinction the editors of the journal seemed to grasp, because what Sokal



Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, in a 1943 photograph set amid one of his manuscripts.

said in his trickster voice was precisely that there was no external world independent of human constructions of it. And the trickster didn't even make an argument for his outlandish claim. He simply tossed around the jargon, let it fall where it might, and concluded—voilà—that there is nothing out there unless we construct it into being.

Maybe Fish failed to get the point for the same reason the editors didn't see it: because the writing was as impenetrably bad as most prose published in *Social Text*, and indeed as bad as so much current academic writing. The not-so-secret little secret, it turns out, is that no one really reads this stuff anyway, not even folks who produce reams of it for countless scholarly publications. And in truth, the stuff is not meant to be read. It's a form of professional feather display, the ritual gesturing by which scholars establish standing with others in their particular niche, or subniche, of the scholarly trade. Display the jargon—feminist, neo-Marxist, post-colonialist, deconstructionist, whatever—and you're in, you're one of us, we want you on our tenure track.

If this seems to be a partisan slam against only the more progressive, left-leaning, and postmodern members of the academic community, let me second a point made by Patricia Nelson Limerick in the *New York Times Book Review* (Oct. 31, 1993): The more conservative traditionalists within the academy can often be just as bad as the Sado-Marxists and the Martian-Leninists (or maybe *almost* as bad). Limerick quotes a passage from that best-selling tract *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), by the late Allan Bloom, a University of Chicago scholar who trained, and was subsequently revered by, a cadre of neoconservative

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thinkers now gone forth into the world to pursue an assortment of academic and nonacademic occupations:

If openness means to “go with the flow,” it is necessarily an accommodation to the present. That present is so closed to doubt about so many things impeding the progress of its principles that unqualified openness to it would mean forgetting the despised alternatives to it, knowledge of which would only make us aware of what is doubtful in it.

Got that? And does it not read like something only barely translated from German, or a directive from the Department of Housing and Urban Development? Postmodernish, far-leftish types may commit more, and more grievous, sins against the ideal of clear prose, but they are not alone in their sins.

**W**hy have so many been undone by willful obscurantism and given themselves over to cant and nonsense? So many reasons, so little time to state them all. In fact, many have already been stated, and many times over. But let me mention a couple that might not have received quite as much attention as they deserve, before coming to what I think is a fundamental cause.

First of all, academic writing has never been all that much fun to read. Mencken, as I mentioned earlier, went to town on the foibles of academese, focusing with particular viciousness on sociologist Thorstein Veblen’s tortured, jargon-flecked prose. But does that mean that Veblen’s theories about the leisure class and conspicuous consumption were unimportant? Not at all. Writing about difficult matters can be difficult—and often requires neologisms and complicated, subtle analysis. We have a hard time following the explanations of auto mechanics. Why should the explanations of a philosopher or sociologist be easier to follow? Clarity of expression should be a handmaiden of intellectual brilliance, but Veblen and many others demonstrate that often it is not.

That said, the rife obscurantism in scholarly publications today comports itself in a self-congratulatory, almost arrogant manner. Its promulgators argue that the difficulty is essential to the gravity of their ideas or to an intellectual or political stance, and that clarity, in any case, is just some elitist, dead-white-male convention. In “Troubling Clarity: The Politics of Accessible Language,” published by the *Harvard Educational Review* (Fall 1996), Patti Lather justifies the liberating complexity of her own feminist writings:

Sometimes we need a density that fits the thoughts being expressed. In such places, clear and precise plain prose would be a sort of cheat tied to the anti-intellectualism rife in U.S. society that deskills readers. . . . Positioning language as productive of new spaces, practices, and values, what might come of encour-

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aging a plurality of discourses and forms and levels of writing in a way that refuses the binary between so-called “plain speaking” and complex writing? . . . What is the violence of clarity, its non-innocence?

Claiming that her book about women with HIV/AIDS, *Troubling Angels*, was aimed at a popular audience, and even intended to be what she calls a “Kmart book,” Lather boasts at the same time that she refused to produce a “tidy book” or a “comfort text,” with the kind of writing “that maps easily into our ways of making sense and ‘giving sense.’” I have yet to encounter *Troubling Angels* on any of my visits to Kmart. I wonder whether any other Kmart shoppers have come across it.

Lather, like so many who proudly assert their obscurity, does not have the justification of a Veblen or a Hegel. There is no brilliance or insight or originality in her work. There is only a thicket of nonsense, faddishness, and claptrap. But Lather wears her opacity proudly, like a badge, and no doubt enjoys tenure at Ohio State University because of it. And she is no rarity, no exception. Her kind are everywhere—troubling texts, troubling clarity, troubling the hegemonic hold on beauty and truth—and the sheer quantity of the drivel they produce is another big part of the problem.

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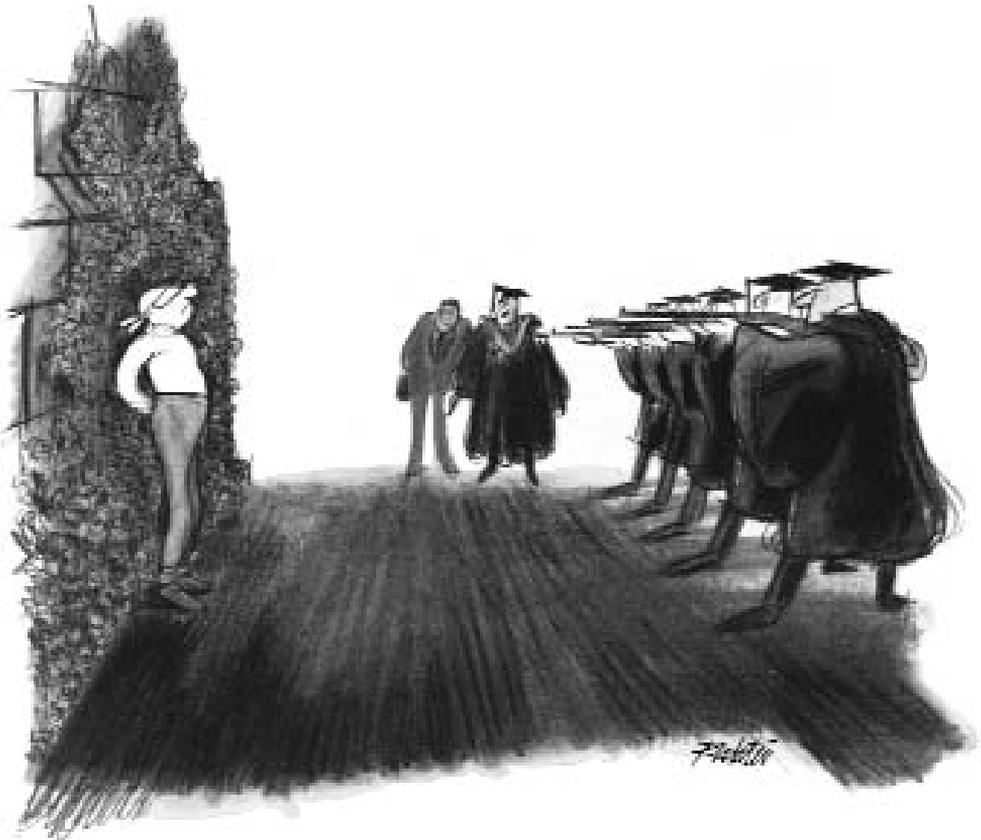
The endless production is a matter of necessity and survival, of course. The academic professions require it—and not just the noble drudgery of teaching, research, editing, and monograph writing that engaged more modest scholars in the past (particularly those who recognized their intellectual and writerly limitations). No, the professions today demand substantial “original” works by all members of the professoriate who hope to rise to tenure. And that demand is simply unrealistic. For how much new is there under the sun? Not much—in scholarship or in any other human pursuit. Yet never have so many words been used so badly, and to say so little, as in these works of professedly original scholarship. Yes, there are still scholarly writers who produce truly groundbreaking work that reaches, informs, and enlightens not just other scholars but popular audiences as well. But beneath that apex, how enormous is the mountain of entirely superfluous scholarly prose!

One remedy seems obvious: more modesty on the part of the academic professions and a return to other scholarly tasks, including teaching, greater mastery of the core subject matter of a field, and recognition that in the realm of “original” work, less is more. But the obvious solution is no easy solution. It may even require coming to terms with a difficult matter indeed—the very character of the modern scholarly enterprise. The formation of that character has a complicated history, which has already been the subject of many works of scholarship. Let me attempt to make sense of the problem by blaming it, only half facetiously, on one of the more brilliant minds of the past century.

## *The Making of the Public Mind*

Great minds can do great mischief, and few minds have been greater than that of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), the Vienna-born philosopher who spent some of his productive years disturbing the donnish waters of Cambridge University. Wittgenstein first decided to establish very precisely, in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), what philosophy should and should not discuss. He then all but reversed the conclusions of that book to develop his notion that human language has a fundamentally gamelike quality—a notion that implied a far less restrictive view of philosophy’s mission. Though he accomplished those feats in a prose so gnomically stringent that it almost defies comprehension, he left a deep imprint not just on philosophy but on 20th-century intellectual life in general. But that influence, alas, was not wholly benign.

The baleful part of Wittgenstein’s legacy is not so much a matter of strict logical-philosophical inadequacy as it is a problem of intellectual style—a certain prejudice, expressed both in his personal dealings with people and in his work, about what the life of the mind should be. One way to get a sense of this style is through an anecdote recounted by one of his Cambridge friends, the literary critic F. R. Leavis. In a short memoir about their friendship, Leavis told how Wittgenstein came to him one day “and, without any prelude, said, ‘Give up literary criticism!’” Cambridge being a relatively civil place, Leavis



*"It's publish or perish, and he hasn't published."*

didn't assault the brash Austrian. He didn't even make the obvious retort—"Give up philosophy!"—in part because he thought that Wittgenstein had fallen under the sway of John Maynard Keynes and other Bloomsbury wits who liked to toss off facile putdowns of people or ideas they disagreed with. More to the point, Leavis noted that Wittgenstein had only a "rudimentary" sense of literature, and so was incapable of thinking that it (much less literary criticism) "might matter intellectually." Such a view could not have been more inimical to Leavis's conviction "that the fullest use of language is to be found in creative literature, and that a great creative work is a work of original exploratory thought." And to validate his conviction, Leavis adverted to his view about the inadequacy of philosophers: They were, he said, "weak on language."

What confidence! Had it endured within the precincts of higher learning, it's fair to ask whether we would have avoided the current parlous state of academic letters. I think so, even as I acknowledge the overstatement implicit in my assertion, and even as I allow that Leavis's confidence was itself a little shaky.

**M**any factors share responsibility for the deplorable condition of academic writing, but none is more fundamental than the fatally mistaken view that intellectual work must be "serious." By claiming that literary criticism was serious in a way that Wittgenstein should have been able to appreciate, Leavis all but embraced, however unwittingly, Wittgenstein's definition of seriousness: a rigorous way of thinking and proceeding intellectually, rooted in the assumedly clear procedural ways of the inductive sciences and leading to objective truth about the world, people, and what Wittgenstein called "everything that is the case." That is scientism, of course, driven by a Protestant intentness on having one's subjective perceptions validated by claims to the kind of objective truth that can be revealed by the scientific method. No, I am not attacking science, the scientific method, or the many real and obvious blessings that have resulted from them. Nor am I attacking the notion of objectivity or the laudable goal of objective truth. I am merely pointing to the misapplication of the scientific idea, and to the consequences of the same.

Wittgenstein's early philosophy led him to the conclusion that we cannot talk rigorously or precisely about most things that humans deem of ultimate importance: truth, beauty, goodness, the meaning and ends of life. We can speak precisely and meaningfully only about those things that objective science can demonstrate. In his view, philosophy was to be a helpful tag-along of science: It can paint clear verbal pictures of what science divulges. But even Wittgenstein recognized that this understanding of the limitations of language was too limiting, and he became more and more interested in the provisional and social character of language, and in how the mystery of meaning emerges out of the shared play of making worlds out of words. He was struggling beyond scientism, and his final book, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), posthumously assembled, seems to point suggestively away from the narrowness and inconsequentiality of his earlier position.

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But if Wittgenstein struggled against the conclusions of his early work, I fear that the Western academic world increasingly succumbed to a desire for the kind of dubious seriousness that enticed the young philosopher. Scholars of literature and the arts, historians, philosophers, and other academic humanists joined sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists in trying to make their fields as “serious” as the hard sciences. They grew obsessed with theory and methodology, and particularly with the most abstract issues of epistemology—how we know what we know. This is largely the story of professionalization, of course, of how professional standards and approved behaviors got established in the academic realm. It was Wittgenstein’s curse upon the professionals of the humanistic and social science disciplines that they took his kind of seriousness as an essential goal.

**W**hy a curse? For one thing, because it burdened those professions with a narrow-spirited utilitarianism. In his early work, Wittgenstein believed that his job was to make philosophy useful. He wanted to clear out, like so much underbrush, all the metaphysics and other matters that couldn’t be resolved the way a problem in, say, engineering (in which he had had training) can be resolved. In his early view, remember, philosophy was supposed to become a helpful user’s manual for the hard sciences. For it to be anything else was frivolous, an indulgence, *unserious*. Wittgenstein, as many of his contemporaries noted, had a genius for making colleagues and students feel guilty about not doing useful, productive work. He urged a number of his students to abandon scholarship altogether and become car mechanics or hospital orderlies. Some took his advice—to the shock and sorrow of their parents.

The compulsion to prove the utility of ideas spread through the humanities and social sciences like a contagion, assuming a variety of political, ideological, and theoretical colorings. It was no longer sufficient to master and convey the great historical record, or to locate and celebrate the pleasures of great works of literature or painting or music. Even the pursuit of wisdom was not enough, once wisdom got problematized. Theorizing took over. Elaborate theorymongering, often French- or German-inspired, displaced the mastering of subject matter, so that fledgling literary scholars, for example, ended up knowing more (or thinking they knew more) about Bakhtin than about Chekhov, more about queer theory than about any literary tradition. The pretense of helping the working class, or liberating gays by deconstructing texts, or doing meta-meta-interpretations of historical questions appeared to be the really serious work. No matter that such seriousness arguably achieved no serious real-world consequences. No matter that it became increasingly irrelevant to the real world—and completely impenetrable to most people in that world.

There’s an additional problem. The drift of much postmodern thought has been toward the conclusion that there is no absolute or objective truth; there are only constructions of the truth, influenced by power and power relations within society (might makes right—and truth) or by unacknowledged biases rooted in, say, gender or race. This radical skepticism, elaborated by

such thinkers as the pragmatist Richard Rorty, holds that the pursuit of truth is essentially bootless. Whether such skepticism is itself simplistic (and, in Rorty's case, whether it's a misreading of the far more complicated view of truth held by earlier American pragmatists such as Charles Sanders Peirce) is beyond discussion here. But skepticism's almost dogmalike standing within much of the academic community introduces a rich irony: Whereas skepticism would seem to invite scholars within the humanities, and even the social sciences, to abandon their reliance on pseudoscientific theories and methodologies and become truly independent thinkers and writers, it has in fact enslaved them all the more to pseudoscientific doctrines.

And make no mistake: The doctrines are pseudo. The same Sokal who fooled the editors of *Social Text* subsequently teamed up with philosopher Jean Bricmont to write a book, *Fashionable Nonsense* (1998), that showed the absurd and often hilarious efforts by leading postmodern thinkers to dress up their theories with scientific terminology and even mathematical formulas. (The highly influential Jacques Lacan, for example, boasted that his theories drew from "the most recent developments in topology.") On close inspection, the terminology and the formulas make no sense at all. "They imagine, perhaps, that they can exploit the prestige of the natural sciences in order to give their own discourse a veneer of rigor," write Sokal and Bricmont. "And they seem confident that no one will notice their misuse of concepts."

Such dishonesty is bad enough in itself. But the effect of the pseudoscientific doctrines on writing throughout the humanities and social sciences—and the writing remains unchanged, despite Sokal and Bricmont's valuable unmasking—only increases the seriousness of the crime. Forcing their ideas into the Procrustean beds of Foucaultian or Lacanian theoretical constructs—or others equally dubious—scholars produce a prose that seems to have emerged from a machine, a subjectless void. Where in that prose is the self, the individual? Nowhere. There is no mind grappling freshly with a problem. There is no feeling, no humor, no spark of what is human; there is only the unspooling of phony formulas, speciously applied to the matter at hand.

The great harm in all of this has been a loss of confidence in the fundamental worth of the seemingly irrelevant pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, and even pleasure for their own sake. Though an edge of defensiveness crept into his voice, Leavis was right to say that respectful but not uncritical reflection upon great literary works was worthwhile. Such activity deepens and complicates the individual, even as it expands the individual's appreciation of the larger world of other people, society, politics, the natural and physical order. The pleasurable pursuit of knowledge and wisdom is, in great part, an extended meditation on the relations between self and world, subjectivity and objectivity, and on the question of where truth resides. It is, of all pursuits, the most relevant for human lives, and to the extent that the academy chooses to stand apart from it, academic writing withers and dies. □

# The Struggle for the Soul of the Sentence

by Sven Birkerts

Ours is the great era of infotainment, of the much lamented migration away from serious reading. The communications revolution—everything from e-mail to the ubiquitous cell phone—has spawned what seems to many an impoverished, phrase-based paradigm. The sound byte, the instant message—with every year, increments of meaning and expression seem to shrink. One might naturally expect American fiction of the last quarter-century to reflect that contraction, and gifted young writers, the products of an accelerated culture of distraction, to map in their prose the rhythms and diction patterns of our times.

Instead, almost to a writer, a new generation of novelists and short-story writers are forging styles of notable complexity and of cultural, if not always psychological, nuance. Life as presented in fiction has never seemed more ramified, more mined with implication, more multiplex in possibility. This shocking reverse of expectation marks a major shift in the how and what of literary fiction in America. A pitched battle between ways of seeing and representing the world—what might be called a struggle over the soul of the sentence—has been fought for at least a half-century now, and skirmishes during the past two decades have brought a victory for complexity that few would have predicted.

To give this battle a crude first formulation, we are witnessing the later stages of a long warfare between what I think of as ascetic realism—a belief in the artistic and ethical primacy of the understated treatment of the here and now—and something we might call, for want of an official term, “maximalism,” a tendency toward expansive, centrifugal narrative that aspires to embrace the complexity of contemporary life. If we go back a quarter-century, to the mid-1970s, we can see the polarity alive and well, represented, on the one hand, by Raymond Carver’s influential short-story collection *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976) and, on the other, by Thomas Pynchon’s limit-busting novel *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973).

In these works, the conflict between worldviews is revealed at the level of the sentence. The aesthetics of a Carver and a Pynchon could not be more different. Carver’s writing registers, by way of a harshly pruned-back affect, the injurious impact of the world on the susceptible psyche. Pynchon’s prose opens itself to the overwhelmingness of life, registering detail, exploring myriad connections (often in a playful manner), and communicating a



*Capturing a “minimalist” moment: Edward Hopper’s Summer Evening (1947).*

sense of open-endedness that is always outrunning the perceptions of the moment.

At the subsentence—thematic—level, what we confront is the gulf between two visions of Americanness, one older and one of more recent vintage. The perspective with the longer lineage assumes a link between willed simplicity and virtue, and harks back to a mythos of rural and small-town beginnings that has been at the core of our popular culture from the start. The newer vision would mark the epochal changes brought on by the acceleration, interconnectedness, and radically expanded sense of context that are the products of late modernity. What Philip Rahv once described as the core split in our literature between “redskins” and “palefaces”—primitives and aesthetes, if you will—can now be seen as the split between the conserving and the liberating impulses. There are those who have a hard time facing the fact that our world has been refigured in the last decades by globalism and electronic communications, among other things, and those who are scrambling to make sense of the new situation.

**F**or a long time I shared what I think of as the great populist prejudice. I had imbibed it in my schooling and in all the reading I’d done growing up in the 1950s and ’60s, in what might fairly be called the Age of Hemingway in American fiction. Our American genius, I was far from alone in believing, was at root an unpretentious directness, a humble, plain-spoken, verb-and-noun relation to the primary conditions of life and the largely stoical codes that honor them. I mean, among other things, the “manly” restraint of excessive feeling, and a rejection of pretense and, with it, intellectual complexity. This credo had its iconic father and manner: Within the

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plank-and-nail sentences of Ernest Hemingway, the ethos had its most representative life. “The door of Henry’s lunch-room opened and two men came in”: A standard of purity and realism was embodied in such prose.

This equating of the demotic with the essential American virtues did not originate with Hemingway, but it found its great midcentury expression in his work and his public presence. (Something of the same hierarchy could be said to have prevailed in poetry, with Robert Frost taking the Hemingway position, and possibly in the essay as well, where the chair belonged to E. B. White.) The plainspoken tradition had its mainly male line of succession. The spirit and the prose were passed along through writers such as Robert Stone, Andre Dubus, Richard Ford, and a number of others. But Raymond Carver was Hemingway’s primary heir.

Stylistically, he was a direct descendant, with his pared-down, understated prose idiom. Carver’s thematic interests, though, took more of a turn toward implied interiority. Where Hemingway was preoccupied with war and its lacerating effects on the manly self-conception, never mind the soul, Carver took on the loss and failure faced by individuals left behind by the general rush into modernity. His was the blue-collar lament, the cry of the new superfluous man. The downbeat poignancy of this passage from “They’re Not Your Husband” is vintage Carver:

Early Ober was between jobs as a salesman. But Doreen, his wife, had gone to work nights as a waitress at a twenty-four-hour coffee shop at the edge of town. One night, when he was drinking, Early decided to stop by the coffee shop and have something to eat. He wanted to see where Doreen worked, and he wanted to see if he could order something on the house.

We find a similar naturalistic bluntness in such writers as Stone, Dubus, Ford, Russell Banks, Tobias Wolff, and Geoffrey Wolff, to name a few. Yet all of them work more with an eye toward narrative development, and cannot be said to be Carver protégés in any sense. Carver’s influence is far more apparent in the work of the so-called minimalists, a group of mainly young writers, many of whom were published in the 1970s and ’80s by an influential editor at Alfred A. Knopf, Gordon Lish (who, as an editor at *Esquire*, had been instrumental in getting Carver’s early work published).

**M**inimalism took to more stylized extremes the idea of the understated utterance, though with more ironic inflection, and the belief that suggestion and implication were built through careful strategies of withholding. Minimalists likewise eschewed big themes, preferring to create uneasy portraits of American middle-class domesticity. But here we bump up against one aspect of the paradox that is at the root of this seeming face-off between approaches. For if the subject matter was, in this most reduced sense, realistic, the impetus of the

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mode was aesthetic: The prose of minimalist exemplars such as Amy Hempel, Mary Robison, Janet Kauffman, and others unmistakably reflects a highly craft-conscious sensibility. Every feature in this close-cropped scene from one of Hempel's stories is bathed in hyperawareness: "Ten candles in a fish stick tell you it's Gully's birthday. The birthday girl is the center of attention; she squints into the popping flash cubes. The black cat seems to know every smooth pose there is."

Hempel's carefully posed affect is fairly representative. If the popular equation of minimalism with an antiornamental—therefore democrat-ic/populist—approach ever really held up, it does so no longer. Indeed, if we look past the reflexive association of Hemingway's clipped sentences with the plainspoken truth of things, we find a high degree of aestheticism there as well. Hemingway is as mannered, in his way, as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf are in theirs, as studied as Cézanne (whom he studied).

So it was hardly a surprise when gadfly essayist and novelist Tom Wolfe saw no realism to commend in minimalism in his hyperbolic blast "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast: A Literary Manifesto for the New Social Novel," published in *Harper's* in 1989. Pistols popping in all directions, Wolfe declared the landscape of American fiction blighted and plumped hard for the kind of reheated Balzacianism that his two best-selling novels, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1990) and *A Man in Full* (1998), could be said to represent. As Wolfe wrote in a much-quoted passage:

At this weak, pale, tabescent moment in the history of American literature, we need a battalion, a brigade, of Zolas to head out into this wild, bizarre, unpredictable, hog-stomping Baroque country of ours and reclaim it as literary property. Philip Roth was absolutely right. The imagination of the novelist is powerless before what he knows he's going to read in tomorrow morning's newspaper. But a generation of American writers has drawn precisely the wrong conclusion from that perfectly valid observation. The answer is not to leave the rude beast, the material, also known as the life around us, to the journalists but to do what journalists do, or are supposed to do, which is to wrestle the beast and bring it to terms.

Wolfe, though he growled and gnashed in his distinctively big-bad style, was hardly alone in his impatience with the evasions of minimalism and with the more self-consciously formalized metafictional experiments of writers such as Robert Coover, John Hawkes, and John Barth, in which the artifice of fiction becomes in some sense the subject. His essay helped to expose the limitations of American piety about the truth-telling power of plainspoken prose—and to reveal that the polarity between the ascetic realists and the mandarin maximalists was not what it seemed at all. For, in his high dudgeon, Wolfe also swept aside as hopeless aesthetes the "palefaces," whose elaborate sentences may, in fact, have been lassoing the "rude wild beast" in new and inventive ways that he failed to appreciate, wedded as he was to a 19th-century prose of enumerative specificity

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and linearity. He did not seem to see that the deeper nature of selfhood and social reality was itself changing, transforming our fundamental notions of connectedness, of subject and object, of consciousness, in a world less temporally and spatially fixed than ever before.

There are many ways to write the story of the gradual triumph of the maximalist approach. But a catalytic moment surely was the publication in 1973 of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, the novel that ambitiously combined antic black comedy, a compellingly paranoid historical vision, and a sensibility saturated in the ethos of the then-counterculture. To be sure, that big book's arrival was preceded by the publication in 1953 of Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* and in 1955 of William Gaddis's *The Recognitions*. And in their very different ways, more elaborate stylists such as John Updike and John Cheever, along with Roth and Bellow, were also staking an ambitious claim to charting our turbulent social and spiritual landscape. Still, Pynchon's novel remains, more than any other work, the ur-text for more contemporary makers of fiction; the book exerts its influence even on those who have never read it.

Pynchon's opening sentence is, it's true, arrestingly declarative: "A screaming comes across the sky." But before long, we are in the spawn bogs of the real, the essential, Pynchon sentences:

On a wooden pub sign daringly taken, one daylight raid, by a drunken Barley Gobbitch, across which still survives in intaglio the legend SNIPE AND SHAFT, Teddy Bloat is mincing bananas with a great isoceles knife, from beneath whose nervous blade Pirate with one hand shovels the blond mash into waffle batter resilient with fresh hens' eggs, for which Osbie Feel has exchanged an equal number of golf balls, these being even rarer this winter than real eggs, other hand blending the fruit in, not overvigorously, with a wire whisk, whilst surly Osbie himself, sucking frequently at the half-pint milkbottle filled with VAT 69 and water, tends to the bananas in the skillet and broiler.

Gloriously elliptical, digressive, allowing his clauses to loosen and drift before drawing tight around noun and verb, Pynchon is, by design or not, making a revolutionary turn against the Hemingway mode. Keep in mind, too, that Pynchon was writing before the advent of our polymorphous electronic culture. His contribution — one of many — was to patent a style, an approach that could later be adapted to rendering the strange interdependencies of a world liberated from its provincial boundedness. He modeled a swoop of mind, a way of combining precision with puckishness, a kind of rolling agglomeration that would prove formative for the generation now coming into its own.

**W**hat is happening can be seen as a kind of gradual ice-heave action against the seemingly dominant presence of the plainspoken and simplified. Slowly they advance, the proponents of the richer and headier view, each one different in form and



Sally Said (1994), by Jane Calvin

particular expression, sharing only the impulse to break the confining box, the austere stoicist ethos, and to get hold of—annex—the sense of a burgeoning world. In the footsteps of writers such as Updike, Roth, and Bellow, with their complex intelligences, we now remark the ascendancy of William Gass, Don DeLillo, Cormac McCarthy, Cynthia Ozick, Harold Brodkey, Annie Proulx, Toni Morrison, Paul West, and Maureen Howard, as well as short-story acrobats Barry Hannah, Denis Johnson, and Thom Jones. There is obviously a world of difference between the verbally impacted sentences of a Gass and the almost mythical involutions of Morrison, but at root one senses a common expansive will: to embrace, to mime, to unfold in the cadence of a sentence the complexities of life as lived. Far from a betrayal of the real, the elaboration of stylistic surface is often a more faithful transcription than the willfully reduced expression.

From David Foster Wallace (*Infinite Jest*) to Richard Powers (*Galatea 2.2*, *Plowing the Dark*) to Donald Antrim (*The Verificationist*) to Helen DeWitt (*The Last Samurai*) to Rick Moody (*Purple America*) to Colson Whitehead (*John Henry Days*) to Jonathan Franzen (*The Corrections*), and on and on, the drive is not just to structural layering and counterpoint, but to the building of sentences that articulate, at every point, implicit-

ly, the fact that life and the consciousness that greets it are deeply involved and involving.

Consider the tour de force convolutions of Wallace:

The student engineer, a pre-doctoral transuranial metallurgist working off massive G.S.L. debt, locks the levels and fills out the left side of his time sheet and ascends with his book back through a treillage of inter-neural stairways with semitic ideograms and developer smell and past snack bar and billiard hall and modem-banks and extensive student counseling offices around the rostral lamina, all the little-used many-staired neuroform way up to the artery-red fire door of the Union's rooftop, leaving Madam Psychosis, as is S.O.P., alone with her show and screen in the shadowless chill.

We might marvel at, and also feel ourselves numbed by, the detailed density, the terminological fetishism, the “neuroform” intricacy of consciousness in descriptive motion. We might also look at this tweezer-extracted bit from Powers’s densely woven novel *Galatea 2.2*:

The web was a neighborhood more efficiently lonely than the one it replaced. Its solitude was bigger and faster. When relentless intelligence finally completed its program, when the terminal drop box brought the last barefoot, abused child on line and everyone could at last say anything instantly to everyone else in existence, it seemed to me that we’d still have nothing to say to each other and many more ways not to say it.

Not only is the prose elegant and clear, but it captures in its cadences, in its deferral of predicate, something of the phenomenon it reflects upon. There is here a palpable sense of language venturing a stretch, challenging our idea of sufficiency, opening itself to take in more reality.

Granted, these brief samples are from two of our more cerebral and experimental young writers, but I could very likely make my point by looking

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at the prose of better-known, or less overtly heady, writers—DeLillo, Proulx, Ozick, Howard, Michael Chabon, Michael Cunningham, Brad Leithauser, Steven Millhauser, Alice Munro, and Michael Ondaatje. All could be said to share a belief in linguistic potency, in language’s achieving its highest and most essential aims through enfold-

ing, not through suggesting by omission.

Maybe this prospering of the maximal does not represent a paradox, or contradiction, after all. To look at our new culture solely in terms of the forms

of electronic communications—the byte-speak mode—is to ignore the impact of the system itself. The net effect (pun intended) of that system is to make the world hugely more complex, and, perhaps less obviously, to force us to retool our reflexes, thereby allowing us to tolerate, possibly even requiring us to seek out, ever greater levels of sensory input. We do not live as our parents did. We do not live even as *we* lived 10 years ago. We might have to accept that we are changing, evolving new capacities that permit us to discern patterns and harmonies—rather than mere noise—in the much-expanded orchestration of reality.

This literary transformation has been working itself out from two directions. On the one side, contemporary writing, in prose style and subject matter, reflects the excitements and anxieties of the arrival of cyber-culture in all its permutations. At the same time—on the other side—we are witnessing the displacement of older themes and approaches. One generation of novelists after another cannot keep finding inspiration in, say, the confusions wrought by the sexual revolution (Updike, Mailer, Oates, Roth), or in the tensions and ambitions bound up in Jewish assimilation (Bellow, Roth, Malamud)—though younger writers, such as Chang-rae Lee in *A Gesture Life* or Jhumpa Lahiri in *The Interpreter of Maladies*, have found new twists and turns to chart in the assimilation struggles of other cultures. The simple fact is that changing realities do solicit the artist; they declare new needs and imperatives.

**A**nd that is the difference, the larger shift I'm talking about. The expansive thrust is not in itself a new thing. The quest to capture complexity and nuance has been part of writerly—indeed, artistic—sensibility since the time of Herodotus. Even in America, where an anti-intellectual suspicion of overly intricate subtlety took root early on (one byproduct, perhaps, of our frontier origins), many of the literary titans of the last century were expansive to the highest degree. What is new is a sense, not of arrival exactly, but of breaking through—in prose styles that signal an ascension to a new plane of vantage. These writers are pushing toward a vision based on the idea of radical social and psychological shifts in our ways of living and interacting. I see this as evidence of movement—I would even use that freighted word *progress*. It belies the tired postmodernist assumption that everything has been done and that there is no place left to go.

The diverse works of the young maximalists can be seen as the first reflection of this larger transformation in consciousness. They help mark our steady movement into global awareness, into the recognition that we are now and henceforth living in a world connected by a grid of lightning impulses. This world will never get simpler. Perceptions, communications, social relations, the meaning of time and distance, the very materiality of things—nothing is as it was. More than ever before, our living needs to be mirrored and interpreted, vigorously and discerningly. The struggle for the soul of the sentence is, at the same time, a struggle for the mastery of subject matter, which is nothing less than a world that threatens at every moment to outstrip us. □

# The Professors and *Bush v. Gore*

by Peter Berkowitz and Benjamin Wittes

“**Y**ou cannot raise the standard against oppression, or leap into the breach to relieve injustice, and still keep an open mind to every disconcerting fact, or an open ear to the cold voice of doubt,” warned the great American jurist Learned Hand (1872–1961). “I am satisfied that a scholar who tries to combine these parts sells his birthright for a mess of pottage; that, when the final count is made, it will be found that the impairment of his powers far outweighs any possible contribution to the causes he has espoused.”

One need not share Learned Hand’s drastic view to appreciate that political engagement by scholars runs the risk of betraying intellectual integrity. Scholars have a vital role in democratic debate, but to perform it properly they must exercise a certain restraint. Americans today confront a range of complex public-affairs issues—from the economic consequences of law and government policies to the practical effects and moral implications of cloning and stem cell research—that can be understood only with the help of expert knowledge. In trying to come to reasoned and responsible judgments about such matters, citizens depend upon scholars to marshal relevant facts and figures, to identify the more and less likely consequences of law and public policy, and to clarify the moral principles at stake. But deference to expert knowledge depends in part on public confidence that scholars will honor their obligation to separate the pursuit of truth from political advocacy and personal advantage. When scientists wade into the public debate over stem cell research, for example, we expect, above all, that they will give a fair and accurate account of the facts. This is not to say that scholars cannot express opinions. It means rather that their first obligation is to speak the truth. Scholars are paid to not rush to judgment. If one scholar violates this obligation, the authority of the rest is compromised, and the public is invited to view all scholars as no different from the seasoned spinners and polished operators and purveyors of the party line who crowd our public life.

Restraint may be hardest when justice is at stake. For legal scholars, the risk is especially acute when they weigh in on a controversial case while they are serving as consultants to a party to the controversy, or take an unyielding stand before partisan fires have cooled. In recent years, law professors have assumed a higher profile in public debates, and scholarly restraint has steadily declined. No longer confined to the pages of professional journals, law professors now appear regularly as pundits on TV and radio shows. Their new prominence dates at least to 1987,



*Tempers were running high throughout the nation last December when police were forced to separate angry supporters of George W. Bush and Al Gore outside the U.S. Supreme Court.*

when, amid an uprising in the legal academy, the testimony of eminent law professors in the bitter Senate confirmation hearings of Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork was nationally televised. A decade later, legal academics found a new stage with the O. J. Simpson trial, and they really hit their stride with the Kenneth Starr investigation and the impeachment and Senate trial of President Bill Clinton. Few of them performed admirably during those public spectacles. But this past winter, with the Florida election controversy, members of the legal academy, in their role as public intellectuals, reached a distressing new low in the exercise of scholarly restraint.

**A**lthough the war over Florida's 25 electoral votes was waged on many fronts, the decisive battles occurred in courts of law. Following the blunders by the television networks in calling the Florida vote on the evening of November 7, 2000, and up through the U.S. Supreme Court's dramatic intervention five Tuesdays later, on December 12, the Bush camp and the Gore camp, an army of pundits, Florida lawyers, and an ample supply of law professors from around the country struggled to make sense of the legal wrangling in Florida. There were disputes about the legality of the notoriously confusing butterfly ballot in Palm Beach County, the legality of conducting manual recounts in some counties and not others, the legality of varying standards for interpreting chads in manual recounts (dimpled chads, dangling chads, chads through which light passes), the legality of excluding recounts finished after the statutorily imposed deadline, the legality of improperly completed overseas absentee ballots

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in Martin and Seminole counties, the legality of excluding recounts completed after the deadline imposed by the Florida Supreme Court, and a host of other questions of law. These disputes culminated in two controversial Florida Supreme Court decisions, which were celebrated by Democrats as vindications of the will of the people and denounced by Republicans as acts of judicial usurpation.

Partisan rivalry quickly turned to bitterness and anger in Florida, and people on both sides passed beyond the limits of political civility. There is surely something to be said for controversy in a democracy that worries about the fading political engagement of its citizens. Yet when the case passed to the highest court in the land, citizens had every right to expect that at least one group would maintain a degree of calm and dispassion: the scholars who serve as our national interpreters of the law. But *Bush v. Gore* provoked from the legal academy a response that was without precedent. Never before had a decision of the Supreme Court been subjected by large numbers of law professors to such swift, intense, and uncompromising denunciation in the popular press as greeted the December 12, 2000, ruling that effectively sealed Governor George W. Bush's victory in the presidential election. No doubt the professors' fury, which has yet to abate, tells us something about *Bush v. Gore*. It also tells us something important about the professors' understanding, or rather misunderstanding, of the public responsibilities of intellectuals.

**M**any aspects of the Court's 5–4 decision in *Bush v. Gore* and the Florida election controversy that it brought to an end should disturb the democratic conscience. Despite a certain skepticism about the use of the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, and a pronounced aversion to constitutional innovation, the U.S. Supreme Court's five conservative justices expanded equal protection doctrine and offered a novel reading of Article II, section 1, of the Constitution, which provides that each state shall appoint presidential electors "in such manner as the Legislature thereof may direct." Even if one allows that the recount ordered by the Florida Supreme Court violated equal protection guarantees (as seven of nine justices of the U.S. Supreme Court and three of seven judges of the Florida Supreme Court said), the Court's justification for halting the recount rather than directing the Florida court to continue it on the basis of constitutionally appropriate standards (as the two dissenting justices on the U.S. Supreme Court who acknowledged equal protection problems with the Florida recount wished) has the appearance of a technical legal trap being sprung. The evidence indicates that a disproportionate number of African American voters in Florida saw their votes spoiled. There is good reason to believe that on November 7, 2000, a majority of Florida voters cast their ballots *intending* to vote for Vice President Al Gore. All nine justices of the U.S. Supreme Court, moreover, faced a conflict of interest in deciding *Bush v. Gore*: The new president would very likely have the opportunity to nominate their new colleagues (or their successors). In addition, the Florida election controversy raised divisive political questions that the Court might have been wise to leave for resolution to Florida and, ultimately, to Congress.

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The foregoing are serious matters, and they demand careful public consideration. The problem is that much that has been written about *Bush v. Gore* by law professors in their role as public intellectuals has not advanced that kind of careful consideration. Instead, it has muddied the waters and stirred more partisan ire. Far from counteracting the public's tendency to collapse the legal dimension of the controversy into the political, many scholars have encouraged it. The two dimensions can—and must—be separated.

The overarching *political* question was whether the electoral system, in Florida and in the nation, reflected the will of the people. The fundamental *legal* question was whether the Florida Supreme Court's two critical decisions, on November 21 and December 8, complied with the requirements of American constitutional law. (In the first case, in a lawsuit brought by Vice President Gore, the Florida Supreme Court overruled a lower Florida court and extended by 12 days the deadline for protesting election returns and for officially certifying the results; on December 8, again in a lawsuit brought by the vice president, it overruled a lower Florida court and ordered as part of Gore's contest of the official certification a statewide manual recount of undervotes.) The U.S. Supreme Court was called upon to resolve *only* the legal dispute—the constitutionality of the conduct of the Florida Supreme Court.

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To listen to the nation's preeminent constitutional theorists tell it, *Bush v. Gore* was an obvious outrage—nothing less than a politically driven repudiation of democracy and the rule of law. In the months immediately following the decision, Bruce Ackerman, a professor of law and political science at Yale University and one of the nation's most prominent legal intellectuals, spoke for a substantial majority of law professors when he issued the brutal judgment—in agreement, he plausibly argued, with Justice John Paul Stevens's dissent—that the majority opinion was “a blatantly partisan act, without any legal basis whatsoever.” Leading conservative professors of constitutional law were not much heard from, and they were comparatively measured in their statements: By and large they found in *Bush v. Gore* a reasonable though flawed ruling. Two days after the decision, University of Utah law professor Michael McConnell argued in the *Wall Street Journal* that the Court was correct to conclude that the “manual recount, as ordered by the Supreme Court of Florida, would be unconstitutional,” but he found the “question of remedy” to be “the troubling aspect of the decision.” Conservatives, however, form only a small fraction of the legal professoriate. The great majority of their fellow law professors who spoke out on *Bush v. Gore* followed Ackerman and other leaders in pouring scorn on it:

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- Vanderbilt University law professor Suzanna Sherry maintained in the *New York Times* that “there is really very little way to reconcile this opinion other than that they wanted Bush to win.”
- Harvard University law professor Randall Kennedy proclaimed in the *American Prospect* that *Bush v. Gore* was a “hypocritical mishmash of ideas,” and that “the Court majority acted in bad faith and with partisan prejudice.”
- University of Texas law professor Sanford Levinson asserted in the *Nation* that “*Bush v. Gore* is all too easily explainable as the decision by five conservative Republicans—at least two of whom are eager to retire and be replaced by Republicans nominated by a Republican president—to assure the triumph of a fellow Republican who might not become president if Florida were left to its own legal process.”
- American University law professor Jamin Raskin opened an article in the *Washington Monthly* by describing the case as “quite demonstrably the worst Supreme Court decision in history,” and proceeded to compare it unfavorably with the notorious *Dred Scott* decision.
- A total of 554 law professors from 120 American law schools placed a full-page ad in the *New York Times* on January 13, 2001, declaring that the justices had acted as “political proponents for candidate Bush, not as judges. . . . By taking power from the voters, the Supreme Court has tarnished its own legitimacy.”
- Harvard University law professor Alan Dershowitz asserted in *Supreme Injustice: How the High Court Hijacked Election 2000* that “the decision in the Florida election case may be ranked as the single most corrupt decision in Supreme Court history, because it is the only one that I know of where the majority justices decided as they did because of the personal identity and political affiliation of the litigants. This was cheating, and a violation of the judicial oath.”

The gravamen of the complaint was that the five conservatives on the Court—Chief Justice William Rehnquist, and Justices Sandra Day O’Connor, Antonin Scalia, Anthony Kennedy, and Clarence Thomas—hypocritically threw overboard their long-held and repeatedly affirmed judicial philosophy of restraint, deference to the states, and a preference that the political process, rather than the courts, resolve disputes. In a breathtakingly important case, one in which that philosophy would have guided them to a correct result, they betrayed their principles. They energetically extended the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, they failed to defer to the Florida Supreme Court’s interpretation of Florida law, and they aggressively intervened in the political process before it had a chance to play itself out. According to the Court’s accusers, the majority’s rank partisan passion was the only explanation for this egregious betrayal. And the damage, they contended, would be considerable: *Bush v. Gore* would undermine the legitimacy of the Bush presidency—and of the Court itself.

If these charges are true, then *Bush v. Gore* deserves the opprobrium that law professors have showered upon it. Yet the scholarly critics generally seemed to regard the truth of their assertions as too obvious to require sustained evidence or argument, if they considered evidence or argument necessary at all. In fact, the careful study they failed to carry out before announcing their verdict shows that not a single one of their charges is obviously true, and that all, quite possibly, are false.

We do not mean to pass judgment on the ultimate correctness of the Court's decision. The case, which is complicated and raises a variety of multilayered questions of fact and law and politics, will be debated for years to come. Indeed, our aim is to defend the case's difficulty against those scholars who, sadly, insist that there is virtually nothing to understand about *Bush v. Gore* that cannot be summed up with the term *partisanship*. The scholars' hasty accusations of gross politicking may apply with more obvious justice to the accusers themselves than to the Court majority whom they convict.



Recurring defects in the legal academy's initial reaction to *Bush v. Gore* can be seen in the public pronouncements of three of its most eminent constitutional theorists: Ackerman, Cass Sunstein, and Ronald Dworkin.

Even those scholars whose public utterances were relatively responsible could be found making flamboyant assertions supported only by their authority. In the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Jan. 5, 2001), for example, University of Chicago law professor Sunstein declared that future historians would conclude that the Court had "discredited itself" with its "illegitimate, unprincipled, and undemocratic decision." We do not know what factors caused Sunstein to come to this harsh conclusion, because in his brief article he provided no arguments to support it. Nor did Sunstein mention that only three weeks earlier he had taken a much more measured view. On December 13, the day after the case was decided, Sunstein told ABC News reporter Jackie Judd that the opinion "was a stabilizing decision that restored order to a very chaotic situation." On the same day on National Public Radio, Sunstein observed: "The fact that five of them [the justices who signed the majority opinion] reached out for a new doctrine over four dissenting votes to stop counting—it's not partisan, but it's troublesome." While he did not "expect the Court to intervene so aggressively," Sunstein allowed on NPR that its decision may have provided "the simplest way for the constitutional system to get out of this. And it's possible it's the least bad way. The other ways maybe were more legitimate legally but maybe worse in terms of more chaotic." Many months later, in the *University of Chicago Law Review*, Sunstein attempted to synthesize these two seemingly irreconcilable views. His more detailed analysis of the case, however, falls far short of supporting the inflammatory language he used while the controversy was still hot.

## *The Making of the Public Mind*

A more troubling characteristic of the assaults on the Court was the tendency to misstate matters of fact and law. In the *New York Review of Books* (Jan. 11, 2001), New York University law professor Dworkin offered a high-minded warning against “reckless accusations” of partisanship: “It is, after all, inherently implausible that any—let alone all—of them [the five-member majority] would stain the Court’s reputation for such a sordid reason, and respect for the Court requires that we search for a different and more creditable explanation of their action.” In “sorrow,” however, Dworkin concluded that the “implausible” charge was correct—because “the legal case they offered for crucial aspects of their decisions was exceptionally weak.” Yet in his essay, Dworkin failed even to restate accurately the legal case the majority offered, and without meeting that minimal requirement he never fairly engaged the majority’s reasoning.

The defects in Dworkin’s approach begin with a tendentious characterization of events:

The conservatives stopped the democratic process in its tracks, with thousands of votes yet uncounted, first by ordering an unjustified stay of the statewide recount of the Florida vote that was already in progress, and then declaring, in one of the least persuasive Supreme Court opinions that I have ever read, that there was not time left for the recount to continue.

Whether the U.S. Supreme Court “stopped the democratic process in its tracks” depends in part on whether the two Florida Supreme Court rulings—of November 21 and December 8—that were guiding the process in Florida were lawful and democratic. A scholar might responsibly criticize the Court by showing that the two rulings were indeed lawful and democratic. But Dworkin examined neither of them.

If you believe—as three dissenting members of the Florida Supreme Court argued in that body’s 4–3 decision on December 8—that the majority’s ruling departed substantially from the legislative scheme in place on November 7 for resolving election disputes, created serious equal protection problems, and provided a remedy that was inherently unworkable and hence unlawful, the U.S. Supreme Court’s action begins to look very different. One might reasonably conclude that, far from having “stopped the democratic process in its tracks,” the Court rescued it.

Dworkin’s contention that the recount was stopped with “thousands of votes still uncounted” obscures the fact that Florida’s ballots were actually counted twice, by machines, as required by Florida law in close elections (where the margin of victory is 0.5 percent or less). At the same time, his anodyne reference to “the statewide recount of the Florida vote” glosses over the dubious parameters of the manual recount actually ordered by the Florida Supreme Court. It was not a *full* manual recount of the presidential vote. Nor was it a full manual recount of undamaged ballots that failed to yield a valid, machine-readable vote for president, as would appear to have been required by the Florida Supreme Court’s own principle that *all* votes should be counted in pursuit of a “clear indication of the intent of the voter.”

Rather, the Florida court ordered a manual recount of a subset of the so-called nonvotes, the *undervotes*, which are ballots (estimated to number about 60,000) with no machine-readable vote for president. Despite the objections raised by Florida chief justice Charles T. Wells in his dissent, indeed without explanation, the majority excluded from the recount *overvotes*, an entire class of undamaged ballots (estimated to number about 110,000) that were invalidated because machines detected multiple votes for president. And yet, like the undervotes, they too may have contained (and we now know did contain) discernible choices.

Dworkin also misstates the majority's holding, though he claims it was "quite simple." The U.S. Supreme Court, Dworkin incorrectly argues, held that the Florida recount violated equal protection only because it failed to establish a uniform and specific standard for determining in the recount whether a ballot revealed a voter's clear intention. In fact, the Court identified *four* discrete features of the manual recount ordered by the Florida Supreme Court that raised equal protection problems. In addition to the one Dworkin mentions, the Court singled out problems with the arbitrary exclusion of overvotes, the inclusion in the results of an uncompleted recount in Miami-Dade County, and the use of untrained and unsupervised personnel to conduct the statewide recount.

**H**aving failed to mention three of the four problems that *taken together*, the Supreme Court held, violated the fundamental right to vote protected by the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, Dworkin never reached the central question: whether, as the majority concluded, the Florida recount in its various features violated the principle articulated in *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964) that "the right of suffrage can be denied by a debasement or dilution of the weight of a citizen's vote just as effectively as by wholly prohibiting the free exercise of the franchise."

Though in the end, and for reasons that are not altogether clear, Dworkin allows that the Court's equal protection holding was "defensible," he insists that the controversial remedy, which he also misstates, was not. In Dworkin's understanding, the U.S. Supreme Court halted the Florida recount by adopting a "bizarre interpretation" of the intention of the Florida legislature expressed in the state's election law. The question concerned the state's approach to the December 12 federal "safe-harbor" deadline (Title III, section 5, of the U.S. Code), which provides that in counting electoral votes, Congress will not challenge presidential electors if states appoint them by the safe-harbor date and on the basis of laws in place before the election. As Dworkin correctly notes, adherence to the federal safe-harbor law is not mandatory—if Florida wished to put its electoral votes at risk by failing to meet the December 12 deadline, it was free under federal law to do so. But, according to Dworkin, the Court read into the Florida statutory scheme a legal obligation to meet the "safe-harbor" deadline and then, "in violation of the most basic principles of constitutional law," imposed that interpretation of Florida law on the Florida Supreme Court.

But the majority argued that in addressing the question of remedy it was giving effect to the Florida Supreme Court's interpretation of Florida law:

Because the Florida Supreme Court has said that the Florida Legislature intended to obtain the safe-harbor benefits of 3 U.S.C. §5, Justice Breyer's proposed remedy—remanding to the Florida Supreme Court for its ordering of a constitutionally proper contest until December 18—contemplates action in violation of the Florida election code, and hence could not be part of an “appropriate” order authorized by Fla. Stat. §102.168(8) (2000).

In other words, the majority claimed that the Florida Supreme Court *itself* had interpreted Florida law as imposing the December 12 deadline. Indeed, the Florida Supreme Court appears to affirm that deadline as many four times in its December 11 opinion (which it issued in direct response to the U.S. Supreme Court's request on December 4 for clarification of the grounds for the Florida Court's November 21 decision). But Dworkin never examines the December 11 opinion.

In fashioning its remedy, the majority plausibly claimed to rely upon and defer to the Florida Supreme Court's interpretation of Florida law. In fact, it was the remedy contemplated by the dissents of Justices Stephen Breyer and David Souter, and endorsed by Dworkin himself, that very likely would have involved the Court in repudiating the Florida Supreme Court's reading of Florida law. To be sure, even notable defenders of the U.S. Supreme Court's opinion regard the remedy as its weakest link, but to be fairly criticized it must first be correctly understood.

Perhaps the most serious infirmity in the law professors' response to *Bush v. Gore* was the tendency, under the guise of legal analysis, to abandon legal analysis. In contrast to Sunstein and Dworkin, Ackerman did not so much as pause in his attack to caution against premature accusations of partisanship. His verdict in the *American Prospect* (Feb. 12, 2001) was uncompromising: “Succumbing to the crudest partisan temptations, the Republicans managed to get their man into the White House, but at grave cost to the nation's ideals and institutions. It will take a decade or more to measure the long-term damage of this electoral crisis to the Presidency and the Supreme Court—but especially in the case of the Court, *Bush v. Gore* will cast a very long shadow.”

As Ackerman explained in an article that appeared almost simultaneously in the *London Review of Books* (Feb. 8, 2001), the trouble with the 2000 election began with “the gap between the living and written Constitutions.” Under what Ackerman derisively calls “the written Constitution,” the president is selected by the Electoral College, which gives smaller states disproportionate representation. But “the living Constitution”—which is nowhere written down or codified—rejects that unjust formula, having “created a system in which Americans think and act as if they choose their President directly.” Because Gore won the popular vote, “George W. Bush's victory is entirely a product of the federalist bias inherited from 1787.” For Ackerman, *Bush v. Gore* was part of the vast right-wing conspiracy, and, he declared in the *American Prospect*, it called for drastic countermeasures:

“When sitting [Supreme Court] justices retire or die, the Senate should refuse to confirm any nominations offered up by President Bush.”

Ackerman is far clearer regarding what should be done about the Court’s perfidy than he is about what exactly was wrong with the justices’ work. Whereas in the *American Prospect* he accuses the Court of acting lawlessly, in the *London Review of Books* he accuses it of foolishly applying the wrong law—the law that actually exists (the written Constitution), rather than the one he believes time has made more relevant (the living Constitution). At other times in the same article, Ackerman argues only halfheartedly that the Court incorrectly applied the “written Constitution.” He concedes in the *London Review of Books* that there were strong pragmatic reasons for the Court to get involved: “If one is haunted by the specter of acute crisis, one can view the justices’ intervention more charitably. However much the Court may have hurt itself, did it not save the larger Constitutional structure from greater damage? Perhaps.” He even goes so far as to acknowledge, without actually engaging the legal arguments of the majority or of the dissenters, that the Court’s central holding, which he misstates much as does Dworkin, was correct: He says that he does “not challenge [the Court’s] doctrinal conclusion.”

In the end, Ackerman’s problem is not that the Court intervened, but that it did so on Bush’s behalf rather than Gore’s: “The more democratic solution would have been . . . to stop the Bush brothers from creating Constitutional chaos by submitting a second slate of legislatively selected electors. The court could have taken care of all the serious difficulties by enjoining [Florida governor] Jeb Bush not to send this slate to Congress.”

Leave aside the considerable legal difficulties in Ackerman’s call for the Court to issue an injunction that was not requested by any party to the litigation against other persons and entities that were also not parties to the litigation. The larger problem is that he would have had the Court issue orders to elected state officials based on a nonexistent document (the living Constitution), to whose authority neither Bush nor Gore ever appealed, to protect a recount that he admits violated the law the justices were sworn to uphold. What, one wonders, is democratic or lawful about that?

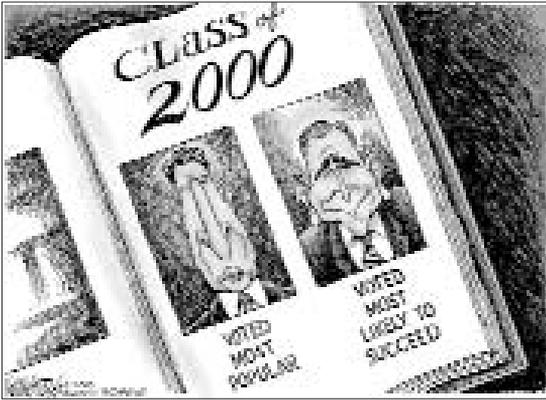


Of course, it is possible that while the critics failed to state accurately the arguments in *Bush v. Gore*, their basic charge—that the Supreme Court undermined its legitimacy by riding roughshod over its own principles to reach a purely partisan conclusion—is still correct. Yet even a brief examination of those principles—an examination that none of the major critics offered the public in conjunction with their harsh condemnations—and reflection on the critics’ premises and predictions reveal that the law professors’ prima facie case against the decision is at best a caricature.

Consider first the gross oversimplification in the charge that *Bush v. Gore* violated the majority’s core jurisprudential commitments. The Supreme Court’s conservatives have indeed shown a commitment to ruling generally on the basis of

explicit textual statements and well-settled precedents rather than abstract values thought to be implicit in the constitutional text and previous opinions. These conservatives have also displayed an instinct to avoid unnecessarily interfering in state court matters, and a readiness to recognize zones of state authority in which Congress is forbidden to tread. The solicitude for state power is particularly visible in habeas corpus litigation, where the Court has been increasingly reluctant to allow federal courts to second-guess state convictions. It can also be seen in the Court's insistence that Congress's power to regulate interstate commerce has limits, and in its expansive interpretation of state immunity against suits conferred upon state governments by the 11th Amendment. However, the majority's federalism is scarcely recognizable in the crude version of it that law professors constantly invoke against *Bush v. Gore*.

In no sense does the modern conservative vision of federalism contend that state action—including state court action—is not subject to federal court review for compliance with the federal Constitution. In fact, the conservative justices often vote to reverse state supreme court holdings on grounds that they offend federal constitutional imperatives.



Only six months before *Bush v. Gore*, the same U.S. Supreme Court majority reversed the New Jersey Supreme Court's decision that the Boy Scouts could not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.

The state court had held that the Boy Scouts were a public accommodation within the meaning of a state anti-discrimination law; the Supreme Court said that the law, so interpreted, violated the Boy Scouts' First Amendment right of expressive association. The parallel with *Bush v. Gore* is exact: The Supreme Court invalidated a state court interpretation of state law on the ground that what state law required offended the federal Constitution.

Nor is it true that the Court's conservatives were uniformly hostile to applying the equal protection clause to strike down state actions before *Bush v. Gore*. In a series of voting rights cases beginning with the 1993 decision in *Shaw v. Reno*, the same five justices relied on the equal protection clause to strike down legislative districting schemes motivated primarily by racial considerations. The conservative justices have also used the equal protection clause to rein in affirmative action programs. To be sure, the conservative interpretation of this clause is different from the liberal one, and in critical respects it is less expansive. It still serves, however, for the conservatives as a constraint on state action, and it is by no means obviously inconsistent with the holding the Court majority issued in *Bush v. Gore*.

In addition, Chief Justice Rehnquist's concurring opinion, which argued that the Florida court changed the state's election laws in violation of Article

II, section 1 of the Constitution, has been criticized as hypocritical. Conservatives, the criticism goes, profess to respect state court holdings on state law, yet in this instance the chief justice—and Justices Scalia and Thomas, who joined him—dissected the Florida court’s interpretation of Florida’s election statutes. Again, however, conservatives, and certainly the Court’s three most conservative justices, do not argue that the deference owed to state courts on matters of state law entitles states to violate the federal Constitution. From the conservatives’ point of view, Article II, section 1 of the Constitution, which declares that a state shall appoint presidential electors “in such manner as the legislature thereof may direct,” provides an explicit textual obligation on the part of the state courts to interpret—rather than rewrite or disregard—state law concerning presidential elections.

**T**he willingness of the conservatives to review state supreme court interpretations of state law is particularly evident in cases involving the takings clause of the Fifth Amendment, which forbids government seizures of private property without just compensation. In 1998, for example, the Court ruled that interest on clients’ money held by their lawyers constituted “private property” for purposes of the takings clause. This contradicted the view of Texas property law taken by the



Texas Supreme Court, which had promulgated a rule under which interest from trust accounts was used to pay for counsel for indigents. In another case, the Court said it reserved the right to examine the “background principles of nuisance and property law” under which a state supreme court determined that the state can restrain uses of private property without compensating property owners. In one case, Justices Scalia and O’Connor even dissented from a denial of certiorari on grounds that the Court should not be too deferential to state court interpretations of state law in takings matters. “As a general matter,” Justice Scalia wrote, “the Constitution leaves the law of real property to the States. But just as a State may not deny rights protected under the Federal Constitution through pretextual procedural rulings . . . neither may it do so by invoking nonexistent rules of state substantive law.” The opinion in *Bush v. Gore* is based on the same principle: While the Court owes great deference to the Florida Supreme Court’s view of Florida law, that deference ends where federal law requires the Court to ensure that state supreme courts have reasonably interpreted state law.

The larger point is not that the majority opinion and concurrence in *Bush v. Gore* were perfectly consistent with the conservatives’ judicial philosophy. Whether they were is debatable. As we have noted, there is certainly some-

thing unexpected in the majority's willingness to expand equal protection doctrine and in the concurring justices' novel Article II argument. But noting those oddities, and appreciating the novel circumstances in which they arose, should be the start of the discussion, not the end of it.

Consider next the accusation that in *Bush v. Gore* the conservative majority was driven by a self-interested political motive: A conservative president would appoint like-minded jurists to the Supreme Court. The critics' failure to properly engage the Court's reasoning suggests that partisan corruption on the justices' part was not the scholars' sad conclusion, as they claim, but rather their operative premise from the beginning. But it is a dogmatic and dangerous premise, especially for intellectuals engaged in shaping public opinion. For one thing, it obviates the need for careful evaluation of legal arguments, converting them, before examination, from reasons to be weighed and considered into rationalizations to be deflected and discarded. And the premise is easily turned against its user. It is not difficult to identify potent partisan interests driving the scholarly critics of *Bush v. Gore*. Many were stalwart supporters of the Clinton administration, and many keenly favored Gore for president. Were Gore appointing federal judges, many would have significantly improved their chances of placing their students in prestigious judicial clerkships, as well as of disseminating their constitutional theories throughout the judiciary.

Consider finally the prediction that *Bush v. Gore* would gravely damage President Bush's and the Court's own legitimacy. That claim is subject to empirical testing. And the tests prove it false—that is, if legitimacy is regarded as a function of public opinion. By April 2001, after his first 100 days in office, President Bush enjoyed a 63 percent overall approval rating in a *Washington Post*-ABC News poll. In response to the question “Do you consider Bush to have been legitimately elected as president, or not?” fully 62 percent answered affirmatively. That was actually a small increase over the 55 percent who regarded Bush's election as legitimate in the immediate aftermath of the Court's decision. Bush's popularity will wax and wane like any other president's, but he does not seem to have legitimacy problems.

Nor has the Court itself fared badly in the public's eye. The Pew Center for the People and the Press has been measuring the Court's approval rating since 1987. In that time, the rating has fluctuated from a low of 65 percent in 1990 to a high of 80 percent in 1994. In January 2001, the Court's favorability rating stood at 68 percent. Three months later, it stood at 72 percent. More interestingly, the Court was viewed favorably by 67 percent of Democrats.

The continued high opinion of the Supreme Court is consistent with other surveys that straddle the date of the Court's action. The Gallup Organization, for example, asked people immediately after the decision how much confidence they had in the Court. Forty-nine percent of Americans had either “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence, up slightly from the 47 percent who expressed such confidence the previous June. Both the Pew and Gallup polls suggest that the partisan composition of the support changed somewhat following the Court's action, with Democratic confidence declining and Republican increasing. That shift, however, does not constitute a national legitimacy crisis,

any more than conservative disaffection with the Warren Court did during the 1960s. The Court has enjoyed a remarkably stable level of public confidence and trust over a long period of time.

The academics worrying themselves about the crisis of the Court's legitimacy present as a sociological claim what is really normative criticism: The Court deserves to lose the public's confidence, or, put differently, as a result of *Bush v. Gore* the Court has lost legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of academic pundits (namely, themselves) whom the public ought to follow. The Rehnquist Court's "loss" of legitimacy among leading constitutional theorists might be more troubling if it had ever enjoyed such legitimacy. But despite all the expressions of concern for the Rehnquist Court's standing following its December fall from grace, it is hard to find any evidence that the Court's more prominent scholarly critics ever held it in much esteem. Sunstein, whose writings on the Court reflect a complicated relationship, is an exception. But Ackerman and Dworkin certainly are not. Even before *Bush v. Gore*, their work dripped with disdain for the conservative majority, whose legitimacy they discovered only when they felt at liberty to say that it had been lost for good.



**B***ush v. Gore* was a hard case. The Court confronted novel and difficult legal questions, both parties made plausible arguments, the political stakes loomed large, partisan passions ran excruciatingly high, and the controversy deeply implicated fundamental concerns about justice and democratic self-government. Reasonable people may differ over whether *Bush v. Gore* was correctly decided. But the charge that the decision is indefensible is itself indefensible. That this untenable charge has been made by legal scholars repeatedly and emphatically, and with dubious support in fact and law, is an abuse of authority and a betrayal of trust. If scholars do not maintain a reputation for fairness and disinterestedness, their own legitimacy may well suffer grievously in the eyes of the public, and so could American democracy.

When scholars address the public on matters about which they are expert, the public has a right to expect that the scholars' reason, not their passion, is speaking. Because liberal democracy is grounded in the rule of law, and because law is a technical discipline—the resolution of whose cases and controversies often involves the interpretation of arcane statutes, the mastery of voluminous case law, the understanding of layers of history, and the knowledge of complicated circumstances—the public is particularly dependent on scholars for accurate and dispassionate analysis of legal matters. Those scholars who assume the office of public intellectual must exercise a heightened degree of care and restraint in their public pronouncements.

Scholarly restraint—so lacking in the aftermath of *Bush v. Gore*—is indeed compatible with lively participation by scholars in democratic debate. By putting truth before politics, out in public as well as inside the ivory tower, scholars make their distinctive contribution to that precious public good, reasoned and responsible judgment. □

# Knowing the Public Mind

by Karlyn Bowman

In their 1940 book *The Pulse of Democracy*, George Gallup and Saul Rae defended a new instrument, the public opinion poll, but they cautioned as well that polling, an industry then just out of its “swaddling clothes,” would need to be evaluated afresh in the future. The infant industry, long since matured, is full of life today. Polls are a commonplace of American life, conducted almost nonstop on almost every conceivable subject. But some of the same questions Gallup and Rae asked about polling six decades ago are still being asked: Is public opinion unreliable as a guide in politics? Are samples truly representative? What are polling’s implications for the processes of democracy? And along with the old questions, there are significant new ones, too: Is the proliferation of polls, for example, seriously devaluing the polling enterprise?

The amount of polling on a subject much in the news of late may suggest an affirmative answer to that last question. In late July, the Gallup Organization asked Americans for their views on embryonic stem-cell research, a matter that has vexed scholars, biologists, and theologians. From August 3 to August 5, Gallup polled Americans again. On August 9, immediately after President George W. Bush announced his decision to provide limited federal funding for the research, the survey organization was in the field once more with an instant poll to gauge reaction. From August 10 to August 12, Gallup interviewers polled yet again. Gallup wasn’t the only polling organization to explore Americans’ views on this complex issue. Ten other pollsters, working with news organizations or academic institutions, conducted polls, too. Hoping to influence the debate and the president’s decision, advocacy groups commissioned polls of their own. The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International, a supporter of stem-cell research, reported that a solid majority of Americans were in favor of federal funding, and touted the findings in newspaper advertisements shortly before the president spoke. The National Council of Catholic Bishops, an organization opposed to stem-cell research, released survey findings that showed how the wording of questions on stem-cell research can affect a poll’s results.

So much polling activity on a single issue isn’t unusual anymore, and it clearly indicates how powerful a force polls have become today. Fourteen national pollsters release data publicly on a regular basis, as do



*Can pollsters really see into these minds?*

scores of others at the state and local level. Many of these organizations also poll for private clients, though much of that work never becomes public; market research on new products and consumer preferences (conducted privately for the most part) dwarfs the public side of the business. In the political life of the nation, campaign and public pollsters, particularly

those associated with media organizations, have enormous influence, and they are the focus of this essay.

The Roper Center, at the University of Connecticut, collects and archives polling data for most of the national survey organizations that release their data publicly. The Roper archive, the oldest and largest devoted to public opinion data, contains about 9,000 questions from the 1960s—and more than 150,000 questions from the 1990s. Nine organizations regularly contributed to the Roper archive in the 1960s. Today, 104 do. Materials from Gallup and Harris, two of the most familiar names in the survey business, represented slightly more than 75 percent of the Roper Center's holdings in the 1960s; in the 1990s, they accounted for less than 25 percent. There were 16 questions asked about Medicare in 1965, the year that legislation became law, and more than 1,400 questions about the Clinton health care plan in 1994, the year that proposed legislation died. From 1961 to 1974, pollsters asked some 1,400 questions about Vietnam; in the eight months from August 1990 to March 1991, they asked 800 questions about the Persian Gulf War. A combined total of 400 questions were asked about the 10 first ladies from Eleanor Roosevelt through Barbara Bush; twice that many questions were asked about First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton alone.

The polling business has grown dramatically outside the United States as well. Five firms polled for major British newspapers and television stations in the last days of the British election campaign this past June. About a dozen different news organizations, including three from the United States, conducted polls during the 2000 Mexican presidential campaign. The presence of independent pollsters surveying voters on election day in Mexico, and the expeditious broadcast of their findings, reinforced the belief that the election, which was won by the challenger, Vicente Fox, was fair. The *New Yorker* recently chronicled the work of a political pollster in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. In the past three Mongolian national elections, the pollster “predicted the winner within fewer than 2.8 percentage points.” The article described how one of the pollster's young associates traveled by motorbike, in a remote province with no roads, to speak to prospective Mongolian voters. When he handed out his questionnaires, the nomads began weeping because, as the young man said, “for the first time they feel that somebody cares about what they think.”

**P**olls in the United States have achieved a degree of prominence in public life that was inconceivable when George Gallup, Archibald Crossley, and Elmo Roper started using scientific sampling techniques almost seven decades ago to gauge Americans' opinions. Some of the most familiar polling questions today (“What is the most important problem facing the United States?”; “Do you approve or disapprove of how the president is handling his job?”; “In politics, do you consider yourself a Democrat or a Republican?”) were asked for the first time

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by those pollsters—the founding fathers—in the 1930s. All three measured Franklin Roosevelt’s popularity and predicted his victory in 1936. Roosevelt himself became an enthusiast for polls after they predicted his win, and he enlisted Hadley Cantril of Princeton University to measure opinion about issues that concerned him, particularly views about the war in Europe. Cantril used Gallup’s facilities at first, but he later set up an independent operation that provided secret poll reports to the White House. Harry Truman, not surprisingly, became skeptical about polls after their famously incorrect prediction that Thomas E. Dewey would defeat him in 1948. Most observers date the modern era of political polling to Louis Harris’s work for John F. Kennedy in 1960. Since then, pollsters working privately for political candidates have become so influential that virtually no candidate runs for major office without hiring one.

THE PUBLIC SIDE OF THE  
POLLING BUSINESS DERIVES  
ITS GREAT INFLUENCE IN  
PART FROM MEDIA ALLIANCES  
AND COVERAGE.

Private polling is used in almost every aspect of political campaigns today—from strategic planning to message development to fund-raising—and at every stage of campaigns. And the activity doesn’t stop when the campaigning is over. In a post-election memo to Jimmy Carter in 1976, Patrick Caddell, the president-elect’s pollster, argued that politics and governing could not be separated. Thus was launched “the permanent campaign,” with its armies of pollsters and political consultants. Once in office, presidents continue to poll privately, and they collect data from the public pollsters as well. During the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations, according to political scientists Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, “public opinion analysis became an integral part of the institution of the presidency,” with staff members given the task of monitoring the data. Successive administrations have become “veritable warehouses for public opinion data.” (The private polling that’s done for presidents and paid for by the political parties is lucrative indeed for pollsters—and often helps attract new clients.)

The public side of the polling business derives its great influence in part from media alliances and coverage. Since the earliest days of polling, pollsters who release data publicly have depended on news organizations to disseminate their findings. Gallup syndicated his polls in various newspapers; Crossley polled for Hearst, and Roper for *Fortune*. It wasn’t until 1967 that a news organization—CBS News—started conducting its own polls. CBS polled alone at first, but joined forces with the *New York Times* in 1975. (In the 1990s, CBS News and the *Times* asked Americans more than 10,000 questions.) Some of the other prominent partnerships today include Gallup, CNN, and *USA Today*; Harris Interactive, *Time*, and CNN; and Opinion Dynamics and Fox News. ABC News polls both alone and with

the *Washington Post*. A bipartisan team led by Democrat Peter D. Hart and Republican Robert Teeter polls regularly for NBC News and the *Wall Street Journal*. Princeton Survey Research Associates polls for Bloomberg News and, separately, for *Newsweek*. Zogby International, which recently conducted a poll for NBC, worked with Reuters during the 2000 campaign.

Like their counterparts that poll for candidates, pollsters associated with news organizations are involved in all phases of the permanent political campaign. Pollsters inquire about how the president-elect is handling his transition, and whether the outgoing president is making a graceful exit. In the first 100 days of the Kennedy administration, Gallup asked four questions about how the new president was handling his job. During the same period in Jimmy Carter's presidency, four national pollsters asked 14 job approval questions. In George W. Bush's first 100 days, 14 pollsters asked 44 such questions. The total is substantially higher if one includes questions about how the president has handled specific aspects of his job, such as the economy, the environment, or foreign policy. Americans have already been asked whom they will vote for in the presidential election and senatorial contests in 2004. All this activity is a mark of how successful the pollsters have become, but it has also given rise to criticism that the sheer volume of the activity may be diminishing the value of polls.

In the media/pollster partnerships, the needs of the media often trump those of the pollsters. The press has to work quickly, whereas good polling usually takes time. The competitive news environment has pollsters vying to provide the first reaction to a breaking news story. Kathleen Frankovic, director of surveys at CBS, reports that it took Gallup two weeks to tell the country who won the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates. In 1992, CBS had results within 15 minutes of the second presidential debate. Technological advances have made it possible to conduct interviews and to process responses faster and more inexpensively than in the past, but the advances don't necessarily make the practice wise. Instant polls such as those conducted after President Bush's speech on stem-cell research and Connie Chung's interview with congressman Gary Condit (D-Calif.) may satisfy a journalist's requirement for speed and timeliness (and perhaps even sensationalism), but they do not always satisfy a pollster's need for adequate samples. To understand just what the public is saying often takes time, and time is a luxury media organizations don't have.

**T**he media's preoccupation with speed caught up with the pollsters in spectacular fashion last year. Although their record of prediction in the 2000 national election was one of the best ever, the exit-poll consortium (the five networks and the Associated Press pool resources and conduct a joint poll of voters leaving selected precincts) was roundly criticized for its role in precipitous election-night calls. CNN's internal report on the election night fiasco argued that "television news organizations staged a collective drag race . . . recklessly endangering the electoral process, the political life of the nation and their own credibility." As the results of a national *Los Angeles Times* poll make clear, the public objects to the

practice of calling elections before voting has finished. Three-quarters of those surveyed told interviewers that the networks' practice of predicting the results in some parts of the country while citizens in other parts of the country are still casting ballots "is interfering with the voting process and the practice should be stopped." (Just 22 percent said that the results constitute "breaking news" and that the networks should be allowed to continue the practice.)

Because competition in the news business is so great, polls are being conducted and reported about many matters on which opinion isn't firm—or may not exist at all. Questions about a candidate's strength or a voter's intention, asked years before an election, are largely meaningless. In Gallup's first poll about the stem-cell controversy, taken in July 2001, only nine percent of those interviewed said they were following the debate about government funding "very closely," and 29 percent

THE MEDIA'S PREOCCUPATION  
WITH SPEED CAUGHT UP  
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"somewhat closely." Sixty percent said they were following it "not too closely" or "not closely at all." Asked whether the government should fund this type of research, 57 percent of respondents said that they "didn't know enough to say." In the weeks that followed, Americans did not take a short course in molecular biology or theology. Yet many pollsters reported their views as if they had. Poll findings released by advocacy organizations—on issues from stem-cell research to missile defense—have become weapons in political battles, and the development may undermine polling generally if it causes people to believe that you can prove anything with a poll.

In his forthcoming book *Flattering the Leviathan*, political scientist Robert Weissberg levels a serious indictment at contemporary polling on policy issues. He argues that polls, as currently constructed, "measure the wishes and preferences of respondents, neither of which reflect the costs or risks associated with a policy," and he urges policy makers to ignore them. He takes two superficially popular ideas—that the government should provide money to hire more grade school teachers and that it should provide money to make day care more affordable and accessible—and subjects them to rigorous scrutiny through a poll of his own. Opinions about the ideas turn out to be far more complicated, and far more skeptical, than the initial positive responses suggested. Weissberg believes that "contemporary polls tell us almost nothing worthwhile about policy choices facing the nation." In his view, polls have an important place in the political life of the nation when they measure personal values and subjective opinions, but they subvert democracy when they purport to provide guidance on complicated policy debates.

Although the public displays no overt hostility to polls, fewer Americans are bothering to respond these days to the pollsters who phone

them. Rob Daves, of the Minnesota Poll, says that “nearly all researchers who have been in the profession longer than a decade or so agree that no matter what the measure, response rates to telephone surveys have been declining.” Harry O’Neill, a principal at Roper Starch Worldwide, calls the response-rate problem the “dirty little secret” of the business. Industry-sponsored studies from the 1980s reported refusal rates (defined as the proportion of people whom surveyors reached on the phone but who declined either to participate at all or to complete an interview) as ranging between 38 and 46 percent. Two studies done by the market research arm of Roper Starch Worldwide, in 1995 and 1997, each put the refusal rate at 58 percent. A 1997 study by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press found statistically significant differences on five of 85 questions between those who participated in a five-day survey and those who responded in a more rigorous survey, conducted over eight weeks, that was designed to coax reluctant individuals into participating.

Much more research needs to be done on the seriousness of the response-rate problem, but it does seem to pose a major challenge to the business and might help to usher in new ways of polling. (Internet polling, for example, could be the wave of the future—if truly representative samples can be constructed.) Polling error may derive from other sources, too, including the construction of samples, the wording of questions, the order in which questions are asked, and interviewer and data-processing mistakes.

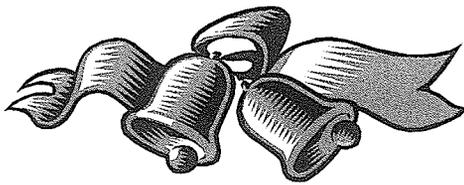
**T**he way many polls are conducted and reported today obscures some very important findings they have to offer about public opinion. Polls taken over long periods of time, for example, reveal a profound continuity about many of the core values that define American society. Huge majorities consistently tell pollsters that they believe in

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God and that religion is important in their daily lives. In 1939, 41 percent of those surveyed by Gallup answered “yes” when asked if they had attended church or synagogue in the past seven days. When Gallup asked the same question this year, an identical 41 percent answered “yes.” Americans’ views about the role of the United States in the world show a similar long-

term stability. In 1947, 68 percent of those surveyed told National Opinion Research Center interviewers that it would be best for the future of the United States if it played an active role in world affairs, and 25 percent said that it would be best for the country if it did not. When the question was asked 50 years later, 66 percent favored an active role and 28 per-

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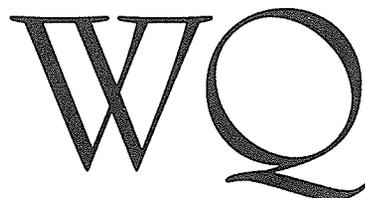
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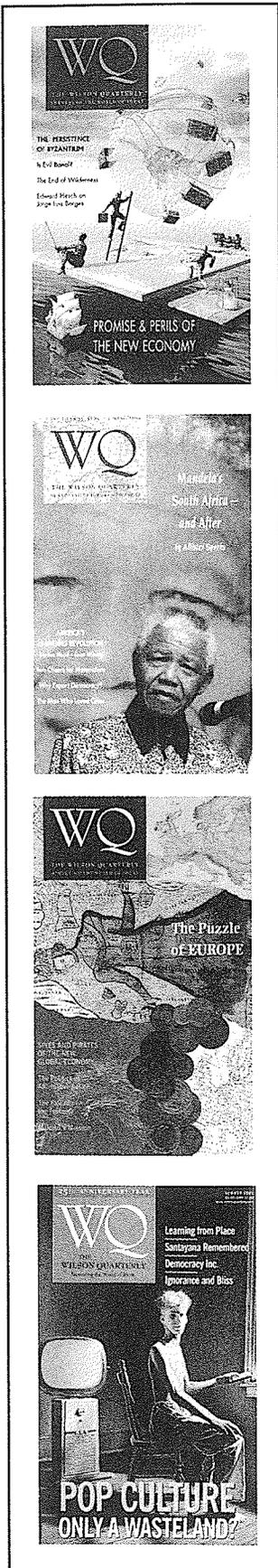
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cent were opposed. In dozens of iterations of the question, opinion hasn't budged. Americans are cranky at times about shouldering so many burdens abroad, but they are internationalists nonetheless.

There are other telling instances of stability. When Gallup asked in 1938 whether the government should be responsible for providing medical care to people unable to pay for it, 81 percent said "yes." When the question was repeated in 1991, 80 percent so responded. Polling on the minimum wage, too, shows consistent support for a wage floor beneath American workers. Many early observers of American democracy feared that public opinion would be too fickle and volatile to make democracy successful. But the polling data on many issues reveal a public strong and unyielding in its convictions.

Polls can also reveal how the nation has changed its mind. In 1958, only four percent of whites approved of marriage between "whites and colored people." Today, a solid majority of whites approve. In 1936, only 31 percent of respondents said they would be willing to vote for a woman for president, even if she were qualified in every respect. Today, more than 90 percent respond that they would vote for a woman. When Gallup asks people whether they would vote for a black, a Jew, or a homosexual, solid majorities answer affirmatively. (People are evenly divided about voting for an atheist for president, a finding that underscores the depth of Americans' religious convictions.) In 1955, Americans were divided about which they enjoyed more—time on the job or time off the job. Today, time away from work wins hands down. The work ethic is still strong, but Americans are taking leisure more seriously than they once did.

**P**olls show that Americans are of two minds on many matters, and that makes the findings difficult to interpret. Take the issue of abortion. When Americans are asked whether abortion is an act of murder, pluralities or majorities tell pollsters that it is. When they are asked whether the choice to have an abortion should be left to women and their doctors, large majorities answer that it should. Americans tell pollsters that they want government off the back of business—even as they also tell them that government should keep a sharp eye on business practices. The nation wants a strong and assertive military, but Americans are reluctant to send troops abroad. The "on the one hand/on the other hand" responses to many questions are a prominent feature of American public opinion, and the deep ambivalence seems unlikely to change.

It's essential in a democracy to know what citizens are thinking, and polls are a valuable resource for understanding a complex, heterogeneous public. Gallup and Rae had high hopes that polls would improve the machinery of democracy. But polls can be both overused and misused. Instead of oiling the machinery of democracy, the polls now seem to be clogging it up. In an article in this magazine in 1979, the editors wrote, "Americans today seem obsessed with their reflection in the polls." If contemporary refusal rates are a fair indication of their interest, that is no longer the case. Their former enthusiasm is now ennui. □

# History for a Democracy

by Wilfred M. McClay

Americans are said to be notoriously indifferent to the past. They are thought to be forward looking, practical, innovative, and results oriented, a people passionately committed to new beginnings and second (and third) chances. They are optimists and dreamers, whom the green light of personal betterment and social transformation always beckons, and whose attitude toward history was conclusively (if crudely) summarized in the dismissive aphorisms of Henry Ford, the most famous perhaps being this: “History is more or less bunk.”

Maybe those propensities were inevitable features of the American way of life. The United States has been a remarkably energetic and prosperous mass democracy, shaped by the dynamic forces of economic growth, individual liberty, material acquisitiveness, technological innovation, social mobility, and ethnic multiplicity. In so constantly shifting a setting, a place where (in Henry David Thoreau’s words) “the old have no very important advice to give the young,” what point is there in hashing over a past that is so easily and profitably left behind? “Old deeds for old people,” sneered Thoreau, “and new deeds for new.” That could almost be the national motto.

Even on the rare occasions when tradition enjoys its moment in the spotlight, the nation’s love affair with possibility manages to slip on stage and steal the show. Consider, for example, the standard fare in an outdoor concert for the Fourth of July. Along with Sousa’s “Stars and Stripes Forever” and Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture*, one can expect to hear Copland’s stately *Lincoln Portrait*, with an inspirational narrative that draws on the 16th president’s own words. But in addition to familiar phrases from the Gettysburg Address, Copland includes the following: “The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. . . . As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves and then we shall save our country.”

*Disenthrall* is a rather strong word to use against the past on a day of national piety. Yet Lincoln’s words seem merely to echo Thoreau’s sentiments—or, for that matter, those of Thomas Paine, who urged his contemporaries to discard useless precedents and think “as if we were the first men that thought.” Such statements limn a familiar American paradox: We are to honor our past on Independence Day precisely because it teaches us that we should become independent of our past.

What, indeed, could be more American than to treat the past as a snare, something to which we are always potentially in thrall? Yet by that standard, it would be hard to account for a notable phenomenon of the American summer of 2001. I refer to the re-emergence of John Adams—revolutionary leader,

## *The Making of the Public Mind*

Founding Father, second president of the United States, sparring partner of Jefferson, nonadmirer of Paine—as an icon of our public life. Who can have failed to notice Adams’s round and rosy countenance peering at us with 18th-century seriousness and stolidity from the cover of David McCullough’s new biography—the publishing sensation of the summer, a 751-page tome stacked high in nearly every bookstore in every mall and airport terminal in the land?

Adams hardly seems the stuff of which modern bestsellers are made. Despite his boundless energy and ambition, and his many accomplishments, he cannot be judged an especially skillful politician or a notably successful president. (It was not for nothing that he was our first one-term president, and his son John Quincy our second.) A man of high integrity, he was free of the lower Jeffersonian or Clintonian vices that stir the interest of tabloid-minded readers. Nor was he a figure cast in the classic heroic mold, being small and rotund, with a vain and prickly personality and a self-confessed tendency to fits of pettiness and pique. His sober and distrustful view of human nature, including his own, would earn him a thumbs-down from the positive thinkers in the Oprah Book Club. His approach to politics was grounded in a belief in the inevitability of permanent social and economic inequalities—and that approach, even in his day, was slowly but surely on its way out of American life.

And yet, astonishing to report, there are close to a *million* hardcover copies of McCullough’s book in print. We cannot account for this success merely by noting the author’s literary gifts or Simon and Schuster’s marketing prowess. There must be other factors boosting Adams’s popular appeal. Does the revival of his reputation have something to do with public disillusionment over the low character of our public officials, past and present, and a desire to find at least one who was estimable? Might it relate to Adams’s stubborn commitment to principle throughout his political career, a commitment that repeatedly cost him power and influence—in stark contrast to recent politicians whose success seems directly related to their utter lack of principle? Does it have to do with the steadily declining reputation of Thomas Jefferson, so often seen as Adams’s opposite number? Could it be because of the human interest of Adams’s unusually devoted and companionate relationship with his wife, Abigail? Is it because Adams’s principled straight talk and aversion to “spin” and partisanship contrast so sharply with the pervasive verbal dissembling of our current political culture?

**A**ll of those possible explanations have some merit, but the real reason may be a good deal simpler: A considerable part of the American public actually has a broad and sustained hunger for history and has repeatedly shown that it will respond generously to an accessible, graceful work about an important subject by a trusted and admired author. Americans yearn for solid knowledge of their nation’s origins, which in a real sense are their own origins too. Their hunger is entirely healthy and natural, though it is often neglected and ill fed.

One could see the yearning in the celebration of the nation’s bicentennial in 1976, particularly in the excitement generated by the spectacle of the Tall Ships.

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*A hunger for history: Crowds jam Civil War reenactments like this one in Gettysburg, Pa.*

That parade of venerable, restored sailing vessels passed in review through New York harbor on July 4, like a procession of great and ghostly heroes from a vanished epic world, and was observed by a crowd estimated at seven million. Although the Tall Ships had little or nothing to do directly with the American Revolution, their remarkable presence elicited an affective link to the American past, a link so clear and poignant that a broad American public needed no scholarly explanations to grasp it. A similar response was evoked by Ken Burns's television series on the Civil War, which did more than any number of professional historians to keep alive public interest in the American past.

Americans do not want to view the nation's history as merely a cultural-literacy grab bag of factoids and tales. They want, rather, to establish a sense of connection with it as something from which they can draw meaning and sustenance, and in which their own identity is deeply embedded. That should suggest how critical a role the writing and teaching of history play in refining the nation's intellectual and moral life. Far from being of little interest—a record of old deeds for old people—history turns out to be of great consequence in the formation of the public mind.

That may help to explain why discussions of historical subjects, and conflicts over questions of historical interpretation and practice, have become so visible and lively a feature of our cultural life in recent years. The gradual passing of the World War II generation has served as an especially powerful stimulant to historical consciousness, and has given rise to films such as *Saving Private Ryan* and the TV miniseries *Band of Brothers*, attractions such as the D-Day Museum in New Orleans and the controversial World War II Memorial planned for the National Mall in Washington, and popular books such as Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* (1998) and Stephen Ambrose's *Citizen Soldiers* (1997).

## *The Making of the Public Mind*

A passion for history is reflected as well in various heated, and sometimes nasty, debates that have occurred over the past decade, often as an offshoot of the so-called culture wars: debates over the National History Standards, the *Enola Gay* exhibition at the Smithsonian, a slavery exhibition at the Library of Congress, the public display of the Confederate flag, reparations for slavery, Jefferson's personal relations with the slave Sally Hemings, Edmund Morris's fictionalizing in his biography of Ronald Reagan, the historian Joseph Ellis's lying in the classroom about his military service and personal life. All of those episodes—and more—mirror the public's growing engagement with historical controversies.

**B**ut even as we note the engagement, we must acknowledge something else as well: the immense, appalling, and growing historical ignorance of most Americans. To say that an abiding appetite for history exists is not the same as to say that the hunger is being satisfied. On the contrary. The steady abandonment of instruction in history by our schools and colleges shows no sign of reversal, and makes it a near certainty that the next generations of young Americans will lack even the sketchiest knowledge of the country's historical development.

Survey after dismal survey confirms that Americans are being poorly served by their educational institutions, at all levels. One-fifth of American teenagers don't know the name of the country from which the United States declared independence. A fourth don't know who fought in the Civil War, and cannot say what happened in 1776; three-fifths do not know that Columbus discovered America in 1492. Perhaps the most depressing study of all, released last year by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), examined the historical knowledge of *graduating seniors* at America's 55 most selective colleges and universities. The study found that 81 percent of the seniors could not pass a simple test of American historical knowledge, which asked about such basic matters as the separation of powers and the events at Valley Forge. Not one of the colleges required the students to take a course in American history, and less than a fourth of them required any history courses at all. (On the bright side, 99 percent of the students surveyed were able to identify the cartoon characters Beavis and Butthead. So they are learning something.)

The ACTA report caught the attention of Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.), one of the Senate's most historically minded members. He resolved on the spot to show his concern in a highly tangible way: by adding a \$50 million amendment to the Department of Education's FY 2001 appropriations bill (and promising \$100 million more in FY 2002) to support the development and implementation of "programs to teach American history." But the ACTA survey suggests that money is not the problem. It was, after all, a study of students at America's *elite* colleges, most of which are private institutions that charge upward of \$30,000 a year for their services, and that have endowments in the hundreds of millions, and in some cases billions, of dollars. Whatever problems these institutions may have, a lack of financial resources is not one of them—and is certainly not the reason they are failing to teach their students American history.

Nevertheless, Byrd's passion on the subject is encouraging. It suggests that, with the clashes over the National History Standards now behind us, there might be

grounds for a national consensus on the need for dramatic improvement in history education. But formidable barriers remain—barriers that cannot be much affected by the appropriation of fresh federal money.

To begin with, one would have to challenge the entrenched power of educators who have relentlessly sought over a period of decades to displace the study of history in our schools in favor of a “social studies” curriculum that they believe is more conducive than the “fact-grubbing” specificity of history to the creation of useful habits of problem solving, generalization, and harmonious living. The triumph of what social critic Russell Kirk called “social stew” led to a whole series of subsequent disasters: the downgrading of history in state social-studies standards, the near disappearance of history from the primary grades, the weakening of standards for history teaching, and the replacement of real books with inane, plodding, politically correct texts that misrepresent the subject of history by robbing it of its narrative zest and interpretive fascination. It will take nothing short of a revolution in educational philosophy to reverse the trends. More money poured into the system will only reinforce the status quo and compound the historical illiteracy of Americans.

There are other, more complex barriers to improvement: the character of the historical profession itself and the nature of its public responsibilities in a democratic society. In reality, the clashes over history standards are no more behind us than the culture wars that lay behind the clashes. Americans have generally been willing to trust in the probity and judgment of those calling themselves historians. But that trust has eroded somewhat in recent years, and for entirely understandable reasons. Part of that erosion derives from ideological factors, made all too obvious by such follies as the American Historical Association’s official opposition to the Reagan defense buildup in 1982, or, more recently, the ill-advised petition signed by historians who opposed the impeachment of President Bill Clinton. In both cases, certain professional historians drew improperly upon the authority of their discipline to lend force to partisan political positions, and, in so doing, damaged the long-term credibility of all historians.

But the distrust is also grounded in divergent views of the function of history and the responsibility of historians. There are profound tensions inherent in the practice of history in a democracy—between a history that is the property of all and a history that is the insight of an accredited few, or between a history organized around the requirements of American citizenship and a history that takes its bearings from, and bases its authority upon, more strictly professional criteria. The tensions cannot be, and should not be, finally resolved; neither side holds a trump card. Certainly, professional historians should be able to challenge conventional wisdom. One can understand, for example, the chagrin of the historians and curators who found their professional judgments being overruled in the *Enola Gay* case. But their perspective was not the whole of the matter, particularly when the subject in question was a publicly supported commemoration of a profoundly significant event in the nation’s four-year-long war effort. Historians who use public money in public forums to express views with public implications cannot expect to be insulated from the public’s reaction. On the contrary, the endless interplay between the public and professional uses of history should be a source of intellectual vitality. This makes it all the more lamentable that so many pro-

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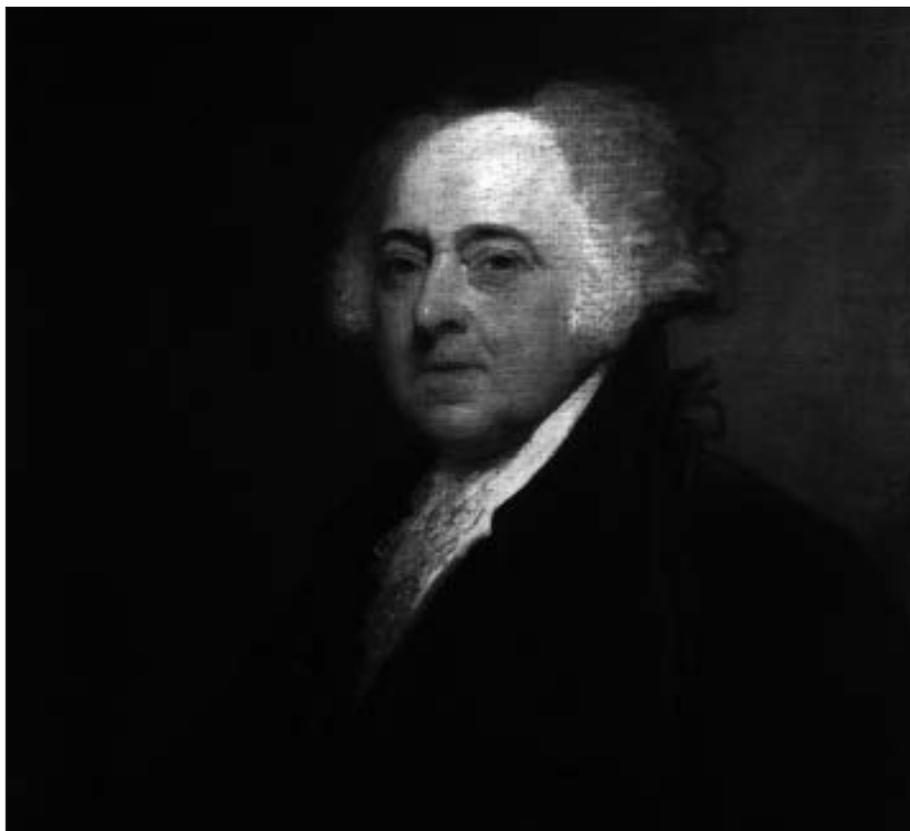
Professional historians have come to embrace an understanding of history that looks more and more like a dead end, both on its own terms and for the enrichment of public life.

**M**ore than three decades ago, the British historian J. H. Plumb, in a book called *The Death of the Past* (1970), argued that “true history” is a “destructive” process: It assaults all the forms of “created ideology” by which people give meaning to the life of their institutions and societies, and it intends finally “to cleanse the story of mankind from those deceiving visions of a purposeful past.” That credo may sound brutal, but it is nothing more than a particularly succinct and candid expression of the logical conclusion to which the relentlessly critical spirit animating modern professional historiography is drawn. That spirit would ruthlessly sweep away both the large narratives of nation-building and the small pieties human beings have always used to shield their eyes from the harsh light of reality. It’s not that there is nothing to be said for the work of the critical spirit. The difficulty, rather, is that what would be available to put in the place of the large narratives and small pieties when they are finally vanquished has never been made clear.

In the beginning, of course, there was great value in bringing the conventional narratives of American history into question, for they had often served the purpose of rendering minorities and marginalized groups silent or invisible. But the energy of those more particular histories is almost entirely derivative and, ironically, dependent upon the grand narratives of American national identity against which they push. The nation has not yet disappeared entirely from American history, but it often resembles nothing more than, in John Higham’s marvelous phrase, the “villain in other people’s stories.” Yet without the nation, and some of the other narratives and pieties that critical history has dispensed with, there can be no plausible way to organize history into larger meanings that can, in turn, inform and inspire the work of citizenship and reform.

Indeed, by the late 1980s, historian Peter Novick was arguing in *That Noble Dream* (1988), an exhaustive and highly influential study of the American historical profession, that there was no unifying purpose at all left in the profession; there remained only a vast congeries of subdisciplinary fields within which small armies of specialists worked at solving small-scale technical problems. “As a broad community of discourse,” said Novick, “the discipline of history” envisioned in the founding of the American Historical Association in 1884 “had ceased to exist.” Under such circumstances, the very possibility of cultivating a public historical consciousness, substantively informed by academic historical work, was rendered practically nil, as was the antique notion that historical understanding might contribute to the refinement or deepening of individual awareness. French historian Pierre Nora brought a touch of Gallic intellectual delicacy to his summary of the situation: “History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it.”

The problem with such programmatic skepticism is not only that it is completely self-contradictory and unworkable in human terms, but that its final result is a historical understanding as cleansed of human interest as it is of deceptive visions. To suppress and destroy memory is to violate human nature in a fundamental way.



*John Adams was a familiar face at the beach this summer thanks to David McCullough's biography. Books on the Founders—Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton—have enjoyed a recent vogue.*

And to imply that the honest writing of history requires such erasure is a travesty. As professional historiography trudges further and further down its chosen path of specialization and fragmentation, satisfied with its increasingly hollow rhetoric about “pushing back the frontiers of knowledge,” it pays a steep price for every step, and the price comes directly out of its own hide, out of an animating sense of purpose. In writing off the larger audience it might have had, professionalization of that sort impoverishes not only the public mind, but the discipline itself.

This is not to suggest that historians should entirely abandon the critical enterprise. But they need to be honest enough to turn their criticism back upon the act of criticism itself, modest enough to concede that man does not live by critical discourse alone, and wise enough to understand that a relentlessly debunking spirit cannot possibly be a basis for anything resembling a civilized life.

Historical knowledge and historical understanding are two quite different things. As Novick well expressed it, one can speak of historical knowledge as “something accumulating on library shelves,” but historical understanding “is in the mind of a human being or it is nowhere.” The acquisition of a genuinely historical consciousness amounts to a kind of moral discipline of the soul. It means learning to appropriate into our own moral imaginations, and learning to be guided by, the distilled memories of others, the stories of events we never witnessed and times and places we never experienced. By an expansion of inward sympathy, we make those things our own, not merely by knowing about them, but by incorporating

## *The Making of the Public Mind*

them into our awareness, looking at the world through their filter, learning to see the past as an immanent presence woven invisibly into the world that lies before us. By its very nature, historical consciousness can never be the exclusive province of a historical guild or priesthood, for it is meant to be the common possession of all.

**A** democratic nation needs a democratic history. There was a time not so long ago when this was assumed to mean that a genuinely democratic history should ignore politics and constitutions and intellectual elites and the like and insist upon viewing the past exclusively “from the bottom up,” through a study of the social history of nonelite groups. But that assumption now seems far less obvious. Indeed, there is a kind of unconscious scorn buried in it—as if political and intellectual history were beyond the common people’s means, and as if individuals could not be expected to take an interest in any aspect of history that did not involve them, or others exactly like them. There is every reason to believe that the United States can nurture a national culture in which a rich acquaintance with the great documents, debates, and events of the nation’s past becomes the common property of all citizens.

If that is ever to happen, the historical profession will have to take more seriously its role as a potential shaper of the public mind and public life. It’s not necessary to do so by justifying history as a source of public-policy initiatives. The historian can make a far greater contribution by playing the essentially conservative role—or is it a radical one?—of standing athwart the turbulence of modern life and insisting on the dignity of memory and the reality of the past. Historians should not forget, in the pressure to find “practical” justifications for what they do as historians, that they further an important public purpose simply by being what they are, and by preserving and furthering a certain kind of consciousness, a certain kind of memory—qualities of mind and soul, and features of our humanity, that a culture of ceaseless novelty and instant erasure has all but declared war upon.

As it happens, John Adams himself had something exemplary to say about all this. McCullough relates in the final pages of his book that Adams composed no epitaph for himself in anticipation of his death. In that respect, as in so many others, he was the opposite of Jefferson, who designed the very obelisk that was to mark his grave and specified the precise words that were to be inscribed on it. Yet Adams did compose an inscription for the sarcophagus lid of his ancestor Henry Adams, the first Massachusetts Adams, who had arrived in 1638. The inscription speaks volumes about how Adams conceived his place in history, and how he accepted the obligation to instruct the future by honoring the past:

This stone and several others have been placed in this yard by a great, great, grandson from a veneration of the piety, humility, simplicity, prudence, frugality, industry, and perseverance of his ancestors in hopes of recommending an affirmation of their virtues to their posterity.

In concluding his book with this marvelous inscription, McCullough means us to see yet another contrast between Adams and Jefferson. But we should not miss the even more instructive contrast: the one between Adams and us. □

# THE PERIODICAL OBSERVER

*Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad*

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## *The Magic of Head Start*

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

It's hard to find a federal program more popular than Head Start. Especially since the end of the Reagan administration, it has enjoyed bipartisan favor, with its budget quadrupling to \$6.2 billion. So it is surprising to be reminded that there's very little empirical evidence that the program actually does give a head start to the underprivileged preschoolers it serves.

President George W. Bush has now proposed moving the program from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to the Department of Education and increasing Head Start's emphasis on teaching language skills. (He has also proposed a two percent budget increase.) That has touched off a debate about what Head Start should be asked to do.

When President Lyndon B. Johnson launched Head Start in 1965 as part of his War on Poverty, the goal was to give economically disadvantaged children a leg up by providing a range of educational, medical, social, and psychological services so that they could enter kindergarten on a more equal footing with their better-off peers. Today, Head Start serves more than 800,000 preschoolers—about half the eligible population.

"The jury is still out on Head Start,"

notes economist Janet Currie of the University of California, Los Angeles, in her survey of research on early childhood education programs in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (Spring 2001). There's never been a large-scale, long-term study of Head Start children (though HHS is now planning one). One reason: There's no single Head Start; the roughly 1,500 Head Start programs are locally administered. Also, such studies are costly and difficult. The children (including a non-Head Start control group) would have to be tracked over many years to determine whether Head Start had any measurable effects on their school performance or other aspects of their lives. Other influences, such as differences in family income and parents' marital status, would have to be taken into account.

The research that does exist tends to point to one conclusion: Head Start's academic effects fade out as kids grow older. A 1990 Educational Testing Service study, for example, found that involvement in the program "had positive effects on both verbal test scores and measures of social adjustment." But by the end of second grade, the Head Start kids were statistically indistinguishable from their peers.

That's where today's debate begins: What's responsible for the apparent "fade-out," and what should be done about it?

Two sides of the argument are presented in *Education Matters* (Summer 2001, online at [edmatters.org](http://edmatters.org)). David Elkind, a professor of child development at Tufts University, says that the fade-out should come as no surprise. "The giants of early-childhood development," such as Maria Montessori and Jean Piaget, all agreed on at least one thing: Children's minds develop in stages, and they're not equipped "until the age of five or six" to reason their way through reading and math. It's far more important for young children "to explore and conceptualize" by "seeing, touching, and handling new things and . . . experiencing new sensations." In Elkind's view, it "makes little sense to introduce formal instruction in reading and math" to preschoolers, and it's "simplistic" to think that early schooling will give disadvantaged youngsters "the skills and motivation to continue their education and break the cycle of poverty."

In the same issue of *Education Matters*, the arguments of Grover J. Whitehurst, chairman of the Department of Psychology and a professor of pediatrics at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, could not offer a greater contrast. He contends that the problem is the century-old "child-centered" style of education featured in Head Start (and many American primary and secondary schools). Yes, children can be harmed by schooling that's beyond them, he says, but the average child attending Head Start now "exits that program in the summer before kindergarten being able to name only one—yes, one—letter of the alphabet."

Whitehurst favors "content-centered" schooling "organized around the principle that there are skills and dispositions that children need to be taught if they are to be prepared for later schooling and life." He scoffs at Elkind's "giants," who conducted no empirical research, but he allows that the evidence for "content-centered" education is only "inferential" at this point. That evidence is strongest in

the case of reading. For example, there are studies showing a strong link between the literacy skills children possess upon entering kindergarten and their subsequent school performance, while other studies reveal a link between student reading difficulties and other problems, such as dropping out or committing crimes.

One of Head Start's founders, Yale University psychologist Edward Zigler, offers yet another perspective in *Education Matters*. Go ahead and strengthen the preschool education component of the program, he and a Yale associate say, but don't forget Head Start's other purposes, from identifying children who are malnourished or have vision problems to providing emotional support to troubled kids.

That's similar to the tack Janet Currie takes. Her own research suggests that the Head Start fade-out afflicts only African American children. She thinks the problem may be what happens *after* Head Start, when black children go off to inferior schools. But Currie still thinks Head Start has a lot to offer.

Her "back-of-the-envelope" calculations suggest that the short- and medium-term social benefits of Head Start cover 40 to 60 percent of its costs. Those benefits include everything from improving child nutrition to saving kids from costly special education programs later in their school careers. Above all, the benefits include the value of quality child care. The alternatives to Head Start are frequently dismal. Stir in hard-to-estimate longer-term benefits (e.g., better school attainment, reductions in crime), and Currie believes that the program could pay for itself. One study suggests that the Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan—a much more expensive version of preschool than Head Start—has yielded a total package of benefits that far outweigh the costs.

Currie believes that the evidence is "compelling enough" to warrant a recommendation. To her, it makes the most social sense to expand Head Start into a year-round, full-time program and open it up to more poor and children who are otherwise at risk.

## *Our Secular Fathers*

“Religion and the Founders” by John Patrick Diggins, in *Partisan Review* (Summer 2001), Boston Univ., 236 Bay State Rd., Boston, Mass. 02215.

Diggins reminds us that several candidates in the 2000 American presidential election made sure to let the public know that they were running with Jesus. Asked to name his favorite philosopher, George W. Bush answered “Christ.” The reason? “He changed my heart.” Al Gore volunteered that whenever he is faced with a difficult decision, he asks himself, “What would Jesus do?” Even Joseph Lieberman, an Orthodox Jew, said that we should look for spiritual guidance to the “compassion and love of Jesus of Nazareth.” All three men put themselves squarely in the tradition of politicians who want to make a case for religion in American political culture. Diggins, a historian at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and the author of *The Proud Decades: America in War and Peace, 1941–1960* (1988), wonders whether any of them understands the real message of Christ and Christianity. Jesus urged his followers to lead lives of self-effacement, which is not exactly a characteristic we associate with politicians.

Diggins is especially suspicious of attempts by American politicians to link their religiosity to the Founding Fathers. He remarks on how absurd the delegates to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 would have found the notion of asking what Jesus would do in their place—and how fortunate it was for the country that the “Founding Fathers neither allowed Christ to influence their minds nor stopped to ask Gore’s question after the Boston Massacre of 1770, when British Redcoats slaughtered

American colonists. Had they followed the gentle Jesus and his Sermon on the Mount, they would have ‘turned the other cheek’ instead of taking up muskets.”

Diggins regrets that the public today seems too little aware of the break America’s founders made with religion when they wrote in the spirit of the Enlightenment. “Thinkers like Ben Franklin were thrilled to see nature take the place of the supernatural and science replace religion,” he notes, and John Adams said that America’s 13 colonies and their new constitutions were “founded on the natural authority of the people alone, without a pretense of miracle or mystery.” Thomas Paine, who wrote *Common Sense* (1776), was also the author of *The Age of Reason* (1794), in which he urged America to leave religion to the Middle Ages. Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence drew on the philosophy of John Locke, who thought that knowledge of God’s nature and “purposes” was beyond humanity’s reach. Alexander Hamilton and James Madison compared religious sects to political factions in their tendency to fanaticism, and they followed the skeptical David Hume in opting for a politics of “interest” rather than a politics of “zeal.” In the Lockean America where the Republic was born, the role of the state was not to carry out God’s will but simply to protect life and property. For Diggins, to allow religion an important role in politics is to deny what America meant to the individuals who wrote the foundational documents of the United States.

## *The Limber Side of Reagan*

“Reagan and the Gorbachev Revolution: Perceiving the End of Threat” by Barbara Farnham, in *Political Science Quarterly* (Summer 2001), The Academy of Political Science, 475 Riverside Dr., Ste. 1274, New York, N.Y. 10115–1274.

Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency in 1981 with a fiercely held conviction that communism and the Soviet Union threat-

ened America. He was expected to be unyielding in his approach to dealing with the Soviet threat, and yet by the end of his



*Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev share a fireside moment at the Geneva Summit, November 1985.*

second term he had come to see the conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States not in absolutist terms—as a confrontation with an “evil empire”—but, in Farnham’s words, “in terms of mutual misperception. He was hopeful about the possibility of substantial change.”

Farnham, a senior associate at the Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia University, notes that the evolution is all the more intriguing “in view of the numerous criticisms that have been leveled at Reagan’s cognitive abilities.” Why was he able to overcome his predispositions so successfully and to perceive and respond to the adjustments that were occurring in Soviet policy in the 1980s?

Farnham credits a combination of Reagan’s personal qualities and a belief system more complex than he has usually been given credit for. He was convinced that communism would change because it had no choice—it was doomed by history. Personal experience counted for everything with him, and strong personalities, in his view, could alter the world. So he looked for change in the Soviet Union over the course of his dealings with the

Soviet leadership both because it was bound to occur and because he believed that he could make it happen.

“What does the success of Reagan’s approach to the Soviet Union tell us about his abilities as a leader?” Farnham asks. She acknowledges that “good outcomes can be the result of any number of factors, including luck,” and she cites qualities in Reagan—he could be “passive, incurious, uninterested in detail, ignorant of the nuances of policy, and stubborn”—that sometimes worked against his effectiveness as a leader. But he had people skills, negotiating skills, and powers of persuasion, and “he was more flexible, pragmatic, and willing to compromise than his ideological orientation led many to expect.” He was open-minded and optimistic, he accepted criticism, and he did his homework when the subject interested him—as it did when his core beliefs were involved. Farnham quotes French president François Mitterrand’s assessment of Reagan: “What he does not perceive with his intelligence, he feels by nature.”

“What stands out,” according to Farnham, “is how context-dependent Reagan’s

performance was. When the nature of the problem played to his particular strengths—as it did in the dealings with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, when openness, insight, persuasion, and negotiation were the qualities most required—“it could be quite good. But in other situations”—such as the Iran-contra affair, when a detailed understanding of policy was required, and he was detached and at the mercy of others—“these skills could not compensate

for Reagan’s failings, and some of his strengths became weaknesses.”

Reagan believed that the Soviet Union would respond to changes in U.S. behavior, and many former Soviet officials, including Anatoly Dobrynin, long-time ambassador to the United States, agree that that was precisely what happened. “Reagan’s conciliatory policies toward the Soviet Union,” writes Farnham, “enabled Gorbachev to forge ahead in his domestic and international initiatives.”

## *How the Court Killed Privacy*

“Privacy and the American Constitution” by David J. Garrow, in *Social Research* (Spring 2001), 65 Fifth Ave., Rm. 354, New York, N.Y. 10003.

Does the Constitution guarantee a right to privacy? In the minds of most Americans, landmark Supreme Court decisions such as *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) and *Roe v. Wade* (1973) established and defined such a right. But legal scholars assaulted the reasoning behind those decisions so successfully that the Court was long ago forced to rethink—and reject—privacy as a constitutional right.

*Griswold*, which struck down a state prohibition on contraceptive use by couples, is the pivotal case responsible for both the construction and the eventual collapse of the right to privacy as a constitutional concept. In his seven-page majority opinion, Justice William O. Douglas famously wrote that “specific guarantees in the Bill of Rights have penumbras, formed by emanations of those guarantees that help give them life and substance.” In those penumbras Douglas discovered the right to privacy.

The Court had been working up to an articulation of such a right since the late 19th century. As young lawyers, Louis Brandeis and Samuel Warren had introduced it in an 1890 *Harvard Law Review* essay titled “The Right to Privacy,” in which they advocated legal protection for “the private life, habits, acts, and relations of an individual.” Brandeis’s dissents as a Supreme Court justice in the 1920s carried the torch for an individual’s right to privacy.

Twice in 1940s the Court alluded to privacy rights in majority decisions.

While *Griswold* catalyzed young lawyers and activists of the late 1960s to use its protection of reproductive privacy to bring and win cases such as *Roe*, which established the right to abortion, many constitutional specialists found fault with Douglas’s opinion. The decision was correct, they argued, but his reasoning was too shaky and his language too nebulous to hold up as the foundational legal argument for right-to-privacy cases. Matters weren’t helped by Justice Harry A. Blackmun’s 51-page decision in *Roe*, which leaned on *Griswold* but struggled to find solid footing for the right to privacy. Legal critics from all points on the political spectrum pounced on the underlying reasoning. Harvard’s Lawrence H. Tribe did not criticize the result but expressed regret that “the substantive judgment on which [*Roe*] rests is nowhere to be found.”

One of the leading critics of *Griswold* and *Roe* was Judge Robert Bork, and his 1987 Supreme Court nomination foundered in large part because of his uncompromising rejection of the constitutional right to privacy that grew out of *Griswold*. Ironically, that right was already all but dead in the minds of constitutional scholars.

The Court reacted to criticism of *Griswold* and *Roe* by affirming those deci-

EXCERPT

## *Sizing Up the Roosevelts*

*It is possible to divide Americans into two groups: those who prefer President Theodore Roosevelt, and those who prefer Franklin Delano. . . .*

*TR came to the White House a few years too soon, before public opinion was ready for major changes. When President McKinley was assassinated in 1901, Roosevelt served out his term; won another term himself; then retired, bored, because there was not enough to do to use up his immense energy.*

*In 1912 he sniffed the winds of change and re-entered the fray, but all he succeeded in doing was to split the Republican vote and let Wilson slip into power. This was a tragedy, for TR would have brought America into the First World War two years earlier than Wilson did, and the whole of 20th-century history would have been different. . . .*

*TR was an Oyster Bay Roosevelt, traditionally Republican, while FDR was a Hyde Park Roosevelt, always Democrats. Relations between the two branches of the family were edgy, and when FDR married his Oyster Bay distant cousin, Eleanor, for reasons which are still mysterious, it was quite an event. TR and FDR had cordial relations but the authors exaggerate their intimacy. They were fundamentally very different men. TR was an extrovert, open, concealing nothing of his intentions or emotions.*

*He said “speak softly and carry a big stick,” and there is no doubt about the size of his stick—what is more difficult to find is evidence that he ever spoke softly. When he opened his mouth the decibels rose sharply. . . . TR, however, had a puritanical streak. He loathed his Long Island neighbor, the great glass artist Louis Tiffany, because “he lays his hands on other men’s wives,” and when he got to the White House smashed to bits Tiffany’s masterpiece, the superb dining-room screen that President Arthur had commissioned. He ostentatiously put morals, public and private, before any other consideration.*

*By contrast, FDR was an amoralist, devious, secretive and, especially in his love affairs, unfathomable. Not even his closest associates knew his inner mind, and none of the hundreds of vast tomes written about this great but flawed man pluck the heart of his mystery. That is why, as with Napoleon, there is always room for one more study. I suspect FDR lacked self-confidence, a weakness which his polio increased. His attitude to governing was quite unlike TR’s.*

*The latter ruled in the traditional manner. Indeed, he picked an exceptionally strong and independent-minded cabinet. . . . FDR, by contrast, bypassed the cabinet and began the modern White House system of rule through personal followers, or brains trusts, as they were called, who were entirely dependent on his patronage.*

*Was there a special reason for FDR’s brittle self-respect? At Harvard, TR—friendly and popular, whose favorite term of approval was “bully”—sailed into the Porcellian, probably the most exclusive club in the world, even then. FDR was found too introvert and failed, the most bitter disappointment of his entire life. The pain did not diminish. When TR’s daughter Alice married another member, the authors record that all the Porcellians present gathered in another room to drink special toasts and sing club songs. FDR, who attended the wedding, found himself excluded, as he always did on such occasions.*

*The Oyster Bay Roosevelts looked down their noses on the Hyde Park cousins, not least on FDR, who got the cold shoulder. Perhaps that is really the reason why he married Eleanor, to bolster his social self-confidence.*

—Paul Johnson, a British historian, in a review of *The Three Roosevelts: The Leaders Who Transformed America*, at [www.booksonline.co.uk](http://www.booksonline.co.uk).

sions in substance while rebuilding the argument underneath them. In *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* (1992), a landmark case in which the Court reaffirmed *Roe*, three of the five justices in the majority found that “choices central to personal dignity and autonomy” such as abortion fall under “the liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment.” The *Casey* trio made no mention of the “p-word.”

Constitutional scholars applauded

*Casey*, and the Court has shunned the right to privacy, as a term and as a concept, ever since—though it does recognize a zone of privacy created by the Fourth Amendment ban on unreasonable searches and seizures. It’s “sad,” Garrow thinks, that America’s elite legal commentators have killed off a constitutional right most Americans think they possess—and at precisely the moment when new technologies are raising fresh concerns about individual privacy.

## FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

### *Baltic Madness?*

“The Next NATO: Building an American Commonwealth of Nations” by James Kurth, in *The National Interest* (Fall 2001), 1112 16th St. N.W., Ste. 540, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Ten years ago, the plucky Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania claimed their independence from a crumbling Soviet Union, and ever since they’ve been sterling citizens in the new global order of liberal democracy, free-market economics, and the rule of law. Now it seems only natural that they’re in line for membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). But that’s worse than a bad idea, argues Kurth, a Swarthmore College political scientist—it’s insane.

President George W. Bush’s call last June for NATO’s enlargement “from the Baltic to the Black Sea” should have sparked a “Great Debate” on the scale of the League of Nations fight of 1920. Instead, the nation snoozed. Meanwhile, it’s taking on military commitments of unprecedented scope, and for the wrong reasons.

“For the past decade, the grand project of the United States in world affairs has been globalization,” Kurth writes. That has meant securing in Europe a “solid base” that accepts “the American way of globalization” against those parts of the world that don’t, which include China and Russia, and the large portions of Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America that have simply been left out. But for this economic and political project—which Kurth sees as an undertaking of danger-

ous hubris—the United States has no suitable vehicle. So it has adapted a military alliance (NATO) to its purposes. And that’s the problem.

What’s rarely considered in the talk about extending membership to the Baltic is that the American global predominance so easily taken for granted today may not exist decades from now. Yet, as NATO members, the Baltic countries would always be able to call upon the United States to come to their defense. And that call may not be as unlikely as it now seems. Estonia’s border, for example, lies only 30 miles from St. Petersburg, and while Russia is surly but weak today, it could be surly and strong tomorrow. Most troubling to Kurth is the problem of Kaliningrad, the Russian oblast, or province, cut off from the rest of Russia when Lithuania got its independence. This “dismal slum” of 900,000 is full of Russian soldiers and Russian woes: crime, infectious disease, and pollution. If Lithuania joins NATO, Kaliningrad “will become a Russian island and strategic anomaly surrounded by a NATO sea”—“a crisis in waiting.”

It’s no accident that the Baltic countries have not enjoyed the protection of an outside power for several centuries, Kurth observes. The looming presence of Russia ensured that no European power would

ever guarantee their independence. To do so now would be “reckless and irresponsible,” Kurth says. It would “require of the American statesmen of the 21st century a level of sophistication and determination that would have amazed those of the 20th.”

Kurth sees two alternatives to the Bush plan: admit Russia to NATO or the Baltic trio to the European Union. But Washington won't back the former idea and the EU, reluctant to take on more poor members, won't back the latter.

## *Europe and Missile Defense*

“Missile Defense and the Transatlantic Security Relationship” by Wyn Q. Bowen, in *International Affairs* (July 2001), Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 350 Main St., Malden, Mass. 02148.

Now that the Bush administration has shown its determination to push ahead with an ambitious “layered” ballistic missile defense system, America's European allies have softened their opposition. Yet a “transatlantic schism” is not out of the question, warns Bowen, a lecturer at Britain's Joint Services Command and Staff College.

The big European powers—Britain, France, and Germany—are not alarmed by U.S. intelligence estimates that say North Korea, Iran, or perhaps Iraq may be only a dozen years away from the ability to build long-range missiles. They doubt such weapons would be used, are skeptical that a technologically feasible defense can be built, and prefer “constructive engagement” with potential aggressors. Above all, they worry how Russia will react to a missile defense system.

The Bush administration has done one important thing to allay Europe's fears. By deciding last February to extend the zone of protection to include its allies—only the United States was defended in the Clinton administration's more modest plan—it eased concerns that missile defense would create a “Fortress America” mentality and spur America's unilateralist tendencies.

Yet the Europeans still worry about Russia's reaction, as well as China's. A Russia provoked by a unilateral U.S. withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (which stands in the way of the Bush plan), or left feeling vulnerable by measures that undermined nuclear deterrence, might be tempted to build more offensive nuclear weapons. That would undermine European stability and put

pressure on Europe's two nuclear powers, France and Britain, to make costly additions to their own arsenals. A deal to include Russia under the missile defense umbrella or to share the technology with Moscow could pose the same problem: The French and British deterrents would also be compromised.

At issue, too, is the architecture of any future system: What kinds of interceptors would be used and where would they be based? Would there be one command and control center, or more?

Cost is another consideration. The European states' traditionally skimpy defense budgets are declining sharply (overall, by five percent annually in real terms), even as the European Union struggles to build an all-European “rapid reaction” force of some 60,000 troops. Europe doesn't want to be called on to help pay for a system expected to cost more than \$50 billion by 2015 (although German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has declared that his country has a “vital economic interest in helping to develop missile defense technology”). Bowen suggests that a “grand bargain” may be possible: The United States guarantees nuclear security, while Europe assumes the burden of humanitarian intervention in places like the Balkans.

It's encouraging that the Bush administration is now consulting its European allies, Bowen says. But one thing seems nonnegotiable in Europe's capitals: Washington must “reach an agreement with Russia to amend the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, or at least not withdraw prior to engaging in serious discussions to seek an accommodation.”

## *Business* ♥ *Washington*

“Save Us from the States!” by Jonathan Walters, in *Governing* (June 2001),  
1100 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Ste. 1300, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Washington regulators were once the bane of business existence, but they're beginning to look much lovelier to corporate executives. Faced by thickets of state and local laws, business is increasingly seeking single federal standards, reports Walters, a staff correspondent at *Governing*. Banks, for example, have gone to federal court to argue that federal banking law preempts state and local laws restricting certain automatic teller machine surcharges. Walters says that 35 preemptive bills were introduced in Congress in 1999, “mostly in the areas of telecommunications and finance.”

From a corporate point of view, the advantages of uniformity are obvious. It's easier and cheaper to conform to a single federal standard than to 50 different state standards. “The business attitude today seems to be that no matter how bad a single federal standard might be, it's better than 50 of them,” notes the Cato Institute's Adam Thierer. And centralized regulation allows business to concentrate all of its resources on enacting, modifying, or defeating a single law or regulation.

Others see great advantages in multiple standards. “In a world of increasingly large, amorphous, and distant corporations, who better to hold business accountable than those officials closest to the people?” writes Walters, summarizing this view. In some cases, the states have been able to step in when Washington has fallen down on the job. “Congress failed to agree on a health bill in 1994; the states have responded with patients' rights and prescription drug laws. Congress debated bills to deregulate the electric utilities industry but passed nothing; more than 20 states went ahead and did it.”

Utah governor Mike Leavitt (R) argues that the state governments must cooperate with one another and with the federal government to coordinate their efforts in areas where it makes sense for them to act. “States are going to have to reinvent themselves,” he declares. Otherwise, they will become “functionally obsolete.” But state governments don't have a strong record of collaboration. The 45-member Multistate Tax Commission has been working for years without success to devise a policy dealing with the application of state sales taxes to out-of-state mail-order purchases. And last year's federal Gramm-Leach-Bliley law overhauling the financial services industry allows the states to regulate the insurance industry if 29 of them can settle on a uniform standard. Leavitt himself says that's not likely.

Getting state and local governments to cooperate may require a slap in the face. Walters knows just where it might come from: an international trade tribunal. For example, when a small town in Mexico denied Metalclad Corporation a permit to dump toxic material, the U.S.-based company complained to a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) arbitration panel. The company won a \$16.7 million judgment against Mexico. Now NAFTA is looking at another case: A Canadian company is seeking \$970 million because the state of California is phasing out the gasoline additive MBTE on health grounds the company says are not scientifically justified.

Leaving such wild cards aside, Walters is sanguine about the effort to shift power away from the states. As one official said, “there's always an ebb and flow” in a federal system.

## *The Rich Get Richer*

“Where Has All the Money Gone?” by Edward N. Wolff, in *The Milken Institute Review* (Third Quarter, 2001), 1250 Fourth St., 2nd fl., Santa Monica, Calif. 90401-1353.

Yes, the rich got richer than other Americans did during the late, lamented economic boom. But there's a bit more to the story than that.

Overall, writes Wolff, an economist at New York University, the richest 20 percent of American households claimed 91 percent of the increase in wealth between 1983 and

1998. The remaining 80 percent garnered only nine percent of the gain. (Thanks to social mobility, however, a lot of families moved into or out of the top 20 percent.)

The middle 20 percent of households enjoyed only a 10 percent increase in their net wealth during those 15 years, from \$55,500 to \$61,000. Americans at the bottom of the scale fared worst of all. In 1983, 15.5 percent of households had no net worth or were in debt. By 1989 that number had grown to 17.9 percent, and it remained virtually unchanged through 1998.

The share of all wealth owned by the top one percent of U.S. households grew quickly between 1983 and 1989, but then slowed in the years up to 1998. Overall, their share increased from 33.8 percent to 38.1 percent. (Wolff's data do not extend through the recent Wall Street downturn.) Even so, the number of millionaires jumped 54 percent during the 1990s, and the number of decamillionaires (those with net worth totaling \$10 million or more) almost quadrupled.

It's not just corporate moguls and movie stars who prospered. Two-thirds of the top one percent are small-business owners.

Wolff sees a disturbing trend in the rise of Americans' indebtedness, which grew from 13 percent of household wealth in 1989 to 15 percent in 1998. Forget the usual suspects, credit card and other consumer debt. Bigger mortgages and home equity loans are the problem. Net home equity (the value of a house minus outstanding mortgages) dropped from 24 percent of total household assets in 1983 to 18 percent in 1998. "Middle class households, it appears, were spending down their net worth to maintain their living standards," Wolff writes.

Despite the stock market mania of the '90s, most Americans still have the lion's share of their wealth in real estate. (The home ownership rate rose three percentage points, to 66.3 percent, between 1983 and 1998.) Less than a third of households owned stock worth more than \$10,000 in 1998.

Overall, median wealth grew a bit more slowly than median income during the 15-year period. It was up 11.1 percent, while income grew by 13.8 percent. Both measures point to the same conclusion, says Wolff: "The boom of the 1990s . . . bypassed most Americans. The rich have been the main beneficiaries."

## *Why Europe?*

"The Fates of Human Societies: A Review of Recent Macrohistories" by Gale Stokes, in *The American Historical Review* (April 2001), 400 A St. S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003.

It's money, not politics, that makes our new globalized world go 'round, and that may explain why historians have been returning lately to an old question: Why Europe? Why, asks Stokes, did this "relatively small and backward" region suddenly burst upon the world scene in the 16th century and soon dominate it?

Two main schools of thought exist, according to the Rice University historian, while a third, very impressive body of ideas is developing.

One school, led by Harvard University's David Landes, author of *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (1998), holds that some kind of European exceptionalism—individualism, the rise of unfettered science—is the best answer. Europe, says Landes, enjoyed the advantage of diverse cultures combined with a single unifying language: Latin. More impor-

tant, it developed values, such as thrift and honesty, that favored economic development. Above all Europe was open to new knowledge, while its chief rival, China, was hobbled by what Stokes calls "a systematic resistance to learning from other cultures."

An opposing school of thought, which finds its best expression in Andre Gunder Frank's *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (1998), holds that, essentially, Europe got lucky. Frank and other scholars portray the last 1,000 years as an era dominated by the more advanced cultures and economies of Asia (mainly China), with the period of Western advantage brief—and likely to end soon. They see evidence in China of all the things said to distinguish precapitalist Europe, including vigorous markets and trade, technological innovation, and Ben Franklin-like sages who

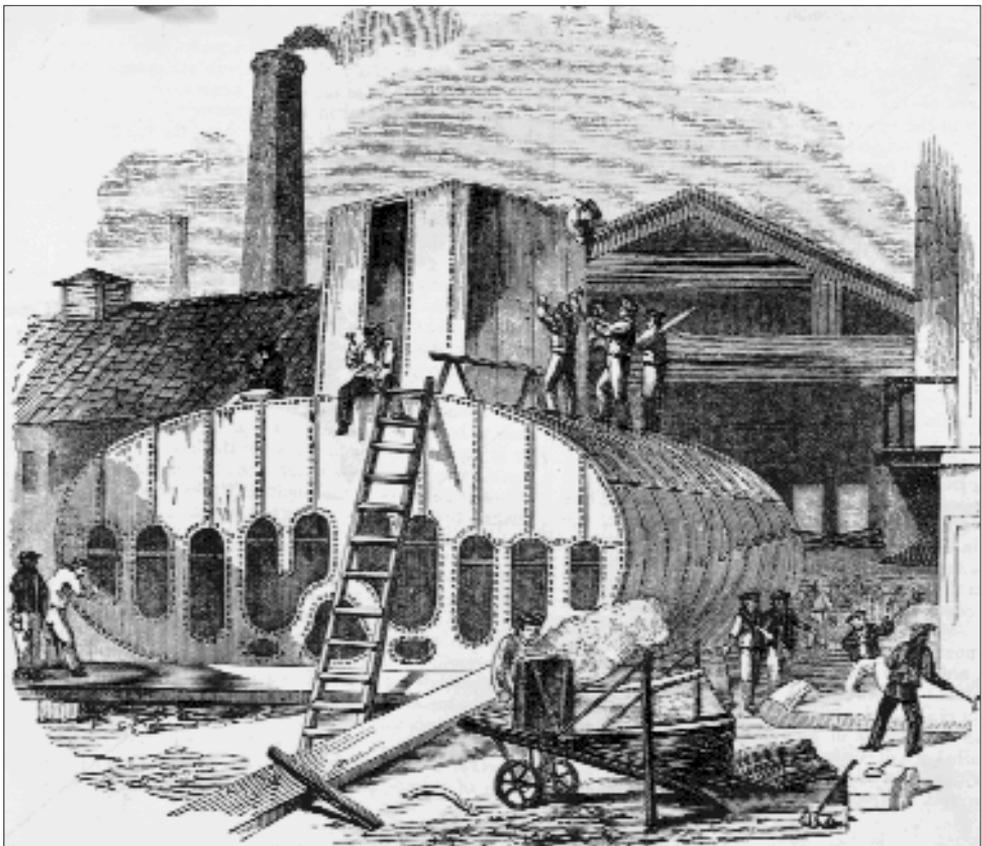
preached capitalist virtues. Even after Emperor Wang Yang-Ming famously pulled the plug on China's ambitious program of overseas exploration in 1433, prosperity continued. Europe didn't really get a leg up until about 1800, in this view, and then only because it was able to exploit the gold and silver wealth it had stumbled upon in the New World. Says Frank, "The Europeans bought themselves a seat, and then even a whole rail-way car, on the Asian train."

Historians in the emerging third school of thought tend to avoid invidious comparisons. In *China Transformed* (1997), for example, R. Bin Wong of the University of California, Irvine, argues that Europe's many states, its semi-autonomous social classes, and its independent church combined to give it great flexibility and other advantages in adapting to economic change. Yet Wong also argues, in Stokes's words, that "the Chinese state's concern for the welfare and moral education of the public, especially the poor, produced social policies that

European states could not even imagine until recently."

Wong and his leading ally, historian Kenneth Pomeranz, author of *The Great Divergence* (2000), join Frank and others in pushing forward the moment when Europe gained an edge from the 16th century to about 1800, but they give a different reason: the invention of coal-fired steam power. This, too, owed something to accident: England's endowment of coal and iron deposits in proximity to each other. In the 18th century, China and Europe both felt the effects of ecological constraints, such as shortages of wood and declining soil fertility. Steam power, which led to industrialization, allowed Europe to escape the "Malthusian trap."

Stokes calls the Wong-Pomeranz arguments "powerful." But he thinks that the two historians' new "world history" has yet to take into account the uniquely European ideas—liberty, individualism, equality, popular sovereignty—that have done so much to shape the world since 1800.



Europe's edge? An 1843 engraving shows a steam boiler at the Clydestream boatworks in England.

SOCIETY

## The Special Ed. Fiasco

“Revamping Special Education” by Wade F. Horn and Douglas Tynan, in *The Public Interest* (Summer 2001), 1112 16th St. N.W., Ste. 530, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Before the federal government intervened in 1975, perhaps a million disabled children were being denied a public education because of their handicaps. But special education, which began as a great boon, has ballooned into a massively “costly and ineffective” program.

Over the years, the program has swollen to include many students it was not designed to serve, according to Horn, a clinical child psychologist who heads the National Fatherhood Initiative, and Tynan, a pediatric psychologist at the A.I. duPont Hospital for Children in Wilmington, Delaware. From including 8.3 percent of all schoolchildren in the 1976–77 school year, special education grew to include 12.8 percent in 1997–98. Last year, 6.1 million children were enrolled in such programs.

Horn and Tynan identify four sources of growth. First, eligibility has been broadened, notably by including children diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Second, there has been a vast increase in the number of children included under the rubric of “specific learning disability” (SLD), which includes disabilities in areas such as mathematics problem solving and reading. Nearly half of all special education students today fall into the SLD category, and most have reading “deficits.” Third, some school districts have pushed poorly achieving students into special education in order to gain state and federal subsidies. (Until recently, moreover, special education students generally were not required to take the statewide exams used in assessing schools.) Finally, many parents have lobbied to have their children placed in special education, where they may get personal tutors, laptop computers, and other benefits. In affluent Greenwich, Connecticut, nearly a third of all public high school students are classified as disabled.

Costs have soared. Nationwide, average per pupil expenditures are \$6,200, but outlays for special education students are about \$13,000. The annual price tag for special education is \$41.5 billion.

Washington is supposed to pick up 40 percent of the cost, but it actually pays only 12 percent, or \$5 billion. Special education is a classic “unfunded federal mandate.” But because it is a federal mandate, local school districts can be sued “for not providing the services that parents think their child deserves,” the authors say. Local officials are petrified. One result: Public school districts now pay \$2 billion annually in private school tuition for special education students.

Worst of all, many children are ill served. An effort launched to accommodate kids with permanent disabilities isn’t well suited to those with conditions that can be mitigated or overcome. Rather than merely accommodate a student with ADHD by providing an aide to keep track of his schoolwork, for example, schools should teach the child to keep an assignment pad, organize his desk, and so on. Yet special education has “largely failed to help most of its students” achieve independence, the authors assert. A 1993 study involving 16 states found that only one to 12 percent of children over the age of 14 “graduated” from such programs each year. Far from “mainstreaming” kids, the authors assert, special education teaches them that “they are entitled to operate under a different set of rules from everyone else”—rules that aren’t recognized in the world they will encounter after leaving school.

Horn and Tynan propose many reforms. Above all, they say, it is important to recognize that there are three kinds of special education students: those with physical and sensory disabilities (less than 10 percent of the total); those with learning disabilities, ADHD, and similar conditions; and those with “conduct or behavioral problems,” such as “oppositional defiant disorder.” The first group is currently well served. Helping the second group will require early intervention, certain improvements in classroom instruction, and other changes. For the third group, the authors prescribe what amounts to an age-old form of special education: discipline and accountability.

## Bigger Is Better

“Two—Make That Three—Cheers for the Chain Bookstores” by Brooke Allen, in *The Atlantic Monthly* (July/Aug. 2001), 77 N. Washington St., Boston, Mass. 02114.

The guardians of culture are up in arms about the rise of chain bookstores. Even Hollywood got into the act with Nora Ephron’s 1998 film *You’ve Got Mail*. The chains are killing off the independent shops that preserve literary culture, the critics cry, crowding out worthy books with calendars and junky bestsellers, and dumbing down America.

“Absurd,” replies Allen, a writer and book critic. These “sumptuous emporia,” as she calls them, “have made a wide variety of books more easily available, in more places and to more people, than ever before.” Overstocked? The typical superstore carries about 150,000 titles, while an independent rarely stocks more than 20,000. At her local Barnes & Noble in New York City, Allen counted 196 feet of shelf space devoted to philosophy and 92 feet given over to military history. She visited that store and a local independent

with a shopping list of five “midlist” titles—the kinds of quality books, such as *The Music at Long Verney*, by Sylvia Townsend Warner, that the critics say are being crowded out. The score: megastore 4, independent 2.

It’s true that the independent book stores have suffered, dropping in number from some 5,000 in the mid-1990s to about 3,000 today, but their numbers are now stabilizing. “Wonderful though many of the independents were (and are),” Allen writes, “the fact is that most of the good ones were clustered in the big cities, leaving a sad gap in America’s smaller cities and suburbs.” The chains have stepped in, measurably improving the quality of life. Books-A-Million, for example, has 202 stores concentrated in the Southeast, and Borders has shops in once underserved places such as Murray, Utah, and Hagerstown, Maryland. The stores stay open

### EXCERPT

## *Off to the Races*

*When [the history of Census 2000] is written, the issues surrounding sampling and other aspects of measurement theory will be a footnote, albeit an important footnote, to the real story of this count: multiracial identity. With “Question 8: What is this person’s race? Mark one or more,” we turned a corner about how we think about race in this country. Census 2000 identifies five discrete racial groups: white; African American, black, or Negro; Asian; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; and American Indian or Alaskan Native. It also allows respondents to select an “other” category, making a total of six. There are 63 possible combinations to how the race question can be answered. And if these 63 are subdivided by Hispanic and non-Hispanic groupings (which are treated by the census as ethnic rather than racial distinctions), there are 126 categories.*

*There is no way to measure race. Race is not a scientific construct but a political one. During the 19th century, the census counts helped put in place a discriminatory set of social policies. In the second half of the 20th century, the census has been a tool to undo that discrimination. It is unlikely that more than a small percentage of the population will describe themselves as multiracial in Census 2000. But this expected change in self-identification has long-term and unpredictable consequences for race-conscious social policy. Laws prohibiting racial or ethnic discrimination in such areas as education, housing, and employment assume a small number of fixed racial or ethnic groups. With the proliferation of different multiracial groups in society and the general blurring of racial boundaries, the future of enforcing such laws is unclear.*

—Kenneth Prewitt, former director of the Bureau of the Census, in *The Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* (Summer 2001)

late; they feature comfortable chairs where customers can curl up with a book, and cafés where they can chat over coffee. It's just like heaven—or at least Manhattan.

Allen likens the impact of the chain bookstores to that of the sturdy paperback, which made books affordable to millions of readers after its invention in 1935. “Before the appearance of the chains, a relatively highbrow, urban clientele shopped at the independents, and a rel-

atively lowbrow, largely regional one bought mass-market titles at supermarkets, price clubs, and drugstores,” writes Allen. “Now . . . the vast territory between the two extremes has been bridged. Elitists may carp, but the truth is that they are no longer quite so elite.”

And therein, Allen suspects, lies the true source of the bitter reaction to the megastores: “the knee-jerk snobbery that is never far from the surface in American cultural life.”

## *The Chautauqua Moment*

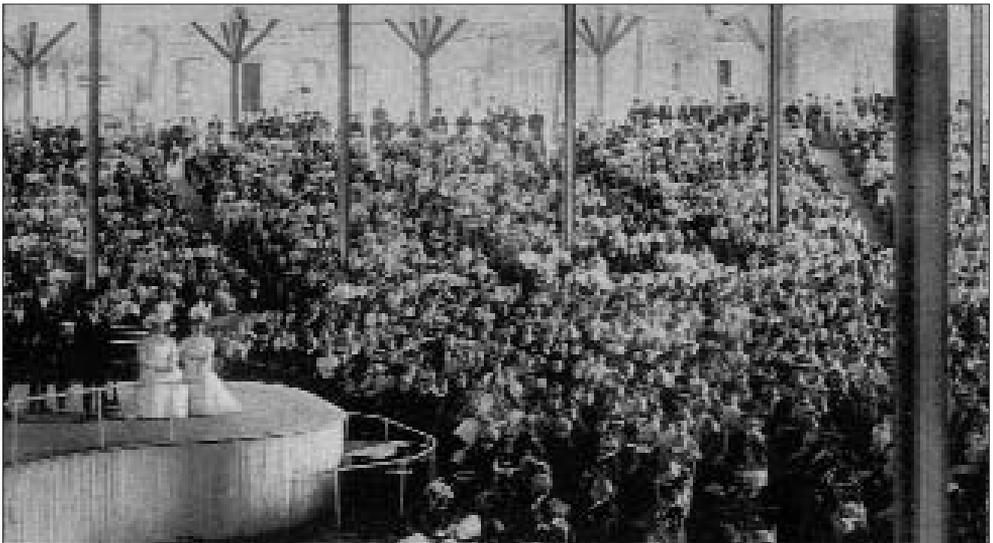
“Dancing Mothers’: The Chautauqua Movement in Twentieth-Century American Popular Culture” by Russell L. Johnson, in *American Studies International* (June 2001), 2108 G St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20052.

Theodore Roosevelt called it “the most American thing in America.” Born in the summer of 1874 at Lake Chautauqua in western New York, the chautauqua movement enjoyed a 50-year reign over American cultural life.

When they began a summer-training program at Lake Chautauqua for Sunday-school teachers, Protestant ministers John Heyl Vincent and Lewis Miller had no idea they would inspire “a vast national cultural movement,” says Johnson, a professor of U.S. history at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey. But within two years, similar assemblies for mass uplift “began springing up in small towns and cities across the nation.” Organized and run by local committees, and often held in a large tent near a river or lake, the chautauquas would run for about

a week. Mornings were typically given over to Bible study, and afternoons and evenings to a mixture of lectures, musical acts, debates, dramatic readings, birdcallers, and bell ringers.

Early in the 20th century, “circuit chautauquas” developed, as entrepreneurs put together traveling extravaganzas and required local committees to guarantee a certain level of ticket sales. During the early 1920s, Johnson says, “chautauquas brought their unique blend of education, inspiration, and entertainment” to as many as 10,000 municipalities a year. For “tired, isolated men and women,” chautauquas had much appeal, said one acid critic later in the decade. “Even the twittering of a bird imitator gave relief from the silo, the cowshed, the cooking, and the greasy dishes of the



*Participants pack the amphitheater at Lake Chautauqua to hear a quartet perform, circa 1900.*

depressing lives these people led. Even a lecturer with nothing much to say was a relief to husbands and wives who, for years, had even less to say to each other.”

The chautauqua was not just a rural phenomenon, Johnson notes. It was “one of the first attempts to deliver a truly national culture to the masses—a culture linking rural and urban, East and West, North and South. Although the Midwest, and especially the state of Iowa, became the center of chautauqua activity, pro-

grams were held in all regions of the nation and in the largest cities,” including New York and Chicago.

The early 1920s, Johnson notes, saw “the emergence of rival means of delivering a national culture to even the most isolated parts of the nation: radio and motion pictures.” Only some 500 cities held chautauquas in 1928. By the 1950s, only one chautauqua was left—in Mediapolis, Iowa. It was no longer “the most American thing.”

## PRESS & MEDIA

### *Watching the Feds*

“Where are the Watchdogs?” by Lucinda Fleeson, in *American Journalism Review* (July/Aug. 2001), Univ. of Md., 1117 Journalism Bldg., College Park, Md., 20742-7111.

Are federal agencies too boring to cover on a regular basis? Editors at most major newspapers seem to think so. According to a recent *American Journalism Review* survey, a number of government bureaucracies are not covered by any full-time newspaper reporters, including the \$46 billion Department of Veterans Affairs, which is the third-largest federal employer after the Pentagon and the Postal Service.

Critics warn that the change leaves government agencies less accountable to the public. Consumer advocate (and erstwhile presidential candidate) Ralph Nader argues that to cover government, reporters must “get inside, you’ve got to get the leaks, and the whistle-blowing, and you can’t do that once in a while.”

Editors are generally unapologetic, notes Fleeson, a former *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter. “We don’t cover buildings,” says Sandy Johnson of the Associated Press. At the *Washington Post*, national editor Liz Spayd says that her staff of 50 isn’t big enough to do the job, even if she wanted it to. Editors also insist that the old approach often lost sight of larger issues in a sea of trivia, or yielded stories of marginal interest. Besides, Reuters and the Associated Press (as well as trade publications) still cover the old beats. Today’s editors prefer to assign reporters to cover several agencies at once, or to produce thematic or issue-oriented “enterprise” stories.

Out of the changes has emerged what Fleeson calls “the New Washington Reporter,” who gives “only part-time scrutiny to the busi-

ness of the federal government.” One of them is Lisa Hoffman, a Scripps Howard reporter charged with covering the Pentagon, the State Department, and the Internet. She still stalks the halls of the Pentagon on occasion, and she’s a good reporter, Fleeson says. But Hoffman is stretched thin and there’s a limited payoff to covering the Pentagon: The chain’s papers don’t always run her defense stories. Readers aren’t interested, editors say.

Another member of the new breed is the *Los Angeles Times*’s David Willman, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his 1998 stories revealing that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had given fast-track approval to seven drugs over the objections of its own experts and other warnings. Willman reported that one drug, Rezulin, a diabetes treatment, was linked to 33 deaths. After Willman’s story broke, the drug was recalled by the FDA. But it was a triumph of enterprise rather than beat reporting: it took almost two years to complete the story, and Willman had to be freed from covering campaign finance reform and other matters.

Willman’s *Times* colleague, Alan C. Miller, scored a coup in 1994 by uncovering ethical misdeeds by then Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy. He went back to Agriculture two years later and wrote about the theft of timber in national forests. “Every time I dug into something at the Ag Department, we hit paydirt,” Miller told Fleeson. But the *Times*, based in the nation’s biggest agricultural state, doesn’t have anybody “covering the building.” The department “is

largely uncovered except by the AP, Reuters, and the *Des Moines Register*.”

Fleeson is not unsympathetic to the editors’ dilemma: hard news or enterprise. But she

reaches an “uncomfortable” conclusion: Despite all the talk, “fewer and fewer mainstream news organizations bother any anymore with dailies or enterprise stories.”

## *Privileged Reporters?*

“The Reporter’s Privilege, Then and Now” by Stephen Bates, in *Society* (July–Aug. 2001), Transaction Periodicals Consortium, Rutgers Univ., P.O. Box 10826, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

There’s one story the news media never tire of running: Somewhere in America, a reporter has gone heroically off to jail after defying a court order requiring him to turn over notes or tapes to the authorities. It’s a First Amendment issue, journalists cry. Without a “right to silence” they will become de facto investigators for the state, and the chilling effect on sources will compromise the constitutional guarantee of a free press. In the eyes of government, however, journalists have the same obligations as other citizens.

The law is equivocal, notes Bates, literary editor of the *Wilson Quarterly* and formerly a lawyer in the office of the Whitewater Independent Counsel. There’s no record of any reporter claiming such a privilege before 1848, when John Nugent of the *New York Herald* refused to reveal to Congress who had supplied him with a secret draft treaty with Mexico. He was jailed for 10 days but kept his secret. By 1896, the question of privilege apparently had arisen often enough that Maryland passed a “shield” law protecting journalists from state subpoenas. (Today, 31 states have such laws.) It wasn’t until 1957 that a case involving a clear First Amendment argument reached a high federal court. The reporter lost.

Things changed in the 1960s, as a new generation of politically liberal and generally more adversarial journalists took the stage. Early in the Nixon administration, moreover, federal prosecutors aggressively pursued media subpoenas, as did Congress. News organizations mostly complied but warned loudly of the dangers to liberty. Finally, in 1972, the Supreme Court weighed in. In *Branzburg v. Hayes*, it rejected by a 5-4 majority three reporters’ separate claims of journalistic privilege, noting that the only “testimonial privilege” afforded by the Constitution is the Fifth Amendment’s protection against self-incrimination. Worries

about a chilling effect, the Court said, were largely “speculative.” It pointed out that judges could still intervene if a malicious prosecutor used subpoenas to harass the press.

However, Justice Lewis E. Powell, Jr.’s concurring opinion left a number of doors open, and some lower federal courts have marched through, often recognizing a testimonial privilege after applying a three-point test to media subpoenas. The Supreme Court, while sticking by *Branzburg* in principle, according to Bates, has passed up opportunities to correct the lower courts.

What to do? Above all, Bates argues, government and the news media must strive to avoid situations in which journalists defy the rule of law. “The law suffers when court orders are flouted without shame—or, indeed, with pride.” Strict guidelines already limit the number of media subpoenas pursued by the U.S. Department of Justice to one or two dozen annually. (In 1997, there were 2,725 media subpoenas, mostly from civil litigants and criminal defendants; federal prosecutors accounted for fewer than 25.) Some federal independent counsels may arguably have been incautious in seeking *particular* media subpoenas, but Congress isn’t likely to reenact the now defunct law needed to create future independent counsels. (It has also declined to pass a shield law or other limits on media subpoenas.)

The news media must also exercise self-restraint, Bates says. When the New York State police posted newspaper photos on its Web site to aid in the identification of criminals at the Woodstock ‘99 festival, the Associated Press and Syracuse Online forced their removal, claiming copyright infringement. That was simply bad citizenship, declares legal ethicist Stephen Gillers. He warns, says Bates, that inflating such “trivial incursions . . . may numb the public to the dangers posed by true First Amendment violations.”

## *Philosophy's Purpose*

"Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline" by Bernard Williams, in *The Threepenny Review* (Spring 2001), P.O. Box 9131, Berkeley, Calif. 94709.

Philosophy has become so recondite and airless an occupation these days that the very title of Williams's essay may seem a reproach. Williams, who teaches philosophy at Oxford University and the University of California, Berkeley, and is the author of *Shame and Necessity* (1993), among many other books, regrets that students too often end up believing that philosophy is "a self-contained technical subject." He believes that philosophy should rather be "part of a more general attempt to make the best sense of our life, and so of our intellectual activities, in the situation in which we find ourselves." If it is to do that, philosophy needs to rid itself of what Williams calls "scientific illusions." It should not try to behave like a branch of the natural sciences, except in those cases where that is precisely what it is—"work in the philosophy of quantum mechanics, for instance, or in the more technical aspects of logic." Philosophy must certainly take an interest in the sciences, but without being assimilated "to the aims, or at least the manners, of the sciences."

Philosophy, for Williams, belongs to an expansive humanistic enterprise. If philosophy is to contribute successfully to that process of understanding ourselves and our activities, it must attend to all the other parts of the enterprise, especially history: "If we believe that philosophy might play an important part in making people think about what they are doing, then philosophy should acknowledge its connections with other ways of understanding ourselves, and if it insists on not doing so, it may seem to the student in every sense quite peculiar."

Williams acknowledges the reservations that someone, "perhaps a young philosopher," will have about the encompassing approach he proposes: "Doesn't it mean that there is too much we need to know, that one can only do philosophy by being an

amateur of altogether too much? Can't we just get on with it?" In other words, isn't small and good, the successful approach of much contemporary analytic philosophy, better than broad and bad?

Williams argues that philosophy should not abandon an approach that allows for the division of labor, but that it should reconsider the nature of the division, which "tends to be modeled too easily on that of the sciences, as dividing one field or area of theorizing from another." He proposes that the subject be divided up differently—"by thinking of one given ethical idea, for instance, and the various considerations that might help one to understand it." And as for not knowing all that you think you might need to know before undertaking philosophy, "it makes a difference," he observes, "what it is that you know you do not know. One may not see very far outside one's own house, but it can be very important which direction one is looking in."



The Menacing Muses (1916), by Giorgio de Chirico

Williams worries that the traditional humanistic enterprise of trying to understand ourselves is coming to seem odd, archaic, and unnecessary at a time when education is focused increasingly on the technical and the

commercial. He fears that reflective activity may be preserved, at best, “as part of the heritage industry.” And if that should occur, “it will not be the passionate and intelligent activity that it needs to be.”

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

## Who Killed the Woolly Mammoth?

“Mass Extinctions Pinned on Ice Age Hunters” by Leigh Dayton, “A Multispecies Overkill Simulation of the End-Pleistocene Megafaunal Mass Extinction” by John Alroy, and “New Ages for the Last Australian Megafauna: Continent-Wide Extinction about 46,000 Years Ago” by Richard G. Roberts, Timothy F. Flannery, et al., in *Science* (June 8, 2001), American Assn. for the Advancement of Science, 1200 New York Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

It’s an Ice Age mystery: What caused the sudden mass extinction of huge, exotic mammals and flightless birds in the late Pleistocene era, 11,000 to 50,000 years ago? Climate change has been suggested. But the evidence is mounting against the prime suspect in the case, *Homo sapiens*, reports Dayton, a science writer in Australia.

Dating megafauna-bearing sediments from 28 sites across Australia, scientists led by Roberts, a geochronologist at the University of Melbourne, and Flannery, a mammalogist at the South Australian Museum in Adelaide, found that a continent-wide extinction of large animals took place about 46,000 years ago—not many millenniums

EXCERPT

### *The Planet Speaks?*

*The first thing to know about global warming is this: The science is sound. . . .*

*But it isn’t just the scientists who are hard at work on this issue. For the past five years, it’s almost as if the planet itself has been peer-reviewing their work. We’ve had the warmest years on record—including 1998, which was warmer than any year for which records exist. And those hot years have shown what even small changes in temperature—barely a degree Fahrenheit averaged globally—can do to the Earth’s systems.*

*Consider hydrology, for instance. Warm air holds more water vapor than cold air, so there is an increase in evaporation in dry areas, and hence more drought—something that has been documented on every continent. Once that water is in the atmosphere, it’s going to come down somewhere—and, indeed, we have seen the most dramatic flooding ever recorded in recent years. In 1998, 300 million humans, one in 20 of us, had to leave their homes for a week, a month, a year, forever, because of rising waters.*

*Or look at the planet’s cryosphere, its frozen places. Every alpine glacier is in retreat; the snows of Kilimanjaro will have vanished by 2015; and the Arctic ice cap is thinning fast—data collected by U.S. and Soviet nuclear submarines show that it is almost half gone compared with just four decades ago.*

*In other words, human beings are changing the planet more fundamentally in the course of a couple of decades than in all the time since we climbed down from the trees and began making use of our opposable thumbs. There’s never been anything like this.*

—Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature* (1989), writing in *In These Times* (Apr. 10, 2001)

after humans appeared on the Australian scene. Though the evidence is circumstantial, Roberts thinks it “definitely” implicates humans. But the lethal blow that humans delivered to frightful 660-pound, claw-footed kangaroos, flightless 220-pound *Genyornis* birds, and other huge beasts was indirect, he believes. Aborigines habitually set fire to the landscape, perhaps to make hunting and traveling easier, and so reduced the megafauna’s food supply. Hunting and climate change may have pushed the big animals the rest of the way to extinction.

“In North America, by contrast,” writes Dayton, “hunters may have been in the thick of the faunical fray.” Ice Age America had saber-toothed tigers, giant antelopes, woolly bison, and woolly mammoths. But by the end of the Pleistocene era, 11,000 years ago, more than two-thirds of the large mammals had died out—once again, after humans had arrived on the scene. According to the “blitzkrieg” hypothesis put forth in 1967 by geoscientist Paul Martin of the University of Arizona, Tucson, early hunter-gatherers followed their prey across the top of Asia to North America, then southward. Wiping out animals locally, the hunters ultimately drove populations to extinction.

To test Martin’s theory, Alroy, an evolutionary biologist at the University of California, Santa Barbara, recently ran computer simulations of such an invasion of human hunters in North America, starting 14,000 years ago, and the impact it would have had on 41 species of large, plant-eating animals. “Alroy found that no matter how he adjusted the variables, mass extinctions ensued,” Dayton writes. “Even the slowest, clumsiest hunters unleashed ecological devastation,” and the largest animals were hardest hit. Hunting and human population growth could have done in the megafauna even without climate change.

But “not everyone is convinced,” notes Dayton. Biologists Ross MacPhee and Alex Greenwood, of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, say that Alroy’s hunter argument fails to explain why extinctions ceased 10,000 years ago, instead of continuing into the current era, the Holocene. But MacPhee and Greenwood don’t let *Homo sapiens* completely off the hook. They suspect that the human newcomers brought with them a lethal, highly contagious virus, and that it did in the woolly mammoth and the other behemoths of the Ice Age.

## No Hocus-Pocus

“The Truth and the Hype of Hypnosis” by Michael R. Nash, in *Scientific American* (July 2001), 415 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017-1111.

It is a scene familiar from countless movies. A pocket watch swings back and forth on a chain while a voice soothingly intones, “You are getting sleepy, very sleepy.” But hypnosis is more than Hollywood fantasy. It has important, widely recognized medical uses, reports Nash, a professor of psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

A National Institutes of Health panel found in 1996 that hypnosis alleviated pain in patients with cancer and other chronic conditions. It also has reduced pain in burn victims and women in labor. A recent review of various studies found that hypnosis relieved the pain of 75 percent of 933 subjects taking part in 27 different



“You’re getting sleepy . . .”

experiments. In a few cases, says Nash, the relief was greater than that provided by morphine.

Another “meta-analysis,” of 18 different studies, found that hypnosis, in conjunction with psychotherapy, helped treat anxiety, insomnia, hypertension, and obesity. But certain other conditions such as drug addiction and alcoholism “do not respond well” to hypnosis, says Nash.

Psychologists in the late 1950s developed a series of 12 tests to measure the depth of a subject’s hypnotic state. In one test, for instance, the subject is told that he is holding a very heavy ball. If his arm sags under the imaginary weight, he scores a point. The more tests the individual passes, the more responsive to hypnosis he is. On a scale of zero to 12, most people score between five and seven.

Contrary to what one might suppose, readily hypnotized persons aren’t necessarily prone to “gullibility, hysteria, psychopathology, trust, aggressiveness, imagination, or social compliance,” says Nash. Instead, they tend to be people who lose

themselves in reading, daydreaming, or listening to music.

Studies show that a person’s capacity to be hypnotized, like an IQ score, remains stable throughout adulthood. Identical twins are more likely to have similar hypnosis scores than same-sex fraternal twins, a finding that indicates a possible hereditary factor.

“Under hypnosis, subjects do not behave as passive automatons,” Nash observes. Rather, they actively respond to the hypnotist’s suggestions. Yet they typically perceive the sometimes dramatic changes in thought and behavior that they experience—including hallucinations, delusions, and memory loss—as “something that just happens” to them, without any effort on their part. “My hand became heavy and moved down by itself,” a subject might say.

The clinical use of hypnosis, Nash believes, may become a matter of course for some patients with certain conditions. Hypnosis is not yet a part of standard medicine, but it has “come a long way from the swinging pocket watch.”

## *The Darwinian Doctor*

“Dr. Darwin’s Rx” by Beth Saulnier, in *Cornell Magazine* (Mar.–Apr. 2001), Cornell Alumni Federation, 55 Brown Rd., Ithaca, N.Y. 14850–1247.

There seems no end to the frontiers of medicine. The latest: “Darwinian medicine,” an emerging field that takes an evolutionary perspective on human health. Advocates, notes Saulnier, an associate editor of *Cornell Magazine*, look at the symptoms of illnesses or injuries that physicians traditionally treat, and ask whether some symptoms are not beneficial.

Consider fever, for instance. “A moderate fever, below about 103 degrees, actually can speed the healing process,” says Paul Sherman, an evolutionary biologist at Cornell University. “It makes the body’s environment less able to be invaded by the pathogen, and it enables its immune system to work faster.”

Morning sickness, in the Darwinian perspective, is another misunderstood protective response, writes Saulnier. Sherman and a stu-

dent, Sam Flaxman, found that women “who experience moderate morning sickness are less likely to miscarry.” Meat, eggs, and certain other foods are likely to contain chemicals or pathogens that could harm the developing fetus, so the mother’s nausea and vomiting protect the baby. Thus, women genetically disposed to morning sickness are “more likely to reproduce and pass on the trait.”

“Human biology is designed for Stone Age conditions,” wrote researchers Randolph Nesse and George Williams in a 1991 article that gave the nascent field of “Darwinian medicine” its name. That design lag can help explain information age maladies.

The craving for fat, for instance, once was “a distinct evolutionary advantage,” Saulnier says, since fat has more calories

than other types of food. But “in an age of abundance . . . that same craving can be a one-way ticket to obesity and heart disease.”

Modern conditions also have altered the worth of some evolutionary tradeoffs, Saulnier points out. The gene that causes sickle-cell anemia once gave people who had only one copy of the gene (rather than the deadly two copies) valuable protection against malaria. Similarly, the gene that causes Tay-Sachs disease warded off tuberculosis. But with the threats posed by

malaria and TB so much diminished today, the genes' benefits are minimal, while their dangers remain.

Only a few dozen American researchers are now at work in the field of Darwinian medicine, and the field is not well known. But that may change, says Saulnier. One big contribution Darwinian medicine could make lies in the allocation of medical resources. Why develop costly drugs to relieve morning sickness, for example, if it protects the baby?

## ARTS & LETTERS

# *The Other Rockwell*

“Rockwell Kent Rediscovered” by Stephen May, in *American Arts Quarterly* (Spring 2001), P.O. Box 1654, Cooper Station, New York, N.Y. 10276.

Painter, illustrator, printmaker, and author, Rockwell Kent (1882–1971) was recognized as a major American artist during the 1930s. But in subsequent decades his accomplishments as a painter were overshadowed, first by his commercial illustrations and political posters, then, during the Cold War, by controversy over his left-wing politics. Though not a member of the Communist Party, Kent was a staunch supporter of the Soviet Union (and a recipient of the 1967 Lenin Peace Prize).

Several recent exhibitions have revived interest in Kent's rugged landscape paintings (some of which he gave to the Soviet Union in 1960), as well as his striking graphic images. These works are “among the finest achievements” in 20th-century American art, asserts May, a writer based in Washington and Maine.

Born in 1882 in Tarrytown, New York, Kent showed an early aptitude for drawing and studied under William Merritt Chase, Robert Henri, and Abbott Thayer. In 1905, Henri, a leader of the “ashcan” school of painting, introduced Kent to the harsh beauty of Monhegan Island, off the coast of Maine. The young artist stayed there for sev-

eral years, eking out a living as a carpenter and lobsterman. “Inspired by the soaring cliffs, pounding waves, and forested landscape of Monhegan,” writes May, “Kent produced some of the most powerful paintings of his career. In *Toilers of the Sea* (1907), the hard life of men who make their living from the sea was underscored by the dramatic backdrop of the island's towering cliffs.”

Married in 1908 to Thayer's niece (the first of three wives), Kent moved to Newfoundland six years—and three children—later, settling in a small fishing village. But with World War I nearing, the outspoken stranger's “open admiration for German culture” led villagers to suspect that he was a German spy. In mid-1915, he was ordered to leave Newfoundland.

In subsequent years, he traveled to Alaska, Tierra del Fuego, and Greenland. He made his final home in the late 1920s on a dairy farm near the village of AuSable Forks, New York, with the Adirondack Mountains on the horizon. In each setting, says May, Kent produced “stark, evocative art. His crisp, modernist images, both paintings and graphic work, reflect his superb artistic gifts



**Self-Portrait (It's Me, O Lord),**  
1934, by Rockwell Kent



The Artist in Greenland (1935), by Rockwell Kent

and his grasp of the essentials of each place.” In *The Artist in Greenland* (1935), for instance, “the tiny forms of Kent and his dog team are engulfed in the silent, white vastness of the arctic space.”

Kent used his graphic work to produce needed income. The more than 270 pen-and-ink drawings he did for a 1930 edition of *Moby Dick* established him as a top illustrator. “His bread-and-butter work,” May says, “ran the gamut from illustrations for

Sherwin-Williams paint guides to illustrations for *Beowulf* and *Paul Bunyan*.” Kent also turned out lithographs and posters that reflected his passionate political views, often by featuring idealized depictions of workers as heroes or victims. His output of paintings—mostly views of his farm in the Adirondacks—diminished. Yet his powerful landscapes, says May, “seem destined to endure as masterpieces of American realistic art.”

EXCERPT

### *How to Live Many Lives*

*One seeks sanctuary in literature so as not to be unhappy and so as not to be incomplete. To ride alongside the scrawny Rocinante and the confused Knight on the fields of La Mancha, to sail the seas on the back of a whale with Captain Ahab, to drink arsenic with Emma Bovary, to become an insect with Gregor Samsa: these are all ways that we have invented to divest ourselves of the wrongs and the impositions of this unjust life, a life that forces us always to be the same person when we wish to be many different people, so as to satisfy the many desires that possess us.*

—Mario Vargas Llosa, novelist and a professor of Ibero-American literature at Georgetown University, in *The New Republic* (May 14, 2001)

# Holden at 50

“Holden Caulfield’s Legacy” by David Castronovo, in *New England Review* (Spring 2001), Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vt. 05753.

Holden Caulfield, that young despiser of “phonies,” turns 50 this year but shows every sign of remaining America’s perpetual adolescent. Immensely popular when first published in 1951, J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* has had “cultural significance and staying power beyond its literary value,” observes Castronovo, the author of *Edmund Wilson* (1985).

Like Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*, Thomas Wolfe’s *Look Homeward, Angel*, and Ernest Hemingway’s Nick Adams stories, Salinger’s novel is “about a lonely young boy who thinks there is something wrong with the world, something essentially dead and phony and disgusting about the arrangement of things,” notes Castronovo. But unlike the earlier protagonists, Holden has “no unfolding destiny, no mission,” and not even much in the way of dramatic moments.

Turning against what Holden calls the “David Copperfield crap,” Salinger made his book antiliterary in a new way, filling it with babbling and “impressions that are overtaken by afterthoughts, comic contradictions, half-recognitions, and canceled insights,” Castronovo writes. The familiar subject of lonely youth is

conveyed with “a managed incoherence, an attractive breakdown of logic that appeals to the confused adolescent in all of us. Sweeping denunciations are followed by abject apologies—only to be followed by other ridiculous pronouncements.” Among the many Holdenisms: “I’m quite illiterate, but I read a lot,” and “I hate the movies like poison, but I get a bang imitating them.”

Throughout the novel, Holden offers advice for “cant-free living,” notes Castronovo. Be “casual as hell,” for instance, and never use the word *grand*. *Catcher* is, in a sense, “one of the first manuals of cool, a how-to guide for those who would detach themselves from the all-American postwar pursuit of prosperity and bliss,” Castronovo writes. And after a half-century, the teachings still have cultural force. “Young people and their fearful elders know that coolness is the only way. Formal discourse, sequential thinking, reverence for the dignified and the heroic: these acts closed by the 1960s. The voice of Holden played a part in shutting them down. Its tone—directed against prestige and knowingness—is as cutting today as it was in 1951.”

## OTHER NATIONS

### *The EU’s Religious Factor*

“Does Religion Matter? Christianity and Public Support for the European Union” by Brent F. Nelsen, James L. Guth, and Cleveland R. Fraser, in *European Union Politics* (June 2001), Sage Publications Ltd., P.O. Box 5096, Thousand Oaks, Calif. 91359.

Scholars seeking to explain public attitudes toward European integration usually stress economics: More affluent (and better educated) Europeans, they note, tend to be more supportive of the European Union (EU). The authors, who are all political scientists at Furman University in South Carolina, contend that another important factor, religion, is overlooked.

While the EU may be chiefly an economic community, European integration and religion, particularly Catholicism, “were explicitly linked, theoretically and politically,” when the

dream of unity took shape in the early years after World War II, Nelsen and his colleagues observe. “European integration in the 1950s was largely a Christian Democratic project, led by devout Catholics such as Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman, and Alcide de Gasperi.”

Moreover, write the authors, “the great divide over integration has always run between Catholic nations, which envisioned a single European federation, and Protestant latecomers, such as the United Kingdom, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Norway (which never did join), with their pragmatic preference for clos-

er cooperation among sovereign states. The Protestant countries are reluctant to abandon sovereignty for historical and political reasons,” while the Catholic Church “has consistently supported both the European Union and its expansion.”

But social scientists, convinced that religion is fast becoming a spent social force in Europe, have paid little heed to religion’s role in recent European politics. The authors’ analysis of Eurobarometer survey data from 10 countries over recent decades suggests that this neglect is a mistake. They find that Catholics, especially devout ones, “are warmest toward the Union, while Protestants tend to be slightly less supportive than secular citizens are.” Strong religious

commitment may also encourage support for European integration among some Protestants in established state churches (Lutheran and Anglican) who take their cues from their clerical leaders. But the most devout sectarian Protestants, such as Calvinists in the Netherlands and Northern Ireland, “are the least fond of the European Union.”

“If, indeed, religious tides are slowly ebbing in Europe—especially Catholic commitment—a prime source of Europeanist sentiment may be eroding,” Nelsen and his co-authors conclude. As a result, the EU “will be ever more dependent on its economic performance” for continued public support.

## *A Brighter View of Russia*

“Russia” by Anders Åslund, in *Foreign Policy* (July–Aug. 2001), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1779 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Mention Russia today, and an image of catastrophic decline may well come to mind. Shock therapy failed, the economy has collapsed, the infrastructure is crumbling, corruption is widespread, the population is shrinking. Russia, in this view, seems headed for Milton’s “reign of Chaos and old Night.” Get a grip, urges Åslund, author of *How Russia Became a Market Economy* (1995). The country’s plight has been vastly exaggerated.

True, official data show that gross domestic product (GDP) shrank 44 percent between 1989 and 1998. But that’s a statistical mirage. “Under communism,” Åslund notes, “everybody padded output to reach targets in the planned economy, while nobody cared about the quality (or even the usefulness) of the items produced.” The subsequent decline in production of shoddy or useless goods should be welcomed, he says. And the statistics miss the substantial output of the postcommunist underground economy.

A more accurate picture of Russia’s economic development to 1998 would show stagnation, says Åslund. The problem is not excessive “shock therapy,” but “too little shock and too much corrupt state therapy in the form of subsidies to the country’s elite.” And don’t blame the plague of bribery on

privatization, he says. It “is overwhelmingly connected with law enforcement, tax collection, and state intervention.” Despite all its problems, Åslund points out, Russia since 1998 has achieved continued economic growth: The GDP increased 5.4 percent in 1999, and 8.3 percent last year.

Another important and largely unrecognized achievement, says Åslund, is the “extraordinary improvement” that privatization and market pricing have made in Russia’s infrastructure. He cites an impressive expansion in the telecommunications industry, improvements in airports and airlines, increased road construction, and new ports that have been built around St. Petersburg. Russia is in the midst of a “building boom.” Maintenance problems, however, persist “where state monopolies linger,” he observes.

As for Russia’s population meltdown, Åslund says the shocking statistics are misleading. Yes, the country is “losing” more than 500,000 people a year—but population decline is “an issue across Europe.” Yes, male life expectancy decreased from 64 years in 1989 to 57 years in 1994—but the 1989 figure was an aberration caused by former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev’s anti-alcohol campaign. The 1994 figure fit long-term trends. “Nothing suggests that

average healthcare standards in Russia have fallen,” Åslund maintains. Indeed, the infant mortality rate fell by 17 percent between 1993 and 1998.

Slow as Russia’s reforms have been, Åslund says, they “have progressed far enough to keep the communists at bay.”

Many Russians and foreigners think that democracy is Russia’s problem, and that “a strong leader” is needed. On the contrary, Åslund maintains, “the unlawful enrichment of the elite is the problem. . . . The widespread disregard for democracy and the repression of media are the greatest dangers.

## *Venezuela’s Delusions of Wealth*

“The Real Story behind Venezuela’s Woes” by Moisés Naím, in *Journal of Democracy* (Apr. 2001), 1101 15th St., N.W., Ste. 802, Washington, D.C. 20005.

*Corruption, corruption, corruption*—that’s the reason most people in oil-rich Venezuela are poor, President Hugo Chávez asserts, and a large majority of Venezuelans believe him. Lambasting the “politicians” and the “rich” for stealing the country’s wealth, the fiery former military officer promises to set things right. Unfortunately, the national “fixation with corruption” is as much of a roadblock to progress as corruption itself, argues Naím, the editor of *Foreign Policy* and a former Venezuelan minister of trade and industry (1989-90).

The focus on corruption encourages Venezuelans to believe that theirs is a rich country crippled by thieves. According to a recent public opinion poll, about 90 percent of Venezuelans believe that their country is wealthy. But despite occasional windfalls, oil income “has long been insufficient” to make Venezuela rich. Oil’s contribution to the national treasury fell from \$1,540 per person in 1974 to only \$200 two decades later. Sixty-eight percent of Venezuelans live in poverty today—more than twice the percentage two decades ago.

“Venezuela’s tax system, labor and social security laws, health, education, housing, state-owned enterprises (including the oil and petrochemical industry), agriculture, and almost all its public-sector institutions, as well as most of its regulatory frameworks, are in desperate need of reform and modernization,” Naím writes. Yet the national obsession with corruption precludes a debate. Indeed, thanks in

no small part to “the enormous role of the state” in Venezuela, “corruption has become pandemic,” he says. An experiment with neoliberal economic reforms during the 1990s was modest and short-lived, falling “far short . . . of what most other Latin American countries implemented.”

Even so, the reforms provoked widespread popular discontent. During the 1990s, Naím notes, “the two political parties that were the building blocks of Venezuelan democracy for more than five decades lost almost all of



A Chávez supporter demonstrates in the streets of Caracas last year, shortly after his landslide reelection.

their influence, as did the country's business, labor, and intellectual elites."

Elected president in 1998 and again last year under a new constitution, and backed by the military and the Left, Chávez now possesses immense powers, observes Naím. "The executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, most state and local governments, the central bank, and the oil industry . . . are all under [his] direct and active control." Though it enjoyed an unex-

pected spike in oil revenues in 1999 and 2000, the Chávez administration has failed to come up with a "credible" plan for economic reform, says Naím.

"The real danger," he argues, "is that the government's poor performance may be aggravated by dwindling oil revenues, which in turn may lead to social and political turmoil." If that happens, Chávez might jettison democracy and become "just another third-world dictator."

## *Africa's Cursed Treasure*

"Blood Diamonds" by Frédéric Barrault, in *African Geopolitics* (Spring 2001), 815 15th St., N.W., Ste. 506, Washington, D.C. 20005; "The Failure of Peacekeeping in Sierra Leone" by William Reno, in *Current History* (May 2001), 4225 Main St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19127.

Civil strife in Africa is often blamed on political grievances or ethnic hatreds. But there's another, perhaps more important factor: diamonds. The major civil wars in Africa today—in Angola, Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea—are being fought in or near diamond-mining zones, notes Barrault, who teaches at the Institut Catholique d'Études Supérieures at La Roche-sur-Yon, France.

Africa holds more than half of the global reserves of diamonds and it supplies half of the \$7 billion world market in uncut diamonds. "Given their value, diamonds always have been an aim of conquest and power among the different powers and rival factions in Africa," Barrault says. Since African nations gained their independence, diamonds have been fueling civil wars. The first wars in the former Belgian Congo in the 1960s, for instance, were fought against a background of struggle for control of the Katanga and Kasai mines. The pattern continues today. "People in Africa fight over diamonds, and the diamond trade finances the insurgencies, thus supporting situations of permanent warfare," Barrault points out. "It is a vicious circle [and] a tragedy for the people of Africa." Hundreds of thousands have been killed.

In a detailed analysis of the decade-old war in Sierra Leone between the government and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Reno, a political scientist at Northwestern University, underscores the important

role diamonds have played in the conflict. The rebels have obtained weapons from Liberian president Charles Taylor in return for diamonds mined in Sierra Leone. This, Reno observes, has enabled the RUF to wage war against the country's "corrupt and inept government" without making an effort to develop popular support. "The RUF bases its political power on control over diamonds, much as had the corrupt Sierra Leone politicians that the RUF criticized."

Responding to reports of atrocities in Sierra Leone, the United Nations Security Council, at the request of Britain and the United States, voted unanimously in March to impose an embargo on Liberian diamond exports, with the aim of cutting off the RUF's resources. It was the third UN embargo against African diamonds in less than two years, notes Barrault. In mid-2000, at Britain's request, an 18-month embargo on all Sierra Leone diamonds was declared. A year before that the UN Security Council, at Canada's request, had targeted Angolan diamonds, which for 25 years have been fueling the civil war between Jonas Savimbi's rebel UNITA forces and the Angolan government.

"Not too much should be expected of these measures," Barrault says. Embargoes are rarely effective, he points out, and diamonds, being small and easily concealed, make circumvention a cinch. Africa's warlords, he says, will continue to make use of their cursed treasure.

# RESEARCH REPORTS

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

## ***“Computer Exports and National Security: New Tools for a New Century.”***

Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1800 K St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006. 68 pp.

Paperback, \$21.95. Author: *James A. Lewis*

Since the Cold War, it's been widely assumed that keeping high-performance computers and microprocessors out of the hands of potential U.S. adversaries is vital to national security. This assumption is badly outdated, according to this report of a commission on technology security, whose co-chairs include former defense secretary James R. Schlesinger and former Central Intelligence Agency director R. James Woolsey.

The dramatic increase in computing power over the last decade, and the ever expanding access to such power via the Internet, the commission says, have broken “the connection between high performance computing and weapons proliferation.”

“Military applications do not require much computing power,” the commission declares. The F-22, the most advanced U.S. fighter jet, was designed with a “supercomputer” that had only about one-fourth of the

computing power now found in an ordinary Pentium chip. In building modern weapons, years of experience at integrating different technologies count for more than computer power, the commission says. In designing nuclear weapons, “access to data derived from nuclear weapons explosions is more important.” And much of America's military edge today derives from superior *software* and the ability to use it in the management of military operations.

The commission urges elimination of U.S. export controls based on computational power. Washington should focus instead on safeguarding its unique software applications, developed through “years of operational experience and extensive testing.” And it should focus on the development of new military software applications by working more closely with universities and with private information-technology companies.

## ***“Declining Share of Children Lived with Single Mothers in the Late 1990s.”***

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 820 First St., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002. 13 pp. Available

at [www.centeronbudget.org/6-15-01wel.htm](http://www.centeronbudget.org/6-15-01wel.htm). Authors: *Allen Dupree and Wendell Primus*

It was bad news for the traditional family last spring when the Census Bureau revealed that the number of families headed by a single mother increased 25 percent between 1990 and 2000. Now, some (qualified) good news: The proportion of children under 18 who live with their divorced or unwed mother and no father or surrogate father declined by nearly eight percent in the late 1990s.

The proportion of youngsters in such circumstances fell from 19.9 percent in 1995 to 18.4 in 2000, report Primus, director of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities' Income Security Division, and Dupree, a research associate. They used the Census Bureau's annual Current Population Survey data for their analysis.

The proportion of children living with their mother and an unmarried adult male (who might or might not be the child's father) increased somewhat, from 2.6 percent to 3.0 percent. That could be good news for the children, if the male fulfills the paternal role—or bad news, if he doesn't.

The proportion of children living with two married parents remained essentially the same between 1995 and 2000: about 70 percent.

Still more good news: The proportion of black children living with two married parents substantially increased—from 34.8 percent in 1995 to 38.9 percent five years later. Meanwhile, the share of black children in single-mother homes with no father or surrogate father present declined by more than eight percent—from 47.1 percent to 43.1 percent.

## Research Reports

Last year, 83.6 percent of children in “higher-income” families (i.e., families at more than twice the official poverty level) were living with two married parents. (That was down from 85 percent in 1995.) Only half the children in “lower-income” families were so fortunate.

Year-to-year shifts in such statistics tend to be small, the authors note, but between 1999 and 2000, strikingly, some changes “were large enough to be statistically significant.” For example, the overall proportion of children liv-

ing with a single mother who was not cohabiting fell from 19.6 percent to 18.4 percent.

The good news seems clear, but the authors are silent on what’s responsible for the trends. Some analysts have pointed to the welfare reform law of 1996 as a factor. Ironically, Primus quit his position at the time in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to protest President Bill Clinton’s signing of the measure. “In some ways, it is working better than I thought,” Primus said recently.

### *“The Performing Arts in a New Era.”*

RAND, 1700 Main St., P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, Calif. 90407–2138. 137 pp. Paperback, \$20.

Available at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org). Authors: Kevin McCarthy, Arthur Brooks, Julia Lowell, and Laura Zakaras

**T**he performing arts in America appear to be flourishing these days, but beneath the glittering surface, “a fundamental shift,” with some possibly worrisome implications, may be taking place, McCarthy and his fellow RAND researchers find.

While a few big commercial organizations and nonprofits, such as the New York City Ballet, are getting larger and putting on more elaborate productions, many “midsized” nonprofits— theater groups, symphony orchestras, opera companies, and dance companies—are finding it hard to attract large enough audiences to cover the costs of paid staff and professional artists. “Many of these organizations are likely to disappear,” the researchers say.

These woes come in the midst of an apparent arts boom. Even the audience for opera grew four percent between 1992 and 1997. In a 1997 survey, 42 percent of those polled said that they had attended at least one live performance during the preceding year; the average among those surveyed was five performances.

More than 8,000 theater groups and other organizations gave live performances in 1997. Up to three-fourths of those among them operating year-round had revenues of less than \$500,000 that year. Performing arts groups are concentrated in California and New York, but on a per capita basis the District of Columbia leads the nonprofit pack, with 45 groups per million inhabitants. On the for-profit side,

Nevada tops the list, with 77 taxable groups per million inhabitants.

While the number of commercial organizations increased more than 40 percent between 1982 and 1997, the number of nonprofits shot up more than 80 percent. Most of the new nonprofits are small, local groups (often with annual revenues of less than \$100,000), relying heavily on unpaid labor.

In the face of increased competition, large nonprofits have been relying more on “star-studded blockbuster productions,” say the authors, much like their commercial counterparts. Midsized nonprofits have turned to “warhorse” traditional works in an effort to attract general audiences, and small organizations have looked to niche markets.

“Despite intensive efforts at marketing” and higher ticket prices, the authors note, the nonprofits’ bottom lines have not improved. Government contributions amount to only about five percent of aggregate revenue (in 1997). Donations from individuals (15 percent) have grown, but so have fundraising costs. Grants from corporations and foundations (14 percent) increasingly have strings attached.

McCarthy and his colleagues see a performing arts world emerging that is divided not between “high art” nonprofits and “mass entertainment” for-profits, but between big and small arts organizations. The distinction between “high art” and “popular art” will continue to erode, and professional live performances of the high arts will increasingly be concentrated in big cities. Small groups,

dependent on unpaid volunteers, will continue to proliferate. Midsized nonprofits, meanwhile, will likely be pressed by reduced

demand, rising costs, and stagnant or declining contributions to become much larger or much smaller—or else simply to shut their doors.

## WILSON CENTER DIGEST

### *“Asian Americans and Politics: Perspectives, Experiences, Prospects.”*

Wilson Center Press. Distributed by Stanford Univ. Press, CUP Distribution Center, 110 Midland Ave., Port Chester, N.Y. 10573–4930. 425 pp. \$60 (paperback, \$22.95).

Editor: *Gordon H. Chang*

In 1970, there were fewer than one million Asian Americans; today there are some 10.9 million. With heavy concentrations in three key electoral states—California, Texas, and New York—Asian Americans have become an attractive political prize and a potentially potent political force.

Asian Americans “are becoming important as activists, as voters, as candidates, as political contributors, and as participants in policy debates,” writes Chang, a historian at Stanford University and the editor of this volume of essays that grew out of a 1998 Wilson Center conference. A count made before the November 2000 election showed 516 Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders holding public office, including two U.S. senators, five U.S. representatives, two governors, 49 state representatives, 89 city council members, 26 mayors, 133 school board or higher-education board members, and 210 judges. Asian Americans have appeared in a less positive political light as well, notably during the controversy over illegal campaign fundraising practices in the Democrats’ 1996 presidential drive.

Before 1996, Asian Americans were widely regarded as politically apathetic, write Frank H. Wu, a Howard University law professor, and consultant Francey Lim Youngberg. (Among those considered Asian Americans are people of Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Indian, Korean, Vietnamese, and Hawaiian descent.) But despite their relatively low turnout at the polls, “Asian Americans have always contributed money to political candidates.” Since 1988, the major political parties have actively pursued their dollars and their votes.

But neither party has those votes locked up, write political scientists Wendy K. Tam Cho, of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Bruce E. Cain, of the University of California, Berkeley. Their 1996 survey of California Asian Americans showed that although Japanese Americans are predominantly Democratic, Asian Americans (unlike blacks and Latinos) “are a genuine swing group . . . not bound by strong partisan identifications.” Which party they choose “seems to have less to do with race and immigration policy” than with its stands on economic and foreign policy matters.

The emergence of an immigrant majority (58 percent in 1996) among Asian American voters is reshaping their collective political orientation, observe Paul M. Ong, a professor of urban planning and social welfare at the University of California, Los Angeles, and David E. Lee, executive director of the nonpartisan Chinese American Voters Education Committee. In both liberal northern California and conservative southern California, for instance, foreign-born Asian Americans generally are more likely than U.S.-born ones to identify themselves as Republicans. Self-appointed “progressive” spokespersons have a hard time claiming to represent all Asian Americans.

Asian Americans are a diverse group. Some highly affluent members have long family histories in the United States, while others are relatively recent arrivals. But recent immigrants also include poor rural folk from Cambodia and middle-class urbanites from South Korea. No activist of any stripe is likely to succeed in molding them into “a coherent political pan-ethnic force,” Chang observes.

# CURRENT BOOKS

*Reviews of new and noteworthy nonfiction*

## *Melancholy Dane*

KIERKEGAARD:

*A Biography.*

By Alastair Hannay. Cambridge Univ. Press. 496 pp. \$34.95

*Reviewed by David Lodge*

I should perhaps explain that my only qualification for reviewing this book is that a few years ago I wrote a novel (*Therapy*) whose chief character, a writer of TV situation comedy, becomes incongruously obsessed with the life and work of Søren Kierkegaard during a more than usually acute midlife crisis. Kierkegaard (1813–55) was a Danish philosopher and theologian who challenged the Hegelian philosophical orthodoxy of his day and was hailed in the 20th century as the first existentialist. But what particularly interested me about Kierkegaard, and led me to use him for fictional purposes, was the connection between what he called his “melancholy” (and we should call depression) and his writing, and how the latter was a kind of therapy for the former. “Only when I write do I feel well,” he noted in his journal. “Then I forget all of life’s vexations, all its sufferings.” His greatest suffering, however, was self-imposed. In 1841, he broke off his engagement to his beloved Regine Olsen, on the paradoxical grounds that he was bound to make her unhappy. He kept the psychological wound of this parting open by brooding on it for the rest of his life.

I turned to Alastair Hannay’s new book hoping for more light to be thrown on the life and personality of this fascinating and baffling figure. I was disappointed, but

that is the publisher’s rather than Hannay’s fault. The preface describes the book as an “intellectual biography,” and that is exactly what it is; but the epithet does not appear on the title page. As a guide to the development of Kierkegaard’s thought in his writings, it could hardly be bettered, but there is little about those specific details of the subject’s daily life that make a historical personage live in the reader’s imagination. As far as I can judge, Hannay has discovered no significant new facts about Kierkegaard’s personal and emotional life, and indeed he deals more cursorily than previous biographers with such topics as the somber drama of the Kierkegaard family history (the father’s first wife died childless, and within a year he married his housekeeper after making her pregnant; she bore him seven children, most of whom died young, which he interpreted as divine punishment for a blasphemy committed in his youth) and the agony of the breach with Regine.

Hannay’s treatment of the latter event, surely the pivotal moment in Kierkegaard’s life, is brisk and rather dismissive: “On 11 October, Kierkegaard went to say that the break was final. There followed a wrought conversation sadly reminiscent of television soap-opera, after which Kierkegaard ‘went straight to the

theatre.’” I am not sure what Hannay’s source is for this conversation, but the dialogue between Kierkegaard and Regine that took place shortly afterward, as recorded in his journal (Walter Lowrie’s translation), seems to me almost unbearably poignant: “She asked me, Will you never marry? I replied, Well, in about 10 years, when I have sowed my wild oats, I must have a pretty young miss to rejuvenate me.—A necessary cruelty. She said, Forgive me for what I have done to you. I replied, It is rather I that should pray for your forgiveness. . . . She said, Kiss me. That I did, but without passion. Merciful God!”

This is not, then, a biography of Kierkegaard that will kindle interest in those unfamiliar with his work, but one for committed students and fellow specialists. An emeritus professor at the University of Oslo, Hannay is a distinguished scholar of Kierkegaard who has translated and edited several of his books. He is well informed about the genesis and composition of all of them, and a reliable guide to their interpretation. What these books really mean is very difficult to establish because of Kierkegaard’s idiosyncratic method of composition, especially his practice of publishing many of them as the work of pseudonymous editors and narrators with fanciful names (Victor Eremita, Johannes Climacus, Nicolaus Notabene), and constructing them out of different kinds of discourse—essays, letters, short stories, treatises—in which he expresses radically different points of view. In this respect, his writings are more like the work of a novel-

ist—and a rather ludic, metafictional novelist, such as Laurence Sterne—than of a conventional philosopher.

His first major work, *Either/Or* (1843), became a literary success and established Kierkegaard as a subversive, avant-garde writer. When planning a second edition, he contemplated adding a typically teasing postscript: “I hereby retract this book. It was a necessary deception for deceiving people, if possible, into the religious, as has been my constant task all along. . . . Still, I don’t need to retract it. I have never claimed to be its author.” The book contrasts the “aesthetic” attitude to life with the “ethical,” an opposition Kierkegaard later abandoned in favor of an existential commitment to the “religious.” But it would seem, too, that he was somewhat disconcerted by the book’s acclaim and was tempted to disown it or to reinterpret it retrospectively. He takes cover finally behind the purely literary convention of pseudonymous authorship—a transparent subterfuge, because by this time everyone knew he was the author.

The complexity and playfulness of Kierkegaard’s mode of writing have opened his work to assimilation by a great variety of mutually incompatible views and attitudes. Lately, efforts have been made to read him as a kind of proto-postmodernist or deconstructionist who demonstrated through paradox and irony the impossibility of ever attaining a stable truth. Hannay will have none of this. He believes there is a core of positive, nonironic meaning to be found in even the most complex and confusing texts, and addresses himself patiently and persuasively to the task of



uncovering it. In short, he takes Kierkegaard's commitment to "the religious" seriously.

One learns from this biography that Kierkegaard was aware of the work of David Friederick Strauss, and therefore of the impending wave of demythologizing biblical scholarship that was to shatter the faith of so many intellectuals in the second half of the 19th century. We might therefore see Kierkegaard's life work as a kind of preemptive strike against the Higher Criticism, based on his conviction that because scientific method and supernatural religious faith could never be logically reconciled, some other ground must be sought for faith in

individual consciousness. Hannay's scrupulous study would support such a view. The fact is, however, that because Kierkegaard used so many fictional devices in his most characteristic work, neither Hannay nor Kierkegaard himself can set limits on what readers may find in it.

>DAVID LODGE, *emeritus professor of English literature at the University of Birmingham, England, is the author of the novels* The Picturegoers (1960), The British Museum Is Falling Down (1965), Changing Places (1975), Small World (1984), Nice Work (1988), Paradise News (1992), Therapy (1995), and Thinks (2001), *among others. His nonfiction books include* Language of Fiction (1966), Working with Structuralism (1981), The Art of Fiction (1992), and The Practice of Writing (1996).

## Military Unreadiness

WAR IN A TIME OF PEACE:

*Bush, Clinton, and the Generals.*

By David Halberstam. Scribner. 544 pp. \$28

*Reviewed by Gary Hart*

Almost three decades ago, David Halberstam led a movement that redefined journalism. His *The Best and the Brightest* (1972) opened the councils and processes of government by seeming to open up the minds of key participants. The book offered an authoritative voice and omniscient point of view with minimal reliance on immediate documentation.

A generation of journalists and writers, among them Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, owe Halberstam a debt of gratitude. Out of this movement came tidal waves of anonymous sources, self-serving leaks, treachery, internal dissent within administrations, and problematic policymaking. Not only was journalism revolutionized; the very process of government would never be the same. What was to follow—Watergate, assassination plots, foreign policy disasters, out-of-touch presidents, feuding staffs, and a scandal a minute—didn't merely serve the notion of the people's right to know; it also altered their perception of their government.

If everything was a scandal, was it possible that nothing was *really* a scandal?

The scandal exposed in Halberstam's new book is America's near-total failure to anticipate, understand, or prepare for the post-Cold War world—a scandal that contributed to a thousand deaths in Somalia (including 18 Americans), tens of thousands in the former Yugoslavia, and (at least indirectly) 800,000 to a million in Rwanda, and now some 7,000 on American soil. The decade following the collapse of the Soviet empire saw a shift in the nature of warfare, from confrontation between massed armies of nation-states to low-intensity urban conflict among tribes, clans, and gangs. The new strife seemed more in keeping with the 17th century than the 20th. Neither the first Bush administration nor the Clinton administration was ready.

Indeed, both Republicans and Democrats, governing under the heavy influence of public-opinion polls, decided rather by

default to downplay foreign policy because, in their minds, the American people didn't care about it. The thinking in Washington, to the degree there was any, seems to have been that the United States needn't play a leading role in the world because our constituents don't want to be bothered. Or, more bluntly, it's the economy, stupid. (The one exception to the noninvolvement norm, not much discussed here, was the Persian Gulf War. But that was less about democracy in Kuwait than about oil, and even in the information economy, oil is still king. So chalk the Gulf War up to the economy too.)

berstam's lengthy story are the 1992 and 2000 elections. After a cursory review of Bush the first's foreign policy success in liquidating the Cold War and his military success in the Persian Gulf, we get to the election of William Jefferson Clinton, the figure who dominates the rest of the book. In chapter after chapter, Halberstam describes him as one of the most talented, capable, charismatic, natural politicians of the second half of the 20th century—yet one who constantly seems surprised by events.

Halberstam's definition of political



*Which way now?*

As its title suggests, *War in a Time of Peace* judges the general failure of a coherent foreign policy, absent the central organizing principle of containment of communism, by only one of its main components: the use or the threat of use of military force. A further subtitle to the book might have been: the failure to understand how to use military power as an instrument of foreign policy in an age when the nature of warfare is changing.

The chronological bookends for Hal-

berstam's definition of political genius is exceedingly narrow. He sees it as a mix of empathy, ability to connect, manipulation, personal charm, and guile. The possession of these qualities seems more important than the ends to which they are put. Others might think of characteristics such as foresight and forethought, anticipation, forcefulness at framing issues, and the ability to reach consensus and form coalitions—in short, leadership. Seemingly persuaded by

Clinton's extraordinary gifts according to this restricted definition of political genius, Halberstam portrays a Jekyll-and-Hyde president, a brilliant politician repeatedly caught off guard by a changing world. This doesn't sound much like Franklin Delano Roosevelt, or even Harry Truman. Clinton's domestic political stumbles suggest that his kind of brilliance doesn't guarantee powerful, sure-footed governance at home either. Perhaps the lesson is that we need to reassess the nature of true political leadership in an age concerned more with style than substance and more with appearance than reality.

To be sure, Clinton inherited a foreign policy of improvisation, perhaps more politely called pragmatism—a self-defeating, hopelessly incomplete approach put in play by the Europeans and the first Bush administration, and reinforced by Clinton's reluctance to use force. But what an opportunity for a new president to introduce structure and coherence where neither existed (or exists even today) and to raise the sail of principle over a ship of state wildly veering between Jimmy Carter's emphasis on human rights and Henry Kissinger's realpolitik. If Clinton raged at the narrowness of the choices presented to him, why didn't he create alternatives of his own? Apparently Halberstam does not see such inventiveness as an element of political genius.

The story of U.S. foreign policy in the 1990s is an unhappy muddle of the conflicts in bitter Bosnia, hapless Haiti, murderous Rwanda, gangland Somalia, and tragic Kosovo. None possessed the nobility of World War II, the certainty of the Cold War, or the focus of the Gulf War. When the nature of war shifted, deciding how, when, and where to use American military force became, to say the least, problematic. That's where the generals in Halberstam's title come in. Of the several profiled in this book, Colin Powell is larger than life; his successor as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, John Shalikashvili, is quietly effective; and Wesley Clark, North Atlantic Treaty Organization commander in Kosovo, is especially colorful. Powell and Clark are extremes: Powell wants to use force very selectively; Clark is eager to

mount up whenever the bugle sounds.

Both, of course, must wait for civilian command, which in Halberstam's depiction is ambivalent, ad hoc, and often confused. Here the principal players are a reserved Warren Christopher and then a bellicose Madeleine Albright at the State Department; a Hamletesque Anthony Lake as Clinton's first national security adviser; and, most interestingly, a highly talented but high-risk Richard Holbrooke in several diplomatic roles. Halberstam shows that America's Balkans strategy was adrift and hesitant until French prime minister Jacques Chirac provided spine by insisting on Western intervention to prevent ethnic cleansing. It then fell to Holbrooke the civilian and Clark the general to coordinate diverse and fractious allied forces and bring the hammer down on the gangsters, thugs, and criminals who passed for political leaders in the region.

For students of the presidency, nothing is more troubling than Halberstam's depiction of President Clinton's relations with the military. When he first entered the White House, Clinton deemed the military a hostile political constituency; that attitude stayed with him as late as 1998. For their part, senior military men did not trust the president or the people around him. So much for political genius in a job that includes the title "commander in chief."

One key player, Vice President Al Gore, pops up occasionally as a hawk on Bosnia, but otherwise is curiously absent. And the book seems to lack a final chapter. Bush the younger assumes power, and that's it. One wonders what Halberstam, a veteran observer of politics and foreign policy, makes of all he has discussed in this 800-page saga. Surely there are lessons to be drawn from America's decade-long effort to define its role in the post-Cold War world. Alas, the author, so qualified to provide them, denies us his interpretations of this curious interim era.

>GARY HART, a former U.S. senator (D-Colo.), practices international law in Denver. He is the author of 12 books, including the forthcoming *Thomas Jefferson's Ideal of the Republic in 21st-Century America*, for which he received a D.Phil. from Oxford University.

## ARTS & LETTERS

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### *THE WARDEN OF ENGLISH: The Life of H. W. Fowler.*

By Jenny McMorris. Oxford Univ. Press. 320 pp. \$27.50

I think of the world as I wish it were, with its hedonism tempered, its courage roused, its greed eliminated, its love of truth multiplied. In that world, Henry Watson Fowler (1858–1933) would have been a hero—statues, tickertape parades, a knighthood, the whole bit. Fowler is, of course, the author of *Modern English Usage* (1926), a reference book that is revered even today, three-quarters of a century after it was first published, and revered even in America, which Fowler never visited and about whose idioms he freely admitted knowing little.

Fans of *MEU* will tell you that it's invaluable for more than the judgments it renders about the niceties of English. They treasure it as well for the character of Henry Fowler—for the way he brought that character to bear on his subject matter, teaching readers by example how to arrive at sound judgments of their own. For instance, he began a discussion of whether to set off slang words with such phrases as “so to speak” and “to use an expressive colloquialism”: “Surprise a person of the class that is supposed to keep servants cleaning his own boots, & either he will go on with the job while he talks to you, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, or else he will explain that the bootboy or scullery-maid is ill & give you to understand that he is, despite appearances, superior to boot-cleaning. If he takes the second course, you conclude that he is not superior to it; if the first, that perhaps he is. So it is with the various apologies . . . to which recourse is had by writers who wish to safeguard their dignity & yet be vivacious, to combine comfort with elegance, to touch pitch & not be defiled.”

To love *MEU* is to want to know more about its author, and now McMorris, the archivist for the Oxford English dictionaries, gratifies that desire. Fowler is full of surprises. A physical fitness buff, he for many years went for a daily run and a swim in the ocean. A shy and self-effacing scholar who was almost otherworldly about money, he did not marry until he was 50, but then entered into what was apparently a blissful marriage with a large, jolly chat-

terbox of a nurse. Half a dozen years later, the Great War broke out, and although Fowler was certainly overage and had plenty of other good reasons to stay home, he wangled his way into the army and then crusaded to be sent to the front lines.

McMorris lucidly recounts the facts of Fowler's life without grinding any particular ax about him. It's up to us to reconcile the man who ultimately composed passages such as the one quoted above with the man who, McMorris writes, mentioned his mother in print just once, telling “a rather foolish tale of his own snobbery as a schoolboy. He was embarrassed by her habit of trimming lamps and polishing glass in the house each morning, and felt that she did this because there were not enough servants to allow her to leave these things alone as, he believed, a lady should; she had explained to him that servants rarely did these small tasks satisfactorily. Only later did he understand the financial burden of educating eight children and that his mother needed to do some small jobs around the house.” Fowler extracted wisdom from his life—and we, too, have the chance to do so, with the help of McMorris's intelligent and winsome biography.

(Anyone tempted to dip into *Modern English Usage* itself should be warned that the stamp of Fowler's heart and mind is faint indeed in the heavily revised 1996 third edition, though it is clear in the 1965 second edition, which remains in print.)

—BARBARA WALLRAFF

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*IT'S ONLY A MOVIE:  
Films and Critics in American Culture.*  
By Raymond J. Haberski, Jr. Univ. Press of Kentucky. 264 pp. \$27.50

Ain't the past quaint. One of the charms of *It's Only a Movie* is the opportunity to experience again this poignant if banal truism. Erik Barnouw's excellent three-volume history of broadcasting lives in my memory chiefly as the place where I first read General David Sarnoff's pious assurance that network broadcasting was too important an undertaking to be turned over to “hucksters.”

Similarly, Haberski's survey of a century of film critics is enlivened by the goofy pleasure of discovering that Hugo Münsterberg, a pioneer thinker about the psychology of moviegoing, fretted in 1916 over the "trivializing influence of a steady contact with things which are not worth knowing." (As I write this, MTV turns 20.) One can also savor this nugget of auteur theory from writer Ferydoun Hoveyda in 1960: "The specificity of a cinematographic work lies in the form rather than in its content, in the *mise-en-scène* and not in the scenario or dialogue." On behalf of the Writers' Guild, grateful appreciation.

Haberski, a history professor at Marian College in Indianapolis, tells the story of American movies from the vantage point of the critics—at first the amateur and then the professional observers of the craft. It's a Rosencrantz-and-Guildenstern angle on how the industry struggled to elbow aside jazz and have itself recognized as America's only true art form. We move from the 1920s Chicago Motion Picture Commission hearings on film censorship to the rhetorical arena, where, in the 1950s and early 1960s, Pauline Kael and Andrew Sarris sparred over whether movies were Cinema. We revisit an era when the repeated viewing of the same movie was an act of scholarly love by film-besotted nerds, not just some teenage obsessive-compulsive behavior.

There's also a remarkable chapter on Theodore Dreiser's attempt to force Paramount to make a faithful adaptation of *An American Tragedy* (1925), and on the semifarcical lawsuit he filed when, oddly enough, the studio decided to go another way. Although the Dreiser story doesn't have much to do with criticism (he did enlist a "jury" of critics to watch Paramount's version and deride it for the edification of the judge), it can provide hours of pleasure in pondering which is funnier, artistic pretension or rag-trade philistinism.

The story Haberski tells has, in current Hollywood parlance, a good arc: Art critics despise movies, art critics begin to appreciate movies, art critics love movies to death, the concept of art disappears, and the critics become irrelevant. *Become* irrelevant? The author keeps hinting that the decline in the

salience of criticism is lamentable, as if film criticism has something of value to offer. Unfortunately, he never quite gets around to making the case that it does, whether by educating the public (early critics believed in elevating the taste of the masses—there's that quaintness again) or by exhorting the industry to follow its better angels (if you believe in that premise, I have some Internet stock I'd like to sell you).

I've been in and around the movie industry since I was seven years old, and I've yet to hear any practitioner discuss reviews or critics except in the context of whether they hurt or helped business. In an age when Spielberg and Lucas have redefined motion pictures as increasingly expensive recapitulations of childhood media experiences, the only reason movie critics don't feel totally superfluous is that the God of Media, in His infinite wisdom, invented television critics.

—HARRY SHEARER

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**SHIKSA GODDESS (OR, HOW I SPENT MY FORTIES): *Essays.***

By Wendy Wasserstein. Knopf.

235 pages. \$23

Wasserstein is allegedly a humorist, but the centerpiece of this collection of "essays," as her publisher boldly calls them, is a self-absorbed psychodrama about her grim struggle to conceive and give birth on the brink of the menopause. It's a case of life imitating art. After winning the Pulitzer Prize for *The Heidi Chronicles*, a play about a middle-aged, intellectual spinster who suddenly decides to become a single mother, Wasserstein, 40, decided to have a baby of her own.

At first she tried to do it the old-fashioned way. "I began studying fertility brochures and showed them to the man I was currently involved with." A real seductress, this girl. When, for some strange reason, her lover fled, she turned to sperm catalogs to find a partner in artificial insemination. But she flunked the fertility tests, so she took drugs to stimulate her flagging ovaries and tried in vitro with "an old and dear friend" as sperm donor. Fate, though, thwarted her again: When she had six egg-and-sperm combos on ice and a surrogate mother lined up, her

doctor told her—so help me, I copied this correctly—“Your eggs are scrambled. They were not properly packed or frozen. We cannot proceed.”

But we must. This was a *project*, and every grad student knows what that means: You have to finish it and turn it in at the end of the trimester or you won't get credit. Abandoning the surrogacy plan, Wasserstein replenished her supply of embryos and had herself implanted with them until, eight years after she started trying, she finally got pregnant at the age of 48. The account of the rest of her ordeal has all the elements of a Lifetime Channel movie set in an obstetrics ward: women in perpetual states of self-discovery, female bonding in the sisterhood of the stirrups, the noble African-American mother in the next bed, one life-threatening emergency after another, and no kidney stone left unturned.

Wasserstein's baby, weighing less than two pounds and afflicted with various lung and brain problems, was delivered by caesarean in the sixth month and had to remain in an incubator for three months. But the infant lived, and the book carries the de rigueur single-motherhood blurb: “Wendy Wasserstein lives in New York City with her daughter, Lucy Jane.”

Wasserstein calls her writing “satiric,” but she never goes for the jugular when the jocular will do. The title essay, in which she gives herself WASP roots to match Hillary Clinton's claim to Jewish roots, is a heavy-handed riff, full of trite Aryan-from-Darien stereotypes long since run into the ground by Philip Roth and Gail Parent. What passes for humor here is the fluffed-up agony of women's magazines, where many of these pieces originally appeared, or brittle New York smart talk involving name-dropping, place-dropping, and label-dropping. Lunch with Jamie Lee Curtis, dinner with Tom Brokaw; Armani this, Russian Tea Room that; Bottega Veneta bags here, Plaza Hotel there; and a bizarre story about using votive candles for shoe trees, “which accidentally burned my Manolo Blahnik pumps.” Even the baby has an “Isolette-brand incubator.”

Wasserstein seemingly considers herself a cultural leader, but she comes across as the kind who leads where everybody is already

WQ

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going. She talks the talk about liberation and self-determination, yet she follows every fad.

—FLORENCE KING

**THE DEATH OF COMEDY.**

By Erich Segal. Harvard Univ. Press.  
589 pp. \$35

“I fart at thee!” The motto on the Farrelly brothers' crest? Nope. It's the first line of Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610), and just a trace of the abundant evidence in Segal's book that the comic theater has always had a rude streak. A lewd streak too, right from the start in ancient Athens, where the comic actors wore outsized phalluses and the nimble theater-going citizens divided their time between feeling patriotic and feeling randy—or, when roused by Aristophanes, feeling both at once.

Segal traces the history of dramatic comedy from A (Aristophanes in the fifth century B.C.) to B (Samuel Beckett in the 20th century A.D.). He first describes comedy's origins in Greek festival and ritual, especially rituals of rebirth, erotic renewal, regeneration, and rec-

conciliation, and he then recounts how the Western tradition took hold of those elements and ran with them for two and a half millennia. Comedy lost its breath when the absurdist playwrights of the 20th century—Jarry, Ionesco, Cocteau, and Beckett—substituted head for heart and willfully destroyed the classical forms. Whereas the great heroes of comedy take on the world with extravagant gestures and profligate language, Beckett's characters are all but immobile, out of words and out of energy.

Segal, a classicist, a best-selling novelist, and a veteran of the theater, movies, and television, is an engaging and immensely well-informed guide through the literature. He believes in the virtues of old-fashioned chronology, and his major figures take the stage comfortably on cue: Aristophanes, Euripides (the tragedian with a comic gene), Menander, Plautus, Terence, Machiavelli (between the preceding two comes a 1,500-year intermission during which comedy bides its time, "with steely churchmen preaching against the diabolical dangers of all stage plays"), Marlowe, Jonson, Shakespeare, and Molière. The book grows thick with Segal's summaries of individual plays. He's generous with his citations, and free—wanton even—with his translations.

Yet you may not laugh, or even smile, at much of what's here. That's because an awful lot of comedy travels about as well as six-year-old kids. Consider Menander, about whose plays, from the Greek comic theater of the late fourth century B.C., it was easier to be enthusiastic when we could also be wistful: We had only fragments of them until a complete play, *Dyskolos* (*The Grouch*), was found in 1957. The excuse then became that we had found the wrong play. And yet, for centuries, both Greeks and Romans thought Menander peerless. "O Menander and life," wrote one ancient commentator, "which of you is imitating which?"

In terms of influence, Segal deems Menander "arguably the single most important figure in the history of Western comedy." Why? Because he excelled at

putting realistic characters from life—young lovers, ill-tempered old fathers, cooks, soldiers, slaves, virgins, prostitutes—on stage, where they have remained, and multiplied, ever since. Menander's quintessential plot is motivated by love, usually at first sight, and driven by ingenious (mechanical?) complications and giddy (inane?) misunderstandings, such as rapes that aren't rapes after all because in due course the parties legally unite. The misunderstandings are resolved; a marriage occurs; progeny are in prospect. Sound familiar? Were he around today, Menander would be writing for TV. Not *The Simpsons* or *Malcolm in the Middle*; maybe *Dharma and Greg*.

Thank goodness Segal knows that a play lives a sheltered life, at best, on the page. His heart is on stage with the players, and he's not afraid to sink to—no, sink below—the jokey level of his subject. When tradesman Ben Jonson gives up manual labor for playwriting, Segal has him "throwing in the trowel." And near-miss incest is "Oedipus interruptus." Twice. It's not every scholar who can also do Mel Brooks.

—JAMES MORRIS

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**A COMPANY OF READERS:**  
*Uncollected Writings of W. H. Auden,*  
*Jacques Barzun, and Lionel Trilling*  
*from the Readers' Subscription and*  
*Mid-Century Book Clubs.*

Ed. by Arthur Krystal. Free Press.  
289 pp. \$26

In 1951, historian Jacques Barzun, literary critic Lionel Trilling, and poet W. H. Auden sat down together and formed a book club. The



(l. to r.) Jacques Barzun, W. H. Auden, and Lionel Trilling

Readers' Subscription (no relation to the current club of that name), later reconstituted as the Mid-Century Book Society, provided its members with recently published works of literature and history selected by these three celebrated men of letters. "Poets and Professors," wrote Auden, "and all those whose love of books exceeds their love of automobiles will welcome a chance to save in excess of 50 percent on their book purchases." Each month a newsletter carried an essay—enthusiastic, learned, personal—on the club's main selection, and 45 of those pieces have been collected here.

It's a wonderful book, as exciting and pleasurable a gathering of essays as anyone could ask for. Auden on the *Short Novels of Colette* must be one of the best book reviews ever written. He opens, "For years I resisted every recommendation to read her"; in the middle, cites a passage "so beautiful one could cry"; and ends with a ringing statement, after summing up Colette's virtues: "I am reminded of only one other novelist, Tolstoy." In a piece on Philip Larkin and Geoffrey Hill, Auden describes how he approaches a new book of poems, "from the part to the whole," looking for a single striking line, and then sampling a stanza, and finally perusing the complete volume, "comparing one poem with another," to discover whether the poet "possesses what I value most of all, a world and tone of voice of his own." Robert Graves, needless to say, displays the requisite distinctiveness, for "he has been one of the very few poets whose volumes I have always bought the moment they appeared."

As a man who lived by his pen, Auden might be expected to write engagingly, but, to my surprise, his partners from Columbia University are just as entertaining. Trilling could be earnest and pontifical in some of his literary criticism; in these pages, though, he writes boldly about the "obsessive, corrosive, desperate, highly psychologized" depictions of love in Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*, tosses out aperçus about the notion of will in classic fiction, and observes that the magic-realist stuff in Durrell may be "all storyteller's nonsense, the usual mystery of the East, but it consorts with my sense of the way people ought to be, in a novel at any rate—that is to say, objects of wonder." Elsewhere, Trilling reflects on Kenneth

Clark's *The Nude*, the work of James Baldwin, *Lord of the Flies*, *The Wind in the Willows*, Ingmar Bergman's films, and Kenneth Tynan's early theater criticism—and in every case the result is shrewd, unexpected, and sometimes moving. Who else would have remarked on the "Vergilian sadness" and "Lucretian desperateness" of *Ulysses* and *Remembrance of Things Past*?

Well, Barzun might have. Even 50 years ago, the author of last year's *From Dawn to Decadence* possessed a magisterial grasp of art, history, and just about everything cultural. Barzun suggests that Montaigne's motto "*Que sçay-je?*" might be slangily translated as "Don't be too sure," reminds us while praising Hugh Trevor-Roper's *Men and Ideas* that history should give "pleasure and instruction," notes that Erwin Panofsky's 15 pages on Dürer's famous print *Melencolia* are this distinguished scholar's "critical masterpiece," suggests that Molière's *Misanthrope* may be "the comedy of comedies," and proclaims Bernard Shaw "the greatest master of English prose since Swift."

Though one may quarrel with aspects of Krystal's introduction—like his teacher Barzun, he pretty much loathes academia's current focus on theory—one can have no argument with his taste or his punctilious scholarship. He provides a full bibliographical record of all the articles written for the newsletter by its editors, not just those included here. I only wish he had been able to reprint all 173 of them. I want to read Auden on C. S. Lewis's history of English literature in the 16th century, and Barzun on Spengler, and Trilling on Claude Lévi-Strauss. There really were giants on the earth in those days.

—MICHAEL DIRDA

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**CLEAN NEW WORLD:  
*Culture, Politics, and Graphic Design.***

By Maud Lavin. MIT Press. 201 pp.  
\$27.95

**GRAPHIC STYLE:  
*From Victorian to Digital (rev. ed.).***

By Steven Heller and Seymour Chwast.  
Abrams. 240 pp. \$24.95

Lavin, who teaches art history and visual culture at the School of the Art Institute

## Current Books

of Chicago, is one of the most incisive thinkers about graphic design. Here she examines design as it relates to power, communication, and democracy—or, as she puts it, “who gets to say what to whom.”

Her favorite period seems to be the Weimar Republic, and for good reason. The publishing house Malik Verlag, co-founded by John Heartfield, his brother Wieland Herzfelde, and George Grosz, showed how photomontage and other graphic art of ferocious originality could help create a powerful political voice on the left—a voice financed in part through sales of Grosz’s prints to bourgeois customers. Other members of the avant-garde, including Kurt Schwitters and Jan Tschichold, helped shape a modernist business culture with their equally striking photomontage images for makers of industrial equipment. And the photographers Ellen Auerbach and Grete Stern infused women’s hair-products advertisements with both feminism and humor, breaking two taboos of German advertising of the era.

The downside of today’s peace and prosperity seems to be an impoverishment of ideological zest. Only a few of Lavin’s recent examples are both memorable and widely circulated. Perhaps it is not just the

new global corporate order in general but the broadcast industry in particular that has hamstrung (to use Lavin’s word) the graphic designer. To generations raised with the visual grammar of the video and the 30-second commercial, graphics of the 1920s and 1930s may be more remote than Baroque scenography. Today’s politically engaged graphics won’t be seen unless carried in a televised demonstration—and seen then only through the grace of producers and tape editors.

*Graphic Style* makes an excellent companion volume to Lavin’s. It is as comprehensive as hers is selective, and, because it has been edited by practitioners—Heller is art director of the *New York Times Book Review*; Chwast directs a New York design firm—it is also a visual feast. We are plunged into a world of relentless persuasion, a reflection of the rise of mass consumption and popular politics from the 19th century to the present.

*Graphic Style* reveals the Internet to be a surprisingly disappointing source of design innovation. As Heller and Chwast put it, “the paradigm one minute is an artifact the next.” Perhaps the problem is that few computer monitors can display even a full letter-sized page. Toulouse-Lautrec never had to contend with a scroll bar.

—EDWARD TENNER

## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

### COMMON PRAYERS: *Faith, Family, and a Christian’s Journey through the Jewish Year.*

By Harvey Cox. Houghton Mifflin.  
305 pp. \$24

Cox, a Christian theologian on the faculty at Harvard Divinity School, and the author of *The Secular City* (1965) and *The Seduction of the Spirit* (1973), among other works, is obviously a man who takes religion seriously. So when he married a woman from a secular Jewish background who was becoming more involved in her own faith—Nina Tumarkin, professor of Russian history at Wellesley College—the age-old question arose: “What about the children?” It grew

increasingly pressing with the birth of a son. The couple decided that she would keep her faith and he his, while each would respectfully participate in the traditions of the other. They would raise their son, however, as a Jew, in deference to the Jewish conviction that a child’s religion is derived from the mother. Thus, through marriage and fatherhood, Cox became what he calls a latter-day “sojourner” in the “Court of the Gentiles,” that outer court of the ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem where non-Jewish “God-fearers” were welcomed. He experienced Judaism, he writes, “not as a complete outsider, but not as a full insider either.”

From this perspective, immeasurably

enriched by the authority of Cox's stature as a Protestant theologian, *Common Prayers* offers a fresh view of both Judaism and Christianity, as well as a kind of guide for promoting understanding between the two faiths. Discovering early in his marriage that Judaism "is not about creed, it is about calendar" (not to mention home, family, community—and eating), he takes readers on a tour through the Jewish year, and in the process provides a glimpse into the Jewish way of reflecting, rejoicing, and remembering. Of particular interest is his chapter on Israel Independence Day (Yom ha-Atzma'ut), with a fascinating analysis of how Christian Zionism fostered support of the Jewish state by American presidents from Woodrow Wilson, a Presbyterian minister's son, to Harry Truman, a Southern Baptist, to Ronald Reagan, who, according to biographer Lou Cannon, as a child listened spellbound to end-of-days scenarios spun out by evangelical ministers.

Cox amiably recognizes that the irregularity of his situation and the singularity of some of his views and practices will annoy people on both sides—literalists among the Christians and "the classical rabbis" among the Jews. Jewish traditionalists might be suspicious of the depth of Cox's commitment. He omits, for example, Shavuot (Pentecost), the

festival that commemorates the giving of the Torah, which, along with Succot (Tabernacles) and Passover, is one of the three major holidays on which Jews were obliged to make a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem. Some Christians, for their part, will not be thrilled to read Cox's indictment of Christian anti-Semitism and the role of "more than a thousand years of Christian derogation of Jews and Judaism" in preparing the ground for the Nazi genocide.

Both sides should relax. Cox is not only a good Christian, he is also a good Jew. He is a good Christian because he passionately demands the best from his fellow believers. He calls for "both Catholics and Protestants to emerge from the present period of breast-beating and begin to change their actual practices with regard to Jews." And he is a good Jew because of his bottom-line commitment to Jewish survival, to "respecting one of the most basic of all Jewish beliefs—that the child of a Jewish mother is a child of the covenant, a Jew, and should be recognized as such." This commitment is reflected through his words as well as through the events he chronicles—above all, the Jewish rite of passage: the day his son became a bar mitzvah, a Jewish "son of the commandment."

—TOVA REICH

## HISTORY

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### *IN THERAPY WE TRUST: America's Obsession with Self-Fulfillment.*

By Eva S. Moskowitz. Johns Hopkins Univ. Press. 358 pp. \$34.95

To confess in public to personal weakness was once regarded as rather indiscreet, vulgar, or reprehensible. Nowadays, parading one's vices is regarded as a sign of sincerity, maturity, willingness to change for the better, and fundamental goodness of heart. This is the natural culmination of an outlook that treats human existence as an elaborate form of psychotherapy, whose object is to procure for men and women the self-esteem and self-fulfillment to which they believe themselves by birthright entitled. *In Therapy We Trust*,

written in admirably plain prose uncluttered by academic jargon, traces the gradual rise of the therapeutic conception to our current apotheosis of self-centered triviality.

Moskowitz, a historian now serving on the New York City Council, does this by describing an apostolic succession of movements and ideas. She starts with the work of Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, the New England quack who regarded all illness as the consequence of mistaken ideas, and who is remembered now principally as a formative influence on Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science. From Quimby we pass on to the reformers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who saw antisocial acts as manifestations of psychological problems arising from

a defective upbringing, and who therefore sought to have juvenile delinquents treated as ill rather than punished as wicked. In the 1930s, the psychological approach spread to the middle classes with the marriage counseling movement. During World War II, millions of soldiers were psychologically tested for combatworthiness and bombarded with professional advice about how to stay sane and happy while walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

After the war, the supposedly bored and dissatisfied American housewife was deemed to need psychological support to cope with the neuroses consequent upon suburban prosperity; then came the social unrest of the 1960s, which sought “liberation” not only from oppression but from all personal inhibition. With the Me Decade of the 1970s, it seemed as if some kind of nadir had been reached, but in the following decades millions of people discovered that they were “survivors” of trauma or addicted to something or other, from car theft to sex to shopping. Everyone is now a victim, for lack of self-control is considered a bona fide illness, and thus the search for psychological self-fulfillment has come full circle: We are all, by virtue of drawing breath, in need of therapy. Whether this coherent story wholly corresponds to reality, it makes for a plausible and interesting read.

Moskowitz, who is generally hostile to these developments, does not dig very deeply into the reasons why American society should prove so susceptible to the therapeutic idea. Could it have something to do with the concept of inalienable human rights upon which the Republic was founded? The belief in such rights renders everyone equally important, and therefore raises expectations—which inevitably founder on the existential rock of human limitation. Many Americans are therefore beset by an unease at the contrast between life as they think it ought to be and life as it actually is, an unease that the therapeutic outlook falsely promises to assuage.

Likewise, the author does not explore very deeply the modern taste for victimhood, which is surely connected with the political cataclysms of the 20th century. Few people like to admit that they have led sheltered,

privileged, or fortunate lives. They envy suffering, or rather the moral authority that suffering has given such figures as Primo Levi and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Consequently, they inflate the miseries of their own past.

This book is a suggestive rather than a definitive exploration of its theme, but it is a highly worthwhile contribution nevertheless.

—THEODORE DALRYMPLE

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**BLOOD, SWEAT, AND TEARS:**  
*The Evolution of Work.*

By Richard Donkin. Texere. 374 pp.  
\$27.95

The state of nature may have been nasty, brutish, and short, but was it also leisurely? The bushmen of the Kalahari devote no more than three days a week to gathering food. The Hadza, also of Africa, limit hunting to two hours a day, Donkin reports, “preferring to spend more time in diversionary pursuits such as gambling.” In the developed world, meanwhile, “work has come to dominate the lives of the salaried masses, so much so that they are losing the ability to play.” Is this progress?

“All true work is religion,” wrote Thomas Carlyle. Donkin, a columnist for the *Financial Times*, aims to expose the shaky foundations of our most essential faith. The narrative is lively and larded with savory facts. We hear of Ned Ludd, the apprentice in a hosiery factory in late-18th-century England who, when threatened with a whipping for working too slowly, took a hammer to the machinery. His 19th-century followers, the Luddites, tried to destroy the technology that would throw them out of jobs. The movement failed, but its name has endured.

Schemes to put workers in a hammerlock have been as constant as their attempts to wriggle free. George Pullman created a town of 12,000 just south of Chicago for the people who built his luxury railroad cars. While the initial expenses were his own, he instituted a system designed for profit at every turn. He marked up the water and gas. He even made money from the vegetables fertilized with worker sewage. One worker said, “We are born in a Pullman house, fed from the Pullman shops, taught in the Pullman school, catechized in the Pullman church, and when

we die, we shall go to Pullman Hell.” When the depression of 1893 hit, Pullman cut wages but not rent. His proles began to go hungry. There was a strike, and they fled paradise in droves. The bitterness ran so deep that when Pullman died in 1897, his coffin was “encased in a thick slab of concrete, lest anyone should try to desecrate his grave.”

Harsh feelings between CEOs and their charges were more recently excited by the corporate blood-lettings of the 1990s. “Neutron” Jack Welch cut 100,000 jobs during his first five years at General Electric. Al “Chainsaw” Dunlap laid off a third of the work force at Scott Paper within a year.

Why do we let work become such a dominant element of our lives? Just for the pay? As Donkin notes, the quest for money can’t explain Stonehenge, the pyramids, or the paintings at Lascaux and Chauvet. At its best, he believes, work enables us to “leave something better for those we leave behind, some signpost of our existence, our potential.” To that end, he recommends a new work ethic, “an ethic that questions the content of work, that does not value prolonged hard work above everything.” And he poses a revolutionary question: “If work is neither well done nor worthwhile, why work at all?” This book is both well done and worthwhile.

—BENJAMIN CHEEVER

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**AN AMERICAN INSURRECTION:  
*The Battle of Oxford,  
Mississippi, 1962.***

By William Doyle. Doubleday.  
383 pp. \$26

Nearly 40 years have passed since an epic constitutional confrontation between a daffy governor of Mississippi, Ross Barnett, and a dithering Kennedy administration almost escalated into a renewal of the Civil War. The 1962 desegregation of the University of Mississippi caused a night of carnage, including two deaths, and provoked the deployment of 30,000 troops to ensure James Meredith’s enrollment. The events inspired several books (and a ballad by Bob Dylan) before passing into Southern history. Now Doyle, author of *Inside the Oval*

*Office* (1999), has returned to the conflict. After interviewing surviving figures and inspecting hitherto unavailable material, he has produced a balanced narrative filled with fresh and important details.

To keep Meredith out of the school known as Ole Miss, Barnett and his segregationist allies fell back on legal arguments invoking states’ rights. But their passions were really fired by an abhorrence of racial integration; Barnett called it “genocide.” The author is unsparing in his account of the obstruction by Mississippi officials—and unflattering to the Kennedys, too. Though President John F. Kennedy privately thought such civil rights activity as the Freedom Rides a “pain in the ass,” he and his brother, Robert, the attorney general, were compelled to uphold the court desegregation order. Their protracted negotiations with Barnett would be considered *opéra bouffe* had they not led to such deadly results. Barnett’s deceit in the bargaining became well known and eventually crippled him politically.

The extent of the Kennedys’ misjudgments is documented here for the first time. Their agent in command, Deputy Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, decided, “without any prior planning, without much thought at all,” to use federal marshals to seize the school’s administration building as a show of force. It triggered rioting. After reluctantly committing the army to quell the insurrection, the attorney general countermanded years of U.S. policy by forbidding the use of black troops—including many who



*James Meredith escorted by U.S. marshals on the campus of the University of Mississippi*

held leadership rank. During the nightlong riot, the military command structure unraveled. Robert Kennedy complained, “The army botched it up.” But the author says that “it was the Kennedys who had botched things up, and royally,” by dealing with Barnett and then activating an invasion of Oxford in the middle of the night.

Despite claims by federal authorities that only tear gas—and no live ammunition—was used to repel the rioters, Doyle uncovered FBI papers indicating that marshals used revolvers at one point. He speculates that an errant bullet could have killed one of the victims. Using the Freedom of Information Act, Doyle also discovered that the army raided a fraternity house where Ole Miss senior Trent Lott was president and confiscated a cache of 24 weapons. Lott, now the Republican leader in the U.S. Senate, didn’t respond to Doyle’s repeated requests to discuss the case.

At the center of the storm was Meredith, a courageous but enigmatic man. Doyle

describes the black student as “an obscure loner” dwelling “inside a myth of his own design, a realm often remote and impenetrable to other people.” As one of the book’s few heroes, Meredith convinces Doyle that he cunningly engineered the conflict between the governor and the president. In reality, Meredith was merely the *deus ex machina* used to break segregation in Mississippi.

In his epilogue, Doyle notes that Meredith went on to embrace conservative causes. He even endorsed Barnett in a 1967 campaign in which the old governor finished fifth. There were many other ironies. Hundreds of white Mississippi National Guardsmen, put under federal command, joined thousands of regular troops in risking their lives to put down the rebellion. “Despite recommendations by various commanders,” Doyle writes, “the Defense Department issued not a single commendation medal for the bravery of U.S. troops during the Battle of Oxford.”

—CURTIS WILKIE

## CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

**HUBBERT’S PEAK:**  
*The Impending World Oil Shortage.*

By Kenneth S. Deffeyes. Princeton Univ. Press. 224 pp. \$24.95

In *The Coal Question* (1865), economist W. S. Jevons predicted that Britain’s prosperity would decline in about a century, when the nation ran short of coal. The British coal industry did go into sharp decline in the 1980s, not because of supply constraints but because Britain developed its own oil industry (and because Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher wanted to undermine trade union power). In 1956, petroleum geologist M. King Hubbert predicted that American oil production would peak around 1975. He was close: It peaked in 1970. In this venerable vein, Deffeyes argues that world oil production will peak between 2004 and 2008 and decline thereafter, with potentially calamitous consequences.

Geologist Deffeyes began his career in the Oklahoma oil patches, proceeded to Shell Oil’s research lab, and ended up on the faculty of Princeton University. The first half of his



*A gusher: Beaumont, Texas, in 1901*

book is an accessible and absorbing primer explaining where oil comes from, how it was formed, and where and how it is found and extracted. Deffeyes's long experience in the oil business allows him to explain these subjects with authority and verve, mixing passages on the structure of hydrocarbon molecules with tales of old-time oilmen.

In the second half, he advances his controversial argument with a blend of geology and mathematics. He thinks it most unlikely that additional major oilfields remain undiscovered. On its own terms, his argument convinces. Against it is the fact (which he acknowledges) that big oil companies, which presumably have access to the best information, aren't behaving as they should if he's right: They aren't buying up every last oil well. Nor, as yet, has the stock market behaved as if it agreed with Deffeyes. It may be that he has extrapolated too blithely from the United States, where oil prospecting has been very thorough, to countries where it has been less methodical. At the moment, no one can know for sure.

If Deffeyes is right, the implications are enormous. Though he does not spell them out in detail—that would offer too many hostages to fortune—he anticipates that sharply higher oil prices will bring difficult economic, social, and political passages for those societies most dependent on oil, especially on imported oil. Exporters will charge top dollar: a gigantic windfall for the Saudis, Kuwaitis, and a handful of others. He implies that the tumult will be greater than that occasioned by the oil price hikes of 1973 and 1979.

To avoid this scenario, Deffeyes recommends that we begin preparing now. We must develop renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and tidal power. We must improve energy efficiency. Such steps will not be enough, however, so we also must shed our fear of nuclear energy. In short, Deffeyes envisions an energy future very different from the status quo. One implication is that current American policy, in promoting still heavier investment in fossil fuels, is misguided. If we don't shift away from oil, we may as well gift-wrap the entire budget surplus and send it to the Saudi royal family.

There are few things as important nowadays as the energy system, and few books on the subject as thought provoking as this one.

—J. R. McNEILL

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### WAGING MODERN WAR.

By Wesley K. Clark. PublicAffairs.  
479 pp. \$30

As Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, General Clark was the chief architect of the 1999 war for Kosovo, an odd conflict that produced victory of a sort but no heroes. Least of all Clark: When the war ended, he was effectively cashiered. Now the general aims to salvage something of his lost reputation by providing a detailed revisionist account of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's first real war. Operation Allied Force, he insists, was an unqualified triumph. Though Clark capably settles scores with those Pentagon officials who either let him down or actively conspired against him, his attempt to recast his own efforts in a more positive light fails. Yet his very failure raises important questions about the role of senior military leaders in an era of U.S. global primacy.

Clark depicts himself as a "strategic commander," situated at the nexus between politics and operations. His experience in Bosnia had convinced him that the United States could no longer base its security policy on the mere existence of military power; the nation needed to put its armed might to work. In formulating the strategy for doing so, though, Clark proved to be a naif—as his own narrative makes abundantly clear. Like Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, he believed at the outset that a bit of muscle flexing would spook Slobodan Milosevic. "I know him as well as anyone," Clark quotes himself instructing a White House official. "He doesn't want to get bombed." Wrong on that count, Clark found himself in a shooting war.

But to what end? As hostilities began, Clark identified three priorities for his commanders: to avoid losing aircraft, "impact the Yugoslavian military and police activities on the ground," and "protect our ground forces." He did not tell his subordinates how this cautious approach would bring victory. Although he publicly vowed to "attack, disrupt, degrade, devastate, and ultimately destroy" the Yugoslavian army, the limited bombing at the outset only led to accelerated ethnic cleansing and the exodus of refugees from Kosovo. These

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results caught Clark flatfooted. His response was to escalate, with more aircraft and talk of a possible ground invasion. But the goal of “impacting” Serbian forces in Kosovo remained elusive—he kept urging his air commanders to try harder, with few apparent results (and perhaps less than all-out efforts on their part).

NATO’s eventual success, against an isolated Serbia weakened by a decade of perpetual crisis, was preordained. But when victory came after 11 weeks, it did so despite the leadership displayed at the top, not because of it. “Strategic commander” Clark was simply out of his depth. Schooled to fight a major war against the Soviets, and obsessed with avoiding another Vietnam, he possessed neither the intellectual framework nor the grammar to formulate strategy in circumstances where the canonical lessons of the Cold War didn’t apply. The supreme commander didn’t even know what he didn’t know.

For a nation that, like it or not, exercises global military power, a strategically illiterate officer corps represents a serious danger. By calling attention to that danger, albeit unwittingly, *Waging Modern War* deserves recognition as an important book.

—ANDREW J. BACEVICH

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**THE NEW AMERICANS:**  
*How the Melting Pot Can Work Again.*  
By Michael Barone. Regnery. 338 pp.  
\$27.95

Sometime in the past year or two, American politicians awoke en masse with a terrible hangover on the issue of immigration. Policy had been dominated by restrictionists, who warned that a brown or yellow or multicolored tide was about to change the character of the nation, if not destroy it entirely. Gradually, though, the shrill voices of Pat Buchanan and Pete Wilson faded, the role of immigrants in the economic boom became clear, and legislators began amending or repealing the anti-immigrant statutes put on the books just a few sessions earlier.

Now, with the Immigration and Naturalization Service under orders to clean up its act, and new amnesties and guest worker programs under serious consideration, the tone of the popular debate has come full circle. Instead of books denouncing the rise of “alien”

influences and blaming immigrants for everything from Los Angeles traffic jams to Chesapeake Bay pollution, we have books extolling the contributions of immigration to American life and values.

A political commentator best known as the coauthor for the past three decades of *The Almanac of American Politics*, Barone sensibly debunks “the notion that we are at a totally new place in American history, that we are about to change from a white-bread nation to a collection of peoples of color.” On the contrary, “the new Americans of today, like the new Americans of the past, can be interwoven into the fabric of American life. . . . It can happen even more rapidly if all of us realize that that interweaving is part of the basic character of the country.”

Barone compares three groups of what he calls “new” Americans—blacks, Latinos, and Asians—with three ethnic groups that predominated among immigrants a century ago—the Irish, Italians, and Jews. Interesting, even compelling, Barone’s construct produces a number of useful insights about upward mobility and assimilation. Past and present have, in some respects, uncanny parallels. But there is also a major flaw in the approach. The African Americans of whom Barone writes have, for the most part, been in America far longer than almost anyone else he discusses, including most of the “white-bread” people. He acknowledges the problem early on, and then lamely dismisses it “for the purpose of this book.”



*A young Polish immigrant shoulders his trunk on Ellis Island in 1907.*

Despite that weakness, many readers will enjoy Barone's rapid, hold-on-to-your-hat histories of life in America for five of the six groups covered here. (His chapter on Asians seems cursory; perhaps he ran out of space, time, or interest.) The encyclopedic knowledge he has gained while visiting every congressional district in the country adds depth and flavor to his stories, though his periodic swipes at such policies as affirmative action

and bilingual education seem gratuitous.

The book may not live up to its subtitle, but it does provide a reassuring reminder that "the United States has never been a monoethnic nation." The American majority is made up of an ever-shifting coalition of many minorities. And yet, remarkably, out of that relentless change there emerges a unique and enviable stability.

—SANFORD J. UNGAR

## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

### *REVEALING THE UNIVERSE: The Making of the Chandra X-Ray Observatory.*

By Wallace Tucker and Karen Tucker.  
Harvard Univ. Press. 295 pp. \$27.95

This book might more appropriately have been called *Revealing NASA*, for there is not much here of the universe. The narrative ends as the first images are coming in from the \$2 billion Chandra X-Ray Observatory, named for 20th-century astrophysicist Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar, and launched into Earth orbit by the space shuttle in 1999. These images, in which invisible x-rays are rendered in color, are rather less dramatic than the pictures we are used to seeing from the Hubble Space Telescope. They may be packed with valuable information for astronomers, but the average onlooker can be forgiven for thinking, "Ho, hum."

Which is not to say that the book is a "ho, hum" read. At the beginning, I was put off by an alphabet soup of acronyms (even Chandra started life as AXAF, the "Advanced X-ray Astrophysics Facility"). But as the pace picked up, I was drawn into the depiction of how the National Aeronautics and Space Administration works, technically and politically, and how an instrument such as Chandra gets built and deployed. The story is nothing short of heroic, and the Tuckers are ideal guides. He is a spokesman and she a science writer for the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory in Cambridge, Massachusetts, parent institution of Chandra science. They saw much of it happen, and they had access to the key players.

The universe reveals itself in every part of the electromagnetic spectrum, from low-energy radio waves to high-energy x-rays and gamma

rays. X-rays are produced by the most violent objects in the universe—black holes, colliding galaxies, exploding stars—but they are absorbed by Earth's atmosphere. Consequently, much of the fun stuff can only be seen if we heave our instruments thousands of miles into the sky.

The short wavelengths of x-rays place extraordinary demands on the optics used to focus them. Chandra's mirrors are the most perfectly shaped and polished ever produced. The fragile mirrors and detectors must be aligned to within the thickness of a few atoms, placed atop a hugely powerful rocket, and blasted into space. Perhaps never in the history of engineering has there been such a conjunction of delicacy and power. Indeed, you wonder why the astronomers and NASA managers and technicians ever bothered to try. The technical odds against success seem overwhelming—even without factoring in the political gauntlet that such a project must run before getting to the launch pad.

Lots of taxpayer dollars were riding on Chandra's success; lots of careers, too. Nearly 30 years passed between the first proposal for a large x-ray telescope and the final deployment. That's a huge chunk of one's life to devote to machinery that may never fly—and may not work if it does fly. On reaching the end of the book, readers will have a profound respect for the scientists who conceived the great space observatories and made them happen, and for the amazing skills that hide behind the flurry of NASA acronyms. The Tuckers have managed to turn a potentially dry technology tale into an edge-of-your-seat read.

—CHET RAYMO



*A mammoth find in Khatanga*

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**MAMMOTH:**  
*The Resurrection of an Ice Age Giant.*  
By Richard Stone. Perseus Publishing.  
250 pp. \$26

We are drawn to vanished creatures, writes Stone, who himself is particularly drawn to mammoths: “majestic animals”—covered with long, orangey-brown hair over dense, soft undercoats—with “long narrow heads, downward-sloping hindquarters, small ears, and tusks up to 16 feet long.” About 11,000 years ago, mammoths died out and their bodies fossilized or froze. Native Siberians thought the buried bodies were giant ice rats; Europeans thought they were elephants swept north in biblical floods.

Modern paleontologists know that mammoths lived on northern continents—Europe, Asia, North America—at the edges of Ice Age glaciers, on cold, dry grasslands called the mammoth steppe. What paleontologists don’t know is why they vanished. Not to worry, though, for scientists always have theories: Maybe the warming postglacial climate changed the mammoth steppe and the mammoths starved; maybe our ancestors hunted them to death; maybe a killer microbe wiped them out.

Theories need evidence, and evidence in this case requires expeditions. So about a year ago, professional and amateur paleontologists, a Discovery Channel film crew, and a few journalists—including Stone, *Science’s* European news editor—journeyed to Khatanga, a mining town in Siberia, where a frozen mammoth was being held in cold storage. An earlier expedition had found the mammoth buried in permafrost. Instead of melting

it out, which would have damaged its tissues, members of the expedition cut out the whole mammoth/permafrost block, hitched its 23 tons to a helicopter, and flew it to the refrigerator in Khatanga.

The second expedition aimed to thaw the mammoth out gently. Once thawed, the tissues could be studied by a group of scientists for lethal microbes. Another group of scientists, more forward looking, could extract sperm cells, use the cells to fertilize an elephant, and resurrect the whole species. Some nonexpedition scientists, more forward looking still, made plans to recreate the mammoth steppe for the species to come home to.

The book describes these expeditions and their leaders. Bobbing in and out are the stories of much else: other mammoth-finding expeditions, attempts to isolate mammoth DNA, technology for cloning extinct species, and evidence for extinction by starvation, by hunting, and by disease. The result at times feels like a shell game of people, history, and science, and the reader’s biggest problem is keeping an eye on the pea. (Maybe someday we’ll thaw out another extinct species, the book editor.)

The outcome of these expeditions is apparently disappointing. In a recent article, Stone says that the block of permafrost didn’t hold the expected amount of mammoth, certainly not enough to verify any theories, let alone make some elephant a single mother. That needn’t bother the reader, for the fun is in getting there. The book’s science is beautifully clear, the expedition leaders are obviously nuts, and those mammoths are lovely to think about.

—ANN FINKBEINER

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# The Anniversary Mystique

*One good celebration deserves another.*

*by Cullen Murphy*

Some years ago in these pages, a little-known, and indeed imaginary, historian named Sybil Schwartz published an essay under the rubric “Reflections” on the subject of a discipline called Decalogy—the study of the “inner rhythms” of history as reflected in the recurring patterns of the decades. The conceit of the essay, which appeared as the 1980s began, was not only that “the decade” was a scientifically legitimate unit of history but also that the character of decades—the ’20s, the ’30s, and so on—was predictable from century to century. The ’60s, for instance, are always a tumultuous decade, whenever they occur, whereas the ’80s always tend to be dull. During a ’90s decade things generally pick up somewhat. I’m not aware that Decalogy ever became the focus of a provocative session at Aspen or Davos, but neither have I heard that its basic tenets have ever been disputed.

Vast amounts of intellectual effort have been wasted on (or channeled harmlessly into) a quest for the predictable patterns and reliable rules of history. The bright exception of Decalogy aside, that enterprise has little to show for itself. The ambitious systems of the Toynbees and the Spenglers lie in ruins. Leopold von Ranke proclaimed the goal of history to be ascertaining “what really happened,” but the wisest historians of our own age regard even that modest quest as a pathetic delusion. They scoff at the idea that we can objectively “know” the past, much less figure out what history means or discover the rules by which it proceeds.

Within this chaotic postmodern jungle thrives a hardy and abundant weed—mundane, nearly useless, adaptable to almost any context, and possessing an inherent ability to repli-

cate forever. I am referring to that hoary benchmark of journalism and scholarship, the anniversary. In celebrating anniversaries we celebrate the one element of history that can be predicted with dead-on certainty. Mention some event from the past—anything at all—and its anniversary dates can be discerned unto the end of days. Nothing in the news will change the fact that the year 2002 brings the thousandth anniversary of the birth of England’s Edward the Confessor; the 65th anniversary of the abdication of Edward VIII; and the 50th anniversary of the accession of Queen Elizabeth to the throne. Nothing can sidetrack the 300th anniversary next year of the abolition of serfdom in Denmark. The Vatican in coming months may choose to ignore it, but no power in heaven or on earth can forestall the 700th anniversary of the papal bull *Unam Sanctam*, issued in 1302, which advanced the papacy’s most expansive (and ultimately most disastrous) claim to supremacy over temporal kings.

Admittedly, anniversaries like these don’t represent the kind of predictable pattern that great historical minds have vainly sought. But you sure can count on them.

It would be wrong to say that a major sector of modern scholarship is devoted to the study of anniversaries, but a small cottage industry does concern itself with the sociology of time. The practitioners of this subdiscipline over the years have included such distinguished thinkers as Émile Durkheim and Bronislaw Malinowski. St. Augustine commented upon time’s slippery conceptual character: “What is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain what it is to him who asks, I do not know.” But sociologists of time



The Parisians Waiting for the Famous Comet (1857), by Honoré Daumier

have not been deterred, and have constructed sensible taxonomies—“clock time” and “social time,” “linear time” and “circular time.”

Anniversaries arise, of course, out of circular time. The first anniversaries that people took note of were the ones Nature provided—the cycles of the heavens and the seasons of the year. Whatever else they signify, seasonal anniversaries and the effort that goes into them (think of Stonehenge) suggest a certain confidence that the universe is not entirely capricious—that the basic pattern will enjoy a long run. As time passed, the calendar became crowded with a very different kind of annual occurrence: birthdays, first of the gods, then of cities, temples, and rulers. By the Hellenistic period, the birthdays of ordinary people had become occasions of note; Epicurus gave a banquet on his birthday every year. One of the key texts in the annals of women’s history—the first Latin document known to come from a female hand—is an invitation to a birthday party written in about A.D. 100. (It was unearthed several years ago near Hadrian’s Wall.) The awareness of personal birthdays is one of those civilizational signposts marking the emergence of a sense of self, a sense of individual distinctiveness. Instilled as

a child, birthday consciousness may survive childishly into old age. In 1984 General William Westmoreland, when asked to state his age before testifying during his much-publicized libel suit against CBS, sounded like someone in kindergarten. He responded, “I’m seventy-and-a-half.”

Every human being has an obvious origin; time itself has not been so fortunate. But calendars need to start somewhere, and an anniversary usually provides a beginning, transforming the arbitrary into the sacral. The Hebrew calendar numbers the years starting from the creation of Adam, which is reckoned to have occurred in 3761 B.C. The Romans numbered the years starting with the mythical date of the founding of Rome—753 B.C. The Muslim calendar starts counting with the Hegira, Mohammed’s flight from Mecca to Medina, in A.D. 622. The events in Aldous Huxley’s novel *Brave New World* (1932), which conjures a grimly seductive technological dystopia, take place in the year 632 A.F., the initials standing for “After Ford.” (“Ford” refers to Henry Ford, whose industrial methods Huxley saw as a progenitor of the world his novel imagined.)

## The Anniversary Mystique

The fortunes of anniversary keeping are bound up with those of time keeping. “In the medieval period,” says Kendrick Oliver, a historian at the University of Southampton, in England, “*death days* were much more likely to be celebrated than *birth days*, in part because not that many people knew exactly when they had been born. Advances in record keeping, literacy, and the time-management requirements of industrial society have all contributed to our current culture of recording the passing of days and years.” Those commemorative days, as Oliver pointed out in a recent article titled “The Memory of Catastrophe,” are as important to entire nations as they are to mere individuals. At some point in the 18th century, he notes, “the experience of seismic political change” came to be regarded as something to be marked with anniversaries. The United States has observed the Fourth of July from the outset. The first recorded example of a “centenary” celebration was the centenary of the Glorious Revolution, in 1788, celebrating the overthrow of King James II by William and Mary. The leaders of the French Revolution did not succeed in having the year 1792 accepted as the new Year One by the rest of the world (or even France), as they had hoped, but Bastille Day itself has taken firm hold.

From time to time, the odd stick-in-the-mud seeks to discount the significance or utility of annual commemorations. Alexander Pope was both dismissive and melancholy: “Is that a birthday? ‘Tis alas! too clear; / ‘Tis but the funeral of the former year.” Ryan Bingham, the protagonist of Walter Kim’s recent novel *Up in the Air*, calls into question the very reliability of our dates. “Factoring in leap years and cosmic wobble,” he observes, “our anniversaries aren’t our anniversaries, our birthdays are someone else’s, and the Three Kings would ride right past Bethlehem if they left today and they steered by the old stars.”

And yet, for all the skepticism, something in the human psyche responds naturally and without demurrer to the idea of anniversaries. One type of evidence for this, though it might be dismissed as “anecdotal” by critics, is the evidence of our eyes and ears: the

crowds that gather with candles in Central Park every December 8 to mark the death of John Lennon; the restiveness among Serb nationalists every June 15, the anniversary of Serbia’s devastating defeat by the Turks at the battle of Kosovo, in 1389.

If quantitative proof is needed, then what about the phenomenon known as the “death dip”? The term refers to the fact that death rates respond to the gravitational influence of birthdays, holidays, and other significant anniversaries, usually by diminishing somewhat in the period leading up to the occasion being celebrated. The reason, presumably, is that mortality responds to sheer force of will. Thus, could the “coincidence” that both John Adams and Thomas Jefferson died on the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence plausibly be explained by the profound desire of both men to survive until that momentous day? The sociologist David P. Phillips, of the University of California, has found a death dip among Jewish males in the days before Jewish holidays; for instance, mortality declines by 35 percent in the week before Passover. (It increases by 35 percent in the week afterwards, a phenomenon for which no one has yet coined a name. Perhaps “croak crescendo”?) Phillips notes: “It is not uncommon for people to bargain with God for an extension of life until a significant occasion has arrived.”

Along similar lines, a study of records from Ohio documented a sharp rise in mortality in the days immediately following Christmas. A researcher in Australia, Simon Jolly, of the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine, recently examined local coroners’ records and determined that, insofar as natural deaths are concerned, people tend to cling to life until their birthdays arrive, with the likelihood of death rising on the birthday itself and in the days immediately afterward. (The chance of *accidental* death on one’s birthday is particularly high. Jolly writes: “It is not difficult to imagine how judgment may be impaired on this special day.”) The statistical data, in sum, may not point to any single conclusion about the influence of anniversaries on mortality—but they do show that anniversaries exert an influence.

> CULLEN MURPHY is the managing editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*. He was an editor at the *Wilson Quarterly* from 1977 until 1984, having joined the staff shortly after the first issue appeared. His wife, Anna Marie Torres, the *WQ*’s first managing editor, was a member of the staff at the magazine’s founding. Copyright © 2001 by Cullen Murphy.



*There's always time for another anniversary.*

Will the power of anniversaries persist indefinitely? One cause for concern involves the impact of “anniversary inflation”—too many anniversaries chasing a finite supply of significance. The devaluation of anniversaries is apparent everywhere. In Congress, legislators introduce so-called “members’ bills” by the hundreds to place a national imprimatur on banal commemorations. The commemorable timespan of teenage relationships seems to get shorter and shorter; a “one-month anniversary” can be an epochal event, the stuff of Abelard and Héloïse. In newspapers, the “Today in History” and “Today’s Birthdays” columns venture into increasingly trivial terrain. One recent morning the *New York Times’s* online “On This Day” feature alerted readers to the fourth anniversary of the indictment of former agriculture secretary Mike Espy and to the birthdays of the actress Tuesday Weld and the rap musician Bobo. The use of anniversaries as marketing tools becomes only more prevalent. In Germany, anniversaries may still play a part in the restraint of trade (according to the *Wall Street Journal*, clearance sales in Germany are limited to twice a year “plus anniversaries of a business’s birth that are evenly divisible by 25”),

but in the United States commemorative holidays are an occasion mostly for shopping.

The editors of the *Wilson Quarterly*, it is fair to say, have not been averse to capitalizing on anniversaries. Has it been a century since the death of some widely known but woefully misunderstood literary eminence? Has it been exactly 50 years since some vital nation had the misfortune to discover oil or to experiment prematurely with democracy? Was it only two decades ago that some promising social reform perversely planted the seeds of unforeseen catastrophe? Opportunities like these have always proved irresistible to the *WQ*.

But the more elemental anniversaries celebrated by the *WQ* are the ones it implicitly honors through its publication schedule: winter, spring, summer, and fall. With the current number, the *WQ* marks 25 of these annual cycles. I have all the issues on a shelf, a reminder that something enduring did indeed emerge from the 1970s. They’re not quite as heavy as Stonehenge, but they embody a similar sort of faith: that the universe is not entirely capricious—that the basic pattern will enjoy a long run. □

## FROM THE CENTER

On the 25th anniversary of the *Wilson Quarterly*, it seems appropriate to honor the enduring influence of President Woodrow Wilson's idealism, which has been an important element of American foreign policy during the past century.

As a governor, author, and academic, Wilson focused almost exclusively on domestic issues, in the tradition of America's pre-20th-century history. On the eve of his inauguration as president, he famously said to a friend, "It would be the irony of fate if my administration had to deal chiefly with foreign affairs." That was indeed to be the case. Wilson subsequently articulated both a vision of America's emerging role in the world and the structure of an international order—over which, as he foresaw, the United States would ultimately preside.

Wilson feared a second world war after experiencing the horrors of the first. So the new world order included support of an international organization for conflict resolution. Wilson committed America abroad to ensure that our economic and security interests were protected and to offer an American model of democracy to the world community. His prescient observation that "the whole world had become a simple village; each part had become the neighbor of the rest, where there was no avoiding the interdependence of nations," anticipated by many decades the global village the world has now become.

For more than half a century, the United Nations has been for the nations of the world a forum in which to air their grievances and discuss pressing issues. With the aid of the great powers, the UN has given diplomacy a place to breathe freely. In the years ahead, the UN will need the full support of the United States to be a constructive force in the world and to cope with crises (AIDS and global warming, for example) that transcend national interests. Those crises are driven by circumstances that mandate international cooperation on an unprecedented scale.

The world community confronts innumerable other issues that threaten international

stability. Can arms control and arms reduction continue? Are the two Koreas on a path to peaceful reunification? Can the United States help bring about a peaceful reconciliation of the People's Republic of China and Taiwan? How will China and the United States engage each other? Can the United States broker a peace in the Middle East, where there is an intractable case of two rights? How can two proud heritages (Arab and Jewish), which share historical rationales that link their destinies to geography, coexist in the face of growing populations, limited water supplies, and limited economic development opportunities? Will Vietnam become a significant American trading partner? Will Cuba? Can globalization evolve into a stability-inducing force without undermining national identities and economies?

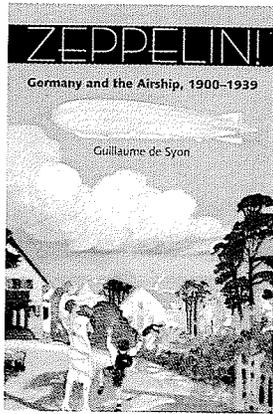
What are the long-term consequences of glasnost and perestroika? Do we have the skills to recognize the forces that are changing the ambitions of friend and foe alike?

The United States needs to muster all its energies and political creativity to counter the powerful forces that are hostile to world stability. We have to resist our isolationist impulses—impulses rooted in pessimism and fear, not in the American values of optimism, possibility, and destiny. The United States is neither the world's policeman nor "the answer" to the world's problems. Rather, we symbolize political freedom and economic opportunity. We are the paradigm that the world seeks to emulate.

With so many of the world's key institutions inspired by American ideals drawn specifically from the Wilsonian vision, the United States must continue to be the leader in world diplomacy. We cannot impose solutions on other nations, but we can be a force for continued debate and discussion, and for the exchange of ideas that, when joined to economic opportunity, can bring stability. We must honor Wilson's vision by creating in this new century a climate of leadership, trust, and confidence that will inspire our current and future allies—and our current and former foes.

Joseph A. Cari, Jr.  
Chair





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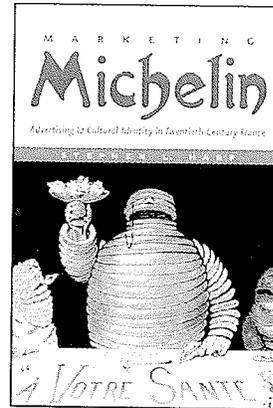
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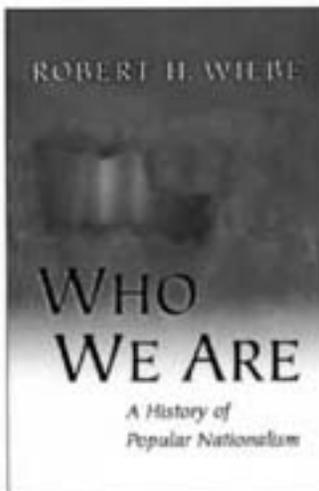
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