

driving addiction, combined with single-use zoning, which separates homes from public spaces and services that are crucial to real neighborhoods, has created the barren “bed-room community,” designed not around human needs but around three-car garages, wide streets, and highway access to shopping malls.

Another factor driving our residential excess is an orgy of consumerism. We simply need more space for all our stuff. Friedman and Krawitz remind us, for example, that a “wired” home once meant a black telephone in the hallway and a TV in the parlor. They warn that the abundance of new electronic devices that supposedly connect us with the world in fact diminish face-to-face contact in the home, which risks becoming a mere “container for communication devices.”

Peeking through the Keyhole suggests that “labor-saving” gizmos actually *decrease* our leisure. Computers bring the workplace into the home, where new cooking and cleaning equipment raises housekeeping standards to four-star levels. Between the machines indoors and the wasteland outdoors, suburban life becomes, in developmental psychologist James Gabarino’s phrase, “technology intensive and often socially deficient.”

Friedman and Krawitz struggle with the academic temptation to let substance—particularly statistics—swamp style. Nevertheless, their book is full of fun facts. For instance, home equity of \$4 trillion accounts for more than half of Americans’ personal net worth. Ditching four appliances equipped with transformers—those blocky plugs on cordless phones and the like—yields the same annual energy savings as getting an energy-efficient refrigerator. The authors maintain that family life now revolves around the microwave oven, which has changed not only what we eat but also how we shop, cook, dine, and clean up.

Friedman and Krawitz argue that as a society, we must revamp old ideas about

home in light of new realities. In this anxious time of global political unrest, domestic economic uncertainty, and rapid social and technological change, readers may want to ponder whether their own homes are the adaptable sort that can, as the authors put it, “roll with life’s punches.”

—WINIFRED GALLAGHER

GREENBACK:
*The Almighty Dollar and the
Invention of America.*

By Jason Goodwin. Holt. 320 pp. \$26

In reading the historian Jason Goodwin, you get the facts, plenty of facts, because he’s a joyful researcher—but the facts are selected and arranged for his own special effects, above all his delicate sense of the absurd. The *mélange* will be familiar to fans of *Lords of the Horizons* (1999), his history of the Ottomans, those quaint people in fezzes and soft slippers who ruled a vast section of civilization for 500 years but about whom we know as little as if they were a mythic race of visiting aliens. A delight to read, *Lords of the Horizons* succeeds in sketching a lost world, so one pauses to plug it, emphatically.

In *Greenback*, Goodwin turns his attention to the dollar bill, and he makes a persuasive case that paper money is a specifically American innovation, one that has helped to establish the nation’s global caliphate. “In 1691,” he writes, “three years before the founding of the Bank of England and the earliest five-pound note, faraway Massachusetts became the first state since medieval China to issue its own paper currency.” The New World’s radicals and inno-



Some 8,000 different forms of state and private currency circulated during the latter half of the 19th century. Many of them sported extravagant designs, such as this two-dollar bill from New York’s Saint Nicholas Bank.

vators and ignoramuses were rearranging all metaphysics to suit themselves and their pragmatism—Ben Franklin adjusted Time Itself, urging people to move their clocks forward in summertime for a brighter workday—and it does seem characteristically American to remove the superstition of value from barbaric yellow metal and print value instead on worthless paper.

“This knack for substitution came as second nature to men dealing with novelties every day,” writes Goodwin, “but the concept of ‘lawful money’ was a smoking fuse laid against the ancient right of kings to regulate the currency, a small but ultimately significant declaration of colonial America’s aims and purposes.” Once the game was in motion, control over the symbol was sovereignty itself. Thomas Jefferson tended to be afraid of money, both in principle and in practice at home on his farm. Franklin printed it up in bales to pay the soldiers. (To foil counterfeiters, he stepped out the back door of his press room and picked up a leaf to slip into the press’s platen; the print of its veins could never be duplicated.) Quickly the shell game of banking grew up, in which notes were backed by only a 20 percent gold reserve. During the 19th century, tiny regional banks flourished everywhere in the business of, virtually, counterfeiting. Nicholas Biddle tried to enshrine a federal note in a central bank, which Andrew Jackson tried to destroy, seeing everything but gold as phony.

But then, it’s all counterfeit in a sense. Maybe if we paused at the cash register and reflected on the situation, all our dollars would turn back to leaves, all our coaches to pumpkins. The design of the bill, its lacy, grimy tattoo and rune, is supposed to back our unexamined faith, and Goodwin gives free rein to the numismatic fetish of the paper idol itself, the art, the wonderful peculiarities of the dollar’s engraving.

This isn’t a comprehensive history. Poor Jefferson may seem a little dotty in these pages, and the colonists are characterized somewhat strictly as slaves of religiosity. But Goodwin is an Englishman whose view of this country is mostly fond. The tawdriness of the American project is an easy thing for Europeans to smirk about. Goodwin, kindly, persists in discerning something intrepid.

—LOUIS B. JONES

NOBODY’S PERFECT:

A New Whig Interpretation of History.

By Annabel Patterson. Yale Univ. Press. 288 pp. \$27.50

The reformist Whigs dominated British politics from the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to the early 1830s, and their political success inspired a historical school. The “Whig historians” believed, in general, that history endlessly repeats the contest between the Whig Party and its opponents, with the forces of progress—the Whig side—invariably prevailing in the long run. The Whig approach predominated until Herbert Butterfield, in *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), faulted Whig historians for imposing “a certain form upon the whole historical story,” a form that matched their political agenda. Butterfield’s spirited monograph led generations of historians to dismiss the Whig interpretation as a mere mask for political or moral judgments.

Annabel Patterson, a professor of English at Yale University, seeks to refurbish the tarnished reputation of the Whig approach. *Nobody’s Perfect* draws from several disciplines, and the prose is lively and relatively free of academic jargon. But after some early jabs, Patterson does not so much refute Butterfield as ignore him. Like earlier Whig historians, moreover, she uses such terms as “left” and “center right” as if they retained a constant meaning through the centuries, which leads her to group contemporary figures such as Bill Clinton with Whigs such as John Milton and the English radical John Wilkes.

Patterson’s treatment of Edmund Burke is revealing. His early support for American independence, she contends, required that he support the French Revolution, and his failure to do so represents a “slide” into “conservatism,” the abandonment of principle for self-advancement. She barely considers the possibility that he held fast to a conception of progress or democracy that differs from her own, and she offers no argument to the many Burke scholars who see his views as consistent.

We can learn from the Whigs and their rich tradition of political argument. Indeed,