



"Dust Storm, Cimarron County, Oklahoma," by Arthur Rothstein.

as a direct order to produce untruthful images for the government. He ignored, Hurley says, the context and the humor in Stryker's comment. Delano, moreover, was no oppressed pawn; he believed in the agency's mission of helping small farmers.

Sally Stein, in her introduction to *Marion Post Wolcott: F.S.A. Photographs* (1983), similarly distorts a 1940 telegram from photographer Marion Post Wolcott to Stryker, in order to portray her as having been victimized by him because of her gender. "You are a cruel and heartless master. I feel like a Finnish Boy Scout . . . am fingerless, toeless, earless. Wish you were here with the wind whistling through your britches too," she told Stryker, who had sent her to snap wintry scenes in New England. But she, too, was only kidding, as a long letter she sent to Stryker four days later makes abundantly clear—and indeed as Wolcott herself angrily made clear to Hurley after the Stein study appeared.

Two other recent works—Maren Stange's *Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America, 1890–1950* and James Curtis's *Mind's Eye, Mind's Truth: FSA Photography Reconsidered*, both published in 1989—look at the FSA photographs through "neo-Marxian deconstructionist" lenses, Hurley says. Stange sees Stryker as a conspiratorial agent, "manipulating the poor photographers in the interests of capitalism." Curtis, without offering

any evidence whatsoever, accuses Lange of having intrusively directed the "Migrant Mother" in order to suppress the woman's individuality "so that she could become an archetypal representative of the values shared by Lange's middle-class audience."

The danger in all this slanted scholarship, Hurley says, is that the historical context in which the memorable FSA images were created will be lost. "If we allow that to happen we will have done damage to the images and to American history."



"Bleached Skull of a Steer, South Dakota Badlands," by Arthur Rothstein.

Arnold's Prescription

"Culture and Anarchy Today" by Steven Marcus, in *The Southern Review* (July 1993), 43 Allen Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, La. 70803–5005.

Relativism rules American culture today. The "isms" of the moment—multiculturalism, deconstructionism, and postmodernism, among oth-

ers—have made it virtually impossible to agree on objective standards for judgments about truth and quality. This perplexing situation, says Marcus, a professor of English at Columbia University, is not wholly unlike the one that Victorian poet and critic Matthew Arnold (1822–88) confronted in his famous *Culture and Anarchy* (1869).

Witnessing reform agitation and the broadening of the franchise in England, as well as the rise of nonconformist Protestant sects, Arnold worried about increasing anarchy, both social and spiritual. In *Culture and Anarchy*, he addressed the question of how to reconcile progress or change with order and continuity. He offered two related remedies. The first, Marcus notes, was increased education for middle- and working-class children. “The second, which in some sense includes the first, is the inculcation by a variety of means of the ideas, attitudes, practices, and habits of temperament and sensibility that are implicit in his master term, ‘culture.’” Salvation, Arnold said, was “a harmonious perfection only to be won by cultivating many sides in us.”

These recommendations could be given “such a high spiritual priority,” Marcus points out, only on the presupposition that revealed religion, specifically Christianity, was no longer “the ultimate authority or standard of values and spiritual ordering, and that modern societies must, in this primary sense, make do without it.”

Yet the “credent certitude” carried by the truths of revealed religion could hardly be

matched. By supposing that they could, that “culture” could take the place of Christianity, Marcus says, Arnold built *Culture and Anarchy* on a foundation of sand. Paradoxically, however, this “logical vulnerability and impairment” of the work strengthen it, give it “historical relevance and life.” Just as the sacralization of art and the artist that was taking place during the same period in Europe led eventually to “destructive negation, subversion, and disintegration,” so Arnold’s sacralized culture led eventually to “aridity, triviality, and anomic despair.”

To the problem of finding “‘a source of authority,’ a ground upon which we can establish some ‘strict standard of excellence,’” Arnold gave an answer that is “pragmatic, anecdotal, and experientially, if not logically, convincing,” Marcus writes. “He asserts that there can be something like ‘a certain centre of correct information, taste and intelligence,’ and that we can be nearer to or farther away from such an ideal in our opinions.”

Culture was the province of those able to rise above the constrictions of social class, Arnold believed. Culture, he wrote, “does not try to teach down to the level of inferior classes; it does not try to win them for this or that sect of its own, with ready-made judgments and watchwords. It seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere. . . . This is the *social idea*; and the men of culture are the true apostles of equality.”

OTHER NATIONS

Mighty MITI?

A Survey of Recent Articles

For a long time after the Tokyo stock market crash of 1990, all the news out of Japan was about that nation’s unaccustomed economic aches and pains, and the scribes who once avidly debated the sources of Japan’s marvelous economic success were little heard from. Lately, however, with the advent of a new American administration seeking a more active

role in shaping industries and markets, the what-is-their-secret debate has been revived. It has sprawled over successive issues of several publications and consumed dozens of pages.

The debate, rife with blustery assertions and accusations, comes down to a single question: How much credit does Japan’s famed Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) de-