

surprised by this; certainly Hourani is not. He points out that since the early 1960s there has been remarkably little change in most Arab regimes or in their policies. The degree of political stability in the region is remarkable and continues despite population explosion, rapid urbanization, the transformation of the countryside, and the continuous eruption of armed conflict. In Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco, no substantial changes have been witnessed for more than a generation; in Libya, South Yemen, and Iraq, groups that seized control by 1970 were still in power two decades later. In all of the countries, the cohesion of the ruling group is still a decisive factor. What is the secret of this surprising stability? It seems the Khaldunian clans have mastered the peculiarly 20th-century *‘asabiya* of police

surveillance and military intelligence.

Hourani is not the first modern historian to have found in Ibn Khaldun a useful guide to Arab-Islamic history, with its distinctive blend of idealism and pragmatism, generosity and selfishness. Few historians, however, can match Hourani in his knowledge of the original sources, in his breadth of reading in the secondary literature, and above all in the facility with which he translates complex processes into readable English. Specialists will admire the book for the depth of its scholarship; the general reader, for its making the history of the Arabs so freshly accessible.

—*Malise Ruthven, a visiting professor of religion and history at the University of California, San Diego, is the author of Islam in the World (1984).*

NEW TITLES

History

IN SEARCH OF HUMAN NATURE: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought. *By Carl N. Degler.* Oxford. 400 pp. \$24.95

Is that which is uniquely human about us something we are born with, or do we acquire it culturally? Pulitzer Prize-winning Stanford historian Carl Degler says this chicken-or-egg question actually has an answer, or several answers, all of which are determined by extra-scientific, political considerations.

At the turn of the century, Darwin was assumed to have proved that human moral and emotional capacities had evolved from animals, just as our physical shapes had. Seemingly harmless, this conclusion made it possible to cloak a good deal of ideology in the guise of science. Sociology textbooks used throughout the 1920s explained the "backwardness" of African-Americans genetically: "The negro," one such textbook declared, "is not simply a black

Anglo-Saxon deficient in school." Sociologists pronounced it "unscientific" to attempt to govern different races by the same system of legal rules. Sterilization laws were passed in America 25 years before they were in Nazi Germany: By 1930, some 30 states had enacted laws to prevent criminals, imbeciles, and rapists from passing on their "deviant genes."

During the 1920s, a reaction to this kind of thinking set in as progressive intellectuals attacked the very idea of human instinct. John Dewey and George Herbert Mead argued that nearly anyone could be taught nearly anything. By the 1930s, such arguments constituted the new scientific orthodoxy, and permeated the thinking of New Deal reformers, who saw different social groups' attainments as the result of favorable or unfavorable discrimination. If there was no such thing as human nature, then those who were socially—not inherently—disadvantaged should be helped.

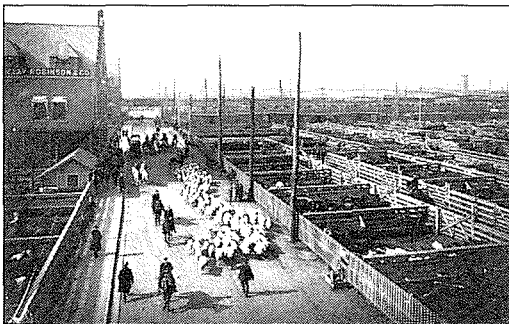
In recent decades, however, Darwinism has made a comeback. Zoologists such as William Hamilton and sociobiologists such as E. O. Wil-

son stress the animal origins of human behavior. Degler believes that by dispensing with the ideology, we can discover a scientific, biological basis for human ethics without all the racism, sexism, and politicized eugenics of the old Social Darwinism. Degler seems not to notice that his own brand of Darwinism—with its elevated biology and moral analogies between people and animals—is an ideological construct, one to which other social scientists may fail to subscribe.

NATURE'S METROPOLIS: Chicago and the Great West. By William Cronon. Norton. 530 pp. \$27.50

At the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his influential paper on "The Closing of the Frontier in American History." By then, Chicago was already a giant, sprawling city of a million people, yet some older visitors to the Exposition could remember when the city was only a tiny trading post of a few dozen souls. What had made Chicago, practically in the middle of nowhere, grow so fast?

In *Nature's Metropolis*, Cronon, a Yale historian, provides an answer that, among other things, turns Turner's thesis on its head. Turner had depicted the peopling of the frontier as a movement of pioneers and homesteaders escaping an urbanized America in order to create an open society of democratic politics, unfettered economy, and rugged individualism. To the contrary, Cronon argues, the frontier was, in effect, a mirror-image of Chicago. Rural history and urban history are usually separate disciplines, but Cronon shows that from the Appalachians to the Sierra Nevadas there was a



single economic "ecosystem" and that Chicago and the hinterlands interacted to determine each other's growth.

If part of Cronon's story sounds familiar, in other ways he has written the strangest history of Chicago imaginable. One should not turn to *Nature's Metropolis* for any account of Chicago's labor struggles, ethnic conflicts, political machines, or social reformers. Cronon's heroes and villains are not Marshall Field, George Pullman, or Louis Sullivan, but movements of produce and goods. These largely impersonal commodity flows in grain, lumber, and meat tied city and country tightly together, so that to write of the two separately, Cronon says, amounts to "moral schizophrenia."

Cronon's original blend of economics and ecology is persuasive but perplexing. He intends his tales of Chicago's growth in the 19th century "as parables for our own lives as well," but if so, they seem parables without practical application. Because he has denied people their role as the agents of change, the problems he associates with growth—"threats of species extinction, unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, widespread destruction of habitat"—seem, after reading *Nature's Metropolis*, less amenable to solution than ever.

Arts & Letters

A LIFE OF PICASSO: Volume I, 1881–1906. By John Richardson. Random House. 548 pp. \$39.95

Ordinarily, a 550-page biography that brings its subject to the ripe age of 25 might seem to be running in slow-motion. But with regard to Picasso (1881–1973), as art historian Richardson demonstrates, the word "ordinary" does not apply. By age 25 Picasso had painted more celebrated pictures and worked through more styles than most artists do in a lifetime. The Blue period of *La Vie* (1903), the Rose period of *Boy with a Pipe* (1905), the Circus period of *Acrobat and Young Harlequin* (1905), and the classical monumental torsos such as *Two Nudes* (1906) all were in the past, and he was beginning the cubistic *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1906–07), which Richardson calls "the most innovative painting since Giotto."