

ment “glorif[ied] the horrors and humiliation of the evil of slavery.” Yet some critics were won over, Horton reports, and academic historians generally approved of the careful reenactment, at least so long as it did not turn into “entertainment.”

“Slavery is so uncomfortable a subject, both for interpreters and visitors,” Horton

writes, “that some have understandably asked, ‘why confront it at all?’” Why not, as a black woman demanded at a recent lecture he gave, “‘put slavery behind us’”? Because, Horton answers, Americans cannot address present-day concerns about race “while ignoring the institution that has been so central to American race relations.”

Message to the Future

“Capsule History” by Lester A. Reingold, in *American Heritage* (Nov. 1999), Forbes Building, 60 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10011.

For centuries, humans have carefully stashed artifacts in cornerstones and other secure spots. In the seventh century B.C., for example, King Esarhaddon of Assyria deposited relics and inscriptions of baked clay in the foundations of his monuments. But the time capsule is a distinctly modern and distinctly American invention, explains Reingold, a writer in Washington, D.C.

One key characteristic of the time capsule is a set opening date. The first capsule with this stipulation was an attraction at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. The “Century Safe” contained photographs, autographs of dignitaries, and a book on temperance. Instructions were left that it be unearthed for the bicentennial celebration of 1976. Three years after the centennial, fol-

the ambitious mission of “preserving the record of an entire civilization.” The Westinghouse capsule was a sleek seven-and-a-half-foot torpedo that held, among other things, a slide rule, a Lilly Daché woman’s hat, a Bible, and various messages to the “Futurians.” Albert Einstein concluded his decidedly mixed overview of the world’s condition in the mid-20th century by saying, “I trust that posterity will read these statements with a feeling of proud and justified superiority.” If anybody is around to open the capsule on the appointed day, a little less than 5,000 years from now, they probably will.

Science writer Dava Sobel speculates that in America, a world power with a relatively short history, there is a special taste for time capsules. “After all, when you encapsulate the essence of



Among the Westinghouse time capsule’s treasures: a Bible and a Lilly Daché woman’s hat.

lowing a reunion of Civil War veterans, General John J. McNulta filled a glass bottle with mementos of the event, including a cigar donated by Ulysses S. Grant; following his request a century later, three of McNulta’s great-grandsons smoked it.

The time capsule was truly born when public relations executive G. Edward Pendray, the overseer of the Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company exhibit at the 1939 New York World’s Fair, coined the term that year. Capsule enthusiasts of the 1930s, says Reingold, added the final element of the modern time capsule:

an era and declare that the container can’t be opened for millenniums—you’ve made instant history out of your present.” The newest innovations in time capsules come in the form of interstellar NASA probes filled with plaques and phonograph records, and capsules that are to be seeded under the surface of Antarctica and the moon.

Many time capsules fail in their mission, falling victim to natural elements, tampering, and misplacement. But in a sense, says Reingold, they still fulfill their most important purpose. Time capsules act as an engine for self-awareness and the imagination.

Although they won't be of much help to "Futurians," who will still need to "root around in our leavings" to understand our civilization, time capsules "convey an appre-

ciation of preservation and life's continuum," Reingold observes. They are "intended less as messages from ourselves to the future, than as messages from ourselves to ourselves."

What Makes a Rapist?

"Why Men Rape" by Randy Thornhill and Craig T. Palmer, in *The Sciences* (Jan.–Feb. 2000), New York Academy of Sciences, Two E. 63rd St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

What makes the rapist different from other men is not his sexual desire but his lust for power over women, an unnatural urge born of a sick society in which females are regarded with fear and contempt. That's what many feminists and social scientists believe these days, but it's dangerously misleading, say Thornhill, an evolutionary biologist at the University of New Mexico, in Albuquerque, and Palmer, an evolutionary anthropologist at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. Rape, they argue, "is, in its very essence, a sexual act [which] has evolved over millennia of human history."

The two authors disagree about rape's precise evolutionary function. Thornhill believes that rape has evolved as "one more way [for males] to gain access to females" in order to pass on their genes, a sexual strategy for males who lack "looks, wealth or status" or see low costs in coercive copulation. Palmer believes "that rape evolved not as a reproductive strategy in itself but merely as a side effect of other adaptations, such as the strong male sex drive and the male desire to mate with a variety of women."

But whether adaptation or byproduct, both agree that "rape has evolutionary—and thus

genetic—origins," and that this explains some "otherwise puzzling facts." Among them: that most rape victims are of childbearing age, and that rapists seldom use more force than needed to subdue or control their victims. "The rapist's reproductive success would be hampered, after all, if he killed his victim or inflicted so much harm that the potential pregnancy was compromised," the authors say. Moreover, while some partisans in the rape debate deny it, rape does occur in the animal world (among scorpionfly species, for instance).

That rape is "a natural, biological phenomenon," Thornhill and Palmer emphasize, does not mean that it is justified or inevitable. But to be effective, preventive measures must take into account rape's evolutionary roots. Young men should be taught "to restrain their sexual behavior." Young women should be told the truth: "that sexual attractiveness does . . . influence rapists," that provocative dress "can put them at risk," and that they should be careful about being alone with men. "As scientists who would like to see rape eradicated," say the authors, "we sincerely hope that truth will prevail" over the "politically constructed" notions about rape now in vogue.

PRESS & MEDIA

Hurrah for Big Media!

"Big Is Beautiful" by Jack Shafer, in *Slate* (Jan. 13, 2000), www.slate.msn.com.

When Time Warner (old media) and America Online (new) announced their merger this year, the usual suspects once again complained that media conglomeration is *bad, bad, bad*. "It is a business thing," critic Robert A. McChesney said. "Good journalism is bad business and bad journalism is, regrettably, at times good business." Hogwash, says Shafer, deputy editor of the on-line magazine *Slate*.

"The McChesneyite critique of big media," he says, "misses the long-term trend that started with Gutenberg and is accelerating with the Internet: As information processing becomes cheaper, so does pluralism and decentralization, which comes at the expense of entrenched powers—government, the church, the guild, nobility, and the magazines and TV stations that Big Media God