

Lasch died in 1994, America lost one of its true iconoclasts. The author of such provocative works as *The Culture of Narcissism* (1978) and *The Revolt of the Elites* (1994), he could always be counted on to challenge conventional wisdom. This collection of essays, edited and introduced by Lasch's daughter, is no exception.

Written between 1974 and 1993 and organized topically rather than chronologically, the essays are only loosely connected. Still, there are common threads. One is Lasch's preoccupation with the rise and fall of "bourgeois domesticity," and along with it a change in attitudes about marriage. Until the 1700s, marriages were more a matter of business than love. Lasch cites one notable exception in "The Suppression of Clandestine Marriage in England: The Marriage Act of 1753." He relates how Parliament outlawed the medieval practice of "clandestine marriage," whereby a couple's verbal agreement to marry was, if consummated, as binding as an official marriage ceremony. In ruling against the custom, Parliament helped to suppress the emerging idea of marriage as a relationship between equals, entered into freely.

Bourgeois domesticity blossomed in the late 18th century, Lasch argues, when middle-class women began to imitate the leisurely lives of their upper-class counterparts. A greater focus on the comforts of the home and the challenge of childrearing fostered a "cult of domesticity" in which women were glorified as the "guardians of the moral

order." As women gained respect in this realm, marriage began to be seen as an arrangement based on mutual affection. This ideal was extended into civic life, and throughout the first half of the 20th century women became increasingly involved in the community, only to see that involvement diminish with the rise of the suburbs. When middle-class families left the cities, women became isolated in the home—the source, Lasch believes, of the dissatisfaction that in the early 1970s gave rise to contemporary feminism.

Underlying these historical essays is Lasch's evident belief that there is more to women's history than a long dark night of patriarchal oppression—that, to the contrary, women have actively shaped their own social roles. Lasch also rejects the notion, articulated by the psychologist Carol Gilligan, that women are more nurturing, and less egoistic, than men. In a scathing essay titled "Gilligan's Island," he calls this idea "insidious." The sexes are alike, he insists, in needing to test themselves against adversity. Whether achieved through work or through caring for others, the ideal of human life is selflessness. Hence Lasch's long-standing conviction (stated in the final essay, "Life in the Therapeutic State") that as doctors and other specialists become the fount of wisdom on family life, women are the losers. Instead of gaining self-respect by tackling some of life's hardest problems, they become passive consumers of "expert" advice.

—Robyn Gearey

History

THE MILITARY AND THE MEDIA, 1968–1973.

By William M. Hammond. Army Center for Military History, Government Printing Office. 659 pp. \$43 cloth, \$33 paper

"Our worst enemy is the press!" exclaimed Richard Nixon during the controversial U.S.-backed incursion into Laos in 1971. Such sentiments came easily to the beleaguered president who inherited the bloody stalemate in Vietnam from Lyndon Johnson. But were his sentiments justified? Did the news media contribute significantly to America's defeat in Vietnam?

Not according to this unusual official history commissioned by the U.S. Army. In the present volume (his second), civilian histori-



an Hammond finds that President Nixon's tortuous effort to achieve "peace with honor" was marked by so many contradictions that widespread skepticism among journalists was almost guaranteed.

Attempting to placate the "doves" in Congress and the clamorous middle-class peace movement, Nixon began in 1969 to withdraw American troops and "Vietnamize" the war. At the same time, he sought to pressure Hanoi into a settlement by ordering secret B-52 bomber raids and (in 1970) the invasion of communist bases in Cambodia. Many newsmen, who expected the troop withdrawals to lead soon to a U.S. disengagement, were outraged. The credibility of Nixon and his top advisers further declined among journalists just as the White House began to treat reporters as implacable foes, rebutting their coverage and seeking to control information. When the 1972 "Christmas bombing" occurred, the media were ready to believe the worst—including unwarranted enemy claims of massive civilian losses.

Given access to hitherto classified Nixon papers, Hammond dwells overmuch on the White House's machinations. The strengths of his chronicle are clarity, detail, and balance. While granting the accuracy of much reporting—on Cambodia, on drug abuse and racial clashes among U.S. soldiers, on the enemy's abortive 1972 Easter offensive—he also traces the media's shift of focus from combat reporting in Vietnam to feeding frenzies at home over horror stories such as the My Lai massacre.

Hammond concludes that adversary journalism as such did not undermine domestic support for Nixon's war. As the casualty list grew, the public's patience slowly ran out. Nevertheless, he adds that by "remaining in Vietnam to retrieve the nation's honor," many in the military "fixed their anger on the most visible element of the society that appeared to have rejected them, the press, rather than on the failed policies that had brought them to that point. When reporters took up the challenge, anger and recrimination on all sides were the inevitable result."

—Peter Braestrup

AMERICAN FRONTIERS:
*Cultural Encounters and
Continental Conquest.*

By Gregory H. Nobles. Hill & Wang.
286 pp. \$25

Long before Huck Finn vowed to "light

out for the territory" and escape the "civilizing" influence of Aunt Sally, the frontier was a potent symbol in American life. In works ranging from Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) to James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823–41), from Louis L'Amour's popular novels to Hollywood Westerns, the frontier has been depicted as the essence of America. So argued the historian Frederick Jackson Turner in his famous address of 1893, when, in bold defiance of the historical establishment that had trained him, he located the genius of American civilization not in the "seeds" planted by Europe but in the transformation that American soil had wrought upon European transplants. American history, Turner declared, was "the history of the colonization of the Great West." The existence of "an area of free land" continually receding before the march of settlement "explained" America. Period.

As the single most influential interpretation ever offered by an American historian, Turner's "frontier thesis" has been an inexhaustible source of research ideas—and a perpetually inviting target. In recent decades, the latter use has predominated, as many younger historians, reacting against the unconscious arrogance of Turner's Euro-American triumphalism and its implicit dismissal of Indians, have conjured his shade only to riddle it with ideological bullets.

Still, in the hands of a skilled and sensible historian, this new approach to the American frontier can greatly enhance understanding. While Nobles, professor of history at the Georgia Institute of Technology, is properly critical of Turner's frontier thesis (which has many grievous faults), his book also pays tribute to the enduring validity of Turner's great theme.

Rather than caricature the frontier story as a melodrama starring heroic (or villainous) Euro-Americans and villainous (or heroic) Native Americans, Nobles stages an immensely complicated drama featuring a crazy-quilt cast of characters and cultures, each altering and being altered by the others. For example, in outlining the great imperial rivalries of the 17th and 18th centuries, he includes the Indians not as passive or romanticized victims but as active, resourceful players in their own right, subject to their own political rivalries.

Yet this emphasis upon "intercultural con-