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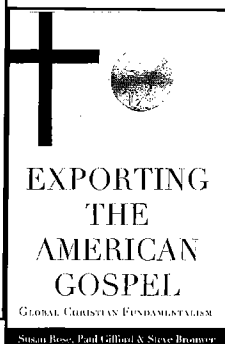
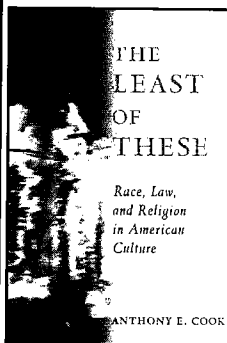
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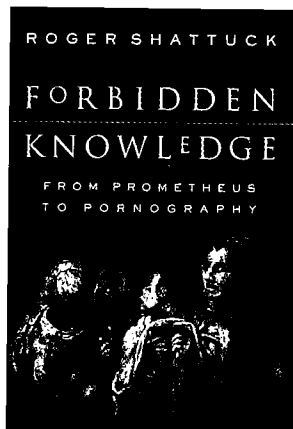


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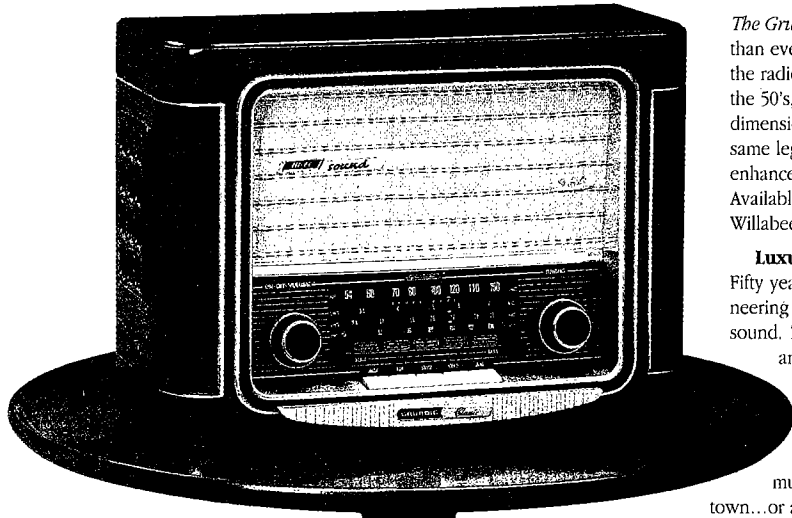
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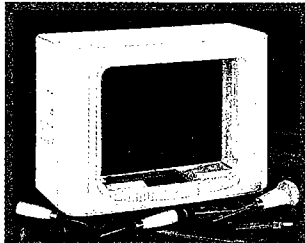
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EDITOR'S COMMENT

About 10 years ago, the work of a most unusual mind was brought to my attention. The mind belonged to Edward Tenner, a former editor at Princeton University Press and the author of a number of revelatory essays that had appeared in such places as *Harvard Magazine*, *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, and various business publications. His subject was technology, philosophically considered, with an emphasis on the effects of technology on society, particularly those that are unintended or perverse, or even both. In one of his early, eye-opening essays, "The Paradoxical Proliferation of Paper," Tenner pointed out the then-unnoticed fact that the computer revolution had increased, rather than reduced, the stacks of paper littering the modern workplace. In the first essay he wrote for us, "High-Tech Tantalus" (Summer 1990), he dubbed such phenomena "revenge effects," and he went on to explore them at greater length in a book that was published last year, *Why Things Bite Back*. That work, and the favorable response to it, have begun to bring him the attention he richly deserves.

During the writing of his book, Tenner continued to contribute pieces to this magazine (on technology and sports, for example), and even spent a year at the Woodrow Wilson Center as a Fellow. A conversation with Mr. Tenner, of which I had more than a few during that year, is what I imagine a conversation with Denis Diderot might have been: a quick tour of significant knowledge on just about any topic. The range is encyclopedic, but the uses to which it is put are never merely trivial. If I had to give a label to what he does, it would be the anthropology of the made world: the study of the feedback process by which what we make in turn makes us.

We're happy to have Mr. Tenner return to our pages with an essay on the chair—why and how this most ergonomically unsound tool for sitting came to conquer the world. (He also assumes a position on our masthead as contributing editor.) I don't know if Mr. Tenner's essay will drastically alter your way of life, but it should prompt some reflection the next time you fold your frame into your favorite easy chair.

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Europe from a Distance

The cover articles on Europe ["Europa: The Past and Future of an Idea," *WQ*, Winter '97] were timely, well-intentioned, but misfocused. At a time when Europe is completing its first half-century of integration with a revolutionary monetary union, 20th-century Europe deserves a better understanding than that given by John Pocock and Michael Howard. Their articles are marked by a skepticism toward the European Union which is common in Britain, where both have roots, but inappropriate in the United States, which fostered European integration from 1945. It is also misleading to think their views typical of European historians.

The British have been outsiders in the European Union since it started in 1950 with the Coal and Steel Community. They reluctantly entered the economic community in 1973 and have been a drag on Europe's progress ever since. Why not invite a French and a German, or other Continental scholars, to measure the meaning of the European Union as the century turns?

A final, and related, thought on books concerning Europe: an excellent account of the self-limiting British role in Europe since World War II is Michael Charlton's *Price of Victory* (London, 1983). A BBC interviewer, Charlton documents how, in Jean Monnet's phrase, Britain's valiant fight in that war had a high cost for the country: the illusion that it could resume its prewar role as a world power. It could not, and it has drifted in Europe ever since.

Clifford P. Hackett
Washington, D.C.

Exaggerated Espionage

In "While America Sleeps" [*WQ*, Winter '97], John J. Fialka points to the flow of industrial intelligence from the U.S. to Japan as one reason why, in his words, "we are losing at a game of economic jujitsu." Although it is not clear to me, a long-time resident of Japan, that

America is being outdone by this country economically or otherwise, Fialka is certainly right that the United States has been an intellectual-property bonanza for Japan. He implies, however, that one remedy is to increase the number of researchers traveling from the United States to Japan, to bring it closer to the much larger number of researchers going from Japan in the United States.

In fact, recent efforts to boost the number of foreign scientists spending time in Japan has increased the net flow of intelligence into this country. Moreover, this outcome is no accident. Researchers posted to "basic research" laboratories in Japan, usually thanks to fellowships from American industry associations and

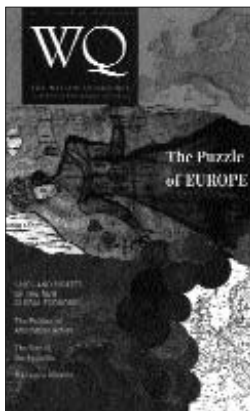
universities (often originally funded by Japanese corporate donations), report that their host institutions turn out to be mere clearing-houses for research done abroad. These American scientists typically find that, during the year or more that they remove themselves from their work in America, their only duties are to give lectures on their own work and to otherwise assist in gathering intelligence from their colleagues back home. Japanese labs do what they can to prevent their foreign

guests from taking intelligence back with them. When a British scientist once asked his handler if he might make a copy of a list of projects and researchers that he saw taped to the wall, he was suddenly called into a confusing meeting with the laboratory head. The list in question disappeared and was never seen again.

Merely sending researchers to a foreign country, and giving those researchers "cultural orientation" and teaching them the local language, will not necessarily reverse the flow of intelligence.

Brad Hall
Urayasu, Japan

John J. Fialka writes that there have been three waves of economic espionage directed



against the United States. “First came the Russians,” who “caught the United States with its barn doors wide open.”

Maybe they did. Fat lot of good it did them. The Warsaw Pact has disappeared, the Soviet Union has disintegrated, and Russia’s deputy industry minister, Mark Dvortsin, recently warned that no revival of the Russian economy can be expected before the second half of 1998.

Let’s move to the second wave: Japan. “While the Soviet Union’s industry outside the defense area couldn’t really assimilate U.S. technology,” which helps explain why economic espionage by itself doesn’t work, “the Japanese economy could, and in the 1970s and ’80s it did so at an awesome pace.”

The 1970s and ’80s? This is 1997. What happened in the 1990s? While the U.S. stock market has powered ahead to all-time highs based on the dynamism of the American economy, the Japanese stock market languishes at less than half the level it reached at the beginning of the decade. To be sure, the Japanese economy does represent a threat, but not the one suggested by Fialka. Japan is “still mired in deep recession,” the *Washington Post* reported on February 7. “With Japan’s banks

still struggling to stave off collapse from the weight of unpaid loans . . . Group of Seven authorities have become troubled by the risk of a global financial emergency if Japanese capital flees the country in favor of the dollar.”

It looks as though the Japanese made a bad bet. Instead of economic spies, they should have hired some bank examiners.

That still leaves the third wave, China, which, Fialka writes, “has flooded the United States with spies.” But as he points out, “Unlike the Japanese, who have focused on ways to take over commercial markets, China’s strategists have military goals.” That, however, is not economic espionage, which Fialka defines as an effort “to gain some secret advantage over a competitor” and then “slow[ing] the competitor’s attempts to recover.” Spying to obtain military secrets is traditional espionage, and if the Chinese are doing it on such a large scale, it challenges one of the assumptions behind the recent emphasis on economic espionage: that with the end of the Cold War, traditional security threats have all but disappeared, leaving unfair economic competition as the major threat to American security.

Unfortunately, national security threats have not gone away, and Fialka is right to point

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to China as an especially serious concern. "Military preparations for possible 'liberation warfare' [against Taiwan] continue," Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* reported on February 5. "The generals' warlike rhetoric, which had disappeared for several months, has again dominated many an internal meeting in Beijing. For example, Defense Minister Chi Haotian pointed out recently: 'It looks like we have to beat them [Taiwanese] up before reunification can be expedited.'" Even more striking is an article by Chen Qimao, president emeritus of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, in the November 1996 issue of *Asian Survey*. "The recent Taiwan Strait crisis indicated that whether this issue can be handled appropriately or not has become a matter of war or peace," he states bluntly. "If Taiwan becomes independent under the support of some foreign powers, China will use every means possible to reverse this, including the decisive use of military force, even at the risk of a military conflict with the United States."

I don't know if statements like these get Fialka's attention. But they definitely get mine. And they had better get the CIA's, especially in light of the growing ties between Russia and China.

Stanley Kober
Research Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies
Cato Institute
Washington, D.C.

Although John J. Fialka's article is nominally about industrial espionage, much of the article is a set of opinions or assertions about other matters, usually matters that have been widely covered with much greater depth and subtlety in the general press. Consider what he says about Chinese espionage. Although Fialka asserts that China represents the greatest espionage threat, he also states clearly that China is primarily stealing military secrets. If that is so, it isn't due to military complacency about security; nor is it terribly relevant to his purported overall theme.

But the strangest thing about this article has nothing to do with the parts that should have been edited out. The strangest thing about this article is that when Fialka does present us with evidence of the horrors of government-sponsored industrial espionage, the evidence does not support his thesis!

He presents many statements, usually from biased observers, that other countries are pro-

moting government-supported industrial espionage. Although it's hard to tell from quotations out of context, some of his examples are quite misleading. For example, the much-studied story of Dow Corning and its battles with the Japanese Patent Office (JPO) over fiber-optic technology had a lot to do with the ways of the JPO and little to do with government espionage. The question of patent practices in less developed countries is an interesting one, discussed much more thoroughly by Patrick Marshall in the same *WQ*. Similarly, Fialka's quotes from Laura Tyson are misleading; her general study is of industrial policy overall, not just industrial espionage. Whether you believe her number of \$105 billion or not, certainly only a small fraction of that number came from targeted government-sponsored espionage.

But those are quibbles. Let's assume everything he says is true. Where is the problem? Tyson's \$105 billion was over a five-year period, a total of \$21 billion per year, or \$8.40 per American per year. That isn't a big problem. In return, what we have learned from Japan over this same period was how to make higher-quality, lower-cost cars with much better gas mileage, and how to make our semiconductors far more reliable. That was worth a lot more than \$42 apiece. Parenthetically, those of us in the high-technology industry also learned to start following Japanese industry much more thoroughly than we had in the past. Similarly, Fialka's survey showing \$5.1 billion of unspecified losses from intellectual-property theft doesn't impress me as a terribly large problem in a \$7 trillion economy.

Interestingly, there was a recent industrial espionage case, involving General Motors and Volkswagen, that shows how far from reality Fialka's views are. An employee allegedly stole secrets from GM when he went to work for Volkswagen. The German government was certainly not involved, and in fact is prosecuting the individual for theft of trade secrets. GM certainly did not try to hide the trade-secret theft to avoid embarrassment. The industrial spy is certainly not a German national "mole." In other words, in a real-world case involving perhaps a billion dollars worth of value all by itself, Fialka's model and view are wrong in every single particular.

I've specifically avoided discussing the ethics involved in industrial espionage, as did Fialka. It is worth pointing out parenthetically that the United States has traditionally tried to

recognize the value of ethical positions even at the cost of some national economic self-interest, not just in foreign policy but in international business rules. We have laws preventing U.S. companies from bribing foreign officials, for example, and I believe most Americans support those laws even though they cost us some business. Similarly, we are morally conflicted about doing business with unpleasant regimes around the world, and we recognize the moral conflict and economic costs associated with such scruples as legitimate costs to bear. I say this parenthetically because, based on Fialka's discussion of government support of industrial espionage, there apparently is no need for a moral tradeoff. Based on his evidence, government support of industrial espionage is simply wasteful and ineffective.

The question of industrial espionage is an interesting one. I looked forward to a thoughtful, focused article from a respectable thinker that would give me a good background on the topic. That's what *WQ* normally provides; this time you blew it.

*Allen Becker
Newton, Mass.*

In "Guarding the Wealth of Nations," [*WQ*, Winter '97], Patrick Marshall erroneously states that United States patents have a term of 17 years, "with a possible extension of five years under certain circumstances." In fact, under patent law revisions enacted in 1994 pursuant to the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, patents that originate from patent applications filed after June 8, 1995, are entitled to a term beginning on the date of the patent grant and ending 20 years from the date of filing of the earliest application from which the patent issued. Patents in force on June 8, 1995, and patents originating from patent applications filed before June 8, 1995, are entitled to the longer of 1) a term of 17 years from the date of the patent grant, or 2) a term beginning on the date of the grant and ending 20 years from the date of filing of the earliest application from which the patent issued. Patent term extensions, which are limited to a maximum period of five years, are available in the event of administrative delays during the patent application process.

*John C. Todaro
Steinberg, Raskin, and Davidson, P.C.
Patents, Trademarks, and Copyrights
New York, N.Y.*

Equal Rights, Equal Treatment

Peter Skerry has written a valuable and perceptive original essay ["The Strange Politics of Affirmative Action," *WQ*, Winter '97] about a subject that has been overcome by arguments and counterarguments that by now are as stale as they are familiar.

Skerry is right in underscoring the contradiction between the two core values in the American Creed—individualism and egalitarianism—and in pointing out that the tension between these fundamental values has consistently been reflected in the attitude of Americans toward equality and affirmative action. It is regrettable that many of the earliest and most zealous bureaucrats charged with enforcing affirmative action guidelines never seemed to understand that a government-directed policy of affirmative action would never win the backing of a political majority by using a social calculus blind to the fact that equality is not an absolute virtue, standing alone. American equality has always been tempered by a sense of its connections with other democratic values, such as the principle of evaluating each person according to his or her merits.

Skerry asks if the "peculiar mix of individualism and group rights" bodes well or ill for the ability of America "to sort out its racial affairs at the end of the 20th century." No one really knows. What we do know is that the public opposition to the direction affirmative action has taken has been shaped by a particular view of equal rights rooted in certain procedural guarantees (too long denied, it should be noted, to blacks and other minorities).

Properly understood, this view of equality is built on a sequence of ideas that runs from equality before the law to equality of opportunity, and only then (if ever) equality of results.

The answer to Skerry's question will depend on whether our policies in the years ahead run against the American promise of equal right and equal treatment.

*John H. Bunzel
Senior Research Fellow
Hoover Institution
Stanford, Calif.*

Peter Skerry reminds us of four important facts about contemporary politics in general and affirmative action politics in particular. First, politics always reflects the incentives political actors face and the values citizens cherish. Second, these incentives are largely defined

and structured by the kinds of organizations and other institutions through which politics is conducted. Third, the organizations that advocate affirmative action have increasingly artificial ties to the members they claim to represent. Finally, Americans' core commitment to merit-based individualism remains in deep tension with these organizations' attempts to elevate *all* members of their respective groups.

Skerry's perspective highlights some easily missed features of affirmative action politics. Unlike Jim Crow's system of racial identification, ethnicity today is more self-claimed than legally ascribed. But this creates a severe organizational problem for civil rights groups. Co-ethnics can free ride on the group's efforts yet feel no reciprocal obligation. Attributing their success to their own efforts (just as the individualistic credo affirms), they can feel that they or their forebears have already paid their dues by overcoming discrimination. While publicly claiming a devoted membership, groups can extract few resources from their members and must seek support elsewhere. They must practice politics on the cheap and at wholesale: unaccountable leadership, sacrifice of material interests to symbolism, and outside strategies to cultivate media and foundation elites as much as members.

But if Skerry illuminates the political behavior of ethnic groups, he leaves us in the dark about how they managed to institutionalize affirmative action. After all, politicians' ability to assess the genuine level and intensity of public support for proposed policies, like entrepreneurs' ability to gauge new markets, is perhaps their most important survival skill. Why has this policy survived bitter assaults by the majority party in Congress? One answer—that in a fragmented political system such as ours, the power of inertia entrenches any policy once adopted—simply begs the question of how the policy was adopted in the first place.

Ethnic preference is found in almost every political culture. Its American proponents have tried, with some success, to link it to the dominant ethos of individualism, insisting that it is a transitional remedy for past wrongs, not a permanent one, and that it promotes equality of opportunity, not results. Nor is its advocacy confined to the beneficiary groups. Powerful interests—large employers and unions, the educational establishment, national media, courts, the Clinton administration, and civil rights bureaucracies—seem willing to bear economic and political costs in

its name. It can impose large and obvious social costs—the stigmatization of minority achievements, the promotion of dissimulation and discord among groups, and the creation of perverse behavioral incentives—while its benefits often seem transitory or illusory. These facts only deepen the puzzle and intensify our need for a solution.

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Robust Youth

I agree with the writer of "Findings" in the Winter '97 issue of *WQ* who deplores the pervasive use of clichés in today's communication, whether written or spoken. "Robust" certainly is an apt example. Another is "paradigm." But his implication that "robust" is used incorrectly by his statement, "a word once associated with the taste of red wine, the aroma of coffee," somehow indicates to me his relative youth. My *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, fifth edition, 1942, defines "robust" as follows: "1. Having or evincing strength or vigorous health; strong; vigorous; sound." [Certainly the sense in which it so frequently is applied in the current discourse of economists, sociologists, and political scientists.] "2. Rough; rude; 3. Requiring strength or vigor.—Syn. Lusty, sinewy, sturdy, hale, hearty."

It is in my *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1967, that I find "FULL-BODIED [coffee]" as the fourth definition, after the three given in the fifth edition. I might add that "paradigm" is defined first as an example or pattern in both editions; so, loosely, speaking, it is being used correctly to describe a new way of thinking, a new model. But it would be pleasant to have greater variety in the words chosen to convey their thoughts by our peers.

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Corrections

In a *WQ* periodical review (Winter '97, p. 124), we misstated the number of reported deaths that might have resulted from complications due to abortion between 1972 and 1990. The correct number is 550. In that same issue, the name of Edinburgh's downtown thoroughfare was given as Prince's Street. The correct name, as several readers pointed out, is Princes Street. We regret the errors.

FINDINGS

IN PRAISE OF THE OBSCURE: Criticizing the jargon-ridden prose that passes for writing in vast regions of the academic world is easy. Defending it, as Michael Bérubé does (in admirably clear language) in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Feb. 21, 1997), is another matter. Bérubé agrees that professors sometimes ought to address themselves to a broader public. But “if the pedagogy and service end of a discipline is in good working order . . . then the groundbreaking-research end of the discipline can be as obscure and generally incomprehensible as it wants or needs to be.”

Nobody complains about the writing of specialists in the sciences that is incomprehensible to all but a handful of fellow specialists, Bérubé points out, because they assume that the natural world is complex and difficult to describe. Humanists inhabit an equally complicated world, with subjects that require their own recondite language, such as “the narrative techniques of Browning’s *The Ring and the Book*, or the differences between English and French feudalism in the 12th century.”

Yes, there are “unnecessarily opaque” works of theory. But some theorists today “are necessarily difficult,” Bérubé writes. “Their *ideas* are complex, and you can’t just scrape away the prose to get to the ideas underneath.”

The American academy, he says, “should be proud that it houses obscure writers, just as it should be proud of being home to people who are fluent in a dozen medieval languages. We could use more professors who write regularly for non-academic audiences, but we do not need to insist that every professor in every discipline write in a language immediately intelligible to every educated reader.”

OLD SCHOOL UNTIES: Elsewhere in this issue (see p. 124) we report on research showing that the compensation of corporate CEOs has reached extraordinary levels relative to that of other workers. An interesting notion about how this trend might be moderated comes from a trio of academics in the

Academy of Management Journal (Dec. 1996): put the upper class in charge of executive pay. Social psychologist Maura Belliveau and her colleagues found that it’s bad news for CEOs when a corporate board of directors appoints a person of high social status (indicated by such things as educational attainment and schools attended) to chair its compensation committee. An Ivy League pedigree doesn’t do a CEO much good if that officer has to bargain with an equally high-toned chair. But match him against a lower-status chair, and he gets paid about 16 percent more than a CEO who has to wrangle with a chair of higher status. What gives? Pedigreed committee chairs probably bring a little more experience in other organizations to the bargaining table, the researchers say, but there’s no substitute for being a top dog.

Apparently, these are not the only social psychologists bent on moving into the economists’ territory. Others have ideas about helping people at the bottom of the economic heap. Recently spotted in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*: “The Effect on Restaurant Tipping of Male and Female Servers Drawing a Happy, Smiling Face on the Backs of Customers’ Checks.”

DREAM JOB: Goddard College, which describes itself as “a small, progressive, democratic institution in central Vermont,” recently advertised for a new president. “In the past,” says the ad, “presidents at Goddard have resigned, due in part to conflicts with a community committed to complete participation in all important decisions affecting the college. . . . We need someone who is prepared to lead us through a process that questions the necessity of a President in the first place, and can, if necessary, conceptualize alternative governing methods.”

FLUSHING OUT THE TRUTH: The advance of knowledge continues at a frightening pace. Texas A&M University Press recently announced the publication of *Those Vulgar Tubes: External Sanitary*

Accommodations aboard European Ships of the Fifteenth through Seventeenth Centuries, by Joe J. Simmons III. Information about how ancient mariners disposed of their waste products is “amazingly scarce,” says the Press’s catalogue. “With clear illustrations and a timeline that graphs the development of sanitary facilities,” the blurb’s authors boast, “*Those Vulgar Tubes* fills a longstanding void in the history of maritime travel.” Or should they have said, “voids a longstanding fill?”

THE MICKEY TEST: It is almost impossible to read a book or article about America’s built environment without encountering a reference to what used to be called “the wonderful world of Disney.” To those who hate it, “Disneyfication” is right up there with the malling of America in its culpability for turning the public realm into an unreal space. What they hate above all are the assorted corporate-sponsored



attempts to recreate the Norman Rockwell world of small-town America. On the other side are those architects and planners who are determined to bring back the virtues of an earlier style of American planning. To them, the Disney ideal incarnated in the recently opened Florida new town, Celebration, is not in principle a bad one and in fact points the way to practicable concepts. The two sides have it out again in a pair of recent books: Ada Louise Huxtable’s *The Unreal America: Architecture and Illusion* and Beth Dunlop’s *Building a Dream: The Art of Disney Architecture*.

Regardless of who may be right, perhaps the most astonishing fact is that the name of a modest cartoonist who built an empire on a herd of animated creatures is at the center of the most heated debates about how Americans will design the places they live.

OBIT LIT: We recently joked about an unlikely new book called *Living Post-humously: Confronting the Loss of Vital Powers*, suggesting that it might be “the last

word in self-help books.” Little did we realize how widely the never-say-die spirit has penetrated American life. Among the new books we’ve spotted in the death-defying category are *Dying Well: The Prospect for Growth at the End of Life* and *Love Beyond Life: The Healing Power of After-Death Communications*.

WOULD LAD OR LASS HAVE BEEN OKAY? Rule 2.18 of *Guidelines for Bias-Free Writing*, by Marilyn Schwartz and an alert task force of language minders, holds up an altogether laudable stricture: “The condescending terms *boy* and *girl* to refer to adult persons of color should also be avoided.” But the example cited, from a university film review of *Map of the Human Heart*, is a bit of a head-scratcher: “An Eskimo boy,

befriended by a Canadian cartographer, is sent down to Quebec to cure his TB, falls in love with a half-breed Indian girl, then reunites with her years later when they’re serving in WW II England.” Trouble is, the Eskimo in the film is a boy when he’s sent to the sanitarium in Quebec. And the young half-Indian female he meets also happens to be a . . . girl. Is there such a thing as politically overcorrect?

MORE USES OF THE WEB: Researchers at Cornell University’s Wilson Laboratory were puzzled recently to find that the laboratory’s home page on the World Wide Web suddenly was getting hundreds of hits a day. The high-energy physicists at Cornell didn’t delude themselves, as academics sometimes do, into thinking a benighted public was about to recognize the fascinating nature of their work. After all, the page is devoted to the rather esoteric doings of the laboratory’s silicon vertex detector. So they investigated. It turns out that their home page had somehow wound up on a list of the top 10 sites devoted to the blonde bombshell of *Baywatch*, Pamela Lee Anderson. (The Cornell site was rated number nine.) Speculation on campus is that a Web search engine somehow made a connection between the laboratory’s silicon vertex detector and the actress’s famously formidable bust.

AT ISSUE

The Age Demanded

Attitude: a fleeting affectation of style or manner suggesting a purposive relation to the world and one's fellows; a contemporary alternative to belief, conviction, and, possibly, character; occasionally pejorative, but more often a term of high approbation, as in, "That lady has *attitude*."

To point out that American culture today is all about attitude is nothing more than to state the obvious.

Should we worry, or even think about being worried? Why not just change the channel?

Before we do, though, we might pause for a moment, or at least until the next commercial. Because there is something NEW—even something NEW and EXCITING—about attitude. Something that tells us about US. And if we're no longer interested in the world, as every major survey says, we're at least interested in US.

Here it is, like the "plastics" tip given to Dustin Hoffman in *The Graduate*: attitude rules because history is over.

No, not over in the way Francis Fukuyama meant in his essay of 1989 ("The End of History?"): not because communism has closed shop and liberal democracy-cum-free-marketism has prevailed.

We're talking higher concept here: the transformation of psyche and culture, not everyday politics. We're talking end of all past-connectedness, not to mention all past-hauntedness. History is a complicated nightmare from which we finally awoke. And where we are now—I mean right now—is in this long, lazy stretch and yawn called . . . you got it . . . attitude.

Can't you just feel it? It's a bit like not shaving or combing your hair and wear-

ing your pajamas all day long, indoors or out, and not really giving a damn what other people think—because what do other people think, and who cares, because who the hell are you, and I'm Bart Simpson and Al Bundy and Roseanne all rolled into one. And it really is kind of funny, the way nothing matters, the way cause and consequence have gone out the window, or at least the way we think they have.

You encounter attitude everywhere. Of course on the tube, and of course in the movies. Films might even be its prime showcase, having some time ago abandoned all interest in plot and character. A perfect instance is the much praised *English Patient*, which, like the novel it's based on, is about a collection of attitudes bumping into one another in romantic settings, doing things for no plausible motive or reason. If it works even better on the screen than on the page, it's because the attitudes are embodied in attractive, model-perfect actors. And attitude, after all, is the suggestion of character and action in *look*.

As well as strutting across our various stages and playing fields, attitude fills newspapers, magazines, and other outlets of gab and buzz. It's not only the subject—whether sports hero or a movie idol—but the style in which the subject is handled. So we get volumes of edgy profiles of

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defiant Dennis Rodmans or chastened but unbowed Madonnas. Everything is discussed with attitude, including politics, as we see on the talking head shows, where tidbits of insider gossip are delivered with a snarl or a sneer or a just-so smile. Should we be surprised or disappointed that politicians themselves are becoming masters of the game, more concerned with making the right kind of statement than with making policy?

The end of history that brought about the cultural triumph of attitude didn't just happen overnight, of course. The process has been charted by scores of culture critics. The historian Warren Sussman saw it in the gradual displacement of character by personality. The satirist George S. W. Trow described it as the emergence of the "context of no context," a culture in which, among other things, the ideal and authority of adulthood no longer hold force.

Such seismic cultural shifts resulted from the dizzying changes that science and technology brought about in our material world—and particularly the ever-accelerating speed of those changes in this century. The late-Victorian American moralist Henry Adams, contemplating the steam-driven dynamo at the 1900 Paris Exhibition, predicted that technology would have a devastating effect on human character by accelerating the very tempo of life. The poet Ezra Pound, not two decades later, might even have adumbrated the coming aesthetic of attitude when he wrote, "The age demanded an image/ Of its accelerated grimace."

The speed at which everything moves—from human bodies to information—is so fast that we now vicariously experience the equivalent of many lifetimes during the course of our single one. Life itself seems to be less the living out of a linear, chronologically unfolding destiny than a vicarious sampling of various life possibilities, or lifestyles (a word unheard-of as late as the 1950s). Attitude is just the mask we assume for our current choice.

So much is this a time of attitude that representations of an older, more time-

bounded reality come almost as palpable shocks: shocks of the old, you might say. One such representation comes, surprisingly, in the Hollywood film *Jerry McGuire*, which despite its obligatory slickness, shows characters changing fatefully as a result of decisions they make and actions they take. A successful sports agent, played by Tom Cruise, risks his career by suggesting to his colleagues that there might be a better, more decent way of doing business. He pays for his presumption (a false note: in reality he would have been ignored), but he learns and recovers from his losses, perhaps too neatly staging a comeback by living according to his principles. The astonishment of this film—in addition to a child actor, Jonathan Lipnicki, who steals the show from his elders—is that it has what Aristotle would have recognized as a plot: plot as the development of character—not the display of attitude.

A far more textured and credible reminder of the world we have left behind—indeed, a brilliant fictional version of how we journeyed from belief and conviction to attitude—appears in John Updike's recent novel, *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. The novel traces the fortunes of one American family from the dawn of this century to our bewildering present. It begins with the Reverend Clarence Arthur Wilmot, rector of the Fourth Presbyterian Church in Paterson, New Jersey, whom we encounter just as he enters a crisis of faith that will cost him his position, his station, and his security—losses not only for him but for his wife and children.

In addition to leading us through the coils of Wilmot's crisis and its pathetic aftermath—the fallen reverend is reduced to selling encyclopedias door to door, at one point to his former maid—Updike suggests how the shadow of that spiritual catastrophe plays across three successive generations of Wilmots, including a greatgrandson who joins a religious cult and is killed in a Waco-style battle with the law.

The effect of the reverend's legacy on his various heirs, who end up every-

where from small-town Delaware to Hollywood to the mountains of Colorado, is a spiritual hunger that drives them down different but equally desperate paths. Updike dramatizes the interaction of their private struggles with the great cultural changes of the century, changes that reshape communities and reconstruct human character. The reduction of life, including true feeling derived from real experience, to a simulacrum life, in which feelings must consult appearances for confirmation, is captured in a powerful scene in which the cultist's mother, a famous actress, learns of her son's death: "Her heart came into her throat as she heard this bleat of news but she wondered if her reaction was sincere; she checked her face in the rear-view mirror to see how actressy she looked. No, her sudden shocked haggard look was genuine."

It could be worse, Updike as much as

says. The mother might have had no real feelings against which to check her appearances. More hopeful yet, we learn that her son, despite his malformed character, in the end behaved nobly, helping the women and children escape from the lethal conflagration against the will of the deranged cult leader.

For the granddaughter and great-grandson of the Reverend Wilmot, as for most of us, some concern for truth and reality survives, albeit shakily. Despite the accelerating assaults of the fantasy machine, we cherish some link with the real past, with history. Among other things, this attachment accounts for our renewed curiosity about our ancestors the Victorians, who first encountered the accelerating upheavals of the modern, and did so with imagination and bravery. But in the age of attitude, the link grows ever more fragile. And there is no guarantee of its holding.

—Jay Tolson

REDISCOVERING THE VICTORIANS

The reputation of the Victorians fared poorly in the hands of their immediate successors, the early moderns. Popular literary indictments, such as Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918), depicted 19th-century Britons as humorless prigs and moralizing hypocrites. Add mean

spirited, money grubbing, aesthetically impoverished, and imperialistic,

and the dismal anti-Victorian

bill of particulars is almost

complete. Unfair and one-

sided as that picture was,

it remained the standard

view, at least among

most intellectuals, for a

goodly portion of this

century. During the past

two decades, however,

scholars and others have

taken a fresh look at the

culture and society of the

Victorians and found a richness

and humanity previously denied.

Looking at several aspects of the

Victorian achievement—from the visual arts (once dismissed as merely decorative) to the empire—our authors explain why the Victorian experience may speak more clearly to us at the end of the 20th century than it did to those who lived in its immediate aftermath.



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Signs of the Times

by Malcolm Warner

When Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert, commissioned Franz Xaver Winterhalter to paint *The First of May, 1851*, they wanted a family portrait that would also be an allegory of national pride and achievement. The aged duke of Wellington—known affectionately as the Iron Duke, victor over Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo—was the idol of the people, and for many the embodiment of British courage, forthrightness, and good sense. As godfather to Prince Arthur, he came to Buckingham Palace on the afternoon of May 1 with presents for the boy on his first birthday, and this is the event that occupies the queen, the child, and Wellington in the portrait. Prince Albert, however, turns slightly away, in the direction of a distant building with the sun's rays bursting from behind—not a royal palace, as one might expect, but the Crystal Palace, that huge structure of girders and glass erected in Hyde Park for the first world's fair, the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations.

The exhibition, which the queen had opened earlier that afternoon, had been largely Prince Albert's idea. The period since Waterloo had been one of unbroken peace for Britain, and it was hoped that the exhibition would help maintain peace by promoting a spirit of friendly exchange among the nations. Peace had brought prosperity, and this too would continue as a benefit of the technological progress celebrated in the exhibition's extraordinary displays of machinery. It was also hoped that bringing Britain's material achievements to the attention of the world would advertise the wisdom of its ways in politics, notably its commitment to political reform and the Liberal Party tenets of *laissez-faire* and free trade. If the Iron Duke was a living monument to the glory of the past, the Crystal Palace promised glories into the future.

Among the 100,000 exhibits in the Crystal Palace there was some sculpture, but the only paintings admitted were "illustrations or examples of materials and processes." If there had been paintings chosen as



The First of May, 1851, by Franz Xaver Winterhalter

works of art, it is not difficult, knowing the eminent and popular painters of the day, to guess who the British contingent would have been; they would not, generally speaking, have presented a very bright prospect. Apart from the work of a few embattled young rebels, nothing in British painting showed even an inkling of the raw modernity Joseph Paxton had brought to the architecture of the Crystal Palace.

Some of the problems of painting in this brave new Britain appear, although the artist himself would never have seen them as such, in Winterhalter's family portrait. The Great Exhibition was the picture's whole reason for being. It proclaims the triumph of the modern and the material; but its heart is clearly elsewhere, with the traditional and the ideal. It is couched as an homage to the old masters of the 16th and 17th centuries, a would-be *Adoration of the Magi*. As the queen explained later, disapprovingly, to Prince Arthur: "Dear Papa and Winterhalter wished it to represent an Event, like Rubens—& Paul Veronese did . . . *without any exact fact.*"

Since the middle of the 18th century, the goal of most ambitious painters in Britain had been to align themselves with the tradition of European art passed down from the High Renaissance in Italy through old masters such as Veronese and Peter Paul Rubens. The mainstay of this tradition, that of the so-



Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Night (1834–35), by J. M. W. Turner

called grand manner, was the notion of the ideal. The aim of the artist working in the grand manner was not to show people and things as they appeared in real life but in the noblest manner possible. This was the aesthetic philosophy promoted by Joshua Reynolds, the eminent portraitist who had been the first president of the Royal Academy, and whose *Discourses* (delivered 1769–90) remained the canonical work of art theory in Britain. For him, the ideal was “the great leading principle, by which works of genius are conducted,” and the duty of artists “to conceive and represent their subjects in a poetical manner, not confined to mere matter of fact.” He held that they could follow no better model in this than the Renaissance master Raphael.

By the time of the Crystal Palace, however, some bright, serious critics and painters had come to believe that Reynolds’s version of the history and purpose of art was a dead hand. The critic John Ruskin asserted that the greatest of all British painters, J. M. W. Turner, had been hampered by the notion of the ideal in landscape painting, and rose to greatness despite its influence. Ruskin’s inspiring prose must have led many a young, dissatisfied painter to look to Turner for suggestions as to a way forward. But in the end, there seemed almost as little future in following him as in following Reynolds. One reason for this was an important shift in ideas by which the more extravagant productions of the Romantic

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movement, in art and literature, came to seem outdated.

This was an age that had broken away from the past as had no other in history, and it was keenly conscious of its own singularity. The “Mechanical Age,” as the social prophet Thomas Carlyle had named it in his essay “Signs of the Times” (1829), called for a progressive art in tune with its practical, inquiring tendencies. The rise of Manchester and other industrial cities had, in fact, brought about a boom period in British art. The recently enfranchised, Liberal upper-middle classes were not only wealthy enough to pay high prices for paintings but also inclined to buy the work of British artists rather than the old masters—works that illustrated the play of ideas and attitudes, the tensions and debates that exercised the middle-class mind.

The painting that would speak to the age would present the world neither as beautified and old masterly, nor as apprehended through strong, complicated, and personal feelings; like the age itself, it would deal honestly and heartily in facts. It would respect the importance of material things in themselves. The subject matter of the new painting need not be literally mechanical, showing scenes of locomotives and factories, nor even drawn from modern life. Whether modern or historical, biblical or literary, it need only be of serious interest to living men and women. The revolution would lie in the handling, the description of things in a language that was 19th-century Britain’s own. These are some of the ideas that lay behind the founding, in 1848, of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

The Pre-Raphaelites believed artists had been more humbly observant of nature before the High Renaissance, and in that sense were trying to return to an earlier time. But if their choice of name sounds regressive rather than progressive, it is misleading. In fact, their main idea was to challenge Reynolds and the grand manner; they should perhaps have called themselves “Anti-Raphaelites,” which would have prevented at least some of the misunderstanding that met their first works.

Reynolds had urged the artist to avoid the particular, but the Pre-Raphaelites believed that the particular was everything, and that the people and things in a painting should approach not the ideal, but the most painstaking, warts-and-all kind of portraiture. “Pre-Raphaelitism has but one principle,” stated the sympathetic Ruskin, “that of absolute, uncompromising truth in all that it does, obtained by working everything, down to the most minute detail, from nature, and from nature only.”

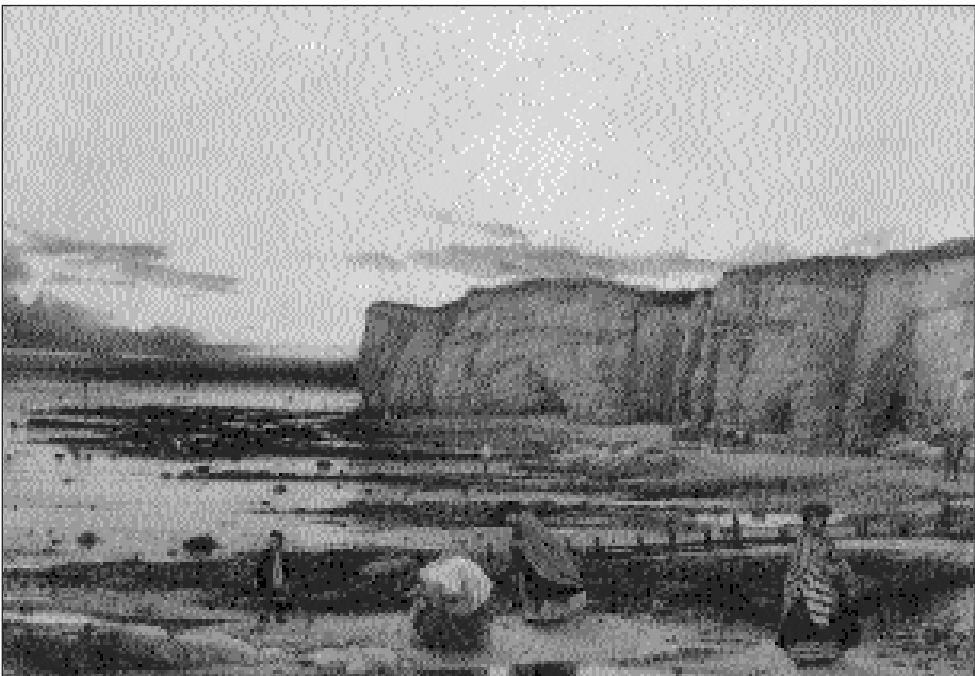
The members of the “P R B,” especially William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais, tried to approach painting with the rigor of the modern scientist: they disdained received notions, working directly and entirely from their own observations. The Pre-Raphaelites presented no glimpse or “impression” of the world; their method had more to do with collecting data than with the everyday experience of the eye. It developed in the spirit of modern empiricism and, more than any other kind of contemporary British art, in the spirit of the Crystal Palace. The Pre-Raphaelites’ pictures are great exhibi-

tions in themselves: accumulations of objects are carefully displayed, and the sheer quantity to see and consider demands a long visit.

The Pre-Raphaelites loved facts for themselves, but also as the means to a higher end. Frederic George Stephens said that the scientific approach to painting was calculated to serve art's "moral purposes" and compared the artist to a priest. It was a central idea of the period that art should be the instrument of good. It could do good even at the level of technique, by showing the right moral qualities in the way it was made. The products of intense and grueling application on the part of the painters, Pre-Raphaelite pictures embodied the idea of industry.

The moral and religious understanding of work grew naturally, in the minds of earnest painters, into a moral and religious understanding of brushwork: if it showed honest toil, it was good; if not, especially if it suggested some kind of sensual pleasure in paint as a material, it smacked of sin. Only against the background of the Victorian religion of work can we begin to understand, for instance, the fervor of Hunt as he described the fluent, old-masterly technique taught to him by his early teachers as loose, irresponsible handling, or warned that the "wildness" of impressionist brushwork "stimulates a progressive lowering of the standard of personal responsibility, and must breed increased laxity of principle in social rectitude, until the example of defiant indolence imperils the whole nation."

Art should also do good, painters like Hunt believed, through the ideas suggested by its subjects and symbols. Their paintings tell stories with morals, and present characters of interest and importance from the



Pegwell Bay: A Recollection of October 5th, 1858, by William Dyce

moral point of view. The Pre-Raphaelites found morals in everything; they revered nature not only for its glories and wonders as God's creation, but for the capacity of each object to suggest ideas. Even the man-made world, viewed in the spirit of humility and moral awareness, contained in latent symbolic form an elaborate commentary upon itself: Hunt, for example, depicts a woman's entire future in a dropped glove.

Though entirely sincere in the optimism and self-confidence they announced to the world in the Great Exhibition, the early Victorians were by no means free of private doubt and anguish. The sheer speed at which society and ideas were changing, the transitional state of everything, induced a mental and spiritual unease. The discomfort was nowhere more intense than in the sphere of religion, where people quite rightly sensed an impending crisis. The certainties of Christian faith with which most of them had grown up were beginning to fade under the influence of scientific and materialistic habits of thought. Biblical scholars had begun to study Scriptures not as divine revelation but as historical documents that could be judged to be fact or, as was disturbingly often the case, something else. More important, the whole tendency of modern geology, particularly in the work of Charles Lyell, was to show the natural world not as the once-and-for-all work of a creator but as the result of a slow, constant, and continuing process of change, operating under its own laws, over a long period of time.

Science affected people's imaginations as never before, changing their view of the world and themselves. The British coastline and its cliffs, regarded by earlier generations as the very bulwark of national stability and security, began to suggest a whole new set of associations—with troubling scientific knowledge, with fossils and erosion. Under the famous white cliffs of Dover, where he wrote the poem "Dover Beach" (1851), Matthew Arnold seemed to hear the ebbing of the Sea of Faith. In *Pegwell Bay: A Recollection of October 5th, 1858*, that most intelligent of all Pre-Raphaelite paintings, William Dyce shows himself sighting a comet over more fossil-rich cliffs, an image suggesting the immensities of both geological time and astronomical space. Pegwell Bay was where Saint Augustine landed to bring Christianity to Britain; the boy and woman looking out from Dyce's picture could almost be scanning the horizon for a new Saint Augustine to deliver the country, not from paganism this time but from doubt.

In this time of religious uncertainties, in which modern knowledge was undermining the authority of Bible and church alike, people looked for certainties from their writers and artists. It was the age of the writer as prophet, the artist as preacher. The Pre-Raphaelites were interested in religious subjects from the outset, and Hunt was to lead a realist revolution in sacred art; arising, in part, from the British Protestant's traditional distaste for devotional images, it may be more apt to call it a reformation. Taking his Pre-Raphaelite principles to their natural conclusion, he made it his practice to paint scenes from Scriptures—as far as possible—on the spot in the Holy Land, observing the local people, manners, customs, and surroundings, taking into account the discoveries and theories of biblical archaeologists. In *The*



The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple (c. 1854), by William Holman Hunt

Finding of the Saviour in the Temple (c. 1854), he painted the heads and costumes of the elders largely from models in Jerusalem. Such a picture stood as a testament to the truth of the given event and the characters involved, arrived at scientifically; if there were symbols pointing to higher truths, as there always were, they were confined to objects that would appear in the actual scene.

The spirit of the Great Exhibition held through the 1850s. But in the 1860s and early 1870s it showed signs of waning, and in the last quarter of the 19th century the early Victorian attitude of self-assured powering ahead turned into something more like coasting along. The defeat of the Liberal Party under William Ewart Gladstone in the general election of 1874, ending 28 years of Whig-Liberal domination in Parliament, marked a shift in the national consciousness. Although Britain remained the most powerful country in the world, its pre-eminence in industry and commerce was no longer unchallenged. At home, it was troubled by a growing sense of antagonism in public life, in particular by the controversy and violence over home rule for Ireland. The birthrate declined, strife between the classes increased, the countryside became more depressed, and the cities grew more polluted. By the end of the century, the optimistic Crystal Palace seemed to the young G. K. Chesterton and his contemporaries like “the temple of a forgotten creed.”

The early Victorians might have been shaky in their beliefs, but they held fast to the idea that, in the end, definite answers did exist, that there was an absolute truth to be revealed and known, even if it might take the overthrow of cherished traditions and conventions of thought. From the 1860s onward, however, ideas developed and spread that made early Victorian doubt look almost like belief. After the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859), which built on Lyell’s ideas and advanced the theories of evolution and natural selection, the debate between science and faith grew more intense and upsetting.

Another, still related tendency in later Victorian thought was toward rel-

ativism, which denied the existence of absolutes, all so-called truth being relative to the mind and culture in which it appeared. Such were the ideas behind the highly seductive writings of Walter Pater, notably in his collection of essays *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873). For Pater, reality began and ended within human consciousness; to comprehend experience, we should think “not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them.” The person who believed that he could think his way out of his own “dream of a world,” know things as they really were, discover the right way to live, was deceiving himself. The only life of any meaning was the inner, aesthetic life, the only faculty worth cultivating was that of taking pleasure in one’s own sensations.

The greatest wisdom lay in the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake. To the fact-loving, morally conscious, early Victorian way of thinking this was, of course, anathema—which is why Pater, though writing mostly on the art of the past, had such a radical effect on the arts of his own time.

One way in which the movement against the factual and moral idea of art showed itself was in the increasing fondness of artists for likening visual art to music, which tends by its nature to be fact-free and moral-free. As early as 1861, Frederic Leighton called a painting *Lieder ohne Worte* (Songs without Words), a title borrowed from Felix Mendelssohn. It shows a girl at a fountain listening to running water and bird song, and the artist explained to a friend that he was trying “both by colour and by flowing delicate forms, to trans-



Symphony in White No. 1: The White Girl (1862),
by James McNeill Whistler

late to the eye of the spectator something of the pleasure which the child receives through her ears.” Beginning in the 1860s, James McNeill Whistler also gave pictures musical titles—symphonies, arrangements, nocturnes, and so on—with the predominant colors given in place of keys, as in *Symphony in White No. 1: The White Girl*. Pater stated the principle of musicality in its most quotable form when he wrote, “All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.”

For Whistler and his friends, the idea of the painter as observer of facts was ridiculous. In his “Ten O’Clock” lecture (1885) he quipped, “To say to the painter, that Nature is to be taken as she is, is to say to the player, that he may sit on the piano.” The Pre-Raphaelites’ clarity of vision, their exhibitions of detail, their rawness, were strictly for the tone-deaf and lowbrow. People had come to expect too little of art and too much, ignoring the music of form and color in their desire for realism and improving stories; they had acquired “the habit of looking . . . not *at* a picture, but *through* it.”

To the “aesthetic movement,” as this tendency in British art and taste came to be known, the only essential concern of art was beauty. The aesthetic artists and critics used this term more broadly and vaguely than Reynolds: it was not necessarily bound up with bodily perfection, nobility, and the classical tradition. They found it in Greek sculpture and Renaissance painting, especially in Giorgione and the other Venetians, but also in medieval art and Japanese woodblock prints, both of which Reynolds would have considered primitive. For them, beauty lay in exquisiteness, in objects that gave pleasure simply by being well formed, in works of art with an arrangement of lines, shapes, colors, and brushwork that had a life and a grace of its own, independent of whatever it might describe.

According to Whistler, the problem for art and beauty in the modern world was the rise of the commercial and industrial middle class. When art was the province of the favored few, taste was governed by artists and all was well. But when the Industrial Revolution elevated the middle class, it also elevated bad taste. To distance themselves from the prevailing spirit of philistinism in the world, he and other artists of the aesthetic movement assumed the position and demeanor of an upper class, a cultural aristocracy.

The last thing this breed of artist sought was engagement with the real world; the social turbulence of the times was something from which to remove oneself as far as possible. In a lecture to students of the Royal Academy (1883), Oscar Wilde advised them “to realise completely your age in order completely to abstract yourself from it.” The artist must be, in Whistler’s words, “a monument of isolation.” The cozy togetherness of middle-class Victorian family life held as little appeal to him, generally, as industry and commerce, politics and fashion. The studio, not the parlor, was his sanctuary. He took no great pains to disguise the fact that his pictures were created in the studio, and even relished a certain artificiality, allowing models to look like models, costumes like costumes, props like props.

For those earlier Victorians who did seek engagement with society at large, the casting of models for figures in their pictures and the catching of expressions, the signs of both character and emotion, were of the utmost importance. By contrast, the beautiful

female face that was the chief icon of aestheticism was virtually without expression, at most “hinting at sadness,” in Whistler’s phrase. The models artists chose were not representative or typical, hardly human-looking in some cases; they were merely superior, an aristocracy of beauty. Their beauty was the mainstay of art; nothing could be allowed to disturb the perfect harmony of their features, and any marked expression, artists believed, would do just that. If the aesthetic face expresses anything at all, it is tenderness and gentle melancholy. Edward Coley Burne-Jones touched upon this point in defending the minimal expressions on the faces of the three grieving queens in *The Sleep of King Arthur in Avalon* (1881–1898): “A little more expression and they would be neither queens nor mysteries nor symbols, but just . . . Augusta, Esmeralda, and Dolores, considerably overcome by a recent domestic bereavement.”



The Sleep of King Arthur in Avalon (detail), by Edward Burne-Jones (unfinished, begun in 1881)

The aristocratic persona and serious work hardly go together, and the painters of the aesthetic movement took almost as much delight in idleness as the early Victorians took in industry. Never do their beautiful models actually do much; typically they stand or sit still, recline, even fall asleep. Seldom could their works be said to promote morality in the early Victorian sense; on the contrary, the combination of beauty and lassitude could be powerfully erotic, suggesting fleshly abandon. By the same token, artists played down any suggestion of labor in the way they painted, going for an impression of virtuosity rather than virtue, playing up the sensual side of picture making. They allowed the materials of painting a life of their own, free of the demands of describing reality. They tended to suppress space, making their compositions work first as designs in themselves, on the decorative, abstract level, and only after that as representations. They used color and technique as all-over, keynote devices, to harmonize the figures and objects in their compositions rather than to individualize them. Brushwork was there to be beautiful, to be looked *at*, not *through*. Millais, the lapsed Pre-Raphaelite, gave up painting single blades of grass in favor of a painterly bravura recalling Frans Hals and Velázquez. In *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1875), Whistler painted fireworks in a manner that was pyrotechnic in itself,



Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket (1875),
by James McNeill Whistler

and Ruskin accused him of “flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face.”

Whistler believed that artists always had to edit the world in their art, and that 19th-century Britain presented no particular problems in that respect; he could paint warehouses as palaces in the night, factory chimneys as campanili, the industrial riverfront as a fairyland. But for many later Victorians, finding beauty in the modern world seemed impossible. The problem went far beyond that of low taste among the newly enfranchised

middle class: it was the machinelike soullessness of modern life in general.

The Victorians were haunted, ever increasingly, by nostalgia. In the optimistic time of the Crystal Palace, when progress was an article of national faith, it was easy to see the present as ascending toward an even-better future; by the 1870s, it seemed to many to be more like exile from a better past. As the Britain of the Industrial Revolution appeared ever smokier, grimmer, and more inhuman, most people longed for the handmade, for the rural, for almost any and every preindustrial era. This had a profound and obvious effect on all the arts: it was an age of revivals. Millais painted “souvenirs” of Thomas Gainsborough and Reynolds that were meant to bring back the supposed grace and refinement of British life just before industry took hold, part of an 18th-century revival that made itself felt in all the arts, as well as in fashion. John Singer Sargent’s portraits flattered people that they were like aristocrats from the time of Velázquez and Anthony Van Dyck. But there is no doubt that the greatest historical yearning of the Victorians was for the Middle Ages.

The medieval appeared to the Victorian mind as a national alternative to the classical, a rich source of stories like the myths and legends of the Greeks and Romans, only set in Britain. In a time of bewildering change, people enjoyed the thought, right or wrong, that the monarchy and other beloved institutions had

descended from the Middle Ages in a continuous tradition. The queen and Prince Albert played up to this when they had Edwin Landseer paint them as the 14th-century Queen Philippa and Edward III.

In the earlier Victorian imagination, the history and legends of the Middle Ages were seen as morality teaching by example. In the paintings of Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and others from around 1860, however, a different medieval and Arthurian world emerges, one beyond good and evil, a world of beauty, love, and mysticism. For them, the adulterous Queen Guinevere was no longer Alfred Tennyson's "wicked one, who broke / The vast design and purpose of the King," but a kind of sacred personage, whose great beauty and passion put mere morality to shame. The medieval world was a beautiful dream that no one pretended had any relation to the reality of life in that time, and paintings of it were self-consciously dreamlike.

The Victorian nostalgia for the Middle Ages was, at root, a nostalgia for that most lamented casualty of the modern world, religious faith. Burne-Jones was typical in his love of the Middle Ages as the age of faith, and of faith as a beautiful, medieval idea. Of course, he was too much a man of the 19th century to hold medieval Christian beliefs, but on an aesthetic level he could immerse himself in them totally. While at work on his large watercolor *The Star of Bethlehem* (1890), he was asked whether he believed in the miraculous story of the Magi and the guiding star. He answered: "It is too beautiful not to be true." How different his attitude toward religion and religious art was from that of Hunt, for whom beauty was hardly a consideration, let alone a guarantee of truth, and whose paintings could be described as too true not to be sometimes a little ugly. How ironic that Hunt, the earnest, modern believer and seeker after truth, received no commissions from the church, while Burne-Jones, for whom religion was more a matter of nostalgia and aesthetics, was in constant demand as a designer of stained-glass windows.

As a nation of engineers and empire builders, the most powerful on earth, the Victorians readily identified themselves with the ancient Romans. Yet the ancient culture that most interested them, perhaps for the very reason that they were like the Romans, was Greece. The ancient Greece of their imagination existed in a time that was good for all time, when eternal beauty took shape in the world.

The Victorians looked to classical culture as they looked to medieval culture, for qualities of which they felt bereft in their own. This is why the work of the Victorian classical painters, the "Olympians," as they have been called, has a quite different flavor from neoclassical art of the 18th century. For Reynolds in Britain, as for his contemporaries all over Europe, the classical world was one of grandeur, nobility, and virtue; the work of art that seemed best to capture its essence was the commanding, heroic figure of the famous Apollo Belvedere. To aesthetic taste, the sense of purposeful action about the Apollo compromised its beauty, while the writhing dynamism and emotion in a piece such as the Laocoön were anathema. The aesthetic movement chose classical touchstones showing the avoidance of emotion. They were works of the most patent grace and serenity, female and passive: the goddesses from the pediment of the Parthenon



Chill October (1870), by John Everett Millais

(then known as the Fates), and the Venus de Milo.

Unlike their counterparts of the previous century, who tended to value line and form above color, the Victorian classical painters were ardent colorists. They had no wish to carry over into their pictures the austerity of bare marble; on the contrary, they believed color to be the vital touch that could make Greece come alive in 19th-century Britain. They were given heart by recent archaeological discoveries, which suggested that originally some Greek sculpture itself had been brightly painted. Through color and brushwork, the attributes of painting as opposed to sculpture, the painter could infuse Greek form with some of the mystery and suggestiveness the modern mind craved.

The later Victorians' vision of the British landscape was almost as saturated with nostalgia and longing as their dreams of the Middle Ages and ancient Greece. Nowhere did industrialization show its dark side more ominously than in the spoiling of the countryside, made yet grimmer by agricultural depression and depopulation. As fears of irrevocable loss deepened, the painting of landscape became more charged with mood, or "sentiment," as it was commonly called. The fact-by-fact, tightly symbolic approach taken by the Pre-Raphaelites gave way to a concern with broad conditions of light, atmosphere, and weather, nature's mood-creating "effects." A pervasive sentiment of melancholy suffuses the later Victorian landscape, a dwelling on grayness and bleakness, a liking for dusk, autumn, and winter, as is evident in such works as Millais's *Chill October* (1870).

The painting of proletarian subjects, both rural and urban, took on a seriousness and grandeur far beyond traditional genre painting at this time. Like landscape, scenes of hard work, hard times, and poverty were charged heavily with sentiment, generally pessimistic in tone, and painted with an eye to broad, overall effects. The interest in such subjects

emerged from a complicated weave of middle-class attitudes that included both pity and a slightly envious admiration: the life of manual labor was tough, yet glorious in its physicality; it was free of mind-wearying complexity; its joys, sufferings, and tragedies were elemental. The fascination of country people in particular, farm workers, fishermen, and their families, was that they were supposedly in touch with nature. They were also thought of as pious, childlike in their souls, accepting of all the beautiful religious beliefs that modernity had rejected. The work they did, sowing and scything, for instance, evoked deep symbolic and biblical associations. In *A Hopeless Dawn* (1881), Frank Bramley shows a print of *Christ's Charge to Peter* by Raphael in the fisherman's cottage to make the point that fishermen were Jesus' first followers.

The pursuit of sentiment and effects in the grander forms of landscape and genre painting that flourished from the 1870s onward fostered much experimentation in technique. Artists looked with renewed admiration to the painterly touch of the old masters, to Velázquez in particular; they looked to the great painters of the British tradition, to Gainsborough and John Constable, with the thought that the free, direct, natural feeling about their brushwork expressed the national character. Most controversially, some young artists of the 1880s and 1890s developed bold techniques influenced by contemporary painting in France, including the "square" touch, in which strokes and dabs of color retain enough of their separateness and direction to give a slight all-over blockiness to the image, a highly infectious technique invented by the French painter of peasants Jules Bastien-Lepage. Walter Sickert learned his version of French impressionist technique from



A Hopeless Dawn (1881), by Frank Bramley



Sower of the Systems (1902), by George Watts

Edgar Degas, and used its uncanny power of suggesting the play of light, its glints, gleams, reflections, and color-rich shadows, to paint the highly British subject of the London music hall. His aim was to be neither moral nor particularly realistic, he claimed, but to catch the protean beauty that was particular to modern urban life.

To many older British painters, the spread of French technique appeared as an insidious disease afflicting the young. One objection was that it was un-British, not just in the literal sense but in going against the national character. For Millais, part of the essence of Britishness was being an individual; the truly British painter, Gainsborough or Constable for instance, developed a technique that was British not only in its freedom and naturalness but in being wholly and unmistakably his own. But the French-influenced painters, Millais said, “persist in painting with a broken French accent, all of them much alike, and seemingly content to lose their identity in their imitation of French masters.” To Burne-Jones, they represented simply

the dire impoverishment of painting: “They don’t make beauty, they don’t make design, they don’t make idea, they don’t make anything else but atmosphere and I don’t think that’s enough—I don’t think it’s very much.”

The most pessimistic of these older Victorians could never have suspected that a hundred years later, at the end of the 20th century, French impressionist painting would be the most beloved and celebrated art of the Western world. Now all 19th-century art tends to be measured against the French avant-garde, the impressionists and the postimpressionists, leading toward fauvism, cubism, and so on. People commonly speak of Turner, rather insultingly, as if his main importance were as a forerunner of impressionism, a voice crying in the artistic wilderness. In this light, the Victorians can seem hopelessly stuck in a preimpressionist mentality, as they did to those British modernist critics of earlier this century who did so much to blight their reputation.

Of course, it all depends on which aspects of Victorian painting, and which artists, one takes as representative. Sometimes a Victorian can almost out-modern the moderns. When urged by a friend to add some touch of realism to one of his paintings, Burne-Jones replied with the resoundingly 20th-century statement: “I don’t want to pretend that this isn’t a picture.” Like Whistler and all the painters of the aesthetic movement, he thought of a painting in protomodernist terms, as a musical arrangement of forms and colors on a surface, a thing to be looked *at*, not *through*.

It is not as surprising as it might first seem that the young Pablo Picasso admired Burne-Jones; after seeing some of his paintings reproduced in art magazines, the Spanish artist hoped to come to Britain to study them at first hand. Victorian painters even discussed and experimented with the idea of abstraction. Leighton recommended classical subjects “as vehicles . . . of abstract form,” and the briefest look at George Frederic Watts’s *Sower of the Systems* shows the leaning toward abstraction that was present in all aesthetic and idealist painting.

Looking at the Victorians within such a frame of reference, assessing their position in the history of European 19th-century art, has its value. Certainly, doing so makes for an interesting debate. But Victorian painting really comes alive when we understand its currents and crosscurrents as part of the history of the diverse movements and tendencies within what has famously come to be known as the Victorian frame of mind.

The Ends Of Empire

by David Gilmour

U ntil the last quarter of the 19th century, the ruler of the world's largest empire possessed no imperial title. Russia and Austria-Hungary had been ruled by emperors for centuries; Germany, recently united under Prussia, had just acquired its first, while France had just discarded its second. But Queen Victoria remained merely a queen until in 1876 her prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli, persuaded Parliament to make her empress of India.

The title was of purely symbolic significance: it did not apply to other parts of the empire and it did not even affect India, which continued to be administered by a viceroy responsible to the cabinet in London. But it reflected an increased sense of imperial purpose, a strong and growing belief in the permanence of British rule overseas. The empire still had a long way to expand: large territories in Africa and Asia had to be added before it could be claimed that a quarter of the globe was painted red. But 1876 may be seen as the apogee of imperial self-confidence. The 1857 Indian Mutiny, which briefly threatened British rule in the north, was almost a generation in the past; the "scramble for Africa" had not begun; and Britain's economic predominance was as yet unchallenged by Germany and the United States. Lord Mayo's belief that Britain should hold India "as long as the sun shines in heaven" was widely shared.

The Victorian sense of empire was concentrated on India partly because of the subcontinent's strategic importance. As Lord Curzon, the queen's last viceroy, observed, the loss of India would reduce Britain to the status of a third-rate power. But India also provided the Victorians with an imperial calling which they could not pursue in other parts of the empire. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were settler societies responsible for their own government and without large native populations to administer. The South Africans had problems peculiar to themselves, but they too were white colonists with a hunger for land. When





At the 1903 Delhi durbar (assembly), Indian notables parade past Lord Curzon, the last viceroy appointed under Queen Victoria.

the writer John Buchan remarked that the empire was about “a sense of space in the blood,” he was talking about the great and sparsely inhabited tracts of the white colonies. But in India, the Victorians were not colonists. They saw themselves as people with a mission, administrators entrusted by Providence to rule India for the sake of the Indians and to implant British ideas of justice, law, and humanity.

It had not always been so. Since the 17th century, Britons had been sailing to India to enrich themselves. Many had been adventurers who risked the ravages of climate and disease to bring back large fortunes from Bengal. Some had liked India for itself, immersing themselves in native culture and adopting local styles of living. Both types became

almost extinct in the Victorian period, victims alike of a high-minded and intolerant zeal for Westernization.

Victorian attitudes toward empire were shaped by the Evangelical and Utilitarian movements in Britain, neither of which had sympathy for Indian customs or religion. Many people dreamed fantastically of a mass conversion of Hindus to Christianity. William Wilberforce, who was largely responsible for the abolition of the slave trade, regarded the conversion of India as even more important, “the greatest of all causes.” And even though the number of converts from Hinduism turned out to be very small, the last Victorian bishop of Calcutta believed as late as 1915 that an Indian “Constantine” would emerge and bring his followers into the Christian fold.

Few of the administrators shared this aspiration. Curzon regarded missionaries as a nuisance and believed that conversion was both improbable and undesirable. But members of the Indian Civil Service (ICS), that elite body of 1,100 men that administered the Indian Empire, were heavily influenced by the idea of secular Westernization explicit in the writings of the Utilitarians. The crucial figure was the philosopher James Mill, who in 1806 began writing a six-volume history of British India, a study regarded by Thomas Babington Macaulay as “the greatest historical work” in English since Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Mill, who had never been to India and knew no Indian language, argued that Indian society was so barbarous and decadent that it could be redeemed only by a system of government and law based on Utilitarian principles. A number of British officials, such as Mountstuart Elphinstone, the governor of Bombay, were repelled by Mill’s sarcasm, but they never refuted him in print. Mill’s volumes became a textbook at Hailybury, the college established for entrants to the civil service, and were largely unchallenged for half a century.

“Westernization” of course had its positive side: the practice of *suttee* or widow burning, was abolished, female infanticide was slowly reduced, and *thuggee*—the ritual murder of travelers carried out by thugs devoted to the goddess Kali—was suppressed. India also benefited from judicial and administrative reforms as well as from the great surge of Victorian engineering, particularly the building of railways and canals for irrigation. But an inevitable result of Mill’s thought was a deterioration in relations between British and Indians. Once it had been accepted that Indian society was barbarous and needed British help to reform itself, it was natural for the British to regard themselves as a superior race appointed to assist in the redemption of the barbarians. The consequent racial segregation—Indians in the bazaars and Britons in neat Civil Lines and army cantonments—is usually blamed on the racism and snobbery of Victorian ladies. But this is not fair. Many Victorian memsahibs no doubt were racist and snobbish, yet nobody has explained how they could have integrated into native society while

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Indian women, Hindus as well as Muslims, remained in purdah. The real villains were Mill's presumption and ignorance. Indian society was poorer and more backward than it had been in the 16th century, but solutions to its problems required both a sympathy and an understanding that a pseudo-historian in London simply did not possess.

Macaulay denigrated the East and extolled British virtues even more eloquently than Mill. His essays on Robert Clive and Warren Hastings, the two preeminent figures in the making of the 18th-century empire, encouraged the view that the acquisition of India had been an essentially heroic enterprise, a theater for the display of true British character. Just as Sir Francis Drake's plundering was played down in the making of the Elizabethan hero, so Clive's rapaciousness during his first Bengal governorship was brushed aside by the need to provide an exemplar of British virtues. Victorians were taught that their Indian Empire had been won against enormous odds by qualities familiar since the days of Agincourt: courage, self-sacrifice, duty, iron will. And if such qualities had been the formula for India's acquisition, it was logical to assume that these qualities could also be deployed for its retention. Sir James Stephen, a redoubtable administrator, defined English virtues as "the masterful will, the stout heart, the active brain, the calm nerves, the strong body."

Young district officers of the ICS were taught to believe that the future was in their hands. If they behaved as England expected, the Indians would accept them and the empire would be safe. So they dedicated their lives to the pursuit of justice, confident in their belief that all that these teeming districts needed was a solitary Englishman, straightforward and incorruptible, riding from village to village, setting up his table under a banyan tree and settling their disputes. It was an exhilarating experience, especially for young men fresh

from Oxford University sent out to govern half a million people in areas the size of a large English county. What joy, one of them recalled, "feeling that one is working and ruling and making oneself useful in God's world."

Based though they may have been on bad history and false premises, Victorian beliefs contained much that was true. Clive may not have been a spotless hero, but his military and administrative records are remarkable. The ICS officers may have believed that they belonged to a superior race, but their administration was regarded by most Indians as just; villagers divided by religion, caste, and class were happy to accept judgments handed out



Lord Curzon (1859–1925)

by a pink-faced, unbribable young man who belonged to none of their subdivisions. The statistics demonstrate how broad that acceptance was and also indicate how Western views of Indian inferiority had permeated the Indians themselves. Even after the horrors of the 1857 mutiny, Britain kept only 65,000 white soldiers in an area populated by 300 million people that now includes not only India but Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Burma. In one district of Lower Bengal, 20 Britons lived among 2.5 million natives. As late as 1939, about 28 million Punjabis—people not renowned for their docility—were governed by 60 British civil servants. No wonder Stalin grumbled that it was absurd for India to be ruled by a few hundred Englishmen.

Nearly a century after the death of Queen Victoria, we can appreciate how precariously her Indian Empire rested on the self-confidence of its administrators. But this fragility was clear neither to most of them nor to foreign observers at the time. There seemed to be a solidity about the empire that enabled Theodore Roosevelt to compare its “admirable achievements” with those of the Romans. Bismarck, the German chancellor, once declared that “were the British Empire to disappear, its work in India would remain one of its lasting monuments,” and even Gandhi was inspired to say that “the British Empire existed for the welfare of the world.” All of them could see that the government of India was a despotism, yet all believed that it was a stable and enlightened one. India helped to illustrate the boast that at home Britain was “Greek” while abroad it was “Roman.”

At the height of the Victorian empire, few people foresaw the day when India would no longer need Britain. The peoples of the two countries, believed Curzon, were tillers in the same field, jointly concerned with the harvest and ordained to walk along the same path for many years to come. Like others, he believed in the emergence of a new patriotism, common to both British and Indians, that would bind the two races forever. As he once told members of the Bengali Chamber of Commerce,

If I thought it were all for nothing, and that you or I . . . were simply writing inscriptions on the sand to be washed out by the next tide, if I felt that we were not working here for the good of India in obedience to a higher law and a nobler aim, then I would see the link that holds England and India together severed without a sigh. But it is because I believe in the future of this country, and in the capacity of our race to guide it to goals that it has never hitherto attained, that I keep courage and press forward.

British imperialists had a special feeling for India, the oldest part of the empire, but the civilizing mission was directed also to Africa. Writing in the 1890s, the young Winston Churchill asked,

What enterprise is more noble and more profitable than the reclamation from barbarism of fertile regions and large populations? To give peace to warring tribes, to administer justice where all was violence, to strike the chains from the slave, to draw the richness from the soil, to plant the earliest seeds of commerce and learning, to increase in whole peoples their capacities for pleasure and diminish their chances of pain—what more beautiful ideal or more valuable reward can inspire human effort?

Neither Curzon nor Churchill could envisage Britain without an empire. “We have to answer our helm,” declared the former, “and it is an imperial helm, down all the tides of Time.” Wherever peoples were living in backwardness or barbarism, “wherever ignorance or superstition is rampant, wherever enlightenment or progress [is] possible, wherever duty and self-sacrifice call—there is, as there has been for hundreds of years, the true summons of the Anglo-Saxon race.” And if the race did not answer that summons, if Britain became a country with “no aspiration but a narrow and selfish materialism,” it would end up merely “a sort of glorified Belgium.”

Although the empire continued to expand into the 1920s, the tide had begun to turn against the modern Rome at least a generation earlier. Toward the end of the 19th century, a growing number of ICS officers were beginning to feel that their duty should be not to preserve British India “as long as the sun shines in heaven” but to prepare the country for their eventual departure. Simultaneously, the Indian National Congress, founded in 1885 by a new breed of Indian nationalists, coupled protestations of loyalty and even gratitude to the empire with demands for greater Indian involvement in the administration. Like their sympathizers in the ICS, they understood the fundamental contradiction of the Victorian empire: that it was impossible to reconcile the imperial mission abroad with the liberal tradition at home. While in Africa the colonists were under no pressure to attempt that reconciliation, in India the issue was impossible to avoid. How, for example, could it be explained to Jawaharlal Nehru, who was educated at Harrow and Cambridge, that the British liberal tradition could be applied to him in England but not in India? How could it be argued that such a man was unfit to govern his own people?

Goaded by the Russian Revolution, the pressures of World War I, and the increasing talk of self-determination, the British government declared in 1917 that its goal—the same as Gandhi’s later on—was self-rule for India within the British Empire. Much of course had to be resolved before self-rule became a reality, and an extra delay was caused by another world war. But, in 1947, the British finally let their liberalism triumph over their imperialism and withdrew peacefully from the subcontinent. The amicability of the withdrawal and the subsequent friendliness between the two peoples surprised observers such as Eleanor Roosevelt who were determined to see British India as a typical instance of colonial occupation. But there were few parallels with the situations in Algeria, Indochina, or anywhere else. Cheered by the populace, the last British regiment marched through Bombay’s Gateway of India and sailed home. Despite differences over international issues, the respect and the affection remained: in 1979, when Lord Mountbatten was killed by an IRA bomb, the Indian Parliament went into recess to mourn the last British viceroy of their country. India’s leaders still remembered that in 1947 the British had kept their promise and departed; they had not been ejected. At the time of independence, Rajendra Prasad, who became India’s first president,

sent a message to King George VI that helps explain Indian feelings toward their recent rulers:

While our achievement is in no small measure due to our sufferings and sacrifices, it is also the result of world forces and events; and last, but not least, it is the consummation and fulfillment of the historic traditions and democratic ideals of the British race.

Within 20 years of its departure from India, Britain had withdrawn from nearly all the rest of its empire. Soon the great swathes of red paint were reduced to a handful of dots such as Hong Kong, Gibraltar, and the Falkland Islands. The center of the world's greatest empire was transformed into a modest European state. Dean Acheson famously observed that Britain had lost an empire and not found a role, but most Britons were in fact not looking for a role. They wanted to jettison the remaining parts of their empire as soon as possible and forget all about their imperial past. Politicians of the 1960s were concerned about joining the Common Market and making Britain a more civilized society by measures such as decriminalizing homosexuality and abolishing capital punishment. Historians sought to write India out of their island story or, where this was not possible, to disparage the achievements of the ICS and overestimate the importance of the Indian National Congress. Clive was reduced from the status of schoolboy hero to that of a worthy soldier who owed his success to the wealth of Bengal and the strength of the British navy.

Exhilarated by the radical spirit and hedonism of the 1960s, people in Britain looked back at the empire with a mixture of guilt and embarrassment. The change in national status was so overwhelming that it could be managed only by rejecting or belittling the past. Even the adjective *Victorian*, referring as it does to the greatest period of national consequence, became a term of mockery and abuse, aimed at the reactionary, the prudish, and the old-fashioned. Britons congratulated themselves on having shed every remnant of that age. They visited India for its gurus and its mysticism, not because their grandparents had lived there or because the subcontinent was so bound up with their history that it contained two million British graves. All they needed from the imperial past was E. M. Forster's *Passage to India*—and later the film David Lean made of it—to convince them that the Raj was both stupid and morally wrong. They were much comforted too by Richard Attenborough's film *Gandhi*, which pandered to anti-Raj feeling, not least by having Lord Irwin, the benign young viceroy who was trusted and admired by Gandhi, played by Sir John Gielgud in his late seventies as a cantankerous martinet always itching to throw Gandhi in jail.

In the 1980s, the emergence of a tepid Raj nostalgia (illustrated by the growth of Indian restaurants in Britain with names such as “Lancers” and “The Indian Cavalry Club”) coincided with Margaret Thatcher's call for a return to “Victorian values” at home. Unfortunately, this term was exploited by both the prime minister and her crit-

ics for purposes of propaganda. To Thatcher, “Victorian values” primarily meant enterprise and self-reliance, while her left-wing critics talked about Victorian hypocrisy and reminded the nation of child chimney sweeps and Dickensian slums. Both sides regarded “Victorian values” as part of a remote past; neither saw nor attempted to see how many of the true Victorian values had survived in Britain and even abroad. Most of the ideals of William Gladstone, who symbolizes the Victorian age much better than its queen, are still among the ideals of British parliamentarians: liberty, free trade, international co-operation, representative government, and a foreign policy based on moral considerations as well as national interest. British political leaders often fail lamentably to uphold them, but they remain the ideals. Britons may have consigned the empire to remote and inaccurate history, but many of its values are still with them.

Ironically, the Victorian empire is remembered more clearly in India than in Britain. Indeed, the Indian people are more aware of the whole Indo-British connection than the British are. Although some of them might like to expunge the Raj from their past, too much of its legacy remains in their institutions and on their ground. The British can distance themselves from their imperial past in a way which the Indians are denied. Arriving in the colorful anarchy of modern India, visitors might feel initially that the country has cut all links with the colonial epoch. But awareness of how much of the connection still survives will soon follow, not just among the great Victorian buildings of Bombay or in the imperial capital of New Delhi but among the people and their institutions. The civil service and the judiciary system are both descendants of the Victorian era, while parliamentary government is a legacy of later British rule. Democracy is far from perfect in India as elsewhere, but it is infinitely preferable to the regimes offered by its neighbors, China and Pakistan, over the last 50 years. And at a cultural level, English is now more widely spoken in India than ever and remains the only means of communication between an educated Hindi speaker in the north and an educated Tamil from the south.

But the most vibrant Victorian legacy, one that would have astonished the Victorians themselves, is the game of cricket. This sedate sport, designed for English afternoons on village greens and school playing fields, remains almost incomprehensible outside the boundaries of the former British Empire. Yet in India, as in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the West Indies, it is played with a kind of baseball vigor and enthusiasm quite alien to England. The visitor to an Indian city on a Sunday will witness an extraordinary sight: crowded into every square yard of parks, gardens, alleys, and even cemeteries, thousands of Indian boys will be playing cricket, hitting and running and all the time shouting in antiquated English jargon. In India, cricket is truly what it never became in England—the national sport.

Enduring Fictions

by Edward Alexander

Although the Victorian period officially ended with the queen's death in 1901, its political and artistic cultures continue to have an unrivaled immediacy for us. In recent years, conservative moralists have praised the Victorian orphanage and recommended the Victorian virtues of thrift, cleanliness, hard work, self-reliance, self-respect, and national pride as solutions to American woes. At the other end of the political spectrum, university offices of moral sanitation issue pamphlets warning young women of date rape that recall Victorian manuals exhorting young women to avoid "vulgar familiarity." John Stuart Mill's schemes for flouting the tyranny of the majority by plural voting have been resurrected (albeit with the typical American emphasis on race) by the ill-fated Lani Guinier. In 1995, a magnificent exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite paintings traversed the country, and the National Gallery of Art in Washington is now the site of a major exhibition of Victorian painters.

But most of all it is Victorian novelists who exercise over Americans an appeal unmatched by that of any other group of writers. In 1996, the Morgan Library organized a sumptuous exhibition of the Brontës' manuscripts and memorabilia. Television productions of the works of Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Joseph Conrad (following a run of Anthony Trollope adaptations) pour forth abundantly, and films based on the novels of Emily and Charlotte Brontë and Thomas Hardy, though less abundant than those of the pre-Victorian Jane Austen, also proliferate. The Trollope Society, founded in 1987, boasts as a vice president the current British prime minister, John Major, and flourishes mightily: in the Seattle area, where I live, there are three separate branches. In the present euphoria, it came as little surprise to learn recently that Mary Thompson, who at 120 had become the oldest living American—she died in 1996 but did not make the *Guinness Book of Records* because, as the daughter of ex-slaves, she had no birth certificate—was reported by her son to have followed a strict regimen of reading Victorian novels every evening, and of having them read to her when she lost her sight.

The Victorians themselves would have found this strange; they believed the novel was the genre least likely to survive into the next generation, much less the next century. The essayist Thomas De Quincey, writing in 1848, shortly after the appearance of *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Dombey and Son*, declared the novel an inferior and ephemeral genre. "All novels whatever, the best equally with the worst, have faded almost within the generation that produced them. This is a curse written as a superscription above the

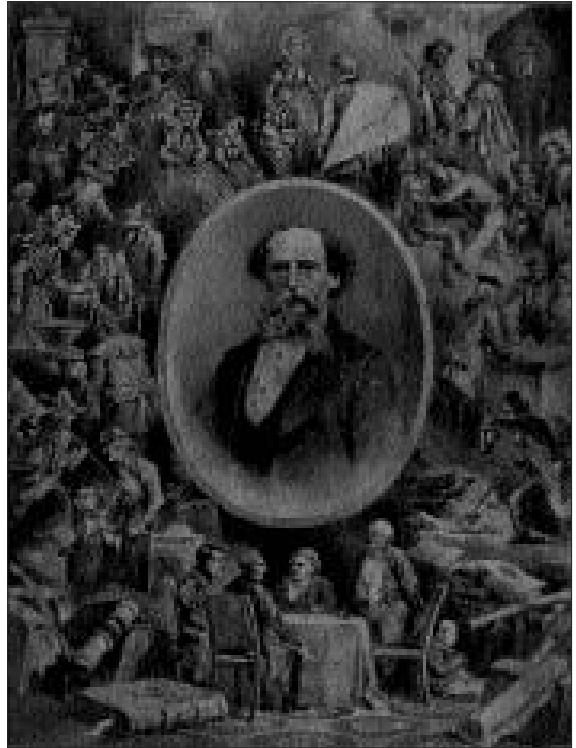
whole class. . . . It is only the grander passions of poetry, allying themselves with forms more abstract and permanent,” that, De Quincey said, could last. Mill deemed the novel an inferior genre because it could depict only outward things like manners and scenery, not the inner man: “The minds and hearts of greatest depth and elevation are commonly those which take greatest delight in poetry; the shallowest and emptiest . . . are . . . not those least addicted to novel-reading.” Matthew Arnold told Stephen Coleridge that he had been offered £10,000 to write a novel, but would not soil his hands by doing so because, as Coleridge’s famous ancestor Samuel had said, “Novel reading spares the reader the trouble of thinking . . . and establishes a habit of indolence.”

Nor were disparaging opinions of this subpoetic genre limited to poets and essayists. “By the common consent of all mankind who have read, poetry takes the highest place in literature,” Trollope said. “In his own age, [the novelist] can have great effect for good or evil; but we know as yet of no prose novelist who has influenced after ages. . . . [T]he novelist can expect no centuries of popularity. But the poet adapts himself to all ages by the use of language and scenes which are not ephemeral.”

Novelists understood better than anyone else that their characters emerge, in part, out of historical awareness. Nevertheless, all of these clever people have turned out to be wrong; and George Bernard Shaw—who said that writers who write not for an age but for all time have their reward by going unread in all times—right.

Far from being time-bound, the Victorian novelists have demonstrated a staying power unequaled by their poetic contemporaries. Is this simply because of their intrinsic artistic merit? “Dickens,” said Leo Tolstoy, “is a genius born once in a hundred years.” William Makepeace Thackeray, according to Charlotte Brontë, was on a par with the Hebrew prophets.

Brontë’s sister Emily was, said Matthew Arnold, a writer “whose soul/Knew no fellow for might,/Passion, vehemence, grief,/Daring, since Byron died” (a reminder that it was the Victorian novelists, not the Victorian poets, who inherited the prophetic passion of the Romantics). George Eliot, whose fiction after *Adam Bede* (1859) was considered by Victorian critics the standard by



Charles Dickens and his world

which her contemporaries should be judged, was described by the luminaries who tried (unsuccessfully) to satisfy her wish to be buried in Westminster Abbey as “a woman whose achievements were without parallel in the previous history of womankind.” But surely all these qualities were as evident to both common and uncommon readers at the beginning of the 20th century, when the reputation of Dickens, for example, was at its nadir, to be revived only after World War II, and Trollope was alleged by critics to have “disappeared.”

Let me, cautiously, suggest (in ascending order of importance) four reasons for the enduring—and more especially the present—appeal of Victorian novelists.

First, unlike most serious modern novelists, they were content to think of themselves as popular entertainers cultivating a warm personal relationship with their readers yet also telling them what to do or think. (Until Virginia Woolf, no lengthy fiction was detached from its teller.) Who can resist the incessant direct addresses to their readers by Thackeray and Charlotte Brontë, as in the culminating one of the 30 in *Jane Eyre*?: “Reader, I married him.” Dickens used the direct address less frequently but was equally concerned to make his readers familiar and comfortable with his voice. Tolstoy attributed this intimate relationship with readers to the Victorians’ affection for their characters: “The first condition of an author’s popularity, the prime means to make people like him, is the love with which he treats his characters. That is why Dickens’s characters are the friends of all mankind: they are a bond of union between man in America and man in Petersburg.” Thackeray, alluding to the serializations favored by him and Dickens, said that after his characters had been “boarding and lodging with me for 20 months,” he knew them thoroughly, even to the sound of their voices. Those of us who were brought up on the modernist writers, so notably lacking in a tone of tender inclusiveness, now find the accents of love in the Victorians irresistibly endearing. (One of these accents is the reticent treatment of sex, in contrast to the banal explicitness of many contemporary novelists.)

We are also attracted to the Victorians by a curious mixture of the exotic and the familiar, the time-bound and the prescient. If they do not offer us precisely, as Thackeray described the world of his youth, “stage-coaches . . . riding-horses, pack-horses, highway-men, knights in armour, Norman invaders, Roman legions, Druids, Ancient Britons painted blue,” they do give us plenty of fox hunting, dowry hunting, Puritanism, Irish peers, Knights of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, First Lords of the Powder Closet, and Grooms of the Back Stairs. We find in Victorian novels a depiction of variegated manners that our more democratic polity lacks, a class system with clearly demarcated, yet crossable, lines. We may rejoice in our freedom from the Victorian novelists’ obsession (especially powerful in

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Dickens and Trollope) with becoming a gentleman, and yet be entranced by the thickness of social context in which Pip and other aspirants to gentlemanliness pursue their quest. Henry James explained his own need, as a novelist, for the Victorian English ambience in his 1879 description of “the lightness of the diet to which [Hawthorne’s] observation was condemned.” Being a young American rather than a young English novelist, Hawthorne was confronted by a negative spectacle: “No state . . . barely a specific national name. No sovereign, no court . . . no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country-houses, no parsonages, nor thatched cottages nor ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great Universities nor public schools—no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow . . . no Epsom nor Ascot!”

A third reason for the Victorians’ appeal is our recognition that Victorian society, despite its differences from the contemporary world, confronted its novelists with problems that prefigure our own: how to reconcile democracy with traditional humanistic culture; how to create a humane existence in the welter of urban life; how to find secular equivalents for fading religious faith. Foreshadowings of our dilemmas abound in the Victorian novel. Lionel Trilling justified both Dickens’ alleged “exaggeration” and his interest in the mystery of evil

when he wrote: “We who have seen Hitler, Goering, and Goebbels put on the stage of history, and Pecksniffery institutionalized in the Kremlin, are in no position to suppose that Dickens ever exaggerated in the least the extravagance of madness, absurdity, and malevolence in the world.” Readers in search of early stirrings of feminism will find them in the passionate outbursts of Brontë’s heroine in *Jane Eyre* and Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure*, as well as in the intense yearnings of Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch*. Joseph Conrad’s depiction, in *Heart of Darkness*, of the deterioration of imperialist idealism into a

desire to “Exterminate all the brutes!” casts a lurid, prescient shadow on the ideologues of later final solutions; his portrait of the bomb-carrying “professor” in *The Secret Agent* prefigures our “guerrillas with tenure.” In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot probed so deeply into the roots of both Zionism and a



The Brontë sisters (l.–r.): Anne, Emily, and Charlotte

Toynbee-esque variety of intellectual anti-Semitism that a street is named after her in each of Israel's three major cities. In *The Warden*, Trollope created in Tom Towers the archetype of many a *New York Times* or *Washington Post* columnist, issuing infallible bulls from "the Vatican of England," and "studiously striving to look a man but knowing within his breast that he was a god." In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy depicted with tremendous sympathy the intellectual ambition of a self-educated worker to break into the closed circle of Oxford, an ambition akin to that of American minorities to redefine the "mainstream" of our intellectual life. If Pip's quest for gentlemanly status is alien to us, the snobbish contempt for his adoptive "father," Magwitch, that results from the very "refinements" that Magwitch has purchased for Pip is a very American story, familiar—alas!—to countless European and Asian immigrants.

No single formula can encompass Victorian novelistic imaginations. Dickens insisted that all novelists report their own conception of reality from their own perspective, for "we are all partly creators of the objects we perceive." But although perception is creative, commonality of purpose may exist. Charlotte Brontë wrote of herself and her novelist colleagues as if they belonged to a trade union of moral reformers, headed by Thackeray: "I regard him as the first social regenerator of the day—as the very master of that working corps who would restore to rectitude the warped system of things." In her insistence on the moral responsibility of novelists, their intense concern with conduct and its consequences, we recognize a stark contrast to the works of contemporary American novelists who subscribe to William Gass's dictum that "Life is not the subject of fiction" and believe that the novel is mainly about itself or about its language. It is above all a longing for what Arnold called Hebraism and a sense that faith abandoned remains a more compelling presence in literature than secular creeds adopted that draw us backward to the Victorians.

A contemporary, W. H. Mallock, spoke of George Eliot as "the first great godless writer of fiction that has appeared in England." What this godlessness meant, exactly, is suggested by F. W. H. Myers's description of his conversation with the novelist as they walked in the Fellows' Garden of Trinity College, Cambridge on a rainy evening in May 1873: "She, stirred somewhat beyond her wont, and taking as her text the three words which have been used so often as the inspiring trumpet-calls of men,—the words, *God*, *Immortality*, *Duty*—pronounced, with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the *first*, how unbelievable the *second*, and yet how peremptory and absolute the *third* . . . her grave, majestic countenance turned toward me like a sibyl's in the gloom; it was as though she withdrew from my grasp, one by one, the two scrolls of promise, and left me the third scroll only, awful with inevitable fates."

To some extent, this "withdrawal" of and from God and immortality was implicit in the genre Eliot was practicing. It has been argued that deism made the genre of the novel possible because it asserted that God started the world and then went to sleep, allowing its inhabitants to fend for themselves. In this way, it freed writers from puz-

zling over origins and opened the way for historical awareness and the uncontested rule of natural law. But the “godlessness,” however caused, led Eliot to search, through her novels, for worldly equivalents of values that she believed the religious tradition could no longer sustain. “I must tell you,” she wrote to a friend in 1868,

that I am always a little uneasy about my share in the talk when it has turned on religion. . . . My books are a form of utterance that dissatisfies me less [than talk], because they are deliberately, carefully constructed on a basis which even in my doubting mind is never shaken by a doubt [as to] the relative goodness and nobleness of human dispositions and motives. And the inspiring principle which alone gives me courage to write is, that of so presenting our human life as to help my readers in getting a clearer conception and a more active admiration of those vital elements which bind men together . . . and . . . help them in gradually dissociating those elements from the more transient forms on which an outworn teaching tends to make them dependent. . . . Since you have read my books, you must perceive that the bent of my mind is conservative rather than destructive. . . . We ought . . . not to sit down and wail, but to be heroic and constructive . . . like the strong souls who lived before . . . in other eras of religious decay.

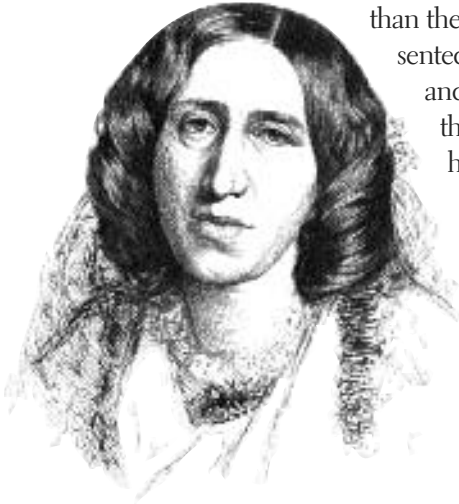
Religious decay”—a peculiar description, perhaps, of an era in which evangelical Christianity provided the still-firm moral cement of society; and yet the most consistently vilified characters in Victorian novels are evangelicals, ranging from Pitt Crawley in *Vanity Fair* to Mr. Brocklehurst in *Jane Eyre* to Obadiah Slope in *Barchester Towers* and the Chadbands in *Bleak House*. (The evangelicals returned the favor, becoming the principal critics of novels as “instruments of abomination and ruin.” In the *Evangelical Magazine*, love of novels was ranked only slightly less heinous than drunkenness and adultery.) Like many of their contemporary admirers, the Victorian novelists, however dismissive of Christianity’s claim to truth, felt they were more suited to tend the sacred flame than ordained ministers who presided over “transient forms.” This may explain why Dostoevsky alluded reverentially to Dickens, who vehemently rejected such central Christian doctrines as original sin, as “the great Christian—Dickens.”

Middlemarch realized Eliot’s desire to be “conservative” of religious values in an era of religious decay. The book begins with reflections on the life of Saint Theresa, asking whether “later-born Therasas” will be able to find a “coherent social faith.” The novel’s main aspirant to Theresa status is Dorothea Brooke, whose stature, bearing, and dress, in the midst of provincial society, give her “the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible . . . in a paragraph of to-day’s newspaper.” It is left to Dorothea, who refuses to wear a cross and admits that she “hardly ever pray[s],” rather than to her clergyman husband or any other clerical figure in the novel, to uphold traditional religious values. When Will Ladislaw condescendingly refers to her social idealism as “a beautiful mysticism,” she replies sharply: “Please not to call it . . . Persian, or something else geographical. It is my life. I have found it out, and cannot part with it. . . . I have always been finding out my religion since I was a little girl.” This is a secular saintliness

on the part of a character who, though occasionally satirized for confusing doing good with feeling good about what she is doing, is a part of Eliot's grand design: finding secular equivalents for religious values. In her last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot even suggested a Jewish version of this design. In the preface to *Middlemarch*, she had spoken of "human hearts . . . beating to a national idea"; in *Deronda* she names the idea and creates in the protagonist an early illustration of the saying that when a man can no longer be a Jew he becomes a Zionist.

George Eliot felt no regret that people should turn to the forms and ceremonies of religion if they found comfort in them, as she herself did; but she

had "faith in the working out of higher possibilities than the Catholic or any other Church has presented," and insisted that "the 'highest calling and election' is to *do without opium*." She therefore made the moral enlargement of human sympathies the purpose of her art: "the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings, is that those who read them should be better able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures." The most daring exercise of this sympathetic imagination in *Middlemarch* comes when



George Eliot

the narrator asks us to identify with the repellent Casaubon solely because he faces death: "Here

was a man who now for the first time found himself looking into the eyes of death—who was passing through one of those rare moments of experience when we feel the truth of a commonplace . . . when . . . 'we must all die' transforms itself suddenly into the acute consciousness 'I must die—and soon.'" Stepping into the void left by religion, the "godless" writer recalls her readers—then and now—to a fundamental tenet of religious belief: that we are all, even this desiccated researcher into moldy futilities, equal in the face of death.

Eliot was by no means the only Victorian writer who thought that she could draw upon traditional faith and traditional feeling through the very act of withdrawing from them intellectually. Among the novelists, Hardy comes closest to her, as when he said of himself that "although invidious critics had cast slurs upon him as Nonconformist, Agnostic, Atheist, Infidel, Immoralist, Heretic, Pessimist . . . they had never thought of calling him what they might have called him much more plausibly—churchy; not in any intellectual sense, but insofar as instincts and emotions ruled." (This passage comes from the biography written by Hardy's second wife, but was actually dictated by Hardy himself.)

Rarely do we hear in these novelists the sneer of the disbeliever or the icy indifference of the rationalist. In fact, they tended to sing the praises of Christianity: it was beautiful, it was historical, it was necessary to the preservation of morality, it was conducive to the

composition of great music and the construction of majestic buildings. The one thing they could not bring themselves to say was that it was true.

“I have been looking for God 50 years,” Hardy wrote with the painful regret of the lapsed Christian who wishes he could believe, “and I think that if he had existed I should have discovered him.” In his novels about the world of Anglican Christianity, the question that Trollope keeps asking about this ancient institution is not “Is it true?” but “What is the meaning of it?” Why has it been believed by thoughtful people, and received by generations of Englishmen? Trollope is critical of Dr. Grantly (in *The Warden*) for his theocratic defense of clerical privilege. Nevertheless, the tone of the archdeacon’s mind is inseparable from something venerable: “Who without remorse can batter down the dead branches of an old oak, now useless, but ah! still so beautiful, or drag out the fragments of the ancient forest without feeling that they sheltered the younger plants, to which they are now summoned to give way in a tone so peremptory and so harsh?”

How could one preserve the values of religion without subscribing to its “transient forms”? Arnold thought the only solution was literary: “There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialized itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry the idea is everything.”

In retrospect, however, it appears that it is not poetry but the novel, as practiced by the Victorians, that has come closest to fulfilling Arnold’s prediction that literature would one day take the place of religion. But how close can this be? John Henry Newman, the most powerful Victorian religious voice and a sometime novelist himself, credited the novels of Sir Walter Scott with turning men’s minds in the direction of the Middle Ages, and when he wanted an image of the disordered condition of the human race out of joint with the purposes of its creator, instinctively invoked the figure of the disinherited child named Oliver Twist.

Nevertheless, Newman’s final judgment on the imperial reach of Victorian literature was an admonition we might do well, in the midst of our current enthusiasm, to remember: “A literary religion is . . . little to be depended upon; it looks well in fair weather, but its doctrines are opinions, and, when called to suffer for them, it slips them between its folios, or burns them at its hearth.” To which one might add that admitting a devil’s advocate (as Newman is in this context) into the midst of your dearest, most sacred truths—apt to grow windy and worthless unless challenged—is also a Victorian virtue.

The Age of Philanthropy

by Gertrude Himmelfarb

Civil society” has become the rallying cry of liberals and conservatives alike, especially in the wake of the recent reform of the welfare system. The devolution of welfare to the states suggests a further devolution to local authorities, and a still further one to the unofficial but powerful institutions of civil society—families, neighborhood groups, churches, private social-work agencies, philanthropies—all those “voluntary associations” that Alexis de Tocqueville took to be the genius of American democracy.

It is surely presumptuous to quarrel with Tocqueville, yet in one small respect I venture to do so. Tocqueville presented those associations as a unique feature of American society. Although the Americans, he observed in the second volume of *Democracy in America* (1840), “took some of their laws and many of their customs” from the English, his own travels suggested to him that “the principle of association was not used nearly so constantly or so adroitly” in England as in America.

Tocqueville had visited England in 1833, just before writing the first volume of *Democracy in America*, and again in 1835, after the publication of that volume and before writing the second. But long before then, indeed almost a century before then, largely under the impetus of the Wesleyan revival, a multitude of associations (“societies,” they were often called) had sprung up in England for every conceivable purpose: to establish and endow schools, hospitals, orphanages, and almshouses, and to serve a myriad of other charitable and social functions. In the course of the 19th century many more such societies were founded, suggesting that the English used that “principle of association” at least as “constantly” and “adroitly” as did the Americans. And if the concept of civil society is extended (as surely it must be) to include the family, here too the English must take pride of place, for not even the Americans could be more reverent of the family, or of the other institutions of civil society, than the Victorians were.

Tocqueville might have contributed to one of the hoarier myths about Victorian society: that it was ruthlessly materialistic, acquisitive, and self-centered. The myth starts with the image of the hard-headed, hard-nosed Victorian employer who regarded his workers as instruments of production rather than as human beings, and who exploited them under the cloak of principle, invoking the natural, even divine, laws of

political economy. The sole function of government in this laissez-faire system is said to have been the preservation of law and order, which in practice meant keeping the potentially lawless and disorderly lower classes in a state of docility and subjugation. Those who professed a concern for the poor are dismissed as eccentric do-gooders, condescending Lady Bountifuls, or officious philanthropists who pretended to help the poor for their own self-serving motives.

Part of this myth is easily disproved. Neither in principle nor in practice was political economy as rigidly laissez faire as this picture suggests. The first of the factory acts limiting the hours of work for children was passed in 1833; within a decade it was followed by laws limiting the hours of women, and somewhat later, the hours of men. In the course of the century, Parliament enacted scores of other reforms concerning health, sanitation, housing, education, transportation, even holidays, while the municipalities assumed responsibility for the water supply, sewage, public baths, street lighting, street cleaning, libraries, and parks. All of these reforms coincided with a period of rapid economic growth, so that by the last quarter of the century the standard of living of the working classes had risen considerably, thus belying the Marxist theory of “immiseration”: the idea that capitalism inevitably results in the growing misery and poverty of the proletariat.



The mark of Victorian philanthropy was direct and personal involvement in the day-to-day lives of the poor.

Even more remarkable than the improvement in the conditions of the working classes was the enormous surge of social consciousness and philanthropic activity on the part of the middle and upper classes. This is not to say that there had been no such consciousness and activity in the previous century. When John Wesley propounded the trinity, “Gain all you can. . . . Save all you can. . . . Give all you can,” he gave practical effect to it by taking up collections following the sermon and distributing the money to the poor, setting up loan funds and work projects, and instructing his followers to pay “visitations” to the sick and to prisoners in jail. It is not surprising to find Methodists and Evangelicals prominent in the founding of orphanages, schools, hospitals, friendly societies, and charitable enterprises of every kind. By the late 18th century, the principle of “philanthropy” (still car-

rying with it its original meaning of “love of mankind”) had given rise to full-time philanthropists such as John Howard, who successfully agitated for the reform of the prison system, and Jonas Hanway, who devised the “boarding out” system to remove infants from the poorhouses. Hannah More, preferring moral reformation to philanthropy, characterized this period, not altogether in praise, as “the Age of Benevolence.” A London magistrate, deploring the corruption of “virtue” into “good affections,” complained, “We live in an age when humanity is in fashion.”

That magistrate would have had more to complain of in the 19th century, when the fashion for humanity expressed itself in a score of legislative and administrative reforms as well as a renewed burst of philanthropies and social activities. So far from supplanting private, voluntary efforts, as many people had feared, the government seemed to inspire them to greater exertions. To the French historian and critic Hippolyte Taine, this was yet another of the peculiarities of the English. Citing an article in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1861, he noted that of the £13 million spent on public education in the preceding 21 years, only £4 million was contributed by the state; the rest came from private subscriptions. (Even after the institution of compulsory, publicly supported education in 1870, church-endowed and private schools continued to play a large part in the educational system.) And education was only one of the causes that drew upon private funds:

There are swarms of societies engaged in good works: societies for saving the life of drowning persons, for the conversion of the Jews, for the propagation of the Bible, for the advancement of science, for the protection of animals, for the suppression of vice, for the abolition of tithes, for helping working people to own their own houses, for building good houses for the working-class, for setting up a basic fund to provide the workers with savings banks, for emigration, for the propagation of economic and social knowledge, for Sabbath-day observance, against drunkenness, for founding schools to train girls as schoolteachers, etc., etc.

What was even more remarkable, Taine observed, was that an Englishman regarded this kind of “public business” as “*his* business,” feeling obligated to contribute to the “common good” and bringing to it the same conscientious attention a Frenchman brought to his private business affairs.

Two decades later Taine would have had more societies to add to his roster and more reason for astonishment. The 1880s saw a veritable explosion of social concerns and activities. In 1884, the journal of the leading philanthropic association, the Charity Organisation Society, reported: “Books on the poor, poverty, social questions, slums and the like subjects, rush fast and furious from the press. The titles of some of them sound like sentimental novels.” That same year, Beatrice Potter (better known as Beatrice Webb, the Fabian) wrote in

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her diary: "Social questions are the vital questions of today: they take the place of religion."

There was, in fact, a religious, almost revivalist tone in this accession of social consciousness. Webb has left a memorable description of what she called the "Time-Spirit" of this period. The spirit was a compound of two elements: the first, a religious dedication to the service of others, inspired not by orthodox religion or a belief in God but by a secular religion, the "Religion of Humanity"; the second, the faith in science, the idea that the welfare of society could best be promoted by scientific, rational, organized means.

To one degree or another, these elements manifested themselves in the multitude of philanthropic enterprises, reform movements, humanitarian societies, research projects, publications, and journalistic exposés that flourished in the last quarter of the century. Some were overtly religious, such as the Salvation Army and the Christian Social Union. But many more exhibited the kind of sublimated, secularized "religion" described by Beatrice Webb. In this respect, the time-spirit of late-Victorian England was in notable contrast to that of earlier periods. Most of the reformers earlier in the century, such as the Evangelicals, who led the movement for the abolition of the slave trade, had been inspired by a firm religious creed; they were reformers, one might say, because they were devout Christians. Many of the later reformers were less devout but no less ardent in pursuing worthy causes. Just as they redoubled their moral zeal to compensate for their loss of religious faith, so they redoubled their humanitarian zeal as well. Humanitarianism became, in effect, a surrogate religion. This quasi-religious spirit was evident even in the socialist organizations such as the Fabian Society, which was professedly secular, or the Social Democratic Federation, which was ostensibly Marxist.

The scientific aspect of the time-spirit also took many forms. For socialists (in the Fabian Society, Social Democratic Federation, and Socialist League), science meant the rational, planned organization of the economy and society. For social workers (in the Charity Organisation Society), it meant the rational, planned organization of charity and relief. For settlement-house workers (in Toynbee Hall), it meant the education and edification of the working classes. For social researchers (such as Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree), it meant the systematic investigation and analysis of the different classes of the poor, their material and moral conditions, their problems and prospects of improvement.

It was this combination of religiosity and rationality that informed the social consciousness of the late Victorians. Critics at the time complained that the Religion of Humanity had the effect of diluting and distorting religion, replacing the old stern Puritanism with "a vapid philanthropic sentiment . . . a creed of maudlin benevolence." In fact, the new humanitarianism was neither vapid nor maudlin. The God of Humanity proved to be as stern a taskmaster as the God of Christianity. The Charity Organisation

Society instructed its social workers that “scientific” charity should not be “indiscriminate” or “promiscuous,” distributed without regard to need or worth, lest it contribute to the very evil it was designed to remedy, the pauperization and demoralization of the poor. True humanitarianism was an exercise in doing good, not feeling good—doing good to others, even if it meant curbing one’s own spontaneous, benevolent impulses.

The dispensers of charity, no less than the recipients, were held to high standards. They were expected to give generously of their time and resources and to have a sustained personal involvement in their work. This was not “checkbook philanthropy,” satisfied merely by the contribution of money (although such contributions were expected, in small amounts as well as large, since the organizations were entirely dependent on private funds). Nor was it the kind of “telescopic” philanthropy satirized by Charles Dickens in the character of Mrs. Jellyby, in *Bleak House*, who was so preoccupied with the natives of Borrioboola-Gha that she neglected her own children. Nor was it professional philanthropy in the current sense, where everyone from the director of the charity to fund raisers, social workers, and clerks is a salaried employee, paid to do a job quite like any other.

Victorian philanthropists, social workers (“visitors,” as they were called), settlement-house residents, even researchers, were personally involved in the day-to-day lives of the poor with whom they were concerned. And while they brought to their work a spirit of professionalism, seeking to dispense charity or conduct their inquiries “scientifically,” they also brought to it the dedication of unpaid, voluntary workers giving a good deal of their time, their energy, and their money to the welfare of those less fortunate than themselves.

Philanthropy was inspired by the dual motive: to serve others and to fulfill a moral need. When Beatrice Webb started work as a visitor for the Charity Organisation Society, she weighed the relative importance of the “moral facts” and “economic facts” involved in charity, “the relationship of giver and receiver,” and “the moral effect on the person who receives.” She concluded that it was “distinctly *advantageous to us* to go amongst the poor,” not only to have a better understanding of their lives and problems but because “contact with them develops on the whole our finer qualities, disgusting us with our false and worldly application of men and things and educating in us a thoughtful benevolence.” In some instances, she recognized, benevolence might take the form of “pharisaical self congratulation.” But the real philanthropist would not be guilty of this, for he would be too aware of the “mixed result” of his work (if indeed it had any result) “to feel much pride over it.”

Today, such statements are often taken as evidence of the elitist, authoritarian, self-serving nature of philanthropy. But they can as well be taken as evidence of a self-sacrificing, even self-abasing spirit, a belief that the “privileged,” no less than the poor, had spiritual needs, that they had to “give” (as Wesley said), as much as the poor had to receive, and that what they had to give was of themselves. Even the Fabian socialist Walter Besant paid tribute

to the principle of the “new philanthropy,” as he called it: “Not money, but yourselves.”

Two criticisms are commonly made of Victorian philanthropy. The older, more familiar one is that even at the time such philanthropy was obsolete and irrelevant, that the social and economic problems of late-Victorian England could not be solved by private, voluntary efforts but required either substantial legislative and administrative action by the state or radical structural changes in the economy. Philanthropy was not only inadequate but counterproductive, since it distracted attention from real remedies for all-too-real problems. From the beginning, the argument goes, and certainly by the end of the 19th century, industrialism and urbanism had created social evils that were beyond the scope of individuals. Poverty, unemployment, bad housing, overcrowded slums, and unsanitary conditions were neither the result of a failure of character on the part of workers nor of a lack of good will on the part of employers and landlords. Therefore they could not be solved or even alleviated by well-disciplined workers, well-intentioned employers, or well-wishing philanthropists.

More recently, criticism has taken another turn. The gravamen of the charge now is that philanthropy is all too often a self-serving exercise on the part of philanthropists at the expense of those whom they are ostensibly helping. Philanthropy stands condemned, not only as ineffectual but as hypocritical and self-aggrandizing. In place of “the love of mankind,” philanthropy is now identified with the love of self. It is seen as an occasion for social climbing, for joining committees and attending charity balls in the company of the rich and the famous. Or as an opportunity to cultivate business and professional associations. Or as a way of enhancing one’s self-esteem and self-approbation by basking in the esteem and approbation of others. Or as a method of exercising power over those in no position to challenge it. Or as a means (a relatively painless means) of atoning for a sense of guilt, perhaps for riches unethically acquired. Or as a passport to heaven, a record of good works and virtues to offset bad works and vices. Or (the most recent addition to this bill of indictment) as a form of “voyeurism,” an unseemly, perhaps erotic interest in the private lives of the lower classes.

This kind of criticism is often advanced as a corollary to the “social control” thesis. Just as Victorian values are said to have been an instrument for the pacification of the working class, so Victorian philanthropy is described as a device for the subjugation of the even more vulnerable class of the very poor. By discriminating between the “undeserving” and the “deserving” poor, the dispensers of charity managed to keep the former in a condition of servility in the workhouse while forcing the latter into the labor market on terms set by the employers. Thus profits were secured, the status quo was maintained, discontent was suppressed, and revolution was averted.

The difficulty with the “social control” thesis is that it can be neither proved nor refuted, since any empirical fact can be interpreted in accord with it. If some philanthropists and reformers advocated a system of free, compulsory education, it can be said that they did so only because educated workers were more productive than uneducated ones; if others opposed such a system (ostensibly out of a distrust of any kind of state-controlled

education), it was to keep the poor in a state of ignorance and submission. By this mode of reasoning, any philanthropic enterprise, regardless of its nature, purpose, or effect, can be disparaged and discredited.

The other familiar argument, that philanthropy was no solution to the problem of poverty, would have been conceded by Victorians, who never made any such claim, if only because they did not believe that poverty was a “problem” that could be “solved.” At best they thought it could be alleviated, and this only for some individuals or groups, in certain circumstances, and in particular respects. The entire purpose of Charles Booth’s monumental study, *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1891–1903), was to break down the category of “poor” into distinctive “classes,” analyzing each of them in terms not only of income but also of the regularity of their work and earnings, their living and working conditions, their habits and moral qualities. The effect was to distinguish the various problems that went under the umbrella term “poverty,” and thus the specific remedies—not “solutions”—appropriate to those specific problems.

This “disaggregation,” as we would now say, was typical of Victorian social reformers and philanthropists, who were perfectly aware of the special and limited nature of their enterprises. The Charity Organisation Society, which tried to coordinate the activities of the many philanthropic groups, made a great point of distinguishing between the functions of private charity and public relief. Where the Poor Law was directed to the relief of the indigent, charity should be reserved for those who were needy but not actually destitute, who were generally employed and might even have some resources such as savings or possessions but who had temporary problems that, unless alleviated, might lead to pauperism. Relief, in short, was meant for paupers; charity for the poor. And neither relief nor charity would “solve” the problem of poverty; at most they would alleviate it.

Nor did the reformer Octavia Hill have any illusions about solving the housing problem when she embarked upon her housing projects. She hoped that the principles she established for her houses—that tenants pay their rent promptly, that “rent collectors” (in effect, social workers) respect the privacy of the tenants and assist them unobtrusively, and that the houses include such “amenities” as ornaments and gardens as well as essential utilities—would be applied on a larger scale by private owners and institutions. But she also knew the limitations of her financial resources, the relatively small number of families she could accommodate, and, more important, the particular kinds of workers she wanted to accommodate. She made it clear that her houses were not meant for the artisans who could afford the “model dwellings” erected by the Peabody Trust and other building societies, nor for the vagrants who found refuge in the “common lodging houses,” but rather for the “unskilled laborers” who constituted the bulk of the “industrious, thrifty working people.”

Later-day critics, who fault the Victorians for not solving the problems of poverty and housing, use such words as “vague” and “illogical,” “ambivalent” and “ambiguous,” “transitional” and “half-way house,” to describe the ideas and projects of these philanthropists, reform-

ers, and thinkers. The implication is that Victorian England can be understood only as a prelude to the welfare state (or, as some historians would prefer, to socialism); anything short of that is regarded as naive and futile. If most Victorians objected to a large extension of state control, if they preferred small measures of reform to large ones and local laws and regulations to national ones, if they persisted in expending their energy and resources on private, voluntary efforts, it could only be, so it is supposed, because of a failure of imagination, or a weakness of will, or a commitment to an out-moded ideology or vested interest.

Although Victorian philanthropists did not believe that there were comprehensive solutions to most social problems, they did believe that some problems could be alleviated and that it was the duty of the more fortunate to do what they could to relieve the conditions of the less fortunate. This was the moral imperative that made philanthropy so important a part of Victorian life. But there was another moral imperative: that every proposal for alleviation produce moral as well as material benefits—at the very least that it not have a deleterious moral effect. This was the common denominator that linked together public relief and private charity, settlement houses and housing projects, socialist organizations and temperance societies. Whatever was done for the poor was meant to enable them to do more for themselves, to become more self-reliant and more responsible—to bring out, as Green said, their “better selves.” “Charity,” wrote the secretary of the Charity Organisation Society, “is a social regenerator. We have to use Charity to create the power of self-help.”

The Victorians were avowedly, unashamedly, incorrigibly moralists. They were moralists in their own behalf—they engaged in philanthropic enterprises in part to satisfy their own moral needs. And they were moralists in behalf of the poor, whom they sought not only to assist materially but also to elevate morally, spiritually, culturally, and intellectually—and whom, moreover, they believed capable and desirous of such elevation. Just as it is demeaning to the working classes to suggest (as some historians do) that work, thrift, prudence, sobriety, and self-help were middle-class values imposed upon them from above, so it is demeaning to the philanthropists to say that they promoted these values solely for their own ulterior motives. In any case, whatever their motives (and there were surely self-serving, self-aggrandizing, self-satisfied individuals among them), the values they commended to the poor were those they cherished for themselves and for their own families. It was no small achievement that people of very different political and philosophical dispositions, engaged in very different philanthropic enterprises, should have agreed on this: that the poor had the will to aspire to these same values and the ability to realize them.

Has Jazz Gone Classical?

After years of seeking respectability, jazz is finally winning recognition as “America’s classical music.” But the transition to the concert hall—and musical adulthood—has not been all to the good, our author writes.

by Clive Davis

One unmistakable symptom of old age, we are told, is the habit of picking up a newspaper at the breakfast table and turning first to the obituaries page. If that is the case, then jazz long ago passed the stage when it first began to sense its own mortality; each week, it seems, brings more melancholy news. The death last year of Ella Fitzgerald, who had been in retirement after years of ill health, furnished yet another reminder of how many of the giants have departed. Recent years have also seen the loss of the irreplaceable Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Art Blakey, Sarah Vaughan, Carmen McRae, Gerry Mulligan, and Stan Getz, to name but a few of the pioneers of the last half-century. Of the swing music masters, of course, even fewer remain: the octogenarian vibraphone pioneer Lionel Hampton has gallantly shuffled onto the concert stage for choruses of “Airmail Special”; the former Count Basie trumpeter Harry “Sweets” Edison celebrated his 81st birthday last October in the way he

knows best, blowing a languid blues solo on a bandstand.

The iconography of jazz is arguably more fashionable now than at any time since the days of *The Great Gatsby*. Donna Karan supplied the outfits for a recent tour by the hip young saxophonist Joshua Redman; no glossy magazine is complete without a bourbon advertisement depicting some artfully photographed tenor player, eyes shut, perspiration glistening on his brow. Yet the media hubbub is counterbalanced by an undeniable mood of unease. Though the Basie orchestra, for instance, continues to win magazine polls, the Count himself, possessor of the most inimitable of piano signatures, has been dead for 13 years. The Mingus Big Band’s raucous weekly sessions at The Fez, a New York watering hole, have become a chic attraction. But Charles Mingus himself passed away nearly two decades ago. His most admired albums—*Mingus Ah Um*, *New Tijuana Moods*, *The Black Saint*



Wynton Marsalis has led the movement to make jazz a music of the concert hall.

and the Sinner Lady—are more than 30 years old.

When, last autumn, New York's Town Hall played host to an all-star tribute to Oscar Peterson—now 71 and still performing in spite of the effects of a stroke—it was impossible to overlook the fact that so many of the musicians paying homage to the pianist belonged to his age group, a generation edging inexorably toward retirement. As Peterson embarked on a vibrant duet with his

excellent protégé Benny Green, a soulful pianist some four decades his junior, I doubt that I was alone in wondering whether Green and his peers would be able to fill the venue when they, in their turn, attain the status of grizzled elder statesmen.

But then, as one wag has put it, if jazz is dead, the body is in remarkably good condition. Walk into the average branch of a large record chain in any

major city, and you are likely to find the racks crammed with enough reissues to satisfy all but the most esoteric collectors. Recordings that were all but impossible to find when they were first issued on 78 rpm or LP discs can now be scooped up by the handful on compact discs replete with alternate takes and voluminous historical notes. The most sought-after purchase of 1996 was a sumptuously packaged, six-disc collection of trumpeter Miles Davis's historic orchestral collaborations with the Canadian arranger Gil Evans—the jazz world's answer, if you like, to the great Frank Sinatra-Nelson Riddle swinging sessions of the 1950s. Not content with reissuing the original albums—including the sublime version of *Porgy and Bess*—accompanied by three extensive essays, Columbia Records also threw in fragments of overdubbed solos, rehearsal sequences, and desultory studio conversation. To some skeptics it was a case of corporate overkill, but for Davis's many admirers, the box set was the next best thing to entering a time machine and sitting in a corner at the recording sessions themselves. More Davis memorabilia are due to follow.

Other record companies, taking their cue from the extraordinary success of Columbia's 1990 retrospective devoted to the blues guitarist Robert Johnson—which sold in excess of 300,000 copies—have plunged into the box set business. The Atlantic/Rhino Records tribute to John Coltrane, aptly entitled *The Heavyweight Champion*, outweighs even the Davis set, devoting no fewer than seven discs to a mere 18-month phase in the prolific saxophonist's career. Another recent arrival, on the Blue Note label, is an effervescent, four-disc compilation of traditional music, *Hot Jazz on Blue Note*, performed by the likes of Sidney Bechet, George Lewis, and Bunk Johnson. These fascinating recordings from the 1940s and '50s were reissued under the aegis of America's Jazz Heritage, a program organized by the Smithsonian Institution and the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Foundation. The foundation is also investing several million dollars in jazz programs run by Lincoln Center and National Public Radio,

music databases, and a fledgling touring and recording network.

If America's inheritance seems in safe hands at last, the contemporary agenda looks rather more ambiguous. Identifying a modern classic, the 1990s equivalent of, say, Miles Davis's 1959 masterpiece *Kind of Blue*, is difficult. Plenty of interesting albums are still being made, but none that herald any dramatic advance beyond what has gone before. What are we to make of the fact that perhaps the most publicized album of last year was the soundtrack of Robert Altman's film *Kansas City*—swing music played by Joshua Redman, James Carter, and other young saxophonists in fedoras and baggy suits, all doing a wonderful job of pretending to be Ben Webster and Coleman Hawkins?

The problem, some would contend, is that renovation and restoration are not sufficient on their own. According to this view, we are simply witnessing the repackaging of a dynamic art form as little more than a collection of museum pieces, a sanitized theme park bereft of that crucial element of spontaneous inspiration—what *New Yorker* jazz critic Whitney Balliett famously described as “the sound of surprise.” Even among those who abhor the prolixity of John Coltrane's “sheets of sound” solos—frenzied epics of improvisation that could last for 30 minutes or more—it is generally agreed that the tenor saxophonist remains the last major innovator. The 30th anniversary of his death, this coming July, will no doubt be marked by another bout of reissues. Yet if nobody has taken his place after three decades, so the argument runs, then jazz can hardly hope to compete with an all-pervasive rock culture, the musical equivalent of McDonald's, or the exotic temptations of so-called world music.

The respected critic Francis Davis summarized the concerns of many observers in a provocative essay in the *Atlantic Monthly* last July. Noting the record industry's propensity to seize upon the latest youthful talent at the expense of older and more expressive artists, Davis complained that the musicians who have been receiving the most attention over the last decade or so—the so-called young lions—lack the individuality of authentic



When jazz was young, bands such as Carroll Dickerson's Orchestra, shown here in Chicago around 1922, attracted large popular audiences with entertainment and dance music.

leaders: "There are no Thelonious Monks or Ornette Colemans in this bunch—no innovators or woolly eccentrics among those we've heard from so far. In setting craftsmanship as their highest goal these neophytes remind me of such second-tier stars of the Fifties and Sixties as Blue Mitchell and Wynnton Kelly—players whose modesty and good taste made them ideal sidemen but whose own record dates invariably lacked the dark corners and disfigurements of character that separate great music from merely good."

In a subsequent interview, Davis made a particularly striking observation. Whereas critics have historically been cast in the role of guardians of the canon, sternly measuring new work against the timeless standards of the old, their role has now been reversed, he pointed out. Now it seems to be the musicians who are most interested in clinging to tradition, while critics chafe at the perceived dearth of fresh, adventurous voices.

Who is the new Miles, the new Charlie Parker? After all, the history of jazz traditionally has been presented as a series of Great Leaps Forward initiated by towering individualists: the urbane New Orleans

polyphony of the pianist and bandleader Jelly Roll Morton gave way to soloist-led, small-group music championed by Louis Armstrong; Basie, Benny Goodman, and the swing bands then took center stage before being supplanted after World War II by Dizzy Gillespie and the beboppers. Frustrated with the predictable harmonic framework of bop, Ornette Coleman and Coltrane led their followers into the inhospitable, atonal realm of Free Jazz during the 1960s, while another faction headed by Miles Davis headed for the broader—and much more lucrative—pastures of jazz-rock, otherwise known as fusion music. Bearing in mind that the first jazz record, *Livery Stable Blues*, by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, was made in 1917, and that the first waves of the avant-garde crashed into the public's consciousness by the end of the 1950s, the pace of change has been astonishingly rapid. The novelist Kingsley Amis, an aficionado of the raucous speakeasy music of the 1920s and '30s, spoke for many a bewildered member of the old guard when he reflected on his lost love in his *Memoirs*: "Good going in a sense, to have got from Monteverdi to John Cage in—what? Forty years? The Hot Five to Ornette Coleman?"

Nothing makes me feel more thoroughly old than to realize that there is nothing but a bloody great hole where quite an important part of my life once was. I mean, poetry, the novel and much more besides have gone off all right, but they have not *vanished* (except as it might be for pastiches of bygone writers)."

The 1970s were, it is fair to say, the bleakest period of all. (Given the quadruple blight of rock "supergroups," disco, punk, and Andrew Lloyd Webber, it was hardly the brightest era for popular music in general.) The following decade saw the rise of what has been called a "neoclassical" movement, a school of twentysomething, conservatory-trained musicians who have sought to counteract what they saw as the lowering of standards wrought both by the self-indulgences of the avant-garde and the crowd-pleasing posturings of the jazz-rockers.

Wynton Marsalis, a trumpeter born in Louis Armstrong's native New Orleans, emerged as the unchallenged fig-

urehead of this austere, high-minded band of suit-and-tie revivalists. Beginning with frighteningly precise evocations of the Miles Davis Quintet, circa 1964, Marsalis has worked his way back through the canon, trying his hand at olde-worlde New Orleans and the sleeker lines of Ellington's big band scores. As a star of Columbia's roster and artistic director of the fast-expanding jazz repertory program at Lincoln Center, Marsalis is now, at 35, the most influential figure in world jazz. By last summer *Time* was listing him, with a touch of hyperbole, as one of "America's 25 Most Influential People." Hailed in a *Washington Post* profile, with the faintest hint of sarcasm, as "the Leonard Bernstein of jazz," Marsalis has led a frenetic one-man campaign to restore the music to its former prominence in American culture. Thanks to an extended series of albums, tours, television appearances, and high school clinics—and above all through the mixture of revivals and new works presented at Lincoln Center—he has become inextricably linked with the notion

of jazz as an indigenous classical music.

The link between the classical and jazz traditions has been a thread running through Marsalis's career. When he signed with Columbia in the early 1980s, he made a point of dividing his energies between the classics and recordings by his group (which at that time also featured his elder brother, Branford, on saxophone). In 1984, he became the first musician to win Grammy awards in both the classical and jazz categories. Indeed, the disc that brought him the classical accolade—a performance of the Haydn, Hummel, and Joseph



A man of "dark corners": Thelonius Monk in New York City, 1949

Haydn trumpet concertos—finds him playing with more abandon and exuberance than can be found on any of his early jazz albums.

Marsalis subsequently retreated from classical concerts. However, he is due to return to the stage this spring in a Lincoln Center touring program that will include Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat*. Meanwhile, with his Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra in tow, he has launched a major international tour, presenting his composition *Blood on the Fields*, an oratorio inspired by the history of slavery in the United States. Plans for the 1997–98 season, unveiled in January, include a celebration of Cuban jazz and concerts marking the birthdays of Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk, as well as the centenary of Sidney Bechet.

Marsalis's eminence as a classical interpreter is unquestioned. But his pronouncements on musical tradition and his activist role in New York have aroused resentment among performers and critics alike. Even in a domain renowned for its petty internecine warfare—jazz has endured almost as many sectarian disputes as the average Trotskyite sect—the controversy surrounding the man who would be trumpet king has been unusually acrimonious.

The issue of race has stirred the most rancor. In short, Marsalis and his advisers (who include the outspoken critic and polemicist Stanley Crouch) have been accused of indulging in “Crow Jim”—a term minted in the 1940s by critic and composer Leonard Feather to describe reverse racism. By 1993, there were repeated rumblings that the programming at Lincoln Center consistently neglected the legacy of white performers such as Bill Evans and Benny Goodman, and that too many of the new commissions stayed in the hands of Marsalis himself or his inner circle of friends. Marsalis consistently denied any improprieties, but the fact that, during a television interview, he once referred to control of the music industry being wielded by “people who read the Torah and stuff” hardly helped his cause. The combative writings and remarks of Stanley Crouch, who routinely supplies manifestolike liner notes for Marsalis's

records, and claims to have provided him with a grounding in jazz history and literature, have inflamed matters further.

Marsalis can usually count on a favorable (some would say, fawning) press in New York, but as one newspaper commentary followed another, matters came to a head in the summer of 1994, when he challenged one of his principal antagonists, the writer and historian James Lincoln Collier, to a public debate. The immediate cause of what amounted to a bare-knuckles fight was a letter Marsalis wrote to the *New York Times Book Review* in response to a positive review (by the British journalist Russell Davies) of Collier's latest book, *Jazz: The American Theme Song* (1993), a collection of highly readable essays.

Collier combines an interest in social commentary with a passion for the trombone that he indulges in lunchtime Dixieland sessions at a Cajun restaurant on New York's Eighth Avenue. In 1978 he published *The Making Of Jazz*, which remains one of the best single-volume surveys of the subject. As his friends would agree, he also relishes an old-fashioned set-to. It therefore did not come as a complete surprise that, in an intriguing chapter on racial divisions in his book, he took a swipe at Lincoln Center for its decision to “turn to blacks as authorities on the music simply because they are black.” Not content to rest there, Collier followed up with a chapter devoted to the inadequacies of critics which included a blunt attack on Stanley Crouch.

The Marsalis-Collier bout, held at Lincoln Center in front of an audience mostly predisposed to favor the trumpeter, proved to be as entertaining as any concert. Fighting on his own turf, with the venue's audio-visual resources set up at his disposal, Marsalis was obviously looking forward to administering what he promised in his opening remarks would be a “whipping.” Some newspaper accounts agreed that Collier was “trounced,” but although Marsalis scored numerous points by noting technical inaccuracies in the author's controversial and unflattering 1987 biography of Duke Ellington, the older man appeared the superior debater. Some members of the audience,

hissing at his remarks and occasionally trying to shout him down, had clearly come with the intention of taking part in a politically correct public execution. Collier cheated them of that dubious pleasure.

It was an ugly but undeniably entertaining occasion from which Marsalis emerged with less dignity than his opponent. For all the theatrics, though, it would be a mistake to overestimate the significance of the various Lincoln Center skirmishes. In some respects this was a classic New York insiders' story of large egos battling in an enclosed space. Some of the resentment directed at Marsalis arises from a perennial problem: the city plays host to too many dedicated, poorly paid musicians chasing too little work. Besides, Marsalis and his repertory formula are just one segment of the fractured mosaic of international jazz, which ranges from the ephemeral dance-floor rhythms of the fusion style called "acid jazz" to the stark, New Age ambience of recordings on the German ECM label, or the vibrant South African township rhythms of the pianist Abdullah Ibrahim.

Marsalis's record sales, it should be added, have also been in decline—partly because he has issued too much honorable but undistinguished material. The sprawling, double-album "sacred" suite, *In This House, On This Morning*, was a case in point, a distinct anticlimax after the vigor of another two-disc set, *Citi Movement*, a hyperkinetic score composed for the choreographer Garth Fagan. Like George Eliot's Mr. Casaubon, Marsalis has long seemed to be burrowing his way toward a magnum opus. He has not reached it yet—Casaubon never did—and the New Orleans prodigy has reached an age at which many musicians find their best work is already behind them.

Cynics who believe he never will create anything as inspired as the music of the masters he so admires should also ask themselves where jazz would be without his high-profile campaigning. Moreover, from his bully pulpit on Manhattan's Upper West Side, he is making important points about the health of popular music. (And he is listened to with greater respect than any critic: through his ex cathedra comments, his endorsements of

other performers, his media appearances, and his dispensing of commissions, he has robbed the critical fraternity of a good deal of its power.)

Marsalis's basic argument—one with which I sympathize—is that popular music has for some time been subject to an ever-accelerating process of infantilization, epitomized by the irresistible rise of Michael Jackson and Madonna. Jazz musicians, he insists, have a duty to resist the erosion of standards rather than contribute to the pace of "dumbing down" in music. Many column inches have been devoted to Marsalis's weary denunciations of rap music; as he pointed out in an interview, the genre is only one symptom of a malaise: "My feelings are not just about rap, but about the whole direction of American popular music. Once it switched from an adult base to an adolescent base, that was a major step backwards. Pop music used to be adult music, with adult sensibilities. But since pop made that switch to an adolescent base, it has never been able to return, as music, to what it was. And I guess it's understandable, because in terms of commerciality, it becomes more successful every year."

Marsalis and Crouch affirm that jazz can flourish only if new generations of musicians, students, and audiences are introduced to the treasures of the past and learn from them—just as the classical listener learns to appreciate Bach or Mahler. Hence the need for the Lincoln Center program and similar projects at Carnegie Hall and the Smithsonian, where the saxophonist and arranger Bob Wilber (who skillfully recreated the sound of the Ellington band on Francis Ford Coppola's 1984 film *The Cotton Club*) founded a repertory group nearly 20 years ago.

The objection is often raised that the unfettered spirit of jazz withers away in the formal setting of a concert hall. My own experience is that sitting in the best seat at Avery Fisher Hall or London's Royal Festival Hall is no substitute for the intimate acoustics of a club. Yet it would also be foolish to ignore the resources made available by institutions such as Lincoln Center. Repertory music, with all its copyists and rehearsals, does not come cheap. The ultimate

implication of all this is that the tradition has in fact reached a terminus of sorts: as Marsalis has expressed it, an adult evolves and grows more slowly than a six-year old. Interestingly, his archenemy Collier arrived at a very similar conclusion in his epilogue to *The Making Of Jazz*—published, remember, two decades ago: “We have to divest ourselves of the idea that the history of jazz has always been toward better and better. In no art has this ever been the case. . . . Jazz has always been obsessed with the new, with experimentation, and the result has been that it has rarely paused to exploit its discoveries before leaping out to make fresh ones. . . . Jazz needs, at the moment, a respite from experiments. It needs time to consolidate the gains, to go back and re-examine what is there. There is enough work left undone to last many lifetimes.”

Of course, the strategy carries risk. Too much church-like solemnity, too many overblown pseudoclassical suites, too much reverence for old standards, could well alienate new listeners. Yet, in view of how much damage the worst excesses of fusion and the avant-garde have caused over the past quarter-century, the gamble is worth taking. Who knows, we may also be witnessing the beginnings of a return to an emphasis on arranger-led music rather than music structured around the supposedly superhuman faculties of the soloist.

Certainly, the neoclassical reaction has produced an over-emphasis on technique for its own sake (a problem compounded by the narrow, homogenized curricula of many music schools). But in new arrivals such as Joshua Redman and the percussionist Leon Parker it is possible to detect musicians who put emotion and that indefinable quality we call “soul” ahead of merely following the rules. Just as encouraging is the flourishing of a clutch of young vocalists—chief among

them the superb Canadian singer-pianist Diana Krall—who are reminding us of the simplicities and virtues of unadulterated melody.

To wish for the return of Louis Armstrong or Count Basie’s original, raw Kansas City orchestra is to long for the magical return of a combination of social conditions that have gone forever. Even at the height of the swing era, in the 1930s, when big bands embodied the popular music of the day, the amount of interesting music being played was relatively small: what most people enjoyed was dance tunes tinged with the jazz idiom. For better or worse, bebop’s coterie aesthetic severed those fragile ties with the mainstream; henceforth, jazz tended to be produced and discussed as a branch of “art music.” If the music faces a crisis of confidence today, it is not too different from the predicament that confronts so many of the arts in this febrile era of postmodernism. Are the novel or the visual arts in a much better state? Can the cinema be in the best of health when the film-school antics of Quentin Tarantino are the height of fashion?

If jazz has been pushed further toward the margins, that is a fate it shares with classical music and other art forms. As MTV culture seeps deeper into the social fabric, embracing the baby boomers as well as their children, cultural horizons shrink further. When I opened my newspaper this morning, I read another article reporting the calamitous fall in classical music sales. The business section, by contrast, announced that the rock singer David Bowie had collected \$55 million from the issue of bonds on future royalty payments on his music. You do not have to be as pessimistic as Allan Bloom to detect a connection there.

How the Chair Conquered The World

The chair is one of those everyday objects whose function seems at once so obvious and necessary that we rarely, if ever, pause to consider its existence. But, as our author explains, the chair's creation and popularity were anything but preordained.

by Edward Tenner

Pull up a chair. And take a good look at it. It forms our bodies. It shapes our thinking. It's one of the first technologies an American or European child encounters. No sooner has a child been weaned than it learns to eat in an elevated model. And even before, it is (by law) strapped into a special molded minichair for automobile transportation, and indeed is sometimes carried by hand in the same little seat. At school, the chair is one of the most common objects in the classroom and among the first words a child learns to read and write. Despite all its variations, the chair could almost stand for the whole "domain of middle-size dry goods," to use the philosopher Charles Taylor's phrase.

In the West, we prefer to contemplate nature without too many chairs obtruding. We picnic on the grass and spread blankets on the beach. But in artificial settings, there is something disconcerting about the absence of chairs. The "festival seating"—that is, none



High-backed chair (1902) designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh

at all—introduced by post-Woodstock concert promoters soon connoted not celebration but chaos and violence. (The arrangement, though widely banned in the 1980s, is still common, even if the euphemism has long worn thin.) The standing-room-only arrangements of many British football stadiums in the same period amplified hooliganism and turned small perturbations into fatal stampedes. Chairlessness as dehumanization was carried to a nightmarish extreme by the infamous mass transports of the prewar Reichsbahn and the Soviet gulag.

Chairs go a long way toward filling a vacuum. They act as our proxies, claim space for us. The New Jersey Transit rail line between Princeton Junction and New York passes a large, new, nondescript condominium near the station in downtown Linden; almost half of the apartments have plastic chairs on their balconies, yet I have never seen a soul sitting in them at any hour I passed by. The chairs seemingly are not for

human use but rather for filling otherwise empty niches in the building's exterior.

Yes, chairs are in every sense fundamental to us. With their humbler cousins, the stools and benches, they have been with us for millennia. Curiously, though, they are neither essential nor especially healthful even in industrial and postindustrial societies—even if a few activities probably do demand them. Until relatively recently, the majority of the world's people rarely used chairs, and many still do not. Yet chairs have spread inexorably around the world, occasionally promoted deliberately by Western rule or influence but more often spontaneously adopted. The change has been one of the most thoroughgoing and apparently irreversible in the history of material culture. Essential parts of this spontaneous technology transfer are still obscure. But in every sense, the fortunes of the chair illustrate human malleability—and society's construction, reconstruction, and misconstruction of the human body. Once people begin to spend most of their lives in chairs, they are removed as though by ratcheting from their original ground-level ways; individual return may be hazardous, and social reversal has been unknown. Whole civilizations, in adopting chairs, literally change not only their posture but their point of view.

The chair's history is made up of several stories. The first is a functional and a negative one: chair seating was not predestined to dominate modernized humanity. Western specialists themselves branded it a health hazard, but only after it had become such a standard that radical change became almost impossible, as would later be the case with computer keyboard layouts. The use of chairs spread partly because technological systems were built around them before alternatives were available. The second story is a symbolic one: physical elevation appears to be a mark of prestige and power in nearly all societies, yet for centuries raised seating (including objects similar to Western chairs) never went beyond its ritual boundaries in nonchair societies. The third story is a material story: the chair as a European cultural good adopted less for economic than for social reasons, a slow but relentless change. And the fourth is functional again: the chair finally makes itself indispensable by induc-

ing changes in the bodies of its users. Yet those users have second thoughts, and begin their own experiments in ground-level living.

* * *

Europeans and Americans occasionally are disconcerted to see Asians, individually or in families, sitting in airports or even at urban bus stops, preferring squatting or other ground-level positions to standing or raised seating. They may be feeling envy because chairs in most Western public spaces are so appalling. (The *Newark Star-Ledger* reported in 1989 that the Port Authority was installing “specially designed, uncomfortable seats” in its New York bus terminal. They remain.) But the feeling may also be wonder at seeing a remnant of an allegedly preindustrial, agrarian way of living. Western technology, with its operatives seated at everything from farm tractors to computer terminals, seems a functionally chair-borne way of life. In the West, the closest we come to a floor-sitting worker is the cross-legged hand tailor, laboring in the shadow of sewing machines designed for chair operation. (The British columnist Bernard Levin once gloated good-naturedly to his readers that, having grown up in an East End needle-trade family, he could sit cross-legged and they couldn't.)

But floor- or mat-level seating could have been and could still be perfectly functional. The same technologies that let paraplegics operate machinery of all kinds without the use of foot pedals (seated in chairs, but only because the rest of Western society is) could also allow design of lower-profile automobiles, truck cabs, and even aircraft controls. Computer monitors and keyboards could be used at precisely the heights at which scribes and scholars composed masterpieces of science and literature in ancient civilizations from Egypt and the Americas to Asia. John T. Bonner, professor emeritus of biology at Princeton University, recalls his World War II days in aviation research at the Army Air Force's Wright Field, when pilots complained of intense pain after extended missions using conventional seats and praised the first alternative design, a simple cloth sling that put users in a position closer to reclining. In fact, recumbent bicycles, with

the rider leaning back rather than perched on a saddle, are potentially more efficient and generally speedier (and less hazardous to operate) than the “safety” frame that has prevailed for the last hundred years. Perhaps cultural prejudice against reclining as much as sheer conservatism prompted bicycling officials to reject the design for competition.

Chairs themselves are surprisingly hazardous. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, 410,000 injuries serious enough to disable someone for at least a day occur every year in connection with chairs, sofas, and sofa beds, most as a result of falling. Another 400,000 injuries involve beds; the number would be far lower if we used floor-level bedding like the original Japanese futon. (Just as missionaries brought some of the first chairs to China, they later introduced Western beds to Japan.) John Pierson has written in the *Wall Street Journal* that sitting in chairs causes most of the lower-back pain that costs the American economy \$70 billion a year.

We don't often consider mat-level alternatives, partly because our upbringing hastens us in childhood from the positions that the very young find so natural. The French anthropologist Marcel Mauss considered the loss of childhood squatting “an absurdity and an inferiority of our races, civilizations, and societies.” Depriving the child of this capacity is “a very stupid mistake. . . . All mankind, excepting only our societies, has so preserved it.” In *Growth and Culture: A Photographic Study of Balinese Childhood* (1951), Margaret Mead and Frances Cooke MacGregor observe that Balinese children “retain the flexibility that is characteristically seen in the human fetus, moving with a fluidity that suggests suspension in amniotic fluid.”

* * *

It is a challenge to reconstruct how part of humanity began sitting in chairs while the

rest (including some of the most culturally complex) lived near ground level. The historian Bernard Lewis has remarked that during their seventh- and eighth-century expansion, the Arab conquerors, a desert people without a steady wood supply, replaced the chair-level ways of the pre-Islamic Middle East with softer seating closer to the floor, only to return to the chair in today's urban society. But why did the Egyptians and other Mediterranean peoples begin to use chairs in the first place? Skeletons can sometimes reveal something about seating habits, but the answer remains mysterious.

What is clear is that chairs are keys to a distinctively Western system of things and symbols. Many other cultures have had elevated seating for rulers and other authority figures. It is almost a cultural universal that higher is better. In folk culture and trade union caricature, the rich are portrayed as sitting on top of the poor. Even other animals attach



Ancient Egyptians, such as the ones depicted in this facsimile painting of a tomb wall (1450 B.C.), used stools to facilitate everyday tasks. These workers are stringing beads for jewelry.

importance to keeping the high ground; when a pet parrot sits on a human shoulder, it asserts possession as much as it claims protection, and owners of some aggressive dogs must prove their dominance to reclaim their favorite chair or sofa.

All this does not suffice to promote the chair as we know it. Hierarchy can exist very close to the ground. In pre-Columbian Mexico, even Aztec rulers slept on the same kinds of mats as their subjects, and the same mats on low platforms were standard seating even in law courts and government offices. It is true that the wood or wicker seat (*icpalli*) of emperors and notables had backrests that provided much of the allure of power seating

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attributed to today's high-backed "executive" or judge's chair, but the sitters were still cross-legged. In fact, in pre-Columbian Mexico rulers were often called "He of the Mat." Most of the thrones of South Asia, including Iran's original golden Peacock Throne (actually removed as booty from Delhi in 1739), were designed for cross-legged sitting, though Western-style chairs were also known; the current replacement of the lost Peacock Throne follows Western throne models. And even in the contemporary United Arab Emirates, according to the cultural historian Margaret Visser, guests must lower their bodies immediately to floor level and never rise while their host is seated.

In the absence of heavy furniture, the mat and the carpet have rich symbolic worlds of their own. The Japanese tatami is a module still used as a basic measurement of space. Among Japanese artisans, "mat learning" had the same connotations that "armchair knowledge" does in the West. The Chinese title translated as "chairman," *chu hsi*, means literally "mat master."

In the West, the chair diverted attention from the floor covering and helped determine every aspect of life and belief from the sublime to the material. Jewish and Roman sources both acknowledged chair sitting as central to kingship. Solomon's throne in 2 Chronicles 9:17-19 sets the pattern of a ruler elevated with legs suspending from the body and resting on a small stool; Greeks and Romans represented their deities on the high-backed *thronos*. The Holy See, the bishop's cathedra, and other chairs of state also followed this pattern. In the European High Middle Ages, high-status men and women worked the finest gradations of power and prestige in the public arrangement of their chairs. The physical occupation of a seat of office not only stood for office, it constituted office, and in one 12th-century succession dispute in the Holy Roman Empire, three ranking bishops physically removed Henry IV from his throne and thereby deposed him. (This mentality does not require a Western-style throne. Even in the 20th century, one Indian prince recalled for the anthropologist Adrian C. Mayer: "So long as I ascend the *gaddi* [a cushionlike throne for cross-legged sitting] I am ruler, otherwise I am not. I am just

nobody.") Even today, cartoonists depict Saint Peter in a heavenly chair, not sprawled on a cloud.

From such exalted seats of power the chair has extended throughout Western society, even into its rudest outposts. The archeologist James Deetz has argued that until around 1600, the chair in most households was a single seat for the male head: "As the ruler was enthroned before his court and kingdom, so was the husbandman enthroned within his household. Others sat on stools, chests, settles, benches, cushions, or rush-covered floor." In our own popular culture, Archie Bunker's easy chair in *All in the Family*, higher than his wife Edith's, echoes ancient patriarchy.

For men and women of all stations, sitting Western-style affects more than the spine. While the water closet as we know it dates only from the 19th century, the contrast between the Western seated position for defecation and the Asian and African squatting posture has long been familiar to travelers. In this century, Western physicians and designers have subjected the commode to the same scrutiny as the office chair, and most agree that it promotes straining and constipation. (Along with diet, squatting seems to have kept the common Western inflammation of the bowel, diverticulitis, out of Africa.) The architect Alexander Kira's definitive 1976 monograph, *The Bathroom*, cites overwhelming medical opinion against the throne-toilet as we know it; yet so accustomed are we to the sedentary life that no significant market has ever developed for re-designed fixtures.

* * *

With so little to recommend them, chairs and related objects—raised beds, desks, worktables, commodes—nevertheless dominate the world. And at first glance this is not surprising. Were not chairs part of the baggage of empire, instruments of hegemony? And sometimes the symbolism of sitting positions is apparent. Press photographs of Ayatollah Khomeini and his circle always showed them seated at carpet level in robes and turbans, in contrast to the Westernized shah and his officials—a contrast that must

have been powerful to Iran's traditionalists.

But there is far more to the adoption of chairs than conquest or modernization. More than 30 years ago, the remarkable self-taught Sinologist C. P. Fitzgerald investigated one of the mysteries of material culture: why, of all the peoples of Asia, the Chinese should have changed from ground-level to chair seating before modern times, within a half century of the year 1000, to be exact. There were several types of chair seating documented in China as early as the second century A.D. One involved a military folding chair not so different in function and design from goods available today through L.L. Bean and originally intended for use in often-muddy fields where mat and carpet living were impractical. Over the centuries, it became a common furnishing indoors, and as such gradually ceased to be noticed by writers. By around A.D. 750, another form began to appear: a fixed frame chair closer in appearance and use to Greco-Roman and Byzantine counterparts. (Fitzgerald observes that the Chinese were sitting in chairs for centuries while most Europeans contented themselves with stools.)

Fitzgerald believes that Greek- or Syrian-born Nestorian missionaries brought chair sitting from Constantinople to China, but there was another source closer to home: the peoples of the north, some of whose rulers surprised Han Chinese diplomats by holding formal audiences while sitting on chairs with their legs hanging down. This practice also is seen in the imagery of one of the five Living Buddhas, the Maitreya, whose cult was popular in the north. Why was this sitting position popular there? It may have reflected the influence of northern peoples who spent much of their time on horseback and found it more natural than cross-legged positions. The Chinese characters for "chair" in any case attests to its foreign origin: "barbarian bed."

The Chinese appear to have modified a raised platform or *k'ang* (a wooden adaptation of an oven-platform popular in the cold winters of the north), adding a back and shortening the seat. But the precise process is less important than the result: a cultural revolution of sorts in which clothing and furnishings were modified for men



Chinese rosewood chair, Qing dynasty, 17th–18th centuries

and women whose bodies were now several feet higher off the ground. Chinese joiners over the centuries created some of the most beautiful and comfortable chairs on earth, and even introduced the S-curved splat, the earliest antecedent of today's domestic designs.

If China shows how powerful historical accident can be in the diffusion of a concept as basic as the chair, Japan illustrates how mat-level ways can persist. Had the Chinese adopted the chair before the beginning of the Heian age (794–1185), Japan might have made the same transition. But though examples of chairs were known to the Japanese, they had little lasting influence. The art historian Kazuko Koizumi has identified a number of periods after the 12th century, when groups of Japanese took to chair living. In the Kamakura period (1185–1333), the chairs of Zen abbots—who usually sat cross-legged rather than in the Maitreya position—were copied for a time by wealthy samurai, the same group who emulated the furniture that arrived with Spanish and Portuguese missionaries and merchants during the brief Momoyama period (1573–1600). Except for the emperor and high-ranking Buddhist clerics, Japan remained almost entirely mat based until the Meiji Restoration in 1868. And for the dignitaries who used chairs, they may have been as much conveniences of age as emblems of exalted status. Colder Chinese winters cannot account for such a sharp difference; neither can Japan's island geography. (Chairs were even less common in Korea.) There may be no better answer than contingent events at crucial junctures.

It was European conquest, diplomacy, trade, and warfare beginning in the 16th century that finally secured the worldwide dominance of the chair, at least among most elites. The lines of influence become easier to draw, if not to explain in detail. We have seen that chair sitting is not inherently more

comfortable to those who have grown up with one of the dozens of other resting positions that the anthropologist Gordon Hewes documented in a masterly article more than 40 years ago. Those who tried it in middle age often reported intense discomfort, he noted. The most influential channel of change may have been the Western-style schoolroom, which accustoms children to chairs in their formative years.

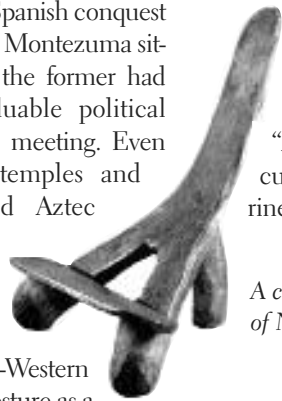
Consciously or not, Europeans began to maneuver non-Westerners into the chair as a precondition of bringing them to the bargaining table. The universal privileging of elevation probably guaranteed that the higher seating technology would prevail. European lore told the story of an African queen whose courtier bent over to make a living chair of his own back when her European hosts tried to humiliate her by not offering one. More likely, the West offered its furniture as instruments of co-optation or coercion.

Aztec manuscripts of the Spanish conquest of Mexico depict Cortés and Montezuma sitting in massive chairs that the former had brought—obviously as valuable political instruments—to their initial meeting. Even after the destruction of temples and palaces, the Christianized Aztec nobles integrated into the Spanish order, adopting the huge, Spanish-style chairs. The Aztec nobility thus became the first of the non-Western elites to change its seating posture as a result of European expansion. But this was a cultural and not a functional change; bureaucracy as such can work perfectly well in mat-level societies without chairs or tables.

In Africa, the result was similar but the forms and motivation radically different. In many traditional African societies, stools were not the stark, utilitarian seats of medieval Europeans, but superbly carved objects almost inseparable from the owner and carried with him on trips. The Ashanti and some other groups believed the owner's soul dwelt in the stool. Royal seats had political potency even beyond their European counterparts; like European thrones and unlike Asian ones, they were occupied with sitters' legs resting on the ground. Whereas the chair remained a practical item of furni-

ture for the Chinese, it entered Africa with a different aura. It was a kind of superstool. Africans had long made backrests for ground-level use, and some kings had already used seats and backrests together.

When Europeans arrived with furniture that integrated seat and back—and the first of these came with the Portuguese in 1481—these well-chosen gifts soon won the admiration of elites. African rulers received them not as alien impositions but as potent elaborations of their own ways. While there had been indigenous high-backed seats in some regions, artisans now developed the European idea with complex narrative and cosmological decorative programs. Some of these magnificent objects in turn made their way to European collectors and museums. What would the original chair makers have thought had they been informed that, in 1921, a Bauhaus student named Marcel Breuer (later celebrated for the tubular-steel sled-base Cesca chair) would in turn appropriate their work, now considered naive, as inspiration for a five-legged “African” chair? It is as though world culture had become not an array of vitrines but a house of mirrors.



A chair crafted by the Tiv peoples of Nigeria

* * *

In the rest of the modernizing world, chairs spread with less aesthetic panache. The European embassy and diplomat's home was usually the point of entry. The Akasaka Detached Palace in Tokyo, built under Western direction in the early Meiji era (1868–1912), was modeled after Versailles. Once the local upper classes began to entertain with Western furnishings, social emulation began a process—later accelerated by the customs of the office, the railroad car, the airplane seat, and the automobile—that did the rest. Sometimes, as in Turkey, the old elites remained conservative and it was members of the newer middle classes who took to Western decor, but diplomats were still the chief agents of change.

For their part, affluent Europeans and Americans were drawn to what they considered sensual alternatives to the sprung and overstuffed parlors of the 19th century. The canvases of Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, Eugène Delacroix, and a host of academic Orientalists later in the 1800s evoked an unbooted, uncorseted, and uninhibited Middle East, duly recreated in three dimensions in the world exhibitions that were the Internet of the age. Later in the century, some Westerners even built “Turkish corners” in their homes with low divans, about as close as they were willing to approach the carpet.



Conversation Mauresque (1832), by Eugène Delacroix

Of course, chairs are not used universally and almost certainly never will be. Many people still cannot afford even simple ones; others, especially peasants, may simply prefer ground-level ways. Richard Eaton, a historian who visits India often, reports that while offices, schools, and factories in the South have chair seating, homes generally do not—another argument against technological determinism.

Still, there are signs that the world’s commitment to the chair may be difficult to arrest, let alone reverse. In Japan, where many households have maintained both tatami and Western rooms, younger people are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain traditional ground-level seating positions. The less time is spent in them, especially in the kneeling meditation posture of *seiza*, the less comfortable they become. Worldwide lumber scarcity has discouraged traditional Japanese building methods, and many families now choose American materials and plans inspired by the sets of Hollywood films. Meanwhile, children as young as two and three sit on tiny chairs at cram-school desks preparing for the kindergarten entrance examinations.

It is not clear whether (as some Japanese and foreign officials have

claimed) the decline of kneeling has supplemented diet in increasing the stature of Japanese youth, or whether different proportions have contributed to the preference for chairs. Sitting habits affect tendons, ligaments, and joints in ways that medical research has hardly studied;

prolonged kneeling can induce bursitis, and extended cross-legged sitting by Western novices may damage knee joints permanently. In our posture, cultural choices become biological facts. It is not clothing but seating that truly makes men and women. Even mature Japanese executives now routinely use cushions with short backs in traditional restaurants to ease their discomfort. Most new toilets are of the Western sitting type.

Meanwhile Europeans and Americans continue to experiment fitfully with mat-level life. Shag carpets, conversation pits, beanbag chairs, and brightly patterned floor cushions are all period pieces, but the impulse is not dead. And behind it is not so much a quest for health or even novelty as the sense that the chair as a technology has raised us a bit too much from nature, from *our* nature. In the end, the chair may not be a matter of health or performance or power, but of values. The scholar of Zen D. T. Suzuki contrasted Rodin’s chair-height *Thinker* with Sekkaku’s Zen master in meditation: “To raise oneself from the ground even by one foot means a detachment, a separation, an abstraction, a going away in the realm of analysis and discrimination. The Oriental way of sitting is to strike the roots down to the center of earth and to be conscious of the Great Source whence we have our ‘whence’ and ‘whither.’” Has humanity lost something in attitude as it has gained in altitude?

WHY BUDDHISM BAFFLES THE WEST

None of the world's major religions is more richly varied than Buddhism. From the time of its birth some 2,500 years ago in India, it was reworked and reshaped over and over again as it spread to the

many kingdoms of Asia—and, recently, to the West. In each of these lands,

Buddhism profoundly influenced local cultures, and was in

turn profoundly remolded by

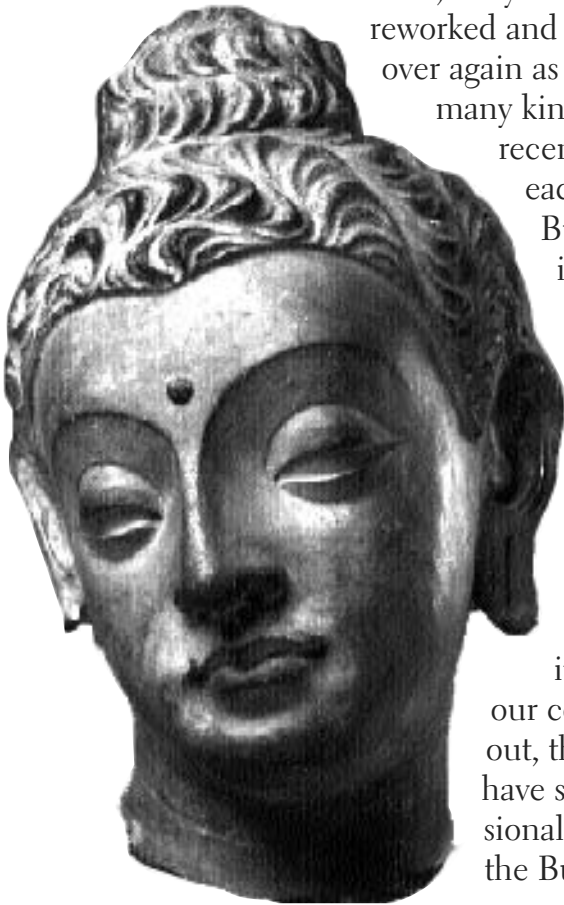
them—so much

so that today's adherents sometimes even honor different Buddhas.

Such variety makes it all the more ironic,

our contributors point out, that Westerners today

have such a one-dimensional picture of the faith the Buddha spawned.



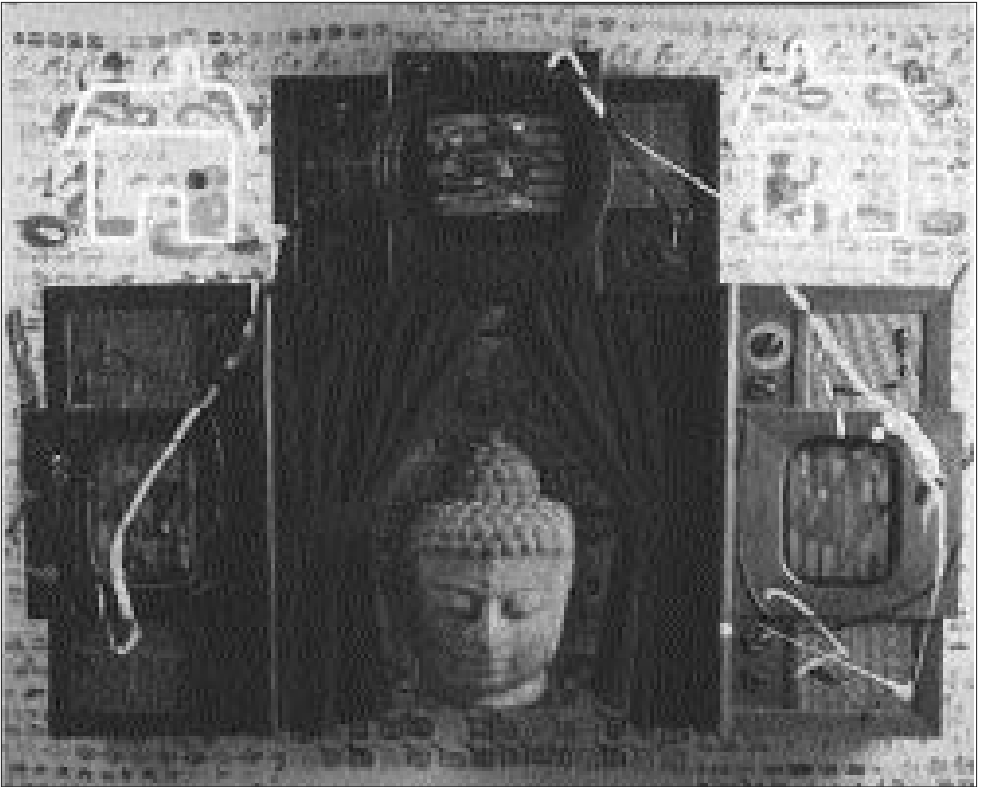
Buddhism Comes To Main Street

by Jan Nattier

Buddhism is big news in America these days. Whether through a *New York Times* article carrying the Dalai Lama's latest remarks or a CNN spot on a political fund-raising scandal at a Taiwanese branch temple in Los Angeles, whether by seeing Bernardo Bertolucci's *Little Buddha* or following Tina Turner's life story in *What's Love Got to Do With It?*, Americans have become more aware than ever before of something called "Buddhism." But it is not only as interesting bits of cultural and political exotica that Buddhism has entered the American consciousness. Increasingly, Americans themselves are becoming Buddhists. Though precise statistics are impossible to come by, according to most estimates between one and two million Americans now consider themselves practicing Buddhists.

American Buddhists are a far from homogeneous lot. The austere minimalism of a Zen meditation hall contrasts starkly with the riot of color in a Tibetan Buddhist center, and the mostly Caucasian crowd of baby boomers arriving for a talk on meditation at a Vipassana center outside San Francisco bears little resemblance to the multigenerational gathering of Thai Buddhists assembling in Chicago for a celebration of the Buddha's birth.

And there are conflicts, as well as contrasts, within Buddhist America. Like many other religious groups, Buddhists frequently find themselves divided by class, culture, or ethnicity. At an outdoor lecture by a famous Vietnamese monk, three Asian-American friends cluster together, feeling the not altogether friendly stares of the mostly Caucasian (and overwhelmingly vegetarian) crowd as they try to enjoy their hot dogs and potato chips. At a small Japanese-American Buddhist church, the parishioners chafe at the identity of the new minister appointed to serve them: a Caucasian man in his thirties, who converted to Buddhism only 10 years before. The differences



Homeless Buddha (1992), by Nam June Paik

can be fundamental. Writing in the Buddhist journal *Tricycle*, Victor Sogen Hori describes how, at the conclusion of a week-long Chinese-style Zen retreat he attended, the white American and ethnic Chinese Buddhists offered profoundly different views of their experience. One Chinese woman broke down in tears as she described the deep sense of shame and repentance she had felt over her selfishness. Her white American coreligionists were often impatient with such sentiments. These participants, Hori writes, “spoke uniformly of how the long hours of meditation had helped them get in touch with themselves . . . and assisted them in the process of self-realization.”

How, then, can we get our bearings in this new and confusing territory? For Americans, especially those raised as Christians, doctrine might seem the obvious place to start. Yet there are relatively few propositions that would be accepted by members of all Buddhist communities. That a person known as the Buddha had an experience of “enlightenment,” that we live not once but many times, and that our karma (which simply means “actions”) will have an effect on us in the future, are all ideas that would be accepted by most Buddhists. But beyond this minimal consensus, differences emerge almost immediately, including disagreements over such fundamental matters as which scriptures are really the word of the Buddha.

Buddhist practices are diverse as well. While one group views medita-

tion as essential, the next insists that Buddhahood is accessible only through recitation of a certain mantra, and a third considers ritual empowerments by a guru to be required. Watching elderly Buddhists reverently offering small gifts of money or food to the Buddha in hopes of achieving a better rebirth, one realizes that in still other groups enlightenment, at least in this life, isn't the issue at all.

With some persistence, though, we can identify a few major fault lines within Buddhist America that can serve as basic points of orientation. First is the obvious distinction between those who were born into the faith and those who have become Buddhists by conversion. That the majority of "hereditary Buddhists" are Asian Americans is hardly surprising. Some observers have even argued that the fundamental divide within American Buddhism is a racial one, separating "white" and "Asian" practitioners.

The distinction is real, reflecting the perennial gap between the enthusiasm of the recent convert and the calm assurance of the hereditary believer as well as differences in cultural heritage. Yet recent converts to Buddhism are by no means all Caucasians. The membership rolls include African Americans and Latinos, as well as a few Asian-American "re-converts" who were raised in Christian or in nonreligious homes. To make sense of the landscape of Buddhist America, one must go beyond race and ethnicity to consider an entirely different factor: the ways in which these various forms of American Buddhism were transmitted to the United States.

Religions—not just Buddhism—travel in three major ways: as import, as export, and as "baggage." (They may also be imposed by conquest, which, happily, is not a factor in this case.) Religions transmitted according to the "import" model are, so to speak, demand driven: the consumer (i.e. the potential convert) actively seeks out the faith. "Export" religions are disseminated through missionary activity, while "baggage" religions are transmitted whenever individuals or families bring their beliefs along when they move to a new place. It is these divergent styles of transmission, not matters of doctrine, practice, or national origin, that have shaped the most crucial differences within American Buddhism.

To begin with the import type, consider a hypothetical example: a college student living in the Midwest in the 1950s finds a book on Zen Buddhism in the public library and thinks it's the greatest thing he's ever heard of. So he buys a plane ticket, heads off to Japan, and begins to study meditation in a Zen temple. After several years of practice and some firsthand experience of Buddhist "awakening," he returns to the United States and establishes a Zen center, where he begins to teach this form of Buddhism to other Americans.

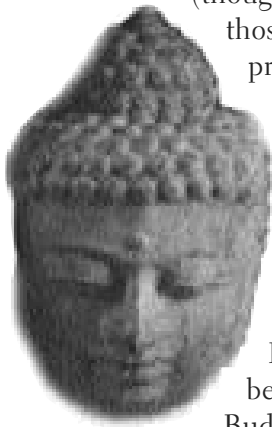
The important point to note here is that the importer (in this case, the

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college student) deliberately seeks out the product and takes the initiative to bring it home. But for this to happen, two crucial resources are required: money and leisure time. Buddhist groups of the import variety, in other words, can be launched only by those who have a certain degree of economic privilege. And not surprisingly, in these groups (as in other voluntary associations), like attracts like. Thus, the upper-middle-class status of the founders tends to be reflected in their followers, with such communities drawing a mostly well-educated, financially comfortable, and overwhelmingly European-American constituency.

A convenient label for the groups formed by the import process, then, would be “Elite Buddhism.” But this kind of Buddhism is more than a matter of socioeconomic background. At first glance, the groups belonging to this category would seem to span the full spectrum of Buddhist traditions: there are a number of schools of Tibetan Buddhism, various centers teaching meditation practices known as Vipassana (drawn primarily from Southeast Asia), and Japanese, Korean, and Chinese varieties of Zen. Yet a closer look reveals that what these groups all have in common is far more significant than the divergence in the sources of their inspiration. For the very names of two of these three types (Vipassana and Zen) mean “meditation.” On the level of practice, then, the most striking feature of Elite Buddhism in America is its emphasis on meditation.

Meditation is, of course, part of the traditional repertoire of most (though not all) Asian Buddhist schools, at least for those who have undertaken a full-time monastic practice. What is distinctive about Elite



Buddhism, however, is not its heavy emphasis on meditation but its scanting of other aspects of traditional Buddhism. For example, though monasticism has been the central Buddhist institution (and monastic life considered an essential prerequisite to enlightenment) in the vast majority of Buddhist countries, Elite Buddhists have been largely uninterested in becoming monks or nuns, preferring to see their Buddhist practice as a way of enhancing the quality of their lives as laypeople. While traditional

Buddhists have spent a great deal of energy on activities that are best described as “devotional,” Elite Buddhists, many of them still fleeing the theistic traditions of their youth, have little patience with such practices. And while codes of ethics have played a central role in traditional Buddhist societies, they have had little appeal for Elite Buddhists, many of whom were drawn to Buddhism by what they saw as its promise of a more spontaneous life. Indeed, until fairly recently, when scandals involving sexual affairs and financial mismanagement in several American Tibetan and Zen communities forced some serious rethinking, ethical codes were given almost no attention in Elite Buddhist circles.

Elite Buddhism thus represents not simply an Asian religion transplanted to a new environment but a curious amalgamation of traditional Buddhist ideas and certain upper-middle-class American values—above all individualism, freedom of choice, and personal fulfillment. These “non-negotiable cultural demands” have reshaped Buddhist ideas and practices in significant ways, yielding a genuinely new religious “product” uniquely adapted to certain segments of the American “market.”

The “export” process of transmission has produced American Buddhist groups of a strikingly different type. Because the transmission itself is underwritten by the home church, the potential convert does not need money, power, or time to come into contact with Buddhism of this sort, only a willingness to listen. Encounters with a missionary may take place on a street corner, in the subway, or even in one’s home. Export religion is thus something of a wild card: it can attract a wide range of adherents, or it may appeal to no one at all.

Since what fuels the formation of Buddhist groups of this type is energetic proseletyzing, an appropriate label for such groups is “Evangelical Buddhism.” And one Buddhist organization in America, above all, fits this category: the Soka Gakkai International. This group (whose name means Value-Creating Study Association) began its life in Japan in the 1930s as a lay association devoted to spreading the teachings of the Nichiren Shoshu school. According to this school (one of the many strands of Mahayana Buddhism), all beings have the potential for Buddhahood, but this inherent Buddha-nature can only be made manifest through chanting of the mantra “*namu myoho renge kyo.*” These words—which literally mean “homage to the *Lotus Sutra*,” one of the most popular Buddhist scriptures in Japan—are believed to be powerful enough not just to change the practitioner’s spiritual state but to improve his or her material circumstances as well. The Soka Gakkai, in other words, teaches a form of Buddhism in which both material and spiritual happiness can be attained not through many lifetimes of strenuous practice, or even weeks or months of meditation retreats, but through the daily recitation of a simple phrase.

Both the simplicity of the practice and the fact that this form of Buddhism addresses economic as well as spiritual needs has meant that the Soka Gakkai, from the time of its arrival in the United States during the 1950s, has had the potential to appeal to a very different, and far less privileged, audience than the Elite Buddhist traditions. Unlike the latter—most of whose members are college educated, with many holding graduate degrees—only about half of Soka Gakkai members have attended college, and barely a quarter hold bachelor’s degrees. Statistics compiled by the Soka Gakkai itself show a wide range of educational levels and occupations; my own observations suggest a center of gravity in the lower-middle class.

But it is in the ethnicity of its members that the distinctiveness of the Soka Gakkai is most obvious, for it has attracted a following that

includes large numbers of Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans (not all of Japanese ancestry). According to a 1983 survey compiled by the organization itself, fully 55 percent of its members had non-European ethnic backgrounds.

The fact that Evangelical Buddhism has undergone fewer changes in America than Elite Buddhism is the direct result of its mode of transmission. Because the Soka Gakkai was established by missionaries accountable to the home organization, its Japanese leadership has been able to limit the extent of its adaptation to American values. Indeed, one former member remarked that the only real difference between the American and the Japanese Soka Gakkai is that members in America usually sit on chairs.

Yet the remarkable success of the Soka Gakkai in the United States—at one point the organization claimed a membership of 500,000, though even Soka Gakkai officials now admit this figure was far too high—would not have been possible if its values had not harmonized with the aspirations of the audience it addressed. In particular, the Soka Gakkai has been able to tap into the “American dream” of upward mobility, a dream that has often been difficult to realize for those who find the obstacles of racism and exclusion in their path.

Finally we come to the category of “Baggage Buddhism”—though perhaps we should have begun with this type, for here at last we meet with Buddhists who were simply born into the faith of their ancestors. Like Export Buddhism, this type involves travel to America by Buddhists from Asian countries, but the migration is not for religious purposes. Instead, these Buddhists (or their ancestors) came as immigrants to the United States to pursue



Members of the Soka Gakkai attend a regular gathering in Philadelphia.

economic opportunity, or, especially in the case of recent refugees from Southeast Asia, to escape persecution at home.

Baggage Buddhists span the full range of schools and national origins, ranging from Theravadins from Cambodia to Mahayanists from Korea to Kalmyck Mongols of the Vajrayana school. But to the outsider, these organizations display remarkable similarities. Above all, they tend to be deliberately monoethnic in membership at the outset, for they serve not only religious purposes but operate as supportive community centers as well. Such temples may provide language lessons, a place to network for jobs, and above all a place to relax with others who share one's own cultural assumptions and to whom nothing needs to be explained. Though all Buddhists (of course) have their own ethnicity, it is only in Buddhist groups of this type that ethnicity serves as the primary defining feature. This type can therefore be labeled "Ethnic Buddhism."

Buddhism in America, at this stage in its history, thus includes participants of three quite different sorts. But though all would call themselves Buddhists, communication across (or even within) these three categories is often difficult, even nonexistent. Within the Elite category we do find considerable exchange; it is not at all unusual for participants to move easily from Vipassana practice to Tibetan Buddhism to Zen. Yet Elite Buddhists do not accord the same acceptance to members of Evangelical and Ethnic Buddhist groups. Since they do not practice meditation—so the reasoning goes—members of these two latter groups cannot be considered "genuine" Buddhists.

Such exclusion-by-definition has not, needless to say, been viewed kindly by those who are excluded—especially the Ethnic Buddhists, whose roots in the faith usually are many generations deep. But it is not only Elite Buddhists whose map of the Buddhist world renders other practitioners invisible. Evangelical Buddhists, too, operate on the basis of a narrow definition of "true Buddhism" (their expression), considering both Elite and Ethnic Buddhists to have missed something essential since they do not practice the chant taught by the Soka Gakkai. Ethnic Buddhists tend, in general, to be less critical of their coreligionists, in large part because they have not abbreviated the spectrum of "real" Buddhism so severely, retaining as they do a broad range of the moral, meditative, and ritual practices that were current in their homelands. Ironically, though, these Buddhists have little incentive to communicate with other Ethnic Buddhist groups, precisely because part of their mission is to preserve their own distinctive culture.

Even when attempts to cross the boundaries dividing these groups are made, the results can be discouraging. When Americans of non-Asian descent are drawn to Ethnic Buddhist temples, for example, the result is often what Paul Numrich of the University of Illinois calls, in *Old Wisdom in the New World* (1996), "parallel congregations": rather than merging to form a single organization, Asian and

non-Asian American Buddhists have often found their visions of Buddhism to be so incompatible that they simply meet at separate times in the same building.

Given these deep rifts within American Buddhism, we might well ask whether any of these subgroups will succeed in becoming a permanent part of the American religious landscape. For Ethnic Buddhists, the question is the one faced by all immigrants: will our children follow in our footsteps? For earlier generations of Asian immigrants, the value of remaining members of a religion viewed as “deviant” by mainstream society was not at all self-evident. Of the roughly 500,000 Japanese Americans in the United States today, for example, fewer than 20,000 are registered as members of the Buddhist Churches of America, the largest Japanese-American Buddhist organization in the country. The vast majority of Japanese Americans have either become Christians (virtually all of them Protestant) or claim no religious affiliation at all.

Things may be different today. Though Buddhists, especially Asian-American Buddhists, still encounter hostility and even violence in some parts of the country, the very fact that Buddhism is now relatively well known in the United States—and even carries, in some circles, significant prestige—may mean that more recent Asian Buddhist immigrants will view their ancestral religion as an asset, not a liability. So far, though, the evidence suggests that this may not be enough to stem the tide of religious assimilation. Ironically, recent Asian immigrants seem to be converting to Christianity (and increasingly its evangelical forms, as Stanford University religion professor Rudy Busto observed in *Amerasia Journal* last year) as rapidly as European Americans are becoming Buddhists.

For Evangelical Buddhists, the greatest challenge may arise not from circumstances in the United States but from events in Japan. In 1991, after years of wrangling between the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, the Soka Gakkai was formally excommunicated by its parent organization. The real sources of the conflict appear to lie in a struggle between the priesthood and the lay organization for financial and political control, but each side has portrayed the dispute as resulting from the religious heresy and moral corruption of the other. The Soka Gakkai has attempted to take the rhetorical high road, likening its separation from the priesthood to the Protestant Reformation, but it remains to be seen whether its membership will find this representation convincing. While the American organization still seems viable, a serious decline in the number of subscribers to the organization’s weekly newspaper (which in recent years has dipped below 40,000) suggests that the schism may have dealt it a painful blow.

The Elite Buddhist groups, by contrast, would seem at first glance to be in good health: major bookstores offer entire shelves of publications on Tibetan Buddhism, Vipassana, and Zen, and mainstream

newspapers and magazines frequently carry articles on the subject. So thoroughly do Elite Buddhist concerns (such as “engaged Buddhism,” much of it the result of Western social activism exported to Asia and subsequently re-exported to the West) dominate the media’s picture of Buddhism that these groups often appear to be the only game in town.

Yet Elite Buddhist groups have one striking demographic peculiarity: virtually all of the communities now in existence were formed by people who came of age during the late 1960s and early ’70s, and members of succeeding age cohorts have joined in much smaller numbers. If such communities do not succeed in attracting younger members (and in retaining the children of the first-generation converts), they will soon fade from the American religious scene.

History offers American Buddhists a chastening lesson. During the 1890s, the United States experienced a “Buddhism boom” not unlike that of today. The *New York Journal* reported that “it is no uncommon thing to hear a New Yorker say he is a Buddhist nowadays,” the historian Thomas Tweed writes in *The American Encounter with Buddhism* (1992). A number of Protestant ministers worried in print that their congregations might be attracted to this strange faith. Public interest was strong enough to provoke the *Atlantic Monthly* to run a feature article titled “The Religion of Gotama Buddha.” Yet by the early 1920s the boom was over, and Buddhism became all but invisible in American life save for a handful of Asian-American congregations.

If today’s American Buddhists are to avoid the fate of their predecessors of a century ago, they must accomplish two things. First, they must move beyond the concept of Buddhism as a matter of individual “religious preference,” grounding it instead in the everyday practice of families and larger social networks. Second, they must create sturdy institutions to take the place of today’s informal associations of like-minded practitioners. In dealing with the first necessity, Ethnic Buddhists, who have always seen their religion as a family affair, are clearly in the lead. The Evangelical Buddhists, with their ready-made organizational structures imported from Japan, may well have the edge in establishing institutions.

Ironically, it is the Buddhists we hear the most about in the American media—the Elite Buddhists—who have so far attracted the least diverse membership, and thus have the greatest challenges to overcome if they are to survive into the next generation. Yet each of the main branches of American Buddhism clearly has much to learn from the others if all three hope to continue to flourish on American soil.

The Worldliness Of Buddhism

by Donald K. Swearer

Despite Buddhism's growing presence in the West, most Americans still badly misunderstand this ancient world religion. The leaders of Philadelphia's Thai community were rudely reminded of this unpleasant fact during the 1980s when they set out to buy land for a Buddhist temple and monastery not far from the City of Brotherly Love. After searching nearly a year, the Thais were delighted to find a lovely 10-acre site overlooking a lake in southeastern Pennsylvania's Chester County. All that was needed was the local zoning board's permission to use the site for religious purposes.

Arriving on the appointed day for their hearing before the board, the group's leaders were surprised to find an angry, standing-room-only crowd packing the room. One after another during the long evening, impassioned residents rose to vent their fears about the Buddhists' plans. A Buddhist presence would destroy the community's Christian and



The Three Jewels of Buddhism: the Buddha, the Dharma (symbolized by the lotus flower), and the sangha (the monk rising from the flower)

American values, some speakers said. Others worried that proselytizing Buddhists would brainwash their sons and daughters and lure them into esoteric religious practices. Buddhism to these Americans was barely distinguishable from the Hare Krishnas and other cults, an exotic threat to their world. The dismayed Thais immediately withdrew their application. No one had asked them about their intentions or aspirations. Nor did it seem likely that anyone would.

Unfortunately, the opponents of the Buddhist temple in Chester County were no worse informed about the nature of Buddhism than most other Americans. To be sure, the view of Buddhism as a mystical religion far removed from the realities of the workaday world has been a major part of the faith's appeal in the West. Yet whether this picture of Buddhism-as-esoteric-religion is seen in a negative or positive light, it is still a flawed and one-dimensional portrait. It is a portrait, however, with a long history. Some of the earliest Western explicators of Buddhism, such as W. Y. Evans-Wentz in *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrine* (1935) and Alexandra David-Neel in *Magic and Mystery in Tibet* (1929), painted Tibetan Buddhism in shades of the exotic and esoteric. During the 1950s, D. T. Suzuki's depiction of Zen Buddhism as antirational and iconoclastic had great appeal to Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac (author of *The Dharma Bums* [1958]), and other members of the Beat Generation. The appeal spilled over into the counterculture movement, which made books such as Alan Watt's *Way of Zen* (1957) and Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* (1922; translation 1951) part of the young's standard equipment. Today, Buddhism is probably personified for most people by the Dalai Lama and celebrity followers such as actor Richard Gere. (That is only the beginning: the Dalai Lama is featured in two upcoming Hollywood movies.)

The view of Buddhism held by many Westerners is one-sided, but not totally without foundation. From its very beginning some 2,500 years ago, there has been within Buddhism a tension between the this-worldly and the other-worldly. This tension was at the heart of many early doctrinal controversies about such matters as the nature of Nirvana, the purpose of monastic life, and the character of the relationship between monks and the laity. Its origins go back to the life of the founder, Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha, or the Enlightened One.

Buddhism emerged in what is now southern Nepal during the sixth century B.C.E. The traditional dates of the Buddha's life are 563–483 B.C.E., although some modern scholars place his lifetime more than 100 years later. It was a time of unusual upheaval and change throughout the world, as the widespread adoption of iron tools and weapons revolutionized farming and warfare. During the Buddha's lifetime, the vast plains of northern India nourished by the Ganges River and its tributaries were being remade. The region's thick forests were disappearing as an expanding population

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In a 19th-century painting from Burma, the Buddha and his followers receive alms from a layman.

claimed more and more land for paddy rice and other cultivated crops. New towns and cities sprang up, and with them came a radically new political order as powerful rulers absorbed the region's many small, autonomous states into larger kingdoms and empires. The Buddha himself lived to see the land of his clan, the Sakyas, overrun by another kingdom, which itself later fell to an even larger empire.

Elsewhere in the ancient world, similar changes were bringing forth other thinkers and prophets, from Confucius and Lao-tse in China to Thales, Heraclitus, and other pre-Socratics in Greece. In India, the Buddha and other mendicant truth seekers—including Makkhali Gosala and Mahavira, the respective founders of the Ajavikas and the Jains—attracted small groups of disciples who followed an informal code of religious discipline and shared many of the same religious concepts. They set themselves against the dominant Brahmanism, which elevated a priestly caste to prominence. The charismatic challengers, although not revered as divine, were honored both for their teachings and for magical feats achieved through the disciplines of yoga, meditation, and asceticism.

Solid facts about the Buddha's life are scarce. The earliest sacred biographies, such as the *Buddhacarita* (The acts of the Buddha), written in the second century B.C.E., are mostly myth and legend. Buddhism's many different traditions have different versions of the Buddha story, and there even are variations within each tradition.

In the version accepted by Theravada Buddhists, who are predomi-



A monastery painting shows the chain of dependent origination. It is gripped by Mara, the personification of death. The animals in the center represent the cardinal faults (passion, hatred, and delusion); the big segments show the six spheres of existence.

nant in Southeast Asia, the Buddha was born Prince Siddhartha Gautama, the son of the ruler of the Sakya clan in the foothills of the Himalayas. Shortly after his birth, eight learned fortunetellers predicted that Siddhartha would become either a universal, world-conquering monarch or a fully enlightened Buddha. Distressed at the prospect that his son might not succeed him, Siddhartha's father surrounded him with material pleasures and possessions. At the age of 16 the prince married, and his father built him three splendid palaces, one for each season, where he was attended by servants and concubines and no less

than 40,000 dancing girls. During the next 17 years, according to legendary accounts, Siddhartha was “wholly given over to pleasure.”

The story takes a dramatic turn when the prince encounters a decrepit old man, a grievously ill man, a corpse, and finally an ascetic. These experiences threw Siddhartha into despair. His palace, “as splendid as the palace of the chief of the gods, began to seem like a charnal ground filled with dead bodies and the three modes of existence [past, present, future] like houses of fire.” He vowed to live the life of a wandering ascetic in a quest for an eternal truth beyond the transient truths of ordinary sense perception and beyond the inexorable realities of aging, sickness, and death. For six years he wandered northern India with five disciples (one of whom was one of the original eight fortunetellers). To no avail, he studied the teachings of the great philosophers and masters of yoga and practiced extreme forms of renunciation and asceticism, at times living on a single grain of rice per day, at others going completely without food. These years, says one Buddhist text, “were like time spent in endeavoring to tie the air into knots.” Finally, after he collapsed during a long fast and was given up for dead by his followers, the Buddha abandoned this path.

After he regained his health, the Buddha seated himself beneath a tree and resolved not to rise until he had found enlightenment. To achieve it he was forced to confront Mara, the lord of the senses, who is strongly associated with death. Again, accounts of this epoch battle between good and evil vary, but in the end Siddhartha defeats the hosts his foe sends against him, calling on the power of Mother Earth to defend himself. He spends the rest of the night in deep meditation, finally attaining insight into the nature of suffering, its cause and its cessation—a state of understanding and equanimity called Nirvana. The tradition dates this event to 528 B.C.E., and the Buddha’s first words uttered after his enlightenment have been passed down in poetry and legend:

Long have I wandered;
Long bound by the chain of life.
Through many births
I have sought in vain
The builder of this house [mind and body].
Suffering is birth again and again.
O housemaker [craving], I now see you!
You shall not build this house again.
Broken are all your rafters,
Your roof beam destroyed.
My mind has attained the unconditioned,
And reached the end of all craving.

The Buddha’s victory represents the core teaching of early Buddhism: suffering and death can be overcome only when ignorance and desire have been put aside. This message was encapsulated in the Buddha’s first post-enlightenment teaching, *Setting the Wheel of the Truth in Motion*. This discourse, delivered to his five disciples at what is now the Deer Park

in the holy city of Benares, enumerated the Four Noble Truths: that life's pleasures and satisfactions are ultimately unsatisfactory or unfulfilling, that this sense of dissatisfaction is rooted in selfish attachment and greed based on an erroneous perception of ego; that a deeper sense of purpose and meaning (Nirvana) is achieved when the false sense of ego is transcended, and that the way to this saving knowledge is by means of the Noble Eightfold Path. The Path's eight elements are right understanding, right intention, right speech, right conduct, right vocation, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Before the five followers would accept his teaching, however, the Buddha had to persuade them that in casting off his life as an ascetic he had not merely embraced its opposite, a life of pleasure. The path to enlightenment, he told them, required following a Middle Way, avoiding the extremes of self-mortification and self-indulgence. The Middle Way is a life of simplicity, not discomfort. When the skeptical disciples finally accepted the Buddha's teaching they became the first members of the *sangha*, or religious order. They, too, eventually became, like the Buddha himself, *arhat* (perfected ones), though their enlightenment was not the equal of the full and perfect enlightenment of the Buddha.

Soon the *sangha* had 60 members, all of whom traveled to spread the Buddha's teaching within an area of perhaps 200 square miles in northern India, and all of whom became *arhat*. Their leader himself spent 45 years as a mendicant teacher. According to Buddhist accounts, he attracted followers from many social classes and walks of life, including merchants, aristocrats, and even ascetics such as the great yogi Kasyapa, whom the Buddha converted through feats of levitation and clairvoyance. After some debate, the Buddha reluctantly allowed women to undertake the monastic life. Mahaprajapati, who was the Buddha's aunt as well as his stepmother, became the first Buddhist nun.

The Western scholars and travelers who took up the study of Buddhism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were enthralled by this story of the Buddha's renunciation and enlightenment. In their writings they implicitly contrasted Buddhism with the faith-based theism of Christianity, portraying it as a rational religious philosophy pursued through a quiet life of renunciation and meditation. A few of these early observers emphasized the more mystical and esoteric aspects of Buddhism, but they shared with other Westerners a focus on what the famed German sociologist Max Weber called religious "virtuosos"—the Buddhist monks who performed heroic feats of fasting and meditation in pursuit of absolute truth.

It is largely because of these earlier writers, especially Weber, that the West has acquired a skewed portrait of Buddhism as a world-denying religion. Idealizing the *sangha* as a company of renouncers, they tended to dismiss the everyday devotional Buddhism of the faith's many ordinary adherents—including such things as their veneration of the *sangha* and of Buddha images and relics—as a corrupt form of Buddhism that arose as illiterate peasants throughout Asia embraced the faith after the Budd-



The vast ninth-century stupa and temple complex at Borobudur, on the Indonesian island of Java, is one of the most magnificent sites in the Buddhist world.

ha's death. In these writers' hands, Buddhism was made to appear a faith virtually without historical, sociological, and political dimensions.

But the "worldliness" of Buddhism may be said to have begun with the Buddha himself. He was, after all, a man of considerable charisma who worked ceaselessly after his enlightenment to show others the way to the truth. Among his most important early supporters were local kings and nobles in northern India, men who had been moved by his words and deeds, such as King Bimbisara, the ruler of the kingdom of Magadha.

The Buddha himself is said to have warned his followers on more than one occasion against worshipping him. In the *Samyutta-Nikaya*, he sends away an overly attentive disciple named Vatkali, saying "What good to you is this body of filth? He who sees the dharma [teachings] sees me." Yet in his own lifetime the Buddha received generous offerings from devoted lay followers, and veneration of his bodily relics may have begun immediately after his death (apparently from dysentery) and cremation in 483 B.C.E. According to Buddhist sources, the Buddha's cremated remains were divided among eight Indian rulers, who enshrined them in reliquary mounds (*stupas*) in their kingdoms. Legend also recounts that King Asoka, who ruled Magadha from about 273 to 232 B.C.E. and eventually extended his dominion—and the influence of Buddhism—over much of the Indian subcontinent, re-enshrined these relics at 84,000 locations throughout India. As Buddhism later spread throughout Asia,

ever more elaborate and beautiful *stupas* were built.

The cult of *stupas* was one of the earliest forms of Buddhist devotional religion. The *stupa* not only symbolized the Buddha but in a magical sense made him present. Freestanding images of the Buddha that began to appear as early as the first century B.C.E. served a similar purpose. In his own lifetime, the Blessed One and the *sangha* received offerings from their lay followers, who came not only to hear religious teachings but hoping to gain some boon or benefit—if not in this life then in some future one. After his death, pilgrims traveled to the *stupas* in order to be in his presence, bringing offerings of incense, flowers, and material goods. Monks, who were originally respected chiefly as teachers of the Buddha's dharma, came to be revered as representatives of his sacred wisdom and repositories of his power. They, too, were showered with offerings by hopeful laypeople.

Ordinary religious practice developed along different lines in different countries, but it generally combines a concern with otherworldly affairs with a very ordinary interest in such things as good health and good crops. The faithful may worship at home before their own shrines and at weekly temple rituals. Throughout the Buddhist world, ceremonies and festivals mark major events such as the lunar New Year, Buddha's Day, and changes in the agricultural cycle. Some holidays are unique to certain locales or specially attuned to local tastes. Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Buddhists honor their ancestors during All Souls feasts. In Tibet, the new year festival includes a ritual exorcism of evil; in Chiang Mai, in northern Thailand, an image of the Buddha is paraded through the streets in hopes of ensuring the onset of the monsoon rains. A day at a temple fair with the raucous noise of hawkers and entertainers would convince most outsiders that Buddhism is not all about withdrawal and meditation.

These rituals, ceremonies, and festivals elevate life from the mundane and give meaning to the seemingly random nature of human experience by connecting it to a Buddhist narrative framework. Buddhism also helps to define social ethics for laypeople, upholding the virtues of generosity and loving kindness toward humans and animals and placing a high value on honesty and uprightness. All Buddhists are expected to embrace the Five Precepts—which forbid killing, stealing, lying, adultery, and the consumption of alcohol. From the renunciant elements of Buddhist practice comes an emphasis on the values of simplicity, equanimity, and non-violence. These values are not confined to the monastery. Lose your temper in a 20th-century Chiang Mai market, and ordinary Thais will soothe you with the words *jai-yen* (literally, have a cool head).

While Buddhists have evolved various conceptions of salvation, early Buddhism did not look for release in an eternal hereafter. The Buddhist conception of existence is cyclical, with escape from the pain of worldly existence possible only for those who attain Nirvana after many lifetimes of effort. In Buddhism there is rebirth but no reincarnation. The Buddha taught that the

idea of a self or soul is an illusion (a teaching that has caused endless debate among his followers). What is reborn is a consciousness conditioned by the sum of all past actions, or karma.

Buddhism's concern with earthly affairs began, in a sense, at the top. As it spread through Asia during the centuries after the Buddha's death, it owed much of its success to the support of powerful kings, many of whom were attracted to Buddhism because it provided a cosmological scheme legitimating a powerful, centralized rule, a scheme rooted in a cyclical view of history. In the golden age, a universal monarch presided over a realm free from poverty, violence, and wrongdoing. But in a world marked by strife, hostility, and greed, kings must maintain order in the secular realm, by force if necessary, while the *sangha* presides over spiritual life and guides monarchs to further the welfare of their subjects.

Probably not by accident, many of the important legends concerning kingship date from about the time of Buddhism's most famous royal patron, King Asoka. In about 264 B.C.E. Asoka conquered Kalinga, the most powerful kingdom in India still independent of his rule, but was so appalled by the horrors his armies had inflicted on the Kalingans that he embraced the Buddha's teaching of nonviolence and compassion. Asoka became convinced that the only true conquest was not by force of arms but by the force of the teachings of religion. If his heirs should also become conquerors, he wrote, "they should take pleasure in patience and gentleness, and regard as (the only true) conquest the conquest won by piety."

Asoka himself may not have been a practicing Buddhist, but there is no doubt that he was an active supporter of the faith. He generously subsidized the monastic order and did much to aid the spread of Buddhism. He was, by all accounts, a wise and humane ruler, and tolerant of other faiths (as were many later Buddhist rulers). On rocks and stone pillars he erected throughout the lands under his control—a number of them still standing—he engraved edicts extolling virtuous behavior, commending specific Buddhist texts, and encouraging his subjects to make the pilgrimage to Bodh-Gaya, the Buddha's birthplace.

A religion that lives by royal patronage can also die without it. Little more than 50 years after King Asoka's death in 232 B.C.E., when his empire passed into the hands of Hindu successors, Buddhism began to wane in the land of its birth. It would revive under royal patronage, but after the 10th century C.E. its last lights in India would flicker out under the combined assaults of a resurgent Hinduism and invasions by the followers of Muhammad.

Throughout Asia, the relationship between state and *sangha* would be vitally important to Buddhism's condition. In north China, Buddhism flourished until the Northern Wei emperor decreed in 446 C.E. that all Buddhist temples and *stupas* were to be destroyed. The religion was later revived but fell again after 846 when a T'ang

imperial edict led to the destruction of some 4,600 monasteries and 40,000 temples and forced more than 260,000 monks and nuns to return to lay life. Buddhism by then was too thoroughly integrated into Chinese life to disappear, but it would never regain the vibrancy it had once enjoyed. Today, in other parts of Asia, the state's role remains important, for better and for worse. In Thailand, Buddhism flourishes as the state religion, while in Cambodia, the faith is still recovering from Pol Pot's murderous assault on monks and religious institutions.

Asoka's patronage, however, was especially important in the history of Buddhism, for he not only sustained the faith at an important point in its development but spread it far beyond his own borders. According to Buddhist accounts, two of his children brought Buddhism to Sri Lanka, and another carried it to Central Asia. It was chiefly from Sri Lanka, especially around the 12th century C.E., that Buddhism spread to Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, and Vietnam. But Buddhism also traveled by many other routes. Central Asia became a major center of Buddhism by the first century C.E., and from there the faith spread along the Silk Road and into China and Korea. It also traveled from India across the Bay of Bengal to the region around Thailand. It was a two-way traffic. Pilgrims also journeyed to India from China and other far-flung regions in search of knowledge from the source.

They did not always find the same Buddhism—and for good reasons: the Buddha's teachings were not even written down until several centuries after his death, and *sanghas* existed in widely scattered locales, many nurturing their own distinctive interpretations and producing their own texts. Tradition has it that there were 18 different schools of Buddhism in these early days. But the main division, arising as early as the first century B.C.E., separated Hinayana Buddhists and reformist Mahayana Buddhists, who took for themselves the mantle of "Greater Vehicle," sticking their rivals with the "Lesser Vehicle" label.

There are within these great schools many lesser divisions. Theravada Buddhism, with roots in the Hinayana tradition embraced and transmitted by Asoka, is predominant in Southeast Asia. Mahayana Buddhism includes many schools—including Zen in China, Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, and Vajrayana in Tibet, and Jodo Shin Shu (or the Pure Land) in Japan.

The Theravada-Mahayana division has its origins partly in disagreements over the all-important rules of conduct governing monks, and partly in disputes over the meaning of certain Buddhist teachings about the nature of the self and the Buddha. Theravada Buddhists are said to be "original" Buddhists in that they adhere to the notion of the historical Buddha and the faith's early emphasis on monks striving for enlightenment. Mahayana Buddhism offers a more metaphysical reading of the Buddha, placing more emphasis on his previous lives as *bodhisattva*, or aspirant to Buddhahood. Many interpreters insist that Mahayana Buddhism makes the prospect of achieving Buddhahood more of a possibility for laypeople as well as monks, and that it encourages all Buddhists, as *bodhisattvas*, to work for the liberation of other people, just as the



Exiled Tibetan Buddhists gather at a temple in Dharamsala, India.

Buddha did. But this distinction is debatable. What can be safely said is that Mahayana Buddhism blurs the distinction between monk and laity far more than classical Theravada did.

Everywhere it took root, Buddhism assumed a different coloration, engaging the world as it adapted to local cultures and religious practices. In many places, relatively simple and unorganized animistic faiths prevailed, offering relatively little resistance to Buddhism. In Thailand Buddhism encountered the *phi*, in Myanmar the cult of *nats*. In Tibet, a form of Tantric Buddhism (itself related to mystical Hindu Tantrism) that arrived in the 8th century C.E. blended with the local Bön shamanism, creating a unique form of Buddhism. By the end of the 16th century, Tibet had become a Buddhist theocracy ruled by the Dalai (great ocean) Lama (teacher), revered as an incarnation of Avolokitesvara, the kingdom's protective deity. The current Dalai Lama is the 14th in this line.

Buddhism was most profoundly altered in China, Korea, and Japan, where Mahayana Buddhists faced well-established and sophisticated doctrines. In all of these countries, the monastic structure of Indian Buddhism gradually yielded to a more laity-based religious practice. In China, for example, Buddhism clashed with the secular, pragmatic doctrines of the Confucian elite, who could hardly have seen the "otherworldly" Buddhist pursuit of enlightenment and Nirvana as anything but alien and threatening. The withdrawal of monks from family and society, their dependence on others for their support, and their claims of independence from worldly government all cut distinctly against the Confucian grain. Chinese Taoism, too, with its

emphasis on the living and on achieving harmony with the forces of nature, did not readily give way before Buddhism. So Buddhism in its many forms accommodated itself to China, attaching itself to existing doctrines where it could and adapting in other cases. In the meditative traditions that developed in India, for example, enlightenment is a goal realized only after many lifetimes of arduous practice under great teachers, while in the most authentically Chinese forms of Zen, enlightenment is a sudden, spontaneous experience.

The coming of Western colonialism and Christianity beginning in the 16th century cast a pall over the Buddhist world. In Sri Lanka, for example, by the time the Portuguese were expelled (by the Dutch) in 1658, some 150 years after their arrival, only five ordained Buddhist monks remained. In places where the Westerners were less zealous in their efforts to convert those they conquered or where other circumstances were more auspicious, Buddhism fared better, but only Thailand and Japan completely escaped colonization.

By the 19th century, resistance to colonial rule in many Asian nations was beginning to coalesce around a new Buddhist nationalism. In 1918, the leaders of the Young Men's Buddhist Association in Rangoon used the British colonials' refusal to remove their shoes when entering Buddhist pagodas to launch a campaign for Burma's independence. The country's first leader after independence in 1948, prime minister U Nu, saw himself in the tradition of the classical Buddhist kings, and like other Buddhist nationalists often evoked Asoka's name. Before he was displaced in a 1962 coup, he tried to create a Buddhist socialism under which the basic material needs of all citizens would be met by the state, freeing them to pursue higher spiritual ends. Today many Buddhist monks risk prison or death to publicly support Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the democracy movement that struggles against the military dictatorship established after U Nu.

To Americans, modern Buddhism's engagement with the world was most memorably demonstrated in South Vietnam, where Buddhist protesters helped bring down the corrupt Ngo Dinh Diem regime in 1963. That year, the Venerable Thich Quang-Duc, one of many politically active Buddhist monks, set himself on fire in Saigon to protest the Diem regime's anti-Buddhist policies, an event engraved in the world's consciousness by photojournalist Malcolm Browne's famous photograph. The mobilization of Vietnam's Buddhist monks during the war years helped lay the foundation for a new kind of Buddhist involvement in the world.

During the past four decades, an international, ecumenical Buddhism has emerged, led by a trio of remarkable men. The chief inspiration for the worldwide "engaged Buddhist" movement, as it is known, has been Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen master and founder of the Tiep Hien Order of Interbeing, an international organization of laypeople, monks, and nuns headquartered at Plum Village, a meditation retreat in southern France. Sulak Sivaraksa, a Thai layman, has led

efforts to fight rural poverty, prostitution, AIDS, and drug abuse in his native country—often battling the Thai government as well—and is the founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists. The groups in this alliance are transforming a monastery-based religion into a force against environmental degradation and the economic pressures that are destroying the social and cultural fabric of many developing countries. While friendly to Christianity and other faiths of the West, the leaders of this movement are critical of traditional Western views of nature and Western materialism.

The world's most widely recognized representative of engaged Buddhism is plainly the Dalai Lama. Living in exile in the northern Indian city of Dharamsala, where he fled two years after communist China occupied Tibet in 1957, he has gained worldwide stature. He lectures around the world on human rights, economic justice, and environmental protection, and challenges the international community to bring pressure to bear on China to end its policies of ethnic cleansing and ecological and cultural genocide in Tibet.

Accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, the Dalai Lama dispelled any sense one might have of Buddhism as solely an otherworldly religion. His speech included concrete proposals for Tibet and the world, including the demilitarization of his native country and a ban on the manufacture, testing, and stockpiling of nuclear weapons around the world—a ban that is coming closer to realization every day. His was not the speech of a monk locked away from the world in a meditative trance. Indeed, he closed his address with a short prayer that exemplifies the Buddhist spirit of engagement with the world:

For as long as space endures,
And for as long as living beings remain,
Until then may I, too, abide
To dispel the misery of the world.

Engaged Buddhism thus joins a long and honorable roll of Buddhisms that have been born during the more than 2,500 years since the nativity of the founder. It is this very heterodoxy and diversity—so extreme that not all Buddhists bow to the same Buddha—that have proved to be the faith's great strength over the centuries.

CURRENT BOOKS

The Great Organizer

W. B. YEATS: A LIFE

Volume I: *The Apprentice Mage*.

By R. F. Foster. Oxford University Press. 625 pp. \$35

by Patrick J. Keane

Shortly after the visit to the Waterford classroom that engendered one of his greatest poems, William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) jotted down this note: “School children and the thought that life will waste them, perhaps that no possible life can fulfill their own dreams or even their teacher’s hope. Bring in the old thought that life prepares for what never happens.” Traceable back to the poet’s 1909 diary, this “old thought” was resurrected at the close of *Reveries*, the memoir Yeats completed in December 1914: “All life weighed in the scales of my own life seems a preparation for something that never happens.” With poetic triumphs (including the Nobel Prize) still to come, with cultural battles yet to wage, with marriage and children in the future, this summary was, to say the least, premature. The “enormous irony” of Yeats declaring his life anticlimactic and essentially over is noted by Foster, who quotes this passage at the conclusion of the massive first volume of the long-awaited authorized biography.

There have been times during the past quarter-century when the thought of “preparing for something that never happens” threatened to become ironic in another sense. The authorized biography was assigned in 1971 to Denis Donoghue. But crossed signals between Senator Michael Yeats and Donoghue, who had requested exclusive access to unpublished papers, led to a reassignment of the task in the mid-1970s. The new biographer was the distinguished historian F. S. L. Lyons, whose sudden death in 1983 required yet another passing of the torch. Foster, the man selected, made use of Lyons’s notes and transcripts but chose to leave unseen the small portion of text he had begun.

Thus, while Foster’s book is dedicated to his late predecessor, it is not a cooperative project. The work has, of course, benefited not only from the generosity of the Yeats family but also the labors of the Yeats Industry. Foster has had the advantage of William Murphy’s studies of the poet’s family, the ongoing and splendidly annotated *Collected Letters*, and a host of specialized studies. He has ably incorporated these materials into his own formidable research in libraries and collections in Ireland, England, and the United States.

Like Lyons, Foster (the Carroll Professor of Irish History at Oxford) is a major and sometimes controversial historian, the author of, among other works, the widely read “revisionist” history *Modern Ireland 1600–1972*. “Revisionists” in general set out, with cool lucidity and astringent skepticism, to correct the more pious, sentimental, teleological versions of Irish history—sometimes forgetting that an objective case can be made for the “traditionalist” expression of righteous indignation at historical injustice. Like Yeats himself, Foster maintains an agile balance in negotiating these crosscurrents. To say that he succeeds in being fair-minded may be to say little more than that his informed and nuanced description of the politics of the period seems just to this reviewer.

In addition, readers will expect not so much a critical exegesis of the poetry, illuminating the “work” in terms of the “life,” as a study bristling with facts, personal details enmeshed in a rich ancestral, familial, and sociohistorical context, with especially adroit handling of cultural and political complexities. This is precisely what Foster delivers. As he notes, most biographical studies of Yeats “are principally

about what he wrote; this one is principally about what he did.” This distinction follows Foster’s tribute to the “luminous works” of Richard Ellmann. By separating the strands of Yeats’s multiplicitous interests and treating them individually and thematically, Ellmann created masterpieces of analysis to which all Yeatsians remain indebted. But as Foster observes, Yeats, like all of us, lived not by “themes, but day by day.” To dissect a complex lived experience can clarify at the expense of creating a false impression. Foster’s own clarifications are not thematically imposed but emerge from the tangled matrix of the life lived by Yeats through the age of 50, when he wrote *Reveries*.

Perforce, Foster covers some well-traveled ground. Yet never before in a single volume have the intersections and nuances been presented in such sophisticated detail. Or with such grace: Foster recreates Yeats’s experience with an aphorist’s concision and a novelist’s wit, while never forgetting that his man is a poet, an alchemical transmuter of experience into great art. Reciprocally, the art remains grounded in the life. One of the two epigraphs to the book records Yeats’s insistence that a writer’s life “is an experiment in living” and that “poetry is no rootless flower but the speech of a man.”

Indeed, Yeats’s poetry was the speech of a resilient and sometimes ruthless man who—despite money problems, political and organizational setbacks, endless controversies, sexual frustrations—strove single-mindedly to achieve literary distinction and to dominate the Irish cultural scene. The youthful and maturing man we encounter in these pages was concerned not only with literal and literary immortality but with tactical and strategic *success*. Well before the establishment of the

Abbey Theatre, the Great Organizer was an active founder and participant in any number of societies—literary, nationalist, occult. The dreamy young poet of Celtic twilight and shadowy waters was also a hardheaded realist, adept at working the political and literary levers and determined both to forge a personal identity and to shape his milieu.

Foster is especially good at discriminating between what actually occurred and versions that emerged in Yeatsian retrospect, filtered not only through the poet’s shaping imagination but through his later positions and concerns. In time, Yeats abandoned his earlier Fenianism, what Foster gingerly describes as “advanced national-

ism,” in favor of a more moderate constitutional nationalism anticipating Home Rule. Though Yeats was always capable of tailoring, even contradicting, his political stance for one audience or another, by and large he stood for a commitment to literary quality as opposed to political banality. In battle after battle, he courageously defended intellectual and artistic freedom against the force aligned against him—that mixture of Fenian

frenzy, nationalist piety, Catholic censorship, sexual repression, and commercial vulgarity that constituted, in his eyes, Irish philistinism.

Yeats’s assaults on the ignorant, in print or from the Abbey stage, were hardly calming. Always held suspect by the Catholic majority and often eager for a row, he became increasingly combative. Foster rightly emphasizes the importance of the first American tour, of 1903–4, in building Yeats’s confidence. This journey was double-edged because it both confirmed the poet’s leadership of the Irish Renaissance and created resentment. Foster supplies many colorful and perceptive por-



traits by Yeats's contemporaries, typically more admiring of his genius than personally flattering. The best known is doubtless the writer George Moore's puncturing of the Yeats afflatus in describing how the great man returned from his American triumphs clad in certitudes and a chinchilla coat.

The Moore anecdote is well known. But there will be, even for Yeatsians, many surprises; this biography, though remote from the schools of leveling and debunking, is not without its revelations. For example, those who thought that Yeats's experimentation with drugs was limited to a brief sampling of "hemp" in decadent Paris will learn that he continued to smoke hashish and ingest it in the more potent form of tablets; he also experimented with mescaline. But he discontinued the use of hallucinogens, and there is no evidence that he derived any creative benefit from them.

Also illuminated are Yeats's relations with women. Interestingly, most of his liaisons or near-liaisons overlapped with other interests. His first "full" experience was with the lovely and unhappily married Olivia Shakespeare, with whom he would enjoy a lifelong personal and epistolary friendship. The attractive Florence Farr is remembered as an actress, occult fellow traveler, and psaltery-playing chanter of Yeats's poetry; many will be intrigued to learn that she was also a firm believer in the health benefits of daily sexual intercourse—a regimen that required a goodly supply of lovers, including George Bernard Shaw and, 10 years after they met, and then briefly, Yeats. Foster quotes Farr's typically wry assessment of the affair: "I can do this for myself."

The fling with Farr occurred in 1903, soon after the bombshell of Maud Gonne's marriage. As everybody knows or else should know, the beautiful, elusive, exasperating firebrand Irish patriot Gonne haunted Yeats almost from the day he first saw her. There is no need here to rehearse the familiar—and no space to detail the unfamiliar—aspects of the troubled history of Yeats and his Muse, fairly and fully presented by Foster. Gonne was cordially despised by the poet's sisters and by his friend and collaborator Lady Augusta Gregory, who wished Gonne no peace in

the afterlife but who nevertheless saved her temporal fortune by advising her to marry John MacBride under English law, so that she could keep control of her own money in case the marriage failed—which, of course, it spectacularly did, with both personal and political implications for Yeats. Yes, Yeats and Gonne did become lovers 20 years after they met, only to rapidly revert, at her wish, to their purely mystical marriage.

Then there was the extravagant and dazzling Mrs. Patrick Campbell, the celebrated actress who once demanded if Yeats was "afraid" of her. "Not in the least," he replied, "you merely fill me with alarm." Lily Yeats, the alarmed man's sister, recalled that when Campbell came to discuss doing the verse drama *Deirdre*, it was "as if a fiery serpent had invited herself to tea." Nonetheless, Campbell gave Yeats one of his greatest triumphs. Thanks to her magnificent performance as Deirdre, the Abbey Theatre turned the financial corner and began to pay its own way.

Prior to that success, the chief financial support for the Abbey had been supplied by Yeats's English admirer Annie Horniman. Foster meticulously details the turbulent relationship with Horniman, whom Yeats cultivated until she became the Abbey's principal, if troublesome, benefactor. Her interest was multifaceted and at times as proprietary as Lady Gregory's. Though Yeats was not attracted, Horniman, flirtatious even when hurt or angry, certainly was. In the words of one Dublin-diverting limerick, it was a mistake for Horniman to choose "Willie Yeats/Who still masturbates/And at any rate isn't a horny man." In July 1909 Horniman wrote Yeats a remarkable letter that, in addition to expressing her disappointment and continued longing, astutely characterized the poet's attitude toward her: "I know that you hold the Nietzschean doctrine that you have no duties towards those who have neither Genius, Beauty, Rank (race or family) nor Distinction, that there are 'Slaves' & that I am one of them. . . . I have tried my best to serve Art in your country. . . . Perhaps you will see some good points in the despised 'slave' when you look back on the

past six years when you are an old man.”

In printing this unpublished document, which he perceptively describes as, for all its mixed tonalities, “a love-letter by other means,” Foster allows Annie Horniman, of all people, to locate the philosophical source of the ruthlessness and hauteur that, while alienating many peers and rivals, expedited the emergence of a Nietzschean noble spirit from the mists of the Celtic Twilight. Yeats’s further devel-

opment into the 20th century’s most powerful poet writing in English was still ahead in the watershed year 1914, this splendid volume’s terminus. But with *The Apprentice Mage* as “preparation,” one can hardly wait for Foster’s fleshing out of the life that did most brilliantly “happen.”

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Come Hell & High Water

RISING TIDE:

*The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927
and How It Changed America.*

By John M. Barry. Simon & Schuster. 524 pp. \$27.50

by Bertram Wyatt-Brown

With the Russian bear no longer threatening, Americans have become preoccupied with the forces of nature. Blizzards, wildfires, and mudslides dominate the headlines; twisters and volcanoes fill the cineplexes. Moreover, political debate rages about how we should treat pristine environments—as friends to be protected or enemies to be controlled. Under such circumstances, a history of the Great Flood of 1927 could hardly be more timely. The struggle to control the Mississippi River bears enough marks of hubris and human frailty to be America’s equivalent of the Tower of Babel.

Barry, a journalist and author of *The Transformed Cell* (1992), demonstrates how the best of intentions can lead to calamity. Power, greed, noble vision, and personal sacrifice are all part of the human epic he presents. Yet he also shows how the great midcontinental river presides over human destinies; in his telling, the statistics of water dynamics are as engaging as the idiosyncrasies of engineers, politicians, and flood relief workers. The Mississippi River moves, Barry writes, “in layers and whorls, like an uncoiling rope made up of discrete fibers, each one following an indepen-

dent and unpredictable path.” Whirlpools 800 feet long and 200 feet across gulp down flotsam, trees, houses. In high flood, the current can race as fast as 18 miles an hour, and a crevasse, a wall of water up to 100 feet high, can roll across open ground at 30 miles per hour.

In movies about natural catastrophes, the special effects often overshadow the human drama. But not here: Barry shapes his account around the vigorous and controversial personalities who, beginning in the 1850s, cut their own channels of influence in the struggle to rule river policy. First introduced is General Andrew Atkinson Humphreys, a neurotic but politically adept West Pointer who took over the Army Corps of Engineers after Appomattox. Humphreys denounced fresh approaches to water management, such as jetties (designed to wash away sandbars) and man-made outlets (to drain off flood waters), in favor of the techniques recommended by outdated West Point engineering textbooks: levees (raising the riverbanks) and dredging (deepening the riverbed). By perpetuating these hoary remedies, Humphreys fixed the agency in a surrealistic time warp.

If Humphreys is the villain of the

piece, then the hero is James Eads, a Saint Louis capitalist and engineer who argued for jetties and cut-offs on the grounds that it was better to guide the overflow than to try to contain it. The rivals' most serious encounter concerned a formidable sandbar that hindered shipping at the river's mouth. Eads won a federal contract to build jetties that would wash away the blockage. At one point, Humphreys's interference forced abandonment of the project. But by 1875, Eads and his crew had overcome the obstructions of both the river and the Corps of Engineers. The jetties Eads built enabled the Mississippi to scour a channel that within a few years increased shipping sevenfold and inaugurated a new era in the economic his-

Mississippi River Commission. The levees mounted ever higher, and the Corps dammed off one tributary after another. Ignoring the nascent science of water management, the aptly named General Lansing Beach, chief of engineers in 1922, pontificated that a proposed "hydraulics laboratory would have no value whatever in solving flood control." In April 1922, the river rose dangerously in its restricted bed, and New Orleans was spared disaster only because, 12 miles below the city, at Polydras, a levee was demolished by a wall of water the height of an 11-story building. If men would not make room for the overflow, then nature would.

The climax of the book is, of course, the Great Flood itself. Here Barry reveals a mixture of all-too-human motives, including those stemming from race and class, in two key places: the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta and New Orleans. The unceasing rains of early 1927 conjured images of Noah, but instead of an ark, the local authorities ordered more levees. Blacks were assigned the backbreaking toil of filling, hauling, and piling sandbags and, exhausted



Greenville, Mississippi, 1927

tory of New Orleans.

Humphreys may have lost that particular battle, but he won the war. Long after his retirement, the general's "levees-only policy" persisted—fueled by congressional parsimony and federal indifference to what should have been a national responsibility rather than an ill-considered state and local one. Why this occurred, Barry does not make entirely clear—though he does note that powerful economic interests were at stake in transforming the vast flood plain of the Mississippi into dry land that "would hum with money, and culture, and industry."

The experimental spirit of the Progressive Era did not penetrate the Corps of Engineers-dominated

by the work, were driven by white overseers wielding guns and whips, as in slavery days. On April 21, the crucial levee at Mound's Landing, north of Greenville, Mississippi, collapsed. "The roar of the crevasse," writes Barry, "carried up and down the river for miles, carried inland for miles. It roared like some great wild beast proclaiming its dominance. Men more miles away felt the levee vibrate under their feet and feared for their own lives." Perhaps 100 black workers were swept away, but only two deaths were reported. Hundreds of others, most of them black, were engulfed as the water "poured out 468,000 second-feet onto the Delta, triple the volume of a flooding Colorado, more than double a flooding Niagara Falls, more

than the entire upper Mississippi ever carried, including in [the flood of] 1993.”

To be sure, there were examples of self-sacrifice and interracial collaboration. Barry describes the heroic efforts of Delta boatmen, white and black, to rescue families—often watching helplessly as torrents and blustery winds separated them from helpless victims. Yet in Greenville, former United States senator LeRoy Percy and his bachelor son Will, heads of a family that had long ruled the district, responded in a way that inadvertently increased racial tensions. Earlier in the decade, the Percys had fought the Ku Klux Klan, earning the hostility of poor whites. Now they alienated poor blacks by permitting only whites to flee the besieged town. According to Barry, the Percys and other cotton planters feared that the black labor force, once gone, would not return.

Downriver in New Orleans, the city’s bankers—not municipal or state officials—prompted the dynamiting of a levee near the site of the Polydras break of 1922. This, they reasoned, would not only save the city but restore confidence in city bonds. Had the bankers waited one more day, water levels would have declined because of levee breaks elsewhere. But the demolition was carried out, and the parishes of Saint Bernard and Plaquemines were washed away to no purpose. Before the event, the city fathers had pledged to reimburse all those who lost their property, only to renege afterward in a particularly underhanded way. Populist resentment at this treachery led to Huey Long’s stridently sought electoral victories over the moneyed class at the close of the 1920s.

Although Barry’s narrative is unusually gripping, he can wax long-winded, as in the passage detailing LeRoy Percy’s difficulties with imported Italian laborers in 1907. The historian might wish for more analysis tying the story to national trends—though to be fair, the overall structure of the book leads neatly to its closing discussion of the larger impact of the catastrophe.

The flood flushed away a number of old policies and ideas. First was the notion that private charity could handle crises of regional or national scope. Presidential hopeful Herbert Hoover, who took charge of flood relief, insisted that the Red Cross and corporate loans to the enterprising poor were adequate vehicles for dealing with the calamity. As it turned out, the loan amounts were pathetically small and the program inadequate, while the lessons learned from flood relief work would eventually prove useful to New Dealers. The second transformation wrought by the flood was a shift in race relations. Robert Moton, heir to Booker T. Washington’s political mantle (especially among Republicans), wrote that “the flood had washed away the old account.” The party of Lincoln began to lose control of northern black voters after 1927, and, just as LeRoy Percy had feared, southern black laborers began to leave the Delta.

With regard to the Old Man, as the river was called, the disaster forced the federal government to adopt a new strategy whereby the Mississippi was to be accommodated rather than mastered. Led by Percy, a phalanx of bankers, corporation lawyers, and landholders steered a landmark river control bill through Congress. When President Calvin Coolidge overcame his conservative scruples and signed it, the legislation had implications far beyond flood control. Barry writes, “This precedent reflected a major shift in what Americans considered the proper role and obligations of the national government.”

Barry provides a rich panorama of personalities who fought the river each in his own way. Yet he never loses sight of his prime protagonist: the Mississippi River itself. Song and folklore may label it Old Man, but sometimes it boils and churns in youthful, muscular anger. Whatever its fickle moods, Barry has captured the great river as though it were a living thing, conscious of its shaping role in American history.

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Color-blind Justice?

RACE, CRIME, AND THE LAW.

By Randall Kennedy. Pantheon. 560 pp. \$30

by William A. Galston and David T. Wasserman

Between 1960 and 1990, violent crime in the United States surged to a level that most citizens found terrifying. During this same period, the phrase “law and order” became a political slogan for the middle class, and the integrationist thrust of the modern civil rights movement was displaced by doctrines of racial separatism and victimization. Together, these developments served to polarize debate concerning the connection between crime and race.

This book is a brave, honest, forceful intervention in that debate. Kennedy, a professor at Harvard Law School, believes that truth alone, however uncomfortable, can serve as the basis for sound public policy. Questioning the assumption that black-white differences in conviction and incarceration rates are *prima facie* evidence of discrimination, he acknowledges that a “notably large proportion of the crimes people fear most—aggravated assault, robbery, rape, murder—are committed by people who happen to be black.” And he rejects the facile argument that stiffer sentencing for using or trafficking crack (as opposed to powder) cocaine reflects racist intentions.

Yet Kennedy is no apologist for the get-tough status quo. With restrained passion, he documents the myriad ways in which our legal system has betrayed the principle of fair and equal treatment for African Americans. Every aspect of American life is beset by racial conflict. “The question,” he says, “is what to do about it.” His answer is an unapologetic return to the original aspiration of the civil rights movement: an American polity that is “overwhelmingly indifferent to racial differences.” To that end, he opposes every proposed change in the criminal justice system—especially mandatory proportional racial representation on juries and a conscious strategy of race-based jury nullification—that would

etch a new color line in American law.

But Kennedy is equally opposed to policies resting on the assumption that color-blindness is a reality rather than a distant aspiration. He warns of a “crisis of legitimacy” in which African Americans see law as a system of external oppression rather than inclusive protection. And, more striking, he insists that the discrimination experienced by black citizens at the hands of the criminal justice system is as much a matter of *neglect* as abuse. To be sure, black suspects and defendants have not received fair treatment. But even worse has been the failure of predominantly white police forces to protect law-abiding residents of black communities.

Too often, says Kennedy, black leaders show more concern for black perpetrators of crime than for their black victims. While some blacks are ambivalent toward criminals, seeing them in part as rebels against an unjust system, most want more stringent law enforcement: Kennedy cites a 1993 Gallup poll in which 82 percent of African Americans were found to believe that local courts do not treat criminals harshly enough; 75 percent favored putting more police on the street; 68 percent favored building more prisons to facilitate longer sentences.

In Kennedy’s view, the only morally acceptable response to the disparate treatment of blacks in the criminal justice system is a tenacious resolve to purge the use of race as a factor. In the case of jury selection, he calls for the elimination of peremptory challenges (those made without explanation), because they have been used to create racially exclusionary panels. If, as he expects, such challenges remain part of our legal system, then at least the Supreme Court’s strictures against their racially discriminatory use should be strictly enforced.

Kennedy is most impassioned in his rejection of race as a factor in police decision making. Most middle-class black men have tales to tell about their encounters with police. Kennedy quotes the writer Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s, quip: "There's a moving violation that many African Americans know as D. W. B.: Driving While Black." From a statistical standpoint, police use of race-based criteria may be rational, but Kennedy insists that such criteria should nonetheless be reserved for extraordinary circumstances. Too often they provide cover for flat-out harassment, which "nourishes powerful feelings of racial grievance against law enforcement authorities." Race-based policing also contributes to the underprotection of black communities: law-abiding citizens decline to cooperate with police out of resentment, or out of fear that they themselves will become objects of suspicion.

In a bold stroke, Kennedy draws a close parallel between race-based police tactics and affirmative action as currently interpreted by the Supreme Court. If race is truly a suspect category warranting strict judicial scrutiny—if arguably beneficial affirmative action strategies are struck down because they inflict harm on innocent individuals—then why not apply the same yardstick to race-based policing? Race should play "no routine role in decision-making regarding whom to scrutinize for purposes of law enforcement," he writes.

Kennedy believes that the goal of a color-blind legal system is not unrealistic. Yet the history of discrimination, so powerfully documented in this book, may complicate efforts to attain that goal. If the disparate treatment of African Americans were primarily a matter of intentional bias, it might be effectively countered by a variety of race-neutral measures, from the careful screening of police recruits to aggressive attempts to detect prejudice in prospective jurors. But racial bias may have worked its way too deeply into perception and social organization to yield itself up to such straightforward measures.

Consider Kennedy's proposed remedy, a rule forbidding the police and judiciary to use race as an explicit justification for

a finding of reasonable suspicion or probable cause. Such a prohibition would ban only the conscious use of race, and ban it only in the judicial oversight of constitutionally regulated police interventions such as stops, frisks, searches, seizures, and arrests. Kennedy does not say how he would limit the implicit and often unconscious use of race in other areas, such as the interpretation of ambiguous behavior. A white man might be seen to be windowshopping, for example, while a black man doing the same thing might be seen as casing the store. Not even the most conscientious police officer, let alone reviewing magistrate, can precisely weigh the role played by race in resolving such ambiguity.

Moreover, Kennedy's proposed rule would have little effect on police actions that fall below the constitutional threshold for judicial review, such as the decisions to observe, monitor, or tail. It is hard to imagine how to prescribe, let alone enforce, race neutrality on this level. Yet the failure to do so virtually assures that law-abiding blacks will continue to suffer the humiliation of being objects of heightened police scrutiny—even when they are not stopped, questioned, or frisked. It may also be that racial bias in policing is most prevalent in settings where blacks are a conspicuous minority. Curtailing police discretion in those settings may well threaten an increase in crime, thereby straining the commitment of the majority to unbiased law enforcement.

Kennedy's ideal of a criminal justice system capable of going beyond race—of "looking beyond looks"—is a two-edged sword. Against black pessimists, he argues that substantial progress has been made toward the ideal of color-blind justice. Against complacent whites, he argues that there is still a long way to go. His book compels readers to see that the reform of our criminal justice system involves not easy choices between good and evil but hard choices between cherished goods and values.

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Science & Technology

CONNECTED KNOWLEDGE: *Science, Philosophy, and Education.*

By Alan Cromer. Oxford University Press. 221 pp. \$25

If heeded, this book could do more to improve science instruction, and American education in general, than a hundred educational summits. In a little more than 200 pages, Cromer, a professor of physics at Northeastern University, surveys human prehistory, the history of education, the meaning of “intelligence,” and the philosophy of science—all as prelude to proposals for serious pedagogical reform.

Cromer’s thesis is that learning is shaped by certain biocultural realities which are ignored by current educational theory and practice. “Most educational reformers accept, at some level, the Rousseauian belief in an ideal natural state in which human beings were once freer and less constrained than they are in organized society,” he writes. “This has led to repeated attempts at progressive, naturalistic, and holistic education, all of which inevitably failed. There never was a time when human beings didn’t live in hierarchical groups, and reading, writing, science, and mathematics aren’t natural.”

Cromer’s particular focus is the educational philosophy of “constructivism.” Based on “the remarkable influence” of Thomas Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), constructivism exaggerates the extent to which scientific knowledge is tentative, socially constructed, and subject to radical revision. Arguing that constructivism is “deeply embedded in many educational institutions in the United States,” Cromer quotes a 1991 document from the National Academy of Sciences in which educators were urged to adopt national standards reflecting “the postmodern view of science,” which “questions the objectivity of observations and the truth of scientific knowledge.” The language was modified after “protest from the scientific community,” but constructivist methods still pervade classrooms.

For instance, it is now common for science teachers to ask students to “construct” an explanation for buoyancy by fooling around with a tank of water and various floating and

sinking objects. Yet Archimedes’ principle—that a body immersed in a fluid is buoyed up by a force equal to the weight of the fluid it displaces—is not so easily rediscovered. Difficult nonintuitive concepts such as density must be grasped beforehand if the exercise is not to end in futility. Tellingly, Cromer cites a National Science Foundation study in which 24 middle-school teachers were themselves taught by both constructivist and traditional methods. When asked to compare the two, they showed a marked preference for the latter. As one commented, the experience “made me reevaluate my own use of inquiry-based teaching. I am going to change to much more content with a little constructivism thrown in.”

Cromer paints a depressingly familiar scenario: cognitively gifted students manage to learn despite misguided teaching, while the majority learn little, and those most in need of skilled instruction learn nothing. He does not need to prove the case; the data, including the declining test scores of American stu-

dents, are plain to see. But he does not stop where most experts do, wringing his hands and demanding more spending, a PC on every desk, and a chicken in every pot. He makes concrete proposals for a concept-ordered curriculum. He recommends specific textbooks, such as Seymour Rosen’s inexpensive and concise middle-school science texts, and urges that students be allowed to keep them. He shows why specific tests, such as the General Educational Development (GED), should be the universal minimal standard and why the animus against “teaching the test” is misplaced. He musters evidence that his concrete proposals work, even in unpromising venues such as prisons. And he argues that their implementation would cost no more, and probably less, than preserving the status quo.

Cromer’s approach differs sharply from the nostrums of both the cultural Left (self-esteem) and the cultural Right (family values). His book has no politics. It merely explains what is *known* about learning and what can be done, here and now, to revitalize the West’s great experiment in public education.

—Paul R. Gross



Religion & Philosophy

SPINOZA, LIBERALISM, AND THE QUESTION OF JEWISH IDENTITY.

By Steven B. Smith. Yale University Press. 304 pp. \$30 cloth

This compelling book rescues Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1663) from undeserved obscurity. The only one of the Dutch philosopher's works to be published during his lifetime (1632–77), the *Treatise* reflects the influence of the new philosophy and method of Descartes, as well as Spinoza's meditation on his experience as a descendant of Jewish refugees from the Spanish Inquisition who found himself excommunicated from the Jewish community of Amsterdam for his unconventional beliefs. As painstakingly reconstructed by Smith, a political scientist at Yale University, the *Treatise* is shown to contain both a far-reaching critique of traditional Judaism and a powerful argument for a democratic republic in which toleration and liberty of thought exist for all.

Smith claims that Spinoza's *Treatise* defined a critical challenge to modern liberalism: reconciling the Enlightenment's universalist aspirations with the reality of human difference. It was Spinoza, Smith argues, who set the terms for the later debate (involving such seminal figures as Moses Mendelssohn, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Kant, and Hegel) about the conditions under which Jews should be granted full rights of citizenship. That debate shaped classic liberalism's account of how a modern state grounded in recognition of the natural freedom and equality of human beings should deal with minorities.

In addition to being a religiously based vindication of individual liberty, the *Treatise* is a politically inspired challenge to religion. Spinoza sought to emancipate his fellow Jews from what he regarded as the back-breaking burden of religious tradition. To this end, he scrutinized the Hebrew Scriptures as a human book, offered withering criticism of miracles and the idea of particular providence, and reinterpreted the Mosaic law as a merely political and long-superseded body of legislation. His goal was to lay the foundations for a secular state that would be home to autonomous individuals who bowed to no authority save that of reason.

Today, this Enlightenment political project

raises concerns about the rise of rank individualism, the deterioration of the family, the appearance of the naked public square, and the breakdown of civil society. The autonomous individual in whose name Spinoza wrote now seems adrift rather than self-directed, enervated rather than emancipated. This problem, in Smith's view, is inseparable from Spinoza's legacy. Smith does not presume to resolve the dilemmas of contemporary liberalism or pass final judgment on what the Enlightenment has wrought. But he does offer a searching exposition of what was overthrown and what was built, what sacrificed and what gained, by the theological-political revolution Spinoza championed.

—Peter Berkowitz

CONSERVATISM:

An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present.

Edited by Jerry Z. Muller. Princeton University Press. 442 pp. \$59.50 cloth, \$19.95 paper

After two decades of intellectual ascendancy and political victory, American conservatism is beginning to look frazzled. Friend and foe alike could benefit from reflection on its origins and guiding purposes. Recalling its debt to and divergence from European forms of conservatism, this rich anthology, edited by Muller, a professor of history at the Catholic University of America, throws "historical and cross-cultural light" on conservative thinkers from Edmund Burke (1729–97) and Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821) through such contemporaries and near-contemporaries as Michael Oakeshott (1901–90), Irving Kristol, and Edward Banfield.

This is "an anthology with an argument." While admitting that conservatives have at different times and places defended different, indeed contradictory, things, Muller maintains that there is a recurring habit of mind—"shared assumptions, predispositions, arguments, metaphors, and substantive commitments"—common to conservatives (almost) everywhere. Yet he distinguishes between "conservatism" and "orthodoxy." The former assumes that long-lived institutions have endured for good reason, and that veneration, custom, and habit are essential to human well-

being. The latter maintains that institutions should ultimately be justified by abstract truth or a transcendent or unchanging moral order, whether revealed or rational. This distinction makes clear why Muller believes that conservatism is not a critique of the Enlightenment (such as orthodoxy often mounts) but rather a part of it, and why he concludes that David Hume (1711-76) was more or less the first conservative.

Muller's definition of conservatism leaves little room for Eric Voegelin and Leo Strauss, not to mention Aristotle, Aquinas, and the American Founders, all of whom held, in various ways, that society's law and customs have, or ought to have, some important dependence on natural justice. But for that very reason, Muller's book is a bracing commentary on the present-day condition of American conservatism, and a welcome invitation to rethink what conservatives ought to be conserving.

—Charles R. Kesler

**THE SENSE OF REALITY:
*Studies in Ideas and Their History.***

By Isaiah Berlin. Edited by Henry Hardy.
Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 304 pp. \$25

"Ideas do, at times, develop lives and powers of their own and, like Frankenstein's monster, act in ways wholly unforeseen by their begetters." So writes Berlin, a fellow at All Souls College, Oxford, and, at 87, one of the world's pre-eminent intellectuals. In this new collection of occasional essays, most of them written during the 1950s and '60s, Berlin ponders the jagged paths sometimes cut by humane and rational ideas.

In "Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Nationalism," Berlin discovers "a traceable line of influence" from Kant's conception of human freedom to the rise of violent nationalism. The German philosopher J. G. Fichte (1762–1814) gave the first twist to Kant's teaching that mature people choose to live by certain values because they know them to be rational and to apply to everyone. From this, Fichte reasoned that fully developed people create their own values based on what they perceive to be true. The second twist, also Fichte's but absorbing the influence of J. G. Herder (1744–1803), was to say that, because individuals are shaped by their milieus, they cannot truly act except as part of a group, a nation, and finally a state. Thus did the German romantic thinkers transform Kant's appeal to reason into an assertion of collective

will, not anticipating how this idea could drive nationalist revolts and, eventually, genocidal slaughter.

Berlin's explanation of how morally beneficial ideas become perverted leads him to conclude that human life is composed of unaccountable infinitesimals, a dark mass of factors that cannot be analyzed, only felt and lived. Absent an all-encompassing truth about reality, and given the vulnerability to fanaticism demonstrated in this century, he urges a conscious acceptance of plural versions of the truth. He admires reformers such as the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), who believed that the only hope for India was to combine English political freedoms with a nationalism rooted in Indian civilization.

Berlin excels at this kind of intellectual portraiture, but he is more than a portraitist. While adding to our store of knowledge about the history of ideas, he has also refocused our thinking. Nationalism, he has shown, is a legitimate expression of the human need for recognition and a degree of material security that, if ignored, explodes into terrible crimes. To accommodate that need, contemporary liberalism must include both protection of people's liberties and a place for them to live satisfying lives as members of communities. Vintage though they are, these essays could hardly be more timely.

—Susan Ginsburg

**A MEASURE OF MY DAYS:
*The Journal of a Country Doctor.***

By David Loxterkamp. University Press of New England. 336 pp. \$24.95

Literature it may not be, but this book is something equally valid: the honest self-portrait of a small-town family doctor trying to do as much good in the world as he can. Earnest, kindhearted, subject to depression and guilt, and above all pious, Loxterkamp seeks and finds in the daily tending of the sick a path to holiness. If there is an overarching point of view, it is that of a devout Roman Catholic whose every act is lent significance by the immediate presence of God.

The language is mercifully simple, devoid of pomp and authorial vanity. It has the scrubbed, plain texture of the monastic cell at the Trappisarium of Gethsemane, where Loxterkamp retreats in emulation of his idol, Thomas Merton. Of course, in keeping this journal, Loxterkamp has chosen to put himself on view, taking the risk that every diarist

takes, of now and then becoming the sly trumpeter of his own praises. No doubt this book will be embraced by physicians and others who see themselves living blamelessly in an otherwise imperfect world. Yet it is greatly to Loxterkamp's credit that the reader feels a bond with this forbearing, forgiving, sorely beset man; he is the kind of doctor we all want for ourselves.

Loxterkamp is at his best when offering clinical vignettes and miniature character sketches of his patients, coworkers, and fellow townspeople. One especially affecting portrait is of a woman with Lou Gehrig's disease trying to communicate: "Her struggle, nodding and

grunting at a plexiglass message board. . . . Two letters constructed, then three; a word, then another, till they strung together in a simple phrase."

Only when Loxterkamp's gaze turns inward toward his own marriage do candor and empathy threaten to stray into confession and sentimentality. And when he vents his disapproval of certain post-Vatican II changes in the Catholic liturgy, he merely echoes criticism that has been better articulated elsewhere. Other faults may lie herein, but none would prevent me from recommending this book as a gift to any prospective doctor.

—Richard Selzer

Contemporary Affairs

THE LIPSTICK PROVISIO: Women, Sex & Power in the Real World.

By Karen Lehrman. Anchor
Books. 240 pp. \$23.95

Lehrman, a journalist and former editor at *The New Republic*, calls herself a feminist but disagrees with many of orthodox feminism's central tenets. Doctrinaire feminists, she believes, often fail to appreciate women's individual choices, especially when those choices place women in traditional roles such as "pink ghetto" worker, nurturing wife, stay-at-home mother, or even sex object. In Lehrman's view, these choices reflect the genuine needs and desires of many women, and champions of



true liberation should respect them just as much they respect high-pressure careers. "You may not like my choices (and I may not like yours), but aside from warning me about the possible pitfalls, my choices are really none of your business," she declares.

How does Lehrman reconcile this defense of traditional womanhood with her complaint that "the feminist revolution" is not yet complete? She does so by making biology a factor in private life but not in the public sphere. Sexually and emotionally, she ventures to argue, "biology will to some extent be destiny for women—just as it has been for men." But in the workplace, all that should matter are the human abilities that women share with men. This is a tidy resolution. But as Lehrman forays into the scientific literature on sexual difference demonstrate, biology is no clear or univocal arbiter of how men and women differ—or how they do not. And where science dares not tread, politics is certain to rush in.

—Martha Bayles

Arts & Letters

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE HUMANITIES?

Edited by Alvin Kernan. Princeton
University Press. 268 pp. \$29.95

The current condition of the humanities cannot be traced to a single cause. The dozen academic humanists who contribute to this judicious and informed volume, edited by Kernan, professor of humanities, emer-

itus, at Princeton University, take up various explanatory threads. One is demographic: the increased presence of minorities and women among the student population. One is technological: the impact of computers on the way people read. One is philosophical: the influence of relativistic epistemologies on the old ideal of disinterested scholarship.

Does the garland of causes make a

noose? It might appear so. The book's statistical appendix reports that while the absolute number of baccalaureate and doctoral degrees in the humanities increased slightly between 1966 and 1993, the percentage of humanities degrees relative to the total number of degrees dropped. Financial support is down too, as America's foundations decide they have other things to do with their money. And so is the more precious kind of support that comes from a receptive and sympathetic public. Snug—and smug—in their encrypted reveries, humanists fail to notice that the room has emptied and they are talking only to themselves.

Ironically, this erosion of influence is accompanied by a passionate insistence on the part of some humanists that their work should effect social change. In the final essay, David Bromwich, professor of English at Yale University, writes that “the place of advocacy in teaching and research has become so prominent as almost to constitute in itself a separate description of what scholarship in the humanities is.” Higher education has accommodated itself to the twin ideologies of “reflection,” according to which institutions of learning must reflect what is going on in the society they serve, and “representation,” according to which scholarly interest and social identity must coincide. (The African-American scholar wanting to specialize in Milton would be viewed, at least, as a curiosity, as would the Native American medievalist or the female admirer of Hemingway.)

Overall, this collection gives the impression of a Web-site download perhaps 90 percent complete: the image is recognizable but wants the last degree of definition. It would have been sharper if the authors had been allowed to undo a couple of buttons on their dispassion—but that was explicitly not their assignment. They were asked to be descriptive as far as the data permitted, and to refrain from judgment. So certain questions go unanswered. Was there a failure of nerve on the part of humanists who watched while their colleagues danced on the cutting edge (where missteps have left them sliced and bloodied)? Did humanists listen politely to nonsense they might better have hooted off the podium? Did they shrink before challenges (“Who are you to say what's important?”) when they should have resisted?

The forces that have buffeted the humanities are not entirely external to them, as most of the contributors acknowledge. The state of the humanities is, after all, related to the state of humanists. It is not self-evident, for example, that changing demographics should have led to conspicuous transformation in the curriculum. The changes were voted in. They were justified, perhaps, as a way of helping students “start from where they are.” But most young people know where they are. The study of literature and history has always been an invitation to explore alien territory, to travel the distance from where one is to where one might be.

—James M. Morris

GEORGE ELIOT:

A Life.

By Rosemary Ashton. Allen Lane/Penguin. 480 pp. \$32.95

No hidden cache of documents has been discovered and no drastic revision of literary reputation has occurred since the publication of Gordon Haight's commanding *George Eliot* in 1968. Why, then, attempt another biography? To explore “George Eliot the writer as well as George Eliot the woman,” is the reason given by Ashton, a professor of English at University College in London. Yet ironically this book has more to say about the woman than it does about the writer.

“Inquiring, skeptical, even rebellious by nature,” writes Ashton, Eliot “was also conservative, timid, self-doubting.” Ashton's retelling of the Victorian novelist's life (1819–80) is especially moving when she describes Eliot's insecurity about her art. Though fiercely opinionated toward others' work, Eliot withered at the slightest criticism of her own. To protect the eggshell fragility of her ego, both her companion and lover, George Lewes, and her publisher, John Blackwood, screened her mail, allowing only the most encouraging praise to reach her desk. Ashton tries to link this “diffidence” to Eliot's work, but the effort falls short. The best explanation offered is Eliot's own, which could have been written about many of her fictional characters: “I want encouraging rather than warning and checking. I believe I am so constituted that I shall never be cured of any faults except by God's discipline.”

—Sudip K. Bose

CHARLIE CHAPLIN AND HIS TIMES.

By Kenneth S. Lynn. Simon & Schuster. 604 pp. \$35

The title phrase “and his times” gives fair warning: this is a biography full of digressions. Some are rewarding, as when Lynn, a professor of history, emeritus, at Johns Hopkins University, explores the symbolism of Chaplin’s silent-screen persona, the “Little Tramp.” It’s a reversal, he says, of the negative stereotype of tramps that was prevalent in the late 19th century. Other digressions, such as the one equat-



ing the Little Tramp’s popularity with that of Hitler, are more of a stretch.

Chaplin (1889–1977) was the son of English music hall performers, though the identity of his father was never absolutely confirmed. His formative years were darkened by poverty and his mother’s mental illness. She was institutionalized in 1903, and young Charlie never got over the shock, at least in Lynn’s view. This childhood calamity set Chaplin on an independent path that would carry him not only to America but, by 1915, to the pinnacle of cinema stardom. It also, as Lynn sees it, doomed Chaplin’s relationships with women. With some 57 pages cited under the index entry “Chaplin, Charlie, sexual history of,” the book’s preoccu-

pation with the subject can seem excessive. And while intriguing, Lynn’s Freudian interpretations of Chaplin’s films can seem overly conjectural.

Still, there is the matter of Chaplin’s three marriages to underage women (the first two at the point of a shotgun), as well as his tendency, not just in his films but in his public and private lives, to show scant regard for the consequences of his actions. In 1952 the United States government, gripped by anticommunist hysteria, lost all patience with the star who, in the words of one official, took a “leering, sneering attitude” toward his adopted country. When Chaplin departed for Switzerland with his family, the government barred his return on the grounds of moral turpitude. His last film made in America, the brilliant, self-referential *Limelight*, was withdrawn from theaters.

Chaplin spent the rest of his life in exile—except for a visit in 1972, when he was granted permission to return to accept a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Lynn captures the moment beautifully: as Chaplin received the longest standing ovation in the history of the Academy, “a look of wonderment, edged with infinite regret, was in his eyes.” A fitting moment for a Hollywood-style fade-out—both for Chaplin, who would die five years later, and for Lynn, who in the end manages to convey, at least, the enigma of his subject. Chaplin has assumed his proper place in the screen pantheon, but to judge by this noble attempt, we will never really know who he was.

—James Carman

History

MEXICO: BIOGRAPHY OF POWER: A History of Modern Mexico, 1810-1906.

By Enrique Krauze. Hank Heifetz, trans. HarperCollins. 704 pp. \$35

Born in Mexico City in 1946, Krauze is a child of Tlatelolco—Mexico’s 1968 version of Tiananmen Square, in which hundreds of protesting students were gunned down by the regime. As editor of the prestigious journal *Vuelta*, Krauze represents the new breed of Mexican journalist: well educated (history and industrial engineering), with an incisive style and a loyal following among Mexico’s small intellectual readership, an audience increasingly restive over the nation’s painful-

ly hesitant advance toward open government and democracy.

Despite its subtitle, this massive history (published in three volumes in Mexico) delves frequently into the Spanish conquest and the colonial era. Krauze’s approach is traditional in the sense of envisioning Mexican history as a struggle between liberals who would expunge a tyrannical past and *continuistas* who would restore it. That history is sacred scripture for Mexico’s intellectuals (with different versions sacralized at different times), as well as a drama continually being restaged: Bishop Samuel Ruiz of Chiapas reprises the role of Bartolomé de las Casas, protector of the Indians, and the insurgent

leader in Chiapas, Subcommandante Marcos, assumes the mantle of the 1810 revolutionaries José María Morelos and Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla.

Krauze's Mexico is not one nation but a mosaic of societies, in which social and economic misery persists despite modernization, and which erupt periodically in fire and blood. The revolutions of Mexico are fraught with tragedy yet eventually come to signify nothing beyond the rise to power of a new strong man, or *caudillo*. The *caudillos*, or "men on horseback," dominate entire eras, from that of Santa Anna and Porfirio Díaz in the 19th century to that of the technocrats of today. Before 1940, Mexico's strong men shot their way to power; they have since employed the modern methods of electoral fraud and patronage.

Mexico has long had constitutions, parties, councils, and congresses. Yet Krauze's application of the term *tlatoani* (Nahuatl for "emperor") to the modern presidents rings dismayingly true. The Mexican president does not preside over a federal republic; he rules a centralized empire. He controls the budget, appoints judges, and makes all important state and municipal decisions. Each *sexenio* (six-year term) takes its character not from the nation's political institutions but from the biases, quirks, even the psychopathologies, of the man in the high palace. And that man is elevated by the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), not by the legislature or the people. The latter have no more say in the matter than the Roman Senate had in the choosing of its Caesars.

The value of this work, at least for American readers, lies in its incisive biographies of modern presidents since Miguel Alemán (1946–52). This history, both factual and gossipy, is little known north of the Río Bravo. Vividly alive even in translation, Krauze's narrative may contain more detail than many readers can digest, but there is no understanding modern Mexico without a feeling for its past.

Captured by none of the ideological abstractions that typically hijack academic historians, Krauze illuminates both the glories and the follies of his nation's past. Thus, he is believable when he states that since 1940 Mexico has been established "as a business and the business is power." When he discusses the prospects for reform within the PRI, there is something of Tacitus's gloomy warn-

ing of the danger of concentrating power in the hands of one leader, whether it be a Caligula or a Trajan. Or even a Marcus Aurelius. The author sums up by saying the "country needs democracy" and all that goes with it, such as honest police and incorruptible courts, without which the economic reform that justifies much of the modern authoritarianism will be "fragile and endangered." Amen.

—T. R. Fehrenbach

REDEEMING CULTURE:
American Religion in an Age of Science, 1925–1962.

By James Gilbert. University of Chicago Press. 390 pp. \$28.95

In the opening pages of this fascinating history, we see William Jennings Bryan ponying up \$5 to join the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Several months before the eminent attorney defended fundamentalism against the teaching of Darwinian theory in Tennessee's infamous Scopes Trial (1925), he was inspired by the spirit of populism to believe that science should belong to everyone. "The preservation of democracy," writes Gilbert, a historian at the University of Maryland, "demanded that [Bryan] oppose the establishment of any elite: corporations, banks, corrupt politicians, and now scientists, who would impose their esoteric reasons and secret purposes on the world."

The book's final pages evoke a different scene: the Seattle Exposition of 1962, where, during the groundbreaking ceremony for the Christian Witness pavilion, a boy in a space suit joined hands with a girl in Pilgrim costume—a gesture meant to symbolize the belief that America was founded on something greater than technology and progress. Gilbert explains that "it was simply unimaginable that the federal government or scientists themselves could present a great public scientific spectacle without including religion in a prominent position."

Between these end pieces, Gilbert assembles a wealth of documentation that adds up to an implicit argument. Beginning with an account of how 20th-century science upset "the historic American tradition that science and religion were compatible," he notes that "the theory of relativity, the uncertainty principle, quantum physics, the principle of complementarity . . . described counterintuitive ideas. They contradicted common sense." To the question of whether religion was capable of

mounting a response, he writes, "A particularly inventive religious genius, an American talent for defining new religions and revising old ones . . . has infused and saturated culture at all levels. In fact the period from World War II to the present has seen one of the longest sustained religious revivals in American history."

A closely related theme, again more implied than stated, is that the seemingly "distant reaches of American culture" are really quite close. For example, in 1951 Bell Telephone Laboratories invited Hollywood film director Frank Capra to produce four television films on scientific subjects. A devout Catholic as well as a graduate of the California Institute of Technology, Capra wanted to incorporate a religious perspective. The debate over whether he should do so occurred across a wide social spectrum, from professional physicists to network executives, university theologians to parish priests, journalists to ordinary viewers. By telling such tales in all their complexity, Gilbert suggests that American culture is created "not by isolated subcultures operating according to their own rules in self-styled obscurity, but by groups and individuals reacting to questions that discharge like sheet lightning across the sky."

—Ken Myers

FOR CAUSE AND COMRADES:

Why Men Fought in the Civil War.

By James M. McPherson. Oxford University Press. 256 pp. \$25

A perennial question about Civil War soldiers, one that especially haunts the post-Vietnam American psyche, is Why did they fight? Why did Northerners shed blood to preserve an abstraction, "the Union"? Why did Southerners fight to preserve an institution, slavery, that did not directly benefit most of them? With the publication of *Ordeal by Fire* (1982) and *Battle Cry of Freedom* (1988), McPherson, a historian at Princeton University, established himself as America's most eminent and accessible chronicler of the Civil War. But he has not rested on his laurels. The present book, his fourth since *Battle Cry*, concentrates not on battlefield tactics and leaders but

on the experiences of men in the field. McPherson does not deny the existence of shirkers and skulkers. But his concern is with those who did fight, and continued to fight, whether enthusiastically or dutifully, until death, defeat, or victory.

Drawing on the vivid, poignant diaries of more than 1,000 soldiers, this account cuts against the conventional wisdom about the motives of Civil War soldiers. To be sure, those reasons were varied. Some soldiers felt a sense of masculine adventurousness, like the Wisconsin captain who craved to "lead [men] into danger to see what they are made of & if I would run," or the South Carolina planter's son who fancied himself "a knight in a beleaguered fortress" who must, "when the castle is to be stormed . . . put on my harness & wield my blade." Others harbored an unholy thirst for vengeance, such as the Louisiana cavalry sergeant who asserted in 1863 that the only thing keeping him going was "absolute hatred" of "the hyperborean vandals with whom we are waging a war for existence. . . . I expect to murder every Yankee I meet if I can do so with impunity."

But at bottom lie the factors named in McPherson's title. Time and again, he finds sentiments similar to those of a New York private who wrote in 1865 that the sacrifice of his friends had been worthwhile because they had fought "against cruelty and oppression" and had "proven to the world that the American people can and will govern themselves." On the southern side, McPherson finds idealistic affirmations of "liberty" and "the dear rights of freemen" against the "vassalage" and "degradation" being threatened by the North.

In short, McPherson concludes that there is no plausible way to reduce the motives of Civil War soldiers to low or self-interested goals. These men understood what was at stake, and a steely sense of honor made them persevere to the bitter end. The reader comes away with lasting admiration for the soldiers on both sides—and a lingering uneasiness about the mettle of our own cynical age.

—Wilfred M. McClay



POETRY

Wisława Szymborska

Selected and introduced by Edward Hirsch

The Polish poet Wisława Szymborska, who won the 1996 Nobel Prize in literature, is a canny ironist and rapturous skeptic. She writes a poetry of sardonic individualism, and comes at common experiences from her own angle, with her own perspective. “Four billion people on this earth,/but my imagination is still the same,” she confesses in her poem “A Large Number”; “It’s bad with large numbers./It’s still taken by particularity.” Szymborska is all too aware of how the world keeps escaping our various formulations about it: “But even a Dante couldn’t get it right,” she admits, “Let alone someone who is not./Even with all the muses behind me.”

Despite her modesty, Szymborska has mounted in her work a witty and tireless defense of individual subjectivity against collectivist thinking, and her poems are slyly subversive in a way that compels us to reconsider received opinion. No sooner does a familiar idea come her way than she starts turning it around to see what it will look like from different directions. She manages to question herself even as she exposes general assumptions and undermines political cant. Indeed, the rejection of dogma becomes the premise of a thoughtful personal ethics.

Szymborska was born in 1923 in the small town of Brnin in the Poznań area of western Poland. She moved with her family to Kraków when she was eight years old and has lived there ever since. She attended school illegally during the German occupation, when the Nazis banned Polish secondary schools and universities, and after the war studied Polish literature and sociology at Jagiellonian University. From 1952 to 1981, she worked on the editorial staff of the cultural weekly *Zycie Literackie* (Literary Life). She has published nine collections of poems and several editions of her selected verse, as well as a volume of newspaper reviews and columns. She is also known to Polish readers as a distinguished translator of French poetry, mostly of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Szymborska came of age during World War II, and spent much of her life under Stalinism. Thus she saw her country twice destroyed. She shares with Zbigniew Herbert and Tadeusz Różewicz—the two other major Polish poets of the half-generation after Czesław Miłosz—an absolute distrust of rhetoric, of false words and sentiments, of political creeds and ideologies, of general ideas and philosophies. The war was such a traumatic event for the writers of this generation that it called all moral and aesthetic values into question and, in a sense, poetry had to be rebuilt from the ground up, like the country itself. Hence, these poets have deliberately cultivated a cool, economical, and antirhetorical style, writing a stripped-down poetry of drastic simplicity. For these poets, stylistic clarity became a matter (and a form) of ethics, a response to ideological obfuscations, political double talk.

Szymborska is a philosophically oriented poet who raises universal subjects nonchalantly, with an offhand charm. She typically begins a poem

with a question or a simple paradoxical assertion which the poem breezily sets out to explore. Her strategy is to run through all the ramifications of an idea to see what it will yield. Often she begins by seeming to embrace a subject and ends by undercutting it with a sharp, disillusioned comment. For example, in the poem “Children of Our Age,” she takes a common assertion—“We are children of our age,/it’s a political age”—and examines it until it begins to leak and fall apart. She tries to find the human being—the human reality—obscured by political dogma.

Meanwhile, people perished,
animals died,
houses burned,
and the fields ran wild
just as in times immemorial
and less political.

One key to Szyborska’s style may be the way she works subversive variations on familiar rhetoric.

Szyborska’s poems—wise, funny, and personal—have the sting of long experience. She looks at the world with the eye of a disabused lover and understands something fundamental about our century. In the poem “Hatred,” she writes, “See how efficient it still is,/how it keeps itself in shape—/our century’s hatred.” In “The Century’s Decline,” she writes, “Our twentieth-century was going to improve on the others”:

A couple of problems weren’t going
to come up anymore:
hunger, for example,
and war, and so forth.

There was going to be respect
for helpless people’s helplessness,
trust, that kind of stuff.

Anyone who planned to enjoy the world
is now faced
with a hopeless task.

Yet Szyborska’s bitterness about human fallibility—human cruelty—mingles with her sense of the world’s unfathomable richness. Despite the odds, she finds herself enjoying the world after all, revitalized by commonplace miracles, by what she calls in one poem “miracle fair”: fluttering white doves, a small cloud upstaging the moon, mild winds turning gusty in a hard storm, the inescapable earth. In the end, she pits her dizzying sense of the world’s transient splendor against unbearable historical knowledge. Or, as she puts it: “My identifying features/are rapture and despair.”



The Joy of Writing

Why does this written doe bound through these
written woods?

For a drink of written water from a spring
whose surface will xerox her soft muzzle?
Why does she lift her head; does she hear something?
Perched on four slim legs borrowed from the truth,
she pricks up her ears beneath my fingertips.
Silence—this word also rustles across the page
and parts the boughs
that have sprouted from the word “woods.”

Lying in wait, set to pounce on the blank page,
are letters up to no good,
clutches of clauses so subordinate
they'll never let her get away.

Each drop of ink contains a fair supply
of hunters, equipped with squinting eyes behind their sights,
prepared to swarm the sloping pen at any moment,
surround the doe, and slowly aim their guns.

They forget that what's here isn't life.
Other laws, black on white, obtain.
The twinkling of an eye will take as long as I say,
and will, if I wish, divide into tiny eternities,
full of bullets stopped in mid-flight.
Not a thing will ever happen unless I say so.
Without my blessing, not a leaf will fall,
not a blade of grass will bend beneath that little hoof's full stop.

Is there then a world
where I rule absolutely on fate?
A time I bind with chains of signs?
An existence become endless at my bidding?

The joy of writing.
The power of preserving.
Revenge of a mortal hand.



Lot's Wife

They say I looked back out of curiosity,
but I could have had other reasons.
I looked back mourning my silver bowl.
Carelessly, while tying my sandal strap.
So I wouldn't have to keep staring at the righteous nape
of my husband Lot's neck.
From the sudden conviction that if I dropped dead
he wouldn't so much as hesitate.
From the disobedience of the meek.
Checking for pursuers.
Struck by the silence, hoping God had changed his mind.
Our two daughters were already vanishing over the hilltop.
I felt age within me. Distance.
The futility of wandering. Torpor.
I looked back setting my bundle down.
I looked back not knowing where to set my foot.
Serpents appeared on my path,
spiders, field mice, baby vultures.
They were neither good nor evil now—every living thing
was simply creeping or hopping along in the mass panic.
I looked back in desolation.
In shame because we had stolen away.
Wanting to cry out, to go home.
Or only when a sudden gust of wind
unbound my hair and lifted up my robe.
It seemed to me that they were watching from the walls
 of Sodom
and bursting into thunderous laughter again and again.
I looked back in anger.
To savor their terrible fate.
I looked back for all the reasons given above.
I looked back involuntarily.
It was only a rock that turned underfoot, growling at me.
It was a sudden crack that stopped me in my tracks.
A hamster on its hind paws tottered on the edge.
It was then we both glanced back.
No, no. I ran on,
I crept, I flew upward
until darkness fell from the heavens
and with it scorching gravel and dead birds.
I couldn't breathe and spun around and around.
Anyone who saw me must have thought I was dancing.
It's not inconceivable that my eyes were open.
It's possible I fell facing the city.

Under One Small Star

My apologies to chance for calling it necessity.
My apologies to necessity if I'm mistaken, after all.
Please, don't be angry, happiness, that I take you as my due.
May my dead be patient with the way my memories fade.
My apologies to time for all the world I overlook each
 second.
My apologies to past loves for thinking that the latest is
 the first.
Forgive me, distant wars, for bringing flowers home.
Forgive me, open wounds, for pricking my finger.
I apologize for my record of minuets to those who cry from
 the depths.
I apologize to those who wait in railway stations for being
 asleep today at five a.m.
Pardon me, hounded hope, for laughing from time to time.
Pardon me, deserts, that I don't rush to you bearing a
 spoonful of water.
And you, falcon, unchanging year after year, always in the
 same cage,
your gaze always fixed on the same point in space,
forgive me, even if it turns out you were stuffed.
My apologies to the felled tree for the table's four legs.
My apologies to great questions for small answers.
Truth, please don't pay me much attention.
Dignity, please be magnanimous.
Bear with me, O mystery of existence, as I pluck the
 occasional thread from your train.
Soul, don't take offense that I've only got you now and then.
My apologies to everything that I can't be everywhere
 at once.
My apologies to everyone that I can't be each woman and
 each man.
I know I won't be justified as long as I live,
since I myself stand in my own way.
Don't bear me ill will, speech, that I borrow weighty words,
then labor heavily so that they may seem light.

Reality Demands

Reality demands
that we also mention this:
Life goes on.
It continues at Cannae and Borodino,
at Kosovo Polje and Guernica.

There's a gas station
on a little square in Jericho,
and wet paint
on park benches in Bila Hora.
Letters fly back and forth
between Pearl Harbor and Hastings,

a moving van passes
beneath the eye of the lion at Cheronea,
and the blooming orchards near Verdun
cannot escape
the approaching atmospheric front.

There is so much Everything
that Nothing is hidden quite nicely.
Music pours
from the yachts moored at Actium
and couples dance on their sunlit decks.

So much is always going on,
that it must be going on all over.
Where not a stone still stands
you see the Ice Cream Man
besieged by children.
Where Hiroshima had been
Hiroshima is again,
producing many products
for everyday use.

This terrifying world is not devoid of charms,
of the mornings
that make waking up worthwhile.
The grass is green
on Maciejowice's fields,
and it is studded with dew,
as is normal with grass.

Perhaps all fields are battlefields,
all grounds are battlegrounds,
those we remember
and those that are forgotten:
the birch, cedar, and fir forests, the white snow,
the yellow sands, gray gravel, the iridescent swamps,
the canyons of black defeat,
where, in times of crisis,
you can cower under a bush.

What moral flows from this? Probably none.
Only the blood flows, drying quickly,
and, as always, a few rivers, a few clouds.

On tragic mountain passes
the wind rips hats from unwitting heads
and we can't help
laughing at that.



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THE PERIODICAL OBSERVER

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A Sex Change for Military Culture?

A Survey of Recent Articles

The war over the role of women in the military has broken out anew, as accusations of sexual harassment and worse have battered the U.S. Army, hitting targets ranging from drill instructors at Aberdeen Proving Ground to the service's highest-ranking enlisted man, with hundreds of other soldiers in between. The fact that the complaints are so widespread has ignited fresh debate over whether the integration of women into the military has gone too far—or not far enough.

"The time has finally come to cease examining these issues solely from the perspective of how the military culture should adjust itself to women," declares James Webb, a former secretary of the navy and a Vietnam veteran, writing in the *Weekly Standard* (Jan. 20, 1997). There is no excuse for sexual harassment and misconduct, he says. The culprit, however, is not the military culture but "a system that throws healthy young men and women together inside a volatile, isolated crucible of emotions [such as] a ship at sea or basic training." Military commanders know this, he says, but they also know that to speak out would cost them their careers.

Feminists such as Madeline Morris, a law professor at Duke University, however, argue that military culture nurtures attitudes toward women that make rape more likely. The culture therefore needs to be changed, through complete integration of the sexes, "from basic training through combat," as Morris puts it in the *Duke Law Journal* (Feb. 1996). As long as women are excluded from "a range of combat positions," and as long as there is not a much greater proportion of women in uniform, she contends, the "hypermasculinity, hostility toward women, [and] adversarial sexual beliefs" are likely to persist.

"The presence of women as full members of the fighting forces," Morris writes, "would be inconsistent with a military culture in which women are viewed as the 'other,' primarily as sexual targets, and in which aggression is viewed as a sign of masculinity. The very presence of women as military equals would call into question such views."

A panel appointed by Secretary of the Army Togo D. West, Jr., to review policies on sexual harassment in the wake of the Aberdeen accusations includes many proponents of removing the restrictions that bar women from ground combat. It is widely expected to urge precisely that course later this spring in the interest of ending sexual harassment and misconduct in the army.

There are plenty of skeptics. The claim "that soldiers can be trained properly to conduct themselves in an asexual, professional manner" in the brutal and stressful environment of ground combat is, for the most part, "a Utopian fantasy," writes U.S. Air Force second lieutenant Laura Boussy in *Proceedings* (Nov. 1996). Sexual tensions and misconduct would be sure to increase, and unit morale and cohesion would suffer, she says.

Most army women apparently have no desire for combat jobs. (Most army men may feel the same way, but they aren't necessarily given any choice.) Though more than 70 percent of some 900 army women surveyed by Laura L. Miller, a military sociologist at Harvard University, thought that women should be able to volunteer for combat posts, only 11 percent of enlisted women and 14 percent of officers said they would opt for such positions themselves. When Miller asked 472 women about the effect of opening up combat billets to females, reports the

New York Times (Dec. 29, 1996), 61 percent agreed that sexual harassment would increase.

Everyone in the military knows, even if few will say so publicly, that incidents such as those at Aberdeen “are bound to recur,” observes Stephanie Gutmann, a New York-based writer, in the *New Republic* (Feb. 24, 1997). “In a military that is dedicated to the full integration of women, and to papering over the implications of that integration as best it can, sex and sexual difference will continue to be a disruptive force. And regulating sex will become an ever more important military sideline, one whose full costs in money, labor and morale we will not really know until the forces are called on to do what they are assembled to do: fight.”

Women now constitute 14 percent of America’s military, up from two percent when the Vietnam War ended. And 20 percent of new recruits are women—compared with 12 percent a decade ago. After Congress repealed the combat exclusion law in 1993, the Pentagon allowed women to fly combat planes and to serve on combat ships; today, women are excluded only from “direct ground combat” units and from submarines.

After Tailhook, the notorious 1991 convention of naval aviators that became synonymous with debauchery, the navy, hoping to nip sexist attitudes in the bud, Gutmann says, began training female recruits at “gender-integrated” boot camps. The army followed suit. “The result,” she says, “has been a kind of feel-good feminization of boot camp culture, with the old (male) ethos of competition and survival giving at least partial way to a new (female) spirit of cooperation and esteem-building.” At Fort Jackson, South Carolina, for instance, evaluations of soldiers’ skills put more emphasis on those such as mapmaking and first aid, at which female recruits excel.

To mute the difference in strength between men and women, writes John Corry, a senior correspondent for the *American Spectator* (Aug. 1996), the armed services “have introduced ‘dual standards’ and gender-normed training requirements. . . . Even the tough-minded Marines have succumbed.”

“The misbegotten campaign to place women in combat units has damaged all the services,” asserts Corry, a former *New York Times* reporter, “but the conditions of ship-

board life have made the navy most vulnerable.” Of the 400 women on the first gender-integrated warship, the *USS Eisenhower*, according to Gutmann, 24 were “non-deployable” due to pregnancy at the start of a Persian Gulf tour and 15 others were evacuated once on the water.

“Pregnancy must be kept in perspective,” argue retired Navy captain Georgia C. Sadler, of the Women’s Research and Education Institute, and Patricia J. Thomas, of the Navy Personnel Research Group and Development Center, San Diego. “Most Navy women, especially junior women, are in their prime childbearing years and some will become pregnant,” they write in *Proceedings* (Apr. 1995). “Nonetheless, the overall impact on the Navy is manageable. The solution is . . . to reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies, especially in the operational forces.”

Although pregnancy poses a problem for the services, it is no longer a blot on an unwed servicewoman’s record. In fact, writes Gutmann, pregnancy now so little adversely affects careers that soldiers sometimes use it “to get out of ‘hell tours’ like Bosnia, to go home.”

But while the presence of women in the military presents new sorts of problems for commanders, Harry G. Summers, Jr., a retired army colonel and syndicated columnist, argues that there is no going back. “The real reason for the dramatic increase in the number of women in the post-Vietnam military,” he writes in the *Washington Times* (Feb. 13, 1997), is that after the draft was ended in 1973, the armed forces became “unable to maintain the educational and intellectual standards essential to today’s high-tech military through male accessions alone. Since reinstating the draft was not politically possible . . . dramatically increasing female accessions and expanding duty assignments open to military women” became the answer. The performance of the 31,000 women who served in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, he says, showed “the wisdom of that decision.” He still favors the exclusion of women from ground combat units, however.

Unpleasant as the job of “regulating sex” among the young men and women in the services may be, Summers observes, “the alternative—trying to field a high-tech military capable [of] winning on the battlefield with a substandard male-only force—would be far more unpleasant.”

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Locke and the Founders

“Serving God and Mammon: The Lockean Sympathy in Early American Political Thought” by Joshua Foa Dienstag, in *American Political Science Review* (Sept. 1996), American Political Science Assn., 1527 New Hampshire Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

During the past quarter-century, historians have overturned the once widely accepted scholarly view that a liberal “Lockean consensus” existed among America’s Founding Fathers. Gordon Wood and others now argue that the Founders adhered to a “republican” creed. Their pervasive talk of “virtue” and political “slavery” is said to be evidence of a republican civic humanism anchored in Aristotle and Machiavelli. Dienstag, a political scientist at the University of Virginia, disagrees.

“The language of virtue and [political] slavery . . . has, in fact, a perfectly plain Lockean provenance,” he asserts. It is rooted in the Christian asceticism that is at the heart of Locke’s liberalism. The spirit of self-sacrifice that John Locke (1632–1704) and the American Founders championed did not stem “from polis-centered public-mindedness (as in republican thought),” Dienstag contends, “but from an inward-looking ideal of self-denial. It is not necessary to trace the founders’ notions of virtue and self-denial tortuously backward through several layers of English political thought to vague connections to 15th-century Florentine philosophy.”

The rejection of Locke as a shaper of the Founders’ thought has its roots in the 1950s, when several scholars offered radical reinterpretations of his thought. Leo Strauss portrayed him as a secret atheist, for example, and C. B. Macpherson attacked him as a Hobbesian authoritarian who favored a rapacious capitalism. Locke’s new interpreters considered it

impossible to reconcile his defense of property rights (and the resultant inequality of wealth) with his professed Christianity. The new Locke was hardly a suitable basis for a modern democracy. Scholars looked elsewhere for roots. But Locke himself had no difficulty reconciling faith and property, Dienstag observes. He subscribed to what sociologist Max Weber a few centuries later dubbed “the Protestant Ethic.”

Locke’s worldview was “reasonably coherent,” Dienstag maintains. He used the term *labor* to refer to both physical and mental activity, and he identified both sorts with virtue, so long as the labor is self-directed. “When one’s labor is not under one’s control, one is in a state of slavery,” Dienstag explains. Enslavement can come about in three ways. “From within oneself comes the threat of indulgence of the passions at the expense of frugality and industriousness. From outside come the threats of both mental enslavement (through restrictions on liberty) and physical enslavement (through the seizure of property).”

American Founders as different in their political views as Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were “sympathetic” to this outlook, Dienstag says. Asceticism was at the root of their moral philosophy, which divided “them neither from Christianity, nor from liberalism, nor from Locke. Rather, it was Locke’s remarkable ability to combine both of these doctrines with a defense of revolution that rendered him so attractive to the founders.”

The Welfare Reform Boomerang

“Block Grants: A Perennial, but Unstable, Tool of Government” by Paul L. Posner and Margaret T. Wrightson, in *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* (Summer 1996), Meyner Center for the Study of State and Local Government, 16 Kirby Hall of Civil Rights, Lafayette College, Easton, Pa. 18042–1785.

Last year’s controversial welfare reform measure ended Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) as an entitlement and provided for federal block grants to the states instead. If the history of such grants

is any guide, the pressure to reverse course is likely to grow very strong in the years ahead, argue Posner and Wrightson, director of federal budget issues and assistant director of federal management issues, respectively, at

the U.S. General Accounting Office.

Block grants provide each state a fixed sum for a broadly defined purpose, and considerable latitude in how to spend it. (The more widely used categorical grants spell out in detail what states must do with the money.) Although they accounted for only about 16 percent of the \$213 billion in federal grants in fiscal year 1995, block grants have been an intermittently popular way of addressing national problems. In 1974, for instance, in response to the perceived failure of urban renewal programs, Congress created the Community Development Block Grant program. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan eliminated almost one in five categorical grants in areas such as public health and certain social services, setting up block grants instead.

"The record shows that states have often maintained a basic continuity in the delivery of block-granted services," Posner and Wrightson observe. Surprisingly, after recovering from the recession of the early '80s, states even used their own funds to make up for federal cuts in long-standing state programs in health and social services.

Yet on some 58 occasions between 1983 and 1991, Congress added new categorical provisions or restrictions to the block grants.

Congress also cut funding even as it provided new categorical grants in the same areas. Why? Members of Congress are able to claim credit for new categorical grants, the authors say, whereas most credit for implementing block grants goes to state and local officials. Also, many interest groups are stronger in Washington than in state capitals, and they like "targeted" grants.

But given the continuing pressure to cut federal spending, block grants are likely to retain their appeal, particularly for open-ended entitlement programs. The federal government can cap spending and shift the painful choices to the states, while the states, in turn, can blame the feds for forcing them to make those choices.

Many observers fear that states will not perform as well with block grants for entitlement programs such as welfare as they did with the block grants initiated in the early 1980s—that they will engage in "a race to the bottom" on benefits. But even if the states do a good job, the authors conclude, unless Congress and interest groups take federalism more to heart, history suggests that in the long run the states could well find themselves faced with reduced federal funding and "creeping requirements."

Conservatives on the Edge

"The End of Democracy? The Judicial Usurpation of Politics," a symposium in *First Things* (Nov. 1996), and "The End of Democracy? A Discussion Continued," in *First Things* (Jan. 1997), 156 Fifth Ave., Ste. 400, New York, N.Y. 10010.

"Articles on 'judicial arrogance' and the 'judicial usurpation of power' are not new," Richard John Neuhaus, a Catholic priest

who is editor in chief of *First Things*, and his fellow editors note in introducing a symposium that "addresses those questions,



A 1993 cartoon points up the endless problems that *Roe v. Wade* has caused the U.S. Supreme Court.

often in fresh ways, but also moves beyond them." This move beyond, particularly by the editors themselves, has prompted outraged resignations from the journal's editorial board, worried considerations of conservatism's "anti-American temptation," and ill-informed talk of "a full-fledged war" between "necons" and "theocons."

Federal court rulings in such charged matters as abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, and assisted

An Honorable Calling?

There is no doubt that public respect for American political leaders and institutions has reached new lows in recent years. Yet an article by Karlyn Bowman of the American Enterprise Institute in the *Public Perspective* (Feb.–March 1997) offers some reminders that Americans have long had a limited enthusiasm for politics. At right, for example, are the responses to an opinion-survey question the Gallup Organization has been asking since 1945. (In 1991, Gallup also began asking the same question about choices people would make for their daughters, yielding essentially the same results.)

“If you had a son, would you like to see him go into politics as a life’s work?”

	Yes	No
1945	21	68
1953	20	70
1955	26	60
1962	23	69
1965	36	54
1973	23	64
1991	24	72
1993	22	70
1994	25	71
1995	32	63

suicide add up to “an entrenched pattern of government by judges that is nothing less than the usurpation of politics,” the *First Things* editors assert. “The question here explored, in full awareness of its far-reaching consequences, is whether we have reached or are reaching the point where conscientious citizens can no longer give moral assent to the existing regime.” They continue: “the question that is the title of this symposium is in no way hyperbolic. The subject before us is the end of democracy.”

But that, the journal’s editors say, is not the only subject: “Law, as it is presently made by the judiciary, has declared its independence from morality. Indeed . . . morality—especially traditional morality, and most especially morality associated with religion—has been declared legally suspect and a threat to the public order. . . . America is not and, please God, will never become Nazi Germany, but it is only blind hubris that denies it can happen here and, in peculiarly American ways, may be happening here. . . . Some of our authors examine possible responses to laws that cannot be obeyed by conscientious citizens—ranging from noncompliance to resistance to civil disobedience to morally justified revolution.”

None of the *First Things* writers—who include former judge Robert H. Bork and evangelist Charles W. Colson, as well as professors Russell Hittinger of the University of Tulsa, Hadley Arkes of Amherst College, and Robert P. George of Princeton University—call for revolution, though Colson (of Watergate fame) toys with it. (“We dare not at present despair of America and advocate open rebellion.”)

Responding to the editors along with many others in a later issue of *First Things*, noted conservative author Midge Dector writes that she “could hardly believe my eyes” to encounter the talk of the legitimacy of the United States government, civil disobedience, “and even, for God’s sake, ‘morally justified revolution!’”

It is true, she says, that the courts have usurped power and reached “extraconstitutional and illegitimate decisions.” But the real problem, in her view, is a culture that has lost its moral bearings. “It used to be said of the court that its decisions followed election results. But even in these less than attractive times nothing quite so cynical is the case: what the court actually follows is the *culture*.” Recklessly questioning the legitimacy of the government, she and others suggest, only serves to discredit conservative efforts to change the culture.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

The Clinton Doctrine

“Democratic Enlargement: The Clinton Doctrine” by Douglas Brinkley, in *Foreign Policy* (Spring 1997), 2400 N St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037–1153.

When President Bill Clinton unveiled his grand strategy of “democratic enlargement” in a 1993 speech at the United Nations, Americans yawned. Even Secretary of State Warren Christopher shunned it, reportedly regarding enlargement as a trade policy masquerading as a foreign policy. Yet, argues Brinkley, a historian at the University of New Orleans, the concept guides Clinton’s day-to-day foreign policy decisions.

Clinton entered office as a foreign affairs novice, Brinkley notes, and in his presidency’s early months, U.S. foreign policy was “the product of crisis management rather than strategic doctrine.” As a candidate, Brinkley says, Clinton had outlined three foreign policy priorities: “updating and restructuring American military and security capabilities, elevating the role of economics in international affairs, and promoting democracy abroad.” In August

1993, Clinton directed national security adviser Anthony Lake to come up with a single word or slogan that would do for him what “containment” had done for the Cold War presidents.

According to Lake, Clinton “embraced the enlargement concept almost immediately,” understanding, Brinkley says, “that it signified the notion that as free states grew in number and strength the international order would become both more prosperous and more secure.”

But this did not imply that the United States was obliged to promote constitutional democracy and human rights everywhere. For the concept to be “politically viable,” Brinkley says, its focus had to be on “primary U.S. strategic and economic interests.” In some cases, that might mean *not* pushing hard for more democracy right away. “For example,” he writes, “Asians in general took a vastly different

Ike Speaks

What would former president Dwight D. Eisenhower think if he were alive today? Historian Louis Galambos, co-editor of Eisenhower’s papers, says in *Johns Hopkins Magazine* (Feb. 1997) that Ike would be shocked at how suddenly the Soviet Union and its empire collapsed.

Eisenhower thought we would win the Cold War, eventually. He thought it would take a long, long time.

He was right. We did win. And it brought to a conclusion the most stunningly successful foreign policy of the 20th century. By any country. It achieved complete victory without a war. I challenge you to come up with a more successful national foreign policy.

Think of it in the context of the interwar years and World War II. How successful was the British foreign policy of the interwar period? Not that successful. How successful was the German policy of expansion? We know the results. The Soviet policy of rapprochement with fascist Germany? We know the results of that. Japan? Italy? France? Who has done anything more successful than this in the present century?

It has long been popular in academic circles, especially in diplomatic history, to say that the United States lacks the patience and elite leadership it needs to be effective in framing and implementing foreign policy. But the success of containment indicates that this is not the case. We were patient. We did have effective bipartisan leadership. We won!

view of what constituted democracy, preferring to emphasize social order over individual rights. Under enlargement, America's chief concern in Asia would therefore be free market access—the rest, for the most part, would be left to sort itself out.”

“We have put our economic competitiveness at the heart of our foreign policy,” Clinton said in 1994. In the Clinton formula, economic advantage and national political interest do not conflict but go hand in hand. Emerging democracies with a growing middle class eager to consume American products, in this view, serve both America's need for markets and its desire for a world of peaceful and prosperous liberal-minded nations. “Relations with countries with bright economic futures such as Mexico and South Korea,” Brinkley writes,

“would thus be placed on the front burner in his administration; poor, blighted nations, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and Central America,” would ordinarily be given little attention.

Some critics favor “a more militarily activist” foreign policy, Brinkley notes. Others complain that enlargement is mostly empty rhetoric that avoids unpleasant realities and hard choices. But the president, Brinkley writes, sees more promise “in helping Toys ‘R’ Us and Nike to flourish in Central Europe and Asia than in dispatching Marines to quell unrest in economically inconsequential nations.”

With his strategy of enlargement, Brinkley says, Clinton is hoping to go down in history “as the free trade president and the leading architect of a new world economic order.”

A Man Called Jane

“How *Fighting Ships* Became Jane's” by Richard Brooks, in *Proceedings* (Dec. 1996), U.S. Naval Institute, 2062 Generals Hwy., Annapolis, Md. 21401.

Civilian “strategic analysts” are accepted figures in public life, populating think tanks, holding forth on op-ed pages, and even landing jobs on network TV news shows. Their analyses are looked to as a counterweight to military views. It wasn't always so. One of the pioneers was Fred T. Jane, says Brooks, author of a forthcoming biography. In turn-of-the-century Britain, his *All The World's Fighting Ships* helped break the British Royal Navy's monopoly on naval affairs.

Born the son of an Anglican curate in 1865 in a London suburb, Jane had forebears on his mother's side who had served in the Royal Navy and Marines. When poor health prevented him from shipping out, he used his talent for drawing to make a career in journalism, sketching naval maneuvers for the *Illustrated London News* and other periodicals in the 1890s. He not only built up his collection of warship sketches but picked the brains of naval officers and enlisted men to get information about the ships' strengths and weaknesses. By 1897 he was

ready to launch the visual warship atlas that came to be known as *Jane's Fighting Ships*, complete with pungent comments about ships' performance from engineering officers he had cultivated.

Jane systematically categorized ships by their appearance, and even provided a visu-



Fred Jane didn't just play with toy ships.

al index of ship silhouettes. Lookouts or officers of the watch could thus quickly identify unknown vessels and their pertinent characteristics, such as speed and weaponry.

With the success of *Jane's Fighting Ships*

and the knowledge he had gained, Jane made various attempts to open up debate on naval matters, Brooks says. The naval establishment did not appreciate his efforts. When one admiral publicly objected to Jane's expressing opinions on naval tactics, the analyst replied that he was "professionally compelled to devote hours and days to the study of points which the average Naval Officer can only spend as many minutes on."

Yet Jane enjoyed some significant victories. In 1903, he published an article by an Italian officer outlining the concept for a revolutionary battleship. Three years later,

the Royal Navy launched it in the form of the big-gun HMS *Dreadnought*. In 1909, when a British official claimed ignorance of the extent of Germany's battleship build-up, a furious Jane pointed out that "anyone who cared to do so could find out German naval progress without the slightest trouble" by reading his *Fighting Ships*.

Unable to find official employment during World War I, Jane "undertook an exhausting series of lecture tours to explain his views on the conduct of the war," Brooks writes. After a bout of influenza, he died in 1916 of apparent heart failure. But his *Fighting Ships* lives on.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Share the Wealth!

"The Spiral of Inequality" by Paul Krugman, in *Mother Jones* (Nov.-Dec. 1996), 731 Market St., Ste. 600, San Francisco, Calif. 94103.

The facts about growing income inequality in the United States are no longer much in dispute, says Krugman, an economist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Consider this: in 1970, American families in the top five percent of earners enjoyed an average income 12 times that of families in the bottom 20 percent; by 1994, the rich were raking in more than 19 times as much as the poor.

The only real question remaining, Krugman says, is what's behind the shift. Foreign trade and "skill bias" (which skews pay toward brain workers) are not as important as many people assume, he argues. What's changed most is values. In 1970, the CEO of a typical *Fortune* 500 company earned about 35 times as much as the average manufacturing employee. "It would have been unthinkable to pay him 150 times the average, as is now common," Krugman says, "and downright outrageous to do so while announcing mass layoffs and cutting the real earnings of many of the company's workers."

Though America a quarter-century ago had large disparities between economic classes, it also had "an egalitarian ethic that limited those disparities," he maintains. The labor movement fostered those egalitarian values and enforced them at the bargaining table and in the political arena,



Unions now represent less than 12 percent of the private work force.

providing a counterweight to the political influence enjoyed by wealthy individuals and corporations.

How can America become again "the relatively decent society we had a generation ago"? Strengthen unions, Krugman says.

In the Enterprise Zone

“An Evaluation of California’s Enterprise Zone Programs” by David E. Dowall, in *Economic Development Quarterly* (Nov. 1996), Sage Publications, 2455 Teller Rd., Thousand Oaks, Calif. 91320.

Nearly 40 states now have enterprise zone programs that give tax breaks to businesses in blighted inner-city areas. The aim is to stimulate economic development. In California, the results have been underwhelming, says Dowall, a professor of city and regional planning at the University of California, Berkeley.

He looked at 13 of his state’s 34 enterprise zones, ranging from the Barrio Logan area of San Diego in the south to Eureka in the north, and including the Watts, Central City, and Pacoima areas of Los Angeles. All were launched in 1986. Over the next four years, Dowall found, the number of firms operating in the zones increased by only 287 (to 8,018), or less than four percent. There was evidence of unusual job growth (relative to the particular county and industry) in only two zones

(Pacoima and San Jose), and even in those, the programs may not have been responsible. Of 159 businesses that Dowall surveyed, only 36 said their decisions about location or expansion had been influenced by the incentives.

Tax records indicate that businesses in the 13 zones claimed some \$10.6 million in state income tax credits between 1986 and 1990. Fewer than 1,000 jobs—only about six percent of the total net increase—were ostensibly “created” as a result. The credits, representing less than one-half of one percent of the total net taxable income (\$2.7 billion) earned by zone businesses, were too small, Dowall notes, to have much impact. He favors throwing more money at the problem, including regulatory relief and financial and technical aid for zone businesses, investments in infrastructure, and job training.

Diminished to Death

“Increasing Returns and the New World of Business” by W. Brian Arthur, in *Harvard Business Review* (July–Aug. 1996), Boston, Mass. 02163.

The law of diminishing returns is one of the most useful contributions economics has made to humanity’s tiny stock of comfortable truisms. Now, however, economists may have to take their gift back.

The law holds that a producer who continually increases output will eventually encounter limits: pouring more resources into production will yield diminishing returns. A farmer, for example, will eventually be forced to put lower-quality land into production, cutting profits. Diminishing returns, in the writing of the great 19th-century economist Alfred Marshall, were a crucial force in bringing prices and market shares into equilibrium in a market economy.

The principle still largely fits the “bulk-processing, smokestack economy,” argues Arthur, an economist at Stanford University, but in today’s high-tech economy, a new “law” is in effect: the law of *increasing* returns.

High-tech goods are different in large part because their production costs do not rise. High-tech producers put most of their money into research, not production. The first copy of Windows cost Microsoft \$50 million; subsequent ones cost \$3 apiece. The law of dimin-

ishing returns does not operate through costs alone. An automaker, for example, suffers diminishing returns when it exhausts the customer base for its brand. Beyond a certain point, Ford must cut prices to sell more Tauruses.

But such limits do not always completely apply to high-tech products, Arthur contends. “If a product or a company or a technology—one of many competing in a market—gets ahead by chance or clever strategy,” he maintains, “increasing returns can magnify this advantage, and the product or company or technology can go on to lock in the market.” That is what happened in the early 1980s, for example, in the market for operating systems for personal computers. Even though computer programmers regarded it as an inferior system, DOS eventually prevailed over its competitors. Users had too much invested in learning the ways of DOS to switch. Software developers put more of their efforts into writing programs for DOS. Microsoft got a lock on the market.

The law of diminishing returns still applies in the traditional, bulk-production part of the

economy. In that environment, Arthur observes, a hierarchy of bosses and workers, planning, and controls are the rule, whereas in the high-tech world, the continual “quests for the next technological winner” require “flat” hierarchies and maximum freedom for employees.

The two worlds of today’s economy are not neatly divided, Arthur says. Hewlett-Packard,

for example, designs knowledge-based devices in Palo Alto, California, and manufactures them in bulk elsewhere. Most high-tech companies have both types of operations, but the firms often keep them separate, he says, because the “rules of the game”—and the underlying economic laws—are different for each.

SOCIETY

Why America Got Malled

A Survey of Recent Articles

The malling of America must be almost complete now. At last count (1995), the country had 41,235 operating shopping centers (including some 1,800 large regional malls). Most Americans seem satisfied with this, but not all. Some critics, such as Kenneth T. Jackson, a historian at Columbia University, are appalled by the sameness of these cathedrals of commerce—“the same products, the same stores, and the same antiseptic environment.” Others, such as Lizabeth Cohen, a historian at New York University, worry that, by “privatizing” public space, malls may pose a grave threat to democracy.

Why did this strange fruit flourish in the American landscape? Scholars usually point to Americans’ postwar rush to the suburbs and to their love affair with the automobile. (The former was given added impetus by rising racial tensions in the cities, and the latter was abetted by the Interstate Highway Act of 1956.) Thomas W. Hanchett, a historian at Youngs-

town State University in Ohio—who joins Jackson and Cohen in *American Historical Review* (Oct. 1996) in examining the malling of America—has a different explanation: a 1954 change in the U.S. tax code.

Shopping centers rarely sprouted before Congress made the change. Entrepreneur J. C. Nichols’s Country Club Plaza, a Spanish-themed cluster of upscale shops in Kansas City often cited as the world’s first full-blown shopping center, attracted much publicity nationwide when it opened in 1922, but only a handful of imitators. “The problem lay in the economics of development,” Hanchett says. “For a developer dealing in raw land at a city’s edge, the swiftest and easiest return came from simply selling lots or houses. A shopping center, by contrast, required the investment of considerable construction capital. Once built, its rental spaces had to be managed carefully over many years in order to generate a profit.”

After World War II, shopping center devel-

The Unreal Environment

When Americans enter the mall, they are leaving something vital behind, writes noted architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable in *Preservation* (Mar.–Apr. 1997).

The changeover from the street to the enclosed, security-controlled mall, where one feels safer than on city streets and where so much of our social and communal life has been relocated, has transformed and diminished the use and meaning of the public domain. There is a growing controversy as to whether the mall is public or private space, with constitutional freedoms or its own police powers. The critic Michael Sorkin argues that this murky area—the increasing privatization of publicly used malls as a substitute for the almost extinct communal function of the street and the square—marks a trend toward the end of public space, with alarming ramifications in terms of democratic diversity and freedom. . . . The cocoon of the mall protects not only from assorted discomforts and troubling diversity but also from our inclusive, democratic history.

opment did increase somewhat, but nearly all of the 30 to 50 new projects opening each year were small “neighborhood convenience” operations. A few developers were more ambitious: Cameron Village in Raleigh, North Carolina (1949), Northgate in Seattle (1950), and Shoppers World outside Boston (1951), writes Hanchett, “heralded a new category of suburban retailing: the planned regional shopping center. Each included one or even two large branch department stores, one or two big supermarkets, and upwards of 30 other businesses.” The economic challenge involved, however, remained formidable. Shoppers World, for example, went bankrupt three years after it opened. At mid-decade, there still were fewer than two dozen regional shopping centers in the entire country.

Then, in 1954, Congress changed the corporate income tax law.

For decades, businesses had been permitted to take deductions for wear and tear on buildings, machines, and other income-producing property, on a “straight-line depreciation” basis. Buildings were assumed to have a 40-year life. Each year owners could deduct from profits 1/40th of the original cost of a building.

But in 1954, apparently intending to stimulate capital investment in manufacturing in order to counter a mild recession, Congress replaced the straight-line approach with “accelerated depreciation,” which enabled owners to take huge deductions in the early years of a project’s life. This, Hanchett says, “transformed real-estate development into a lucrative ‘tax shelter.’ An investor making a profit from rental of a new building usually avoided all taxes on that income, since the ‘loss’ from depreciation canceled it out. And when the depreciation exceeded profits from the building itself—as it virtually always did in early years—the investor could use the excess ‘loss’ to cut other income taxes.” With real-estate values going up during the 1950s and ’60s, savvy investors “could build a structure, claim ‘losses’ for several years while enjoying

tax-free income, then sell the project for more than they had originally invested.”

Since the “accelerated depreciation” rule did not apply to renovation of existing buildings, investors “now looked away from established downtowns, where vacant land was scarce and new construction difficult,” Hanchett says. “Instead, they rushed to put their money into projects at the suburban fringe—especially into shopping centers.

“Suddenly, all over the United States, shopping plazas sprouted like well-fertilized weeds,” he writes. “Developers who had been gradually assembling land and mulling over the shopping-center concept abruptly shifted their projects into high gear.” Twenty-five new shopping centers—including Southdale in Minneapolis, the first enclosed mall—opened in 1956. By the mid-1980s, when Congress finally reinstated straight-line depreciation of commercial property, suburban malls and shopping centers had completed their ascendancy over the old downtowns.

Hanchett’s argument is a strong one, comments Kenneth Jackson, but he pushes it too far. The same tax breaks were available for office buildings, drive-in theaters, and even livery stables, Jackson points out, but investors chose to put more of their money in shopping centers. That suggests that the exodus of commerce from the old downtowns was in the cards anyway—accelerated depreciation merely accelerated the move.

But whatever the precise array of forces causing it, the shift that made privately owned regional shopping centers “the distinctive public space of the postwar landscape” has had important consequences, in Elizabeth Cohen’s view. The mall provided “a new kind of community life—consumption-oriented, tightly controlled, and aimed at citizen-consumers” who were mostly white and middle-class. This change, she believes, “has made more precarious the shared public space upon which our democracy depends.”

Why Did ‘Ordinary’ Germans Kill Jews?

“Browning’s Version” by Adam Shatz, in *Lingua Franca* (Feb. 1997), 22 W. 38th St., New York, N.Y. 10018.

In 1941 and ’42, the 500 members of Hamburg’s Reserve Police Battalion 101, a unit of the German “order police” that had

been pressed into active service, killed 38,000 Polish Jews and deported 45,000 more to Treblinka, the Nazi death camp in

Poland. What prompted these policemen, who were not fervent young Nazis but “ordinary” Germans approaching middle age, to take part in mass murder?

Harvard University historian Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, in *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1996), a controversial best seller both in America and in Germany, argues that the policemen killed because, like most Germans of the day, they believed in the justice of exterminating Jews. Goldhagen has touched off a torrid debate in the periodical press. One of his chief antagonists is the historian Christopher Browning, author of *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution* (1992). Browning, a professor at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington, argues: “Influenced and conditioned in a general way, imbued in particular with a sense of their own superiority and racial kinship as well as Jewish inferiority and otherness, many of them undoubtedly were; explicitly prepared for the task of killing Jews they most certainly were not.” Nor was the brutalizing context of war the explanation, since the men of the battalion had not seen battle. Nor were they forced to kill, since individual police-

men could have refused (some did) without facing dire punishment.

“Having pared away these explanations,” writes Shatz, a contributing editor of *Lingua Franca*, “Browning proposed a more disturbing, and universally applicable theory: The men were driven by a fear of breaking ranks in a time of total mobilization. ‘It was easier for them to shoot,’ because refusal was considered an asocial, even unmanly act.” Wartime passions, and the Nazi regime’s “manipulation of wartime anxieties and pre-existing anti-Semitism,” allowed the policemen “to see themselves as defending the fatherland.”

In a sense, Shatz observes, the Browning-Goldhagen debate is “the latest reenactment of an old argument between those who see the Holocaust as a crime against the Jewish people and those who see it as a crime against humanity.”

Goldhagen’s thesis, profoundly disturbing as it is, reflects a less pessimistic assessment of human nature than Browning’s. This historian’s assessment, says Shatz, suggests “that when a dictatorial regime issues genocidal orders to men with guns amid total war, they will likely obey. . . . In Christopher Browning’s view, there is nothing particularly nice about ordinary men.”

The Attack of the Philanthropoids

“Citizen 501(c)(3)” by Nicholas Lemann, in *The Atlantic Monthly* (Feb. 1997), 77 N. Washington St., Boston, Mass. 02114; “The Billions of Dollars That Made Things Worse” by Heather Mac Donald, in *City Journal* (Autumn 1996), 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

Philanthropic foundations have become increasingly important in American life—and increasingly political, argues Lemann, the *Atlantic Monthly’s* national correspondent. Since 1980, the assets of the 25 largest foundations have more than doubled in real terms—to \$55 billion—and the grants given by the 25 most generous foundations have grown to more than \$2 billion. In response to the rise of aggressively conservative foundations in recent years, Lemann contends, large foundations with “a distinctly liberal cast” have become “more political” themselves. For example, the Ford Foundation contributed \$1.4 million last year to activities aimed at defending affirmative action from attack.

But Mac Donald, a contributing editor of *City Journal* and John M. Olin Fellow at the Manhattan Institute, says that the Ford

Foundation began promoting a liberal agenda in the 1960s, when (among other misguided projects) it sponsored a disastrous school decentralization experiment in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville section of Brooklyn. The experiment produced racial and ethnic turmoil, a citywide teachers’ strike that shut schools down for nearly two months, and a lasting legacy in New York of bitterness between blacks and Jews. But the Rockefeller Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and other large foundations soon followed Ford’s example and adopted social-change agendas. Their efforts, Mac Donald maintains, have helped to create “not a more just but a more divided and contentious American society.”

Believing that discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, class, and ethnicity is widespread in America, for example,

Ford and other foundations, she says, have poured money into universities in efforts to promote “diversity,” ethnic studies, and gender studies. Between 1972 and ’92, women’s studies alone received \$36 million from Ford, Rockefeller, Carnegie, Mott, Mellon, and other foundations.

Though some conservative foundations have risen to prominence in recent years, Mac Donald says, they are vastly outnumbered, and outspent, by liberal foundations. In 1994, while the Olin Foundation, the leading funder of conservative scholarship on campus, gave a total of \$13 million in grants, the Ford Foundation contributed \$42 million in the fields of education and culture alone.

Despite their increased influence in



Disorders at a junior high school in Brooklyn’s Ocean Hill-Brownsville district brought police there in 1968.

American life, Lemann observes, foundations are largely spared the sort of scrutiny that government routinely gets from the news media and the voters. “That ought to change,” he believes. Mac Donald would doubtless agree.

PRESS & MEDIA

Misreporting the AIDS Story

“Aiding AIDS: The Story of a Media Virus” by David R. Boldt, in *Forbes MediaCritic* (Fall 1996), P.O. Box 762, Bedminster, N.J. 07921. (*Forbes MediaCritic* has since ceased publication.)

In a *Wall Street Journal* exposé last year, reporters Amanda Bennett and Anita Sharpe revealed that at a 1987 meeting, officials of the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) decided to exaggerate the risks to heterosexuals of contracting the AIDS virus. That, they believed, was the only way to drum up widespread support for measures to combat the disease, which mainly strikes homosexual men and intravenous-drug users and their sexual partners. “If I can get AIDS, anyone can” was the theme of the public service ad campaign the agency launched later that year. The front-page *Journal* article was “an exemplary piece of journalism,” says Boldt, a columnist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, but it skipped over an important part of the story: “the news media’s deep complicity in aiding and abetting the heterosexual AIDS scare.”

When, for example, the CDC issued a press release indicating that the number of

heterosexuals with AIDS had doubled, the news media, for the most part, failed to explain that the increase was mostly due to a change in CDC bookkeeping. A February 1987 *Atlantic Monthly* story by Katie Leishman, “Heterosexuals and AIDS: The Second Stage of the Epidemic,” Boldt says, “made virtually no attempt to back up its alarmist contentions.” News stories disproportionately featured individuals from low-risk groups as AIDS victims. A 1987 study by the Center for Media and Public Affairs found that heterosexuals were eight times more likely to appear as AIDS victims in TV news reports than they were to contract the disease.

Over the years, Boldt points out, a few journalists, such as the *Chicago Tribune*’s John Crewdson and the *Inquirer*’s Donald Drake, read the “fine print” in the CDC reports and pointed out that the threat to heterosexuals was exaggerated. For their labors, they were roundly criticized, not only by

AIDS activists but often by people inside their own newsrooms.

Journalists played up the threat to heterosexuals for various reasons, Boldt says. Some were just ignorant or credulous. Others may have realized that it improved the chances of a page-one by-line. Others may have feared criticism if they bucked the trend.

Free-lance writer Michael Fumento was relentlessly attacked for his *Myth of Heterosexual AIDS* (1990), Boldt notes. Gay activists and public health officials called him and his book “irresponsible,” “mean-spirited,” “myopic,” “homophobic,” and “sex-

ist.” AIDS activists, according to Fumento, mounted a nationwide campaign to keep his book out of bookstores, and to a considerable extent, succeeded. Ironically, Boldt says, Fumento’s book is praised in some recent books by gay authors who have come to realize that “the anybody-can-get-it strategy” dilutes the efforts made for homosexuals.

Did the *Wall Street Journal* exposé finally put an end to the myth of heterosexual AIDS? “Probably not,” Boldt says. “Reporters long familiar with the story say that too many people now have too much invested in keeping the myth alive.”

Junk Mail Juggernaut

“Direct Mail: The Real Threat to Newspapers” by John Morton, in *American Journalism Review* (Nov. 1996), 8701 Adelphi Rd., Adelphi, Md. 20783-1716.

The rise of the Internet and its endless electronic offerings has partisans of newspapers deeply alarmed. Morton, a newspaper analyst with a brokerage firm, says that they ought to worry instead about a far more mundane threat: junk mail.

Encouraged by the U.S. Postal Service, Morton contends, direct mailers have sapped desperately needed advertising revenues from newspaper publishers and forced them into costly battles that divert them from their main mission. Ten years ago, newspapers claimed nearly 27 percent of all advertising revenues, while direct mail received 16 percent. By 1995, however, newspapers’ share had dropped to 22.4 percent, while the direct mail take grew to 20.4 percent.

Morton traces the rise of junk mail to the transformation of the U.S. Postal Service into a quasi-independent agency during the 1970s. At first, a revenue-hungry Postal Service increased the third-class postal rates

paid by direct mailers. Many advertisers fled to newspaper publishers, who could deliver the advertisers’ full-color brochures and coupons with the morning paper. Realizing its mistake, the Postal Service reversed course, not only trimming rates but allowing mailers to put several circulars in one package. A junk mail boom was born.

Now, says Morton, legislation is pending in Congress that would allow the Postal Service to offer even deeper discounts to high-volume mailers while raising first-class postal rates. The newspaper industry charges that first-class mail, while accounting for only 54 percent of the Postal Service’s volume, already pays 70 percent of the service’s costs. Letting the Postal Service have its way, in this view, would be tantamount to meddling in the marketplace. But even if the legislation does not pass, says Morton, junk mail will remain a far bigger threat to newspapers than anything cyberspace may have to offer.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Is There a Place for Theology in Academia?

A Survey of Recent Articles

Most of America’s private colleges and universities long ago undid the close ties they had at birth to Protestant denominations. Although “the trappings of Christian

institutions” were maintained into the 20th century, political scientist Isaac Kramnick and historian R. Laurence Moore, both of Cornell University, note in *Academe*

(Nov.–Dec. 1996), “one by one the things that had upheld their Christian mission vanished. Ministers disappeared from the rosters of faculty and administrators. Compulsory chapel and prayer services fell into disuse and were then abandoned. Committed study of religion retreated to divinity schools that were increasingly isolated from the central concerns of major universities.” Now, a move is afoot to drive theology out of academia entirely.

The North American Association for the Study of Religion (NAASR) has been pushing for more than a decade for a dramatic redefinition of religious studies—one “that would likely put out of business most of the 1,236 undergraduate theology and religion programs at U.S. colleges and universities—or else marginalize those programs to the point of irrelevance,” writes Charlotte Allen, a contributing editor of *Lingua Franca* (Nov. 1996).

The 50 or so dues-paying members of NAASR and their allies would shift the study of religion out of the humanities and into the social sciences, Allen says. They want to make “the methodological atheism of the natural sciences . . . de rigueur for religion professors as well.” Explains Donald Wiebe, an NAASR board member who teaches at Toronto’s Trinity College, “There’s the *academic* study of religion, and there’s the *religious* study of religion—we believe in the academic study of religion.”

Critics accuse Wiebe and his NAASR colleagues of “reductionism.” Their stand, says Luke Timothy Johnson, a professor of New Testament studies at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology, in Atlanta, “reduces the religious impulse to the interplay of political power or a social movement. . . . It’s like someone who’s tone-deaf trying to explain music.”

The NAASR, Allen notes, “is a tiny David to [the] Goliath” of the 8,000-member American Academy of Religion (AAR), the leading trade organization and learned society for religion scholars. However, the NAASR and its allies recently won a major victory. In its 1995 evaluation of research-doctorate programs at U.S. universities, the Washington-based National Research Council included religion for the first time—and, taking the NAASR line, excluded schools, such as New York City’s famed



In the late 1930s, the students at Princeton University filled the chapel pews.

Union Theological Seminary, that do not offer Ph.D.’s in religious studies, as opposed to doctorates in theology. A council staffer maintains that a doctor of ministry degree reflects professional training more than academic research. Barbara DeConcini, executive director of the AAR and a professor of religion and culture at Emory, however, disagrees. “There’s no gap between theology and research. It’s like a dissertation on Immanuel Kant that might consist of speculative reflection on ideas within Kant’s philosophy. Humanistic research is in large part interpretation.”

Theology deserves a place in the academic curriculum just as much as feminism or Afro-American studies do, William Scott Green, a professor of religion and Judaic studies at the University of Rochester, argues in *Academe*. Theology “is a religion’s version of what secular ideologies call theory. . . . If we can have feminism in the classroom, we can have religion and theology there too.”

“In one form or another,” Green says, “the problem of God is virtually coextensive with Western intellectual life, and there is a rich and elaborate tradition of rigorous academic thinking about the possibility, plausibility, and meaning of divinity.” What a sad comment it would be if universities were to decide that such “serious and persistent” questions were beneath their consideration.

The Twin Towers of Toleration

“Two Theories of Toleration: Locke versus Mill” by Adam Wolfson, in *Perspectives on Political Science* (Fall 1996), 1319 18th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-1802.

Many Americans today worship at the shrine of tolerance. They hold fast to the “one very simple principle” that John Stuart Mill enunciated in *On Liberty* (1859): that society should never interfere with the liberty of the individual except to prevent harm to others. But, argues Wolfson, executive editor of the *Public Interest*, there are serious hazards in that libertarian outlook, as an earlier advocate of toleration, John Locke, well knew.

Mill’s expansive view of liberty rests, in most interpretations, on an interest in securing truth through open debate. But Wolfson asserts that “it is not liberty that secures truth . . . but rather, [Mill’s] peculiar, quite relativistic, notion of the truth that secures the widest possible liberty of thought and action.” As depicted in *On Liberty*, Wolfson says, truth is so complex and many-sided that it cannot be grasped by most individuals except at the level of society, where the various contending half-truths and falsehoods are brought into a rough balance. Even the “truth” thus arrived at by society is really only, in Mill’s words, a “fragment of truth.”

By the time Mill is done, Wolfson says, “there is little sense that [truth] is something available, much less desirable.” Instead, fearful that intolerance might

stamp out individuality, Mill calls for “different experiments of living,” “varieties of character,” and “free development of individuality.” Certain that the commonwealth is secure and that moral truth cannot be infallibly established, Mill, like many Americans today, “permits, indeed encourages, the cultivation of opinions and behaviors that are at odds with liberalism.”

Locke, in contrast, in *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), largely confined toleration to the realm of speculative thought. “The Magistrate ought not to forbid the Preaching or Profession of any Speculative Opinions,” he declared. But practical opinions, which “influence the Will and Manners,” were another story. Unlike Mill, Locke believed that “Morality is capable of Demonstration, as well as Mathematicks,” and that the state ought to discourage pernicious practical opinions.

In Locke’s view, Wolfson says, “a liberal society could not survive, much less prosper, without a preponderance of morality and rationality existing among the citizenry.” And government, therefore, had “at least some interest” in shaping the character of its citizens. That is a lesson, Wolfson concludes, that modern libertarians, who often claim Locke as a founding father, seem to have forgotten.

The Feminized Church

“Gender & Religion” by Kenneth L. Woodward, in *Commonweal* (Nov. 22, 1996), 15 Dutch St., New York, N.Y. 10038.

Is the Christian church a patriarchal institution whose oppression women only lately have begun to overcome? That is not the church that most Americans know, contends Woodward, a long-time writer on religion for *Newsweek*.

“If we look inside Protestant churches on Sunday,” Woodward notes, “we find that most of the people in the pews are women. Although there are no hard-and-fast statistics, pastors I talk to say that women usually outnumber the men three-to-one.” Women also typically dominate the church com-

mittees, the prayer groups, the Bible study groups, and the Sunday schools. And most of those whom a Protestant pastor counsels during the week are women. “The pastoral challenge facing most clergy,” Woodward says, “is to find ways to draw men into active participation.”

Though it might be argued that it is the pastor who has the authority, and therefore the power, in the church, and that most pastors are male, Woodward contends that “the reality of congregational life is more complex than that.” In black Baptist

churches, for instance, the ministers and members of the boards of trustees are male, but women raise the money and effectively determine how it is spent. Power in those churches is wielded by “the Mothers,” a group of older women who dress distinctively in white on Sundays and constitute the heart and soul of the church. As C. Eric Lincoln of Duke Divinity School has written, “woe be it to the minister” who does not have the Mothers on his side.

Within American Christianity, Woodward contends, “the altar and the pulpit represent the last bastions of male presence”—and, within the liberal mainline Protestant denominations, those strongholds are rapidly giving way. Although males still outnumber females by three to one in the mainline clergy, seminary statistics “suggest that the future belongs to women,” Woodward writes. Among Presbyterians, United Methodists, and Episcopalians, male seminarians outnumber

female ones, “but not by much.” Feminist theology is widely taught in the seminaries. Studies suggest that, because of the different attitude toward authority and its exercise that women who enter the seminary have, the ministry is being transformed into a “profession without authority,” one bent on eliminating the distance between clergy and laity. Woodward, however, believes that “congregations . . . require the exercise of authority and demand that some distance be observed between those who stand in the pulpit and those who sit in the pews.”

As the masculine presence in the church diminishes, he writes, “the dialectical relationship of masculine and feminine”—from which, according to Catholic theologian Walter Ong, the church gets “much of its dynamism and energy”—is weakened. That “may be one reason why mainline denominations are in such dire straits” today.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

Dynamic Duo Confronts Refrigerator Menace

“The Einstein-Szilard Refrigerators” by Gene Dannen, in *Scientific American* (Jan. 1997), 415 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017-1111.

In July 1939, Albert Einstein and Hungarian-born physicist Leo Szilard met to ponder the news that scientists had produced a fission reaction in uranium. As a result, Einstein wrote his famous letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt warning that Nazi Germany might be able to develop nuclear weapons. That, notes Dannen, an independent scholar, was not the first time Einstein and Szilard had collaborated for the benefit of mankind. A decade earlier, they had worked to avert the danger posed by mechanical home refrigerators.

Einstein, who by the mid-1920s was the world’s most renowned physicist, became interested in the problem when he read of an entire family that had been killed by toxic gases leaking from their refrigerator.

Refrigerators then, as now, used mechanical compressor motors to compress a refrigerant gas, which then liquefies as excess heat is discharged. When the liquid is allowed to expand again, it cools and can absorb heat from an interior chamber.

But the early refrigerants were toxic, and leaks were inevitable in systems with moving parts. The two physicists’ solution: a cooling system that did not involve mechanical motion and so did not require moving parts.

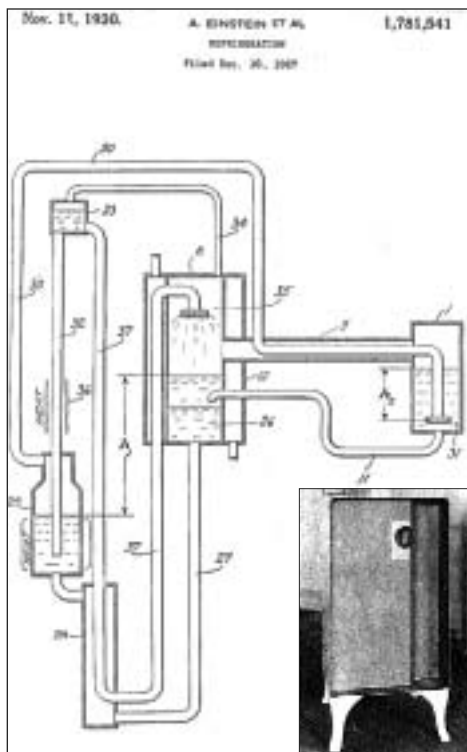
Swedish inventors had designed a so-called absorption refrigerator—in which heat from a natural gas flame, rather than the push of a piston, drives the cooling cycle—and the Swedish firm AB Electrolux was marketing it. Szilard and Einstein devised an improvement—and came up with a host of other designs. In early 1926, Szilard began filing patent applications, and by the fall, he and Einstein had decided on the three most promising designs. One, based on absorption, was very similar to the Electrolux machine; a second was based on the principle of diffusion. Electrolux, seeking mostly to safeguard its own pending patent applications, bought both those designs but never developed either one.

The physicists' third design turned out to be their "most revolutionary, and most successful, invention": an electromagnetic pump. In it, Dannen explains, "a traveling

electromagnetic field caused a liquid metal to move. The metallic fluid, in turn, was used as a piston to compress a refrigerant." Although less efficient than standard compressors and very noisy, the pump would not leak or fail. In July 1931, an Einstein-Szilard refrigerator went into continuous operation at a Berlin manufacturer's research institute.

But the growing worldwide depression and improvements in conventional refrigerators truncated the experimental refrigerator's career. In 1930, Americans demonstrated a new nontoxic refrigerant called Freon, which soon became the global standard. Two years later, the Berlin firm, hit hard by the depression, killed the refrigerator project.

Although the two physicists never produced a product that reached the consumer market, Dannen writes, the Einstein-Szilard pump eventually proved its value: "The built-in safety of its design later found a more critical task in cooling breeder reactors."



The physicists sold an absorption design, but their best refrigerator (inset) relied on electromagnetism.

An Apostle of Science

Richard Dawkins, a professor of "the Public Understanding of Science" at Oxford University, says he is often confronted by the assertion that science is a form of religion. It isn't, he writes in the *Humanist* (Jan.-Feb. 1997).

Science is not religion and it doesn't just come down to faith. Although it has many of religion's virtues, it has none of its vices. Science is based upon verifiable evidence. Religious faith not only lacks evidence, its independence from evidence is its pride and joy, shouted from the rooftops. Why else would Christians wax critical of doubting Thomas? The other apostles are held up to us as exemplars of virtue because faith was enough for them. Doubting Thomas, on the other hand, required evidence. Perhaps he should be the patron saint of scientists.

One reason I receive the comment about science being a religion is because I believe in the fact of evolution. I even believe in it with passionate conviction. To some, this may superficially look like faith. But the evidence that makes me believe in evolution is not only overwhelmingly strong; it is freely available to anyone who takes the trouble to read up on it. Anyone can study the same evidence that I have and presumably come to the same conclusion. But if you have a belief that is based solely on faith, I can't examine your reasons. You can retreat behind the private wall of faith where I can't reach you.

Searching for a 'Supercar'

"A Practical Road to Lightweight Cars" by Frank R. Field III and Joel P. Clark, in *Technology Review* (Jan. 1997), Bldg. W59, MIT, Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

With visions of an ultra-lightweight, highly fuel-efficient "supercar" dancing in their heads, U.S. automakers joined forces with the federal government in 1994 to launch an aggressive research and development project. Its goal: to produce within 10 years a prototype automobile that gets more than 80 miles per gallon, offers the performance and convenience of a conventional car—and is no more expensive.

This last is the rub, contend Field, director of the Materials Systems Laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Clark, a professor of materials science and engineering at MIT.

Using reinforced plastics for auto bodies rather than steel would bring a supercar within reach but would require drastic changes in current manufacturing and design processes. And the resulting supercar might well not be competitive. Reinforced plastics are much more expensive and less stiff than aluminum or steel. And a "unibody" (the design used for steel autos) made of reinforced plastics is hard to manufacture, because the plastic parts must match exactly. Unlike steel or aluminum parts, they cannot be bent, twisted, or banged into

shape to make them fit together.

All of this adds to costs. The reinforced plastic unibody of Ultralite, an experimental car developed by General Motors with the sole aim of getting the highest possible gas mileage (and with no regard for comfort or safety), would cost \$6,400 (at a production volume of 100,000), compared with \$2,500 for a steel unibody.

An aluminum car, based on either a "unibody" design or a "space frame" one (essentially a large truss structure), does better on that score. In a production run of 300,000 (mass-market vehicles such as the popular Ford Taurus are produced in volumes of 300,000 to 500,000), an aluminum unibody would cost about \$2,000, and an aluminum space frame about \$2,400, as compared with \$1,400 for a steel unibody.

An "affordable" supercar is not in the offing, the authors conclude. Instead of "revolutionizing" its designs and technology, the auto industry should focus on gradual weight reductions, especially on the manufacture of cheaper aluminum bodies that function as well as steel ones. More progress will be made that way than by pursuing a "technological chimera."

'Decolonizing' Science

"The Science Wars in India" by Meera Nanda, in *Dissent* (Winter 1997), 521 Fifth Ave., Ste. 1700, New York, N.Y. 10017.

Unmasking harmful "cultural constructs" is all the rage in the academic world. Lately attention has turned to science, attacked by Andrew Ross, Sandra Harding, and others as a Western "cultural construct" whose claim to a universally valid rationality is no more than a flimsy cover for imperialism and racism. These professors seem to think they are doing the oppressed of the Third World a big favor, observes Nanda, a science writer, but they are unwittingly opening an intellectual door for religious fundamentalists.

In India, Hindu nationalists have responded to the call for the "decolonizing" of science by aggressively promoting "Hindu ways of knowing." Nanda writes that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which won 36 percent of the seats in the Indian parliament's lower house last

May, insists in its recent *Humanistic Approach to Economic Development* "that the cultural ethos of the Hindu *Rashtra* (nation) must . . . have the final authority over what aspects of 'foreign' science and technology are admitted into schools and other institutions." When the BJP came to power in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh in 1992, one of its first acts was to make the study of "Vedic mathematics" compulsory for high school students. In government-approved textbooks, standard algebra and calculus were replaced with 16 Sanskrit verses that merely provide formulas for quick computation.

History textbooks in India have also been rewritten as a result of the growing influence of Hindu nationalists in the state and central governments, Nanda says. The books now "cele-

brate all things Hindu (including even the caste system), propagate the myth of India as the original home of the 'Aryan race,' and deplore all 'foreigners,' including . . . Muslims. The history of Indian science and technology . . . is described as an unfolding of the Hindu genius," and the role of critical inquiry in science is given short shrift.

In India during the 1970s and '80s, a "sci-

ence-for-the-people" movement advocated the use of science as a means of social revolution, Nanda says. Those involved sought to employ scientific knowledge "to contest the dominant, largely Hindu world views on caste and women." But when influential intellectuals argue that scientific rationality itself is a "colonial construct," only the interests of Hindu nationalism are served.

ARTS & LETTERS

The Two Black Theaters

"The Chitlin Circuit" by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in *The New Yorker* (Feb. 3, 1997),
20 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson's call last year for an autonomous black theater for black Americans (subsidized by foundations and government agencies) still has the stage world in a tizzy. In January, he faced off with critic Robert Brustein, founder of the Yale Repertory Theatre, in a sold-out debate in New York's Town Hall. "What next?" said Brustein in the *New Republic*. "Separate schools?" Overlooked in all the hullabaloo, observes Gates, head of the Afro-American Studies Department at Harvard University, is the fact that a thriving black theater for the masses already exists: the "Chitlin Circuit."

It was born during the 1920s, when the Theater Owners Booking Association brought plays and other entertainments to black audiences throughout the South and Midwest. Though the association did not outlast the decade, the market it created—disparagingly labeled the Chitlin Circuit—did. Playing in theaters and school auditoriums, black touring companies crisscrossed black America, Gates says, providing "a movable feast that enabled blacks to patronize black entertainers. On the whole, these productions were for the moment, not for the ages. They were the kind of melodrama or farce—or as often both—in which nothing succeeded like excess. But the productions were for, by, and about black folks; and their audience wasn't much inclined to check them against their Stanislavsky anyway." They still aren't.

Today, working- and middle-class black Americans in the roughly 40 cities on the Chitlin Circuit go to see plays such as the one Gates saw in Newark, New Jersey: Adrian Williamson's *My Grandmother*

Prayed for Me. As art, Gates says, the play makes the TV sitcom *Good Times* "look like Strindberg." Yet the play deals with matters—gang violence, crack addiction, and teenage pregnancy—of pressing concern to the Newark audience, as its members' intense engagement with what was happening on stage demonstrated.

The play's comic moments, Gates says, put "all the very worst stereotypes of the race . . . on display, larger than life." The exclusively black audience was able to laugh uninhibitedly, without having to worry that whites might mistake the portrayal for an accurate depiction of black life. "You don't want white people to see this kind of spectacle; you want them to see the noble dramas of August Wilson, where the injuries and injustices perpetrated by the white man are never far from our consciousness," Gates observes.

The people responsible for the Chitlin Circuit shows, he writes, "tend not to vaporize about the 'emancipatory potentialities' of their work, or about 'forging organic links to the community': they'd be out of business if black folks stopped turning up. Instead, they like to talk numbers." Some of the plays have grossed \$20 million or more. (However, these large sums have attracted some criminal "investors," Gates notes.)

The "most successful impresario" of the Chitlin Circuit, Gates says, is a man named Shelly Garrett, who claims that his 1987 play *Beauty Shop* has been seen by more than 20 million people, and that he himself is "America's No. 1 black theatrical producer, director, and playwright." Garrett has never met August Wilson; Wilson has never heard of Garrett. "They are as unacquainted with each

The End of the Eternal?

Writing in *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Fall 1996), George Steiner, a professor of comparative literature at Oxford University, detects “a slow, glacial shift in Western culture’s attitude toward death,” with profound consequences for the traditional conception of literature.

Literature, as we have known it, springs out of a wild and magnificent piece of arrogance, old as Pindar, Horace, and Ovid. Exegi aere perennius—what I have written will outlive time. Stronger than bronze, less breakable than marble, this poem. Pindar was the first man on record to say that his poem will be sung when the city which commissioned it has ceased to exist. Literature’s immense boast against death. Even the greatest poet, I dare venture, would be profoundly embarrassed to be quoted saying such a thing today.

Something enormous is happening, due in part to the barbarism of this century, perhaps due to DNA, perhaps due to fundamental changes in longevity, in cellular biology, in the conception of what it is to have children. We cannot phrase it with any confidence, but it will profoundly affect the great classical vainglory of literature—I am stronger than death! I can speak about death in poetry, drama, the novel, because I have overcome it; I am more or less permanent.

That is no longer available. A quite different order of imagining is beginning to arise, and it may be that when we look back on this time we will suddenly see that the very great artists, in the sense of changing our views—of what is art, what is human identity—are not the ones we usually name but rather exasperating, surrealist, jokers. Marcel Duchamp. If I call this pisoir a great work of art and sign it, who are you to disprove that? Or, even more so, the artist Jean Tinguely, who built immense structures which he then set on fire, saying: “I want this to be ephemeral. I want it to have happened only once.”

other as art and commerce are said to be.”

In an America that is mostly white, it is inevitable that the audience for serious plays

is mostly white, Gates points out. “Wilson writes serious plays. His audience is mostly white. What’s to apologize for?”

Selling the Arts

“Crisis in the Arts: The Marketing Response” by Joanne Scheff and Philip Kotler, in *California Management Review* (Fall 1996), Univ. of California, S549 Haas School of Business #1900, Berkeley, Calif. 94720-1900.

For nonprofit performing arts organizations, the bright lights have dimmed. Corporations, foundations, and government agencies have become more tight-fisted, and attendance at plays, concerts, and dance performances has stopped growing. Scheff and Kotler, who teach at Northwestern University’s Kellogg Graduate School of Management, have some advice for the managers of arts organizations: learn to market the “product” better.

Such skills weren’t needed in the golden era that began in the mid-1960s. Professional orchestras increased in number from 58 in 1965 to more than 1,000 recently; professional regional theater companies went from 12 to more than 400; dance companies, from

37 to 250, opera companies, from 27 to more than 110. Ticket sales (adjusted for inflation) jumped 50 percent between 1977 and 1987. By that year, Americans were spending more on tickets to concerts and other arts performances than on tickets to sports events. And foundations and corporations were contributing vast sums (\$500 million in 1990).

But that era is gone, Scheff and Kotler say. Audiences are no longer expanding, and in many cases are shrinking. Nearly half of all the regional theaters in the country are operating in the red. “Increasingly, funders—especially government agencies and foundations—are restricting their grants for specific purposes and less funding is available for general operating support. Corporate support is

becoming more commercial than philanthropic, and conditioned on arts organizations becoming leaner, more business-oriented, and able to meet the corporation's own marketing objectives."

To survive and thrive, Scheff and Kotler say, arts organizations need to build audiences by mounting "full-fledged campaigns that include direct mail, telemarketing, well-designed, high-quality brochures, advertising, and special offers designed to attract and retain patrons." Surveys indicate "that many more people are interested in attending the

performing arts than currently do so." It will take creative marketing to get them into the theater or concert hall. That may mean, for example, selling tickets in grocery stores or workplaces. The Columbus (Georgia) Symphony enjoyed a 35 percent increase in ticket sales after putting a humorous ad on local television showing that it was okay for concert-goers to dress down.

Many people in the arts have traditionally looked on marketing with disdain, but that attitude, the authors say, is a luxury that arts organizations can no longer afford.

The T. S. Eliot Debate

"A Flapping of Scolds" by Vince Passaro, in *Harper's Magazine* (Jan. 1997), 666 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012.

In *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* (1995), Anthony Julius stirred controversy on both sides of the Atlantic by arguing that Eliot's well-known anti-Semitism blighted the poet's literary achievement. Nonsense! says Passaro, a contributing editor of *Harper's Magazine*.

Eliot (1888–1965) "unquestionably" was an anti-Semite, Passaro says, but Julius renders the great poet "utterly vile" on the basis of just "one full poem, five passages in Eliot's poetry (some of which were not published in his lifetime), and a few scattered prose remarks." It is not mere political correctness that leads Julius to jump from these transgressions to an indictment of Eliot's entire corpus, Passaro says. It is literature itself, with its insistence on "making something significant and even beautiful out of ugliness, dissonance, fever, hatred, anger, failure, and pain" that today's undereducated literary intellectuals find unacceptable. They nod perfunctorily toward Eliot's greatness but do not grasp the meaning of the word.

Eliot's accusers fail to see, Passaro writes, that his "constant effort [was] to take the stuff of the neurotic, damaged, modern personality, and the stuff of everyday irritation, anger,

fear, loathing, and contempt—the self, in all its horrors—and try to move it toward some divine plateau . . . where the burdens of personality fall away and the truth, painful and retributive though it may be, makes itself known." This "narrative movement toward God" can be traced back even to Eliot's early poetry, predating his 1927 conversion to Anglo-Catholicism.

Thus, in the case of "Gerontion" (1920), which contains some notoriously anti-Semitic lines ("And the jew squats on the window sill, the owner,/ Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp."), Julius misses their secondary meanings and the very meaning of the poem itself, Passaro contends. "Gerontion" is about an old man waiting to die, and the house in which he lives "serves as the central metaphor of the poem: the house is his life and contains history itself. . . . The image of the Jew is un-

pleasant and disturbing, but that he is the owner of the metaphorical house containing history itself suggests something else about him. That he is squatting on the windowsill is scatological, but it also suggests an animal about to leap—Christ the tiger, who, later in the poem, 'devours' us." Though the common meaning of *estaminet* is "cafe" or



The transgressive poet.

“bistro,” another meaning—one that would have been well known in Antwerp, since it comes from the Walloon dialect spoken in Belgium—is “manger.” In a later line (“The word within a word, unable to speak a word”) in the poem, Eliot borrows the language of the Elizabethan bishop Lancelot Andrewes and “doubles the image of Christ in the manger.”

Julius saw none of that, Passaro says. “A universe in which a horrifying, hostile, contemptuous image of a ‘jew’ can also be made to suggest God, in his most tender moment of Incarnation as well as in his terrifying justice, is a universe in which Anthony Julius and many other critics steeped in comfortable assumptions would prefer not to live. Literature is not the game for them.”

OTHER NATIONS

Russia: Transition to Nowhere?

A Survey of Recent Articles

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Westerners writing about Russia have probably used no word more often than transition—as in, “transition from totalitarianism to democracy and a free-market economy.” Scholarly appraisals of how much progress Russia has made in this endeavor have varied widely—ranging, on the economic front alone, as Duke University economist Jim Leitzel points out in *Problems of Post-Communism* (Jan.–Feb. 1997), from Anders Åslund’s *How Russia Became a Market Economy* (1994) to Marshall Goldman’s *Lost Opportunity: Why Economic Reforms in Russia Have Not Worked* (1995). Now, some commentators are suggesting that the transition hobbyhorse be set aside in order to get a better grasp of Russia’s situation.

All the *transition* talk in Washington and academia—where “transitionology” represents “a new paradigm . . . for securing funds, jobs, and tenure”—obscures the full extent of “Russia’s unprecedented, cruel, and perilous collapse,” contends Stephen F. Cohen, a professor of politics and Russian studies at Princeton University. The truth is, he says in the *Nation* (Dec. 30, 1996), “that Russia’s new private sector is dominated by former but still intact Soviet monopolies seized by ex-Communist officials who have become the core of a semi-criminalized business class; that inflation is being held down by holding back salaries owed to tens of millions of needy workers and other employees; that a boom has been promised for years while the economy continues to plunge into a depression greater than America’s in the 1930s; that President [Boris] Yeltsin’s re-election cam-

paign was one of the most corrupt in recent European history; that the Parliament has no real powers and the appellate court little independence from the presidency; and that neither Russia’s market nor its national television is truly competitive or free but is substantially controlled by the same financial oligarchy whose representatives now sit in the Kremlin as chieftains of the Yeltsin regime.”

The oft-repeated transition phrase “is profoundly misleading and betrays Western arrogance and ideological blindness,” asserts Anatol Lieven, a Senior Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C. in the *Washington Quarterly* (Winter 1997). He is a former Moscow correspondent for the *Times* of London. Russia, like many countries in Latin America, he says, is today a “weak, quasi-liberal” state, and may well remain so indefinitely.

Since the Soviet Union expired, Stephen Cohen maintains, “the great majority” of Russian families have experienced “an endless collapse of everything essential to a decent existence—from real wages, welfare provisions and health care to birth rates and life expectancy; . . . from safety in the streets to prosecution of organized crime and thieving bureaucrats.” The murder rate is twice that in the United States, and, at last official count, some 8,000 criminal gangs were operating in the country.

Economist Leitzel paints a less stark picture. One reason for the wide disagreement about the economic reforms’

efficacy, he notes, is the inadequacy of the data for the period before the Soviet Union collapsed. In recent years, however, “measured average real consumption has been consistently higher than in early 1992, when the marketization reforms were introduced,” he says. The proportion of the population below the poverty line has *fallen*—from 34 percent in 1992 to 22 percent in April 1996. “The most dire predictions of famine and economic collapse . . . have not been borne out, nor have there been riots or similar manifestations of deep social discord. In the two main instances when the Russian electorate was called upon to determine the direction of economic policy—the referendum of April 1993 and the 1996 presidential election—modest majorities preferred reform.”

But in voting for Yeltsin last year (rather than Communist Gennadi Zyuganov), what many Russians wanted, despite their expectations of further economic hardship, was not so much more reform as stability, argues Dmitri Shlapentokh, a professor of Russian and world history at Indiana University, South Bend, writing in the *Washington Quarterly* (Winter 1997). Although disgusted with politics and politicians, many Russians viewed Yeltsin as representing “the relatively predictable and secure

status quo—as opposed to the risks inherent in change.”

That the election was held at all is a sign of progress toward democracy, Amy Knight, author of *Spies without Cloaks: The KGB's Successors* (1996), notes in the same issue of that journal, but “democracy still appears to be far away.” One of the biggest obstacles, she says, is Russia’s failure to attempt to come to terms with its communist past. “If a new regime simply glosses over past abuses because of either vested interests within the government or the continued influence exerted by the old political leadership, then it takes on the corruption of the old regime. This is what has happened in Russia.” Despite the dissolution of the KGB in 1991, she says, the successor security services “still play a larger-than-life role in politics,” exerting a “pervasive influence” on domestic and foreign policy.

“Russia should not be mistaken for a democratic state,” agrees David Remnick, author of *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (1993), writing in *Foreign Affairs* (Jan.–Feb. 1997). Nevertheless, he has not given up hope that Russia will become a democracy one day. Americans are too impatient, he believes. “A new era has begun. Russia has entered the world, and everything, even freedom . . . is possible.”

History's Revenge

“Dateline Sudetenland: Hostages to History” by Timothy W. Ryback, in *Foreign Policy* (Winter 1996–97), 2400 N St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037–1153.

It was a day that will long live in the annals of folly. On September 30, 1938, in Munich, British prime minister Neville Chamberlain tried to appease Adolf Hitler by agreeing to Nazi Germany’s annexation of the Sudetenland. Six months later, Hitler seized the rest of Czechoslovakia. During the seven years of Nazi occupation that followed, thousands perished in death camps. And then, in 1945—in what until recently has been just an ugly historical footnote to the larger tragedy—Czechs took their revenge. They expelled three million ethnic Germans from the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia, slaughtering tens of thousands—men, women, and children. Now this “footnote” has been elevated to the center of a dispute

that could impede the Czech Republic’s entry into the European Union (EU).

It was the Czechs themselves who first brought up the issue after the “Velvet Revolution” of 1989, notes Ryback, director of the Salzburg Seminar, a forum for international dialogue based in Salzburg, Austria. Just days after his election as president of Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel denounced the expulsions as “deeply immoral.” But Czech attempts at reconciliation with the displaced Sudeten German population, now located mainly in Bavaria, ended in 1991 after the Czechoslovak prime minister and Franz Neubauer, head of the Munich-based Sudeten German Heritage Union, exchanged bitter words.

However, with “one in every four inhabitants of Bavaria claiming Sudeten German heritage, and with Bavaria representing the power base—and much of the economic muscle—of [Chancellor Helmut] Kohl’s conservative coalition government, Neubauer exercises considerable leverage in Bonn,” Ryback says. The Germans removed a clause from the 1992 Czechoslovak-German friendship treaty that would have annulled all Sudeten German property claims in Czechoslovakia, and Germany has blocked compensation payments to 12,000 Czech survivors of Nazi persecution. In the Czech Republic, meanwhile, the Czech Constitutional Court in 1995 not only upheld an old postwar decree depriving the Germans of their property and assets but declared the German people “collectively responsible” for the Nazis’ crimes.

By last spring, it appeared that senior German and Czech officials had smoothed things over. But in May, at the annual Sudeten German rally in Nuremberg, German finance minister Theo Waigel roiled the waters with a broadside attacking the Czechs for the “ethnic cleansing” of 1945 and subtly threatening to block their



Nazi troops march into the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, soon after “peace for our time” was secured at Munich.

petition for full membership in the EU unless a public apology was forthcoming.

The best course for both countries, Ryback believes, would be an apology from Prague in exchange for a renunciation by the German government of Sudeten German claims in the Czech Republic. Such a joint declaration would provoke howls of outrage on both sides, but the uproar probably would not have lasting consequences. In the end, he says, the most remarkable feature about the current conflict may be that the German government has been able, in the shadow of the Nazi past, to speak firmly about an injustice done to Germans then, but without trying to equate the vengeance killings with the Nazi atrocities. “The contemporary Germans are indeed not the Germans of 50 years ago.”

Professors of Genocide

“Africa’s Murderous Professors” by Michael Chege, in *The National Interest* (Winter 1996–97), 1112 16th St. N.W., Ste. 540, Washington, D.C. 20036.

When the predominant Hutus savagely eliminated some 850,000 Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994, their weapon of choice was the garden machete, and it was widely assumed that the driving force behind this genocide was just as primitive—“tribalism.” In fact, says Chege, a citizen of Kenya who is director of the Center for African Studies at the University of Florida, Gainesville, “The catechism of the madness

that . . . overtook Rwanda was authored not by some African magician extolling the supremacy of the Hutu race in ancient ‘tribal’ wars, but by accomplished Rwandan professional historians, journalists, and sociologists at the service of a quasi-traditionalist and genocidally inclined cabal.”

President Juvénal Habyarimana’s Hutu-dominated regime might have reached a

compromise with the Tutsi guerrilla forces—the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF)—in October 1993, Chege says, had it not been “for the determination of a group of Hutu intellectuals and extremists to keep the Tutsis out of power at all costs.”

Working with the extremist Akazu faction of the ruling Hutus, Chege says, Leon Mugesira and Ferdinand Nahimana, both professors of history at Rwandan National University at Butare, along with another member of the faculty, Vincent Ntzipimana, “manufactured doctrines of Hutu ethnic supremacy depicting all Tutsis as a malignant cancer in the nation’s history that deserved to be excised once and for all.”

Shrill calls for the extermination of the Tutsis, broadcast on Rwandan radio and carried in print, mobilized Hutu peasants, militias, and the urban unemployed for murder. After the massacres, Emmanuel Bugingo, the new rector of the university’s Butare campus, lamented that “all the killing in Rwanda was carefully planned by intellectuals and those

intellectuals passed through this university.”

After the Tutsi RPF seized the capital of Kigali in May 1994, Prime Minister Paul Kagame’s government provided human rights groups with the names of 463 surviving ringleaders of the 1994 genocide. Many of them have been traced to Kenya. At the University of Nairobi’s Chiromo campus, for example, Charles Nyandwi—number 35 on the Rwandan list of war criminals—was appointed in 1995 to teach applied mathematics.

“Professor Nyandwi and his colleagues are in good company,” Chege writes. “The Kenyan government has been repeatedly accused by Amnesty International of the systematic torture of its political opponents.” Academics there, too, have joined the regime in fanning ethnic hatred (against the Kikuyu minority). Genocide is also a real possibility in Zaire, Nigeria, and elsewhere in Africa. Hatemongering by African intellectuals, Chege warns, must not be tolerated by Africans—or by Western aid givers.

The Asian Arms Race

“East Asia’s Arms Races” and “East Asia’s Militaries Muscle Up” by Michael Klare, in *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* (Jan.–Feb. 1997), 6042 S. Kimbark Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60637.

With the decline and fall of the Soviet empire, global military spending has plunged, from \$1.3 trillion in 1987 to \$840 billion in 1994. But in East Asia, military expenditures have climbed—from \$126 billion (in constant 1994 dollars) annually during the 1984–88 period to \$142 billion between 1992 and ’94. This trend, warns Klare, who heads the Five College Program in Peace and World Security Studies in Amherst, Massachusetts, could lead to war.

China began to transform its military in 1985, when it shifted its strategic focus from an all-out “people’s war” with the Soviet Union or another invading power to smaller regional conflicts. It has reduced its ground force from four million to three million active-duty troops—still the world’s largest army—while beefing up its air and naval arms. Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia, South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore have been taking similar steps.

The East Asian nations have become “avid consumers” of sophisticated military gear

produced in the United States, France, Russia, and elsewhere. Between 1985 and 1994, they spent about \$67 billion on imported arms, including air-to-air and air-to-ground missiles and other high-tech weapons. Taiwan now has 60 Mirage-2000-5 and 150 F-16 jet fighters, and even Malaysia, though not yet in the same league, has 20 MiG-29 and eight F-18 jet fighters.

This binge is partly a product of affluence, Klare points out. Chronic regional disputes, including those between China and Taiwan and between South Korea and North Korea, along with more recent quarrels (such as that among China, Taiwan, and Vietnam over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea), have also whetted the appetite for arms.

With the chief exception of China, East Asia’s arms industries “are still embryonic,” Klare says. As long as that remains true, the East Asian nations “will be subject to some degree to the political wishes of their principal suppliers.” But as they become more self-sufficient, Klare fears, the threat to peace in the region could grow.

RESEARCH REPORTS

Reviews of new research at public agencies and private institutions

“Pursuing Excellence: A Study of U.S. Eighth-Grade Mathematics and Science Teaching, Learning, Curriculum, and Achievement in International Context.”

National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 555 New Jersey Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20208-5574. \$9.50 (Available for downloading at <http://www.ed.gov/NCES/timss>)

Author: *Lois Peak*

That American students do not sit at the head of the international class when it comes to mathematics and science is by now well known. But this new, 41-nation assessment suggests that some suspects often blamed for the poor showing may be innocent.

The American eighth-graders in this study scored somewhat below the international average in mathematics. In science, U.S. students did better than the international average but were still vastly outperformed by their counterparts in Singapore, the Czech Republic, Japan, and South Korea. If an international talent search were held to select the top 10 percent of all mathematics students, only five percent of American eighth-graders would make the grade—compared with 45 percent of the Singaporean pupils, 34 percent of the Korean youngsters, and 32 percent of the Japanese ones.

Why are American youths lagging behind? Too much TV? Not enough homework? Too short a school year? These oft-fingered culprits may not be guilty, this study suggests. While 38 percent of U.S. eighth-graders spent three or more hours after school watching TV or videos, 39 percent of Japanese eighth-graders did the same. And

whereas 86 percent of U.S. math teachers assigned homework at least three times a week, only 21 percent of Japanese teachers did. As for time in school, U.S. eighth-graders spent 143 hours a year in math classes and 140 hours a year in science classes, compared with only 117 hours and 90 hours, respectively, for Japanese students.

Though the study found no simple explanation for the relatively poor showing of U.S. students, it did turn up a few clues. The U.S. eighth-grade math curriculum is less advanced than others, focusing more on arithmetic than on algebra and geometry. In addition, U.S. math teachers seem to stress getting students to acquire particular skills (such as being able to solve a certain type of problem), instead of encouraging students—as Japanese instructors do—to think in terms of mathematical concepts.

One more clue: In Japan, students at the end of ninth grade must take a high school entrance exam. The scores determine whether they will attend the best schools, and thus powerfully influence their future careers and lives. American junior high students simply are not subjected to that kind of pressure to study hard.

“Women’s Figures: The Economic Progress of Women in America.”

Independent Women’s Forum, 2111 Wilson Blvd., Ste. 550, Arlington, Va. 22201-3057. 58 pp. \$7.95

Authors: *Diana Furchtgott-Roth and Christine Stolba*

More than 70 percent of all women between the ages of 20 and 54 are in the labor force these days. Do they face widespread sex discrimination? Yes, say many feminists, citing the “wage gap” between men and women, the “glass ceiling” blocking women’s rise to the executive suite, and the concentration of women in lower-paying “pink-collar” jobs, such as teaching and nursing. But Furchtgott-Roth, an economist at the American Enterprise Institute, and Stolba, a historian at Emory University, in Atlanta, say these notions mis-

represent the real situation of women.

While the National Organization for Women (NOW) claims that women are paid only 60 to 89 cents for every dollar men earn, the authors say this ignores critical variables. Because of childbearing and family responsibilities, women choose to spend more years away from work than men do. They have less seniority. They are absent more often. This is reflected in their pay. When the incomes of *childless* women and men ages 27 to 33 are compared, as in one recent study, women’s

earnings turn out to be about 98 percent of the male average.

The glass ceiling is also a myth, the authors maintain. True, a 1995 report by the federal Glass Ceiling Commission created by the Civil Rights Act of 1991 found that only five percent of senior managers at *Fortune* 2000 industrial and service firms are female. But, Furchtgott-Roth and Stolba point out, the commission failed to consider that the pool of women qualified by experience and education to hold senior corporate executive positions was tiny. This situation is changing, they add, as more and more women enter “male-dominated” professions and progress through the ranks. During the last decade, the number of female executive vice presidents more than doubled.

Even so, many women do not have the same career goals as their male peers, Furchtgott-Roth and Stolba observe. A recent study by an executive search firm found that only 14 percent of the women

surveyed—compared with 46 percent of the men—were eyeing the top job in their firm.

Many working women, the authors say, prefer traditional pink-collar jobs, despite their typically lower pay, because they offer flexibility that lets the women better combine work with family responsibilities. Also, the job skills required are such that women can leave the work force for a time and then return as viable job candidates. That is not possible in engineering, for example, where job skills must be continually upgraded.

Finally, Furchtgott-Roth and Stolba say, more and more women in recent years have been starting their own businesses (at twice the rate of men)—and succeeding. Between 1987 and 1992, the number of female-owned firms increased 43 percent. Today, they number 7.7 million, including 3.5 million home-based firms in fields such as consulting and finance. These statistics, the authors write, belie the notion that women face an economy stacked against them.

“Farewell to the Factory: Auto Workers in the Late Twentieth Century.”

Univ. of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, Calif. 94720. 248 pp. \$45.00; paper, \$14.95

Author: *Ruth Milkman*

Americans seem to regard every lost factory job as a tragedy. Forgotten, by all except the workers themselves, notes Milkman, a sociologist at the University of California, Los Angeles, are the frustrations and degradations of daily life in the factory. The experiences of workers from one factory—the General Motors (GM) automobile assembly plant in Linden, New Jersey—she says, suggest that “nostalgia for the industrial past is deeply misguided.”

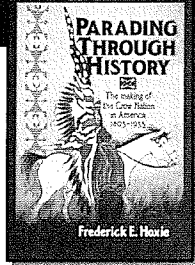
In the mid-1980s, as GM struggled to meet intensified international competition, it gave the Linden plant a \$300 million overhaul. With 219 robots and other automated devices on hand, many fewer workers were needed on the assembly line. Of the more than 4,000 production workers, nearly 1,000—most relatively young—accepted a GM buyout of \$25,000 to \$35,000, knowing that their jobs were not necessarily secure.

Five years later, Milkman says, “almost all reported without hesitation that they would make the same decision . . . over again—in large part because of their bitter memories of working at GM.” The vast majority of these men and women easily found new jobs.

Nearly one-third initially became self-employed (the proportion declined over time), and most of these claimed to be earning more than they had at GM. The workers who turned to wage and salary jobs generally took pay cuts, Milkman says, but few expressed nostalgia for their old jobs.

What about those who stayed with GM to work in the modernized Linden plant? The production workers did not make out as well as the workers in skilled trades, who increased their expertise and gained greater responsibilities. The unskilled workers found that the new technology had further simplified their work, often making it even more mindless than before. But even so, they “have no kind words for the traditional system of mass production, GM style,” Milkman writes. “Contrary to the popular assumption that blue-collar workers are committed to the work rules and other features of the status quo ante, few current GM-Linden employees complain about the new forms of work organization they now confront.” What many do complain about, she says, is management’s failure to go far enough in fulfilling its promise of increased worker participation and responsibility.

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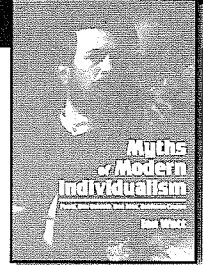
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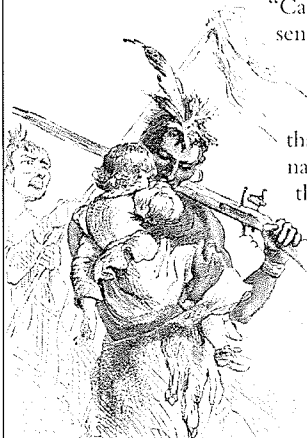
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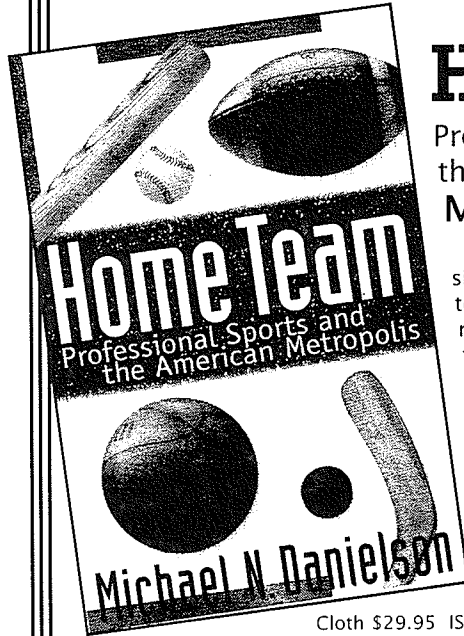
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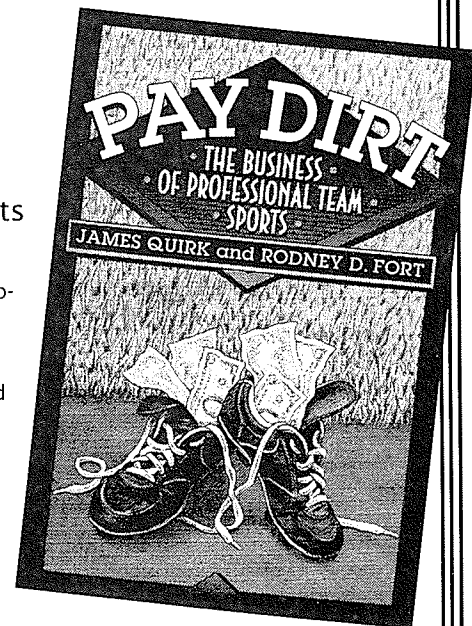
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