

## *In Search Of Reverence*

John P. Sisk on the meaning of Personal ads, in *The Georgia Review* (Fall 1989).

*I trust that observers and scholars of our popular culture have been giving Personal ads the attention they deserve . . . . If so, they may have noted the extent to which "irreverent" has become a highly valorized term. In a recent New York magazine, for instance, a 44-year-old man advertises himself as "successful, handsome, trim, irreverent . . . ."*

*People who grew up between the two world wars may wonder why a person seeking loving company is able to assume that a capacity for irreverence will make him or her desirable. They may remember being advised by parents, teachers, and clergymen to avoid irreverent people, the idea being that those for whom nothing is sacred are probably too*

*caught up in their own egos to treat others with respect . . . .*

*[T]here is a pervasive fear in the world of the Personals that the amorous intensities and life-enlarging expectations of youth are in danger of being lost forever, that unless one resorts to the once-unconventional means of advertising one's plight in some public forum, it will soon be too late . . . .*

*[A society's] fear of sacred space, which is a fear of life lived by what always appears to be the long odds of faith, goes with its reluctance to commit itself to the burden of distinguishing between revitalizing fresh perspectives and faithless subversions. For lack of something worthy of reverential attention it must worship life in its precarious time-bound condition, which means that it must worship youthfulness.*

incentives to order up tests for patients.

But Goldblatt thinks that it is not too late to turn back. Most physicians still deserve trust, she says. Public education, self-regu-

lation by physicians, and perhaps no-fault malpractice insurance can help prevent doctors from becoming "highly trained body plumbers."

## *The Culture of Empire*

"Empire Builders, Culture Makers, and Culture Imprinters" by Charles Issawi, in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (Autumn 1989), Tufts Univ., 26 Winthrop St., Medford, Mass. 02155.

Why is it that the Roman Empire left a lasting cultural legacy in its domain, while the Greek influence all but vanished from the Mediterranean? Why did the Spanish "imprint" their culture on their colonies but not the French? Why the Arabs but not the Persians? Curiously, it seems that certain empires that attained the highest cultural achievements have been the least successful at passing on these achievements to the areas where they held sway.

The reason, says Issawi, an emeritus professor of Near Eastern studies at Princeton, has more to do with the way an empire is organized and where it is located than how advanced its civilization is.

Three factors seem vital to ensuring an empire's cultural legacy. First, the empire must establish itself in a defensible region so its culture can develop and spread. The Arabs, notes Islamic scholar Ibn Khaldun,

solidified their empire when they "forsook a nomadic for a sedentary life [and] concentrated all their energies on politics, rulership, and war." They left learning and scholarship to "the Persians, or those who were . . . subject to them." But the empire also must have "culture bearers" who migrate from the capital to the outlying regions. This migration of "priests and scholars . . . ruffians and convicts" occurred in empires as diverse as the Chinese, Indian, Roman, Arab, Portuguese (in Brazil), Spanish, British, and Russian. Perhaps most important, the empire must be "identified with a religion that either actively proselytized or at least easily admitted converts." This establishes the rulers' language as a sacred tongue, helps spread the culture to the masses, and allows it to survive invaders. In Christian Rome, as in Muslim Arabia, conquerors who destroyed

*Periodicals continues on page 125*

Continued from page 22

these empires were converted to the religion and thus inherited the culture.

It also helps if an empire is the only civilizing force in a region. As Issawi points out, "Rome was dealing with relatively primitive peoples and Greece with highly civilized ones, strongly tenacious of their old cultures." Likewise, it was easier for Portugal and Spain to persuade the natives

of the New World to adopt their culture than it was for the French to supplant the peoples' powerful ties to Islam in their North African colonies.

In almost every case that Issawi studied "it was the culturally less creative people that imprinted a large area." Good fortune, not merit, he believes, is the stuff of which lasting legacies are made.

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## PRESS & TELEVISION

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### *TV's Critics*

"Real and Perceived Effects of 'Amerika'" by Dominic L. Lasorsa, in *Journalism Quarterly* (Summer 1989), Univ. of S.C., 1621 College St., College of Journalism, Columbia, S.C. 29208-0251.

Liberal critics were hopping mad in 1987 when ABC broadcast its tedious seven-part miniseries, *Amerika*. The miniseries' grim depiction of life in a Soviet-occupied United States, they exclaimed, would turn the American people into raving anti-Soviet Rambos. Although Lasorsa, a professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin, does not mention it, ABC aired the miniseries partly to mollify conservative critics, who were hopping mad over ABC's broadcast of *The Day After* in 1983. These critics were convinced that ABC's dire portrait of life in the United States after a nuclear war would turn the American public into pacifist sheep.

As we all know, Americans became neither Rambos nor wimps, and Lasorsa has the opinion poll data to prove it, at least in the case of *Amerika*. But the controversies do raise an interesting question: Why do critics who consider themselves immune

to the influence of television assume that others are such utterly helpless prey to it?

Lasorsa suggests an answer. Of the 523 people he surveyed about *Amerika*, 31 percent felt that the program had much greater impact on others than on themselves. Social scientists call this the "third person effect." What was the distinguishing characteristic of this group? Lasorsa found that many thought of themselves as "political experts." But when he tested all 523 respondents for "real" political knowledge, he found that only 22.5 percent of those "high" in real knowledge exhibited the "third person effect" while 34.7 of those who were "low" in knowledge did.

Lasorsa is rather polite in his conclusion: "Perceived political knowledge rather than real political knowledge fuels the third-person effect." In other words, when it comes to television, those who know least criticize most.

### *No More Deep Throats?*

"When Unnamed Sources Are Banned" by Felix Winternitz, in *The Quill* (Oct. 1989), 53 W. Jackson Blvd., Ste. 731, Chicago, Ill. 60604-3610.

In 1988, George Blake, editor of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, voiced the anxiety of many news executives when he criticized the widespread use of anonymous sources—the ubiquitous "high administration official" or the mysterious "source

close to the investigation." News stories that rely on anonymous sources, Blake said, are "trust-me" pieces that make it "difficult, if not impossible, for the reader to evaluate the accuracy of the information presented." Unlike his peers, how-