



to answer: How was the impostor able to dupe an entire village? Was Bertrande among those he fooled? Davis attempts to broaden her chronicle (evidence for which comes largely from two 1561 accounts of the trial) with excursions into such topics as Protestantism and marriage, rural life, the criminal courts, family roles, and "the significance of identity in the 16th century." But her treatment of such issues is too sketchy to bear comparison with such recent social histories as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error* (1975). For all its interest as a complement to the film, the book promises more than it delivers.

Contemporary Affairs

THE ECONOMICS AND POLITICS OF RACE:

An International Perspective

by Thomas Sowell
Morrow, 1983
324 pp. \$15.95

The provocative gospel according to Thomas Sowell now enjoys a certain notoriety. Elaborated in *Ethnic America* (1982) and other books, it proclaims that disparities in economic performance among America's ethnic groups result less from discrimination than from the cultural values of those groups. For example, discipline, frugality, and persistence are culturally-fostered traits that have enabled the Chinese to prosper in America (and elsewhere) despite often severe discrimination. Projecting his argument upon the international scene, Sowell, a Hoover Institution Fellow, finds that "culture" also explains disparities between the wealthier and poorer nations. While Sowell is particularly dubious that race is a handicap, he is also suspicious of the traditional explanation that environment is the key to some nations' economic difficulties. India's poverty cannot be attributed to overcrowding or lack of resources, he argues, since far more prosperous Hong Kong is at a significant disadvantage in both respects. Human capital, the gamut of organizational skills of a national population, is decisive. (And colonialism, he avers, has often enhanced this resource, the sometimes brutal behavior of colonialists notwithstand-

ing.) Foreign aid that merely redistributes the wealth of prosperous nations among the poorer ones thus does not really help the people of a nation who lack the skills needed to produce wealth; educational and vocational programs, he believes, are far more beneficial. Sowell's words may chasten some would-be rescuers of the poor. But his excessive reliance on single-cause explanations, and his claim that the proof is "simple and obvious" (What, one wonders, happened to the Indians, who had the "advantage" of British imperialism?), occasionally diminish the force of his argument.

**REFLECTIONS OF A
NEOCONSERVATIVE:
Looking Back, Looking
Ahead**

by Irving Kristol
Basic, 1983
336 pp. \$19.95

If Irving Kristol cannot win readers over to neoconservatism, probably nobody can. Kristol is coeditor of the *Public Interest* magazine and unofficial "godfather" of neoconservatism—a movement of once-liberal intellectuals who moved Right after being, as he puts it, "mugged by reality" during the tumult and disarray of the 1960s. In this collection of essays, all previously published, Kristol recounts his own conversion, beginning with the wry "Memoirs of a Trotskyist," and lays out the key themes of neoconservatism. He joins such traditional economic conservatives as Milton Friedman in backing free-market principles, but argues that economic concerns must take a back seat to political goals. An example: Confronting the Soviets overseas requires a U.S. military build-up, even if it means bigger budget deficits. At home, Kristol favors a limited welfare state designed chiefly to provide a social safety net, not to redistribute income. Kristol believes that the government has a legitimate responsibility to shape the habits and tastes of the people. Accordingly, he supports some constraints to keep offensive behavior behind closed doors. His comment on the absence of celebration by liberal opponents of literary censorship after they won their battles during the 1960s and pornography came into the open epitomizes the neoconservative temper: "Being frustrated is disagreeable, but the real disasters in life begin when you get what you want."