

that way, argues Richmond, a research fellow at Harvard University's Taubman Center.

Portland officials originally forecast that the rail line, which opened in 1986, would serve 42,900 daily weekday riders in its seventh year; instead, it drew only 23,700. Not only that, most of the riders (two-thirds in 1996) had merely shifted over from buses. In the dozen cities Richmond studied, suburb-to-downtown bus service—potentially a cheaper, more effective alternative, he says—generally was discontinued with the advent of the new rail line. In no city did the new rail service “noticeably improve highway congestion or air quality,” he says. In fact, only San Diego's South Line light rail, with “high ridership, low costs, and effective system integration,” appears to have been a worthwhile investment.

O'Toole, an economist currently teaching conservation policy at Yale University, says that “reverence” for light rail may well be “*the* defining characteristic of the New Urbanism,” which he portrays as no longer the plaything of architects and planners but an amalgam of interest groups that “is quietly sweeping the nation.” Advocates want to curb low-density suburban development (“sprawl”) and create high-density urban neighborhoods in which people can work, shop, play, and live without having to rely on the automobile.

“Far from delivering urban zones from the curse of ‘auto-dependent’ lifestyles,” O'Toole contends, “New Urbanist policies” in Portland and other cities have led to increased highway congestion and worse air pollution, as well as other ills. Doubling population density, he says, cuts per capita driving by no more than 10 percent. In Portland, planners' most optimistic scenario is that by 2040, car use will have fallen from 92 percent of all area trips to 88 percent. O'Toole's conclusion: “since planners assume a 75 percent increase in population, this translates to a massive expansion in traffic and congestion—they figure three to four times the current number of congested road miles.”

Richmond, in his study, found that three cities—Pittsburgh, Houston, and Ottawa—had achieved “dramatic successes” by building transitways open only to buses (in Houston's case, to carpools and vanpools, as well). The Pittsburgh East Busway, for instance, has the same ridership as that city's three-times-larger light-rail system.

For all of New Urbanism's high profile today, O'Toole doubts that the effort to prop up central cities will succeed. “The ‘decline’ of cities that officials worry so much about,” he says, “is due to the fact that cars, telephones, and electricity make it possible for people to live in lower densities—and most choose to do so.”

## ‘Orientalism’ Reconsidered

“Edward Said's ‘Orientalism’ Revisited” by Keith Windschuttle, in *The New Criterion* (Jan. 1999), 850 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10019.

It is hard to exaggerate the cultural influence of Edward Said and his celebrated 1978 work, *Orientalism*, observes Windschuttle, author of *The Killing of History* (1997). Whether the subject is European art, literature, cinema, music, or history, critics now routinely pay obeisance to the ideas of the Palestinian American professor of literature at Columbia University. In the “postcolonial” theory he helped inspire, Eurocentric derogations of “the Other” extend not only to Islam and Arabs but to other Others, such as Native Americans and Africans. Windschuttle, however, believes that the postcolonial guru's main claims about Orientalism are “seriously flawed.”

*Orientalism* is a critique of the centuries-old academic field of Oriental studies, the study of cultures in the Arab world. Said claims that Western scholarship prepared the way for the extension of colonial rule over the Middle East and North Africa. But aside from invoking Michel Foucault's notion that knowledge always generates power, Windschuttle says, Said fails to provide any historical evidence about “the actual causal sequence” that led to English or French imperialism in the 19th century. (Historians usually point to desires for trade, investment, and military advantage as causes.) And what about the Germans, who produced prominent Orientalists but “never went on to become an imperial power”?



Women of Algiers in Their Apartment (1834), by Eugène Delacroix

Said claims that Oriental studies produced a false description of Arabs and Islamic culture, in the mistaken belief that their “essential” qualities could be defined. Portraying Islamic culture as static in time and place, as “‘eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself,’” gave Europe a sense of cultural and intellectual superiority, and a rationale for Western imperialism, Said maintains.

But in “ascribing to the West a coherent self-identity that has produced a specific set of value judgments—‘Europe is powerful and articulate: Asia is defeated and distant’—that have remained constant for the past 2500 years,” Windschuttle writes, Said himself is guilty of the very “essentialism” he condemns.

In actuality, Windschuttle says, Europeans have drawn their identity from their own heritage, seeing themselves as “joint heirs of classical Greece and Christianity,” each tempered by later developments. The notion that cultures need a geographical Other to define themselves is simply false.

Moreover, when Said criticizes “essentialist” Orientalists for assuming that Islam has possessed a unity since the seventh century that can be read, via the Koran, into, say, modern Egypt or Algeria, he is making “a curious argument,” Windschuttle says. Looking to “the origins of a culture to examine its founding principles is hardly something to be condemned. This is especially so in the case of Islam where the founding book, the Koran, is taken much more literally by its adherents than the overt text of the Bible is taken by Christians today.”

However, if Western ideas about Islamic peoples were limited to stereotypes derived from the Koran and these peoples’ early history, Windschuttle says, Said “would be right to complain.” But they are not. As a matter of fact, he points out, citing Bernard Lewis’s survey in *Islam and the West* (1994), Oriental studies scholars were among the first to overcome Europeans’ initial theological and ethnic prejudices and “to open the Western mind to the whole of humanity.”