

eighth black) and sired “perhaps three or four children who would have been William Faulkner’s cousins”—is so speculative that it is written under the qualifying section title “Maybe.”

Moreover, in his determination to find Faulkner’s one and only literary inspiration in the culture of the American South, Williamson does not leave open the possibility that Faulkner was greatly influenced by other sources, notably his artistic contemporaries—Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Joyce. And Williamson’s interpretation of Faulkner’s literary texts often passes from the banal to the trite, with insights such as “buildings stood for artificial, man-made institutions and the ‘outdoors’ for the natural order.”

Nevertheless, the book is a valuable demonstration of what the cultural historian can contribute to literary interpretation. While William Faulkner never read books about Southern history, he once noted that “he was just saturated with it.” So too was his art.

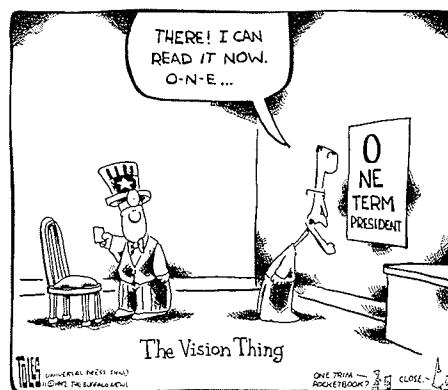
Contemporary Affairs

WHITE HOUSE DAZE: The Unmaking of Domestic Policy in the Bush Years. By Charles Kolb. Free Press. 387 pp. \$22.95

HELL OF A RIDE: Backstage at the White House Follies 1989–1993. By John Podhoretz. Simon & Schuster. 249 pp. \$21

As George Bush’s presidency recedes into political history, two young Reaganites who served under Bush have stepped forward to offer their spin on the rise and fall of an administration. Both books have a great deal in common: Each scolds Bush for not being more like Reagan, each praises the same heroes and fingers the same villains, and each falls under the category of political memoir that Peggy Noonan has called “If Only They’d Listened to Me, the Fools!”

In *White House Daze*, Charles Kolb, formerly a domestic policy adviser, engagingly describes a White House gripped by inactivity and arrogance. Since Bush himself never bothered to define a “vision thing” for domestic policy, his senior underlings emphasized process over ideology. Believing in little beyond themselves, they



fought hard for nothing of importance. “The agenda was a nonagenda,” writes Kolb.

Kolb lodges the standard Republican complaint against Bush: He wrecked his presidency because he broke his promise. The “no new taxes” pledge was just campaign rhetoric. Bush might have recovered from this blunder after the Persian Gulf War by launching an attack on domestic problems with innovative proposals such as school choice and tort reform. But he decided to coast along on saved-up political capital. The enormous egos of Chief of Staff John Sununu and Budget Director Richard Darman only made matters worse, Kolb claims. Both men unflinchingly blocked creative reform efforts.

The Bush administration’s paralysis is on full display in Kolb’s best chapter, which focuses on a single day, December 12, 1990. On that day, the administration had to confront three small crises: the poorly handled firing of Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos, former “drug czar” William Bennett’s surprise refusal to assume command of the Republican National Committee, and education official Michael Williams’s decision to ban funding for colleges and universities that administered or accepted race-based scholarships. To be sure, any administration would have had its hands full that Wednesday morning. But to a White House with no inner compass, the day’s frenetic activity achieved an almost comic quality as the nation’s leaders aimlessly mucked about with no sense of what they wanted to accomplish. As Kolb shows in great detail, almost every day was December 12.

John Podhoretz’s *Hell of a Ride* offers much the same diagnosis. But while Kolb pays close attention to actual policy, Podhoretz, who worked in

the drug czar's office for about half a year, focuses more on White House "culture": the social chasm separating the West Wing from the Old Executive Office Building, the catty in-fighting over press leaks, an obsession with perks verging on parody. A series of "Freeze Frames" between chapters offers brief glimpses into the lives of unnamed staffers. Narrated in the second person, they provide readers with a vicarious tour of the Bush administration. Podhoretz can turn a good phrase, but his metaphors need pruning—career government officials "attach themselves and their careers to the public trough with glue as strong as barnacles"—and he sometimes comes off as too clever by half.

Both books convey a strong sense of betrayal as they describe the Bush administration seducing, frustrating, and finally abandoning its many young and ideology-driven staffers. To them, Bush's failure—not as a Republican, but as Reagan's heir—was a personal affront.

THE FATE OF HONG KONG: The Coming of 1997 and What Lies Beyond. *By Gerald Segal.* St. Martin's. 234 pp. \$21.95

What exactly will happen at midnight on June 30, 1997, when the six million people living in the British colony of Hong Kong are handed over to the People's Republic of China? Journalists and businesspeople frequently envision nightmare scenarios. According to one, Hong Kong, accustomed to running itself as a near-perfect market economy, declares its *de facto* independence; the Chinese Communist rulers then forceably put down the "rebellion" and in the process reduce the island to an economic backwater. Even now, the flight of worried emigrants from Hong Kong—who by 1997 may number one million—is putting a damper on the economy.

Segal, editor of the *Pacific Review*, believes that such fears are exaggerated. What may happen, he argues, is in fact happening already. Determined that China avoid the Soviet Union's fate, Deng Xiaoping has put economic growth first and allowed China's regions to develop their own trade with other countries. For the past decade, China's southern Guangdong province has formed a trading alliance with Hong Kong,

the latter acting as the external engine for an unprecedented prosperity in a mainland Chinese region. This economic interdependence, Segal argues, will also reduce the risk of Beijing's intervention. Moreover, further successes in the Guangdong-Hong Kong region will accelerate the economic decentralization of the country, making it easier for the outside world to deal with China.

Such large-scale forecasts, Segal admits, are risky. At present growth rates, China could well be the world's largest economy after the year 2010. Then there's the fact of China's history: Healthy economic regionalism is quite different from a disunited China in chaos, for which there are precedents. But while Hong Kong's economy will surely suffer in the transfer, at this point the potential for overall benefit seems greater than that for overall disaster.

IN EUROPE'S NAME: Germany and the Divided Continent. *By Timothy Garton Ash.* Random House. 680 pp. \$27.50

Timothy Garton Ash is among the more distinguished contemporary journalists specializing in Central European affairs. He has written vivid accounts of the Solidarity movement in Poland and the 1989 revolutions in Warsaw, Budapest, Prague, and Berlin. Now he turns his attention to a question that is as big as any in the modern world: How will a reunited Germany exercise its power in the future? To find possible answers, Garton Ash painstakingly reconstructs the history of West Germany's foreign policy from the 1950s to the late 1980s, particularly its strategy of *Ostpolitik*.

The brainchild of Kurt-Georg Kiesinger, Willy Brandt, and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Ostpolitik* was West Germany's strategy for dealing with its neighbors to the east, and was consistently implemented right up to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Its central aim was "normalization": establishing full diplomatic and other relations with the communist countries. Most important, it sought to "stabilize" East Germany both by recognizing its legitimacy and by providing hard currency when its economy faltered. The ultimate goal was reunification.

Reunification was surely achieved, but, as Garton Ash shows, the path to this end was