

political doctrines and behavior. Wolfe, by refreshing contrast, sees a nation “dominated by the ideas of the *reasonable* majority: people who believe themselves to be modest in their appetites, quiet in their beliefs, and restrained in their inclinations.” The Boston University sociologist bases his conclusions on 200 in-depth interviews with “middle-class” Americans in eight suburban sites, and buttresses that research with national polls conducted by others.

Wolfe finds that most Americans reject an absolutist sense of religious or political truth. They basically are centrists, holding religious and political values but accepting the views of those who disagree. By 167 to 19, for example, Wolfe’s respondents believe that “there are many religious truths and we ought to be tolerant of all of them.”

Although the respondents have little faith in government, Wolfe reports that they reject “the case for social and political decline that preoccupies social critics and social scientists.” The great majority believe that American society is basically fair. They dispute the notion that “the country as a whole has lost its bearings.” Indeed, almost everyone interviewed (184 to 5) feels that “the United States is still the best place in the world to live.”

Much evidence documents that most nonelite Americans share these Panglossian views. Yet the data themselves reveal anxieties lurking beneath the optimism. A substantial majority (133 to 49) agree that “compared to 20 years ago, Americans have become more selfish.” By a modest margin (110 to 92), most say that “the prospects facing my own children are worse than they were for me when I was a child.” A large majority (177 to 16) feels that “it has become much harder to raise children in our society.” And the in-depth interviews find many parents worrying that affluence is corrupting the moral fiber of their children. All is not right with middle-class America.

All is not entirely right with *One Nation’s* approach, either. Most serious to a student of stratification is the way Wolfe deals with social class. He reports that only 10 percent “classify themselves as *either* lower class or upper class,” with the rest saying middle class. But this does not demonstrate that the United States is a middle-class country. People from Japan to Eastern Europe do the same. To identify oneself with the upper class is boastful; to identify oneself with the

lower class is invidious. So when presented with this three-class question, nearly everyone reports middle-class status.

Back in 1948, however, the social psychologist Richard Centers asked respondents if they were upper class, middle class, *working class*, or lower class. Given the fourth choice, a plurality of respondents—between 35 and 45 percent in the United States and elsewhere—placed themselves in the working class, a noninvidious response. Published as *The Psychology of Social Class* (1949), Centers’s findings have been replicated in recent surveys. *Middle class*, as used by Wolfe and others who identify the United States as a middle-class nation, seems to include everyone not living in dire poverty or great wealth. If so, it is not a useful analytic concept.

Despite this flaw, *One Nation* is a thoughtful, provocative, and data-rich book. It needs a sequel. Fortunately, Wolfe is in the middle of research to provide it. One hopes the next volume will explain why the conservative and liberal literati so exaggerate the failings of their nation.

—*Seymour Martin Lipset*

SPIN CYCLE:

Inside the Clinton Propaganda Machine.

By Howard Kurtz. Free Press.

324 pp. \$25

Hoping to discover the secret of President Clinton’s high approval ratings in the face of scandal, Kurtz ventures backstage at the White House press office. A *Washington Post* reporter, the author finds press secretary Michael McCurry and his staff doing, quite competently, what their recent predecessors have done: leaking stories, awarding exclusives, staging symbolically rich announcements, peddling human interest tales, and, by shying away from learning certain information, maintaining credible deniability. No dazzling innovations here.

Though it’s not the author’s intended message, *Spin Cycle* ends up teaching us that the White House media manipulators are not all that influential. The news, commentary, and chatter chronicled in this aptly titled book go around and around without having much impact outside the circle of officials and correspondents. The bulk of the explanation for Clinton’s enduring popularity must lie elsewhere—most likely in his

own actions, and in the perceptions of those actions out beyond the spinners, in the concentric orbits of partisan politics, government policies, and public opinion.

A siege atmosphere pervades *Spin Cycle*, suggesting that the scandals will bring down either the president or the media. But big news stories have a perverse way of ending

small. Having promised a stark climax, the O. J. Simpson saga closed with two contrary verdicts and a truckload of memoirs. The stand-off that Kurtz details may simply drag on until the president's term expires. By then, most of the media will have moved on to the next presidential show.

—Michael Cornfield

Science & Technology

OUR BABIES, OURSELVES:

Why We Raise Our Children the Way We Do.

By Meredith Small. Anchorbooks.

320 pp. \$24.95

Dr. Spock once astutely observed that “two women who in actual practice would handle a child just about the same could still argue till kingdom come about [child-rearing] theory”—and probably would in America. The converse also holds true. Two women (or two men) who agree about child-rearing theory could easily proceed to treat a child quite differently. Ask them how the differences might affect the growth of a child into a citizen, and the honest answer will be an uneasy “Who knows?”

Small, a professor of anthropology at Cornell University, seeks new clarity for the messy business of child rearing through a pioneering science called “ethnopediatrics”—“a mix of cultural anthropology and developmental psychology, with a soupçon of evolutionary biology thrown in.” The goal of the group of pediatricians, child development researchers, and anthropologists who gave the field its name is twofold: to highlight the culturally relative functions served by “parenting styles,” and to explore the effects those styles might have on the biologically fixed needs of infants. Put in the more prescriptive terms that Small often uses in her lucidly accessible book, “These scientists want to uncover whether mismatches might exist between the biology of the baby and the cultural styles of the parents, with an eye toward realigning parents and babies into a smoother, better-adjusted biological and psychological relationship.”

The ethnopediatricians do discover mismatches, particularly in advanced Western cultures such as America's, where child-rear-

ing theories and methods have changed so often. Babies, according to the evolutionary view that underpins the field, are equipped with “Pleistocene biology” that has changed very little since the hunter-gatherer “era of evolutionary adaptedness” in which our genus, *Homo*, emerged. Faced with the dilemmas of maturation posed by big-brained bipeds, the process of natural selection produced infants designed to develop within a closely entwined relationship with a caretaker.

Proof, or at least illustration (in this necessarily speculative endeavor, the two blend), lies in contemporary cross-cultural evidence that babies who are carried all the time, cuddled through the night, and fed constantly, as their ancestors presumably were—and as infants in some non-Western cultures still are—cry very little. Babies obviously can cope with less intensive bonding, but their developing neurological and biochemical systems will be in greater disequi-

