

life by the clock.” But he attacks the scholarly consensus that urban merchants and traders who demanded standardized forms of time were chiefly responsible for this change. He shows that churchmen—usually seen as foot-draggers—gladly advanced the cause of time and that local aristocrats in towns and cities across Europe regarded public clocks as civic status symbols and rushed to install them. Nor was standardized time an instrument solely of workers’ oppression, Dohrn-van Rossum argues. As early as the 15th century, workmen turned it to their own advantage, using the clock to win hourly wages and limited working hours.

Despite prose charitably described—even allowing for the vagaries of translation—as uninviting, Dohrn-van Rossum paints a highly nuanced picture of time’s conquest of modern life. The old idea that time consciousness was imposed by a rising bourgeoisie intent upon reordering and rationalizing the world no longer seems solid. Dohrn-van Rossum paints a more complex (and untidy) picture of scattered and spontaneous generation; it makes time seem less our tyrant than our duly elected monarch.

—Steven Lagerfeld

*AN ISLAND OUT OF TIME:
A Memoir of Smith Island in the
Chesapeake.*

By Tom Horton. Norton. 352 pp. \$25

“Two things I never felt bad over—poachin’ oysters or takin’ waterfowl.” Who is speaking, a friend of the environment or one of its enemies? When it comes to the Chesapeake Bay, the answer is far from simple. The speaker is a Smith Island waterman, a member of a community that has long depended on the bay for its survival. Yet as native son and environmental journalist

Horton shows in this lyrical memoir, the watermen no longer enjoy an untroubled relationship with their home. Instead, they must deal with the fact that the bay is, as Horton observes, “a world-class resource, polluted big time, and now the object of unprecedented restoration efforts.”

But Horton’s main concern is not with the politics of conservation. It is with the interconnectedness of people who have for generations lived as intertwined with one another as the salt marshes are with the bay. As one islander says, “You know just how to avoid an argument, and you know just how to start one.” Sustaining this balance is a deep sense of tradition—some Smith Island families go back to the 1600s. Only recently has modern life intruded: electricity in 1949, telephone lines to the mainland in 1951. While younger islanders struggle with the enticements of the outside world, pattern and routine remain strong among the older. As one remarks, “I’m 55, and I’ve been crabbing right here for more than 40 years. This boat is nearly the same age. . . . If you were to put me in a new boat, I don’t think I would even know how to crab.”

Still, hovering over Horton’s vivid account is the clash between environmental activists and communities that, like this one, are part of the “ecosystem” the activists are crusading to save. The waterman who doesn’t regret poaching oysters or taking waterfowl tells Horton how “one freezing winter we sent up to Crisfield for corn and fed thousands of starving redheads [ducks] right off the stern of our boats.” Such people should be heeded when they protest. “Whenever you make a law that applies to everywhere,” the same waterman says, “it can’t apply over here. We got no industry and no farmland—just our marsh and the water, and nobody takes care of us but ourselves.”

—Debbie Lim

Contemporary Affairs

THE SOCIAL MISCONSTRUCTION OF REALITY:

*Validity and Verification in the
Scholarly Community.*

By Richard F. Hamilton. Yale Univ. Press. 278 pp. \$32.50

Mozart was buried in a pauper’s grave. The Duke of Wellington said “the Battle of

Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton.” Protestant Christianity nurtured the “spirit of capitalism.” Hitler’s greatest support came from the lower-middle class. Totalitarianism began with the Enlightenment project of reforming criminals instead of punishing them.

Are all of the above true? Or are they

“misconstructions” endlessly repeated by educated people who should know better? With this provocative question, Hamilton, a sociologist and political scientist at Ohio State University, launches his powerful assault on academic groupthink.

Drawing on an earlier work, *Who Voted for Hitler?* (1982), Hamilton refutes the entrenched claim that the lower-middle class is historically the most “reactionary.” Combing through voting records from the Weimar Republic, he finds that support for the Nazis actually rose with voters’ social class, and that the lower-middle class nowhere exhibited a strong preference for Hitler. But while evidence of this voting behavior has long been available, too many scholars of Nazism have preferred to derive their conclusions from faulty Marxist models of German class attitudes.

Equally striking is Hamilton’s reconsideration of the influential French philosopher Michel Foucault. In *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison* (1975), Foucault advanced the thesis that the 18th-century shift in penology from retribution to character reform was not, as many assume, a progressive step for humankind. Instead, said Foucault, the rise of the modern prison—exemplified by Jeremy Bentham’s “panopticon,” a circular structure in which observation-tower guards could see into all cells—marked a quantum leap in oppression. Foucault asserted not only that the panopticon was “the architectural programme of most prison projects,” but also (in Hamilton’s paraphrase) that the modern prison “extended its principles, an all-pervasive system of surveillance and discipline, to the entire society.”

There is just one problem with Foucault’s argument: the panopticon was never built. Nor was it imitated anywhere, except for three highly modified experimental prisons in the United States. This fact is no secret among historians, as Hamilton reports. Yet not a single reviewer of *Discipline and Punish* questioned Foucault’s grandiloquent claims.

How did Foucault get away with such pseudoscholarship? In a broader discussion of “validity and verification,” Hamilton shows how a reluctance to check original sources results in lengthy, little-examined citation chains. Struggling to keep up with “knowledge overproduction” in their own

highly compartmentalized fields, most academics receive scant reward for undertaking literature reviews, replication studies, or other efforts to keep abreast of what is happening in adjacent fields.

There is one question that Hamilton does not ask but probably should. Which ideologies—and ideologues—do most of the misconstruction? His case studies focus on the academic Left. It seems self-evident, however, that scholars of all political persuasions are capable of distorting their work to serve ideological interests. But then, after reading Hamilton, one might feel less secure about what seems self-evident.

—John Rodden

*THE PRICE OF A DREAM:
The Story of the Grameen Bank, and
the Idea That Is Helping the Poor to
Change Their Lives.*

By David Bornstein. Simon & Schuster.
360 pp. \$25

A real page turner on economic development? Unlikely as it may sound, that is exactly what Bornstein, a free-lance journalist, has produced. His subject, the Grameen Bank, was founded by an irrepressible economics professor from Bangladesh named Muhammed Yunus. Educated at Vanderbilt University, Yunus was teaching at Chittagong University in his native country in 1976 when he first got the idea that the poor remain poor because they have no access to the resources that would enable them to improve their lot—they can’t get there from here. So, beginning with the impoverished residents of a nearby village, Yunus began practicing “capitalism with a social conscience.”

Yunus’s idea was to jump-start the development process by making “micro-loans” of \$10, \$25, or \$50 to landless or near-landless peasants. Borrowers formed teams of five for the purpose of mutually guaranteeing the loans taken out by each. If any member defaulted, no other member of that team could ever again receive a loan from the Grameen Bank. Peer pressure did the rest. The borrowers used the money to establish themselves as peddlers, vegetable gardeners, seamstresses, or dairy farmers. More than 90 percent of the borrowers were women, because their poverty is most acute and they are the primary providers of care to children. The idea worked aston-