
ness monopoly but sought merely to contain it.

Just as World War I had put an end to the Progressive Era, so World War II dealt a blow to the New Deal's early ambitions. The rise of fascism made Americans wary of granting more power and control to the central government. And though the war did spur increased government involvement in the economy, it also promoted greater *cooperation* between Washington and the American business community. The experience of the war forced New Deal reformers to acknowledge their own limitations. "By the end of the war they had disabused themselves of the notion that all problems could be helped by fundamental cures," Brinkley concludes. "Instead, they had more modest goals: protecting consumers and encouraging mass consumption, and using fiscal policies and social welfare innovations to find the road to prosperity."

Brinkley admits that a certain measure of present-mindedness spurred his investigation: he wanted to understand why contemporary American liberalism, with its focus on individual rights and group entitlements rather than on the national well-being, has strayed so far from its New Deal roots. Historians frown upon drawing contemporary lessons from their work, but Brinkley's book does provide a cautionary tale when powerful forces in Washington speak blithely once again about fundamentally reordering government and society.

THE OTHER GREEKS: The Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization. By Victor Davis Hanson. Free Press. 541 pp. \$28

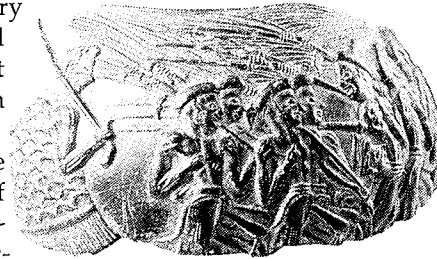
What other Greeks? Who among these ingenious folk have escaped the confines of an old popular tradition? The ancient Greeks were urban and urbane, curious and cantankerous, wrote poems and plays and philosophy, excelled at mathematics and sculpture and architecture, and invented democracy. Hanson, a classicist at California State University, Fresno, does not entirely dismiss this traditional view but sees it as myopic and partial. To understand Greece in its days of glory, he argues, we must look beyond the cities to the countryside, where, from the eighth to the

fourth century B.C., the most important members of the Greek population lived. These essential "other Greeks" were family farmers.

Hanson contends that a new form of agrarianism took hold in Greece sometime around 700 B.C., spurred by the growing population's need for a larger food supply. Central to this change was the emergence of the small farm, rarely larger than 20 acres in size but worked to the limits of productivity by its independent owner. Over time, such owners coalesced as a class and became powerful enough to dictate Greek military and political development through the sixth century B.C.

Many of the fundamentals of Western civilization, Hanson argues, originated in the agricultural practices of the polis: private ownership of land, free choice in economic activity, an economic mentality to improve productivity, constitutional government based on local representation, the subservience of military organization to civilian political control, notions of egalitarianism and equality of property holding, and private ownership of arms. "Agrarian pragmatism," he writes, "not intellectual contemplation, farmers, not philosophers, 'other' Greeks, not the small cadre of refined minds who have always comprised the stuff of Classics, were responsible for the creation of Western civilization."

The startling modernity of Hanson's list signals his larger purpose. He would have us see America through his elaborate Greek prism: the traditional—agrarian—values on which *this* country was founded are disappearing along with the American family farm, and we are slipping into our own Hellenistic age of desultory, untethered pandemonium. Six generations of Hanson's family have worked a ranch in California. When he complains of the farmer's increasing marginalization or describes the hardship of making a life on the land, whether in ancient Greece or 20th-century America, he writes from experience.



Compelling as his book is, Hanson's thesis about the influence of agrarianism on Greek culture is not entirely persuasive. He makes large claims, on behalf of Greece and America both, and his evidence does not always lend them convincing weight. Those ancient playwrights and poets and philosophers and sculptors are not so easily diminished, nor is the vast impersonality of contemporary American agribusiness self-evidently menacing. The world moves through cycles of change, impossible to resist, as the Greeks themselves knew all too well. Still, there is truth to be seen from Hanson's altered perspective, even if it is not the whole truth.

Arts & Letters

THE MAKING OF RUBENS. By Svetlana Alpers. Yale. 178 pp. \$30

Why would a male painter in the Western tradition represent flesh as Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) does in his great picture *The Drunken Silenus*? Alpers, an art historian at the University of California, Berkeley, asks the question in the last of this handsome volume's three tenuously linked essays. It's a reasonable question, apart from that worrisome "male," to ask of a painter as flesh-absorbed as Rubens. But Alpers's answer is something else again: "I think it has something to do with the problem of male generativity. How are men to be creative, to make pictures, for example, when giving birth is the prerogative of women?" (Do we lack evidence that men, some of them painters, have coped with their disadvantage through the ages?)

Silenus is a mythical figure from Virgil's sixth *Eclogue* who must be tied up before he will sing to his captors. He makes his possession by others, his disempowerment, his surrender of masculinity, the condition of his creativity. So too, writes Alpers, did Rubens seek access to a potent, ecstatic mode of creating and to a feminine kind of surrender. Alpers views the body of the drunken Silenus as neither clearly male nor clearly female. It exists rather "in a curious no man's and no

woman's land, between or eliding genders." By identifying with this ambiguously sexed Silenus, Rubens evokes "a desire—a male desire perhaps—for the merging with a woman that was essential to him in the making of art."

Earlier, Alpers describes the development of a French taste for Rubens's art in the 18th century as opposed to the art of Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665). Rubens was a virtuoso in the use of color, and his work was thought feminine, while Poussin, who excelled in line and design, evoked a male world of significant action. Alpers regards this 18th-century critical "engendering" as odd and arbitrary, and it was indeed soon subject to reversal (i.e. Rubens became "masculine"). Yet it seems no more arbitrary than her own fashionable but implausible rendering of a Rubens for our gender-obsessed age: the artist who needed to get in touch with his feminine side.

Alpers contends that "the making of Rubens is not only a matter of circumstances, or of the viewing of his art, it is also a matter of his own activity as a painter." The statement is remarkable for what it implies about the state of art-historical criticism in the academy these days. The painter's "own activity"—his vision, his genius, the pictures, for goodness' sake, which once would have been self-evi-

