

# CURRENT BOOKS

## FELLOWS' CHOICE

*Recent titles selected and reviewed by Fellows of the Wilson Center*

**HAVEN IN A HEARTLESS  
WORLD: The Family  
Besieged**

by Christopher Lasch  
Basic Books, 1977  
230 pp. \$15  
L of C 77-75246  
ISBN 0-456-02883-7

Historian Lasch, author of *The New Radicalism in America* (1965), is impatient with the quality of discussion provoked by today's changing family. Happily, his reaction has not produced yet another set of panaceas, either so incremental as to be insignificant or so utopian as to discourage action. Instead, he trenchantly dissects the theories developed by social scientists and professional counselors to explain the American family's past and current ordeals. Too many of these "experts," he says, rely on misinterpretations of Freud and fail to note that "the family has been coming apart for a hundred years." With impressive scholarship, Lasch (himself a strong pro-family man) links the decline to the growth of Western capitalism. His book raises the level of discussion about the American family, but he may take too parochial a view. A look at the troubles of the family in Soviet society—noncapitalist and Freudless—might yield additional explanations.

—Bernice Madison

**AFFAIRS OF STATE:  
Public Life in Late Nine-  
teenth Century America**

by Morton Keller  
Harvard, 1977  
640 pp. \$17.50  
L of C 76-21676  
ISBN 0-674-00721-2

Writers on the period 1865–1900, even when portraying its virtues, usually repeat its pejorative designation as "The Gilded Age." They also tend to rely upon the testimony of imaginative writers such as Mark Twain and William Dean Howells. Morton Keller of Brandeis prefers a view of history that achieves freshness by being deceptively old-fashioned. Though his range of inquiry is wide, he ignores scandal, anecdote, and the familiar cast of characters (Robber Barons, New York society's Four Hundred) and looks instead at public issues as articulated in courts, legislatures, books, or journals of opinion. He does not glorify the spokesmen of the era. Yet he conveys an informed sympathy in his picture of Americans grappling with

new problems such as big industry, and veering between conservatism (sometimes reasoned, sometimes crass) and innovation (sometimes intelligent, sometimes feckless). Like all first-rate scholars, Keller convinces and illuminates. His interpretation of 19th-century America will be plundered by other writers for a long time to come.

—*Marcus Cunliffe*

**THE ULTIMATE  
EXPERIMENT: Man-Made  
Evolution**

by Nicholas Wade  
Walker, 1977  
162 pp. \$8.95  
L of C 76-52575  
ISBN 0-8027-0572-3

Fairly strict regulations and planned back-up legislation have reassured scientists and laymen about the danger of epidemics caused by new microbes escaping from laboratories in the course of recombinant DNA experiments. But worry about the long-run ecological and evolutionary impact of "gene-splicing" continues unabated. Nicholas Wade, senior writer for *Science*, briskly demonstrates that molecular biologists have reason to be proud of their initiative in working out self-restraining rules to guard against epidemics. His neat little essay on the sociology of science also makes it clear, however, that most members of the scientific community have shown the gambler's unconcern for the future and the cabalist's hostility toward the general public. Could a repressed bad conscience be at work here? One thinks of all the times when scientists have claimed credit for the practical benefits of their discoveries while disclaiming responsibility for the harmful side effects.

—*David Joravsky*

**WILLIAM MORRIS:  
Romantic to Revolutionary**

by E. P. Thompson  
Pantheon reissue, 1977  
829 pp. \$17.95  
L of C 76-62712  
ISBN 0-394-41136-6

William Morris (1834–96) worked with revolutionary zeal to overthrow banal mid-19th-century taste in interior design and architecture. He was also a romantic poet in the tradition of Tennyson, a translator of Icelandic sagas, the author of a utopian novel (*News from Nowhere*, 1890), and organizer of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings. Not last, but least remembered, he became a serious political activist, who served as secretary of the Socialist League and editor of *Commonweal*. Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design from William Morris to Wal-*