

## RESEARCH REPORTS

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

### **"Playing God in Yellowstone."**

Atlantic Monthly Press, 8 Arlington St., Boston, Mass. 02116. 446 pp. \$24.95.  
Author: Alston Chase

Yellowstone National Park, which Theodore Roosevelt called "a natural breeding-ground" for wild animals, faces a peculiar crisis. Indeed, wildlife that Roosevelt saw in Yellowstone in 1903 has vanished. Gone are the wolf, coyote, and white-tailed deer, and formerly flourishing beaver, bighorn sheep, and grizzly bear populations have dwindled.

Chase, a nature writer, contends that "the park's reputation as a great game sanctuary is perhaps the best-sustained myth in American conservation history."

He blames Yellowstone's condition on the agency assigned to protect it, the National Park Service. It manages wildlife by "natural regulation," a policy that is supposed to compensate for man's impact on animal populations.

It works like this: When Yellowstone rangers decided to exterminate the elk's natural predator, the wolf, creating an irruption of elk, natural regulation suggested that the number of elk would stabilize without man having to kill any. The animals would begin to exceed the carrying capacity of the range and the excess elk would eventually starve to death.

But natural regulation hasn't worked in Yellowstone, says Chase, because the elk *destroyed* their range before using up its food supply. They competed for food with other ungulates—such as white-tailed and mule deer—and then began eating alders, a primary food source for beavers and other once-plentiful animals now absent from the park.

The natural regulation policy was adopted in 1966 after then secretary of the interior Stewart Udall commissioned a report to establish guidelines for national park and wildlife management. The report recommended that Yellowstone's original ecosystems "be maintained or where necessary re-created."

But what was Yellowstone like before man arrived? Clearly, by 1966 man's activi-

ties had been affecting local ecology for more than a century. An environment had been established where grizzly bears, for instance, depended on human visitors' garbage for food. Only scientific studies could determine how to restore Yellowstone to its original condition—and how restoration might affect the animals now in the park.

But such studies were never done, says Chase. Instead, the Park Service deemphasized scientific study in favor of "park interpretation" for the public. Park Service researchers became "apologists for management." They gave excuses for wildlife losses (the animals were "hiding in the back-country") and made plans to close garbage dumps to the grizzlies.

Yellowstone's managers discounted the conclusions of private wildlife studies, e.g., John and Frank Craighead's grizzly bear research, which suggested that grizzlies might *need* the garbage dumps to survive.

Indeed, when the dumps were closed to bears in 1968-70, grizzlies suffered. Deprived of a food source they had relied on since Yellowstone's inception, grizzlies began roaming the park to find things to eat, coming into closer contact with visitors. Nuisance bears were captured and expelled by park rangers, or sometimes killed. By 1982, the park's grizzly population—one of the few remaining in the lower 48 states—had declined, until there were fewer than 200 bears left. Today they have all but vanished.

The Park Service blames Yellowstone's loss of wildlife on larger crowds of visitors and development adjacent to the park. But the real problem, in Chase's view, lies in official dogma. The Park Service mistakenly tried to remove man from the environmental equation, instead of managing the vast park and its animals within its new human-influenced ecological framework. The ironic result, says Chase, was to make Yellowstone's wildlife the "victim of an environmental ideal."

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### **“How the Press Affects Federal Policymaking: Six Case Studies.”**

W. W. Norton and Co., 500 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10110. 373 pp. \$25.00.  
Authors: Martin Linsky, Jonathan Moore, Wendy O'Donnell, and David Whitman

### **“Impact: How the Press Affects Federal Policymaking.”**

W. W. Norton and Co., 500 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10110. 260 pp. \$19.95.  
Author: Martin Linsky

Most analyses of the news media's coverage of government focus on one side of the story: the journalists' performance, good or bad. These high-protein case studies, sponsored by Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, break new ground, examining in detail the behavior and interaction of both reporters and Washington officials as six “hot” stories developed during the 1970s and 1980s.

An essay on the Nixon administration's successful effort to stir public and congressional support for postal reform in 1969-70, by David Whitman, shows that coherent policies, fully explained by political leaders, can obtain a fair hearing in the news media. But Whitman's study of the 1977-78 neutron bomb controversy suggests that even sound initiatives can founder when officials fail to explain them.

The *Washington Post* broke the story of the “Neutron Killer Warhead” on June 6, 1977. For nearly a year, the media image of a “capitalist” bomb that “kills people but leave[s] buildings intact”—a paraphrase of a quote in the story by reporter Walter Pincus—would plague the Carter administration.

On June 6, Jimmy Carter postponed production of the neutron weapon, pending further study. The crucial job of explaining the nuclear device to the press and public fell to the Pentagon.

Designed for the potential battlefields of West Germany, the neutron bomb was intended to halt massive Soviet tank thrusts in wartime with “enhanced radiation” while limiting damage to German cities and towns. Already deployed in Europe, notes Whitman, were other U.S. tactical nuclear weapons with “more blast and radiation than the neutron warheads.”

But the Pentagon, hoping the story would fade away, revealed little of this in

its terse press releases.

That summer, popular opposition to the weapon grew in Western Europe. Only in November did Washington finally mount a concerted campaign to “sell” the weapon to the public.

By March 1978, Washington had negotiated a plan with its North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies, intended mainly to counter news media criticism and Western Europe's growing antinuclear movement. The neutron weapons would be portrayed as a response to Moscow's new SS-20 missiles targeted on Europe.

But on April 7, 1978, after weeks of media speculation fueled by White House leaks, Carter announced that he would “defer” production of the weapon. In part, Carter seemed to fear being labeled an “international ogre.” Instead, he gained a reputation for vacillation. And U.S.-European relations were soured while the European antinuclear movement was considerably strengthened.

Did the press kill the bomb? If not for Walter Pincus, one official observed, “nobody would have noticed” the weapon. As Whitman notes, there never was widespread public antipathy in the United States to building the bomb. But Carter, trying to steer clear of controversy, let TV and the press define the issues, and hence was repeatedly forced to *react* to media coverage. Ironically, the Reagan administration's 1981 announcement that it would begin producing the weapons stirred few protests at home or abroad.

In *Impact*, an analysis of the case studies, Martin Linsky, who teaches at the Kennedy School, argues that Washington policymakers must learn to reckon with the press. Some honest “management” of the news by officials, he concludes, is indispensable to effective government.

## **“Catholic High Schools: A National Portrait (Vol. 1); Their Impact on Low-Income Students (Vol. 2).”**

National Catholic Educational Association, 1077 30th St. N.W., Ste. 100, Washington, D.C. 20007-3852. 536 pp. set. \$50.25.

The nation's high schools, once the showcases of public education, are on trial. In 1983, a blue-ribbon panel created by the U.S. Department of Education warned that a “rising tide” of “mediocrity” in the schools was eroding America's ability to compete on the world scene.

That same year, a groundbreaking study by James Coleman and Father Andrew Greeley stirred heated debate among educators. The two social scientists contended that Catholic high schools were superior to their public counterparts. Among other things, they found that Catholic high school students scored at least one grade level ahead of their public school peers in vocabulary, reading, writing, and mathematics.

The National Catholic Educational Association has now tested these findings in a nationwide survey of 910 (out of 1,464) Catholic schools. The results: Catholic students do indeed perform better.

The main reason, researchers found, is that Catholic schools set higher standards. Whereas the majority of public school students choose a vocational or “general” curriculum (with the fewest liberal arts requirements), 80 percent of those in Catholic schools take the academic, or college preparatory, “track” (including advanced courses such as calculus). Not surprisingly, 83 percent of Catholic high school graduates go on to college, versus less than 60 percent of those from public schools.

Research showed that Catholic schools do not achieve better results by spending more money. The average tuition is only \$1,230, and the average cost of educating each student—\$1,783—is roughly \$1,000 less than public schools spend. Nor can Catholic schools claim more parental guidance. In fact, principals report they are disappointed by parents' “fair to poor” involvement in their childrens' education.

Catholic schools have often been accused of “elitism,” but Volume II of the study concludes otherwise. By making a

major commitment to educating urban minorities, the church has stemmed the enrollment decline that has closed down more than 2,000 Catholic high schools over the last 15 years.

Today, one-third of Catholic high school students come from families with incomes below \$20,000. Another third have family incomes below \$30,000. The schools accept 88 percent of their applicants (12 percent non-Catholic, eight percent Hispanic, and seven percent black) and expel only one percent—mostly for academic faults.

Disciplinary problems are relatively rare. Students who disobey the schools' written rules must sit through “detention periods.” Some are glad to comply, at least in retrospect. One graduate remarked that had she not been taught “to be a lady” she would “have a baby by now and be living on the street.”

The study tends to gloss over difficulties. However, it does not conceal the Catholic schools' apparent failure to bring black students up to par. Paradoxically, blacks display more self-confidence and have higher educational expectations than either whites or Hispanics. Yet, on average, they take home the least homework and enter and leave school with the lowest achievement scores.

Money is the schools' most pressing concern. Rock-bottom salaries (\$11,121 to start, compared with \$14,045 in public schools) attract young, zealous, but inexperienced teachers; more than half quit after five years or less. The turnover rate will probably increase as the number of teaching nuns and priests, who in the past formed the “stable core” of Catholic high school faculties, continues to drop. (During the past 20 years, the old 75-to-25 clergy-laity teacher ratio has been reversed.) By the 1990s, most of the teachers will be laypersons. The church schools must find a way to pay them competitive wages—or lose their newfound leadership role.