

United in their resentment of the Anglos, San Antonio's Mexican Americans nonetheless eschew racial rhetoric for the politics of "getting ahead and getting even." Los Angeles offers a much quicker route to the American Dream. The city's Hispanic households had average incomes of \$33,500 in 1990, nearly \$10,000 greater than those of Hispanics in San Antonio, despite the California city's heavy influx of poor immigrants. Yet Skerry believes that San Antonio's political style promotes a healthier kind of assimilation.

Los Angeles politics, scrubbed clean of "machine" excrescences by Progressive-era reforms and dominated by the news media, discourages grassroots politics. Political organizing is made nearly impossible by the never-ending stream of new immigrants, which makes life in many Mexican-American neighborhoods highly unsettled even by Los Angeles standards. The city's Mexican-American politicians have little real connection to their constituents; instead, they attract media attention by playing the race card—raising issues such as bilingual education and immigration policy. The leaders who emerge from this system tend to be ineffective, with political careers as ephemeral as sound bites. The grittier San Antonio style has yielded more skilled leaders (including Henry Cisneros, now secretary of Housing and Urban Development), more municipal jobs for Mexican Americans at city hall, and twice as big a share (14 percent) of seats in the state legislature. Mexican Americans in Texas have what used to be called a stake in the system.

Skerry suggests that the San Antonio model offers Mexican Americans their best hope of political assimilation. But he fears that the American system today is rigged in favor of politics as practiced in Los Angeles.

PANDAEMONIUM: Ethnicity in International Politics. *By Daniel Patrick Moynihan.* Oxford. 221 pp. \$19.95

Plato's idea of a philosopher-prince seemed to acquire, after the Soviet empire broke apart, an artistic twist: Czechoslovakia elected a playwright president and Lithuania a musician. In



America the closest approximation to a philosopher-prince may be New York's senior senator. His politics and scholarship have certainly long reinforced each other. Thirty years ago Moynihan wrote (with Nathan Glazer) an influential study of ethnicity, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, and his awareness of ethnic conflicts has made him a shrewder observer of international realities than many Cold War "realists." Even a decade ago, when Henry Kissinger still defined world politics as an abiding conflict between communism and the free world, Moynihan was predicting that ethnic unrest would soon unravel the Soviet empire. Understanding ethnicity, however, left Moynihan with no illusions that the end of the Cold War could mean the end of history.

Expanding on his Oxford lecture of 1991, Moynihan here explains how ethnicity, conjoined with nationalist ambitions, has produced a recipe for endless conflict. It was Woodrow Wilson—with an addiction to phrasemaking that his secretary of state Robert Lansing privately criticized—who made "the self-determination of peoples" an active principle in world politics. Until recently, Moynihan says, Americans have tended to overlook the difficulties and dangers of this noble-sounding ideal. Conceiving rights in terms of individuals, not groups, Americans believed that governments, not people, caused all the world's problems. Now that international politics is no longer a Manichean struggle between good and evil governments, but rather an infinitely complex network of ethnic and national ambitions, Moynihan worries that America will retreat into a disenchanting isolationism. His main point, indeed, is that American participation is essential if there

is to be "order in an age of chaos." "Sovereignty has become more permeable," Moynihan argues, in such places as the Balkans, where external intervention in domestic politics constitutes not aggression but humanitarian necessity. "Just how much horror can be looked upon with indifference, or at least inaction?" he asks. "To which the answer, of course, is plenty. But," Moynihan concludes, "civilizations with claims to universal values do, in general, try to uphold them, if only after a point."

DEATH WITHOUT WEEPING: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil. By Nancy Scheper-Hughes. Univ. of Calif. 614 pp. \$29

Anthropology during the 1980s, inspired by the deconstructionist vogue in literary criticism, grew painfully self-conscious. Dissecting ethnographic writing, practitioners dispelled the notion that the anthropologist was a neutral observer. Yet after a decade, such textual self-scrutiny became repetitive and threatened to turn anthropology into an armchair discipline.

It may seem odd that a book titled *Death Without Weeping* augurs new life in what looked like a moribund discipline. To Scheper-Hughes, an anthropologist at Berkeley, the convulsions of history are not simply material for aesthetic critique. The sugar plantations of the Brazilian Northeast were born in slavery, and, as she puts it, they are now maintained by slavery of another kind. The region never experienced Brazil's "economic miracle." Quite the contrary. Today its landless peasants suffer from the combined effects of deforestation, regional decline, and agricultural mechanization—a fate shared with much of the Third World.

In Bom Jesus da Mata, where Scheper-Hughes studied everyday life for more than 25 years, a rural worker's average daily caloric consumption is less than that of an internee in Buchenwald. A medical anthropologist, the author describes how the local clinics treat the symptoms of hunger and malnutrition by prescribing medication, thus indirectly helping to maintain terrible social conditions. She goes beyond the usual denunciations of the role of conservative Catholicism in maintaining this status quo; in-

deed, she shows how the progressive liberation theology, which promulgates the church's teachings about female sexuality and reproduction, leaves poor mothers who cannot raise all the children they conceive in a state of "moral and theological confusion."

Scheper-Hughes is most original in her discussion of motherhood. Much recent feminist theory—as expressed in Nancy Chodorow's *Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982), and Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking* (1990)—promotes a nostalgic, almost mystical image of the mother-infant relationship. The behavior of the poor in Bom Jesus is a living—and dying—refutation of any universalist myth of motherhood. With resources too scarce to support all their children, shantytown mothers not only do not mourn the death of sickly babies; they hasten the dying of those unlikely to survive. These undernourished mothers make cold-blooded judgments about their children's chances in a slum environment, practicing what Scheper-Hughes describes, with both shock and sympathy, as "selective neglect" or "passive infanticide."

Scheper-Hughes makes some use of anthropology's recent self-conscious turn, employing critical theory to justify her role as an advocate for real people in real troubles. Her own voice—by turns womanly, muckraking, passionately engaged, and analytical—does not crowd out the many voices of her subjects, but it does contribute to a multitextured, experimental ethnography. Her work, in fact, stands as an invitation to fellow anthropologists to quit their armchair critiques and return to the field.

Arts & Letters

WHERE THE BLUEBIRD SINGS TO THE LEMONADE SPRINGS: Living and Writing in the West. By Wallace Stegner. Random House. 227 pp. \$21

In 1964, a middle-aged Wallace Stegner declared the West to be "the New World's last chance to be something better, the only American society malleable enough to be formed." This pronouncement was characteristically self-effacing.