ducing an explosion of musical talent and creativity that became known as rock 'n' roll. The music in turn was part of a larger youth rebellion, expressed in language, clothing, dance, and attitudes, that blurred racial lines and thereby threatened the traditional structures of social control.

In *Lost Revolutions*, Daniel, a curator at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, brilliantly depicts the people who shaped southern life in the 1950s: the civil rights leaders such as Alice Wright Spearman, an organizer of South Carolina's interracial movement; Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, and the other founders of rock 'n' roll; the reckless and powerful bureaucrats of agribusiness; the free-spirited stock car racers whose passions would later become enshrined in highly commercialized NASCAR races. Daniel sketches gay life in the South too, as well as the pioneering all-women Memphis radio station WHER. A chapter on the crisis at Central High offers a new reading of what he describes as the "strategic realignment of segregationist forces" that united white ministers, women, and high school students under the banner of massive resistance.

A Life Is More than a Moment shows just how deep and unyielding the racial divide was. A young photographer for the *Arkansas Democrat* at the time (he is now professor emeritus of journalism at Indiana University), Counts was there with his 35-millimeter camera when the black students entered Central High. The courage written on the faces of the Little Rock Nine, surrounded by enraged whites and grim National Guardsmen, stands out in the annals of the civil rights movement. The white Arkansans in the photos were not alone in their attitudes; Orval Faubus, the state's prosegregation governor, made Gallup's list of the 10 most admired Americans in 1958. With his exquisite pictures, Counts captures a key moment in the struggle that ultimately cracked the walls of segregation and, through federal legislation, brought revolutionary change that the South alone could not have completed.

—Patricia Sullivan

Arts & Letters

HENRY JAMES:
A Life in Letters.
Edited by Philip Horne. Viking. 668 pp. $35

In composing a biography largely from Henry James's correspondence, Horne is experimenting with a discredited form—the Victorian life and letters of an eminent person. In those tomes, the subject generally got the first and the last word, with the biographer acting as a discreet valet, making sure the old gentleman's linen was clean and brushing him up for public inspection. In the modern biographies that have displaced them, by contrast, the interpreter seizes control of the text, quotes much less from letters, and often feels compelled to expose the subject's flaws.

This revival and revision of the Victorian model allows James (1843–1916) to dominate, but it also permits Horne, who teaches English literature at University College, London, to enlarge on and sometimes contest the writer's account through headnotes. We read James's life as though he had written it in the vivid private language reserved for his inner circle, but with subtitles that grant us access and also correct misunderstandings. Horne's deep knowledge of James and his world illuminates the life without seeming to interpret it. "Edited by" suggests that he is not the real author of the volume.

And yet Horne's subtitle, "A Life in Letters," can be construed another way—as an account of James's professional career. His is not the first edition of James's letters, nor is it the fullest. James's biographer Leon Edel produced a four-volume *Letters* (1974–84) that included 1,100 of them. More specialized collections have since appeared, such as the wonderful exchanges between James and Edith Wharton, and those between Henry and his brother William. Even so, half of the roughly 300 letters in Horne's book have never been published before. Thousands of James letters survive, so that interpreters can create an image of their own choosing through selection.

The James that emerges from Horne's choices is primarily (though not exclusively) an ambitious, disciplined professional writer,

advancing his career, vigorously negotiating with editors, publishers, and literary agents. He aims both to secure his long-term reputation as a serious novelist and to generate the income to devote himself to such work. It is a constant struggle. What he hopes to write (long, complex, often disturbing fiction) is, after his early successes, at odds with what the market wants (shorter, simpler, reassuring novels and stories), and many of the newly published letters record this impasse.

Far from suggesting a confident writer with no reason to worry about money or fame, this volume depicts a tenacious, at times desperate attempt to win the promised rewards. James is convinced that his works will crumble into dust. He would have been amazed that almost every published word he wrote remains in print on the brink of the 21st century, and that the large, discriminating audience he despaired of finding is reading them. And though he feared biographers (see his story "The Aspern Papers," with its "publishing scoundrel" looking for secreted letters), he might have been grateful that one of them has chosen to concentrate on his struggles to make his name rather than on the intensely private world he hid even from his intimates. For readers with similar priorities, Horne's book is an ideal introduction.

—Alex Zwerdling

THE GREAT AMERICAN THING: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915–1935.

By Wanda M. Corn. Univ. of California Press. 470 pp. $50

Its smooth white surface evoked ancient Greece, and its sleek curves echoed Constantin Brancusi's modernism, yet R. Mutt's *Fountain* was barred from the 1917 exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York. Why? It was a urinal, and therefore offensive to the artists and patrons organizing the show under the tutelage of the French Dadaist Marcel Duchamp. The punch line, of course, is that Duchamp himself had pseudonymously submitted *Fountain* in order to expose the provincialism of his "progressive and modern" American colleagues.

Or so the tale is told by most art historians. To them, *Fountain* inspired the conceptual art that today scorns beautiful objects in favor of provocative public gestures. To Corn, an art

Radiator Building—Night, New York *(1927), by Georgia O'Keeffe*

historian at Stanford University, the story is not so simple. In her fascinating study of modernism's first American phase (during and after World War I), she argues that Duchamp, along with other *transatlantiques* accustomed to the filth and stink of the Paris pissoir, truly admired American plumbing and saw its gleaming, efficient products as beautiful objects in their own right.

In recent decades art history has split into two modes of inquiry: the formal analysis of the connoisseur and the contextual approach of the cultural theorist. By combining the two, Corn uncovers a rich and often contradictory mix of motives for each object she scrutinizes, from Duchamp's "readymades" to Joseph Stella's hallucinatory painting of the Brooklyn Bridge to Georgia O'Keeffe's stark still lifes of cattle skulls. Corn argues that American modernism really began in the 1910s and 1920s, not in the 1940s, as urged by postwar critics such as Clement Greenberg. The probing, often playful dialogue between European visitors and emigrés (Duchamp, Joseph Stella, Fernand Léger, Francis Picabia) and homegrown artists (O'Keeffe, Gerald Murphy, John Marin, Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler) set