

Current Books

deadline and 11 empty pages. Some Russian explorers had sent him stunning photos they'd taken of the Tibetan city of Lhasa, a place few in the West had ever glimpsed. Desperate, he threw them into the magazine, worried that he'd be fired for this shocking departure from form. The rest is history—literally.

The life stories of these magazines are also the biography of our times, told affectionately by two men who obviously adore magazines and the way they capture our collective life. What's encouraging is that the

story isn't over yet. All eight of these titles are still alive (the only one that actually died, *Life*, keeps getting resurrected), and the book goes into great detail on the art and craft that allow them to be reborn on a weekly or monthly basis. At one point, former *People* editor Richard Stolley explains that a celebrity news story is often a play in three acts: the rise, the fall, and the redemption. Someday, one hopes, the same will be said for the miraculous old medium we foolishly take for granted.

—WILLIAM POWERS

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

THREE BILLION NEW CAPITALISTS: The Great Shift of Wealth and Power to the East.

By Clyde Prestowitz. Basic.
321 pp. \$26.95

Economist Clyde Prestowitz has reasons to be pessimistic about the future of the U.S. economy—three billion reasons, in fact. With the rapid entry of China, India, and the former Soviet bloc nations into the international economy, three billion “new capitalists” have emerged to compete with Americans on the world stage. Prestowitz worries that the United States has no strategy to deal with these new competitors—and that the ultimate losers will be America's workers.

Drawing on an impressive command of economic trends, as well as countless interviews with political and business leaders worldwide, Prestowitz highlights two problems that he sees facing the United States and the global economy. First, America's de facto economic strategy is to ship key industries overseas. It was bad enough when manufacturing industries began leaving, but now the service sector and even high-tech and R&D are going too, enticed by the East's low wages, high levels of education, tax breaks, and huge potential markets. To his credit, Prestowitz doesn't begrudge India and China their growth and progress—he just wonders what jobs and wages his grandchildren will find in an increasingly “hollowed out” America.

The second problem Prestowitz identifies is that China and India are rising at a time of a simple yet fundamental imbalance in the global economy: “Americans consume too much and save too little while Asians save too much and consume too little.” The deep trade and budget deficits reflect and exacerbate these conditions. “The nightmare scenario—the economic 9/11—is a sudden, massive sell-off of dollars,” Prestowitz warns, “a world financial panic whose trigger might be as minor, relatively speaking, as the assassination of a second-rate archduke in a third-rate European city.” Yes, 9/11 meets World War I in a single sentence! At times, Prestowitz can be positively Thomas Friedmannesque in his overheated metaphors, but while Friedman has made his mark as globalization's Pangloss, Prestowitz is more like its gloomy Eeyore.

His evidence is sometimes shaky—for instance, he uncritically accepts rosy growth projections for India and China but embraces the direst forecasts for the U.S. economy—and his policy proposals range from daring to goofy. In a time-honored Washington tradition, he calls for blue-ribbon commissions and international conferences to do everything from boosting America's “competitive potential” to eliminating the dollar in favor of a new international currency. He argues that the United States must eliminate the mortgage interest deduction on second homes, drop income taxes in favor of consumption taxes, slash defense

spending, and introduce national health insurance. He encourages Japan and India to join the North American Free Trade Agreement, and he wants Japan to adopt the U.S. dollar as its currency—though it's unclear how his new international currency would fit into that scheme. Running throughout is a call for greater government intervention in the U.S. economy, particularly in the realm of industrial policy, which Prestowitz thinks gets a bad rap in Washington. For American business, his overriding recommendation is "Sell things no one else makes," and he chastises narrow-minded corporate leaders for not considering the national economic interest.

Prestowitz has sounded such alarms before. In his 1988 book *Trading Places*, he argued that Japan had become a juggernaut, a "kind of automatic wealth machine" that could topple the United States from the world's top economic perch. History has not been kind to that prediction. For America's sake, one can only hope that Prestowitz's latest forecast will prove similarly off the mark.

—CARLOS LOZADA

PERFECT SOLDIERS:
*The Hijackers—Who They Were,
Why They Did It.*

By Terry McDermott. HarperCollins.
330 pp. \$25.95

Books about the September 11 terrorist attacks are almost too numerous to count, but *Perfect Soldiers* deserves to stand out. Terry McDermott, a *Los Angeles Times* reporter, may know more than anyone else about the Hamburg-based Islamic extremists who pulled off Al Qaeda's spectacularly successful attack.

The most familiar face among the 19 hijackers, Mohamed el-Amir Atta, is actually the most unknowable of the top organizers. In dramatic contrast to the mean and sour visage in photos from the final years of his life, pictures from his youth show a joyous teenager. He was raised in a solidly middle-class Cairo family, and "forced by his father to leave home and go to Germany" for graduate school in 1992, at age 24.

At Hamburg's Al Quds mosque, Atta and three other principal players grew committed

to a Muslim jihad: Marwan al-Shehhi, who flew one plane into the World Trade Center (Atta flew the other); Ziad Jarrah, who piloted the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania; and Ramzi bin al-Shibh, who couldn't get a visa to enter the United States and ended up serving as the plotters' primary overseas contact. McDermott notes that the public expression of radical ideas was "far more common" in big cities "outside the Islamic world than within it." Even so, few could match this quartet's utter preoccupation with the obligations of religious devotion. "It is hard to appreciate how much time these young men spent thinking, talking, arguing, and reading about Islam," he writes. "It became for some of them nearly the only thing they did."

McDermott says that the hijackers' story reflects "the power of belief to remake ordinary men." In no instance was that power more mystifying than in the case of Ziad Jarrah. The son of a secular, middle-class Beirut family, Jarrah, like Atta, came to Germany to pursue his education. In contrast to the aloof Atta, the partygoing Jarrah married a young Turkish woman who had grown up in Germany, and remained devoted to her until he boarded the United Airlines flight on September 11. Jarrah, whom McDermott calls "an unlikely candidate for Islamic warrior," rendezvoused with his wife six times during his final 14 months, while he, Atta, and al-Shehhi were attending flight schools in Florida.

Jarrah kept his real plans from his wife, and McDermott observes that "their relationship survived on her capacity to believe Jarrah's lies, even those that seemed preposterous." Yet on the morning of September 11, Jarrah wrote her a letter that speaks volumes about the dedication of the attackers. "I did what I was supposed to do. You should be very proud of me," he wrote. Their separation would be only temporary, he assured her: When "we see each other again . . . we will live a very nice and eternal life, where there are no problems, and no sorrow." From Jarrah's certainty of a superior future life sprang the ability to sacrifice his present one.

"Al Qaeda was not a slick, professional outfit that didn't get caught because it didn't