

and Ludwig, professors of public policy at Duke University and Georgetown University, respectively.

They base their case on a study of almost 25,000 public and private school students who were tracked, starting in 1988, from the eighth grade to graduation. The black students' educational aspirations were as high in 1988 as the (non-Hispanic) whites': about 60 percent expected to stay in school and earn a college degree. Four years later, nearly 10 percent of the black students had dropped out, compared with almost seven percent of the white ones—a small difference that disappears when only youths with similar family characteristics (e.g., income, father's presence in the household) were compared.

Black students seem to work as hard as white ones, the authors say. In 1990, 36 percent of black 10th-graders reported skipping a class, 65 percent spent at least two hours a

week on homework, and 28 percent missed (according to school transcripts) more than 10 days of school during the year. Those percentages (unadjusted for family background) were about the same for whites.

Nor were black parents any less involved in their children's education than white parents, as measured by such things as attending school events and checking homework.

High school students are notoriously cliquish, but high-achieving black students do not seem to incur a penalty in popularity among their classmates. The eight percent of black 10th-graders (like the seven percent of white ones) who belonged to academic honor societies were less likely than their classmates to perceive themselves as unpopular. Interestingly, at predominantly white schools, black students' "popularity" was not enhanced by membership in honor societies, while at predominantly black schools, it was.

A Good Word for Politics

The chattering classes's recent enthusiasm for "civil society" is all well and good, historian Gertrude Himmelfarb observes in *Commentary* (May 1997), but something important is often overlooked.

It is natural and commendable for individuals to seek satisfaction in their families and communities, to make these the center of their emotional ties and moral commitments. But to feel completely fulfilled in these roles and entirely identified with them is to lose that larger sense of national identity which comes not from civil society but from the state and the polity. Today, when politics has been so tainted by cynicism and scandal, and when the state itself has been so perverted by the politics of welfare, the retreat to private and communal life is all too understandable. But it would be most unfortunate if it were to deprive the state of the services, the resources, and the loyalties of its citizens, in peacetime and, more urgently, in wartime.

Why Hitler Hated Bowling Alone

"Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic" by Sheri Berman, in *World Politics* (Apr. 1997), Bendheim Hall, Princeton, N.J. 08544-1022.

Whether pondering the prospects of democracy in Eastern Europe or fretting about the decline of league bowling in the United States, all latter-day Tocquevilles subscribe to this basic proposition: a vigorous civil society strengthens, and indeed is a crucial prerequisite for, democratic government. But that's not necessarily so, argues Berman, a political scientist at Princeton University. Take the case of Weimar Germany.

Civil society flourished in 19th-century

Germany and grew even stronger, Berman says, during the 1920s, under the democratic Weimar Republic. As middle-class Germans became frustrated with the failures of the national government and the liberal political parties, they "threw themselves into their clubs, voluntary associations, and professional organizations," Berman writes. This, she contends, not only deflected citizens' energies from politics and government, further weakening the republic's democratic institu-

tions, but also provided the Nazis with “a golden opportunity.”

Previously unable to build much popular support, the Nazis during the second half of the 1920s “concentrated on attracting bourgeois ‘joiners’ who had become disillusioned with traditional party politics,” Berman writes. The Nazis reaped a large harvest of “activists who had the skills necessary to spread the party’s message and increase recruitment.” They also used many of the civic associations, occupational organizations, and other social groups as a “fifth column.” By the early 1930s, she says, the Nazis “had infiltrated and captured a wide range of national and local associations.” The 5.6-million-member Reichslandbund and other farm organizations, for instance, became efficient propaganda channels for reaching the rural population. From their base in Germany’s civil society, Hitler and the Nazis launched their *Machtergreifung* (seizure of power), beginning with their strong showing at the polls in 1930.

The Nazis’ success, Berman concludes, shows that without “strong and responsive political institutions,” a vigorous civil society



George Grosz’s *The Agitator* (1928) was a comment on the menace of Adolf Hitler.

of the sort championed by neo-Tocquevilleans, far from promoting liberal democracy, can help undermine it.

PRESS & MEDIA

Honey, They’ve Shrunk the News

“The Shrinking of Foreign News” by Garrick Utley, in *Foreign Affairs* (Mar.–Apr. 1997), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Wearing the obligatory trenchcoat or safari jacket, the foreign correspondent was once a familiar sight on TV’s nightly network newscasts. But no more. Believing that with the Cold War over, the American public has lost interest in events abroad, and facing increased competition from entertainment offerings on cable, the networks have drastically cut back on international coverage. The number of minutes devoted to foreign affairs at ABC News—the only network news division that has kept its overseas operation largely intact—plummeted from 3,733 in 1989 to 1,838 last year. At third-place NBC, it fell even lower, to 1,175.

Paradoxically, notes Utley, former chief foreign correspondent at both of those networks and now a contributor at CNN, this

shrinkage is occurring even as American influence in the world is spreading through increased commerce and exports of American popular culture. More Americans are working and traveling abroad today than ever before.

Economics looms large in the networks’ decisions. Whereas radio or newspaper correspondents are essentially on their own, a TV reporter is accompanied by a field producer, a camera operator, and a sound engineer, plus some 600 pounds of equipment. For satellite transmissions, an editor and 600 more pounds of editing equipment are required. “The cost of this journalistic caravan . . . begins at around \$3,000 a day,” Utley says. “Airfare and excess-baggage charges can easily reach \$12,000.” Currently, the three