HOW THE CANYON BECAME GRAND: A Short History.
By Stephen J. Pyne. Viking. 199 pp. $24.95

In the late 1850s, an army expedition exploring the Colorado River made the first recorded descent to the floor of the Grand Canyon. "The region is, of course, altogether valueless," Lieutenant Joseph Christmas Ives later wrote in *Report upon the Colorado River of the West* (1861). "It can be approached only from the south, and after entering it there is nothing to do but leave. Ours has been the first, and will doubtless be the last, party of whites to visit this profitless locality." By 1875, though, another explorer, Major John Wesley Powell, had called the view from the canyon's rim "the most sublime spectacle on the earth." And in 1903, the site received the presidential seal of approval: Theodore Roosevelt told reporters gathered at a luxury hotel on the canyon's South Rim that the view was one of the "great sights every American should see."

Palisades of the Desert (1996), by Curt Walters

In this slender, lapidary account, the author considers how observers of different eras have perceived the Grand Canyon. Pyne, a historian at Arizona State University, makes a simple point: despite the geographical impediments to reaching and exploring the canyon, "the real question of access was mental." Some of the earliest Spanish explorers, for example, were able to comprehend the canyon's features only by comparing them to the cathedrals of 16th-century Seville. As Pyne explains, "There was hardly yet a cosmology suitable for interpreting a landscape as peculiar as the Canyon. The earth was believed to have commenced a few thousand years before. . . . Perspective had entered Spanish art only a handful of years [earlier, and] the conventions of modern landscape . . . were still a century in the future." Even the 19th-century artists who brought the American public its first pictures of the canyon didn't quite get it—their early drawings, Pyne demonstrates, "show an almost fabulous lack of correlation to any [of the canyon's] tangible features."

How did perspectives change? For one thing, the great age of discovery in the American West coincided with a scientific revolution that invigorated the study of geology. "Between the late 18th century and the mid-20th," Pyne notes, "the known age of the earth increased a millionfold, from less than 6,000 years to more than 4.6 billion." In that context, the Grand Canyon suddenly appeared, quite literally, as a revelation, an opening up of the workings of natural history. "The Grand Canyon," Pyne writes, "symbolized earth history as nowhere else on the planet." Suddenly America had a historical monument, and it was a monument to the *world's* history—older, grander, and more important than anything previously imagined.

Today, the Grand Canyon stands as a powerful symbol of unspoiled wilderness. We think we know the canyon, but in many ways we are probably still as blind as the early Spanish explorers. "The Canyon has something yet to say," Pyne concludes, "even if each visitor hears only the echo of his or her own voice."

—*Toby Lester*

Contemporary Affairs

THE RISE OF THE IMAGE, THE FALL OF THE WORD.
By Mitchell Stephens. Oxford Univ. Press. 259 pp. $27.50

Teenage son and father meet in the hall. Son has been watching ESPN. Father has been reading the *New York Times* sports section and *Sports Illustrated*. Father knows who's leading the league in hitting. Son understands the themes of the season.

Wife is a visual type, too. Assistant managing editor in charge of the look of a leading news-

magazine. Spends workday creating graphic illustrations and retouching photos to communicate truth.

Father struggles for weeks to get through Don DeLillo's *Underworld*. Puts it down. Too many stories. Too many characters. Too many scenes chock-a-block, one after the other.

Family in front of the TV. Son has the remote. No attention span. Changes from station to station. Drives father crazy. By the time he begins to get into whatever is on, commercial or event or boring political speech, son switches stations. Wife grabs the remote. Settles on MTV. Son leaves to go play video game.

Father is asked to review Mitchell Stephens's new book, *the rise of the image, the fall of the word*. Begins to understand.

The temptation is to glorify the past, particularly the past that not only produced us but honored the skills and values that we call our own. But the good old days were usually not as good as we remember them, and the bad new days often trouble us simply because they challenge assumptions that we hold dear. Just as we condemn video as an inadequate and banal communications medium, the elite chattering classes of yore trashed each of its predecessors: writing, printing, photographs, and radio.

The rise of the image, the fall of the word is a fascinating, counterintuitive tour de force, driven by Stephens's belief that we are at the beginning of a communications transformation as fundamental as the introduction of writing 3,500 years ago. In the view of the author, a journalism professor at New York University, the creators of MTV were on to something that ultimately will lead to new truths, new understanding, and levels of communication that we cannot yet grasp.

Stephens first describes how new communications media get introduced into society. Initially, people use the new medium to imitate the old. Early television, for example, simply put existing media—theater, radio, and film—in front of the screen. Stephens next lays out the qualities of what he believes will be the next dominant communications form: moving (usually very quickly moving) images. Finally, he speculates on what tomorrow's "new video" might actually look like: fast, densely paced, asymmetric, surrealistic, full of computer-generated graphics and doctored photos, organized more like music than prose. To make his argument, Stephens draws upon a wide range of sources from history, pop culture, film, literature, and advertising, as well as his experience as a teacher and father.

The picture is at once optimistic and disconcerting. It's upsetting to be told that the world that produced you was neither the highest stage of human achievement nor the last, that the truisms by which you have lived are being superseded, and that your kids, even the little ones, are heading into intellectual frontiers that are beyond your willingness, if not your capacity, to absorb. Stephens has created a different way of thinking about the sands that we feel shifting so quickly under our feet. If he's right, this book review may be a dying art form about a dying art form—and we have reason to be hopeful about what will take their place.

—*Marty Linsky*

GLOBALIZATION:
The Human Consequences.

By Zygmunt Bauman. Columbia Univ. Press. 138 pp. $24.50

Francis Fukuyama ignited an op-ed page controversy in 1990 by portraying the conclusion of the Cold War as "the end of history." In its own way, Bauman's new book is equally apocalyptic: it declares the end of geography.

Bauman, a Polish-born sociologist who has spent much of his career in England, recounts ways in which the technological advances of the past quarter-century have freed knowledge, capital, and political power from the traditional restraints of physical space, allowing them to rocket across the globe at the touch of a computer key. Corporations move where they wish, when they wish. So do the elites who manage them, the specialists who staff them at the highest levels, and the academics and cultural professionals who operate comfortably in their world. Meanwhile, the traditional world of familiar physical space, of local businesses, stable relationships, and face-to-face public communication, is collapsing all across Western civilization. "With distances no longer meaning anything," Bauman observes, "localities, separated by distances, also lose their meanings."

Bauman is not the first to notice such changes, nor does he claim credit for the phrase "end of geography." But he does offer a systematic and wide-ranging (if occasionally sketchy) analysis of its consequences—most of which, in his view, are unfortunate. The fruits of postgeographical life, for instance,