
Contemporary Affairs
**HABITS OF THE HEART:
Individualism and
Commitment**

in American Life
by Robert N. Bellah,
Richard Madsen,
William M. Sullivan,
Ann Swidler, and
Steven M. Tipton
Univ. of Calif., 1985
355 pp. \$16.95

The title comes from Alexis de Tocqueville, the 19th-century French aristocrat whose *Democracy in America* (1835) not only analyzed society in the new American republic but also predicted the dangers that it would face. "Habits of the heart" are those values that shape the national character, and none, as Tocqueville foresaw, would be more powerful in America than individualism. Indeed, his book was largely a survey of those phenomena—the family, religion, local and national politics, associations—that he hoped would check unbridled individualism and save the fledgling democracy from disintegration. The authors of this book (professors, variously, of sociology, philosophy, and religion) report that many of Tocqueville's fears have come true. Interviewing hundreds of mostly middle-class Americans, the authors find that the majority have no "language in which to articulate their reasons for commitments that [go] beyond the self." Submersion in careers, wanton consumerism, a general retreat from public life, cynicism about politics and politicians, a fear of commitment in personal relationships—all exist as widespread symptoms of self-absorption. Reinforcing this unhealthy trend, the authors believe, is the growing popular emphasis on a "therapeutic" ethic. Originating in the mental health professions, this ethic enshrines "personal fulfillment" and self-knowledge as life's paramount goals. The authors' main accomplishment is to hold up a clear mirror to contemporary American society; they also recall the Biblical and republican traditions that once successfully instilled self-denial and public-mindedness in many American citizens.

COUNSELS OF WAR

by Gregg Herken
Knopf, 1985
409 pp. \$18.95

In his first book, *The Winning Weapon* (1980), Herken, a Yale historian, treated America's growing dependence on the nuclear deterrent as the keystone of national defense during the early years of the Cold War. Here he turns to

the specialists—scientists, military men, civilian advisers—who have played a role in the development of U.S. strategic policy during the nuclear age. Thinking about the unthinkable are, according to Herken, two broad groups: One is represented by military historian Bernard Brodie, who, as early as 1946, declared that the “ultimate weapon” left the U.S. military establishment with “no other useful purpose” than the prevention of war with the Soviet Union. The other is epitomized by presidential adviser Paul Nitze: Standing in the rubble of Hiroshima, he foresaw the possibility of future nuclear wars in which one side might emerge “victorious.” Brodie and Nitze, of course, are only two of the men who have variously argued over U.S. nuclear strategy since Harry Truman’s day. Herken describes the strategists’ institutional habitats—among them the Pentagon, the Rand Corporation, and the Hudson Institute—and their often macabre jargon: city-busting, the Sunday Punch, fail-safe, MAD, Peacemaker, and “sunshine unit” (for unit of radiation). In the end, White House nuclear arms policies often owe more to political considerations than to all the diagrams, charts, and top-secret reports. In 1961, though fearing an arms race, President John F. Kennedy bowed to pressure from the military and Congress and proposed to build 1,000 intercontinental ballistic missiles. Herken names no villains, but his chronicle echoes Lord Salisbury’s warning that “you should never trust in experts.”

**PRETORIA’S
PRAETORIANS:
Civil-Military Relations
in South Africa**
by Philip H. Frankel
Cambridge, 1984
215 pp. \$44.50

During the late 1940s, South Africa was an “esteemed member of the international community, a prime mover behind the Charter of the United Nations.” Today, after more than 35 years of National Party rule, marked most dramatically by its policy of institutionalized racism (apartheid), South Africa has become a “pariah state,” routinely denounced in the UN Assembly it once fostered. One striking result of international isolation and internal racial tensions has been the increased militarization of South African society. Frankel,