

RESEARCH REPORTS

Reviews of new research at public agencies and private institutions

"Who Reads Literature?"

Seven Locks Press, P.O. Box 27, Cabin John, Md. 20818. 106 pp. \$9.95.

Authors: *Nicholas Zill and Marianne Winglee*

In the Age of Nintendo, do people still read "serious" literature? Zill, a social psychologist, and Winglee, an analyst at Decision Resource Corporation, knew that someone had to be reciting from the 1,000 volumes of poetry and drama, pondering the 2,000 works of literary criticism, and absorbing the 5,100 novels that are published each year.

They pieced together a portrait of the American reader from the findings of three nationwide reading surveys conducted in the 1980s.

The results are both heartening and disheartening, the authors say. Although 56 percent of American adults claimed in one survey that they had opened at least some fiction, poetry, or drama within the previous year, only about 11

percent of them had read a work of "literary distinction." Just seven percent had read a serious work of contemporary literature. That translates into about 16 million people.

The typical American reader is a white, middle-class, college-educated female living in the suburbs of a Western or Midwestern city. Contrary to the popular notion that people who read are social recluses, two-thirds of literature readers jog or do some other exercise, while only a quarter of non-readers do. Fifty-seven percent of readers visit an amusement park during a typical year, while only 17 percent of non-readers do. Surprisingly, literary sorts are also more than twice as likely as non-readers to perform their own home and car repairs.

Even among people who read, the authors add, literature does not sell as well as pulp fiction, business books, and self-help manuals. One book industry analyst estimates that 3.2 million volumes of contemporary literary fiction and poetry and 9.1 million works of classic literature were sold in 1985. But that was only slightly more than one percent of all books sold that year.

The authors line up the usual suspects to explain the small number of serious readers: the declining quality of education, television, and even the inaccessibility of writers. What can be done to reverse the tide? To start, the authors rather perversely suggest, the publishing industry ought to promote books in newspapers, magazines, and on television.

"The Money Chase: Congressional Campaign Finance Reform."

The Brookings Institution, 1775 Mass. Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. 227 pp. \$29.95.

Authors: *David B. Magleby and Candice J. Nelson*

Campaign contributions have long greased the wheels of American politics. And in concept they are a healthy part of political life: Giving money to a candidate is a way for citizens to participate in politics. A politician's need for support keeps him or her responsible to the electorate.

In practice, however, the influence of money often is not so benign. Magleby, a political scientist at Brigham Young University, and Nelson, a former Fellow at the Brookings Institution, argue that the rising costs of campaigns have turned the legislative branch into a fundraising circus.

The leap congressional campaign spending has taken during the last 18 years is remarkable. During the 1972 U.S. Senate and House of Representatives elections, candidates spent a total of \$66 million dollars. By 1988, the amount jumped to \$407 million—an increase of 456 percent in the House and 600 percent in the Senate.

In 1988, winning candidates for the House spent an average of \$374,000 each on their campaigns, while their counterparts in the Senate shelled out \$3,745,500. If the trend continues, this year those amounts will climb to \$500,000 and

\$4.8 million, respectively.

Where is all of this money coming from? Most of it—about three-fifths in the House and three-quarters in the Senate—is given by individuals. Political action committees (PACs) and political parties contribute the rest. Federal election laws allow individuals to contribute \$2,000 to a candidate. PACs may give \$10,000.

What concerns the authors most is the absence of overall campaign spending limits. Candidates are allowed to heap up as much money as they can. This spurs heated fundraising wars, in which perks such as free mail and media exposure

give incumbents a great advantage over challengers. The incumbency advantage has made many races less than competitive. In 1988, 89 percent of House incumbents who sought reelection won by near-landslides, with more than 60 percent of the vote.

In the Senate, where party control shifted twice during the 1980s, contests tend to be more competitive. Some fearful incumbents have cleverly built huge "war chests" just to scare off potential challengers. By the middle of 1988, more than two years before they would face the voters, Senator Phil Gramm (R.-Tex.) had raised \$2.7 million, and Senator Bill Bradley (D.-N.J.) \$2.8 million.

The authors favor several widely discussed reforms, in-

cluding, oddly enough, raising the ceiling on individual contributions to \$4,800. They reason that this will allow candidates to solicit the same amount of money from fewer contributors, reducing the amount of time they must spend pleading for money on the rubber-chicken circuit. The authors also favor partial public campaign financing, restricting PAC contributions to a small percentage of individual contributions, and placing lids on the amount of money a candidate may spend on an election.

To arguments that money isn't the problem and that any limits merely discourage citizen participation in politics, the authors reply that voter turnout has been dropping as campaign outlays have soared.

In today's typical congressional election, only 22 percent of the voters can name the candidates.

Even if it were true that money had little effect on election results, they add, its influence is pernicious in other ways. One survey of U.S. senators found that 52 percent thought that the demands of fundraising "cut significantly into the time available for legislative work"; 12 percent agreed that fundraising had other "deleterious effects" on the political process, such as influencing legislators' votes.

Still, despite a lot of rumbling about campaign reform in Congress lately, not many members of Congress are eager to surrender the advantages that return so many of them to Capitol Hill each term.

REPORTING FROM MOSCOW

Despite the Soviet Union's new openness, says Gary Lee, Moscow correspondent for the *Washington Post* during 1985-1989, the KGB has actually stepped up its longtime practice of spreading disinformation to western journalists. Lee related his experience in a paper prepared for the Wilson Center's Media Studies Project.

In early May 1988, while I was escorting a Soviet artist from my Moscow apartment to his car, he took me by the arm and told me he wanted to pass on a tip: an anti-Jewish pogrom was being organized on the outskirts of Moscow . . .

Without fully realizing it at the time, I was involved in one of the oldest forms of harassment the Soviets use against western correspondents: disinformation. The nature of the provocations became clear to me when, in swapping notes with colleagues, I found that several of them had also been approached with rumors of the pogrom. The sources, like my artist friend, were all known

to have links to the KGB . . . While glasnost has brought a drop in the other forms of harassment commonly used in the past, such as heavy surveillance and tire slashings, it has seemed to bring an increase in the art of passing false information . . .

It is difficult to say precisely why the rumor about the pogrom was passed on to me. One interpretation is that it was an attempt to foment further anti-semitism . . . Another interpretation is that the story, had I written it, would have discredited me as a reporter since the pogrom never took place . . .

Under glasnost, it seems that disinformation is not only being stepped up, but also highly refined. The source who told me of the pogrom rumor, for instance, had been supplied with everything he needed to appear to be a plain old artist and thus a credible source of information. He had a charming bohemian pad in Moscow, a history of troubles with Soviet authorities, and close links to some of Moscow's leading intellectuals, whom he quoted liberally.

COMMENTARY

We welcome timely letters from readers, especially those who wish to amplify or correct information published in the Quarterly and/or react to the views expressed in our essays. The writer's telephone number and address should be included. For reasons of space, letters are usually edited for publication. Some letters are received in response to the editors' requests for comment.

The Other Story

Peter F. Klarén ["Peru's Great Divide," *WQ*, Summer '90] paints a vivid and accurate picture of modern Peru. However, the role of the Indian question in the current human rights crisis in Peru deserves further reflection. The traditional treatment of peasants as inferior citizens has encouraged one of the most brutal counterinsurgency campaigns in the hemisphere. Nowhere is this disdain more evident than in Vargas Llosa's report on the Uchuraccay massacre, excerpted in Klarén's article. Throughout the description of what may have happened at Uchuraccay, where eight journalists were killed in 1983, Vargas Llosa depicts the local peasants as exotic, savage, and untamed. Yet despite the isolation of many Andean villages, the Peruvian peasantry has been integrated into the market economy and has many ties with the "modern world." Perhaps that is why the prevailing belief in Peru is not that frightened and confused peasants killed the journalists, as Vargas Llosa claims, but rather that they were ordered to kill them by security forces present in Uchuraccay at the time of the massacre.

The military and police officials in charge of counterinsurgency operations come largely from coastal areas. More often than not they do not speak Quechua, the language of the Andes, and have no trust in the local population they are sent to protect. Nor do peasants trust and share information with them. Thus, all peasants are suspected of being guerrillas and are subject to torture, illegal detentions, disappearance, and extrajudicial executions. According to Amnesty International, more than 3,000 Peruvians—the vast majority peasants—have "disappeared" since January 1983. In fact, for three years in a row the United Nations recorded more disappearances in Peru than in any other country in the world. As Klarén points out, thousands more have died. Massacres of entire villages by Peruvian security forces occur with disturbing frequency.

Thus, the exploitation and violence directed against the Peruvian peasantry for centuries continues today. Peru is indeed in the midst of a profound social upheaval, but the road to a new social identity is paved in blood.

Coletta Youngers
The Washington Office on Latin America

The Call of the West

Brian Dippie's article ["The Winning of the West Reconsidered," *WQ*, Summer '90] is a knowledgeable summation of the frontier experience in terms of myth and antimyth, but it seems to ignore a primary ingredient in the *perpetuation* of the myth at the turn of the century, the time when the frontier was supposed to have died.

The myth was real fabric to the people who lived within its spell and participated in the ongoing endeavor to make it manifest on a personal level. By the turn of the century, most people who responded to the call of the West were not cowboys, gold prospectors, or railroad gandy dancers, and they did not necessarily see themselves as part of the myth of the wild and woolly West.

My parents were born when the frontier supposedly closed (1890), but its rhyme and song formed the background of their lives. They finished high school and eloped on a train from Missouri to California. They worked hard, educated themselves, and filled their lives with love, accomplishments, and knowledge. They were never really affluent, they were never famous, yet they lived the "Go West" story as much as any rancher or railroad baron—and made it work. And it is in such stories that the myth lives on in modern America, not in turn-of-the-century Deadwood Dick dime novels.

My parents were saddened over time as they learned of the government's bunglings, corruption, and inhumanity to the native Americans. But those things did not alter their convictions about opportunity in America and the part that opening the West had played. Going west meant starting a new life, leaving behind unwanted baggage, taking advantage of natural expansion in a country that was not only free, but welcomed people from all over the world to help build it. Buffalo Bill Cody? Come on, they saw him at the circus.

Don E. Smith
West Linn, Oregon

Down for the Count?

Brian Dippie has given the traditional western myth a thorough and richly deserved trouncing. That myth was, in many ways, a commercially de-

signed product, engineered to sell dime novels, movies, clothes, and cigarettes. With roots leading more directly to New York and Hollywood than to the collective soul of America, the Wild West has always had a quality of tinniness and shallowness, and Dippie effectively unveils it.

With the old myth down for the count, what happens next? Do we leave a vacancy in the place where the Wild West once stood? It is, I think, now our opportunity to show that the real stories of the American West are, in a word, better—more moving, more instructive, more charged with meaning. While Dippie's article captures recent changes in the writing of western history, history is only one of the fields of regional expression involved in this change. In fiction, poetry, art, and photography, the West seems at long last to be growing up, ceasing to be a cute, young, forgivable Beaver Cleaver of a region, and emerging as a place both haunted and enriched by its past.

Patricia Nelson Limerick
Univ. of Colorado, Boulder

Shot in the Foot

Brian Dippie appears to have fallen victim to the predictable greenhorn disaster: shooting himself in the foot as he tries to draw on his adversary. This is a result of the classic premise of the historian's art—that contemporary appraisals of events are inevitably in error and that time and distance, equally inevitably, correct this. What Dippie fails to recognize is that cultural myths are articulations of cultural *aspirations*. The myth of the West came into being and was adopted by our culture because it embodied values to which we aspired. It is historically self-serving, however, to presume that it was seen as literal fact even in its heyday.

Dippie's curious statement that a good historical explanation accounts for the past *and* the future, and his equally unsupported caveat that a romantic myth which is untrue for the present is probably untrue for the past, leaves me wondering whether his objective is to correct historical inaccuracies or just to debunk a cultural aspiration which he dislikes. Dippie seems more concerned with making the past conform to contemporary values than with examining how the past produced the values of his own time. Historical research would be better served if he and his sort examined how and why the cultural aspirations reflected in the myth of the West have been supplanted by those of insider traders, rock stars with fried brains and foul mouths, and sociopathic killers.

Edgar W. Neville
Keno, Oregon

A New Starting Point

Brian W. Dippie's suggestion that we study the landlord as well as the homesteader, the railroad operator rather than the builder, and entrepreneurs and corporations as well as cowboys and miners, while continuing the now intensive study of women in the West, is well-taken.

What is needed, however, is a different perspective, a different starting point. Western history, for example, seems to stop at the West Coast. But as John Whitehead has recently noted, from the late 18th century onward, the American whaling and sea otter trade in the Pacific was more economically valuable than the Rocky Mountain fur trade. California's relation to Alaska, Hawaii, China, and Mexico deserve fuller coverage. In short, the concept of what is western or western-related needs to be enlarged. The well-known early conservation debates centering on John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, and Theodore Roosevelt, need to be supplemented if not replaced by accounts of what Harold Ickes and a host of New Deal agencies actually did for conservation during the 1930s.

Howard R. Lamar
Yale University

Remaining Committed at Home

I read with trepidation Shelby Steele's opinions ["Thinking Beyond Race," *WQ*, Summer '90] regarding the socioeconomic stagnation suffered by the majority of the people in my ethnic group. What Steele (who, by the way, is not representative of the average "middle class" black in terms of his sociopolitical outlook, his choice of a mate, or the neighborhood in which he chooses to live) fails to accept is that racism does prevent us from being accepted as equal human beings in this nation. His attitude is welcomed by most whites because it absolves them of responsibility for acquiescing in practices that perpetuate racial dissension even as they publicly preach social virtue. This is what President Bush does when he calls for a "kinder, gentler" nation while at the same time opposing civil rights legislation.

Steele's attitude shows that *he*, not those of us who work to build our neighborhoods instead of abandoning them when we achieve some measure of financial stability, is the type of black who has "self-doubt" about his ethnicity. We are not the self-doubting whiners that Steele portrays in his article. We are simply trying to make it in a system in which the color of a person's skin can limit opportunity. Nor are we guilty of trying to "internalize a message of inferiority" received from "school and

the larger society" by continuing to speak out against racism.

Freedom to act involves facing challenges and working to overcome them. If Mr. Steele is so intent upon fulfilling his potential as a black American, why does he reject those of us who choose to remain committed to principles of social progress instead of collective ignorance? He chooses to live in a comfortable, predominately white neighborhood and tries to suppress his own inferiority complex by questioning why other blacks don't wish to lead the same hypocritical existence.

*Sherman T. Hinton
Vandenberg A.F.B., Calif.*

The Lure of Nationalism

Your cluster of articles on East Central Europe ["Eastern Europe," *WQ*, Spring '90] reminded me of a comment I heard while standing in a dairy line in Prague, just after the 1968 Soviet invasion: "Why ever did we let Franz Josef go?" The woman who made it looked old enough to have spent a happy childhood under the Dual Monarchy, and doubtless the fond memories she harbored were more personal than political. Politically, the monarchy was no utopia, and wishing it had been one, wishing it back into existence, will not help its former constituents to solve their current problems.

One of the main problems in the region is resurgent nationalism. It provides deceptively easy answers for hard problems and tends to divert large segments of the population from the highly unattractive prospect of simultaneously tightening both the work ethic and their belts. No one can blame the nation-states of the area for voting in nationalist-oriented parties after being forced for nearly half a century to suppress national feelings in favor of Communist internationalism. Once the furor dies down, however, a sober reassessment of the situation may well lead back to a variety of Central European political unity.

*Michael Henry Heim
Univ. of Calif., Los Angeles*

Gorbachev's Role

To write about East Central Europe in the late 1980s without acknowledging the catalytic role of Gorbachev is like performing *Hamlet* without the Prince. Of course, the peoples of the region would in any event have continued to press their governments for greater freedom, justice, autonomy, and sovereignty. But without Gorbachev's eventual recognition that those regimes lacked legitimacy in

the eyes of their publics, and that without such legitimacy adequate economic and "alliance" performances (and even "socialist" survival) could not be expected, the public pressures might once again have been aborted, as in earlier postwar decades. Indeed, by 1989 the dissidents, dissenters, and youths of East Central Europe had escalated the pressures on their countries' communist rulers *in Gorbachev's name*.

It is interesting that Gorbachev's realistic assessment of the situation was the product of an admirable learning process. Upon coming into office in March 1985, Gorbachev was initially under the illusion that he faced only a difficult but manageable "crisis of performance" rather than, as has proven to be the case, a terminal "crisis of the system" in East Central Europe—and probably in the Soviet Union itself as well. (The terms are Seweryn Bialer's.) By the end of the decade, he knew better. While Gorbachev has made serious mistakes—some of them gratuitous—and while he may yet fail, his rapid and productive learning process on East Central Europe has been quite impressive.

*Joseph Rothschild
Columbia University*

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