
OTHER TITLES

Contemporary Affairs

THE END OF EQUALITY. By Mickey Kaus.
Basic. 271 pp. \$25

That in egalitarian America the richest five percent of society now own roughly two-fifths of the nation's wealth neither surprises nor upsets *New Republic* editor Kaus. Indeed, Kaus's book reads like a calming election-year sermon to his fellow liberals. Its moral is that liberals (by whom he means Democrats) have been exiled from the White House by their misguided commitment to welfare and income redistribution. Typically, liberals ignore the fact that economic inequality is as natural to capitalism as flies and ants are to a picnic. In place of *income* equality, Kaus prescribes *social* equality, which would restrict the spheres of life in which money matters and enlarge those in which it does not.

Kaus may be preaching to the converted. At their 1992 convention, Democrats kept sounding the refrain of how far their party had traveled from 1972 and George McGovern's vow to redistribute wealth. A decade ago, well before Reaganomics had run its course, political philosopher Michael Walzer suggested in *Spheres of Justice* (1983) that people with wealth or authority should not be able to translate such advantages into privileges that work to the detriment of less fortunate people in other sectors of society. Wealth should not translate into privileged access to medical care, for example, and if the wealthy can have their private garden parties, then the public parks should be safe and pleasant as well. Kaus has taken Walzer's idea and packaged it in specific proposals and a political agenda.

Kaus would introduce or reinforce institutions that establish social equality: better schools and public transportation, mandatory national service for the young, an electoral system that is publicly financed, a national public health system. His chief proposal, however, involves replacing welfare with guaranteed jobs. Every American over 18 could, as a fallback, obtain a useful public job, compensated at a wage slightly below the private-sector mini-

mum. The federal government would supplement all low-paid jobs with earned-income tax credits, to raise all employees and their families above the poverty line. Those critics who expect the end of the welfare state to result in huge savings may be shocked at the tab for Kaus's scheme: initially, \$66 to \$83 billion a year. (For purposes of comparison, America's current welfare system costs roughly \$23 billion, while George Bush's requested military budget this year is \$281 billion.) Ultimately, Kaus argues, the investment in a "work ethic state," where there would be a smaller underclass, less drug use, and less crime, would more than pay for itself.

For all of Kaus's discussion of a civic ethic and of a society scaled to human needs, his book is remarkably devoid of any testimony from real people. By keeping to the theoretical, Kaus scants the difficult social and institutional realities involved in getting Americans off welfare and food stamps and into meaningful jobs. Kaus presents a new vision of civic society, of an America animated by a more communal spirit, but he leaves the realization of this vision up to federal authorities, without adequately exploring the role that states, localities, and voluntary groups might play in bringing it to fruition.

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture. By Kwame Anthony Appiah. Oxford. 225 pp. \$29.95

In the film *Mississippi Masala* (1992), a Ugandan-born lawyer of Indian descent becomes furious when a black friend, urging him to flee Idi Amin's terror, quotes Kwame Nkrumah's saying, "Africa for the Africans!" Appiah, a professor of philosophy at Harvard, argues that pan-African slogans such as Nkrumah's encapsulate a most curious history of racism.

Appiah here investigates that convoluted history to learn how the *idea* of "African" came into being. As a cultural notion it was, in fact, created not in Africa but elsewhere. During the 19th century, European colonizers—as a way



of discounting the legitimacy of so many diverse peoples and cultures—fabricated a single African identity. From Europe, Appiah shows, the intellectual drama next shifted to the United States, where the fathers of pan-Africanism—Alexander Crummel (1819–98) and W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963)—took the essentially de-meaning concept of “the Negro” or “the African” and embroidered it with positive connotations. Each race, Du Bois wrote in *The Conservation of Races* (1897), possesses its own special “mission” for civilization. Although Du Bois’s idea of an African civilization may satisfy a deep longing among Africans for some kind of unity, it flies in the face of everything that Appiah (a native of Ghana) personally knows: “Whatever Africans share, we do not have a common traditional culture, common languages, a common religious or conceptual vocabulary.” The contemporary “race industry”—thousands of politicians, professors, preachers, and poets who have a vested interest in race as a fundamental datum of human experience—will surely dislike Appiah’s insistence that there is nothing *essentially* black or African. Yet Appiah’s intention in casting out false racial or metaphorical identities is to help contemporary Africans more freely choose “what it will mean to be African in the coming years.”

But how is such an act of cultural self-definition to be accomplished? Here Appiah shifts to the personal, narrating the strange story of his father’s funeral. Appiah’s father, a modern Ashanti politician, left burial instructions that contradicted his clan’s matrilinear rules. In the ensuing dispute, spells were cast, sheep slaughtered, and poisonings attempted, as Appiah himself was pushed from neat abstractions like “tradition” and “modernity” into “an almost fairytale world of witchcraft and wicked aunts and wise old women and men.” He learned that Ashanti spirits—or, for that matter, the God of Christianity and Islam—have to be re-

spected as more than “symbolic truths.” *In My Father’s House* becomes the very desideratum it is proposing for Africa’s intellectual future: Appiah is writing not “African philosophy” (which he considers a meaningless term) but thoughts by an African in which oral wisdom and European concepts form a unified whole. “If you postulate an either-or choice between Africa and the West,” he concludes, “there is no place for you in the real world of African politics.”

History

A WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN: The Christian Clerical Culture of Western Science. By David F. Noble. Knopf. 330 pp. \$25

Western science has long been something close to a male-only club, a condition documented in such feminist studies as Evelyn Fox Keller’s *Reflections on Gender and Science* (1985) and Londa Schiebinger’s *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (1989). Such books analyze how exclusive male control of the scientific enterprise has shaped our understanding of the physical world as well as the strategies by which we go about “mastering” it.

Noble, a historian at York University in Toronto, proposes to tell how the club became virtually all-male. It didn’t have to be so, he says. Nor was it even the inevitable consequence of the misogyny of Aristotle and other classical shapers of Western science. The problem lies, says Noble, in the history of one of the West’s more influential cultures of learning: the Christian church. Drawing on the work of such specialists as Peter Brown (on late antiquity) and R. W. Southern (on the Middle Ages), Noble shows how women’s exclusion from the world of learning resulted from the long struggle over the character and role of the Christian clergy: Should it be homosocial, celibate, and male-dominated? And should the clergy have the final say in defining correct doctrine and practice?

The fact that these questions were not always answered in the affirmative is proof, in Noble’s telling, of how things might have been otherwise. For example, in the second and third cen-