

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

Henry Luce founded. Do McChesney and company think we were better off in 1970, when there were three TV news networks, than we are today, when there are six or eight? Better off before the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* became national newspapers? Before FM radio and cable?”

In his 1999 book, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, McChesney, who is a professor of communications at the University of Illinois, asserted that just nine major companies controlled much of the world's media. But Shafer, citing a *Columbia Journalism Review* list, maintains that there are nearly three dozen big media companies in the United States alone.

As for the idea that “good journalism is bad business,” Shafer points to the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post* as examples of editorial quality combined with financial success, and observes that “as *USA Today* has become a better paper, it has become more viable as a business.”

Shafer (who notes that he draws his paycheck from *Slate's* parent, Microsoft, which also co-owns MSNBC with General Electric) says that McChesney and his fellow critics of big media look back to a golden age that never was, and romanticize small independent newspapers. “For every *Emporia Gazette* edited by a William Allen White, there's a *Manchester Union Leader* piloted by a William Loeb,” he says. And small, independently owned newspapers “routinely pull punches when covering local car dealers, real estate, and industry, to whom they are in deep hock.”

Despite their many shortcomings, only big media have “the means to consistently hold big business and big government accountable,” Shafer observes. In the 1980s, when Exxon, upset at the *Wall Street Journal's* coverage, threatened to pull its advertising, the paper stood firm and the threat proved hollow. “How would the *Podunk Banner* have fared against a similar threat from the area Chevrolet dealer?”

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The Rise of Neopaganism

A Survey of Recent Articles

Are Americans drifting away from organized religions to embrace a more amorphous spirituality in New Age, environmentalist, or other guise?

That's the trend in most advanced industrial societies today, say political scientist Ronald Inglehart and sociologist Wayne E. Baker, both of the University of Michigan. Church attendance in recent decades has declined in 18 advanced nations, in some cases quite dramatically, they write in *American Sociological Review* (Feb. 2000). In Spain, for instance, the proportion of regular churchgoers shrank from 53 percent in 1981 to 38 percent in the mid-1990s, and in Australia from 40 percent to 25 percent. The “exceptional” United States—which maintains a relatively high church attendance—was no exception here, Inglehart and Baker say, though the falloff was far more modest: from 60 percent to 55 percent.

“Although rising existential security does seem to make religious faith less central,” write

the authors, “the converse is also true. . . . The collapse of communism has given rise to pervasive insecurity and a return to religious beliefs” in Russia and other ex-communist countries. In 1990, a slight majority of Russians described themselves as religious; five years later, nearly two-thirds did. However, regular church attendance, a meager six percent during 1990–91, increased only to eight percent in 1995. (In fervently Catholic Poland, meanwhile, regular church attendance *declined* 11 points during the 1990s, down to 74 percent in 1996.)

Despite the empty pews in most advanced industrial democracies, observe the authors, “the subjective importance of religious beliefs [among their inhabitants] is only declining slightly if at all.” When western Germans, for instance, were asked in 1997 to rate God's importance in their lives on a scale of one-to-10, 16 percent gave it the highest score of 10—the same per-