

Americans "the first people in history to have a centrally organized, mass-produced folk culture." Popular culture could once be leaned on as a source of continuity, says Boorstin, but "the popular culture of advertising attenuates and is always dissolving before our very eyes." Among its other baneful effects: the replacement of leaders by "voices of the people," news by "pseudo-events," and heroes by "celebrities."

**THE POLITICAL
LANGUAGE OF ISLAM**

by Bernard Lewis
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168 pp. \$14.95

Too often, claims noted orientalist Lewis, Westerners misinterpret events in the Islamic world because they understand neither the relevant history nor the language that Muslims use to describe them. Case in point: The Iranian revolutionaries in 1979 looked "to the birth of Islam as their paradigm," not to the cataclysms that shook France in 1789 or Russia in 1917. They sought not to create a new form of government but to restore a centuries-old ideal of Islamic order. When he returned from exile in France, Ayatollah Khomeini, the revolution's leader, was following the pattern of conquest of the Prophet Mohammed (A.D. 570?-632), who left Mecca for Medina, only to return again in triumph to Mecca.

The basic tenet of Islam is, indeed, the eventual conquest of the unbelieving infidels. During the life of the Prophet and his immediate successors, the dramatic spread of Islam throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia seemed to confirm a sense of destiny. But then came setbacks: the Crusades of the 11th century, the Mongol invasions of the 13th century, the imperial ventures of European powers in the 19th century. As each Muslim region struggled to cope with an infidel presence, the traditional political vocabulary underwent changes: A concept such as "nation," once understood to signify a unified society of believers, now came to mean an individual nation-state. Similarly, Islamic autocrats adopted limited parliamentary rule, constitutions, and other Western political practices and institutions.

The perceived failure of these Westernizing efforts has, in recent years, prompted "increasing numbers of Muslims . . . to look to their own past . . . to find a diagnosis for their present ills." But the Iranian Revolution and its aftermath proved that a reconstructed past never quite du-

plicates the past as it truly was. Muslims must decide whether to follow the Iranian example, or, as Lewis says, "find a better alternative, in order to return to the . . . Islam of the Prophet."

**ADAM, EVE, AND
THE SERPENT**

by Elaine Pagels
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Current attacks on Judeo-Christian morality have sent scholars in search of alternative moral strategies. Pagels, a Princeton professor of religion, suggests that we look to the past—to the first four centuries after Christ—to see how basic ideas regarding sexuality, freedom, and human nature were formulated. How did it happen, she asks, that by the end of this period a doctrine that had once celebrated human freedom had become one that stressed the bondage of original sin?

Pagels explains how major figures of the early church interpreted the Genesis story of Adam and Eve—from the Apostle Paul to Augustine of Hippo. Early on, when Christians were persecuted within the Roman Empire, they were buoyed by Jesus's promise of redemption and freedom from man's fallen condition. But as early as the third century A.D., orthodox Christians shunned the Gnostics for their loose, allegorical interpretation of the creation. Increasingly, Christians embraced the Apostle Paul's teachings, that sexuality was the source of man's sinful state. Zealous ascetics such as St. Anthony sought to regain prelapsarian innocence by rejecting the desires of mind and body. Finally, during the century after Emperor Constantine's conversion (A.D. 313), as Christianity became the established faith of the Empire, Bishop Augustine (A.D. 354–430) brought the understanding of Adam and Eve full circle: "Adam's sin not only caused our mortality," Pagels writes, "but cost our moral freedom, irreversibly corrupted our experience of sexuality . . . and made us incapable of genuine political freedom."

But Augustine's view did not hold sway in the West for 16 centuries simply because of its political utility. Pagels speculates that its power is paradoxical, a promise of freedom within unfreedom: Augustine attributed man's often miserable fate to a real and logical cause, the sins he willingly commits; at the same time, he attributed man's sinful nature to Adam and Eve's fall. The doctrine appeals, says Pagels, "to the human need to imagine ourselves in control, even at the cost of guilt."