

**AMERICAN POLITICS:
The Promise of Disharmony**
by Samuel P. Huntington
Harvard, 1981
303 pp. \$15

Why, at certain times, has America experienced so much political consensus—and, at others, so much political conflict? Huntington, a Harvard political scientist, answers with a provocative thesis. As he sees it, an inevitable chronic tension exists between the nation's high "liberal ideals" and its "semi-liberal institutions." The American Creed is egalitarian, individualistic, democratic, and hence against authority, even U.S. authority. Over time, the *intensity* of Americans' belief in the creed varies. The 1960s uproar was an intense, angry reaffirmation of the creed, challenging most existing institutions and practices. Quite similar reformist upsurges occurred earlier, during the Age of Jackson (1820–40) and the Populist-Progressive era at the turn of the century. "America," Huntington observes, "has been spared [European-style] class conflicts in order to have moral convulsions" every third generation. While complacency and hypocrisy are dangerous, mindless reformism could some day cripple the nation's institutions and its ability to support liberty and democracy abroad. "Critics say America is a lie," Huntington concludes. "They are wrong. America is not a lie; it is a disappointment. But it can be a disappointment only because it is also a hope."

**MARKETS AND
MINORITIES**
by Thomas Sowell
Basic, 1981
141 pp. \$13.50

Sowell's great strength is his ability to take a volatile issue—race—and discuss it in a dispassionate manner. The first chart in this volume sets the iconoclastic tone of the book: Ranking family income by ethnic group, it puts WASPs seventh, below, among others, Jews, Japanese, and Poles. As a partial explanation, Sowell offers the age factor (46 is the median for Jews, 18 years above average) and geographic distribution (the Japanese, for instance, are found disproportionately in prosperous California). Sowell's purpose here is to demonstrate that no single factor can explain the wide ethnic differences in family income. He proceeds to look at the historical experiences of ethnic groups in America, examining the rise and fall of their relative positions and

the vehicles (politics, education, commerce) each has used to advance. He contests a number of liberal assumptions. Federal housing programs have not improved the living conditions of the poor. And minimum wage laws, enacted too late to "help" most European immigrants, have actually reduced the number of jobs available to blacks, Hispanics, and recent newcomers. Here, as in his *Black Education: Myth and Tragedies* (1972) and *Race and Economics* (1975), Sowell, a Hoover Institution economist, presses for rigorous scrutiny of issues that have been clouded by rhetoric, emotion, and academic taboos.

Arts & Letters

W. H. AUDEN:
A Biography
 by Humphrey Carpenter
 Houghton Mifflin, 1981
 495 pp. \$15.95

"The biography of an artist, if his life as a man was sufficiently interesting, is permissible," wrote W. H. Auden (1907-73)—"provided," he added, "that the biographer and his readers realise that such an account throws no light on the artist's work." Carpenter, whose previous books include biographies of J.R.R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, takes Auden's pronouncement to heart. For what we have here is a rich and sprawling life. From his boarding school days, when he "confided his first naughty hints about the facts of sex" through his many careers (schoolmaster, film-script and travel writer, lecturer), Auden, a born teacher, felt compelled to share what he learned. Deciding at age 15 to become a poet, the precocious son of a Birmingham physician chose, perhaps, the most difficult vehicle of instruction. His adult life was peripatetic—a year in Berlin after graduating from Oxford, camping in Iceland while researching a book, traveling to Spain and China to observe two wars, in 1939 immigrating to the United States, and then finally returning to Europe (Austria and England) for his last years. All this travel was accompanied by more important intellectual and emotional departures—from the practice of amoral promiscuity toward a firm belief in marriage and monogamy; from Freud to