

stuck on homosexuality. And the psychoanalytic emphasis on individual responsibility goes against the grain of the leftist view that environment is almost everything.

Psychoanalysis never should have gotten

mixed up in politics, Kramer concludes. "With a little luck, it can do considerable good for an individual patient. Outside, in the world of values, it can only be debased, misunderstood, and misused as ideology."

Rome Lives!

"The Vanishing Paradigm of the Fall of Rome" by Glen W. Bowersock, in *The Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* (May 1996), Norton's Woods, 136 Irving St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

For centuries, the Fall of Rome has been a handy, even irresistible, metaphor for thinkers who fret about the state of civilization. Have a social problem on your mind? Trot out a comparison to the last days of the empire. Today, however, observes Bowersock, a professor of historical studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, historians have a surprisingly different view of that oft-invoked example. Rome, they contend, never really fell.

The image of the empire's "decline and fall" was strongly impressed upon the scholarly and popular minds by Edward Gibbon's magisterial *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, whose first volume appeared in 1776. The traditional view then was that the Fall of Rome occurred in 476 A.D., when the invading Ostrogoths, a Germanic people, brought the rule of Romulus Augustulus, the last Western emperor, to an end. But that view was no more than a literary conceit, Bowersock says.

There was no "clear and decisive end" to

the Roman Empire, he asserts, and Gibbon knew that. Rome "changed and multiplied itself. Its centers of power and administration moved." After the fifth century, Italians regarded their sovereign as resident in the East, in Constantinople. It was there, under emperors such as Leo III and Basil II, that Hellenized Roman culture survived for a thousand years. That is why Gibbon ended his history of the Roman Empire in 1453, with the capture of Constantinople ("the new Rome") by the Turks.

Modern historians have gone much further. In his influential *World of Late Antiquity* (1971) and later works, Bowersock says, Peter Brown portrays the age after the supposed Fall of Rome "as the beginning of something grand and distinctive rather than as the end of the classical world everyone knew and admired." Cultures that seemed to Gibbon barbaric and alien in spirit to everything Rome represented now look to his successors like the legates of eternal Rome.

PRESS & MEDIA

Nattering Nabobs?

"Bad News, Bad Governance" by Thomas E. Patterson, in *The Annals* (July 1996), The American Academy of Political and Social Science, 3937 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19104.

Why are Americans disgusted with their government? One reason is that the national news media are relentlessly, corrosively negative in their coverage of political leaders, argues Patterson, a professor of press and politics at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

In 1992, according to his content analysis, 60 percent of the news coverage given presidential candidates Bill Clinton, Ross Perot, and incumbent George Bush was negative in tone. In 1960, by contrast, 75 percent of the

news coverage of John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon was positive. It's not that Kennedy and Nixon were political paragons, Patterson says, because "the tone of election coverage became steadily more negative [after 1960] regardless of who was running." Politicians left and right alike were objects of the media's scorn.

In both TV and newspapers, he notes, "interpretive" reporting has come to replace "just the facts" journalism. As the narrator, the reporter becomes more important in the

In Search of the Golden Age

“Broadcast journalists need to believe that their trade wasn’t always so silly and meretricious,” writes Andrew Ferguson, a senior editor at *The Weekly Standard* (July 22, 1996), so they often speak of their profession’s Golden Age, when “‘standards’ were higher and everybody knew it, and profits were lower and nobody cared.” But the precise time of this glorious era, Ferguson notes, can be hard to pin down.

Disinterested observers will have some trouble fixing the Golden Age of broadcast news in chronological time. It doesn’t help to work backwards. Shortly after Charles Kuralt retired in 1994, he lamented the lost era, implying that it had closed not too long ago.



“The bean counters are really in control now,” he said. “I decided to leave before they could invite me to leave.” (Thanks.) But several years earlier, in the late ’80s, Dan Rather was lamenting the lost Golden Age also, the “tragic transformation from [Edward R.] Murrow to mediocrity” that had recently been accomplished. To the early ’80s then? No, for Walter Cronkite himself had announced that by then the “Murrow continuum” “had really come to a terminal point.” Cronkite may have placed the Golden Age in the years leading up to his retirement in 1981. He would have gotten an argument from Eric Sevareid, who in the mid-1970s said CBS News had “degenerated into show biz.”

Perhaps Sevareid was referring to the golden time as the glorious ’60s and early 1970s, the period leading up to his own retirement. Alas, no. For in 1969 Alexander Kendrick, himself a Murrow Boy and author of the first gargantuan Murrow biography, announced that “the Murrow window on the real world had been shrunk to a peephole. . . . Controversy, with its pros and cons, had given way to compatibility. . . . Emotion replaced editorial perspective.” Fred Friendly, one-time president of CBS News, agreed, although Kendrick was apparently off by a few years. By Friendly’s account, CBS had wholly succumbed to worldly forces by 1966, the year, coincidentally, of his retirement.

And so the Golden Age recedes and recedes, until we reach its first autopsy, performed in 1958 (!) by Murrow himself. In a widely noted speech he declared TV news to be trivial and soporific, given over at last to “decadence, escapism, and insulation.” No matter what day it is, the Golden Age of Television News always ended the day before yesterday.

story than the news maker, using facts mainly as illustrations of the theme he has chosen for the story. In network news coverage of the 1992 general election, the journalists covering the candidates got six minutes of airtime for every minute the candidates were shown speaking.

Reporters today, Patterson says, “constantly question politicians’ motives, methods, and effectiveness. This type of reporting looks like watchdog journalism but is not. It is ideological in its premise: politicians are assumed to act out of self-interest rather than also from political conviction.”

The reporters’ pose of objectivity in such cases often conceals mere opinion—and misguided opinion at that. “Most bad-press sto-

ries criticize politicians for shifting their positions, waffling on tough issues, posturing, or pandering to whichever group they happen to be facing,” Patterson says. But the reality is usually quite different. Four extensive studies conclude that presidents, for example, generally carry out the promises they make on the campaign trail; when they do not, it is often because Congress balks or conditions change dramatically.

The news media have robbed “political leaders of the public confidence that is required to govern effectively,” Patterson writes. Journalists need not go back to the old-fashioned sort of reporting, he concludes, but, in the public interest, they should recognize their own limitations as objective watchdogs.