

ture of two enormous infants joined at the groin. P. T. Barnum, who filled his American Museum in 19th-century New York with jugglers, bearded women, and the Feejee Mermaid, would have approved.

What else can the museum be if it is no longer a noble temple of art? Lind looks to the "contextualist" ideal advanced by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), an English-educated Indian intellectual who spent the last half

of his life in the United States. "The Coomaraswamian museum would showcase objects not as exemplars of eternal aesthetic values but as manifestations of a particular civilization's particular philosophical worldview or religious sensibility. It would, in short, resemble a museum of anthropology or comparative religion." Truth, not sensation, is the proper goal of art, after all, and it is hardly likely to be obtained by shoppers at a cultural bazaar.

### ***Keeping 'Em Down On the Farm***

"From Better Babies to 4-H: A Look at Rural America, 1900–1930" by Marilyn Irvin Holt, in *Prologue* (Fall 1992), National Archives, Washington, D.C. 20408.

The U.S. census of 1920 showed that, for the first time in the nation's history, country folk were outnumbered by their urban cousins. The exodus from the farm had already prompted fears for the future of American agriculture, as the popular World War I song, "How 'Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm (After They've Seen Paree)?," jokingly suggested.

Even before the war, notes Holt, a free-lance writer, the federal government, along with the

agricultural colleges created by the Morrill Act of 1862, had begun making efforts to improve farm life and make it more attractive. President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 set up a commission to study the matter. In 1917, the first of many national conferences was held to bring together all those interested in "rural progress." Education was the U.S. Agriculture Department's favored means of uplift. Farmers were shown how to get higher crop yields and



*Hard labor: An entire Texas farm family, circa 1900, was forced to pick cotton.*

## Malcolm's Rage

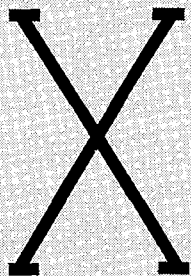
Spike Lee's film biography is only the latest manifestation of the Malcolm X revival in black America. But the Malcolm who has reappeared, journalist Marshall Frady observes in the *New Yorker* (October 12, 1992), is not the Malcolm who was slain.

*From the turbulent black awakening of the 1960s, two lines of descent—two temperaments, two potentials—have contended for the spirit of black Americans: a tension between the children of Martin [Luther King, Jr.] and the children of Malcolm [X]. . . . [I]f it could be said that King's vision expected too much of the species, Malcolm's seemed a vision of humankind's nature reduced to the basest, most minimal terms of anger and retribution for abuse. . . . If, all these years later, the tensions between the visions of Martin and Malcolm have endured in the black community, it can sometimes appear that Malcolm's flat, blank anger has carried the day—and not merely in a certain style of attitude, as evidenced by the swagger and bluster of many rap artists. How Malcolm's presence far more deeply lingers among us was illuminated by the recent upheavals in Los Angeles. . . . But if the lasting racial alienations in America would seem to put King's high moral proposition in doubt, the irony is that at the time Malcolm was slain he had begun to move away from the fierce, implacable persona to which his mystique and his children have now fastened.*

*He had broken with the Black Muslims, and in the last year of his life he had been venturing, however tentatively and unevenly, beyond the insular racial delirium of their doctrine and was approaching a more open and conciliatory vision—a vision closer, if still only in certain nuances, to King's own. . . .*

*Malcolm's mood [in 1965] had become one of cornered frenzy. He told [Alex] Haley that when he concluded that Elijah Muhammad had sanctioned his extermination "my head felt like it was bleeding inside." . . . His protégé Louis Farrakhan had announced in a Muslim newspaper, with the scorpion vigor for which he later became more widely noted, "The die is set, and Malcolm shall not escape. . . . Such a man as Malcolm is worthy of death." . . . It was as if he were ambushed from the past by his own hand. In the end, for all Malcolm's aposileship of wrath over the years, the only violence his message ever demonstrably precipitated was upon himself. . . .*

*He is still hailed by many as the most authentic voice of America's vast black underclass. . . . But it has been his earlier incarnation to which his posterity has somehow clung: to Malcolm's own slayer, in effect. On book covers, and on posters that have proliferated throughout the black community—in university black-student unions and inner-city bookstores—it is the image of Malcolm during his [Black] Muslim days that glares out.*



better produce. Through federally funded extension services sponsored by agricultural colleges, farm women were taught how to do their work more efficiently. The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 provided federal money to the colleges to hire extension agents to organize 4-H Clubs for boys and girls. By 1919, more than 465,000 young people were enrolled in the clubs.

Teachers in rural schools gave lessons in the "elements of agriculture," Holt says, to "show boys the value of the farm in the national scheme of things." Home economics teachers, meanwhile, attempted to persuade girls "that housework was not drudgery but an art." Whatever it was called, farm women had to work extremely hard—on average, according to a 1928 study, more than 63 hours per week. "If

one wanted reasons to explain migrations off the farm or ranch," Holt observes, "the battle to maintain good health amid the hard work of just finding ways to preserve and keep food" is a very good one. "Another . . . was the hard outdoor work that women performed during pregnancy and soon after delivery," including such chores as hauling water, cutting firewood, and digging potatoes.

For most farm families to survive, every member had to contribute—including the children. The Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor "met steady resistance from rural communities and farm organizations" in its efforts to regulate agricultural child labor, and finally decided "that no matter what abuses existed, the need to maintain the family farm was

more important in the broader picture."

If the sole aim of all the rural uplift was to halt the migration from farm to city, then the efforts have to be judged an utter failure. But,

Holt notes, America's farm families did enjoy improved health and education, a reduction in backbreaking work, and more opportunities for organized activities such as 4-H.

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## PRESS & MEDIA

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### *The News, With Feeling*

"The New Writers' Bloc" by Katherine Boo, in *The Washington Monthly* (Nov. 1992), 1611 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009, and "Mo Knows" by Leslie Kaufman, in *Washington Journalism Review* (Oct. 1992), 4716 Pontiac St., Ste. 310, College Park, Md. 20740-2493.

Washington correspondent Maureen Dowd is a talented and amusing wordsmith. During the Democratic primaries last year, Senator Robert Kerrey (D.-Neb.) emerged from her word processor with "large blue eyes and a light-bulb shaped head that give him the look of a bemused extraterrestrial." Another erstwhile presidential contender, Paul Tsongas, was turned into a turtle, "look[ing] around him with a slow, blinking bemusement at the vagaries of fate." Dowd did not invent impressionistic "New Journalism," but the fact that she practices it on the front page of what used to be called the "good, gray" *New York Times* is highly significant. According to Boo, a *Washington Post* editor, and Kaufman, an assistant editor of *Government Executive* magazine, Dowd and a host of imitators are transforming political journalism. The change, say critics, is not entirely for the better.

When the New Journalism emerged in the late 1960s, newspapers usually relegated it to the opinion and style pages. No longer. "Faced on the one hand with engaging a generation raised on MTV, and on the other with stiff competition from faxed newsletters, on-line news services, and CNN," Kaufman writes, "newspapers are being forced to reinvent themselves."

Dowd herself, who likes "to do stories that tweak and amuse," compares politics to Shakespearean drama. "It's one of the few arenas where you can watch character development." But is "character" all in politics? Showing, as Dowd did, how President Bush, while campaigning in Texas, marred "his pork-rind image with a prep-school tendency to say 'whoopsie daisy' and 'by golly,'" Boo notes, may well provide "a better feel for [the] geeky commander-in-chief than a dozen lesser profiles." Franklin Roosevelt was "another patrician who used cornball props . . . in an attempt to come off as a regular guy." Yet the policies of Roosevelt and Bush were worlds apart.

"I don't care about character reporting," syndicated columnist and former *Times* reporter Richard Reeves told Kaufman. "What politicians do or say in private is irrelevant. It is what they do and say in public that's important. We need less focus on character and more on ideas and issues." In its novelistic focus on the personal, that is what the New Journalism often fails to provide. In Dowd's preprimary profile of Kerrey (the "bemused extraterrestrial"), for example, the health-care issue—which was the centerpiece of his presidential campaign—somehow never came up.

### *Enquiring Minds?*

"Reading the Supermarket Tabloids" by Christopher Clausen, in *The New Leader* (Sept. 7, 1992), 275 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001.

Editors at respectable newspapers like to look down their journalistic noses at the *National Enquirer* and other supermarket tabloids. After a close examination, however, Pennsylvania State English professor Clausen concludes that the "tabs" are not so far removed from the mainstream press as the latter would like peo-

ple to believe.

"The tabloids merely cater, albeit at the extreme, to American culture's obsession with personality and generally weak interest in abstract ideas, political or otherwise," Clausen contends. In capitalizing on that obsession, he points out, they are no different than the main-