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Happiness

WORLD WAR IV

BY ANDREW J. BACEVICH



OTTO RANK



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of the Hero

A Psychological
Exploration of Myth

EXPANDED AND UPDATED EDITION

Translated by Gregory C. Richter, Ph.D.,
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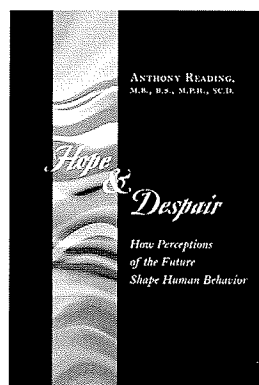
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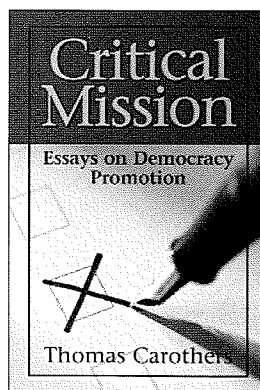
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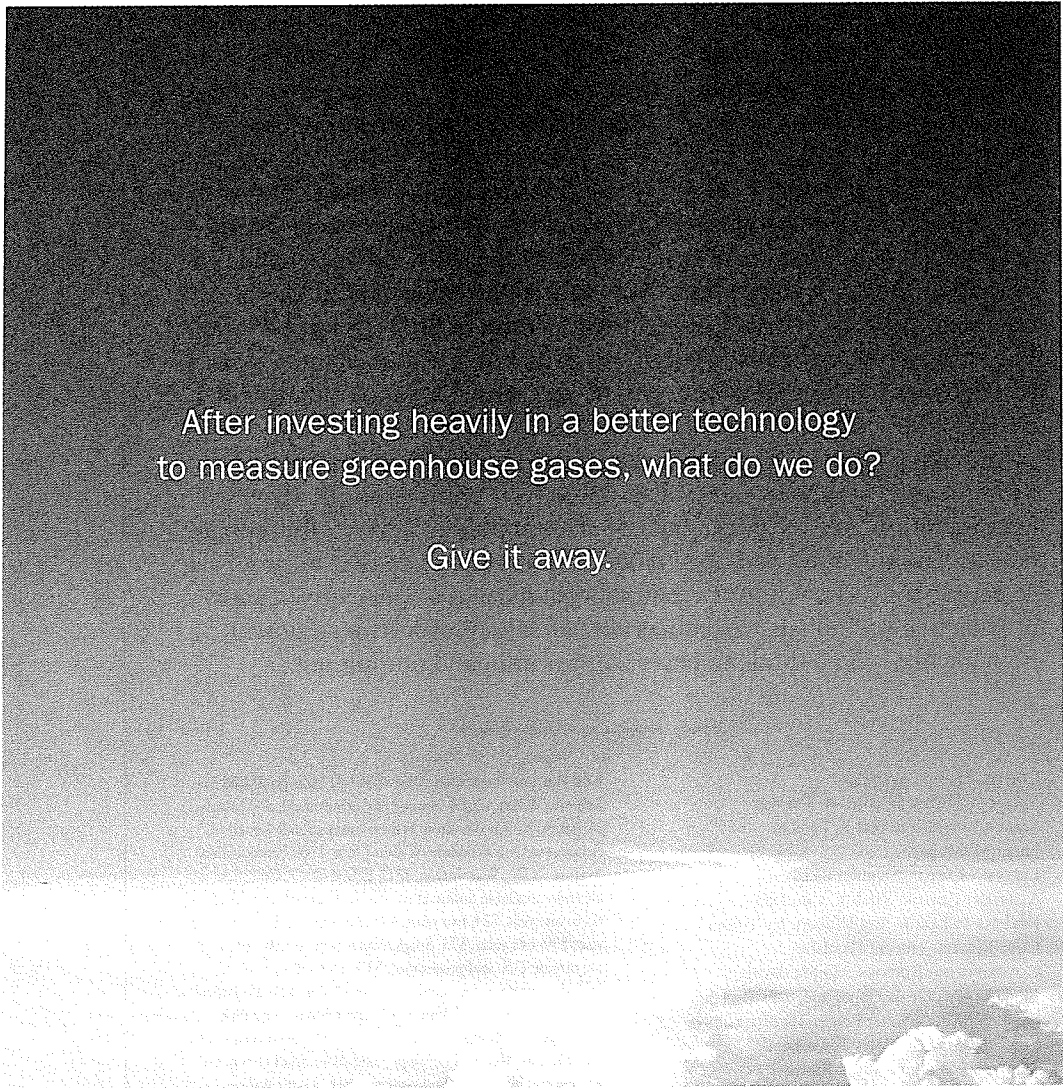
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Editor's Comment

Longtime readers of the *WQ* know that this magazine has an affinity for the intellectual curve ball, the idea that takes an unexpected course. Andrew J. Bacevich, the author of this issue's cover story, has been throwing curve balls for quite some time. When I first met him in the early 1990s, he was a recently retired army officer who had just begun an academic career. A West Point graduate, his career had taken him to Vietnam, to Princeton University, where he earned a Ph.D. in history, and to a variety of army posts. Nothing Bacevich wrote sounded like the usual utterances of either an ex-officer or an academic. In fact, he rarely mentions his military background in print, not wishing to become one of those who "claim authority to comment based on what they once were," he told me recently.

Bacevich's first essay in the *WQ* appeared exactly 10 years ago. It was an original and unsparing critique of the American military's reluctance to adapt to the new missions and challenges of the post-Cold War world, yet it was delivered in a voice sympathetic to what he called "the soldier's dilemma." In that piece and subsequent writings in the *WQ* and elsewhere, Bacevich's thinking followed a long arc of development. It was not obvious where he was coming from or where he was going, and it was always interesting to find out.

His essay in this issue, which is drawn from his forthcoming book, *The Militarization of America*, represents a new turn in his thinking. Once a contributor to *The Weekly Standard* and other politically conservative periodicals, and still a self-described cultural conservative, he now warns of "creeping militarism" in American political life and a dangerous national predilection for military adventures abroad. It's a provocative argument, from a writer whose thinking never fails to command our interest.

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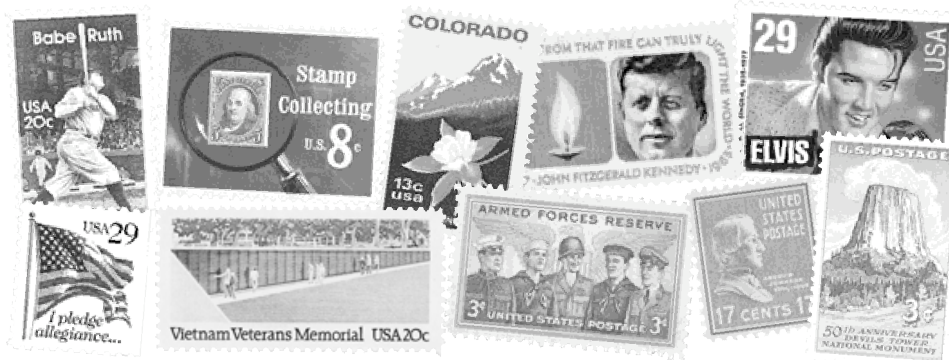
Politics' Polar Climate

Christopher Hitchens's paean to partisanship ["Bring on the Mud," *WQ*, Autumn '04] set me to thinking about the late vice-president Spiro T. Agnew, a politician whom one must assume Hitchens admires. Accused of divisiveness during the angry 1970 congressional campaigns, Agnew came up with perhaps the most effective one-liner of his career: "What's an election for, if not to divide people?"

Agnew made sense then, and Hitchens makes sense now. Campaigns in which the candidates avoid confronting the serious divisions of the moment are failures, no matter how high a standard of politeness and mutual respect the two sides manage to set. The point

I think Hitchens misses is that ignoring divisive questions makes campaigns more vicious, not more polite. When candidates are unable or unwilling to engage in serious ideological debate (on war, or Social Security, or, to use Hitchens's examples, drugs or the death penalty), they are driven to ever more mindless personal attacks in search of something provocative to say. The 2004 presidential election essentially denied the voters a genuine debate on Iraq and replaced it with irrelevant proxy arguments about John Kerry's military service and George Bush's National Guard duty. We were given the worst possible combination: a contest that was not meaningfully divisive but wasn't civil and respectful either.

Continued on page 7



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FROM THE CENTER

One of the Wilson Center's great strengths as an intellectual resource in Washington is its capacity for rapid programmatic innovation. In recent years, we have added more than a half-dozen new projects—defined by geographic area (e.g., Africa and Canada) or overarching themes (e.g., conflict prevention)—and more are on the way. All are intended to bring greater attention and clarity to issues that are likely to be among the most defining of this new century. And, as is the Center's normal practice, all will provide a forum for discussion that's open to policymakers, academic and other specialists, and the general public.

The Center's newest undertaking is its recently announced Southeast Europe Project, which will complement and extend the reach of our current East and West European efforts. Its programming will pay particular attention to regional political and economic issues such as enlargement of the European Union, the prospects for reunification of Cyprus, and the expansion and realignment of NATO in a post-9/11 environment. The new project will be overseen by John Sittlides, former executive director of the Western Policy Center, who will serve on the project's Board of Advisers.

One of our more topical and urgent efforts is a seminar series on terrorism and homeland security, sponsored jointly by the Center's Division of International Studies, the RAND Corporation, and the U.S. Army's Eisenhower National Security Series. There could hardly be a more consequential topic for the Center to tackle at this time. The seminars convene experts from government, business, journalism, and the academy, and provide a setting in which they can examine together both the nature of the terrorist threat and strategies for countering that threat most effectively.

The series does not shy away from controversy. In September, for example, Fernando Reinares, Spain's leading expert on terrorism and political violence, argued that it is

“a great simplification” to assert a direct causal link between events in Iraq and the bombing of four Spanish commuter trains on March 11, 2004, by an Islamic extremist terrorist cell inspired by Al Qaeda. So too, he said, is it a simplification to affirm that the results of the national elections held in Spain three days after the bombings showed weakness in the face of terrorism. The swing from the ruling Popular Party to the Socialist Party involved only some five to seven percent of voters, and it should be ascribed to anger at the government's disingenuous efforts to lay the blame for the bombings not on Al Qaeda but on the ETA, a Basque separatist group. Reinares further noted that, though Spanish troops were subsequently removed from Iraq, their number in Afghanistan grew from 800 to 1,800.

Finally, under the leadership of David Metzner, the Wilson Center's vice chairman, and Kent Hughes, director of its Project on America and the Global Economy, we've launched a science and technology initiative to promote discussion of a kind that takes place all too rarely in Washington—between individuals who shape public policy and leaders in the technology industry. Metzner and Hughes are intent on exploring what the United States needs to do to anticipate the directions of technology-based economic development and prevail against the increasingly forceful tide of worldwide competition. We see the Center's science and technology initiative as itself something like an experimental new technology—full of promise and the potential to make a significant impact.

At the dawn of the new century, then, we have begun a series of what are, in effect, compelling new public conversations at the Wilson Center. Our hope is that they will attract many other participants in the years ahead, and that from the chorus of voices there will emerge not only knowledge but a reserve of practical wisdom.

Joseph B. Gildenhorn
Chair



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Why do these things happen? Maybe the problem is not a fear of controversy but an excess of public-opinion data. In 1970, when Agnew called his opponents traitors and they called him a warmonger, polling was less sophisticated than it is now. There was room for disagreement, not only on the morality of the Vietnam adventure, but on what the American people actually felt toward the war. Both sides had the luxury of believing that they represented the majority view, if only by a little bit. Faced with uncertainty about where the people actually stood, candidates had little choice but to say what they believed.

Things are different now. Both candidates can know with reasonable confidence that, say, 56 percent of likely voters believe Saddam Hussein posed a direct threat to American security. A candidate who thinks otherwise is reluctant to force the issue. Those advising him inevitably reinforce his cowardice. And so we are given an imitation of a debate, not a real one. Candidates are willing to insult each other, but not to challenge public sentiment, however misguided.

In short, there is very little wrong with our campaigns that less information about the opinion of the electorate wouldn't cure. Unfortunately, that is a brand of toothpaste that will not retreat into the tube. We need to find a way to conduct real debate even when we know what the people think. So far, we haven't found it.

Alan Ehrenhalt
Arlington, Va.

The EU vs. the U.S.A.

T. R. Reid's entertaining survey of European anti-Americanism ["The Atlantic Widens," *WQ*, Autumn '04] assumes this phenomenon is a problem for Americans. I think it's a problem for Europeans.

Anti-Americanism, especially among the French, is hardly new; John Adams was as familiar with it as George W. Bush is. For many Europeans, bashing the Yanks is indeed, as Reid notes, a "sheer pleasure," not a response based on any actual ideas about America. Far be it from me to stand in the way of anyone's pleasure, especially on a continent where reproductive rates are disturbingly low, but the importance of French or German affection is something we can

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measure in only two meaningful ways. One is strategic convenience. For years, the United States made concessions to Europe—especially France—because European help was thought useful in combating the communist threat. That is no longer the case. The other measuring stick is pure sentiment: Most Americans like to be liked. But in today's world, being liked is not essential to survival. Terrorists hate everybody.

Reid's notion that anti-Americanism is strengthening "Europeans' belief that an integrated European Union should stand up as a counterweight to the American brute" is a dog that won't hunt. In fact, that dog is nearly dead. As former Dutch prime minister Wim Kok has reported, despite the EU's efforts to reach competitive parity with the United States by 2010, it is falling ever further behind. According to Kok, aging populations will "reduce the potential growth rate of the EU . . . to around 1.25 percent by 2040." In the long run, even earnest economic reform won't save European pensions and other social programs. Only the wholesale importation of largely Muslim populations will, but will these new immigrants happily support the retirement of large numbers of lounging Europeans? Perhaps the EU's Romani Prodi is right when he claims, "Europe's time is here." But if Kok is right, Prodi better not blink.

Since much of the anti-Americanism we see has been encouraged by the leaders of France and Germany for their own parochial political purposes, perhaps it should be left to them to help undo some of the damage, so that if history turns against them, they will not find an indifferent America where once they had a friend.

Denis Boyles

*Author of Vile France (2005) and
EuroPress Review columnist for
National Review Online
Pas de Calais, France*

I wish that the pleasure Europeans take in denigrating America was enough to unify Europe, as T. R. Reid claims, but not even anti-Americanism can bind Europeans together that easily. Has Reid forgotten the huge divide over U.S. policy on Iraq, which pitted Spain, Poland, and others against Germany and France? To designate the EU as a counterweight to the United States will divide Europe, not unite it.

There is indeed anti-Americanism in Europe, but it is less clear-cut than many Americans—including the chattering classes, who spend too many hours in front of TV screens and too often take quotidian superficialities at face value—may believe. Take Germany, for example, which remains a complicated country but since 1998 has been the most U.S.-friendly government in postwar history. The German government risked a narrow vote of confidence against vigorous conservative and socialist opposition to send troops to Afghanistan, and has more troops abroad than any other European nation.

Resentment toward the United States was not created in a vacuum. To lose worldwide sympathy within a few months of 9/11 was quite an achievement. Germans' emotions in the aftermath of 9/11 were not short-lived and superficial, as Reid claims. At the Brandenburg Gate, 250,000 Germans expressed their solidarity with the United States, and German firefighters nationwide raised money for their counterparts in New York City. The attacks were widely understood as the beginning of an era in which Germany would be forced to assume more international responsibilities.

Europe can be difficult political terrain. But if rumor has it right, the United States has only two career diplomats serving as ambassadors in Europe—all the others are buddies or big campaign donors. Very few U.S. diplomats there speak the local language, and even fewer participate in public debates in the media and among local politicians. Of course, not all prejudices can be overcome with diplomacy, and not all strategic disagreements will be resolved by more competent and better-informed

ambassadors. But at least you would have to worry less about the impact of an obnoxious TV skit like "The Lardburgers."

And, please, let's stop making fun of each other. If asked how to improve the transatlantic cooperation vital to both Europe and the United States, I'd suggest adopting the mantra of a frazzled character on *Seinfeld*, one of America's best-loved television shows: "Serenity now, serenity now."

*Helga Flores Trejo
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Correspondence

When T. R. Reid characterizes President Bush as “a pro–death penalty oil man swaggering into the White House,” I sense that he’s not so much reporting on negative European judgments as lending his own support to them.

It seems a growing sentiment among elitists that patriotism is an insular expression of ignorance. Given the lengthy history of savage war in Europe, it is understandable that Europeans are nervous about nationalism and its companion expression, patriotism. However, the United States resolved its key differences in the Civil War, and we can now rightfully express patriotism without fear of igniting internal war. Patriotism is a splendid sentiment, and the fact that European nations do not deserve a similar feeling should not concern us.

Robert Swegle
Bellevue, Wash.

Shadows from the Past

Christopher Clausen’s essay “Living Memory” [WQ, Autumn ’04] brought to mind the memory of my mother’s eldest sister, who was born in a small Mississippi town in 1901. While visiting my aunt when I was in college, I discovered that her birthday fell on the Fourth of July, and I remarked that it must have made her feel very special as a child to have her birthday on such a celebrated holiday. She responded that, quite the contrary, she had always felt cheated. Because that day also marked the anniversary of the fall of Vicksburg, the Fourth of July was then a day of mourning in Mississippi, and wasn’t celebrated there until the 1920s, after she had become an adult.

John Bryan
Houston, Texas

Darwin’s Due

An observation regarding “Evolution’s New Look,” by Michael L. Arnold and Edward J. Larson [WQ, Autumn ’04]: Certainly the science of evolution has itself evolved. Darwin was unquestionably a great pioneer, but he should not be expected to have the last word, any more

than Orville Wright should have been expected to design the stealth bomber. Let us not fail to regard such innovators with due respect.

The main point of the article is that members of separately designated species can and have mated, producing fertile offspring. If they can do so, then by what definition are they of different species? Are the authors changing the long-accepted meaning of the term? That Galapagos finches previously designated as separate species can mate and produce fertile offspring merely shows that they were erroneously categorized. And if the supposed instances of mating between *Homo sapiens* and *Homo neanderthalensis* produced fertile offspring, that would mean that their designation as separate species was also erroneous.

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More on Multiple Intelligences

I notice that in pushing his theory of multiple intelligences, Harvard professor Howard Gardner [Correspondence, WQ, Autumn ’04] does not mention a single corroborating study to back up his argument. The best he can offer is the fact that this theory has “had enormous influence on educational thinking and practice throughout the world.” The first reason he gives is precisely the fudge that has led researchers in other fields to reject multiple intelligences: “Educators know that individuals have different intellectual strengths and profiles.” Who would disagree with that? But to call these differences evidence of multiple *intelligences* is another thing. None of the people in fields he cites earlier (cognitive science, neuroscience, and artificial intelligence) assert as much. As yet, all we have in favor of different talents’ being independent mental aptitudes not reducible to a more general intelligence (*g*) is Gardner’s ever-more-defensive insistence that this is so.

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Findings

Bad Connections

If the rudeness of cell phone users hasn't reached epidemic proportions, the lamentation of it surely has. In the Ethics and Public Policy Center's quarterly journal, *The New Atlantis*, Christine Rosen voices the hope that public cell phone use will go the way of public smoking. "It was not so long ago that cigarette smoking was something people did everywhere—in movie theaters, restaurants, trains, and airplanes," she writes. "Nonsmokers often had a hard time finding refuge from the clouds of nicotine. Today, we ban smoking in all but designated areas." Rosen notes a few signs of progress, such as cell phone bans in some libraries and on Amtrak's "quiet cars."

Complaints about disruptive technology are nothing new, of course. In fact, as Carolyn Marvin recounts in *When Old Technologies Were New* (1988), the original telephone bore its share of blame for corroding civic life. People in the 1880s complained about callers who shouted (some things haven't changed), vulgar language that offended the "refined ladies" working as operators, nerves jangled by the "constantly recurring sharp tinkle" of the bell, and, especially, the intrusiveness of unwanted calls. When Edinburgh, Scotland, considered installing pay phones in 1884, one resident protested feverishly. Telephone subscribers, he said, "have the security at present" that they'll be called only by fellow subscribers, who are "equally interested in the telephone not becoming a

nuisance." But "if everybody who has a penny or threepence to spare" is free to "ring up any subscriber . . . we shall only be able to protect ourselves against triflers and intruders by paying less regard to all telephone communications."

Not every commentator was so dour. An American in 1905 mused, "With a telephone in the house, a buggy in the barn, and a rural mailbox at the gate, the problem of how to keep the boys and girls on the farm is solved."

General, President, Horse Whisperer

Along with military prowess, Ulysses S. Grant possessed another rare skill: As a boy in Ohio, he "gained a statewide reputation" for taming wild steeds, Michael Korda writes in *Ulysses S. Grant: The Unlikely Hero* (HarperCollins). "We do not know how Grant went about 'gentling' difficult and fractious horses, and he may not have known himself," Korda notes. "He spoke to them



Ulysses S. Grant stands next to his horse Cincinnati in June 1864.

Findings

softly and calmly, he stroked them, he never resorted to punishment with the whip—but the important thing was that somehow the horses sensed that Grant was their friend, and they trusted him.” Adds the biographer: “Had he been able to achieve the same effect with politicians and financiers, his presidency might have been more successful.”

Garbo Talks

Photographer Cecil Beaton once overheard Greta Garbo bark at a hostess, “Don’t ask no questions.” The grammar (as well as the insolence) was no momentary lapse, he observes in *Beaton in the Sixties* (Knopf), a posthumous sampling from his diaries: “By being so solitary all these years, she has never learnt to speak grammatical English. The result is that in her beautiful, touching voice she used the idioms of the Hollywood electricians.”

ReName Brands

In its early days, the *Federal* in Federal Express helpfully suggested a status comparable to that of the U.S. Postal Service, observes branding expert Steve Rivkin (collaborating with Fraser Sutherland) in *The Making of a Name* (Oxford Univ. Press). “But problems arose as the company grew,” Rivkin writes. The name increasingly connoted “slow and bureaucratic,” and in Latin America it “conjured unwelcome associations with the *federales*.” So in 1994, the company became FedEx: “shorter, crisper, and clearer.”

Not every rebranding turns out as well. “In the mid-1980s, executives at two energy firms, InterNorth of Omaha and Houston Natural Gas, wanted a catchy name for their newly merged companies,” Rivkin recounts. “Their supposedly world-class choice—*Enteron*—drew attention, but for all the wrong reasons. Numerous callers pointed out that *enteron* is the medical term for the tract through

which the human body digests food and disposes of waste.”

That name was hurriedly abandoned in favor of a nonmedical one. Whatever setbacks the company suffered thereafter weren’t the fault of its name: Enron.

Can’t Cheat the Hangman

When public hangings served social and political as well as punitive ends, the presence of the condemned wasn’t absolutely essential, Darren Oldridge writes in *Strange Histories* (Routledge). Convicted of sodomy and sentenced to death in 1772, the Marquis de Sade fled to Italy—so the executioner beheaded an effigy instead. “The punishment of felons was important,” writes Oldridge, “but the theater of the scaffold conveyed other messages too.”

The Kindness of Strangers

In 1950, as part of his “extensive study of the erotic element in the arts,” sex researcher Alfred Kinsey probed *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Several members of the



Marlon Brando and Jessica Tandy in a scene from the Broadway production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Broadway cast recounted their sexual histories to researchers from Kinsey's Institute for Sex Research, and Kinsey hoped "to correlate their acting with their sexual backgrounds."

In a letter to Kinsey, Tennessee Williams wrote, "I am gratified by the attention you have given *Streetcar*. I hope that you will continue it and even extend its scope." Williams added that he "would welcome (and enjoy) the chance to discuss my plays with you whenever you find the occasion."

But not the chance to discuss certain other matters, according to Albert J. Devlin, editor of the newly published second volume of *The Selected Letters of Tennessee Williams* (New Directions): When the playwright and the sex doctor met a few months later, Williams "declined to give his own sexual history."

Wisdom of Crowds

In disasters, a major threat to life and limb is mass panic, right? Wrong. "In contradiction to images provided by disaster movies or media reports, people almost never panic," Ira Helsloot and Arnout Ruitenberg of the COT Institute in the Netherlands write in the *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*. When panic does occur, it generally doesn't affect many people or last long. Another movie myth turned on its head, like the SS *Poseidon*.

Tomorrow's God

Dystopia, as envisioned in 1846: Europe in decline, global capitalism run amuck, culture trivialized, megastores sprawling over vast acreages, people buying such frivolities as designer water and new faces—"everyone can now choose a nose as he once chose his hat." So wrote Parisian novelist Émile Souvestre in *The World as It Shall Be*, one of the earliest works of dystopian fiction, now published in its first English translation by Wesleyan University Press.

One scene in the novel depicts the faith of the future. At the National Church, a half-

drunk worker named Narcisse Soiffard asks if his daughter might take communion, even though she hasn't the time for catechism classes.

Of course, says the priest. "It is not knowledge that is pleasing to God. The National Church asks for no more than a good intention." The daughter should simply bring her baptismal certificate to the church.

Actually, Soiffard says, his daughter hasn't been baptized. "It costs six francs, and for that I could buy eight bottles of wine."

"The National Church is very accommodating," replies the priest. "It will be enough if your wife brings a copy of your marriage certificate."

The visitor admits that he and his wife aren't technically married.

This, too, poses no obstacle, the priest decides, for "the National Church respects private life."

Soiffard is ebullient. "Religion annoyed me when it told me I mustn't drink, or beat up the bourgeoisie, or live as I pleased," he says. But having discovered "a God who is a really good fellow," he and his family "will be members of this church forever."

Hallmarks of Originality

Before mass-produced greeting cards became dominant, the romance-minded often created their own valentines, according to Barry Shank's *A Token of My Affection: Greeting Cards and American Business Culture* (Columbia Univ. Press). In the mid-19th century, though, commerce began encroaching on courtship.

A suitor of the day might begin by purchasing "a sheet of lace paper, with a simple lithographed and sometimes hand-tinted design in the center, around which [would be] penned—in the sender's own hand—a brief verse," writes Shank. The verse, too, could be bought: *Love Points Inscribed to the Valentine Writer* (1849) and other such volumes contained dozens of verses, enough, *Love Points* promised, to "assist any bashful swain." For best results, though, a guide titled *A Collection of New and Original Valentines* (1857) advised, "write at least with your own pen."

The Dollar's Day of Reckoning

America's falling dollar and mounting international debt are not, as pundits often declare, the wages of profligacy and sin. They are the inevitable products of dysfunctional international financial arrangements—a system that now appears likely to come crashing down, with alarming implications for the American economy.

by Robert Z. Aliber

The past three decades have been the most tumultuous period in international financial history. A complex series of economic developments set in motion decades ago, which can be conveniently marked by the collapse of the Bretton Woods system of fixed international exchange rates in 1971, now appears to be reaching a crisis stage with the rapid decline of the dollar in the foreign-exchange market. A number of other costly adjustments are likely still to come.

Since the late 1960s, there have been four extraordinary developments in the global economy. First, the values of the dollar and other national currencies have fluctuated over a much wider range than ever before, including the turbulent years between the two world wars.

Second, there have been three major asset price bubbles—most recently, in U.S. stocks; before that, in the real estate and stock markets in Thailand and other Asian countries; and before that, in the same markets in Japan and in the unlikely Nordic trio of Finland, Norway, and Sweden. Nothing like this number of sequential bubbles has ever been seen in monetary history.

Third, the national banking systems in more than 40 countries collapsed, includ-

ing those in Japan, Sweden, Mexico, and South Korea, as their banks' loan losses soared to amounts far in excess of their capital. The banks generally remained open only because their national governments explicitly or implicitly guaranteed bank deposits.

Fourth, the United States evolved from being the world's largest creditor country in 1980 to the world's largest debtor in 2000—a rapid reversal without precedent in financial history.

These four sets of extraordinary developments did not arise independently. They were systematically related, linked to one another by large and sudden cross-border flows of money and securities—capital “sloshing” from one country to another in search of higher returns. Funds generally flowed into a country when the investment community recognized that its economic prospects had improved, and the inflow accelerated the country's growth. But then a change in the economic environment or signs of distress led to a sharp reduction or reversal in the flow of funds, causing the country's currency to depreciate sharply.

These sudden shifts in money flows are responsible for the era's unusually wide





The dollar's value is determined in currency exchange markets like this one at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, where the underlying value of futures contracts traded in a day can approach \$80 billion.

currency fluctuations. Economists almost always base their forecasts of changes in market exchange rates on differences between national inflation rates. If a country has a higher rate of inflation than its trading partners, its currency generally will decline in the foreign-exchange market. But in the past several decades, currency values have overshot and undershot these expectations by much wider margins than before. Since the late 1990s, for example, inflation rates in the United States, and in Germany, France, and most other member countries of the European Union, have been roughly similar. But after the euro was launched at the beginning of 1999, the new currency depreciated by 30 percent. Since touching bottom in 2001, it has appreciated by nearly 50 percent. Earlier, in the 1970s, the dollar lost more than half its value relative to the German mark and the Japanese yen as investors became increasingly skeptical about the seriousness of the

United States' commitment to subdue its rising inflation. But after the new Federal Reserve Board chairman, Paul Volcker, announced tough anti-inflation policies in October 1979, the dollar appreciated by 60 percent.

In the past, asset price bubbles have been infrequent and usually solitary, except for the coincidence in 1720 of the South Sea Bubble in London and the Mississippi Bubble in Paris. Two of the three modern bubbles were linked to an inflow of foreign money and an increase in the value of the national currency. In these cases, the bubbles expanded as foreign capital flowed into the country, increasing the supply of credit available to select groups of borrowers.

The most recent bubble occurred in the U.S. stock market during the late 1990s—by some measures, a bigger bubble than the one that preceded the Great Depres-

sion. The dimensions of the American bubble were enlarged by the Asian financial crisis of 1997, which triggered a massive flow of funds to New York from Bangkok, Seoul, Taipei, and Hong Kong, and then by an influx of investment from Europeans eager to profit from the boom in the American economy and the surge in U.S. stock prices. The Asian crises resulted from the bursting of a bubble in real estate and stock prices that had been growing since the early 1990s, and that bubble had in turn followed the implosion of stock prices in Tokyo at the beginning of the 1990s.

The collapse of Tokyo's financial markets ended the "mother of all asset price bubbles," which had ballooned in the latter half of the 1980s. Unlike the other bubbles, Japan's had its roots in the domestic economy. The Japanese bubble followed from the liberalization of financial regulations that had been in place since the 1950s. Those regulations were designed to keep interest rates for preferred borrowers extremely low and to allocate credit to firms that were considered likely "winners" in the global industrial competition. As a result, interest rates were low and investment levels exceptionally high.

The liberalization of the 1980s came partly at the urging of the U.S. government, which wanted American investment banks to gain access to the Tokyo markets on terms comparable to those that Japanese firms enjoyed in U.S. financial markets, and partly because by the 1980s Japanese firms were generating more cash from their operating activities to finance their own expansion.

During the 1980s, real estate prices in Japan increased by a factor of nine, and stock prices by a factor of six. Many of the firms whose stocks were traded on the Tokyo exchange were real estate holding companies, so the increase in real estate prices led to an increase in the value of their assets, and their stock prices accordingly rose. The surge in real estate prices fueled a construction boom, so the stock

prices of construction companies also climbed rapidly. Japanese banks owned shares in various industrial companies and a great deal of real estate, so the increases in prices of these assets led to rapid increases in their capital and, thus, the banks' lending capacity.

Because Tokyo had liberalized its financial regulations, the Japanese banks were able to increase their loans to real estate investors at rates that reached 30 percent annually. Moreover, many industrial firms then began to buy real estate, since the returns from these investments were much higher than the profit rate in industry. In some cases, the firms got their money from business loans that were really real estate loans "in drag."

The price increases in Tokyo's asset markets seemed like a perpetual motion machine—the bank loans to real estate investors led to sharp increases in real estate prices, which in turn pulled up stock prices. Bank capital grew as property and stock prices rose, so the banks were able to increase their loans to real estate and industrial borrowers. Some real estate investors had a "negative carry": Their rental income was significantly less than the scheduled interest payments they needed to make. These investors got the cash to pay the interest on their outstanding loans by increasing the amounts borrowed from the banks against properties they had purchased in previous years.

The liberalization of regulations during the 1980s also enabled Japanese banks to establish numerous branches and subsidiaries in London, New York, Zurich, and other national financial centers. The new Japanese bank branches used funds borrowed in the offshore deposit markets in these centers to rapidly increase their loans; they wanted to grow their banking businesses to cover their costs. At the same time, regulations on borrowing in offshore markets by banks headquartered in Finland, Norway, and Sweden were relaxed, and these banks borrowed large amounts

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from the Japanese bank branches in London and Zurich. As a result, the currencies of the three Nordic countries appreciated, and stock and real estate prices in these countries grew by a factor of five.

The Japanese bubble also touched off booms in South Korea and Taiwan, which supplied many industrial firms in Japan, and even in Hawaii, a warm-weather destination that is for the Japanese what Florida is for New Yorkers.

The Japanese bubble and economic boom began to collapse in the opening months of 1990, when the new governor of the Bank of Japan, concerned that soaring housing prices would prevent families from purchasing homes, instructed the banks to limit the expansion of their real estate lending in the hope of cooling the market. Suddenly, some Japanese borrowers could no longer obtain the cash to pay the interest on their outstanding loans, and they became forced or distressed sellers of real estate. Real estate prices began to fall. A snowball effect quickly set in as more and more properties hit the market, and real estate and stock prices slumped to 30 percent of their values at the late-1989 peak. They are currently in the same ballpark as they were 20 years ago. Virtually all Japanese financial institutions—banks, trust companies, life insurance companies, cooperative banks—would have been formally bankrupt if Japanese regulators had required them to value their loans at the prices they could be sold for in the market.

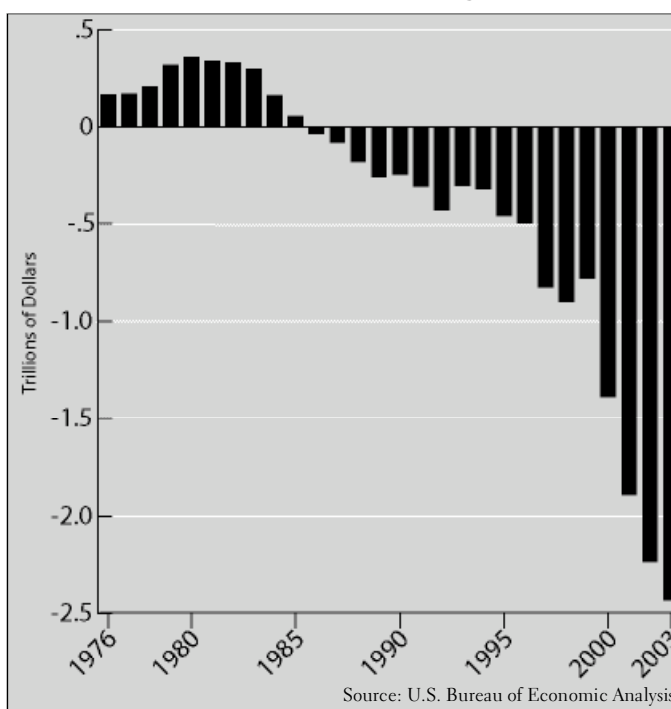
Just as economic booms always occur during the expansion phase of a bubble, so the implosion of a bubble always has a deflationary impact. When stock and real estate prices in Tokyo began to tumble in 1990, Japanese households increased their

saving to compensate for the decline in their wealth. Japanese industrial firms sharply reduced new investments, and, as the growth of domestic demand slowed, they diverted more of their products to foreign markets. As Japan's exports increased relative to its imports, the yen appreciated, which eroded the competitive position of the Japanese factories in global markets. Japanese firms then rapidly increased their investments in China, Thailand, and other Asian countries to take advantage of lower labor costs. Just as America's industrial heartland was devastated by the dollar's rapid appreciation in the early 1980s, so parts of the Japanese economy were "hollowed out" by the strong yen, even as Japanese money was creating new bubbles elsewhere in Asia.

The Japanese banks were in such serious financial distress that business firms, fearing that the government might close the banks, began to move funds to non-Japanese banks in Tokyo and to foreign financial centers, adding to the exodus of capital.

The flow of money from Japan and other

America's Net Foreign Debt



Once the world's largest creditor, the United States became an international debtor in 1986. It is now the world's largest debtor.

developed countries to Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and other developing Asian countries strengthened their currencies and pushed their trade deficits up to five or six percent of their gross domestic products. (The U.S. trade deficit currently amounts to nearly six percent of GDP.) Their international indebtedness increased more rapidly than their GDP. The surge in foreign investment in Thailand and other Asian countries fed economic booms. Prices of real estate and stocks soared; in 1993, stock prices doubled in most of these countries.

In February 1997, an American newspaper ran a story about Hong Kong property prices that could have been written about Tokyo real estate a decade earlier. I decided to visit Hong Kong, where I arranged to meet with a group of individuals involved in various aspects of the real estate market.

I posed three questions to the group:

“What is the rental rate of return?”

“Three percent,” they answered.

“What is the mortgage interest rate?”

“Seven percent.”

“How can you make money if you earn three percent and pay seven percent?”

Their answer: “Real estate prices always rise.”

The responses to these questions were more or less the same in both Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok, and it was clear beyond the shadow of a doubt that a massive asset price bubble had developed throughout the region.

There were two non-sustainable elements in the financial patterns of these Asian countries. Just as in Tokyo, some real estate investors had a “negative carry.” Their rental income was less than their scheduled interest payments, and, just as in Tokyo, these investors got the cash to pay the interest by borrowing more. A similar pattern emerged in the external payments of the countries: They obtained the cash to pay the investment income to their foreign creditors in the form of new foreign investments from foreign creditors.

In the winter of 1997, foreign lenders became concerned about the large losses Thailand's banks were suffering on their consumer loans, and thus about the banks' stability. The flow of money to Thailand

slowed. The Thai central bank could no longer finance the country's large trade deficit, so it stopped supporting the baht in the foreign-exchange market, and the currency depreciated sharply. A contagion effect set in, and foreign investors sharply curtailed their new loans to borrowers (not only in Thailand but in Malaysia, Indonesia, and many other Asian countries) and sought repayment of their outstanding loans. The lenders anticipated—correctly—that the Asian currencies would depreciate sharply, reducing the value of their loans. The losses of the local banks in these countries were significantly larger than their capital, and they would have been forced to close if their depositors had not been convinced their money was fully insured.

The pattern is similar in all the episodes of boom and collapse surveyed here, as well as in Mexico (1994), Russia (1998), Brazil (1999), and Argentina (2001). The growth rate of each country's indebtedness (or the indebtedness of a large sector of its economy) was substantially higher than the growth rate of its GDP, and significantly higher than the interest rates the country paid on the borrowed funds. The difference between the two rates of growth was not sustainable. Borrowers in these countries obtained the cash to pay the interest to their creditors by borrowing even more, often from the same creditors. Some incident then suddenly changed investor sentiment and reduced the flow of cash to the borrowers, and, in the process of adjustment to the reduction, a large number of the borrowers fell into bankruptcy.



This pattern of boom, bust, and massive international flows of money provides an explanation of the fourth unusual financial event of the past three decades: the unprecedented transformation of the United States from the world's largest creditor country in 1980 to its largest debtor today. The United States now owes foreign creditors nearly \$3 tril-

lion—an amount equal to about 25 percent of America's GDP.

America's transformation from creditor to debtor was not the result of a U.S. consumption boom, or inadequate American savings, or any of the other causes commonly advanced as part of the conventional wisdom. It did not come about because American firms and the U.S. government borrowed in a foreign currency. Rather, it occurred because the demand of foreign governments and firms for U.S. securities and real assets surged, especially during the boom and bust crises. Their purchases increased the value of the dollar in the foreign-exchange market, which led to a rise in America's imports, sluggish growth in exports, and growing trade deficits.*

The vast sums of foreign money that have flowed into this country came because the United States plays a unique role in the global economy. For nearly 100 years, it has served as a balance wheel for the world economy. Its international accounts have adjusted more or less automatically to provide global consistency for the payments balances of all countries as a group. If the world's other countries wish to run trade surpluses, for example, the United States automatically develops a trade deficit that generally corresponds to the sum of the trade surpluses of all other countries as a group.

America's special role in the world economy is rooted in the unique function that fell to the dollar beginning in the early 20th century. During World War I the United States, which had already become a significant factor in world trade as a supplier of industrial raw materials to Europe, became a safe haven for foreign money. This development was sped along by the fact that Great Britain and other countries had applied controls on international payments at the beginning of the war, while

money balances held in the United States were not constrained. When the war ended, America emerged as the world's biggest and most stable economy and occupied the leadership role in the global economy that Great Britain had held during the previous century. The dollar acquired several singular international roles, which continue today. It is a "vehicle currency" used by foreign central banks when they buy and sell their own currencies in the foreign-exchange market. The dollar is also a "quotation currency," used as the unit of account for expressing the prices of petroleum, gold, copper, and other commodities. Finally, the dollar is a "reserve currency": About 70 percent of the international reserve assets of foreign central banks are denominated in dollars.

But the United States did not assume global economic leadership by design, and it has imposed virtually no design in its role as the international financial system's key power. A rare attempt at systemic action came at the end of World War II, with the establishment of the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates in 1944. In this environment, most other developed countries designed policies to influence the flow of trade and capital, but the United States by and large did not. Because foreign trade was such a small part of its economy for so many years, and because of its commitment in principle not to interfere in markets, the United States generally took a passive approach to changes in its international balance of payments and balance of trade.

In the early 1950s, for example, Germany and many other countries were eager to buy U.S. dollar securities to add to their holdings of international reserve assets, which had been severely depleted during and immediately after World War II. The dollar was much the strongest currency, and the United States held 60 percent of the world's gold reserves. As a result, these countries earned the international reserve assets they wanted from the United States, which they used to purchase gold from the U.S. Treasury. American gold holdings declined from \$27 billion at the end of 1949 to \$11 billion at the end of 1969. Because

*In reporting on the U.S. trade deficit, the news media almost always get the story backwards, suggesting that the United States is lucky that other countries are willing to fund its trade deficit. In fact, the financing came first, in the form of the foreign purchases of U.S. securities and assets that induced the appreciation of the dollar and a rise in U.S. imports.

The Dollar's Fall

of its role in providing global consistency, the United States developed payments deficits that mirrored the payments surpluses of these foreign countries.

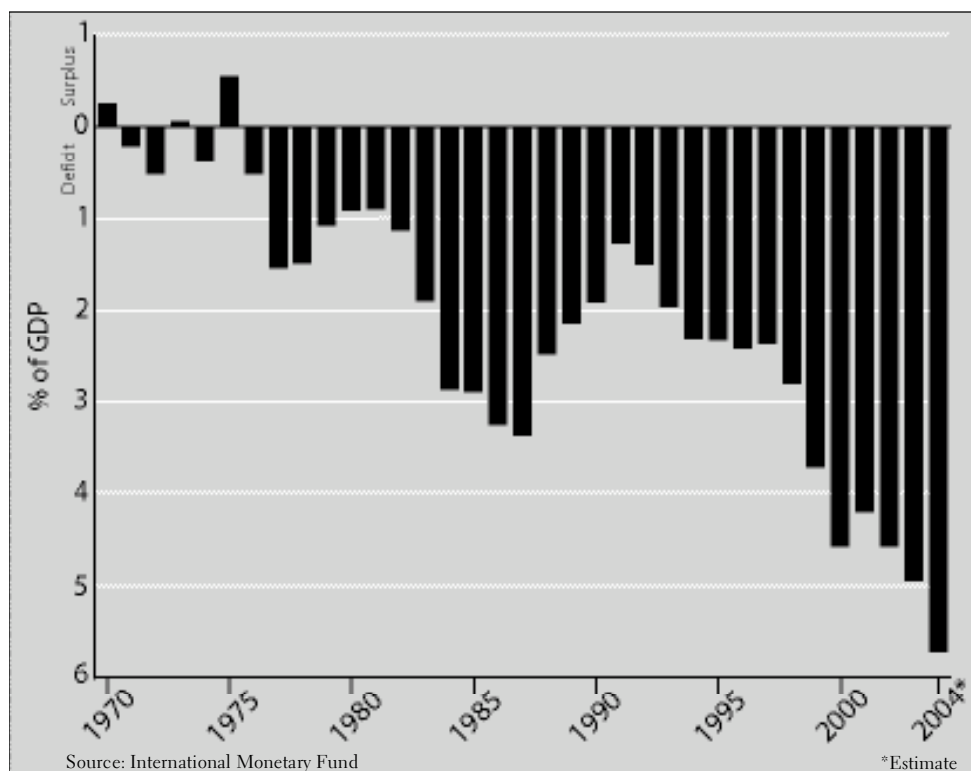
By the end of the 1960s, however, after U.S. gold holdings shrank and the Japanese and German economies began to grow faster than the U.S. economy, foreign central banks became reluctant buyers of U.S. dollar securities. Fearing Washington's wrath, however, they were hesitant to use their dollars to buy gold from the U.S. Treasury, even when the risk of a devaluation of the U.S. dollar became more apparent: They held more dollars than they wanted.

In the second half of the 1970s, the acceleration of the U.S. inflation rate led to a run on the dollar. Investors were concerned that the increase in inflation would lead to a lower value for the dollar in the foreign-exchange market, which would re-

duce the value of their holdings. Their sales of the dollar produced the very result they feared.

This decline in the value of the dollar during the late 1970s is one more example of the way that cross-border transactions in money and securities drive changes in the foreign-exchange value of national currencies and induce changes in a country's trade balance. When real interest rates on U.S. dollar securities declined during the late 1970s, investors wanted to move from them into securities denominated in the German mark and other European currencies. First, however, they had to sell dollars and buy German marks. Their sales caused the dollar to depreciate sharply. As dollars flowed in and marks flowed out, the United States developed a capital account deficit. To fulfill its role as the balance wheel of international finance, the United States needed to develop a trade surplus that

America's Growing Trade Imbalance (Current account as a percentage of GDP)



America's rapidly growing trade deficit was on pace to exceed \$600 billion at the end of 2004.

The China Bubble

In the future, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes,” Andy Warhol once predicted. There is a corollary to Warhol’s notion that helps explain the unusual economic events of recent decades: Every country grows rapidly for 15 years. The classic case is Japan, which enjoyed extraordinary growth in the 1950s and ’60s as industrial firms invested heavily to repair the devastation of World War II. When a country experiences such rapid growth, interest rates and business profits are high (unless they are regulated). Foreign capital flows into the country as outsiders seek to purchase its securities and assets, and its currency therefore tends to appreciate.

Then, when the country’s growth rate slows, the supply of capital exceeds the opportunities for productive investment at home, and the country shifts from being an importer of foreign funds to an exporter of its own funds. The dampening of Japan’s rate of economic growth in the 1970s and, especially, the ’80s was accompanied by a decline in business investment relative to household saving. When Tokyo relaxed financial regulations in the 1980s, there was a rapid increase in the flow of funds leaving the country. In the first half of the decade, Japanese investors bought lots of U.S. Treasury securities and real estate. Later, Japanese firms became big purchasers of American companies: Sony bought Columbia Records and then Columbia Pictures, and its rival Matsushita bought MGM Universal. The implosion of Japan’s asset price bubble in the early 1990s further reduced attractive investment opportunities at home and only served to accelerate the outflow of funds from Japan. One result is that Japan now owns 39 percent of all outstanding U.S. Treasury securities.

The pattern in most of the other countries on the Asian rim—Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea—follows Japan’s. They have become large buyers of U.S. dollar securities as their growth rates have slowed.

China’s economic transformation is the most recent in Asia, and in its pace, it is even more remarkable. Each country’s strategy has been to grow the economy by using a low value for its currency to increase exports, and the yuan has been kept even cheaper than other Asian currencies. But China’s bubble has been caused chiefly by the character of the Chinese financial system, which is dominated by four large government-owned banks. Because China is such a big country, management of its banks is very decentralized; branch managers in the provincial cities are less responsive to headquarters than to local politicians and governments that constantly press them to provide loans for investment in enterprises and infrastructure. To these banks, profitability and solvency are alien concepts. China is the land of “evergreen finance,” where lenders are willing to include the future interest payments in the loan amount, and where there is little expectation by borrowers or lenders that bank loans will be repaid. As a result, there is too much investment in China’s capacity to produce goods relative to the growth in domestic household demand for these goods.

The experience in other Asian countries suggests that, when China’s bubble implodes, its rate of economic growth will slow, probably dramatically, as business investment declines. Household savings will increase, and the growth of consumer spending will slow. More Chinese money will flow into U.S. securities and real assets (China already is the second-largest owner of U.S. Treasury securities after Japan.) China’s trade surplus will swell as business firms increase their exports in response to the reduction of growth at home. And just as the U.S. trade deficit increased after bubbles burst in Japan and Southeast Asia, so it will surge again when the Chinese trade surplus increases.

—R.Z.A.

would produce offsetting receipts in German marks. No decision was made. The weaker dollar made it easier to sell American products overseas.

Then, soon after U.S. Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker announced his tough new anti-inflation policy in 1979, investors became convinced that the U.S. inflation rate would decline sharply. Now they wanted to sell securities denominated in the mark and other European currencies and buy U.S. dollar securities—but first they had to buy dollars in the foreign-exchange market. Their purchases caused the dollar to appreciate (even though the U.S. inflation rate was higher than the rates in Germany and other countries). As the American capital account swung back into surplus, the U.S. trade balance correspondingly went into deficit.



Nearly every one of the foreign financial crises of recent decades, from Mexico's in the early 1980s to Argentina's in 2001, has led to an increase in the U.S. trade deficit. The story is straightforward.

Before the crisis, money tended to flow toward these countries because their rates of economic growth were impressive and the anticipated rates of return on capital were high. When the first crisis hit Mexico and other developing countries in the early 1980s, the sharp depreciation of their currencies led to a marked increase in their exports relative to their imports, and the U.S. trade deficit climbed to provide global consistency. When the Japanese bubble imploded at the beginning of the 1990s, the Japanese trade surplus surged, and the American trade deficit again grew correspondingly. Most dramatically, the sharp depreciation of the Thai baht and other Asian currencies in 1997 was mirrored by a rise in the value of the dollar, and it led to a very rapid improvement in Asian countries' combined trade balances of \$155 billion annually. Correspondingly, the U.S. trade deficit increased by \$155 billion.

Why? Because the Asians used virtually all of their \$155 billion in new export earn-

ings to repay U.S. dollar loans and to buy U.S. dollar securities. That provided the equivalent of a flow of \$155 billion in foreign savings to the United States. This inflow could have produced three results: an increase in U.S. domestic investment, a reduction in domestic saving, or an increase in the federal government's deficit. The operation of the invisible hand ensures that all of the changes would add up to \$155 billion.

Business investment may have increased by \$30 billion, or even \$40 billion, as a result of the decline in the cost of capital (in the form of lower interest rates). And the U.S. government's deficit disappeared during the late 1990s because tax revenues soared in the economic boom. Therefore, most of the impact of the surge in the flow of foreign saving led to a reduction in American saving.

The much-lamented decline in the U.S. saving rate during the 1990s was the inevitable result of the surge in the flow of foreign savings to the United States. It worked this way: The Americans who sold securities to foreign investors used the cash to buy other securities from other American investors, and the transactions necessarily occurred at higher prices. Those investors then used *their* cash to buy securities from other Americans at still-higher prices, and so on. As stock prices and household wealth increased, more and more Americans achieved their wealth objectives, so they reduced their saving from current income and spent more on cars, computers, and vacations.

When the implosion of the bubble in U.S. stock prices in 2000 reduced household wealth, the Federal Reserve sharply and aggressively reduced short-term interest rates—to keep consumers spending, and thereby counter the deflationary effects of the implosion.

Today, the U.S. saving rate remains low because of the continued displacement of American saving by foreign saving. But America's reliance on foreign saving is excessive: The nation's international indebtedness is increasing at much too rapid a rate. The inevitable adjustment will require that Americans' household saving rate increase as reliance on foreign saving declines.



Few of the overseas investors who found the dollar so attractive in the 1980s and '90s were concerned that their investments in the United States might move America into a non-sustainable international financial position—a position that would ultimately lead, among other things, to significant losses in the domestic value of their U.S. dollar securities. But that is precisely what is happening.

The United States today is in a position similar to that of Mexico in 1980, Norway in 1987, and Thailand and Mexico in the early 1990s. These countries paid the interest on their international indebtedness with some of the funds received from the inflow of new foreign investments. The United States is now doing the same thing. It is engaging in Ponzi finance, and the game will soon be up.

By the end of 2004, America's net international indebtedness had increased by some \$500 billion for the year, reaching \$3 trillion. Its international indebtedness has been increasing at an annual rate of 16 percent, while its GDP has been growing at a six percent rate. In the long run, international indebtedness simply cannot increase more rapidly than GDP. If it did, foreigners would, in theory, eventually end up owning all the assets and securities in the United States. As a practical matter, policy adjustments or the market will ensure that this does not happen.

Predicting the timing and pace of the unavoidable transition to a sustainable situation is hazardous. Yet such a transition is inevitable. The needed adjustments in the United States and other countries could occur without significant effects on employment and inflation or major disruptions in the foreign-exchange market, but the likelihood of such a "soft landing" is small.

The primary variable that must change is the U.S. trade deficit. It must decline to between \$100 billion and \$200 billion a year from its current level of around \$600 billion. The purpose of paring back the trade deficit is to reduce the growth rate of America's foreign indebtedness. The target value for the trade balance is deter-

mined by the difference between the maximum sustainable growth rate of that debt (i.e., the growth rate of America's GDP) and U.S. net payments of investment income to foreign creditors. Back-of-the-envelope calculations suggest that the necessary reduction of the trade deficit amounts to between \$350 billion and \$450 billion, a significant drop from today's level of \$600 billion. Because U.S. net external liabilities increase year after year, the longer the delay before the trade deficit is reduced, the larger the needed reduction.

The decline in the trade deficit must be matched by a comparable increase in annual savings (and therefore slower growth in Americans' consumption) and in U.S. production of trade-able goods. While the longer-term results will be positive, the process of achieving them may be extremely painful, including rising rates of inflation, interest, and unemployment, and possibly a severe economic recession. Consider these changes:

—Since the annual flow of foreign savings to the United States will decline by, say, \$400 billion, domestic savings must increase by the same amount. This means that the rate of growth of household consumption spending will slow.

—The production of tradable goods in the United States—exports and import-competing goods—must increase by \$400 billion. As the trade deficit grew from \$200 billion in 1997 to \$600 billion in 2004, \$400 billion of productive resources shifted from the production of tradable goods (such as cars, foodstuffs, and aircraft) to the production of nontradable goods (such as retail trade, education, and food services). That shift will be reversed. Since jobs in the tradable goods sector generally pay better, the number of relatively well-paid jobs will inevitably increase.

—The increase in the production of tradable goods eventually will lead to an increase in federal tax revenues. There are two reasons for this. First, the value added per employee is higher in the tradable goods sector than in the nontradable goods sector, so employees will have more taxable income. Second, as new investment enlarges the tradable goods sector, unem-

ployment is likely to decrease.*

Global consistency requires that the trade and current account surpluses of the countries that now have such surpluses must decline by \$400 billion. The problem is that it is hard to find a country that believes its trade surplus is too large or that its holdings of international reserve assets are too large. Indeed, the implication of the slower growth that lies in store for China and other Asian countries is that their demand for U.S. dollar securities will increase—and so will the U.S. trade deficit. But that can't happen, because the capacity of the United States to adjust to the excesses in foreign countries is nearly exhausted. There is great potential for more conflict between the United States and its trading partners.

The key to achieving a soft landing is a steady decline in foreign demand for U.S. dollar securities of perhaps \$100 billion a year for the next three to four years. If the decline is too rapid, the value of the dollar could plummet, while inflation and interest rates on U.S. dollar bonds surge.

Although the value of the dollar has been declining in the foreign-exchange market for much of the past three years, that decline has not yet reduced either the flow of foreign savings to the United States or the growth rate of America's net international indebtedness. A modest increase in the pace of dollar depreciation might lead to a soft landing. But there are a multitude of other scenarios. For example, an initial modest

*The increase in the U.S. government's deficit in recent years is partly a product of the growth of America's trade deficit. The trade deficit has had three different effects on the government's deficit. The first is transitional in nature: As the trade deficit increases, resources that had been employed in the tradable goods sector become unemployed before they shift to the non-tradable goods sector, thus reducing the tax base. The second effect is longer lasting: When these resources become re-employed, the likelihood is high that people in the new jobs in the non-tradable goods sector will have lower wages and thus pay less in taxes. The third effect works in the opposite direction: The flow of foreign saving to the United States means that the interest rates on U.S. Treasury securities are lower than they otherwise would have been, and so the cost of servicing the government's debt is reduced. However, the negative influence of the first and second effects is significantly larger than the third.

depreciation of the U.S. dollar could seem to hedge-fund managers and momentum traders like a clarion call to "short" the U.S. dollar, by betting on further declines. The central banks in Asia and Europe would then find themselves between the proverbial rock and a hard place. They would feel tremendous pressure from their politicians to buy dollars to prevent the value of their own currencies from rising quickly, and thus hurting exports and domestic employment. But the banks would also recognize the risk in this course: The more Treasury bonds and other U.S. securities they held, the more they would stand to lose as the dollar dropped in value. If this fear were to rule, the dollar could fall far and quickly, inflicting heavy damage on the American economy and others as well.

How this latest episode in monetary history plays out is largely beyond anybody's control. The outlook is far from encouraging. But it is within our means to ensure that the next several decades are not as tumultuous as the past three have been.

A longer-term perspective on monetary history suggests that periods of monetary stability—with low inflation rates and stable prices for currencies in the foreign-exchange market—alternate with periods of instability. The periods of instability are transitions from one type of international financial arrangement to another. The 19th century brought an era of stability based on a gold standard that was managed by the Bank of England. The period between the two world wars was a time of unprecedented instability associated with the transition in monetary stewardship or hegemony from Great Britain to the United States, which culminated after World War II in the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates. The 1950s and '60s were decades of remarkable growth and monetary stability. Since the early 1970s, when the Bretton Woods system collapsed, we have been in another transition, and the turmoil will continue until we devise a new global financial architecture that is better suited to the realities of the contemporary world economy. □



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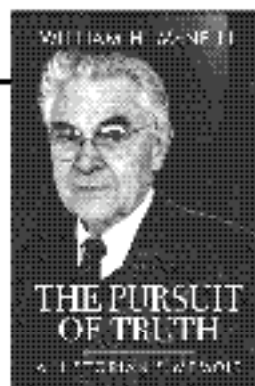
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Paper Moon

Nearly 170 years ago, an upstart New York City newspaper reported that an astronomer had discovered life on the moon. For days, the paper regaled its readers with tales of winged humanoids and intelligent beavers, and the public bought the story. Why did so many readers believe it?

by Paul Maliszewski

On August 21, 1835, close readers of *The New York Sun* perhaps noticed a terse announcement tucked away on page 2 regarding “astronomical discoveries of the most wonderful description.” John Herschel, a British astronomer working at the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, was responsible for these breakthroughs, and was assisted in his endeavor by “an immense telescope of an entirely new principle.” The announcement—a single sentence, really—was reprinted, as was the lazy custom then, from another publication, in this case *The Edinburgh Courant*, and it ended there, without word on what the discoveries were, exactly.

Four days later, on August 25, the *Sun* made good on its tease, delivering the first of several lengthy extracts purportedly from *The Edinburgh Journal of Science* and written by an assistant to Herschel lucky enough to have witnessed the exciting dis-



coveries. What followed was a lumpy blend of rhetorical ponderousness, technical details about the power of Herschel’s telescope, invocations of the Creator and his “mysterious works,” and a good bit of promotion and self-congratulation.

The article began a bit dryly, particularly for the *Sun*, which had, since its founding less than two years earlier, made local crime stories its specialty. If it bled, it led at the *Sun*, where the news was conveyed, for a penny a day, with a flippant smirk. The *Sun* prided itself on giving its working-class readers colorful tales from the streets and not the



sort of daily updates on the government that they were sure to find in the more respectable, better-established six-cent papers, which they were unable to afford.

But on this occasion, if on no other, the *Sun* republished news from the world outside lower Manhattan. “We have the happiness of making known to the whole civilized world,” it said, “recent discoveries which will build an imperishable monument to the age in which we live, and confer upon the present generation a proud distinction through all future time.” All this

Daily life on the surface of the moon, as depicted in this 1835 lithograph, shows the native population of man-bats relaxing in a bucolic paradise shared with an assortment of cranes, gazelles, and unicorns.

sounded not unlike a tiresome introduction to a far more interesting keynote speaker, but the gist of the discoveries attributed to Herschel was, at long last, made plain: He had “obtained a distinct view of objects in the moon, fully equal to that which the unaided eye commands of terrestrial objects at the distance of a hundred yards,” and “affirma-

The Great Moon Hoax

tively settled the question whether this satellite be inhabited, and by what order of beings.” In other, fewer words: Herschel had discovered life on the moon. He had seen it with his telescope. In the supplements to come, readers could expect “engravings of lunar animals.” Other pictures, the paper promised, would follow.

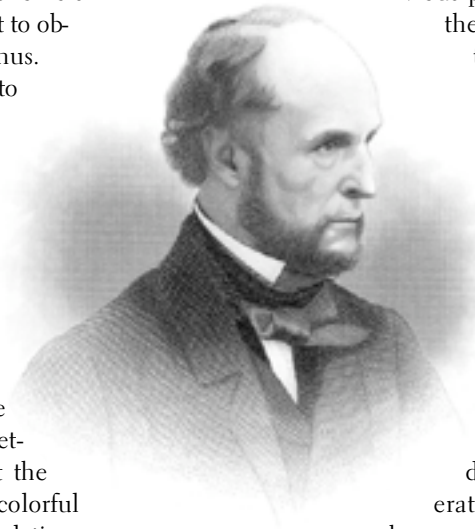
The publication of this newspaper series is remembered even today as one of America’s most elaborate hoaxes. The lone fact that helped substantiate the more outrageous passages was that Herschel was a real astronomer of popular renown who came from a family of famous astronomers—his father was the first to observe and name Uranus.

The hoax was meant to be a satire, or such was the later claim of its real author, a *Sun* reporter who concocted the fictions with the blessing of his editor. The objects of that satire were overheated scientific prose and editors of competing newspapers. But the articles were also a colorful byproduct of the circulation wars that papers then fought as they tried to woo advertisers and attract readers. The *Sun*’s moon hoax might illustrate the gullibility of American audiences, which is well known by now, or the cynicism of journalists and editors, which was well known even then, but it may also suggest answers to some remarkable questions: In 1835, what did people believe? What seemed to them true or, at least, possible and even likely? What did they assume, however naively, science and technology might one day achieve?

New Yorkers lived on an island that was already, by spurts of growth and periods of rapid development, filling up and slowly expanding to the north. Canal Street, today the generally accepted dividing line between upper and lower Manhattan, was the city’s northernmost

street through the 1820s. By 1849, the city had moved north to 14th Street, leaving the rest of the island still covered by dense forest, with a few scattered farms and the temporary camps of those who couldn’t afford housing in the city itself. When such drastic changes were unfolding daily in plain view, was it really inconceivable that a scientist would spy miraculous creatures on the surface of the moon?

Richard Adams Locke didn’t think so. Locke, who was born and educated in Britain, had founded the *London Republican*, a newspaper that failed for the obvious political reasons, and then the *Cornucopia*, a magazine that folded when readers



After an unsuccessful journalistic career in England, Richard Locke gave his imagination free rein as head writer for The New York Sun.

didn’t warm to its mix of literature and science. In 1832, he moved to New York and quickly found ample work as a writer. Locke became highly sought after and well paid, in part because most other reporters then were printers first and writers second, if at all. For a while, Locke worked for a penny paper that competed with the *Sun* and was covering the sensational murder trial—no murder trial lacked sensation to a writer for a penny paper—of Robert Matthias, a.k.a. Matthias the Prophet, who killed one of his followers and then claimed first to be Jesus and then God himself. The *Sun*’s publisher asked Locke to write for his paper, too, on the side, and Locke agreed. In a few months, he went from writing about a fraudulent prophet in White Plains, New York, to becoming the *Sun*’s head writer, to fabricating a fake vision of the moon.

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The *Sun* didn't typically publish articles on important national and world affairs. Its motto was "It Shines for All," which sounded optimistic enough and may even have been true, but the *Sun* did not illuminate all. It didn't cover partisan politics. It didn't feature long, intelligent treatments of public affairs. When Iowa and Wisconsin were admitted to the Union, the newspaper devoted three lines to the news. This was not a publication that strived, in the best tradition, to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Rather, the *Sun* did its best to entertain the comfortable and the afflicted alike.

Still, it filled a void, shedding some light on a New York that ordinary New Yorkers experienced firsthand. At the beginning of the 19th century, most newspapers were specialized publications, tailored primarily to merchants who depended on the announcements of ship arrivals and their cargoes, as well as information on trade and commodity prices. Most of these papers could claim fewer than 2,000 subscribers. But by 1830, just before the dawn of the *Sun*, 47 newspapers were being published in New York, 11 of them dailies. The more than 270,000 people who resided in the city in 1835 enjoyed extraordinary media diversity. They could read trade papers, abolitionist papers, newspapers affiliated with political parties, a Catholic paper and an anti-Catholic paper, immigrant papers, a labor paper, and business sheets, among many others. *Freedom's Journal*, an African-American newspaper, began publishing in 1837.

Into this noisy, competitive market strode the *Sun* and its rivals, the other penny papers. Each was an upstart, and each busily tried to win readers over with lively, sometimes slang-filled writing, an intriguing headline, or a story nobody else had told. According to Frank Luther Mott, whose indispensable history of American journalism remains unequalled to this day, more than 40 years after its first publication, the penny papers owed their success to new technology—namely, faster, more efficient, steam-driven printing presses. The economic depression of 1833 also helped

drive customers toward these cheaper papers. But it was their writing that made them truly popular. They steered clear of both high-toned political editorializing and the sort of dry data featured in the mercantile newspapers, finding instead a voice equal to the energy and enthusiasm apparent in the fast-growing city of New York.

The *Sun* splashed its stunning announcement of life on the moon across the front page. But the paper's editors treated the scoop as if their readers would be in no great rush to get to it, letting them dive instead into a bewildering, almost interminable description of Herschel's second telescope (the first was cracked), how it was constructed, what, exactly, it was made of, and how it differed from his father's, which he had inherited. The article made time also for leisurely forays into such arcane subjects as the history of telescopes, the history of astronomy, and the universe as it was then known. It's hard to imagine Locke, the unsigned mastermind behind the hoax, establishing the credibility and authenticity of his science fiction any more slowly. His moon hoax moved at



John Herschel was credited with building the telescope that revealed life on the moon.

such a glacial pace—and the writing is so apparently sound and sober—that readers of the day likely found it difficult to recognize that they were being teased at all, let alone completely had. And so, in that first dispatch, on August 25, Locke stuck to the seemingly factual, disclosing, for example, that Herschel’s telescope measured 24 feet across. It weighed “nearly seven tons after being polished” and had a magnifying power of 42,000 times—enough, according to the article, to reveal “objects in our lunar satellite of little more than eighteen inches in diameter.” Further details about any actual lunar discoveries remained few, until the following morning’s edition.

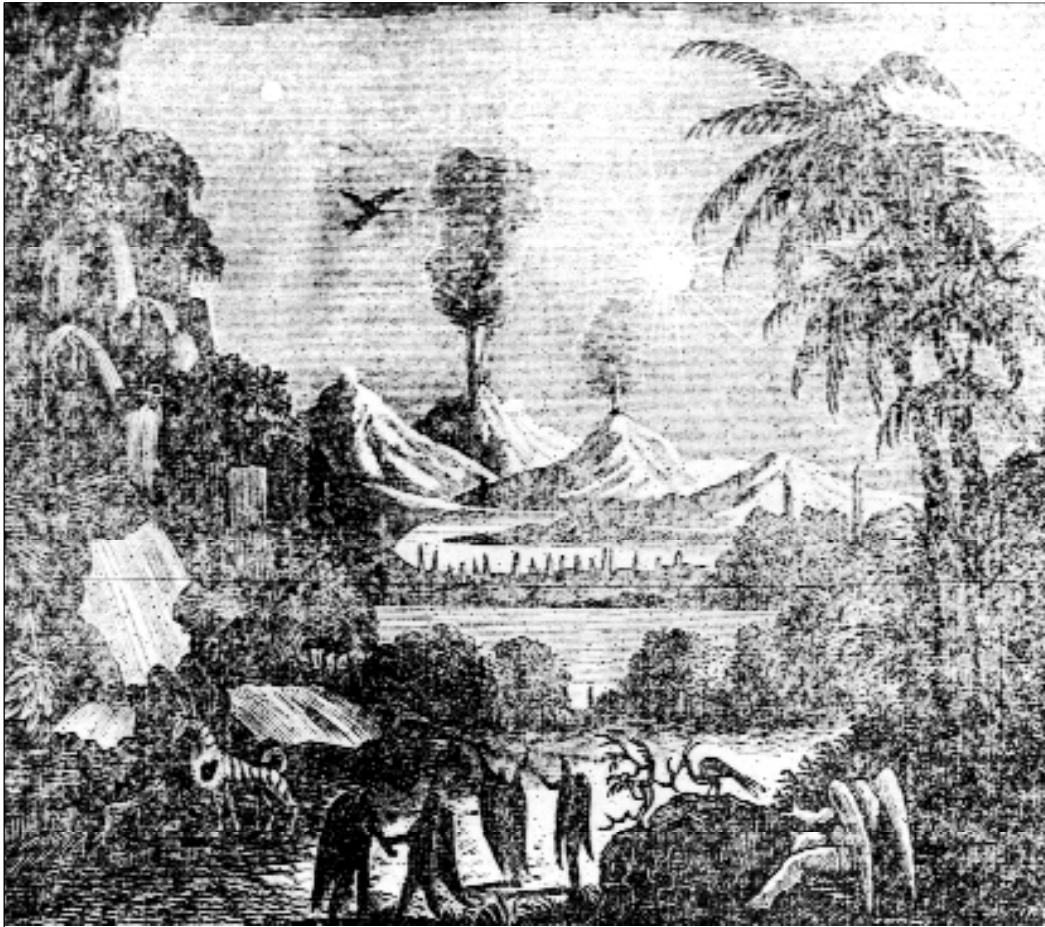
By then, the *Sun* had acquired quite a readership, overwhelming its team of newsboys and taxing its printing presses. The *Sun* took “scrupulous care” to correct its earlier report, explaining that the Herschel telescope had in fact cost £70,000 and not \$70,000—thus cleverly reinforcing the larger story’s credibility, observes Ormond Seavey, a George Washington University English professor, in his 1975 introduction to a reprint of Locke’s moon hoax. As Herschel and his assistants panned that considerably pricier telescope across the surface of the moon, what they saw was breathtaking, a wilderness idyll. A broad green plain gave way to a deep forest with trees unlike any they had seen—except, one assistant suggested, for “the largest kind of yews in the English churchyards.” One discovery followed on the heels of another. The narrator—allegedly a junior scientist and member of Herschel’s team who had recorded the group’s observations for the benefit of the scientific community—was ecstatic. “Then appeared as fine a forest of firs,” he said, “unequivocal firs, as I have ever seen cherished in the bosom of my native mountains.”

Not all the moon’s flora was so familiar. Herschel, according to the account, discovered a long chain of slender, obelisk-shaped pyramids the color of lilacs that stretched for 30 to 40 miles. His assistants thought them architectural, the bold monuments of a new race of people, but the senior scientist, soberly and quite reasonably, pronounced them “quartz formations,” no doubt from the “wine-colored amethyst

species.” The formations measured between 60 and 90 feet tall. None of the scientists had ever seen such crystals, but they kept their heads, took notes, and made observations, sticking as best they could to the scientific method. Locke, who studied science as an amateur, permitted his narrator a few controlled lyrical exaltations, but always steadied these emotional, highly charged moments with more even-keeled passages informed by reason, logic, and scholarship.

On a lunar beach, while Herschel and his team watched, a “strange amphibious creature,” perfectly spherical in shape, rolled into and out of the telescope’s frame. Not far away, in “a perfect zone of woods” surrounding a quiet valley more than 20 miles wide, “small collections of trees, of every imaginable kind, were scattered about the whole of the luxuriant area.” Locke’s narrator, breathless and excited, added, “Our magnifiers blest our panting hopes with specimens of conscious existence.” The scientists discovered bison in that perfect zone. They resembled the bison on Earth, except that they were slightly smaller and had a “fleshy appendage over the eyes.” Locke has his fictional Herschel hypothesize that the cap must protect the lunar bison from “the extremes of light and darkness.” It stood to reason; other creatures, after all, were similarly equipped. Not far away, in the same valley, a blue goat ran and sprang about like “a young lamb or kitten.” The scientists derived “the most exquisite amusement,” watching the goat and its playmates come into view. The telescope supposedly cast images of all these wonderful discoveries onto a large screen, much in the manner of an invention that wouldn’t appear for another six decades, the movie projector. Scientists played at catching the image of a particularly agile goat, “attempting to put our fingers upon its beard,” only to see it “bound away into oblivion, as if conscious of our earthly impertinence.”

Even more extraordinary details followed in the third report, published the next day, and readers in greater numbers flocked to the paper to read it. They found sto-



The New York Sun later elaborated on its hoax with this fanciful lithograph of the lunar landscape.

ries of volcanoes, and glimpses of more bison, a larger species it seemed, red and white birds taking wing, long-tailed birds assumed to be like golden and blue pheasants, moose, elk, a small reindeer, a horned bear, and a petite zebra, about three feet high, “which was always in small herds on the green sward of the hills.” Herschel and his team identified 38 new species of trees and nine mammals in all, including a sophisticated beaver that walked upright, “carri[ed] its young in its arms like a human being,” and lived in primitive but well-constructed huts. “From the appearance of smoke in nearly all of them,” said the *Sun* dispatch, “there is no doubt of [the beaver’s] being acquainted with the use of fire.”

With the publication of the fourth and most sensational installment, on August 28, the *Sun* became the most widely circulated periodical in the world. Regular

subscribers in New York City already numbered 15,440. With sales in Brooklyn, out-of-town orders, and purchases direct from the boys who hawked the freshly printed fabrications in the street, total circulation now came to 19,360. The *Times* of London, by comparison, sold 17,000 copies. In order to satisfy demand, the *Sun*’s presses ran 10 hours a day. People wishing to purchase a copy hung around outside the offices until three in the afternoon, on the mere rumor of a later reprint edition. Those who could get their hands on a copy of the new excerpt read about the greatest discovery of all: humanlike creatures on the moon. No journalist before or since Locke has buried a lead so deep.

These beings, who averaged four feet in height and had yellow faces and shocks of copper-colored hair on their heads, flew with the aid of long, thin, almost translucent wings, which they could fold neatly behind them. The scientists likened their

wings to those of bats, and named the Lunarians *Vespertilio-homo*, Latin for man-bat. The man-bats' "attitude in walking," the Herschel team reported, "was both erect and dignified." They lived in pastoral bliss, spending "their happy hours in collecting various fruits in the woods, in eating, flying, bathing, and loitering about on the summits of precipices." Locke lavished many words on the happiness of his creations. The man-bats, for example, whose beauty "appeared in our eyes scarcely less lovely than the general representations of angels by the more imaginative schools of painters," lived without apparent strife. "The universal state of amity among all classes of lunar creatures, and the apparent absence of every carnivorous or ferocious species, gave us the most refined pleasure, and doubly endeared to us this lovely nocturnal companion of our larger, but less favored world."

On the moon, the valleys were always lovely and green, and the hills, mountains, and promontories were so often described as beautiful—sometimes snow-white marble, sometimes semi-transparent crystal—that Locke's fictional young scientist apologized for "the poverty of *our* geographical nomenclature" and reflected on the difficulty of portraying the physical features in what words he had, writing, "However monotonous in my descriptions, [they] are of paradisiacal beauty and fertility, and like primitive Eden in the bliss of their inhabitants."

At a time when the United States was fast becoming more industrialized and crowded and its citizenry increasingly and bitterly divided by the question of slavery, it can be no accident that the *Sun's* postcards from the moon became such objects of fascination. From a branching river filled with slow-moving water birds to thick veins of gold visible on the surface, there for the easy taking, to hills topped by crystals of such intense yellow and orange that the scientists supposed them on fire, every paragraph opens its own idyll and provides further evidence of a happy, flourishing pastoral society. Locke's fabrication was elaborate, but it was also wishful.

New Yorkers had good reason to betray a weakness for tales of such an Eden. Social stresses of every sort—between black and white; Protestant and Catholic; immigrants and the Europeans who styled themselves natives; gang leaders, whose members took control of the streets in June 1835, and the elected officials who depended on them for help in getting out the vote; bosses and their laborers—led to regular and often bloody confrontations. Social inequality increased each year, as the standard of living for many declined. Coal stoves, gas lights, and ice boxes were available, but remained unaffordable for most citizens, for whom oil lamps, candles, and regular trips into the uptown forest for firewood remained the order of the day. Most people in the city rented, and most renters endured close quarters, disease, and squalor, note Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace in *Gotham* (1998), their magisterial history of early New York.

The roads were either crudely cobbled or unpaved, and traffic was unregulated, a free-for-all. Pigs ran through the streets, at liberty to root for food or eat trash. In a rare show of concern about sanitary conditions a few years before the *Sun's* moon hoax, city officials corralled the hogs, which enraged their owners and touched off a conflict that boiled and cooled over two years, leading eventually to widespread rioting—a prologue to the tragic anti-abolitionist riots of 1833 (which won just the usual slight treatment in the *Sun*). Tennessee congressman Davy Crockett, not anyone's idea of an urban sophisticate, visited New York for the first time and published a ghostwritten account of his unpleasant trip the same year Locke's fantasy took hold. "I do think I saw more drunk folks, men and women, that day, than I ever saw before," Crockett wrote of one impoverished working-class neighborhood on which the *Sun* depended for readers. According to Luc Sante, the author of *Low Life* (1991), a history of the city's seamy side in the years between 1840 and 1919, Crockett also saw people whom he characterized as "worse than savages" filling the streets. They burned the straw from their beds. Their cellars were "jam full of people." Crockett quickly had enough. He turned to his guide and said, "God deliver me from such con-

stituents, or from a party supported by such.”

Little wonder that, in the face of such grim living conditions, New Yorkers developed a taste for the pastoral idylls found in escapist literary fare such as James Fenimore Cooper’s romantic sagas and Washington Irving’s *A History of New York* (1809), a satire that nevertheless presented the young, shallow city with a deep, vibrant, nearly mythical cultural history to call its own. Locke merely had the bright idea to relocate Eden to outer space. Yes, his moon hoax was a complete fantasy, but it masqueraded as fact and relied on details that were all too easy to believe. On Earth, the numbers of bison and beavers dwindled, decimated by the fur trade. On Locke’s moon, the animals thrived.

Locke’s stories were widely read, and reprinted as quickly as the new pages could be set in type. The *Sun* published a special pamphlet edition in which it compiled all the articles. It sold all 60,000 copies in less than a month, at an unheard-of 13 cents per copy. Herschel’s breakthroughs were debated heatedly and evaluated by a contingent of scientists from Yale College (who believed them). The articles were praised (“The promulgation of these discoveries creates a new era in astronomy and science generally”) and damned, with hardly a paper passing up the chance to reprint some of the articles. One rival paper even published a parody.

Then, on August 31, *The Journal of Commerce* unmasked Locke as the author and declared his work a fraud. Other papers echoed the charges, but the hoax could not be killed so easily. Newspapers routinely denounced one another, often just for the sake of competition and the public attention that loud denunciations inevitably earned. Locke responded to the charges, rebutting them in a letter first printed in the pages of another newspaper. He insisted “as unequivocally as the words can express it, that I did *not* make those discoveries”—but did so disingenuously, as a way to fan the flames. To the *Sun*, any criticism of the moon hoax merely extended its life and increased sales. The newspaper gladly reprinted the charges of its critics.

In mid-September, after weeks of back-and-forth among the city’s papers, the *Sun* broke its own silence about the hoax in order to suggest, not very helpfully, that the story had a “useful effect in diverting the public mind, for a while, from that bitter apple of discord, the abolition of slavery.” In a way, the editors couldn’t have been any more honest. The moon hoax had been an entertaining diversion indeed, and not just from slavery. New Yorkers had any number of bitter apples to chew on. Their apartments were in shambles and the streets ran thick with sewage. Internecine social tensions simmered, then boiled over into full-blown riots.

Though the *Sun* had willingly sacrificed any chance for a reputation built on accuracy, it continued to grow. In December 1835, when the paper reported on the devastating fire that tore through Wall Street and burned 20 blocks, sending up flames that were visible in Philadelphia, an English paper in China reprinted the article—in the aftermath of the moon hoax, the *Sun*’s stories were read the world over—but counseled its readers not to get drawn in by another trick. By August 1836, one year after Locke’s first words about Herschel’s wonderful discoveries, the *Sun* was publishing 27,000 copies daily, nearly 6,000 more than all 11 of the city’s six-cent papers combined.

While the *Sun* came in for periodic drubbing, if not open disdain, both during and after the hoax, Locke was not without his fans. P. T. Barnum, himself no stranger to hoaxes, declared Locke’s work “the most stupendous scientific imposition upon the public that the generation with which we are numbered has known.”

Edgar Allan Poe was another famous, though slightly more grudging, admirer. Three weeks before Locke’s first article appeared, Poe had published the first part of his story “The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall” in the *Southern Literary Messenger*. In the story, Pfaall builds a ship and travels to the moon in order to escape his considerable financial debts on Earth, a plot development no doubt inspired by the impoverished writer’s own wishful thinking. Poe intended to continue the tale with at least one more episode, detailing Pfaall’s landing on

the moon and relating what he found there. Once Locke's articles began to appear, however, Poe abandoned the story. He felt sure that Locke had read his work (Locke said he hadn't) and stolen the idea (the stories are not that similar in their detail or design). Over the years Poe backed away from his claim, but remained bitter about the attention the hoax received and continued to poke holes in Locke's shabby science, if only to illustrate how unaccomplished it was even as a piece of fiction. The telescope, Poe calculated, was nowhere near powerful enough for Herschel to see what had been claimed. Still, Poe, who could be gracious only when he really tried, did admire what Locke had made: "Not one person in ten discredited it, and (strangest point of all!) the doubters were chiefly those who doubted without being able to say why—the ignorant, those uninformed in astronomy, people who *would not* believe because the thing was so novel, so entirely 'out of the usual way.' A grave professor of mathematics in a Virginian college told me seriously that he had *no doubt* of the truth of the whole affair!"

John Herschel, the real-life astronomer who unknowingly lent his good name and considerable fame to Locke's fiction, did not learn of the articles and his supposed discoveries until weeks later. News traveled slowly then, and Herschel was working in South Africa. By the time he heard of it, the hoax had appeared in its pamphlet form in Hamburg, Naples, London, and Paris. Herschel expressed little more than amusement. His wife, Margaret, had more to say, however, writing her account of the events in a letter to her husband's aunt—also an astronomer (the whole family was forever looking up):

Have you seen a very clever piece of imagination in an American Newspaper, giving an account of Herschel's voyage to the Cape . . . & of his wonderful lunar discoveries? Birds, beasts & fishes of strange shape, landscapes of every colouring, extraordinary scenes of lunar vegetation, & groupes of the reasonable inhabitants of the Moon with wings at their backs, all pass in review before his & his companions' astonished gaze—The whole description is so well *clenched* with minute details & names

of individuals boldly referred to, that the New Yorkists were not to be blamed for actually believing it. . . . It is only a great pity that it *is not true*, but if grandsons stride on as grandfathers *have* done, as wonderful things may yet be accomplished.

Optimism such as Margaret Herschel expressed in her letter was a necessary ingredient for the success of Locke's hoax. Such hopes quiet doubts and, in doing so, make the extraordinary and fictional seem tenable. Those "New Yorkists," many of them, believed what Locke wrote. This is another way of saying that they exhibited the general capacity or, perhaps better, the desire, to believe. They trusted that science made such discoveries possible. They hoped that these wild fancies might one day be matched by reality. And they had faith that ahead lay progress, guided by the breakthroughs of astronomers, scientists, and doctors. All told, they were easy marks.

And yet, as Mrs. Herschel's letter makes clear, that same optimism fuels exploration and scientific inquiry—the hope that healing cures and marvelous inventions await discovery, and distant lands lie unmapped.

Yes, New Yorkers' hope that life existed on the moon was misplaced and ill informed. Worse, it may have excused—or made it all too easy to ignore—the squalid conditions in the country's young cities and the looming political crisis over slavery, among much else that was wrong and in dire need of fixing. Their optimism was unfounded, but it offered the slim possibility of later escape when great problems overwhelmed the few simple solutions available on Earth. That hope may, for the crass and callow, have indicated the easy way out of a messy reality, allowing idle dreamers to slip into the realm of imagination, where consequences are unknown. But hope need not be deemed so escapist or fanciful or even foolish. Rather, it might be understood as a critical impulse, call it a utopian urge, seldom remarked upon and even less respected, to make lives better and improve on what is here and known for real, and to try to form in the future a society that more closely matches Locke's pastoral idyll, where to this day the buffalo still roam. □

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Suzanne Napper,
Business Director

THE REAL WORLD WAR IV

America's political and military efforts in the Middle East go by many names: War on terror. Clash of civilizations. Democratization. But our author argues that all of these undertakings grow from a fateful decision made decades ago that the American way of life requires unlimited access to foreign oil.

by Andrew J. Bacevich

In the eyes of its most impassioned supporters, the global war on terror constitutes a de facto fourth world war: The conflict that erupted with the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon is really a sequel to three previous conflicts that, however different from one another in terms of scope and duration, have defined contemporary history.

According to this interpretation, most clearly articulated by the neoconservative thinker Norman Podhoretz in the pages of *Commentary* magazine, the long twilight struggle between communism and democratic capitalism qualifies as the functional equivalent of World War I (1914–18) and World War II (1939–45). In retrospect, we can see that the East-West rivalry commonly referred to as the Cold War was actually World War III (1947–89). After a brief interval of relative peace, corresponding roughly to the 1990s, a fourth conflict, comparable in magnitude to the previous three, erupted on September 11, 2001. This fourth world war promises to continue indefinitely.

Classifying the war on terror as World War IV offers important benefits. It fits the events of September 11 and thereafter into a historical trope familiar to almost all Americans, and thereby offers a reassuring sense of continuity: We've been here before; we know what we need to do; we know how it ends. By extension, the World War IV construct facilitates efforts to mobilize popular support for U.S. military actions undertaken in pursuit of final victory. It also ratifies the claims of federal authorities, especially those in the executive branch, who insist on exercising "wartime" prerogatives by expanding the police powers of the state and circumscribing constitutional guarantees of due process. Further, it makes available a stock of plausible analogies to help explain the otherwise inexplicable—the dastardly events of September 11, 2001, for example, are a reprise of the dastardly surprise of December 7, 1941. Thus, the construct helps to preclude awkward questions. It disciplines.



During the 1980s Iran-Iraq tanker war, missiles from both sides struck dozens of oil tankers. U.S. warships were sent to patrol the Persian Gulf and keep Arab oil flowing.

But it also misleads. Lumping U.S. actions since 9/11 under the rubric of World War IV can too easily become an exercise in sleight of hand. According to hawks such as Podhoretz, the chief defect of U.S. policy before 9/11 was an excess of timidity. America's actual problem has been quite the reverse.

The key point is this. At the end of the Cold War, Americans said "yes" to military power. Indeed, ever since Vietnam, Americans have evinced a deepening infatuation with armed force, soldiers, and military values. By the end of the 20th century, the skepticism about arms and armies that informed the American experiment from its founding had vanished. Political leaders, liberals and conservatives alike, became enamored of military might. Militarism insinuated itself into American life.

The ensuing affair has had a heedless, Gatsby-like aspect, a passion pursued in utter disregard of any likely consequences. Few in power have openly considered whether valuing military power for its own sake or cultivating permanent global military superiority might be at odds with American principles.

To the extent that some Americans are cognizant of a drift toward militarism by their country, the declaration of World War IV permits them to suppress any latent anxiety about that tendency. After all, according to precedent, a world war—by definition, a conflict thrust upon the United States—changes

everything. Responsibility for world wars lies with someone else: with Germany in 1917, Japan in 1941, or the Soviet Union after 1945. Designating the several U.S. military campaigns initiated in the aftermath of 9/11 as World War IV effectively absolves the United States of accountability for anything that went before. Blame lies elsewhere: with Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, with Saddam Hussein and his Baath Party thugs, with radical Islam. America's responsibility is to finish what others started.

But this militaristic predisposition, evident in the transformation of American thinking about soldiers, the armed services, and war itself since Vietnam, cannot of itself explain the rising tide of American bellicosity that culminated in March 2003 with the invasion of Iraq. We must look as well to national interests and, indeed, to the ultimate U.S. interest, which is the removal of any obstacles or encumbrances that might hinder the American people in their pursuit of happiness ever more expansively defined. Rather than timidity or trepidation, it is unabashed confidence in the strength of American arms, combined with an unswerving determination to perfect American freedom, that has landed us in our present fix.

During the 1980s and 1990s, this combustible mix produced a shift in the U.S. strategic center of gravity, overturning geopolitical priorities that had long appeared sacrosanct. A set of revised strategic priorities emerged, centered geographically in the energy-rich Persian Gulf but linked inextricably to the assumed prerequisites for sustaining American freedom at home. A succession of administrations, Republican and Democratic, opted for armed force as the preferred means to satisfy those new priorities. In other words, a new set of strategic imperatives, seemingly conducive to a military solution, and a predisposition toward militarism together produced the full-blown militarization of U.S. policy so much in evidence since 9/11.

The convergence between preconditions and interests suggests an altogether different definition of World War IV—a war that did not begin on 9/11, does not have as its founding purpose the elimination of terror, and does not cast the United States as an innocent party. This alternative conception of a fourth world war constitutes not a persuasive rationale for the exercise of U.S. military power in the manner pursued by the administration of George W. Bush, but the definitive expression of the dangers posed by the new American militarism. Waiting in the wings are World Wars V and VI, to be justified, inevitably, by the ostensible demands of freedom.

Providing a true account of World War IV requires that it first be placed in its correct relationship to World War III, the Cold War. As the great competition between the United States and the Soviet Union slips further into the past, scholars work their way toward an ever more fine-grained interpretation of its origins, conduct, and implications. Yet as far as public perceptions of the Cold War are concerned, these scholars'

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diligence goes largely unrewarded. When it comes to making sense of recent history, the American people, encouraged by their political leaders, have shown a demonstrable preference for clarity rather than nuance. Even as the central events of the Cold War recede into the distance, the popular image of the larger drama in which these events figured paradoxically sharpens.

“Cold War” serves as a sort of self-explanatory, all-purpose label, encompassing the entire period from the mid-1940s through the late 1980s. And since what is past is prologue, this self-contained, internally coherent, authoritative rendering of the recent past is ideally suited to serve as a template for making sense of events unfolding before our eyes.

From a vantage point midway through the first decade of the 21st century, the commonly accepted metanarrative of our time consists of three distinct chapters. The first, beginning where World War II leaves off, recounts a period of trial and tribulation lasting several decades but ending in an unambiguous triumph for the United States. The next describes a short-lived “post-Cold War era,” a brief, dreamy interlude abruptly terminated by 9/11. The second chapter gives way to a third, still in the process of being written but expected to replicate in broad outlines the first—if only the United States will once again rise to the occasion. This three-part narrative possesses the virtues of simplicity and neatness, but it is fundamentally flawed. Perhaps worst of all, it does not alert Americans to the full dimensions of their present-day predicament. Instead, the narrative deceives them. It would be far more useful to admit to a different and messier parsing of the recent past.

UNABASHED CONFIDENCE
IN THE STRENGTH OF
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For starters, we should recognize that, far from being a unitary event, the Cold War occurred in two distinct phases. The first, defined as the period of Soviet-American competition that could have produced an actual World War III, essentially ended by 1963. In 1961, by acquiescing in the erection of the Berlin Wall, Washington affirmed its acceptance of a divided Europe. In 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Washington and Moscow contemplated the real prospect of mutual annihilation, blinked more or less simultaneously, and tacitly agreed to preclude any recurrence of that frightening moment. A more predictable, more stable relationship ensued, incorporating a certain amount of ritualistic saber rattling but characterized by careful adherence to a well-established set of routines and procedures.

Out of stability came opportunities for massive stupidity. During the Cold War’s second phase, from 1963 to 1989, both the major protagonists availed themselves of these opportunities by pursuing inane adventures on the periphery. In the 1960s, of course, Americans plunged into Vietnam, with catastrophic results. Beginning in 1979, the Soviets impaled themselves on Afghanistan, with results that proved altogether fatal. Whereas the inherent resilience of democratic capitalism enabled the United States to repair the wounds it had inflicted on itself, the Soviet political economy lacked recu-



American foreign policy was never the same after King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia met with President Franklin Roosevelt in 1945 and pledged a steady oil supply in return for U.S. protection.

perative powers. During the course of the 1980s, an already ailing Soviet empire became sick unto death.

The crucial developments hastening the demise of the Soviet empire emerged from within. When the whole ramshackle structure came tumbling down, Andrei Sakharov, Václav Havel, and Karol Wojtyła, the Polish prelate who became Pope John Paul II, could claim as much credit for the result as Ronald Reagan, if not more. The most persuasive explanation for the final outcome of the Cold War is to be found in Soviet ineptitude, in the internal contradictions of the Soviet system, and in the courage of the dissidents who dared to challenge Soviet authority.

In this telling of the tale, the Cold War remains a drama of compelling moral significance. But shorn of its triumphal trappings, the tale has next to nothing to say about the present-day state of world affairs. In a post-9/11 world, it possesses little capacity either to illuminate or to instruct. To find in the recent past an explanation of use to the present requires an altogether different narrative, one that resurrects the largely forgotten or ignored story of America's use of military power for purposes unrelated to the Soviet-American rivalry.

The fact is that, even as the Cold War was slowly reaching its denouement, World War IV was already under way—indeed, had begun two full decades

before September 2001. So World Wars III and IV consist of parallel rather than sequential episodes. They evolved more or less in tandem, with the former overlaid on, and therefore obscuring, the latter.

The real World War IV began in 1980, and Jimmy Carter, of all people, declared it. To be sure, Carter acted only under extreme duress, prompted by the irrevocable collapse of a policy to which he and his seven immediate predecessors had adhered—specifically, the arrangements designed to guarantee the United States a privileged position in the Persian Gulf. For Cold War-era U.S. policymakers, preoccupied with Europe and East Asia as the main theaters of action, the gulf had figured as something of a sideshow before 1980. Jimmy Carter changed all that, thrusting it into the uppermost tier of U.S. geopolitical priorities.

From 1945 through 1979, the aim of U.S. policy in the gulf region had been to ensure stability and American access, but to do so in a way that minimized overt U.S. military involvement. Franklin Roosevelt had laid down the basic lines of this policy in February 1945 at a now-famous meeting with King Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia. Henceforth, Saudi Arabia could count on the United States to guarantee its security, and the United States could count on Saudi Arabia to provide it preferential treatment in exploiting the kingdom's vast, untapped reserves of oil.

THE REAL WORLD WAR IV
BEGAN IN 1980. JIMMY
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From the 1940s through the 1970s, U.S. strategy in the Middle East adhered to the military principle known as economy of force. Rather than establish a large presence in the region, Roosevelt's successors sought to achieve their objectives in ways that entailed a minimal expenditure of American resources and, especially, U.S. military power. From time to time, when absolutely necessary, Washington might organize a brief show of force—in 1946, for example, when Harry Truman ordered the USS *Missouri* to the eastern Mediterranean to warn the Soviets to cease meddling in Turkey, or in 1958, when Dwight Eisenhower sent U.S. Marines into Lebanon for a short-lived, bloodless occupation—but these modest gestures proved the exception rather than the rule.

The clear preference was for a low profile and a hidden hand. Although by no means averse to engineering “regime change” when necessary, the United States preferred covert action to the direct use of force. To police the region, Washington looked to surrogates—British imperial forces through the 1960s, and, once Britain withdrew from “east of Suez,” the shah of Iran. To build up the indigenous self-defense (or regime defense) capabilities of select nations, it arranged for private contractors to provide weapons, training, and advice. The Vinnell Corporation's ongoing “modernization” of the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG), a project now well over a quarter-century old, remains a prime example.



Tehran demonstrators taunt President Jimmy Carter after Iranian students took 66 hostages at the American Embassy in November 1979. The protracted crisis nudged Carter toward greater U.S. commitments in the Middle East, and ultimately hurt his presidency.

By the end of 1979, however, two events had left this approach in a shambles. The first was the Iranian Revolution, which sent the shah into exile and installed in Tehran an Islamist regime adamantly hostile to the United States. The second was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which put the Red Army in a position where it appeared to pose a direct threat to the entire Persian Gulf—and hence to the West's oil supply.

Faced with these twin crises, Jimmy Carter concluded that treating the Middle East as a secondary theater, ancillary to the Cold War, no longer made sense. A great contest for control of the region had been joined. Rejecting out of hand any possibility that the United States might accommodate itself to the changes afoot in the Persian Gulf, Carter claimed for the United States a central role in determining exactly what those changes would be. In January 1980, to forestall any further deterioration of the U.S. position in the gulf, he threw the weight of American military power into the balance. In his State of the Union address, the president enunciated what became known as the Carter Doctrine. “An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region,” he declared, “will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”

From Carter’s time down to the present day, the doctrine bearing his name has remained sacrosanct. As a consequence, each of Carter’s successors has expanded the level of U.S. military involvement and operations in the region. Even today, American political leaders cling to the belief that skillful application of military power will enable the United States to decide the fate not simply of the Persian Gulf proper but of the entire greater Middle East. This gigantic project, begun in 1980 and now well into its third decade, is the true World War IV.

What prompted Jimmy Carter, the least warlike of all recent U.S. presidents, to take this portentous step? The Pentagon’s first Persian Gulf commander, Lieutenant General Robert Kingston, offered a simple answer when he said that his basic mission was “to assure the unimpeded flow of oil from the Arabian Gulf.” But General Kingston was selling his president and his country short. What was true of the three other presidents who had committed the United States to world wars—Woodrow Wilson, FDR, and Truman—remained true in the case of Carter and World War IV as well. The overarching motive for action was preservation of the American way of life.

By the beginning of 1980, a chastened Jimmy Carter had learned a hard lesson: It was not the prospect of making do with less that sustained American-style liberal democracy, but the promise of more. Carter had come to realize that what Americans demanded from their government was freedom, defined as more choice, more opportunity, and, above all, greater abundance, measured in material terms. That abundance depended on assured access to cheap oil—and lots of it.

In enunciating the Carter Doctrine, the president was reversing course, effectively renouncing his prior vision of a less materialistic, more self-reliant democracy. Just six months earlier, this vision had been the theme of a prescient, but politically misconceived, address to the nation, instantly dubbed by pundits the “Crisis of Confidence” speech, though, in retrospect, perhaps better called “The Road Not Taken.”

Carter’s short-lived vision emerged from a troubled context. By the third year of his presidency, economic conditions as measured by postwar standards had become dire. The rates of inflation and unemployment were both high. The prime lending rate was 15 percent and *rising*. Trends in both the federal deficit and the

trade balance were sharply negative. Conventional analysis attributed U.S. economic woes to the nation's growing dependence on increasingly expensive foreign oil.

In July 1979, Carter already anticipated that a continuing and unchecked thirst for imported oil was sure to distort U.S. strategic priorities, with unforeseen but adverse consequences. (When Carter spoke, the United States was importing ap-

proximately 43 percent of its annual oil requirement; today it imports 56 percent.) He feared the impact of that distortion on an American democracy still reeling from the effects of the 1960s. So on July 15 he summoned his fellow citizens to change course, to choose self-sufficiency and self-reliance—and therefore true in-

HOW THE UNITED STATES
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dependence. But the independence was to come at the cost of collective sacrifice and lowered expectations.

Carter spoke that night of a nation facing problems “deeper than gasoline lines or energy shortages, deeper even than inflation or depression.” The fundamental issue, in Carter’s view, was that Americans had turned away from all that really mattered. In a nation once proud of hard work among strong, religious families and close-knit communities, too many Americans had come to worship self-indulgence and consumption. What you owned rather than what you did had come to define human identity. But according to Carter, owning things and consuming things did not satisfy our longing for meaning. Americans were learning that piling up goods could fill the emptiness of lives devoid of real purpose.

This moral crisis had brought the United States to a historic turning point. Either Americans could persist in pursuing “a mistaken idea of freedom” based on “fragmentation and self-interest” and inevitably “ending in chaos and immobility,” or they could opt for “true freedom,” which Carter described as “the path of common purpose and the restoration of American values.”

How the United States chose to deal with its growing reliance on foreign oil would determine which of the two paths it followed. Energy dependence, according to the president, posed “a clear and present danger” to the nation, threatening the nation’s security as well as its economic well-being. Dealing with this threat was “the standard around which we can rally.” “On the battlefield of energy,” declared Carter, “we can seize control again of our common destiny.”

How to achieve this aim? In part, by restricting oil imports, investing in alternative sources, limiting the use of oil by the nation’s utilities, and promoting public transportation. But Carter placed the larger burden squarely in the lap of the American people. The hollowing out of American democracy required a genuinely democratic response. “There is simply no way to avoid sacrifice,” he insisted, calling on citizens as “an act of patriotism” to lower thermostats, observe the highway speed limit, use carpools, and “park your car one extra day per week.”

Although Carter's stance was relentlessly inward looking, his analysis had important strategic implications. To the extent that "foreign oil" refers implicitly to the Persian Gulf—as it did then and does today—Carter was in essence proposing to annul the growing strategic importance attributed to that region. He sensed intuitively that a failure to reverse the nation's energy dependence was sure to draw the United States ever more deeply into the vortex of Persian Gulf politics, which, at best, would distract attention from the internal crisis that was his central concern, but was even more likely to exacerbate it.

But if Carter was prophetic when it came to the strategic implications of growing U. S. energy dependence, his policy prescription reflected a fundamental misreading of his fellow countrymen. Indeed, as Garry Wills has observed, given the country's propensity to define itself in terms of growth, it triggered "a subtle panic [and] claustrophobia" that Carter's political adversaries wasted no time in exploiting. By January 1980, it had become evident that any program summoning Americans to make do with less was a political nonstarter. The president accepted this verdict. The promulgation of the Carter Doctrine signaled his capitulation.

Carter's about-face did not achieve its intended political purpose of preserving his hold on the White House—Ronald Reagan had already tagged Carter as a pessimist, whose temperament was at odds with that of the rest of the country—but it did set in motion a huge shift in U.S. military policy, the implications of which gradually appeared over the course of the next two decades. Critics might cavil that the militarization of U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf amounted to a devil's bargain, trading blood for oil. Carter saw things differently. On the surface the exchange might entail blood for oil, but beneath the surface the aim was to guarantee the ever-increasing affluence that underwrites the modern American conception of liberty. Without exception, every one of Carter's successors has tacitly endorsed this formulation. Although the result was not fully apparent until the 1990s, changes in U.S. military posture and priorities gradually converted the gulf into the epicenter of American grand strategy and World War IV's principal theater of operations.

CHANGES IN U.S. MILITARY
PRIORITIES GRADUALLY
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PRINCIPAL THEATER
OF OPERATIONS.

Even if there were no Soviet Union," wrote the authors of NSC-68, the spring 1950 U.S. National Security Council document that became the definitive statement of America's Cold War grand strategy, "we would face the great problem of the free society, accentuated many fold in this industrial age, of reconciling order, security, the need for participation, with the requirement of freedom. We would face the fact that in a shrinking world the absence of order among nations is becoming less and less tolerable." Some three decades later, with the So-

viet Union headed toward oblivion, the great problem of the free society to which NSC-68 alluded had become, if anything, more acute. But conceiving the principles to guide U.S. policy turned out to be a more daunting proposition in World War IV than it had been during any of the three previous world wars. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, U.S. policymakers grappled with this challenge, reacting to crises as they occurred and then insisting after the fact that their actions conformed to some larger design. In fact, only after 9/11 did a fully articulated grand strategy take shape. George W. Bush saw the antidote to intolerable disorder as the transformation of the greater Middle East through the sustained use of military power.

Further complicating the challenge of devising a strategy for World War IV was the fundamental incompatibility of two competing U.S. interests in the region. The first was a steadily increasing dependence on oil from the Middle East. Dependence meant vulnerability, as the crippling oil shocks of the 1970s,

CARTER DECLARED
WORLD WAR IV, BUT
THE WAR WAS FULLY
ENGAGED ONLY ON
REAGAN'S WATCH.

administered by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), amply demonstrated. As late as World War II, the United States had been the world's Saudi Arabia, producing enough oil to meet its own needs and those of its friends and allies. By the end of the 20th century, with Americans consuming one out of every four barrels of oil produced

worldwide, the remaining U.S. reserves accounted for less than two percent of the world's total. Projections showed the leverage of Persian Gulf producers mushrooming in the years to come, with oil exports from the region expected to account for between 54 and 67 percent of world totals by 2020.

The second U.S. interest in the region, juxtaposed against Arab oil, was Israel. America's commitment to the security of the Jewish state complicated U.S. efforts to maintain cordial relations with oil-exporting states in the Persian Gulf. Before the Six-Day War (1967), the United States had tried to manage this problem by supporting Israel's right to exist but resisting Israeli entreaties to forge a strategic partnership. After 1967, that changed dramatically. The United States became Israel's preeminent international supporter and a generous supplier of economic and military assistance.

The Arab-Israeli conflict could not be separated from World War IV, but figuring out exactly where Israel fit in the larger struggle proved a perplexing problem for U.S. policymakers. Was World War IV a war of blood-for-oil-for-freedom in which Israel figured, at best, as a distraction and, at worst, as an impediment? Or was it a war of blood-for-oil-for-freedom in which the United States and Israel stood shoulder to shoulder in a common enterprise? For the first 20 years of World War IV, the American response to these questions produced a muddle.

During his final year in office, then, Carter initiated America's new world war. Through his typically hapless and ineffectual effort to rescue the Americans held hostage in Iran, he sprinkled the first few dribblets of Amer-

ican military power onto the surface of the desert, where they vanished without a trace. The rescue effort, dubbed Desert One, remained thereafter the gold standard for how not to use force, but it by no means curbed America's appetite for further armed intervention in the region. Ronald Reagan gave the spigot labeled "military power" a further twist—and in so doing, he opened the floodgates. Although Carter declared World War IV, the war was fully, if somewhat haphazardly, engaged only on Reagan's watch.

Reagan himself professed to be oblivious to the war's existence. After all, his immediate preoccupation was with World War III. For public consumption, the president was always careful to justify the U.S. military buildup of the 1980s as a benign and defensive response to Cold War imperatives. All that the United States sought was to be at peace. "Our country has never started a war," Reagan told the annual Veterans of Foreign Wars convention in 1983. "Our sole objective is deterrence, the strength and capability it takes to prevent war." "We Americans don't want war and we don't start fights," he insisted on another occasion. "We don't maintain a strong military force to conquer or coerce others."

This was, of course, at least 50 percent bunkum. During the Reagan era, with the first stirrings of revived American militancy, defense and deterrence seldom figured as the operative principles. In fact, the American military tradition has never viewed defense as anything other than a pause before seizing the initiative and taking the fight to the enemy.

Partisan critics saw Reagan's muscle flexing as the actions of a reckless ideologue unnecessarily stoking old Cold War tensions. Viewing events in relation to Vietnam and the Cuban Missile Crisis, they forecast dreadful consequences. Reagan's defenders, then and later, told a different story: Having intuitively grasped that the Soviet system was in an advanced state of decay, Reagan proceeded with skill and dexterity to exploit the system's economic, technological, and moral vulnerabilities; the ensuing collapse of the Soviet empire proved conclusively that Reagan had gotten things right. Today neither interpretation, Reagan as trigger-happy cold warrior or Reagan as master strategist, is especially persuasive. Assessing the military record of the Reagan years from a post-9/11 perspective yields a set of different and arguably more relevant insights.

Looking back, we can see that the entire Reagan era was situated on the seam between a world war that was winding down and another that had begun but was not yet fully comprehended. Although preoccupied with waging the Cold War, Reagan and his chief advisers, almost as an afterthought, launched four forays into the Islamic world, with mixed results: the insertion of U.S. Marine "peacekeepers" into Lebanon, culminating in the Beirut bombing of October 1983; clashes with Libya, culminating in punitive U.S. strikes against targets in Tripoli and Benghazi in April 1986; the so-called tanker war of 1984–88, culminating in the commitment of U.S. forces to protect the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf; and American assistance throughout the 1980s to Afghan "freedom fighters," culminating in the Soviet army's ouster from Afghanistan. These actions greatly enhanced the ability of the United States to project military power into the region, but they also emboldened the enemy and contributed to the insta-



President Ronald Reagan and wife Nancy comfort the families of seamen killed when Iraqi missiles hit the USS Stark in May 1987. The attack, which Iraq said was a mistake, provoked questions among policymakers about U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf.

bility that drew Reagan's successors more deeply into the region.

The nominal stimulus for action in each case varied. In Lebanon, the murkiest of the four, Reagan ordered marines ashore at the end of September 1982 "to establish an environment which will permit the Lebanese

Armed Forces to carry out their responsibilities in the Beirut area." This was a daunting proposition, given that Lebanon, divided by a civil war and variously occupied by the Syrian army, the Israeli Defense Forces, and (until its recent eviction) the Palestinian Liberation Organization, possessed

REAGAN'S RATIONALE
FOR THE MILITARY
ACTIONS HE ORDERED
AMOUNTED TO AN
EXERCISE IN MYTHMAKING.

neither an effective military nor an effective government and had little prospect of acquiring either. Vague expectations that a modest contingent of U.S. peacekeepers camped in Beirut might help restore stability to Lebanon motivated Reagan to undertake this risky intervention, which ended disastrously when a suicide bomber drove into the marine compound, killing 241 Americans.

In the case of Libya, Muammar al-Qaddafi's declared intention of denying

the U.S. Sixth Fleet access to the Gulf of Sidra, off Libya's coast, had led to preliminary skirmishing in 1981 and again in March 1986. But it was Qaddafi's support for terrorism and, especially, alleged Libyan involvement in the bombing of a Berlin disco frequented by GIs that prompted Reagan to order retaliation.

In the tanker war, Reagan was reacting to attacks perpetrated by both Iran and Iraq against neutral shipping in the Persian Gulf. Since 1980, the two nations had been locked in an inconclusive conflict. As that struggle spilled over into the adjacent waters of the gulf, it reduced the availability of oil for export, drove up insurance rates, and crippled merchant shipping. An Iraqi missile attack on the USS *Stark* on May 17, 1987, brought things to a head. Iraq claimed that the incident, which killed 37 sailors, had been an accident, and offered compensation. The Reagan administration used the *Stark* episode to blame Iran for the escalating violence. In short order, Kuwaiti supertankers were flying the Stars and Stripes, and U.S. forces were conducting a brisk campaign to sweep Iranian air and naval units out of the gulf.

In the case of Afghanistan, Reagan built on a program already in existence but hidden from public view. In July 1979, the Carter administration had agreed to provide covert assistance to Afghans resisting the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's national security adviser, the aim was to induce a Soviet military response, thereby "drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap." When the Soviets did invade, in December 1979, they became bogged down in a guerrilla war against the U.S.-backed mujahideen. Reagan inherited this project, initially sustained it, and then, in 1985, greatly stepped up the level of U.S. support for the Afghan resistance.

At first glance, these four episodes seem to be all over the map, literally and in terms of purpose, means, and outcome. Contemporaneous assessments tended to treat each in isolation from the others and to focus on near-term outcomes. "After the attack on Tripoli," Reagan bragged, "we didn't hear much more from Qaddafi's terrorists." Nonsense, replied critics, pointing to the suspected Libyan involvement (since confirmed) in the bombing of Pan American flight 103 in December 1988 and in the midair destruction of a French DC-10 nine months later. When a ceasefire in 1988 ended the fighting between Iran and Iraq, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger assessed U.S. involvement in the tanker war as a major achievement. "We had now clearly won," he wrote in 1990. With several hundred thousand U.S. troops deploying to the gulf that very same year to prepare for large-scale war, Weinberger's claims of victory seemed, at best, premature.

To be sure, Reagan himself labored to weave together a comprehensive rationale for the various military actions he ordered, but the result amounted to an exercise in mythmaking. To listen to him, all these disparate threats—Sovi-

U.S. MILITARY ACTIONS
EMBOLDENED THE ENEMY
AND CONTRIBUTED TO THE
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et leaders pursuing global revolution, fundamentalists bent on propagating Islamic theocracies, Arab fascists such as Libya's Qaddafi and Syria's Hafez al-Assad, fanatical terrorists such as Abu Nidal—morphed into a single conspiracy. To give way to one element of that conspiracy was to give way to all, so the essential thing was to hold firm everywhere for peace.

Further muddying the waters were administration initiatives seemingly pred-

icated on an assumption that no such overarching conspiracy against peace actually existed, or at least that selective U.S. collaboration with evildoers was permissible. The Reagan administration's notorious "tilt" toward Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq War, offering intelligence and commercial credits to the region's foremost troublemaker—perhaps the final U.S. effort to enlist a proxy to secure its Per-

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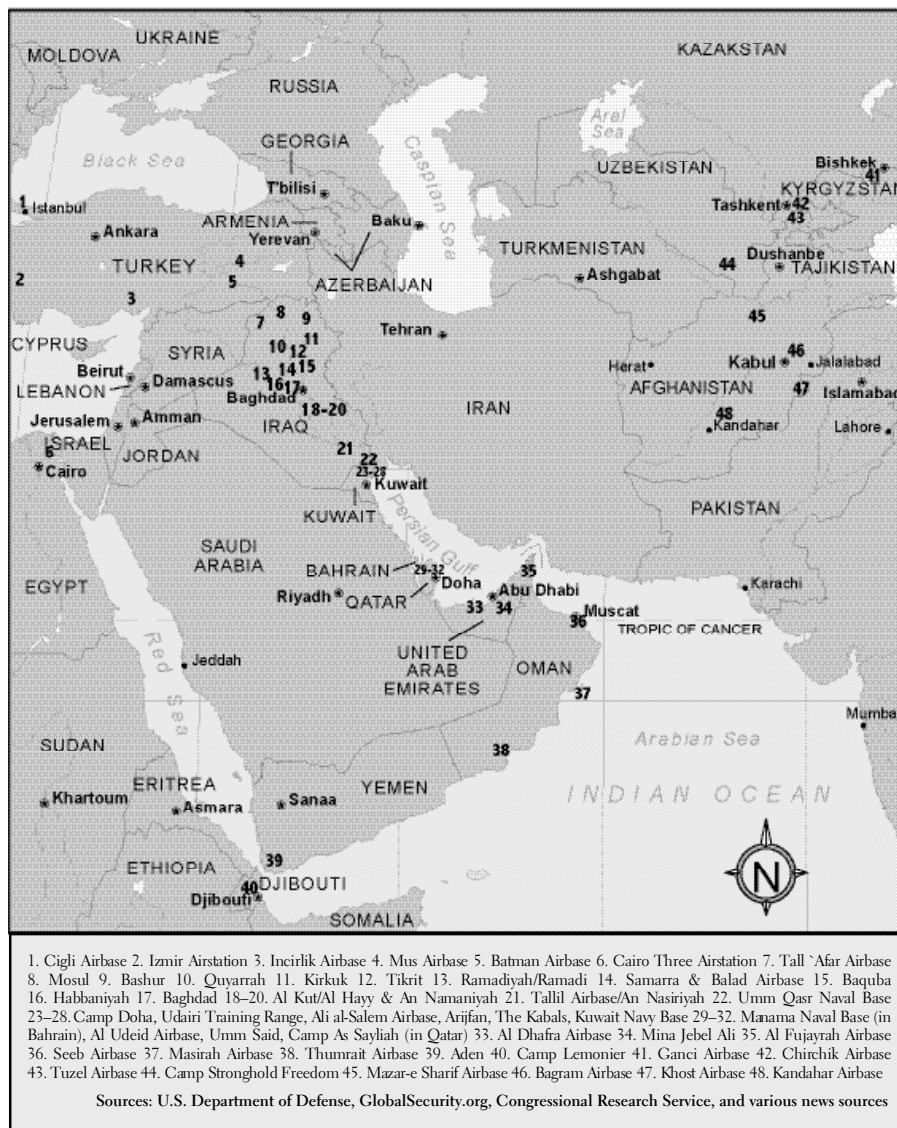
sian Gulf interests—provides one example. Such opportunism made a mockery of Reagan's windy pronouncements regarding America's role as peacemaker and fed suspicions that the president's rhetoric was actually intended to divert attention from his administration's apparent strategic disarray.

Considered from a post-9/11 vantage point, however, Reagan-era uses of force in Lebanon, Libya, Afghanistan, and the tanker war do cohere, at least in a loose sort of way. First, and most notably, all four initiatives occurred in the greater Middle East, hitherto not the site of frequent U.S. military activity. Second, none of the four episodes can be fully understood except in relation to America's growing dependence on imported oil. Although energy considerations did not drive U.S. actions in every instance, they always loomed in the background. Lebanon, for example, was not itself an oil exporter, but its woes mattered to the United States because instability there threatened to undermine the precarious stability of the region as a whole.

The four episodes constituting Reagan's Islamic quartet were alike in one other way. Although each yielded a near-term outcome that the administration touted as conclusive, the actual results turned out to be anything but. Rather, each of the four pointed toward ever-deepening American military engagement.

The true significance of Reagan's several interventions in the Islamic world lies not in the events themselves but in the response they evoked from the U.S. national security apparatus. A consensus emerged that, in the list of pressing U.S. geopolitical concerns, the challenges posed by the politically volatile, energy-rich world of Islam were eclipsing all others, including the size of the Soviet nuclear arsenal and the putative ambitions of the Soviet politburo. Given the imperative of meeting popular expectations for ever-greater abundance (which meant importing ever-larger quantities of oil)—Jimmy Carter's one-term presidency having demonstrated the political conse-

U.S. Military Bases in the Greater Middle East



The United States maintains at least 48 significant military outposts in the Middle East and Central Asia. Because of wartime conditions and the Pentagon's new emphasis on securing shorter-term user rights to foreign facilities—as in Pakistan during the invasion of Afghanistan—rather than establishing U.S.-owned bases, an exact number is difficult to specify.

quences of suggesting a different course—the necessary response was to put the United States in a position to determine the fate of the Middle East. That meant forces, bases, and infrastructure. Only by enjoying unquestioned primacy in the region could the government of the United States guarantee American prosperity—and thus American freedom.

From the outset, *dominance* was the aim and the driving force behind U.S. actions in World War IV—not preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction, not stemming the spread of terror, certainly not liberating oppressed peoples or advancing the cause of women's rights. The prize was mastery over a region that

leading members of the American foreign-policy elite, of whatever political persuasion, had concluded was critically important to the well-being of the United States. The problem, at its very core, demanded a military solution.

In March 1984, Donald Rumsfeld, out of power but serving as a Reagan administration troubleshooter, told Secretary of State George Shultz that Lebanon was a mere “sideshow.” The main show was the Persian Gulf; instability there “could make Lebanon look like a taffy pull.” According to Shultz’s memoir, *Turmoil and Triumph* (1993), Rumsfeld worried that “we are neither organized nor ready to face a crisis there.” In fact, the effort to reorganize was already under way. And here is where Reagan made his most lasting contribution to the struggle to which Jimmy Carter had committed the United States.

Seven specific initiatives figured prominently in the Reagan administration’s comprehensive effort to ramp up America’s ability to wage World War IV:

- The upgrading in 1983 of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, the Persian Gulf intervention force created by Carter after the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan, to the status of a full-fledged regional headquarters, U.S. Central Command.
- The accelerated conversion of Diego Garcia, a tiny British-owned island in the Indian Ocean, from a minor U.S. communications facility into a major U.S. forward support base.
- The establishment of large stocks of supplies and equipment, preloaded on ships and positioned to facilitate the rapid movement of U.S. combat forces to the Persian Gulf.
- The construction or expansion of airbases, ports, and other fixed locations required to receive and sustain large-scale U.S. expeditionary forces in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kenya, Somalia, and other compliant states.
- The negotiation of overflight rights and agreements to permit U.S. military access to airports and other facilities in Morocco, Egypt, and elsewhere in the region to support the large-scale introduction of U.S. troops.
- The refinement of war plans and the development of exercise programs to acclimate U.S. forces to the unfamiliar and demanding desert environment.
- The redoubling of efforts to cultivate client states through arms sales and training programs, the latter administered either by the U.S. military or by American-controlled private contractors employing large numbers of former U.S. military personnel.

By the time Ronald Reagan retired from office, the skids had been greased. The national security bureaucracy was well on its way to embracing a highly militarized conception of how to deal with the challenges posed by the Middle East. Giving Reagan his due requires an appreciation of the extent to which he advanced the reordering of U.S. national security priorities that Jimmy Carter had barely begun. Reagan’s seemingly slapdash Islamic pudding turned out to have a theme after all.

Those who adjudge the present World War IV to be necessary and winnable will see in Reagan’s record much to commend, and may well accord him a share of the credit even for Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. It was Reagan who restored the sinews of American military might after Vietnam, re-fashioned American attitudes about military power, and began reorienting the

Pentagon toward the Islamic world, thereby making possible the far-flung campaigns to overthrow the Taliban and remove Saddam Hussein. George W. Bush pulled the trigger, but Ronald Reagan had cocked the weapon.

Those who view World War IV as either sinister in its motivation or misguided in its conception will include Reagan in their bill of indictment. From their perspective, it was he who seduced his fellow citizens with promises of material abundance without limit. It was Reagan who made the fusion of military strength with American exceptionalism the centerpiece of his efforts to revive national self-confidence. It was Reagan's enthusiastic support of Afghan "freedom fighters"—an emi-

**SADDAM HUSSEIN SOUGHT
REGIONAL HEGEMONY AND
CONTROL OF THE
PREPONDERANT PART
OF THE PERSIAN GULF'S
OIL WEALTH.**

nently defensible position in the context of World War III—that produced not freedom but a Central Asian power vacuum, Afghanistan becoming a cesspool of Islamic radicalism and a safe haven for America's chief adversary in World War IV. Finally, it was Reagan's inconclusive forays in and around the Persian Gulf that paved the way for still-larger, if equally inconclusive, interventions to come.

Throughout the first phase of World War IV, from 1980 to 1990, the United States viewed Iran as its main problem and even toyed with the idea that Iraq might be part of a solution. Washington saw Saddam Hussein as someone with whom it might make common cause against the mullahs in Tehran. During the second phase of World War IV, extending through the 1990s, Iraq supplanted Iran as the main U.S. adversary, and policymakers came to see the Iraqi dictator as their chief nemesis.

Various and sundry exertions ensued, but as the U.S. military profile in the region became ever more prominent, the difficulties with which the United States felt obliged to contend also multiplied. Indeed, instead of eliminating Saddam, the growing reliance on military power served only to rouse greater antagonism toward the United States. Actions taken to enhance Persian Gulf stability—more or less synonymous with guaranteeing the safety and survival of the Saudi royal family—instead produced instability.

Phase two of the war began in August 1990, when Saddam Hussein's army overran Kuwait. From the U.S. perspective, Saddam's aim was clear. He sought to achieve regional hegemony and to control, either directly or indirectly, the preponderant part of the Persian Gulf's oil wealth. Were Saddam to achieve those objectives, there was every likelihood that in due course he would turn on Israel.

So after only the briefest hesitation, the administration of George H. W. Bush mounted a forthright response. At the head of a large international coalition, the nation marched off to war, and U.S. forces handily ejected the Iraqi occupiers and restored the Al-Sabah family to its throne. (Bowing to American pressure, Israel stayed on the sidelines.) Its assigned mission accomplished, the officer corps, led by Colin Powell, had little interest in pressing its luck. The American army

was eager to scoop up its winnings and go home.

The elder President Bush dearly hoped that Operation Desert Storm might become a great historical watershed, laying the basis for a more law-abiding international system. In fact, the war turned out to be both less and more than he had anticipated. No new world order emerged from the demonstration of American military prowess, but the war saddled the United States with new obligations from which came yet more headaches and complications.

Saddam survived in power by brutally suppressing those whom the Bush administration had urged to rise up in opposition to the dictator. After first averting its eyes from the fate of the Iraqi Shiites and Kurds, the administration

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eventually found itself shamed into action. To protect the Kurds (and to prevent Kurdish refugees from triggering a military response by neighboring Turkey, a key U.S. ally), Bush sent U.S. forces into northern Iraq. To limit Saddam's ability to use his army as an instrument of repression, the Bush administration, with British support, declared the

existence of "no-fly zones" across much of northern and southern Iraq. In April 1991, Anglo-American air forces began routine combat patrols of Iraqi airspace, a mission that continued without interruption for the next 12 years. During his final weeks in office, Bush initiated the practice of launching punitive air strikes against Iraqi military targets.

Thus, in the year that followed what had appeared to be a decisive victory in Operation Desert Storm, the United States transitioned willy-nilly to a policy that seemed anything but decisive. As a result of that policy, which the Bush administration called "containment," the presence of substantial U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Persian Gulf, initially conceived as temporary, became permanent. A contingent of approximately 25,000 U.S. troops remained after Desert Storm as a Persian Gulf constabulary—or, from the perspective of many Arabs, as an occupying army of infidels. As a second result of the policy, the United States fell into the habit of routinely employing force to punish the Iraqi regime. What U.S. policymakers called containment was really an open-ended quasi-war.

This new policy of containment-with-bombs formed just one part of the legacy that President Bush bequeathed to his successor, Bill Clinton. That legacy had two additional elements. The first was Somalia, the impoverished, chaotic, famine-stricken Islamic "failed state" into which Bush sent U.S. forces after his defeat in the November 1992 elections. Bush described the U.S. mission as humanitarian, and promised to have American troops out of the country by the time he left office. But when Clinton became president, the troops remained in place. The second element of the legacy Clinton inherited was the so-called peace process, Bush's post-Desert Storm initiative aimed at persuading the Arab world once and for all to accept Israel.

President Clinton was unable to extract from this ambiguous legacy much of tangible value, though not for want of trying. During his eight years in office, he clung to the Bush policy of containing Iraq while ratcheting up the frequency with which the United States used violence to enforce that policy. Indeed, during the two final years of his presidency, the United States bombed Iraq on almost a daily basis. The campaign was largely ignored by the media, and thus aptly dubbed by one observer “Operation Desert Yawn.”

In the summer of 1993, Clinton had also ratcheted up the U.S. military commitment in Somalia. The results proved disastrous. After the famous Mogadishu firefight of October 1993, Clinton quickly threw in the towel, tacitly accepting defeat at the hands of Islamic fighters. Somalia per se mattered little. Somalia as a battlefield of World War IV mattered quite a bit. The speedy U.S. withdrawal after Mogadishu affirmed to many the apparent lesson of Beirut a decade earlier: Americans lacked the stomach for real fighting; if seriously challenged, they would fold. That was certainly the lesson Osama bin Laden drew. In his August 1996 fatwa against the United States, he cited the failure of U.S. policy in Lebanon as evidence of America’s “false courage,” and he found in Somalia proof of U.S. “impotence and weaknesses.” When “tens of your soldiers were killed in minor battles and one American pilot was dragged in the streets of Mogadishu,” crowed the leader of Al Qaeda, “you left the area, carrying disappointment, humiliation, defeat, and your dead with you.”

From Mogadishu onward, the momentum shifted inexorably in favor of those contesting American efforts to dominate the gulf. For the balance of the Clinton era, the United States found itself in a reactive posture, and it sustained a series of minor but painful and painfully embarrassing setbacks: the bombing of SANG headquarters in Riyadh in November 1995; an attack on the U.S. military barracks at Khobar Towers in Dhahran in June 1996; simultaneous attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998; and the near-sinking of an American warship, the USS *Cole*, during a port call at Aden in August 2000.

To each of these in turn, the Clinton administration promised a prompt, decisive response, but such responses as actually materialized proved innocuous. The low point came in late August 1998, after the African embassy

bombings. With the United States combating what Bill Clinton referred to as “the bin Laden network,” the president ordered cruise missile strikes against a handful of primitive training camps in Afghanistan. For good measure, he included as an additional target a Sudanese pharmaceutical factory allegedly involved in the production of chemical weapons. Unfortunately for Clinton, the training camps turned out to be mostly empty, while subsequent investigation

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cast doubt on whether the factory in Khartoum had ever housed any nefarious activity. Although the president spoke grimly of a “long, ongoing struggle between freedom and fanaticism,” and vowed that the United States was “prepared to do all that we can for as long as we must,” the operation, given the code name Infinite Reach, accomplished next to nothing, and was over almost as soon as it began. The disparity between words and actions—between the operation’s

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grandiose name and its trivial impact—spoke volumes. In truth, no one in the Clinton White House had a clear conception of what the United States needed to do—or to whom.

Finally, despite Clinton’s energetic and admirable contributions, the peace process failed to yield peace. Instead, the collapse

of that process at Camp David in 2000 gave rise to a new cycle of Palestinian terrorist attacks and Israeli reprisals. An alienated Arab world convinced itself that the United States and Israel were conspiring to humiliate and oppress Muslims. Just as the Israeli Defense Forces occupied Gaza and the West Bank, so too did the U.S. military seemingly intend to occupy the Middle East as a whole. In Arab eyes, the presence of U.S. troops amounted to “a new American colonialism,” an expression of a larger effort to “seek control over Arab political and economic affairs.” And just as Israel appeared callous in its treatment of the Palestinians, so too did the United States seem callous in its attitude toward Iraqis by persisting in a policy of sanctions that put the burden of punishment not on Saddam Hussein but on the Iraqi people.

The end of the 1980s had found the Reagan administration engaged in a far-reaching contest for control of the Middle East, a *de facto* war whose existence Reagan himself either could not see or was unwilling to acknowledge. Ten years later, events ought to have removed any doubt as to whether the circumstances facing the United States qualified as a war, but the Clinton administration’s insistence on describing the adversary as disembodied “terrorists” robbed those events of any coherent political context. In the manner of his immediate predecessors, Clinton refused to concede that the violence directed against the United States might stem from some plausible (which is not to imply justifiable) motivation—even as Osama bin Laden outlined his intentions with impressive clarity. In his 1996 declaration of jihad, for example, bin Laden identified his objectives: to overthrow the corrupt Saudi regime that had become a tool of the “Zionist-Crusader alliance,” to expel the infidels from the land of the Two Holy Places, and to ensure the worldwide triumph of Islam. But his immediate aim was more limited: to destroy the compact forged by President Roosevelt and King Ibn Saud. A perfectly logical first step toward that end was to orchestrate a campaign of terror against the United States.

For Clinton to acknowledge bin Laden’s agenda was to acknowledge as well that opposition to the U.S. presence in and around the Persian Gulf had a history, and that, like all history, it was fraught with ambiguity. In the Persian Gulf,

the United States had behaved just like any other nation, even as it proclaimed itself democracy's greatest friend. For decades it had single-mindedly pursued its own interests, with only occasional regard for how its actions affected others. Expediency dictated that American policymakers avert their eyes from the fact that throughout much of the Islamic world the United States had aligned itself with regimes that were arbitrary, corrupt, and oppressive. The underside of American exceptionalism lay exposed.

In the annals of statecraft, U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf from FDR through Clinton did not qualify as having been notably harsh or irresponsible, but neither had it been particularly wise or enlightened. Bin Laden's campaign, however contemptible, and more general opposition to U.S. ambitions in the greater Middle East, developed at least in part as a response to earlier U.S. policies and actions, in which lofty ideals and high moral purpose seldom figured. The United States cannot be held culpable for the maladies that today find expression in violent Islamic radicalism. But neither can the United States absolve itself of any and all responsibility for the conditions that have exacerbated those maladies. After several decades of acting as the preeminent power in the Persian Gulf, America did not arrive at the end of the 20th century with clean hands.

Years before 9/11, bin Laden understood that World War IV had been fully joined, and he seems to have rejoiced in the prospect of a fight to the finish. Even as they engaged in an array of military activities intended to deflect threats to U.S. control of the Persian Gulf and its environs, a succession of American presidents persisted in pretending otherwise. For them, World War IV remained a furtive enterprise.

Unlike Franklin Roosevelt, who had deceived the American people but who understood long before December 7, 1941, that he was steadily moving the United States toward direct engagement in a monumental struggle, the lesser statesmen who inhabited the Oval Office during the 1980s and 1990s, in weaving their deceptions, managed only to confuse themselves. Despite endless assertions that the United States sought only peace, Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Clinton were each in fact waging war. But a coherent strategy for bringing the war to a successful conclusion eluded them.

Even as it flung about bombs and missiles with abandon, the United States seemed to dither throughout the 1990s, whereas bin Laden, playing a weak hand, played it with considerable skill. In the course of the decade, World War IV became bigger and the costs mounted, but its resolution was more distant than ever. The Bush and Clinton administrations used force in the Middle East not so much as an extension of policy but as a way of distracting attention from the contradictions that riddled U.S. policy. Bombing *something*—at times, almost *anything*—became a convenient way of keep-

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ing up appearances. Thus, despite (or perhaps because of) the military hyperactivity of the two administrations, the overall U.S. position deteriorated even further during World War IV's second phase.

George W. Bush inherited this deteriorating situation when he became president in January 2001. Bush may or may not have brought into office a determination to finish off Saddam Hussein at the first available opportunity, but he most assuredly did not bring with him a comprehensive, ready-made conception of how to deal with the incongruities that plagued U.S. policy in the greater Middle East. For its first eight months in of-

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fice, the second Bush administration essentially marked time. Apart from some politically inspired grandstanding—shunning an international agreement to slow global warming, talking tough on North Korea, accelerating plans to field ballistic missile defenses—Bush's foreign policy before 9/11 hewed closely to the lines laid down by his predecessor. Although Republicans had spent the previous eight years lambast-

ing Clinton for being weak and feckless, their own approach to World War IV, initially at least, amounted to more of the same.

Osama bin Laden chose this moment to begin the war's third phase. His direct assault on the United States left thousands dead, wreaked havoc with the American economy, and exposed the acute vulnerabilities of the world's sole superpower.

President Bush's spontaneous response to the events of 9/11 was to see them not as vile crimes but as acts of war. In so doing, he openly acknowledged the existence of the conflict in which the United States had been engaged for the previous 20 years. World War IV became the centerpiece of the Bush presidency, although the formulation preferred by members of his administration was "the global war on terror."

When committing the United States to large-scale armed conflict, presidents have traditionally evinced a strong preference for explaining the stakes in terms of ideology, thereby distracting attention from geopolitics. Americans ostensibly fight for universal values rather than sordid self-interest. Thus, Franklin Roosevelt cast the war against Japan as a contest that pitted democracy against imperialism. The Pacific war was indeed that, but it was also a war fought to determine the future of East Asia, with both Japan and the United States seeing China as the main prize. Harry Truman and his successors characterized the Cold War as a struggle between a free world and a totalitarian one. Again, the war was that, but it was also a competition to determine which of two superpowers would enjoy preponderant influence in Western Europe, with both the Soviet Union and the United States viewing Germany as the nexus of conflict.



A burning oil well darkens the landscape after the Iraqi retreat from Kuwait in 1991.

During its preliminary phases—from January 1980 to September 2001—World War IV departed from this pattern. Regardless of who happened to be occupying the Oval Office, universal values did not figure prominently in the formulation and articulation of U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf. Geopolitics routinely trumped values in the war. Everyone knew that the dominant issue was oil,

with Saudi Arabia understood to be the crown jewel. Only after 9/11 did values emerge as the ostensible driving force behind U.S. efforts in the region—indeed, throughout the greater Middle East. On September 11, 2001, World War IV became, like each of its predecessors, a war for “freedom.” To this theme President George W. Bush has returned time and again.

In fact, President Bush’s epiphany was itself a smoke screen. His conversion to the church of Woodrow Wilson left substantive U.S. objectives in World War IV unaltered. Using armed might to secure American preeminence across the region, especially in the oil-rich Persian Gulf, remained the essence of U.S. policy. What changed after 9/11 was that the Bush administration was willing to pull out all the stops in its determination to impose America’s will on the greater Middle East.

In that regard, the administration’s invasion of Iraq in March 2003 can be said to possess a certain bizarre logic. As part of a larger campaign to bring the perpetrators of 9/11 to justice, Operation Iraqi Freedom made no sense at all and was probably counterproductive. Yet as the initial gambit of an effort to transform the entire region through the use of superior military power, it not only made sense but also held out the prospect of finally resolving the incongruities bedeviling U.S. policy. Iraq was the “tactical pivot”—not an end in itself but a way station. “With Saddam gone,” former counter-terrorism official Richard Clarke has written in *Against All Enemies* (2004), “the U.S. could reduce its dependence on Saudi Arabia, could pull its forces out of the Kingdom, and could open up an alternative source of oil.”

Pulling U.S. forces out of Saudi Arabia did not imply removing them from the region; a continuing American troop presence was necessary to guarantee U.S. access to energy reserves. But having demonstrated its ability to oust recalcitrants, having established a mighty striking force in the center of the Persian Gulf, and having reduced its susceptibility to the oil weapon, the United States would be well positioned to create a new political order in the region, incorporating values such as freedom, democracy, and equality for women. A Middle East pacified, brought into compliance with American ideological norms, and policed by American soldiers could be counted on to produce plentiful supplies of oil and to accept the presence of a Jewish state in its midst. “In transforming Iraq,” one senior Bush administration official confidently predicted, “we will take a significant step in the direction of the longer-term need to transform the region as a whole.”

Bush and his inner circle conceived of this as a great crusade, and, at its unveiling, a clear majority of citizens also judged the preposterous enterprise to be justifiable, feasible, and indeed necessary. At least two factors help to explain their apparent gullibility.

The first is self-induced historical amnesia. Shortly after 9/11, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage growled that “history starts today.” His sentiment suffused the Bush administration and was widely shared among the American people. The grievous losses suffered in the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had rendered irrelevant all that went before—

hence the notable absence of interest among Americans in how the modern Middle East had come into existence, or in the role the United States had played since World War II in its evolution. The events of 9/11 wiped the slate clean, and on this clean slate the Bush administration, in quintessential American fashion, fancied that it could begin the history of the greater Middle East all over again.

There is a second explanation for this extraordinary confidence in America's ability to reorder nations according to its own preferences. The progressive militarization of U.S. policy since Vietnam—especially U.S. policy as it related to the Middle East—had acquired a momentum to which the events of 9/11 only added. The aura that by 2001 had come to suffuse American attitudes toward war, soldiers, and military institutions had dulled the capacity of the American people to think critically about the actual limits of military power. And nowhere had those attitudes gained a deeper lodgment than in the upper echelons of the younger Bush's administration. The experiences of the previous 30 years had thoroughly militarized the individuals to whom the president turned in shaping his global war on terror, formulating grand statements, such as his *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, and planning campaigns, such as the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Theirs was a vision, writes James Mann in *The Rise of the Vulcans* (2004), of "a United States whose military power was so awesome that it no longer needed to make compromises or accommodations (unless it chose to do so) with any other nation or groups of countries."

As the epigraph to his book *Why We Were in Vietnam* (1982), Norman Podhoretz chose a quotation from Bismarck: "Woe to the statesman whose reasons for entering a war do not appear so plausible at its end as at its beginning." For the architects of the global war on terror—George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, and Paul Wolfowitz—it's too late to heed the Iron Chancellor's warning. But the out-sized conflict that is their principal handiwork continues.

As this is written, the outcome of World War IV hangs very much in the balance. American shortsightedness played a large role in creating this war, and American hubris has complicated it unnecessarily, emboldening the enemy, alienating old allies, and bringing U.S. forces close to exhaustion. Yet like it or not, Americans are now stuck with their misbegotten crusade. God forbid that the United States should fail, allowing the likes of Osama bin Laden and his henchmen to decide the future of the Islamic world.

But even if the United States ultimately prevails, the prospects for the future will be no less discouraging. On the far side of World War IV, a time we are not now given to see, there wait others who will not readily concede to the United States the prerogatives and the dominion that Americans have come to expect as their due. The ensuing collision between American requirements and a non-compliant world will provide the impetus for more crusades. Each will be justified in terms of ideals rather than interests, but the sum of them may well doom the United States to fight perpetual wars in a vain effort to satisfy our craving for limitless freedom. □

THE QUEST *for* HAPPINESS

Down through the ages, philosophers and poets, politicians and theologians, friends and strangers have argued about the nature of happiness. They haven't been able to settle on what happiness is exactly, but that hasn't kept them from chasing it down. In the end, and the beginning, too, happiness may be a lot easier to experience than to define.

by Darrin M. McMahon

German philosophers are not noted for their lightheartedness. Consider Hegel, who believed that it was the fate of great men like himself to be denied “what is commonly called happiness.” Hegel conceded that “one may contemplate history from the point of view of happiness,” but he saw the task as essentially futile. “History is not the soil in which happiness grows,” he concluded. “The periods of happiness in it are blank pages.”

But what exactly is this thing that Hegel denied himself and so many others? An emotion, perhaps? Many of us today would probably be quick to describe happiness in that way—as a good feeling or positive mood. Yet the very first taxonomist of the emotions, Aristotle, excluded happiness from his classifications. The list of emotions he provides in the *Rhetoric*, the most complete of several such accounts, includes anger, love, enmity, fear, pity, indignation, envy, and contempt. But “happiness” (*eudaimonia*), is apparently something else. A “certain kind of activity of the soul expressing virtue” is how Aristotle defines the term in the *Nichomachean Ethics*. Encompassing a full and flourishing life, happiness is nothing so cheap as a fleeting feeling or a passing fancy. For in the same way that “one swallow does not make a summer,” one day “does not make a man happy.” Happiness entails “a complete life,” a life lived according to virtue and measured right up to its end. Until that end, a tragic turn or a cowardly choice might bring



sible, to say. As Hegel's predecessor Immanuel Kant rightly observed in trying to establish his own hold on the question, "The concept of happiness is such an indeterminate one that even though everyone wishes to attain happiness, yet he can never say definitely and consistently what it is that he really wishes and wills."

That is a disconcerting realization for any human being. In Kant's case, the slipperiness of happiness meant that it could never be a reliable guide to evaluating moral action. Historians have apparently reasoned along similar lines, concluding that happiness is simply not a useful category of inquiry. But they ignore this great human pursuit at their peril. "How to gain, how to keep, how to recover happiness," William James observed in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, "is in fact for most men at all times the secret motive of all they do, and of all they are willing to endure." The contention that the motive was secret, or at least closely guarded, would help account for the intimate nature of the yearning, its deeply personal bent. And that, in turn, would help account for the conclusion of James's contemporary, Sigmund Freud, who maintained that happiness is "something essentially subjective."

Agreeing with James that the desire for happiness is a universal impulse, Freud stressed that this impulse is nonetheless so idiosyncratic and opaque as to be hidden in most cases from the outside observer. "No matter how much we may shrink with horror from certain situations—of a galley-slave in antiquity, of a peasant during the Thirty Years' War, of a victim of the Holy Inquisition, of a Jew awaiting a pogrom—it is nevertheless impossible for us to feel our way into such people" to divine the secrets of their subjective feelings. This was reason enough for Freud to dismiss as a futile endeavor writing the history of happiness. It was simply too difficult "to form an opinion whether and in what degree men of an earlier age felt happier and what part their cultural conditions played in the matter." "It seems to me unprofitable," Freud concluded, "to pursue this aspect of the problem any further."

Few would deny that happiness is most often a subjective proposition, especially if one defines the critical term, as Freud himself did, largely in terms of pleasure and pain. For this reason, the proposed "felicific calculus" of the British utilitarian Jeremy Bentham has never proved a particularly useful mathematics: It is impossible to write equations with unstable variables. As Bentham's predecessor and another close student of happiness, John Locke, had already pointed out in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*:

The mind has a different relish, as well as the palate; and you will as fruitlessly endeavor to delight all men with riches or glory, (which yet some men place their happiness in) as you would to satisfy all men's hunger with cheese or lobsters; which, though very agreeable and delicious fare to some, are to others extremely nauseous and offensive. . . . For as pleasant tastes depend not on the things themselves but their agreeableness to this or that particular palate, wherein there is great variety: So the greatest happiness consists, in the having those things, which produce the greatest pleasure; and in the absence of

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those, which cause any disturbance, any pain. Now these, to different Men, are very different things.

Though all men “aim at being happy,” Locke concluded sensibly enough, they take “various and contrary ways” in pursuit of that end, down as many paths as there are palates. To follow them all would be an exhausting exercise.

But what if one were to consider happiness not as a private emotion or a universal moral end—neither the subjective relish for pleasure nor the common telos of virtue—but, rather, as an idea? Doing so would allow one to treat this mysterious yearning like any other abstract notion—freedom, or justice, or truth—evaluating ideas of happiness as they have taken shape and evolved over time, tracing their genealogy, and following their representations in different cultural contexts. If we acknowledge that happiness itself is an idea, and a powerful one at that, it should not surprise us, for example, that Marx and Engels considered happiness to be an integral part of their system, nothing less than the solution to the riddle of history. “The overcoming of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people,” Marx observed famously in his “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” “is the demand for their real happiness.” Alas, what “real happiness” might actually entail is never revealed by Marx. But what *is* revealing—at least when it comes to treating happiness as a historical concept—is his insistence that we can attain it on our own, in the space once occupied by God.

True, Marx’s stress on human agency is not in itself without precedent. A similar emphasis had long occupied the Greeks. Indeed, Aristotle’s attempt to locate happiness in virtue was part of a much broader effort to wrest happiness from forces over which we have little or no control: fate, the gods, the movement of the stars. As St. Augustine, an important theoretician of happiness in his own right, once observed, it was actually Socrates who first considered in detail the question that would draw the “sleepless and laborious efforts” of all subsequent classical philosophers: the question of the necessary conditions for happiness. “What being is there who does not desire happiness?” Socrates asks his companions in Plato’s early dialogue *Euthydemus*. “Well, then . . . since we all of us desire happiness, how can we be happy?—that is the next question.”

In exploring the “necessary conditions” of happiness, Socrates ran up against what might be called the “tragic tradition of happiness,” a tradition that achieved its clearest expression on the Athenian stage of the fifth century B.C.E., but that was in fact much older and more widespread. The belief that our happiness is ultimately out of our hands—“tragically” controlled by fortune, fate, or the gods; governed by the movement of the stars, the actions of our ancestors, or the whims of occult forces and spirits—appears to be a common feature of virtually all traditional cultures. Where life is uncertain and the universe inscrutable, existence continually threatens to subvert our actions and frustrate our best-laid plans. That is the lesson of Greek *tragoidia*, in which the pretension to individual

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agency, the hubris of believing that one can *make* oneself happy, is repeatedly sabotaged and undermined. “No man is happy,” the messenger in Euripides’ *Medea* darkly proclaims. The chorus in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* is bleaker still, bemoaning the “unhappy race”

Of mortal man doomed to an endless round
Of sorrow, and immeasurable woe!

In such a universe, where suffering is inevitable and struggle preordained, the only hope of happiness is through a stroke of good fortune—the miraculous intervention of a god—the *deus ex machina* who whisks down to pluck the tragic hero from peril. To the extent that tragic drama can be said to have a happy ending, that’s it.

It was very much *against* this tragic fatalism (or reliance on the vagaries of chance) that Socrates and his ancient successors directed their own speculations on happiness. Yet they never succeeded in removing entirely the *daimon* from *eudaimonia*—that “demon” or “god” who haunts our every pursuit, that chance, spiritual element threatening always to trip us up or speed us along. Aristotle, for his part, was perfectly candid on this score, admitting that to call happy a man who suffered inordinately at the hands of fortune would be to engage in a “philosopher’s paradox.” The later Stoic attempt to do just that—to argue that the virtuous could be “happy” in even the most horrendous circumstances—would seem precisely such a paradox. It was also a frank admission that Stoics could do relatively little to manage the vagaries of fortune; the best they could do was manage themselves. For most others in the classical world, even those of perfect virtue, happiness retained some connection to what *happened* to them—which, they knew, was something that could never entirely be controlled.

The persistence of this older connection long outlasted the decline of Greece and Rome and is reflected most clearly in the various Indo-European words for “happiness.” Almost all took shape only in the High Middle Ages and early Renaissance, and almost all are directly related linguistically to fortune, chance, or fate. “Happiness” (from the Middle English and Old Norse *happ*, fortune, chance) is thus literally what *happens* to us. When Shakespeare’s Lucentio declares in act 4 of *The Taming of the Shrew* “hap what hap may,” he is paying homage, in a comedy no less, to the endurance of a much older tragic tradition.

Of course, by Shakespeare’s time, all discussion of happiness had been indelibly shaped by another powerful force: Christianity. Jesus of Nazareth’s promise to his disciples—that although “now is your time of grief, I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy” (John 16:22)—had been developed over the centuries into an elaborate theology of happiness that promised unending ecstasy as the reward for earthly privation. This theology, in turn, rested on a theology of sin, which taught, as St. Augustine explained in *The City of God*, that because of our first parents’ original transgression in the Garden of Eden, true happiness was “unattainable

in our present life.” God, Boethius later confirmed, was happiness incarnate (“happiness itself”), and because we would be fully reunited with God only in the eternal life of death, it followed that death was the true happiness of the elect. Forever yearning, the living could hope at most on earth for what Thomas Aquinas called *beatitudo imperfecta*, imperfect happiness, a pale imitation of our heavenly reward. That brought new meaning to the saying “Call no man happy until he is dead.”

Christians certainly disputed who most deserved this ultimate happiness and how it could best be achieved (by human virtue and good works, or solely by the saving grace of God). And they haggled over what signs one might detect in this world of the coming rapture. But not until the 17th and 18th centuries, in that period we now call the Age of Enlightenment, were considerable numbers of men and women exposed to the possibility that they might legitimately hope for happiness everlasting in this life.

The reasons for this monumental transformation were complex, and they were shaped necessarily by multiple factors: developments within the Christian tradition that de-emphasized original sin and reoriented the human gaze in a worldly direction; the general impact of Enlightenment doctrines that stressed happiness and pleasure as human beings’ natural condition and state; and tremendous advances in the technical understanding and mastery of the world. To dance, to sing, to enjoy our food, to delight in our bodies and the company of others—in short, to construct happiness in a place of our own making—was not to defy God’s will but to live as nature intended. This was our earthly purpose, and in a world understood to be governed by natural laws and liberated from the capricious whims of an angry deity or the chaos of fortune, this purpose was eminently realizable. As the English poet Alexander Pope declared,

Oh, happiness, our being’s end and aim!
Good, pleasure, ease, content! Whate’er thy name:
That something still which prompts the eternal sigh,
For which we bear to live, or dare to die.

When, across the Atlantic in 1776, Thomas Jefferson deemed the “pursuit of happiness” a “self-evident” truth, he was merely summarizing a good century of reflection on the subject in Europe and America. By this time, the truth of happiness had been so often and so confidently declared that, for many, it scarcely needed evidence at all. It was indeed, as Jefferson said, self-evident. To secure the “greatest happiness for the greatest number” had become the moral imperative of the century.

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But just how “self-evident” was the pursuit of happiness (to say nothing of its capture)? Was it, in fact, so obvious that happiness was our naturally intended end? To those raised with a classical education, certainly, the idea that all human beings *desired* happiness, and that some, by living exemplary lives of virtue, might actually achieve it, was hardly a novelty. And Christians of all stripes confessed that human beings *pursued* happiness during their earthly pilgrimage; they remained skeptical only about the attainment. For the followers of Jesus, God’s grace was the indispensable criterion, just as a bit of luck was necessary in the reckoning of most ancients. In either case, the elect—the “happy few”—were considered a virtuous elite, blessed by God, favored by fortune, and sanctified through extraordinary conduct.

Resting as it did on the belief that human affairs were not ruled by inscrutable forces (magic, fate, blind chance), and so could be controlled, the doctrine of

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happiness that gained ascendancy in the 18th century intimated something more. Indeed, if the pursuit of happiness was now to be treated as a natural right, applicable in theory to all, was there a right as well to *attain* it? Admittedly, Jefferson said nothing

about a right to attain happiness in the Declaration of Independence; he restricted himself to its pursuit. And elsewhere he could be frankly pessimistic that the chase would ever be brought to a satisfying conclusion. “Perfect happiness . . . was never intended by the Deity to be the lot of one of his creatures,” he specified in a letter of 1763, adding soberly that even “the most fortunate of us, in our journey through life, frequently meet with calamities and misfortunes which may greatly afflict us.” To “fortify our minds” against these attacks, he concluded with a Stoic nod, “should be one of the principal studies and endeavors of our lives.”

Jefferson thus leavened the pursuit of happiness with a healthy measure of tragic realism. But not everyone was so averse to encouraging peoples’ hopes for happiness. Just a month before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the Virginia legislature adopted the text of Jefferson’s close friend George Mason in proclaiming its own Virginia Declaration of Rights. Among “the certain inherent natural rights” of all men, apparently, were those of “pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.” And when, several years later, James Madison put forth his draft of the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the text spoke similarly of a right to “pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.” The lines were ultimately abandoned in committee, leaving no trace at all of happiness in the Constitution.

Yet the idea that human beings should be entitled not only to pursue happiness as they saw fit but to attain it was clearly in the air. When the French revolutionaries issued their Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789, the preamble included a pledge to work for the “happiness of everyone.” The Jacobin constitution of June 24, 1793, took this promise seriously. “The goal of society is common happiness,” it declared in its very first article. That constitution was never put into effect, and Robespierre’s Reign of Terror made a mockery of



A 1952 postcard from the Soviet Union bears the message, “Glory to the Great Stalin, the Constructor of Happiness!”

its opening promise. But the line was nonetheless indicative of a dramatic shift in the nature of human expectations.

In both the Old World and the New, astute commentators in the succeeding decades drew attention to this shift. After his journey to the United States in 1831–32, Alexis de Tocqueville expressed astonishment at the spectacle of the average American’s “futile pursuit of that complete felicity which always escapes him.” In England, Thomas Carlyle reflected on the novelty of the new ethic of happiness and the impossible hopes it raised, observing in *Past and Present* (1843) that nowadays,

Every pitifulest whipster that walks within a skin has had his head filled with the notion that he is, shall be, or by all human and divine laws ought to be, ‘happy.’ His wishes, the pitifulest whipster’s, are to be fulfilled for him; his days, the pitifulest whipster’s, are to flow on in an ever-gentle current of enjoyment, impossible even for the gods. The prophets preach to us, Thou shalt be happy; thou shalt love pleasant things, and find them. The people clamor, Why have we not found pleasant things?

Here, as elsewhere, Carlyle was inclined to bemoan the loss of genuine spirituality amongst the people. “God’s Laws are become a Greatest Happiness Principle,” he lamented. “There is no religion; there is no God; man has lost his soul.” But what he did not fully appreciate, though he himself drew attention to the fact, was that throughout the Western world a new god was taking shape. Whereas, in the fifth century, Boethius could claim that “God is happiness itself,” by the middle of the 19th century, the formula could easily be reversed to read

"Happiness is God." Earthly happiness was emerging as the idol of idols, the locus of meaning in modern life, the source of human aspiration, the purpose of existence, the why and the wherefore.

And yet, as Carlyle did appreciate, this new God was proving to be as mysterious and enigmatic as the old, whether in the form of the "pleasant things" for

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which the people clamored, or the "real happiness" spoken of by Marx. Surely there was nothing "self-evident" about human beings' ability to achieve lasting happiness on earth, especially as a simple byproduct of existence, a right of living, as distinct from a reward for living well. With regard to the pleasant things of capitalism, Tocqueville observed sharply that Americans "clutch everything but hold nothing fast,

and so lose grip as they hurry after some new delight," enticed always by the possibility of a better life, but never resting content with what they have. What was true of Americans' beloved equality, it seemed, was true also of happiness: "Every instant they think they will catch it, and each time it slips through their fingers."

Of course, the pursuit of Marx's "real happiness" would prove much more elusive, and far more destructive. But in the extremes of Marx's theoretical aspirations, and in the awful extent of their practical failure, one can perhaps see more clearly than in the case of liberal democracy a dynamic common to both. Belief in happiness, like an older belief in God, is a type of faith, an assumption about the meaning and purpose of human existence that, for all its perennial appeal, is a relatively recent development in human affairs. Only since the 18th century have we come to assume that human beings, by virtue of being human, *ought* to be happy, and that, if they're not happy, there's something wrong. Anyone who follows that assumption as it collides with the often-painful realities of post-18th-century existence will see clearly what an article of faith it is.

Freud was one such keen observer. "What do [men] demand of life and wish to achieve in it?" he asked in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. "The answer can hardly be in doubt. They strive after happiness; they want to become happy and to remain so." This, in Freudian terms, was the program of the "pleasure principle," the ego's continual yearning for satisfaction. But it was apparent to Freud that this program was eternally frustrated by "reality": by the suffering of our own bodies; by the hardness of the external world, "which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction"; and by our ever-complicated relationships with other human beings. Freud's verdict on the pleasure principle was clear: "There is no possibility at all of its being carried through; all the regulations of the universe run counter to it. One feels inclined to say that the intention that man should be 'happy' is not included in the plan of 'Creation.'"

Freud wrote those words in the aftermath of World War I and on the cusp of the rise of Nazi Germany, so he may be forgiven his note of pessimism. But in actuality, his larger point—that a good deal of suffering was natural to human existence, and that it was an illusion to believe otherwise—was pessimistic only when viewed from the perspective of post-Enlightenment faith. That this faith—the view that human beings ought to be happy by virtue of being human—remains our own probably helps account for the decline in Freud’s fortunes. Whereas he vowed only to transform “hysterical misery into ordinary unhappiness,” his successors have promised therapeutic alchemy of a more dazzling sort. In place of the base metal of ordinary unhappiness, they hold out the gold of authentic happiness that lasts forever.

If such happiness is indeed our final end, then this development is to be welcomed. But we should be clear about the pressures it creates. For along with the rapid strides now being made in the scientific understanding of mood, and the tendency to pathologize unhappiness, our post-Enlightenment faith inevitably pushes us in the direction of compensating for nature when nature fails us in the pursuit of our natural end. If happiness is not, as Freud said, “in the plan of ‘Creation,’” there are those ready to alter the handiwork of our maker to put it there.

That, of course, was the great fear of another of Freud’s contemporaries, Aldous Huxley, for whom genetic engineering and psychopharmacology harnessed in the service of happiness constituted two of the most chilling features of the dystopia he created in *Brave New World*. We are, one hopes, still somewhat far from that world, though not far enough. As Leon Kass and the President’s Council on Bioethics reminded us in a timely report, significantly titled *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness* (2003), the science of mood enhancement is upon us and is rapidly outpacing our readiness to think through its ethical implications. The members of the council argue, rightly, for increased moral reflection to help us understand our situation today and discern what might lie ahead. In the service of that same end, I would put forth the complementary goal of pursuing increased *historical* reflection on the pursuit of happiness.

The late American historian Howard Mumford Jones once observed that to write a history of happiness would be to write “not merely a history of mankind, but also a history of ethical, philosophic, and religious thought.” Although it is not at all clear what a “history of mankind” might be—and few today, in any case, would have the audacity to attempt one—a history of happiness as a history of ethical, philosophic, and religious thought is not only conceivable, it is a necessary first step toward understanding the trajectory of this elusive but tremendously powerful concept. From a gift of fortune to an ethical ideal in the mind of Socrates, from the object of the “ceaseless and laborious efforts” of the philosophers to the summum bonum of Christianity—and well beyond—the idea of happiness has occupied a privileged place in Western culture. It continues to do so today. As the philosopher Pascal Bruckner has observed, “Happiness is the sole horizon of our contemporary democracies.” To bring that vision into better focus, we must take up Hegel’s neglected challenge to “contemplate history from the point of view of happiness.” We must conceive the history of all hitherto-existing society as a history of the struggle for happiness. □

The Ecstatic Pessimist

With the death last year of Czeslaw Milosz, the world lost a Nobel Prize-winning poet and a singular voice of the 20th century. A survivor of Nazism and communism, Milosz refused to regard the world bleakly—or to retreat into the romantic illusions that beckoned to many of his fellow intellectuals. His intimate verses declare the individual's connection to history, his spiritual autonomy, and his innate dignity.

by Robert Royal

I am no more than a secretary of the invisible thing
That is dictated to me and a few others.
Secretaries, mutually unknown, we walk the earth
Without much comprehension. Beginning a phrase in the middle
Or ending it with a comma. And how it all looks when completed
Is not up to us to inquire, we won't read it anyway.
(“Secretaries,” translated by Czeslaw Milosz and Robert Hass)

When Czeslaw Milosz died in August 2004, at the age of 93 and almost 25 years after winning the Nobel Prize for literature, perhaps the most surprising thing about the reaction around the world was not the unbroken praise for a universally admired poet and man but the urgent sense that Milosz matters and that we still have much to learn from him. That might seem a highly improbable view of a writer who was born before World War I in an obscure corner of Europe (the multiethnic Grand Duchy of Lithuania, then part of tsarist Russia), and who, even after more than 30 years of living in the United States, insisted on writing in his native Polish, a language little known outside its natural habitat. Yet despite Milosz's modesty and self-deprecating humor (“I know what was left for smaller men like me: / A feast of brief hopes, a rally of the proud, / A tournament of hunchbacks, literature”), he occupies an indisputably central place in our attempts to understand contemporary culture and the world.

By a curious paradox, it was Milosz's remote origins on the East-West border that gave him so powerful and individual a perspective—as did the additional experience, shared with many of his compatriots, of having been tried in the refiner's fire of successive waves of Nazism and communism. Another poet might have retreated into an aesthetic dreamland, a tactic Milosz deplored in Western or



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Czesław Miłosz in the garden of his Berkeley, California home in 1992.

Eastern European writers. Or he might have turned into the kind of engagé intellectual common in Europe after World War II. But Czesław Miłosz (pronounced CHESS-wahf MEE-wosh) thought that those fashionable figures, whose drug of choice was most often either communism or existentialism, were equally “talking in their sleep.” He moved with simple ease, at great depth, and without flinching through the thorniest modern cultural questions, seeking a more livable world for the human race in what he did not hesitate to call reality.



One sign of his sheer intellectual power is that instead of lapsing into paralysis, the common malady, he turned the very contradictions and challenges into a source of insight. After the war, he underwent a remarkable inward transformation that gave his work, which had already been

strong, still greater resonance. By some strange poetical alchemy, he was able to transmute personal reactions to the world into a wide-ranging and always illuminating confessional poetry—but not the kind of solipsistic confessionalism so familiar to anyone who reads modern verse. Miłosz regarded subjectivism as the primary threat of a decadent age, the flight from reality to romantic illusions that in our time cannot be indulged without inviting disaster. Though he never wrote a single great work, such as a *Divine Comedy* or *Paradise Lost*, he produced, year after year, hundreds of pages of poetry objectively recording the full range of perceptions of someone who had witnessed the titanic struggles and intellectual dead ends of the 20th century. He describes the change in his work this way: “I had written poems on ‘social’ themes and had been bothered by their artificiality. I had practiced ‘pure’ poetry and been no less irritated. Only now had the contradiction vanished. Now even the most personal poem translated a human situation and contained a streak of irony that made it objective. . . . By fusing individual and historical elements in my poetry, I had made an alloy that one seldom encounters in the West.”

The poetry he wrote after World War II carries a fresh current of life. One of the more political poems was so powerful that some of its lines were chiseled decades later on a monument in Gdańsk to slain members of Poland’s heroic union Solidarity: “You who wronged a simple man. . . . Do not feel safe. The poet remembers. / You can kill one, but another is born. / The words are written down, the deed, the date.” In other poems, he is more concerned with capturing ignored truths and moments of insight that may lead to a different kind of life, though he is wary and ironic toward the culture that has to sustain that life:

Treasure your legacy of skills, child of Europe,
Inheritor of Gothic cathedrals, of baroque churches,
Of synagogues filled with the wailing of a wronged people.
Successor of Descartes, Spinoza, inheritor of the word “honor,”
Posthumous child of Leonidas,
Treasure the skills acquired in the hour of terror.
 (“Child of Europe,” translation by Jan Darowski)

Another dimension of Miłosz’s work appears in the imagery here: He is a religious poet, a Catholic of a unique personal cast, despite recurrent doubts. He was repelled early on by the right-wing Polish Catholicism that he often deprecated as merely a “national rite” and deeply marred by anti-Semitism—a trait that did not exist with the same virulence in the more easygoing and diverse Wilno (his preferred name for Vilnius) of his younger days, where there was a large and vibrant Jewish community.

Another great modern Polish poet, Adam Zagajewski, has explained the religious dimension of Miłosz’s work as a defense of “our right to infinity” despite all the well-known contemporary objections: “The telegram Nietzsche sent to inform Europeans of God’s death reached him, of course, but he refused to sign the receipt and sent the messenger packing.” Witty, but perhaps slight-

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ly misleading. Milosz had gotten a good education in Vilnius and had taken deeply to heart the perennial philosophical and theological disputes in the Western tradition. He was no more susceptible to facile disbelief than to blind belief: "My imperviousness to the usually rather shallow progressive-atheist arguments was like the chess player's contempt for cards." But there were challenges of many other kinds all the same.

Of course, he was to be deeply shaken by the political atrocities and perversions that would destroy the social and natural world he had loved as a boy. His mature work tenderly preserves a highly colored and detailed memory of the Lithuanian countryside and his passionate attachment to it, and perhaps the memory is given

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more emotion by the circumstances of exile. He was the kind of boy who had an insect collection, learned the names (often in Latin) of trees, birds, and flowers, and liked kayaking and wilderness camping. He didn't much care for other sports, but no one reading him will take away the picture of a Slavic nerd. He always displays strong masculine energy, combined with great poetic sensitivity toward nature and human value.

In any event, Milosz's active intelligence did not allow him to indulge in mere nostalgia. His unashamed defense of his childhood experience had to confront something that he came to realize even before the political upheavals: The very structure of nature—quite apart from what we humans do to one another—seemed to him pitiless, as did, at times, its Creator. Nature was morally innocent, because its destruction of humanity and the Darwinian survival of the fittest were mechanical, not malicious. But any honest look at our situation had to allow for the indifference of the world, the passing of all things, and the fragility of memory—precious and to be cultivated while it lasted but unable finally to prevail over time. That perception lies behind his often-expressed sympathy for the Manichaeans, the early Christian heretics and their successors who believed that this world must have been created by an evil *daimon*. Goodness and a good God, if one exists, would have to lie beyond this world with its undeniable evils.

So Milosz was not much impressed with Theodor Adorno's later remark that it was impossible to write poetry after Auschwitz. The Shoah was a special evil, but we are deluding ourselves if we do not see that nature itself is continually committing innocent outrages. If the voice of poetry were to be stopped by the mere fact of great evils, then poetry would not be possible in any age. But this bleak vision of nature was not for Milosz the whole picture: "Nothing could stifle my inner certainty that a shining point exists where all lines intersect." He regularly experienced and recorded in his poetry moments of transcendence, even—indeed, especially—when he contemplated nature. To pick only one example out of hundreds, there is this in "Gift," recording a day when he was 60 and living in Berkeley:

A day so happy.
Fog lifted early, I worked in the garden.
Hummingbirds were stopping over honeysuckle flowers.
There was no thing on earth I wanted to possess.
I knew no one worth my envying him.
Whatever evil I had suffered, I forgot.
To think that once I was the same man did not embarrass me.
In my body, I felt no pain.
When straightening up, I saw the blue sea and sails.

(Translation by Czesław Miłosz)

He had experienced similar moments even in the terrifying years before and during World War II, so it was not mere literary affectation when he stated, “I was always an ecstatic pessimist.”

The significance of all this for Miłosz as poet is probably best seen in his 1980 Nobel Lecture. Unlike many such texts before and since, Miłosz’s is no grandiose philosophical sermon. The overarching point to his witty and humane discourse is that, in our time, it is a blessing to be from a small, obscure, and particular place and culture. If you are writing in a little-known language in France or the United States (as Miłosz was), the realization keeps you faithful to “a certain ideal image of a poet, who, if he wants fame, wants to be famous only in the village or town of his birth.” Though to Western ears this sounds like a sure formula for provinciality, it actually leads not to slavery to literary fashion but to serious engagement with concrete things. The poet thus situated is forced into a dialogue between past and present as he looks for a way to adapt an inherited poetic language to express unprecedented circumstances. In Miłosz’s view, being in this position has large repercussions.

To begin with, it enables the poet to avoid the twin dangers of mere traditionalism on the one hand and an empty avant-gardism on the other (the totalitarians, he points out elsewhere, were quite indulgent of avant-gardism because of its ultimate powerlessness; it was the poet who approached reality whom they attacked). The perpetually unsettled state of the poet makes him a restless seeker: “And it may happen that, leaving books behind as if they were dry snake skins, in a constant escape forward from what has been done in the past, he receives the Nobel Prize. What is this enigmatic impulse that does not allow one to settle down in the achieved, the finished? I think it is the quest for reality. I give to this word its naive and solemn meaning, a meaning having nothing to do with philosophical debates of the last few centuries.” Instead, as a child of Eastern Europe in the first half of the 20th century, Miłosz thinks this pursuit of reality—however much derided in more sophisticated milieus—has a central human importance.

The great prestige of science and technology in the 19th and 20th centuries gave rise to regimes based on scientific notions of society; and, with total confidence in themselves, those regimes murdered tens of millions around the globe. One mark of the totalitarian systems was their fear of realities beyond the reach of their systems: “Precisely for that reason, some ways of life, some institutions, became a target for the fury of evil forces, above all, the bonds between people that exist organically, as if by themselves, sustained by family, religion, neigh-

borhood, common heritage. In other words, all that disorderly, illogical humanity, so often branded as ridiculous because of its parochial attachments and loyalties.” Much, of course, depends on the quality of those loyalties, but dismissing them out of hand as “unscientific” led to far greater atrocities than the old order ever produced.



The intellectual background to all this is clearest in *The Captive Mind*, an analysis of the state of intellectuals’ souls under socialism that Milosz published in 1953. The book expanded his visibility enormously in Europe and America. To re-read it today, more than a decade after the fall of Soviet communism, is to be astonished, page after page, not only by the sheer genius of the exposition but by the then-recent defector’s almost superhuman refusal to indulge in simplistic hatred or bitterness. There is nothing in world literature even remotely like *The Captive Mind*, except perhaps Octavio Paz’s *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, which also combines a poet’s sensitivity and intuitiveness with a powerful but sympathetic intelligence about a whole society, of which the writer cannot deny that he is a part.

Milosz had seen both the sign outside the Warsaw ghetto, “Jews, Lice, Typhus,” intended to scare off visitors, and the arrival of the first troops of the Red Army in Warsaw, “led by a young woman, felt-booted and carrying a sub-machine gun.” Like many liberals in the old Poland, he had been revolted by the mindless carnage of the Third Reich (Milosz himself barely escaped one roundup of young Poles who were sent to Auschwitz; several friends, Jews and Gentiles alike,

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were not so lucky). But they thought it might be possible to avoid a stark choice between East and West, and he asserts right off that it would be “wrong to treat their hopes as matter for contempt.” But they—and he—were defeated by a powerful opponent that moved relentlessly into every nook and cranny of daily life.

Milosz tried to find a seam of freedom within the “Diamat,” the orthodox dialectical materialism that the Leninist-Stalinist system introduced everywhere. In recognition of his work, and even though he was not a member of the Communist Party, from 1945 until 1951 he was posted as cultural attaché in the Polish embassies in Paris and Washington, and briefly at the Polish consulate in New York. But the tightening noose of Soviet thought (which Milosz elsewhere allows had only distant connections to real Marxism) caused him to revolt—though not, he specifies, solely for high-minded motives: “A man may persuade himself, by the most logical reasoning, that he will greatly benefit his health by swallowing live frogs; and, thus rationally convinced, he may swallow a first frog, then the second; but at the third his stomach will revolt. In the same way, the growing influence of the doctrine on my way of thinking came up against the resistance of my whole nature.” He defected in France in 1951, and moved to America in 1960 to become a professor of Slavic languages and lit-

erature at the University of California, Berkeley.

The continuing interest *The Captive Mind* holds for the reader lies not in its author's revulsion toward a discredited system but in his penetrating portraits of people. Miłosz uses several friends as matter for analysis, and their pseudonyms already tell much: Alpha, the Moralizer; Beta, the Disappointed Lover; Gamma, the Slave of History; and Delta, the Troubadour. But he does not subject them to ad hominem attacks. Indeed, by selecting friends with whom he still feels some connection, Miłosz, always the poet of the concrete, forces himself to deal with artists and writers in communist countries as real people in specific circumstances, an approach often lost in ideological arguments. They might appear to have sold themselves to tyranny, but "the truth is more involved," and Miłosz did not exempt himself from judgment by that truth.

To begin with, all these individuals, even the ones who considered themselves Catholics, were vulnerable to the creeping nihilism of European thought in recent centuries, a nihilism that had been unintentionally reinforced by Western science and technology. They were horrified by Nazism, whose effects they had seen in their own country. And they did not like Russia very much, even before the old Russian inferiority complex, the deep source of its messianism, was transformed into the new faith of communism. At the same time, they had no confidence in a Western Europe that had self-destructed because it was willing to accept slavery in order to survive (Miłosz made a similar complaint in the 1990s when Europe failed to deal with Bosnia, and he predicted serious consequences). Even America, the first society to have provided for the material welfare of most of its people, and one that still possessed some of the virtues needed to face totalitarianism,

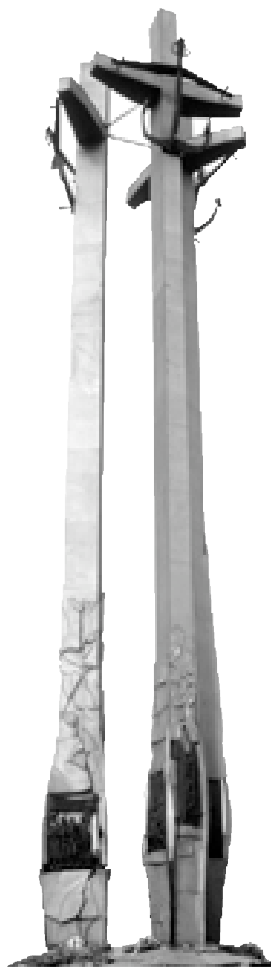
was quite naive about the threats in the world.

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Many of these individuals turned to the practice of *Ketman*, a Persian term Miłosz had encountered in reading about Islam, which justified lying about one's loyalty to the Persian system for the sake of preserving such humane values as can be sheltered in small enclaves. He

records that in Poland people in authority who attempted this difficult balancing act laughed at émigrés who criticized them without understanding the difficult game they were playing. It is astonishing that, in the midst of the East-West struggle and having recently gone into exile, Miłosz had the intellectual balance to let this claim appear for what it was—not an outright exoneration of those who let themselves be drawn into the tangle of untruth, murderous practice, and laudable attempts to mitigate what could not be changed. At the same time, Miłosz's parsing of the whole structure of mendacity is a devastating indictment of a system, if not of the people who were stranded inside it.

Miłosz even allowed that intellectuals in those circumstances had some advantages over their Western counterparts. For one thing, they didn't suffer gladly the triviality of some forms of thought and art from the West: "In the intellectuals



At the Gdańsk shipyard where Solidarity was born, the Solidarity Monument bears the penultimate stanza of this poem by Czesław Miłosz. When Miłosz visited the monument in 1981, after 30 years of exile in the West, members of Solidarity unfurled a huge banner with the message “The People Will Give Strength Unto Their Poet.”

You who wronged

You who wronged a simple man
Bursting into laughter at the crime,
And kept a pack of fools around you
To mix good and evil, to blur the line,

Though everyone bowed down before you,
Saying virtue and wisdom lit your way,
Striking gold medals in your honor,
Glad to have survived another day,

Do not feel safe. The poet remembers.
You can kill one, but another is born.
The words are written down, the deed, the date.

And you’d have done better with a winter dawn,
A rope, and a branch bowed beneath your weight.

(Translation by Richard Lourie)

who lived through the atrocities of war in Eastern Europe there took place what one might call the *elimination of emotional luxuries*. Psychoanalytic novels incite them to laughter. They consider the literature of erotic complications, still popular in the West, as trash. Imitation abstract painting bores them. They are angry—but they want bread, not hors d’oeuvres.” These intellectuals found it difficult to understand how a Westerner such as George Orwell had perfectly intuited life under totalitarianism without ever having experienced it.

Miłosz went out of his way a couple of times in *The Captive Mind* to rebuke Western writers who thought Marxism could be a remedy for social problems in their own countries. A special target was Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet who was a Communist and, later, a fellow Nobel laureate. Miłosz allowed that Neruda might be right about the suffering of the Chilean people “as long as he speaks about what he knows; I stop believing him when he starts to speak about what I know myself. . . . He is wrong . . . when he believes that all the protesting voices of Central and Eastern Europe are the voices of stubborn nationalism or the yelps of wronged reaction.” Miłosz, of course, was both discriminating in his judgments here and bluntly right about the romantic

hopes in communism, but he was sharply criticized by the French Left for that very reason, as was his friend Albert Camus when his own critique of communist illusions, *The Rebel*, appeared. Only with the publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* in the 1970s were large segments of the Western intelligentsia ultimately convinced. Yet Miłosz's book stands as an early and honorable effort that fell neither into anticommunist hysteria nor into a cowardly evasion of frightening truths.

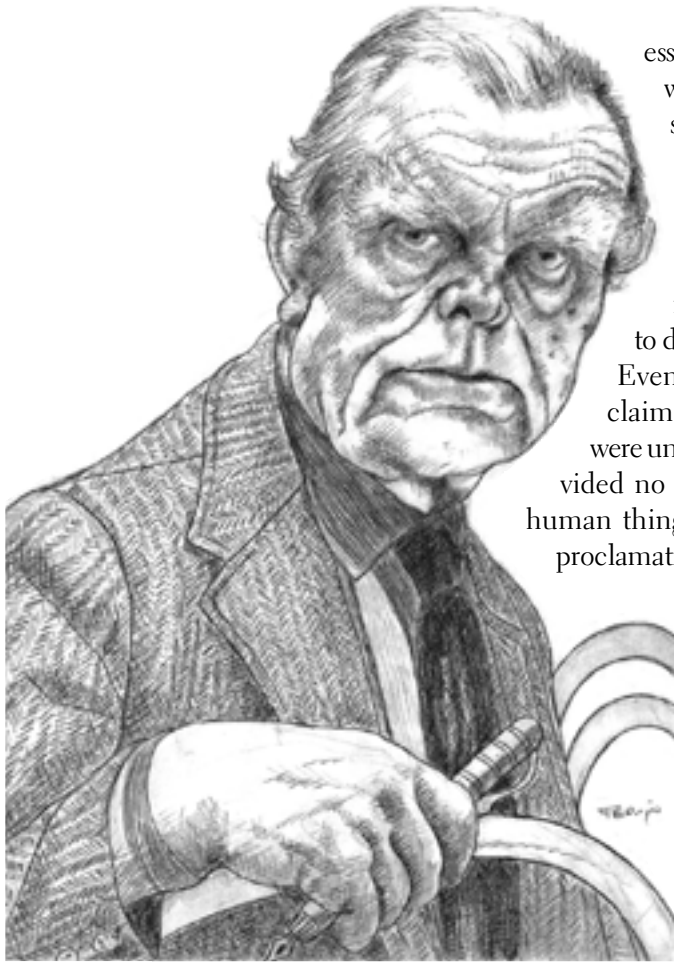


But the political dimension of the 20th century is only one side of Miłosz's work, as it is only one side of human life. Two of Miłosz's autobiographical efforts, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition* (1968) and *The Land of Ulro* (1977), continued to mine the personal dimension, but not for subjective purposes. In these rich memoirs, which often provide a highly detailed starting point for reflections on the task of poetry and the state of the human race in the late 20th century, we can discern both the permanent contribution Miłosz made to modern thinking and a still-current invitation to live out some difficult truths that do not come naturally to us in modern societies. For Miłosz, the West, like the East, suffered from a reductionist view of the human person rooted in the flat and mechanical world of modern physics. The autobiographical works point to the urgency of finding a different way of experiencing and conceptualizing the world. Toward the end of *Native Realm*, Miłosz formulates it in terms of poetry: "Poetic discipline is impossible without piety and admiration, without faith in the infinite layers of being that are hidden within an apple, a man, or a tree; it challenges one through becoming to move closer to what *is*."

That may appear a hopelessly abstract statement, but in actuality it expresses a whole program of life that avoids both the deadening vision of materialism and, its literary counterweight, the unreal fantasies of Romanticism. Miłosz spells this out openly in *The Land of Ulro*, in which he presents a kind of modern pantheon of poets and writers who sought to break the stranglehold of the dead Newtonian universe on the human imagination. The first is Goethe, who, in both his poetry and his writings on science, "waged a Thirty Years' War against Newton." Along with him Miłosz cites William Blake (from whose work he got the name *Ulro*, the world of mechanism), the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, the great Polish Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz, and the modern French thinker Simone Weil. But for Miłosz the most influential representative of this tradition is a distant relative, Oscar V. de L. Miłosz, himself a powerful poet, whom he met in Paris during his twenties. Oscar Miłosz's work, Czesław humbly reports, "without exaggeration, decided my intellectual career."

To list these poets and their concerns risks reducing a complex argument to what seems merely "a fall into mysticism," a phrase Miłosz says was used in Polish literary circles to signify that a writer had uncritically embraced the tenets of religion and was therefore no longer intellectually interesting. The members of Miłosz's pantheon do quite the opposite. Like Václav Havel in more recent days, they all seem to be seeking the space to imagine something difficult to formulate in merely scientific terms. In the old Newtonian system, the world was





essentially an infinite billiard table on which balls randomly collided. In such a world, how could human value—or even an appreciation of the beauty of the world—truly be imagined? The Nazis had tried to use force and the communists the magic trick of the dialectic of history to derive value from what had no values. Even in the West, which loudly proclaimed human dignity, good intentions were undermined by a vision of reality that provided no substantial support for all the most human things, that indeed hollowed out such proclamations even as they were being made.

Milosz came to believe that the Einsteinian universe, which the poets partly anticipated, with its insistence on the demonstrable relatedness of things rather than relativity in the moral sense, and its unusual view of space as a self-involved phenomenon rather than an empty expanse, offered a chance to reimagine the things he had cherished since boyhood. His

last book of poetry, *Second Space*, published posthumously in October 2004, is his attempt to explore that realm himself.



It was an oddity of history that this man, so deeply rooted in particular memories and experiences in the East, should have spent many of his mature years—indeed, from 1961 until he returned to Poland in 1991—in the West, teaching at Berkeley. He admired the dynamism of the United States. (He once wrote of his stint as cultural attaché, “The air in America, even summer in Washington with its 98-degree humidity, did not make me lethargic. It exhilarated me,” and of the American countryside, “It restored me to my boyhood.”) But he also deplored America’s ahistorical existence and materialism. He had a wide circle of friendships among American poets, but he was most strongly attracted to Walt Whitman and, among modern writers, to Robert Frost and Robinson Jeffers, whom he translated. The Manichaeism in him resonated to the dark strain in the latter two poets. Jeffers in particular, who had isolated himself in the then-sleepy California fishing town of Carmel, exerted a hold on Milosz’s imagination—but one that Milosz strove to resist. The cruel and impersonal nature of Jeffers’s universe and his “inhumanism,” a worship of large natural phenomena and

the Darwinian survival of the fittest, came dangerously close to Miłosz's own pessimistic perceptions of the world. But the Pole would not assent fully to this worship of necessity. In a poem to Jeffers, he allows that the poet is powerful, "And yet you did not know what I know. The earth teaches / More than does the nakedness of elements." Miłosz concludes:

Better to carve suns and moons on the joints of crosses
as was done in my district. To birches and firs
give feminine names. To implore protection
against the mute and treacherous might
than to proclaim, as you did, an inhuman thing.
(Translation by Czesław Miłosz and Richard Lourie)

One of the distinctive characteristics of all Miłosz's work is his deep and constant perception that hardheaded, discursive reason neither explains nor offers a solution to our circumstances. He developed this understanding through his own great intelligence. Philosophy and theology have wandered into miasmal swamps in our day, so the knowledge that poetry can bring to us, he realized, becomes more urgent. It was no accident that in his old age Miłosz decided to translate the Book of Apocalypse into Polish, and even learned Hebrew in order to translate some of the Old Testament as well. He frequently spoke about his *daimonion*, a term Plato used for the voice that guided Socrates, and that Miłosz seems to have thought of, quite literally, as a kind of muse, an inspiration from some part of the human mind or spirit to which most of us have little access but that is wiser than we usually are.

In the last poem ("Orpheus and Eurydice") of the posthumous volume *Second Space*, written after communism fell and he moved to Kraków, Miłosz restated his belief in the poet as a channel for a voice of reality: "He submitted to the music, yielded / To the dictation of a song, listening with rapt attention, / Became, like his lyre, its instrument." And what was the content of that song? The answer shows that, to the very end, Miłosz's *daimonion* did not abandon him:

He sang the brightness of mornings and green rivers,
He sang of smoking water in the rose-colored daybreaks,
Of colors: cinnabar, carmine, burnt sienna, blue,
Of the delight of swimming in the sea under marble cliffs,
Of feasting on a terrace above the tumult of a fishing port,
Of the tastes of wine, olive oil, almonds, mustard, salt,
Of the flight of the swallow, the falcon,
Of a dignified flock of pelicans above a bay,
Of the scent of an armful of lilacs in summer rain,
Of his having composed his words always against death
And of having made no rhyme in praise of nothingness.

This is Orpheus's song, but let it stand, too, for Miłosz. If the Poles are looking for an epitaph to put on his tomb, which is in the crypt of the Kraków cathedral, among the kings, saints, and writers of Poland, they need look no further. □

THE PERIODICAL OBSERVER

A review of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

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The Shell-Shocked Democrats

A Survey of Recent Articles

It was the most important election of their lives, many Democrats said, and they blew it. So the debate about what went wrong and what to do next has raged since November 2: Were they done in by a perceived weakness on “moral values,” as some exit polls suggested, by a failure to persuade working Americans to vote in their own economic self-interest, or by some other shortcoming? Of course, a shift of 60,000 or so votes in Ohio would have meant that Republicans would be the ones wringing their hands today. Even so, many analysts think that the Democrats are now in a profound political bind.

Winning the presidency “is not the most difficult challenge” for the Democrats, historian Alan Brinkley, the provost of Columbia University, observes in *The American Prospect* (Dec. 2004). After all, Al Gore very nearly won in 2000 (“many believe he actually did”), and he almost certainly would have been reelected in 2004. The bigger challenge is regaining strength in Congress, particularly the Senate, since more than half the states are solidly Republican. (In the new Senate, the GOP has a 55–44 edge, not counting a lone independent, and in the new House, a 232–202 edge, with one independent.) “If the most Democrats can hope for is an occasional Democratic president facing a consistently conservative Republican Congress, the future of progressive or

liberal hopes is grim, indeed.”

Modern conservatism, Brinkley writes, is “a populist phenomenon, drawing heavily from the lower middle class, the working class, and perhaps above all, the once-Democratic South.” To win those voters back, Democrats “need to turn much of their attention away from culture and back toward class.” They must deliver more forcefully “a clear economic message” about such issues as health care, corporate malfeasance, and workers’ rights.

Brinkley’s view wins a good deal of assent from the contributors to a symposium in *The Nation* (Dec. 20, 2004). Theda Skocpol, a Harvard University political scientist, urges Democrats not to “wander off” into fights over Supreme Court nominations and the like but to focus on the defense of the existing Social Security system and other “bread-and-butter” issues. They must “speak in vivid, morally powerful terms to potential majorities of American working people.”

But William A. Galston, a political theorist at the University of Maryland School of Public Affairs and a former adviser to President Bill Clinton, warns against the kind of economic populism embraced to such disastrous effect by Vice President Al Gore in the 2000 election. The growing income gap between rich and poor, he writes in a pre-election edition of *The Public Interest* (Fall 2004), has been caused not by downward mobility but by *upward*

mobility. The percentage of American families earning \$50,000 or more (in constant dollars) rose from 23 percent to 34 percent between 1968 and 1996; the percentage earning more than \$75,000 more than doubled, reaching 16 percent.

The new class structure is one of the key challenges facing Democrats: "A new Democratic majority requires a coalition between upscale professionals and average workers. The problem is that these two groups do not understand their interests or their values in the same way. In comparison with working-class voters, professionals typically care less about economically activist government and more about fiscal discipline; less about trade protection and more about global markets; less about security and more about opportunity; less about authority and traditional values, and more about 'self-expression' and inclusion."

The party "cannot give contradictory things" to the two groups, Galston writes, and "the terms of a synthesis that is politically as well as intellectually viable are not yet clear."

What about the anguished cries that blue-collar workers who support the GOP are not voting in their economic self-interest? "That is entirely true—and completely beside the point," observes Andrei Cherny, a former adviser to John Kerry and a visiting fellow at Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. "Americans do not enter the voting booth in the manner of accountants calculating take-home income," he writes in *The New Republic* (Nov. 22, 2004). "They have historically voted on hopes and resentments . . . that have nothing to do with the bottom line."

Exit polls on Election Day indicated that more voters (22 percent) cared more about "moral values" than about any other issue. Pundits initially seized on this finding, then backed off after realizing that the phrase was so broad it could refer to the war in Iraq as well as gay marriage. Still, says Cherny, "the fact that voters who selected it as their most important issue went overwhelmingly for Bush (80 to 18 percent) indicates that it was a phrase with much meaning." Without adopting "the agenda of social conservatives," Democrats "need to do a better job of speaking to the moral and spiritual yearnings" of Americans.

Values also matter in foreign policy, writes *The New Republic's* editor, Peter Beinart, in the magazine's December 13 issue, and, by failing to embrace the war on Islamist totalitarianism, Democrats have committed a terrible moral and political blunder. Early in the Cold War, liberal Democrats overcame opposition within their own party to take up the struggle against communism, but today's liberals brush off the new threat, staking everything on mere opposition to the Bush administration's policies.

One manifestation of the "values" divide at home is the growing marriage gap in voting, contends Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, codirector of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University. Married voters favored Bush over his Democratic rival by 15 percentage points. Unmarried voters, meanwhile, went for Kerry by a margin of 18 points. "Kerry seemed utterly unaware of the concerns of married parents with small children," she writes in *Commonweal* (Dec. 17, 2004). "While clinging to rhetoric that supposedly addresses the concerns of working families, Democrats have gravitated toward the libertarian values of the urban singles culture."

Writing in *Commonweal* (Dec. 3, 2004), Galston argues that Democrats should "distance themselves from Hollywood, reduce their reliance on the judiciary as the engine of social change, and temper what appears to many to be intransigence on morally fraught policies. The modern Democratic Party will never turn its back on *Roe v. Wade*, but many Democrats quietly wonder why the party is falling on its sword over partial-birth abortion."

It may be, says Brinkley, "that many, perhaps most, Americans strongly oppose some of the values in which [progressives] deeply believe." On issues such as gay rights, abortion, and affirmative action, "there may be room for pragmatic compromise but only up to a point."

Hearkening back to conservative efforts that began after the Goldwater debacle of 1964, Brinkley sees "years, perhaps even decades," of work ahead to construct the intellectual "infrastructure" of liberal magazines, websites, think tanks, and other organizations needed to help forge a new agenda. "In the meantime, there is the challenge of opposition."

Tocqueville's Second Thoughts

"The Third *Democracy*: Tocqueville's Views of America after 1840" by Aurelian Craiutu and Jeremy Jennings, in *American Political Science Review* (Aug. 2004), American Political Science Assn., 1527 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

The French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville's admiring two-volume *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840) is widely known and cited. Less known is the fact that in the last decade before his death in 1859, Tocqueville became increasingly disenchanted with the United States.

In his letters to various American friends, never published in English translation, political scientists Craiutu, of Indiana University, Bloomington, and Jennings, of the University of Birmingham, England, find misgivings about "an emerging American imperialism, the excesses of American democracy, the decline of mores and the rise of lawlessness, the revolutionary fervor of American politics, poor political leadership, and the reckless spirit of American capitalism."

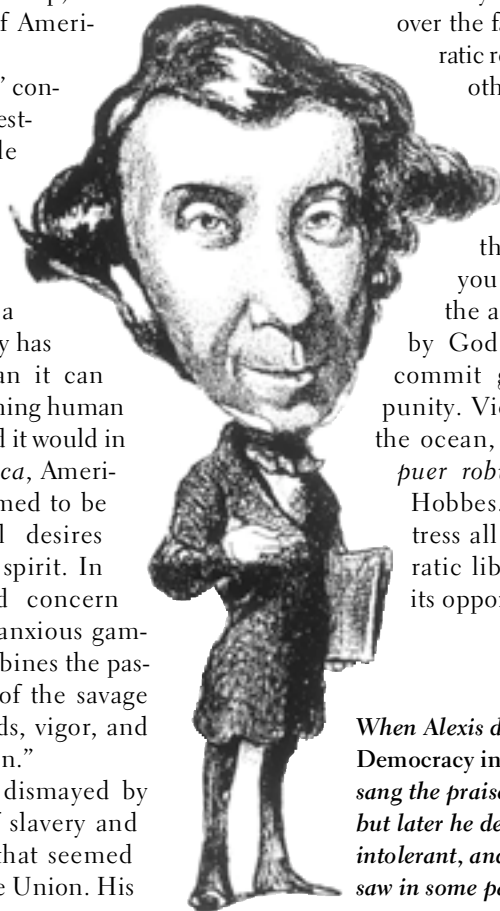
The United States' continuing expansion westward, Tocqueville wrote in 1852, revealed a troubling "spirit of conquest" and was "not a sign of good health for a people which already has more territories than it can fill." Instead of softening human nature, as he'd argued it would in *Democracy in America*, America's abundance seemed to be increasing material desires and the buccaneer spirit. In 1856, he expressed concern about "this race of anxious gamblers . . . which combines the passions and instincts of the savage with the tastes, needs, vigor, and vices of civilized men."

Tocqueville was dismayed by the perpetuation of slavery and the rising conflict that seemed likely to break up the Union. His

doubts flared with the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which created the prospect of the introduction of slavery to those two territories, and the 1856 election to the presidency of James Buchanan, who was sympathetic to slavery's extension. It "pained and astonished" him, Tocqueville said in 1856, that "the freest people in the world is, at the present time, almost the only one among civilized and Christian nations which yet maintains personal servitude." Religion, which Tocqueville earlier saw as a vital ingredient in tilting America's new liberties toward virtue, is barely mentioned in these letters.

Craiutu and Jennings speculate that Tocqueville's new skepticism about America was colored by his deep disappointment over the failure of liberal democratic revolutions in France and

other European countries in 1848. "What is certain," Tocqueville told an American correspondent, "is that, for some years now, you have strangely abused the advantages given to you by God which allow you to commit great errors with impunity. Viewed from this side of the ocean, you have become the *puer robustus* [robust boy] of Hobbes. By being so, you distress all the friends of democratic liberty and delight all of its opponents."



When Alexis de Tocqueville completed Democracy in America in 1840, he sang the praises of the young republic, but later he decried the "violent, intolerant, and lawless spirit" he saw in some parts of the country.

A Populist Specter

“The Triumph and Collapse of Liberalism” by John Lukacs, in *The Chronicle Review* (Dec. 10, 2004), 1255 23rd St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037.

Lukacs has “never been a liberal,” but he sees in the fact that the term has become “soiled, outdated, torn at its edges” a serious threat to democracy itself.

Modern liberals have only themselves to blame for this state of affairs, writes the prolific historian, author of the forthcoming *Democracy and Populism*. Their sins are many, from a too-tolerant view of communism and the Soviet Union during the Cold War to a contemporary tendency “to take the ideas of the Enlightenment to extremes,” for instance, by promoting “a public morality devoid of, if not altogether opposed to, religion.” Yet traditional liberal ideals still desperately need defending:

“When it came to the formation of the democracies of the West, the concepts of liberalism and democracy, while not inseparable, were surely complementary, with the emphasis on the former. Among the founders of the American republic were serious men who were more dubious about

democracy than about liberty. They certainly did not believe in—indeed, they feared—populism; populism that, unlike a century ago, has now become (and not only in the United States) the political instrument of ‘conservatives,’ of so-called men of the ‘Right.’ It is significant that in Europe, too, the appeal of the term ‘liberal’ has declined, while ‘democratic’ is the adopted name of a variety of parties, many of them not only antiliberal but also extreme right-wing nationalist.

“Yes, democracy is the rule of the majority; but there liberalism must enter. Majority rule must be tempered by the rights of minorities and of individual men and women; but when that temperance is weak, or unenforced, or unpopular, then democracy is nothing else than populism. More precisely: Then it is nationalist populism. It may be that the degeneration of liberal democracy to populism will be the fundamental problem of the future.”

The Grail of Efficiency

“Boosting Government Productivity” by Thomas Dohrmann and Lenny T. Mendonca, in *The McKinsey Quarterly* (2004: No. 4), www.mckinseyquarterly.com.

With the first of the 76 million aging baby boomers due to begin retiring in a few years, the federal government will soon be facing some hard choices: Cut retirees’ benefits or raise taxes to pay for them—or reduce public services for everyone else. But there’s another, less painful option: Improve government productivity.

Yes, it’s been tried before, notably in the “reinventing government” effort of the early 1990s, and with some success. But the surface has barely been scratched, say Dohrmann and Mendonca, principals in the Washington office of McKinsey & Company, a management consulting firm.

Between 1987 and 1994, the federal government’s productivity grew by a total of only 0.4 percent, while the private sector’s grew at a

1.5 percent annual rate. Washington then stopped measuring its productivity; private sector productivity has since grown by three percent annually. If Washington could match the 1.5 percent rate, the savings would total \$104 billion to \$312 billion.

That wouldn’t mean simply taking an ax to government payrolls and programs. A handful of state governments and quasi-governmental organizations have shown the way. Illinois, for example, has consolidated public aid programs scattered through six different departments into a new Department of Human Services, eliminating duplication, better serving aid recipients, and redeploying saved money and staff to new programs.

One study shows that the Medicare budget could be pruned by about 20 percent

with no loss in the quality of medical services if the program could be administered as well in every region of the country as it is in the ones where service is most efficient.

Even the U.S. Postal Service has had successes. Despite an increase of seven million since 1999 in the number of addresses it serves, the Postal Service “has saved \$5.5 billion by replicating the best practices of the best sorting plants and by improving its delivery and counter operations.” Productivity has increased by six percent, and “customer satisfaction ratings are at all-time highs.”

New competition has spurred the Postal Service to improve, and governments could

use a stiff dose of the same stuff. Outsourcing, which can put everything from paper clip procurement to schooling in the hands of private contractors, is one way to go. But more can be done even when there’s no competition to be found. Conducting customer satisfaction surveys, publicizing the results, and establishing “metrics” to gauge improvement would prod government agencies to perform better.

Admittedly, the task is difficult. It’s one thing to pass good legislation, the authors note, another to put in the sustained and thankless effort needed to make it effective. But if the Postal Service can do it, why can’t everyone else?

The Christian Gender Gap

“The Partisan Paradox: Religious Commitment and the Gender Gap in Party Identification”
by Karen M. Kaufmann, in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Winter 2004), Northwestern Univ., School of Communication, 2240 North Campus Dr., Evanston, Ill. 60208.

If religious voters are more conservative than others, and if women tend to be more religious than men, why is there a “gender gap” in national elections that leaves the women’s vote tilted toward the Democratic Party?

It could be that religious commitment influences the partisan leanings of only the most devout voters. But that’s not the case, according to Kaufmann, a University of Maryland political scientist who analyzed public opinion surveys from the four presidential elections between 1988 and 2000. Among the highly devout (as measured by such factors as weekly church attendance), the gender gap persists: 59 percent of men, but only 49 percent of women, identified with the Republican Party.

Perhaps religious commitment has a stronger effect on men than on women, making the men more conservative? No, says Kaufmann. On a range of issues—from defense policy to gay rights and other cultural issues—religious belief pulls men and women to the right in equal measures.

But that rightward shift still leaves a big gender gap on one question: attitudes toward the size and nature of the welfare state. Women, Kaufman says, “are simply more liberal than men on questions of social welfare.” And for many religious women, social welfare policies are a more important determinant of voting behavior than the hot-button cultural issues that are said to animate so many religious voters.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Army Lite

“How Technology Failed in Iraq” by David Talbot, in *Technology Review* (Nov. 2004), 1 Main St., 7th fl., Cambridge, Mass. 02142.

In April 2003, an armored battalion of the Third Infantry Division was at the tip of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Racing toward a key bridge near Baghdad, Lieutenant Colonel Ernest Marcone, the battalion commander, had one problem: He knew very little about

the strength of the Iraqi opposition. After seizing the bridge on April 2, Marcone received intelligence that a single Iraqi brigade was moving toward his position. His unit would actually confront three brigades, including 5,000 to 10,000 troops and dozens



High-tech equipment is supposed to help troops track down the enemy in Iraq, but frozen software, long downloads, and other glitches have hampered its effectiveness in combat situations.

of armored vehicles, in the largest Iraqi counterattack of the war. Although Marcone's unit won the battle, its experience, according to Talbot, a senior editor of *Technology Review*, reveals a much larger problem for the American military: The Pentagon's high-tech "force transformation" has serious shortcomings.

The U.S. military has been investing heavily in force transformation for a decade. At a cost of more than \$100 billion, 25 partner companies are building a suite of manned and unmanned machines, loaded with the latest sensors and communications technology, that will be linked together in a "system of systems" reaching all the way down to troops in the field. Planners hope that these technologies will support a lightly armored and more mobile American military. If, for example, the army can replace heavily armored tanks with light Stryker troop carriers that use digital information to evade enemy fire, it could fly—rather than sail—to war.

The Pentagon points to force transformation's many successes in Iraq, from the ability to bomb enemy positions through blinding sandstorms to the lack of friendly-fire incidents. Earlier achievements in Afghanistan, where U.S.

Special Forces coordinated precision attacks against Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters using digital information networks, also indicate that force transformation is working.

But many frontline commanders in Iraq repeated Marcone's experience: digital images of the battlefield and other crucial information never reached them, sensors failed to detect the enemy, software froze, and downloads took hours. The army's microwave-based communications system, designed for a European campaign, required vehicles to come to a halt in order to download information, leaving them vulnerable to attack.

"It was a universal comment: 'We had terrible situational awareness,'" says a RAND Corporation researcher who is working on a study of the Iraq campaign. He sees evidence of a "digital divide" between the battlefield and headquarters units, which sometimes received so much information that they had to pull the plug on the influx.

The Pentagon is committed to building a lightly armored, highly mobile U.S. military, with the expectation that "information armor" will compensate for reduced physical protection. But, as Talbot concludes, "what protected Marcone's men wasn't information armor, but armor itself."

Afghanistan's Brighter Prospects

"Silk Road to Success" by S. Frederick Starr, in *The National Interest* (Winter 2004–05), 1615 L St., N.W., Ste. 1230, Washington, D.C. 20036.

The forecasts were for bloodshed, gross corruption, and low turnout, but Afghanistan's October elections proved the experts wrong. That October surprise is one of several strong indications that the U.S. effort at state building in Afghanistan is now succeeding, contends Starr, chairman of Johns Hopkins University's Central Asia Caucus Institute in Washington.

That's a marked change from the situation in 2003, when the effort may well have been in danger of failing. Pentagon planners had paid too little attention to the need for security and governance. But after an April 2003 visit by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the United States and President Hamid Karzai changed course.

Karzai took control of the Ministry of Defense away from Marshal Fahim, "the greatest force for disunity and corruption," who kept his own militia in Kabul and "cut deals with warlords elsewhere, undermining hopes for a national army." More than

half of Afghanistan's governors lost their jobs when Karzai's new interior minister, Ali Jalali, sacked those who were warlords or in league with warlords. Karzai reached out to alienated ethnic groups and built up a national army, 13,700 strong and slated to double in size by 2006. "The scales are tipping against the warlords," says Starr, "making their demobilization an attainable goal." Plans called for the demobilization of 18,000 warlord troops in 2004. Now "with a general amnesty in force, Karzai must offer a face-saving role to every demobilized militia commander not guilty of criminal acts."

Afghanistan remains "the world's poorest country after Sierra Leone [and] a dangerous place." While the economy grew by 30 percent in 2003, half the country's gross domestic product derives from the production of opium and heroin. Most of the profits go to criminals in Russia, Turkey, Iran, the Balkans, and Western Europe; it's estimat-

EXCERPT

Democracy in Low Gear

Only a few years into the new century, the grand hope that it will prove the age of democracy's global triumph appears far more tenuous than it seemed just 10 or 15 years ago.

American policy makers determined to make democracy promotion a major element of U.S. foreign policy will have to do better than rely on attractive but superficial slogans like "freedom is on the march." It is necessary to move away from the mindset that a democratic trend is advancing in the world and that U.S. policy should aim to support it. The challenges now are more fundamental: how to stimulate democracy in regions where authoritarianism has bested the democratic trend, and how to support democracy where it is under siege because of poor performance. Responding to these challenges will require a greater willingness to pressure authoritarian leaders who offer short-term economic and security benefits to the United States but spell long-term trouble. . . . And it will require the United States to construct more effective partnerships . . . where democracy is under siege. Democracy promotion is a convenient, even easy rhetorical framework for a global policy, especially in the context of the war on terrorism. Making it work in practice is neither convenient nor easy.

—Thomas Carothers, director of the Democracy and Rule of Law Project at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in *Current History* (Dec. 2004)

ed that only 10 percent of Afghans derive any income from the business. Despite the drug trade, Starr believes that Afghanistan “now has a reasonable chance of becoming, over time, a normal and prosperous country.” Last March, encouraged by the progress they’d seen, donor countries decided to give \$4.5 billion in a single year, instead of over three to five years, as previously promised.

“Most Afghans are optimistic about the

future,” says Starr. “This is affirmed by the decision of two million Afghans to return to their homes from Pakistan and another 1.2 million from Iran.” The demise of the Taliban has provided Pakistan and the new states of Central Asia “the greatest opportunity for positive change since they gained independence.” For the United States, the post-9/11 sacrifice of lives and treasure in Afghanistan is slowly paying off in enhanced U.S. security.

Coping with the Nuclear Genie

“Proliferation Rings: New Challenges to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime” by Chaim Braun and Christopher F. Chyba, in *International Security* (Fall 2004), Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Univ., 79 John F. Kennedy St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Last year’s revelations of a Pakistan-based ring headed by scientist A. Q. Khan that clandestinely exported uranium enrichment technology to North Korea, Libya, and perhaps other nations signal the arrival of an ominous new era in which developing countries “trade among themselves to bolster one another’s nuclear and strategic weapons efforts.” No longer will efforts to keep nuclear technology and material in developed countries from being sold or stolen suffice. Combating “proliferation rings” in the developing world will require strong efforts on “both the supply and demand sides of the problem,” write Braun, a senior fellow at Stanford University’s Center for International Security and Cooperation, and Chyba, the center’s codirector.

On the supply side, the Bush administration took “an important new step” in 2003 with the Proliferation Security Initiative. Fifteen nations, backed by more than 60 others, agreed to “practical steps to interdict shipments of missiles, chemical and biological agents, and nuclear components.” The initiative requires good intelligence to work. Its best-known success to date: the 2003 seizure in Italy’s Taranto Harbor of a German-owned ship traveling from Malaysia and bound for Libya with parts for thousands of centrifuges used in uranium enrichment. Libyan president Muammar al-Qaddafi subsequently renounced his country’s nuclear and chemical weapons programs.

Also at the behest of the Bush administration, the UN Security Council last April adopted Resolution 1540, requiring all states to adopt export controls to prevent proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. It’s a laudable effort, say the authors, and more promising than calls for a global treaty with tough enforcement measures, which “could take a long time” to obtain.

But supply-side efforts won’t be enough to halt the “globalization of technology and know-how.” Some countries may eventually be able to produce nuclear weapons on their own. Therefore, demand-side measures also are needed to induce such states to forgo nuclear weapons. These include security guarantees and economic sanctions, which have been used in the past, at times successfully. Carefully designed international efforts to make civilian nuclear power more available to developing nations would be a useful “sweetener.”

Threats of preventive (or, to use the Bush administration’s term, “preemptive”) attacks are likely to be counterproductive, increasing the desire for nuclear weapons, predict Braun and Chyba. “While preventive wars against some proliferators may play their role in the future, the United States will likely often find itself strongly deterred from exercising such options except as a last resort, and in the face of high costs. The United States should therefore place an extremely high priority” on achieving nonproliferation in other ways.

Confessions of a Neoliberal

“Should We Still Support Untrammelled International Capital Mobility? Or Are Capital Controls Less Evil than We Once Believed?” by J. Bradford DeLong, in *The Economists’ Voice* (Issue 1, 2004), www.bepress.com/ev.

As a dewy-eyed neoliberal economist in the early 1990s, DeLong was an enthusiastic proponent of encouraging governments in the developing world to lift controls that prevented capital from flowing to and from their countries. The logic seemed impeccable: Foreign investment had helped the United States and other “developing” countries in earlier times, and now it would help today’s developing countries.

“Working at the U.S. Treasury [as deputy assistant secretary] in 1993, I naively projected that after NAFTA, there would be a net capital flow of some \$10 to \$20 billion a year to Mexico for decades to come.” New capital did indeed go to Mexico, as did new export industries and other benefits, but more capital left the country than entered it—a pattern that has been repeated in many other developing countries. Ironically, the United States is by far the biggest magnet for this money, much of it from investors seeking safety. Overall, the developing world is sending some \$90 billion annually to the United States.

At the same time, the predicted increase in investment by the world’s richer countries never fully materialized, thanks in part to the hair-raising financial crises in Mexico (1995), East Asia (1997), and Russia (1998). As those crises illustrate, greater international capital mobility has left poorer nations more vulnerable to the sudden and devastating withdrawal of capital when sentiment shifts. And it has increased international economic inequality.

For all his regrets, DeLong, who now teaches at the University of California, Berkeley, still favors only “the most minor of controls to curb the most speculative of capital flows.” Under the old system, governments in the developing world controlled investment in their countries. Not only did they do a bad job, but the opportunity to manipulate the rules inevitably led to political corruption. That seems decisive to DeLong: “In the end, we may have to tolerate the equality-lessening reverse flow of capital, in order to promote the equality-increasing and wealth-increasing diminution of corruption in less developed countries.”

Distance Isn’t Dead

“Trade Costs” by James E. Anderson and Eric van Wincoop, in *Journal of Economic Literature* (Sept. 2004), 2014 Broadway, Ste. 305, Nashville, Tenn. 37203.

It’s easy to assume, in our age of instant communication, that goods travel around the world with nearly the speed and ease of e-mails. But they don’t. They need to be shipped, jump trade barriers, cross borders, and be distributed in a recipient country. According to Anderson and van Wincoop, economists at Boston College and the University of Virginia, respectively, the picture that emerges from recent research points to surprisingly high costs for international trade. In the industrialized countries, these costs amount to roughly the equivalent of a 170 percent tax. In developing countries, the costs may be more than twice that.

Imagine a doll that costs \$1 to manufacture. The authors calculate that it costs an additional 21 percent to transport it to a customer country. That makes \$1.21. Then tack onto that 44 percent for “border-related trade barriers”—partly tariffs, but mostly language, security, and currency exchange costs. That boosts the cost to \$1.74. Finally, add 55 percent more for the wholesale and retail distribution costs involved in getting the doll into the hands of a child. That brings the final cost (excluding profits and non-trade costs, such as merchandising) to \$2.70.

Anderson and van Wincoop are mostly concerned with the surprisingly difficult mea-

surement problems involved in estimating the costs of world trade. They even calculate the “time value” of money lost while goods are in transit (one day by air or 20 days, on average, by sea). So, though American stores overflow these days with incredibly cheap leather jackets from China and CD players that cost less

than dinner out, the price tags still reflect a hefty array of hidden costs. It may take a long time to figure out exactly how much “drag” the world economy suffers as a result, but it’s already clear that the enthusiastic talk of a “frictionless economy” and the “death of distance” is extremely premature.

An Index with Attitude

“The Political (and Economic) Origins of Consumer Confidence” by Suzanna De Boef and Paul M. Kellstedt, in *American Journal of Political Science* (Oct. 2004), 350 Main St., Malden, Mass. 02148.

On the 10th day of every month, Wall Street anxiously awaits the release of the University of Michigan’s Index of Consumer Sentiment, a key measure of what Americans think about the state of the economy—and how inclined they might be to open their wallets. In a campaign year, political candidates are also keenly interested in the news from Ann Arbor. What’s rarely appreciated is that the index is not a purely economic indicator. Political feelings play a significant role in how people re-

Boef and Kellstedt, who are political scientists at Pennsylvania State University and Texas A&M University, respectively, zoom in for a closer look at what shapes consumer confidence. They estimate that about 75 percent of the index is actually determined by economic factors, with the rest being influenced by politics and other perhaps “irrational” factors.

Over the long term, according to De Boef and Kellstedt, consumer sentiment does track changes in actual economic conditions, but in

the short term it’s subject to strong influence by shocks such as the Enron scandal (whose effects faded after four months) and, more significantly, by changes in public opinion about the president’s ability to manage the economy. Examining the period from 1981 to 2000, the authors conclude, “For every five percentage point gain in [the president’s] economic approval ratings . . . consumer sentiment goes up an average of one point.”

What about media coverage of the economy? Only when the sources cited in news stories are “nonpolitical” does there appear to be any effect, and even then it’s indirect. Such stories seem to influence the public’s approval ratings of the president, not its view of the economy itself. And presidents may as well forget about “talking up” the economy. According to De Boef and Kellstedt, such happy talk has no impact on consumer confidence at all.



“I see your consumer confidence remains undeterred.”

spond to the University of Michigan pollsters.

Shortly before the 1992 presidential election, for example, 49 percent of Republicans said they believed the economy would improve during the next year, while only 19 percent of Democrats did. A month after the election, Republican sentiment was about the same, but Democrats’ confidence in the economic future shot up to 62 percent.

Using a variety of statistical techniques, De

SOCIETY

The Charter Advantage

"A Straightforward Comparison of Charter Schools and Regular Public Schools in the United States" by Caroline M. Hoxby, at <http://post.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/hoxby/papers/hoxbyallcharters.pdf> (Sept. 2004).

The emotional debate over charter schools has raged for years without much solid evidence on either side. Now, on the heels of a widely publicized American Federation of Teachers (AFT) study last summer that found charter students lagging behind their peers in regular public schools, comes an unusually comprehensive research paper by Hoxby, a Harvard University economist. Her conclusion: Charter schools do a better job of producing proficient students.

Thirty-six states and the District of Columbia now have charter schools, which are publicly funded but free of many of the strictures that bind the conventional public school system. Founded by community members, entrepreneurs, and others, charter schools tend to stress innovative teaching practices and parent involvement. Nationwide, they enroll 1.5 percent of all students.

Hoxby looked at how some 50,000 charter-school fourth graders did on state proficiency exams in reading and math, relative to their peers in comparable regular public schools. The results: The percentage of charter students who were proficient was four points higher in reading and two points higher in math.

The charter schools' superiority was greater in states where they had been in existence longer and enrolled more students. In the District of Columbia, which has a larger proportion of students in charter schools (11 percent) than any state, the advantage was 35 percentage points in reading and 40 points in math. Only in North Carolina, where less than 2 percent of students are enrolled in charter schools, were there charter disadvantages in both reading and math.

Because so few American students attend charter schools, Hoxby says, the tiny sample (3 percent) used in the AFT study (www.aft.org) was statistically meaningless. And the AFT compared the performance of charter schools, which often serve low-income neighborhoods, with statewide school averages. Hoxby's research, by contrast, encompassed 99 percent of all charter-school fourth graders in the 2002–03 school year, and it compared charter schools with nearby conventional public schools, where the student body is more likely to be similar in composition.

But the debate is far from over. After Hoxby's study appeared, the U.S. Department

EXCERPT

The Green Glance

Envy is always most intense when it is experienced laterally, not, as we would expect, when it is experienced vertically—that is, when it is inspired by someone we perceive as a peer rather than someone higher on the economic food chain, whose good fortune stirs only theoretical forms of resentment. The maid does not envy her mistress her jewels; she envies the housekeeper her keys. What's more, envy is so compartmentalized that one profession seldom envies another: The lawyer does not envy the physician, the used-car salesman the mail carrier, the grease monkey the florist. Instead, envy might be thought of as the opposite of xenophobia, of the hatred of strangers; it is the hatred of one's own, of one's cohorts, one's brothers and sisters, Cain's hatred of Abel, Salieri's of Mozart, Tonya Harding's of Nancy Kerrigan.

—Daniel Harris, essayist and critic, in *The Antioch Review* (Fall 2004)

of Education released a report (available at <http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/choice/pcsp-final/finalreport.pdf>) comparing schools rather than students. The results: In all five states studied, charter schools were less likely than

conventional public schools to meet state proficiency standards. Even after adjusting for differences in the composition of the student body and other factors, charter schools in two states came up short.

Dependency Isn't Dead

"Economic Success among TANF Participants: How We Measure It Matters" by Maria Cancian and Daniel R. Meyer, in *Focus* (Summer 2004), Institute for Research on Poverty, Univ. of Wisconsin, 1180 Observatory Dr., Madison, Wis. 53706.

The federal welfare reform of 1996 produced a dramatic nationwide decline in case-loads and a chorus of self-congratulatory hurrahs in Washington. Cancian and Meyer, however, aren't cheering.

They focus on Wisconsin Works, a much-admired program that was launched the year after the federal reform returned control over the welfare system to the states. Wisconsin Works requires most recipients to work or take part in work-related training, but it also provides fairly generous benefits (up to \$673 per month), child care, and health insurance. Based on their study of more than 2,200 randomly selected mothers who entered the program during its first year, the authors, who are both professors of social work at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, say that the program by some measures did a good job of helping the women avoid poverty. Counting earnings and a variety of government benefits, three-fourths of the women had incomes above the poverty line.

But the real boast of Wisconsin Works

and similar programs is that they reduce *dependency*, and that claim looks much exaggerated. The federal government counts as independent all those who receive less than half their total annual income from their state welfare program, food stamps, and Supplemental Security Income, the federal program for low-income people who are aged, blind, or disabled. By that definition, 70 percent of the women in the Wisconsin Works study achieved independence.

But that standard is too loose, the authors say. If independence is instead defined as receiving less than \$1,000 in benefits from the three programs, only 26 percent of the women qualified. (The chief reason: Many continued to receive food stamps.) And an even more deflating picture emerges when the focus is restricted to the crucial subcategory of long-term welfare recipients, those who were on the welfare rolls for more than 18 months before entering the program. Only 17 percent of them achieved independence.

Free Blacks in Colonial America

"Freedom in the Archives: Free African Americans in Colonial America" by Paul Heinegg and Henry B. Hoff, in *Common-place* (Oct. 2004), www.common-place.org, sponsored by the American Antiquarian Society and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

The traditional history of free blacks in early America may need significant revision in light of records Heinegg has found during nearly two decades of sifting through state archives in Virginia, North Carolina, Maryland, and Delaware. Most of the free African-American families who traced their origins to Virginia and Maryland didn't descend from enslaved black women and their

owners, as is commonly supposed, but "from white servant women who had children by slaves or free African Americans."

In Virginia, for example, more than 200 free African-American families descended from white women. When Africans were first brought to 17th-century Virginia, they entered a society that held white indentured servants in such contempt "that masters were not pun-

ished for beating them to death,” write Heinegg and Hoff, a retired engineer and the editor of the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, respectively. Africans and white servants shared a similar lot, joining households where they worked, ate, slept, got drunk, and ran away together. Some slaves were freed, and a number of the men married white servant women. “By the mid-17th century,” the authors write, “some free African Americans were beginning to be assimilated into colonial Virginia society. Many were the result of mixed-race marriages.”

As slaves grew in number in Virginia and increasingly replaced white servants, racial attitudes changed. The colonial legislature “passed a series of laws between 1670 and 1723 designating slavery as the appropriate condition for people of African descent.” It outlawed

interracial marriage, required that any illegitimate mixed-race children of white mothers be bound out as servants for 30 years, and restricted the manumission of slaves. Yet “white servant women continued to bear children by African American fathers . . . well into the 18th century.” Indeed, such births appear to have been “the primary source of the increase in the free African American population in Virginia for this period.”

Because so many free African Americans had light skin, it was assumed that they descended from white slave owners who took advantage of their female slaves. But the evidence gathered by the authors does not bear this out: “Only three of the approximately 570 [free black] families in Virginia and the Carolinas were proven to descend from a white slave owner.”

PRESS & MEDIA

Journalism's Second Draft

“Whose Turf Is the Past?” by Andie Tucher, in *Columbia Journalism Review* (Sept.–Oct. 2004), Journalism Bldg., 2950 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10027.

High-minded journalists used to boast that they were writing the first, rough draft of history, but lately they seem to be essaying finished drafts as well. Take, for example, the thick, well-received volumes by Anne Applebaum, David Maraniss, and Robert Caro. Works by academic historians such as Joseph Ellis and Robert Dallek also show up on best-seller lists, notes Tucher, a historian and former journalist who teaches at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism. Do any consequential differences still separate the two breeds?

“Historians try to pose a really interesting problem or contribute to the debate in a field,” observes journalist Nicholas Lemann, author of *The Promised Land* (1991) and other works, and now the dean of Columbia’s journalism school. “But it’s striking how little professional historians know about how to tell a popular story. They think ‘popular’ means ‘picking a good topic.’”

Yet journalistic storytelling has a “stylized quality, which can be a disadvantage as well as an advantage,” says Robert Darnton, a historian at Princeton University. “By that I mean a

tendency to look for a lead instead of an argument, to hype things, overuse colorful quotes, and exaggerate the importance of personal quirks.”

As Tucher notes, “People have always used stories—carefully told or not—to make sense of the world, to explain its big mysteries (‘Why are there bad guys?’) and its small ones (‘Why did he kill her?’). Journalists and the public together construct stories to order the chaotic buzz of breaking events into a satisfying narrative that reconfirms what’s both important and familiar in the world.”

That can lead to oversimplification, according to Mary Marshall Clark, director of Columbia’s Oral History Office. Many reporters covering 9/11 naturally tended to fit that day’s tragic events into “a highly nationalistic frame” of tragedy and heroism. But the academic interviewers she dispatched into New York City’s streets after the attack recorded other things, such as the self-doubts of firefighters who were portrayed as heroes. Journalists may be writing a first draft of history, but apparently some modern historians are writing the second draft of journalism.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The New Anti-Semitism

"In the Name of the Other: Reflections on the Coming Anti-Semitism" by Alain Finkelkraut, in *Azure* (Fall 2004), 13 Yehoshua Bin-Nun St., Jerusalem, Israel.

The easy explanation for the burned synagogues, profaned cemeteries, and schoolyard taunts of contemporary France is that they are a revival of Europe's ancient anti-Semitism—the same enmity that spawned Shakespeare's grotesque caricature of Shylock, kindled the Dreyfus affair, and culminated in the Holocaust. Too easy, writes Finkelkraut, a lecturer in social sciences at Paris's École Polytechnique. Today's anti-Semitism flourishes in some of the most "enlightened" quarters of French society.

The roots of this new anti-Semitism lie in Europe's reaction to the Holocaust. America's reaction to that horror has been strong but relatively uncomplicated: It was an abomination on foreign soil, and Americans helped put an end to it. But the Holocaust placed Europe in a more troubled position, in which it assumed "the roles of vanquisher, victim, and criminal all at once. The Final Solution took place on its land; the decision was a product of its civilization; and the

enterprise found no shortage of accomplices, mercenaries, executors, sympathizers, and even apologists well outside of Germany's borders." So Europe has taken on the identity of Albert Camus' "penitent-judge," who, Finkelkraut explains, "takes pride in his penitence and is always on guard against himself." It has "broken with its bloody past, intent on remembering only its radical evil." No longer does Europe think of itself first as the home of Dante, Mozart, Picasso, and Fellini. "It must unburden itself by switching from an *admiring* humanism to a *reviling* one." Europeans thus say "never again" to Auschwitz—and to war, power politics, nationalism, and all the other things they think drove them to Auschwitz.

One of the Holocaust's lessons for Europeans is that one must always side with "the Other," according to Finkelkraut, and for decades after 1945, Jews retained that status. But with the rise of Palestinian militancy, and in recent years the hard line of Israeli



Gravestones desecrated by swastikas and other anti-Semitic slogans at the Jewish cemetery of Herrlisheim are one sign of an upsurge of anti-Semitism in France.

prime minister Ariel Sharon, Palestinians have claimed the victim's mantle. Now they are the Other, while Israel—warlike, nationalist, and racist, in Europe's eyes—embodies everything that Europe has rejected.

In France, Finkelkraut shared the sense of relief that inspired huge, joyful crowds to take to the streets on the day in May 2002 when the right wing's Jean-Marie Le Pen went down to defeat in the presidential elec-

tion. But he didn't join the throngs, thinking, "The future of hatred is in *their* camp, and not in that of Vichy's faithful. It is in the camp of the smiles, not of the gritted teeth. In the camp of humane, and not barbaric, men. In the camp of integrated society, rather than that of the ethnic nation. . . . It is in the ranks of the devoted admirers of the Other, and not among the narrow-minded petit bourgeois who love only the Self."

Rights as Aspirations

"Elements of a Theory of Human Rights" by Amartya Sen, in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (Oct. 2004), 130 Corwin Hall, Princeton Univ., Princeton, N.J. 08544.

Never mind all those lofty pronouncements in America's Declaration of Independence, France's Declaration of the Rights of Man, and the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The idea that humans have rights without specific legislation giving the rights legal definition and force is just "nonsense upon stilts," utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Ben-

tham (1748–1832) asserted—and many modern thinkers agree. But Nobel laureate Sen, an economist at Harvard University, takes an opposing view.

Human rights are "primarily ethical demands," he says. Though they often inspire legislation, they're not mainly legal commands. They derive their importance from the underlying freedoms that they're

EXCERPT

Islamism's End Game

Looking back after 9/11 it seems to me that the left-wing terrorism of the 1970s in Europe was . . . a futile attempt to break out of the historical impasse and terminal structural crisis reached by communism, radical labor movements, Third Worldism, and revolutionary trends everywhere. The terrorism of that period was the first visible manifestation of that impasse and the prelude to the final demise of those movements, including world communism itself.

Today the hard-core Islamists' spectacular terrorist violence reflects a no less desperate attempt to break out of the historical impasse and terminal structural crisis reached by the world Islamist movement in the second half of the 20th century. I predict this violence will be the prelude to the dissipation and final demise of militant Islamism in general. Like the armed factions in Europe who had given up on society, political parties, reform, proletarian revolution, and traditional communist organization in favor of violent action, militant Islamism has given up on contemporary Muslim society, its sociopolitical movements, the spontaneous religiosity of the masses, mainstream Islamic organizations, the attentism of the original and traditional Society of Muslim Brothers (from which they generally derive in the way the 1970s terrorists derived from European communism), in favor of violence.

—Sadik J. Al-Azm, an emeritus professor of modern European philosophy at the University of Damascus, Syria, in *Boston Review* (Oct.–Nov. 2004)

about. "For example, the human right of not being tortured springs from the importance of freedom from torture for all." And the ethical demand is not just for the would-be torturer to desist, but for other persons to consider how torture can be prevented and what they themselves should reasonably do toward that end.

Bentham regarded natural rights as false legal pretensions. A modern law-centered view that's more accepting of the idea of human rights sees them as "laws in waiting." But for Sen, human rights are not just the basis for new legislation; they can also influence public opinion and prompt agitation on their behalf. In monitoring abuses of human rights, for example, Amnesty International and other watchdog groups promote the *cause* of human rights.

Only a freedom important enough to justify obliging other people to consider

what they can do to advance it can become the basis for a human right, Sen maintains. And those other people must plausibly be able to make a difference.

Some contemporary thinkers accept the general idea of human rights but reject the inclusion of so-called economic and social rights, such as a common entitlement to subsistence or health care, because the institutions needed to fulfill those rights may not yet exist in many societies. But this, Sen argues, only indicates the need to work toward changing the circumstances that prevent such rights from being realized.

The ultimate test of the validity of claimed human rights, he says, is whether they survive uninhibited, informed discussion and scrutiny, not merely in one society but "across national boundaries." As Adam Smith once wrote, ethical scrutiny requires examining moral beliefs from "a certain distance."

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

Seed Money

"Procreative Compounds: Popular Eugenics, Artificial Insemination, and the Rise of the American Sperm Banking Industry" by Cynthia R. Daniels and Janet Golden, in *Journal of Social History* (Fall 2004), George Mason Univ., 4400 University Dr. MS 3A2, Fairfax, Va. 22030-4444.

You have a better chance of getting into Harvard than of becoming a sperm donor. That's because sperm donation has evolved into a multimillion-dollar industry with an eagle eye for quality control.

Sperm donors and their "donations" are subjected to stringent testing and screening. At most banks, men must be between 21 and 35 years old, between 5'8" and 6'2" tall, and meet weight targets. Adopted men or those with a family history of certain diseases (nearly 100 are listed) are disqualified. Would-be donors also are nixed if they've had sex with another man, with a woman who has had sex with a bisexual man, or with more than a specified number of partners.

But donor recipients seek more than health safety assurances, write Daniels and Golden, professors of political science and history, respectively, at Rutgers University. Most U.S. sperm banks (there were 28 in 2001) produce glossy catalogs lush with vir-

ile-looking models and donor resumé's that provide SAT and GRE scores, educational attainment, musical ability, social characteristics (e.g., "quietly charismatic"), religion—even, in some cases, handwriting samples, hat size, and favorite pet.

From the beginning, consumers and the medical establishment have seen artificial insemination as a way to build a better baby. The first known case in which a donor's sperm (as opposed to a spouse's) was used occurred in 1884, when a Philadelphia physician chloroformed a woman he was treating for infertility, under the pretext of performing minor surgery, and inseminated her with the sperm of his supposedly best-looking medical student. By the 1930s, however, artificial insemination had become a quasi-respectable practice widely reported in medical journals.

With the introduction of cryopreservation, first employed in the cattle industry in

the 1950s, sperm could be frozen and then thawed for use. Public acceptance came slowly, but when cases of HIV transmission were reported in the 1980s and '90s, cryopreservation became a necessity, as it allowed sperm to be kept "on ice" until it tested clean.

Currently, tens of thousands of children are conceived in the United States each year with semen purchased from sperm banks. At companies such as California Cryobank, the samples are stored in numbered and color-coded vials: white caps for Caucasian, black for African American, yellow for Asian, and red for "all others." Donors who best match the ideal Euro-American standard are most desired. Yes, consumers are disproportionately white, but even within other racial and ethnic categories, the most marketable donors are fair, tall, and slender.

With the birth of sperm banks, power to select donors shifted from the paternalistic physician to the consumer who paid for the product. What troubles Daniels and Golden is that the business has proven a breed-



Sperm banks store their wares in tanks of liquid nitrogen, cryogenically preserving the samples at -196 degrees Celsius.

ing ground for "popular eugenics," and heritable traits are often lumped with those that aren't—such as religion or a Ph.D. Today, sperm banks dangle the prospect of a kid with the genetic right stuff to run fast, ace math, and go to Sunday school.

When artificial insemination was still a dirty little family secret, doctors sought sperm that would produce a child who looked like the presumed proud papa, or at least like a relative. No more. Tall, blond donors produce dozens of children, but the 4'7" man need not even apply: Nobody wants the little guy to father Little Johnny.

Is Evolution Over?

"Are We Still Evolving?" by Gabrielle Walker, in *Prospect* (July 2004), Prospect Publishing, 2 Bloomsbury Pl., London WC1A 2QA, England.

As humans continue to advance, their evolution may be grinding to a halt. Natural selection works by picking and choosing among millions of random mutations that occur in each generation, favoring those individuals who bear traits conducive to survival and punishing those with less desirable traits. But we have molded our environments to such an extent that natural selection may have nothing left to work with, observes Walker, a British science writer.

All that's necessary to get everyone's genes on a level playing field is for people to be able to grow up and reproduce, claims geneticist Steve Jones, of University College,

London. And modern technical and cultural developments have assured precisely that. In Britain, a baby who reaches six months of age today has a nearly 100 percent chance of surviving to adulthood. Only 150 years ago, about half the babies born in London died before they reached puberty.

Nature has lost its power to select, Jones argues, and even if certain diseases or conditions, such as obesity, cut a few years off the end of our lives, "evolution won't notice," because we're already past childbearing age. Some in his camp worry that, without the ability to weed out problem mutations, we won't merely cease to evolve, we'll start ac-

cumulating defective genes that will eventually weaken the species. But it's also likely that modern medicine is preserving useful genes that would otherwise perish.

Other scientists don't subscribe to the theory that evolution has reached an impasse. One reason is that—as experts on both sides of the fence agree—cultural changes can affect evolution. A past example of that is the “grandmother effect,” which explains why women don't die off soon after their child-bearing years, as other female primates do. The speculation is that, as Earth's climate turned colder and drier and plants grew tougher and more deeply rooted 1.8 million years ago, having Grandma around to manage the increasingly hard work of foraging while Mom tended to the brood became essential to survival.

Proponents of ongoing evolution point to the continuing role of such cultural changes. Malaria, for example, wasn't a particularly widespread disease before early humans began clearing tropical forests to establish settlements, thereby creating an ideal

environment for malarial mosquitoes. The first human genetic modifications designed to fight the disease appeared after that, about 5,000 years ago. Researchers cite other factors that may still shape the human gene pool, such as drugs that adversely affect people with certain genetic susceptibilities and the rise of “super-resistant” disease organisms bred by the overuse of antibiotics. At least one gene related to human heart disease shows signs of continuing evolution. And in the developing world, which faces plagues of infectious diseases such as malaria and HIV with very little access to modern medicine, “evolution is definitely not over.”

In the end, even leading advocates of the theory that evolution is on hold say there's no guarantee it will remain there. “We're on the edge of a cliff,” says Jones, “on the simple grounds that we're far more abundant in number than we ought to be.” A single deadly epidemic on a global scale might bring back natural selection with a vengeance—unless human ingenuity once again finds a way to stop it.

King of Codes

“Ode to the Code” by Brian Hayes, in *American Scientist* (Nov.–Dec. 2004), P.O. Box 13975, 99 Alexander Dr., Research Triangle Park, N.C. 27709–3975.

It's been four decades since life's genetic code was cracked, yet a nagging question remains: Why does this particular system for communicating vital chemical instructions govern virtually all life on Earth? Shouldn't there have been significant variations in the code as it naturally occurred in life, thus making it, like all living things, subject to evolution over time?

Consider ribonucleic acid (RNA), which often carries instructions to cells telling them how to assemble amino acids into a specific protein. The RNA language uses an alphabet of four “letters” to make 64 three-letter words called codons. Each codon specifies one of 20 amino acids, or else serves as punctuation signaling the end of a message. But with those elements, there's still an astronomical number (10^{83} , to be precise) of ways the instructions could be coded. Why this one?

Francis Crick, co-discoverer of the double helix structure of DNA, argued that the code may have been a “frozen accident,” becoming so deeply embedded in the core machinery of life at some point in the distant past that any further change became impossible, notes Hayes, a senior writer for *American Scientist*.

Resisting that theory, some scientists have pointed to “certain protozoa, bacteria and intracellular organelles [that] employ genetic codes slightly different from the standard one.” But nobody can find any adaptive advantage in those variants.

Other researchers argue that the code as it exists is already close to perfect. Its most evident virtue: its apparent ability to minimize errors in the transmission of genetic information. For example, the way the code is set up—so that some of the 64 codons are “synonyms” for others, with the syn-

onyms physically clustered together—ensures that, even when an error occurs, the proper amino acids are often assembled. Computer simulations with up to a million random codes have shown the existing code to be “a stellar performer” in minimizing errors—“the best of all possible codes,” as one team of researchers put it several years ago.

But the case is not entirely closed. The computer simulations have certain weaknesses, and scientists continue to speculate about the code. Some are intrigued by various mathematical patterns in the code—such as the fact that the number 64 is equal to both 4^3 and 2^6 . The patterns suggest many possibilities, including, unlikely as it may seem, connections with the I Ching.

ARTS & LETTERS

A Prize for the Books

“Sitting in Judgment” by Fiammetta Rocco, in *The Economist* (Oct. 23, 2004), 25 St. James’s St., London SW1A 1HG England, and “The Booker Prize for 2003” by Merritt Moseley, in *The Sewanee Review* (Spring 2004), 735 University Ave., Sewanee, Tenn. 37383.

A year ago, *Economist* literary editor Fiammetta Rocco picked up the phone to hear a thin, reedy voice ask if she would serve as a judge of the Man Booker prize. Fifty thousand pages later, Rocco and four other judges named Alan Hollinghurst’s *The Line of Beauty* the 2004 winner, in a process Rocco sees as emphatic proof of the prize’s value.

The Man Booker—or simply the Booker, as it’s better known—has become enormously powerful. Presented each year for a novel written in English by an author from the British Commonwealth or Ireland, the \$90,000 prize has prestige that reaches far beyond. The 2002 winner, Yan Martel’s *Life of Pi*, has sold 1.75 million copies worldwide, and publishers often print thousands of additional copies merely on the strength of a book’s mention on the shortlist of finalists.

In Britain, where more than 100,000 books are published every year—the same number as in America, which has five times the population—obscurity yawns just beyond the printing house. Of the 10,000 novels published, many never even reach major bookstores. So the Booker is more than a shot in the arm. It can mean salvation.

Rocco’s turn as a Booker judge made her a demanding reader with no patience for timidity, limited vision, or flabby language. She read a “minestrone” of 132 books in 147 days: “Unhappy families featured prominently; so did alcohol and absent fathers. The music of Bruckner was mentioned

more than once, and a quantity of Italian food was ruined either by a disgusting liquor or by an exploding espresso machine.”

Many of the books were admirable, but only a few stood up to all-around scrutiny and gained serious consideration—and the attendant publicity. In a literary age when reviews and bookshop placement aren’t the literary Good Housekeeping Seals of Approval they once were, and knowledgeable bookstore owners are an endangered species, Rocco believes that the Booker selection process is important. It showcases talents that might not otherwise get their due.

Critic Merritt Moseley, who has covered the Booker for *The Sewanee Review* over the past dozen years, has a slightly more jaundiced view. He sees in the Booker a grande dame that is still the most prestigious British literary award but has lost a bit of its strut in recent years to the Whitbread Prizes and the Orange Prize. The Booker response, in Moseley’s eyes, has been to whip up hype. The four to six week interlude between the release of the shortlist and the naming of the winner is calculated to generate chatter: “interviews with the shortlisted authors, comments on the list by all and sundry, oddsmaking and betting, and leaks and speculations.” And now there’s a “longlist” of the 20-plus semifinalists, released even earlier.

Then there’s the matter of the winner itself. When Moseley surveyed the competition in 2003, “the worst novel on the shortlist” won for the first time since he began following the

Booker. That book, *Vernon God Little*, is the tale of a Columbine-style shooting narrated by a colloquial Texas teenager, and its author is Peter Finlay, an Australian swindler using the pseudonym D. B. C. (short for Dirty-But-Clean) Pierre. Moseley intimates that the judges were swayed more by the novel's sensational subject and author than by its literary merit, dryly noting that perhaps their choice made them feel "daring."

Whether the Booker rewards true talent or has run off to join the publicity circus, it continues to play the role of a fairy godmother. In the case of Pierre, he and his past sins were thrust into the international lime-light—as was his promise to use his prize money to compensate those he swindled. Since then, his book has sold nearly half a million copies in Britain alone and has been translated into 30 languages.

EXCERPT

How She Got Her Smile

Waiting to see the Mona Lisa has all the thrill of standing in an airport check-in queue. The crowd pushes forward, cattlelike and unquestioning, performing a ritual they know they have to go through with in order to complete a preordained tourist experience. . . .

You have to feel sorry for Salvator Rosa, whose pictures hang to the left and the right of the Mona Lisa. No one spares a glance for the enormous Heroic Battle, 1652, to the left, with its dramatic portrayal of carnage. There must have been a time when this would have been the more obvious crowd gatherer, but a sequence of quite random events has transformed the Mona Lisa over the past century into a celebrity painting.



Before the 1789 revolution, scarcely anyone had access to it. Then, with the creation of the Louvre, it was for some time kept in the curator's bureau, away from the hordes, and valued much less than Leonardo's Virgin and Child with St. Anne. But as the romantic poets of the 19th century began to be obsessed with the femme fatale, the Mona Lisa was seized on as an ideal of womanhood, her smile and the eyes venerated. The confusion over quite who she was increased her allure. . . .

Then just as the painting was gaining mass recognition, it was stolen in 1911, at a time when popular newspapers were booming. The image was reproduced globally as the search began. Such was the painting's new significance that people lined up to stare at the empty space where the picture had been hanging. The story of the theft and its rediscovery inspired dozens of books and films. Then came the lampooning of the work by Marcel Duchamp, [and] the appropriation of the image by surrealists, pop artists, and finally by the advertising industry.

Art historian E. H. Gombrich says the picture has become so worn out by all these references that it's almost impossible "to see it with fresh eyes." But the reality is that in the Louvre, you cannot really see the painting at all for the far more practical reason that there are too many other people in front of it.

—Amelia Gentleman, a journalist who reports from France for *The Guardian*,
London (Oct. 19, 2004)

Reputation Rehab

"Capote Reconsidered" by Brooke Allen, in *The New Criterion* (Nov. 2004), 900 Broadway, Ste. 602, New York, N.Y. 10003.

The trouble with being a bad boy is that people don't remember you were once very, very good. In author Truman Capote's last years, his cringingly public displays of drunkenness and drug use caused old friends to wring their hands over his squandered talent. By his death in 1984, the shambles of his personal life had dwarfed his literary reputation. But it's time to resurrect him in memory as a literary giant, argues Allen, author of *Artistic License: Three Centuries of Good Writing and Bad Behavior* (2004).

Capote's rise was all the more dramatic for his humble roots. He was born in 1924 to a small-town con man and an itchy-footed girl from Monroeville, Alabama. They soon parted, and Capote spent much of his childhood feeling abandoned by both his absent father and his wayward mother, who left him for a long spell in the care of Alabama relatives.

He cut his literary teeth as a short-story writer for *Mademoiselle* and *Harper's Bazaar*, which were then homes for innovative fiction (*The New Yorker*, where he was a copy boy, refused to publish his stories because they were "romantic in a way this magazine is not"). His charm—issuing, seemingly, from a "puppyish desire for love"—quickly became legendary, adding to his persona.

With the publication of his novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms* in 1948, he was hailed as "dangerously gifted," though his prose was nearly upstaged by the jacket photo, in which he lolled like a "male Lolita." For the next decade, he used his gifts well for the most part, publishing *The Grass Harp* in 1951 and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* in 1958. After noticing a news item in November 1959 about the murders of a Kansas farm family, Capote spent the next six years researching *In Cold Blood*, perhaps the first nonfiction novel of the nascent "new journalism" movement.

With the book's publication in 1966, to a rapt national audience, his star seemingly could shine no brighter.

But the clouds were already gathering—some apparently summoned by the destabilizing experience of writing the book itself, which had immersed him in the grisly crime and drawn him to identify with one of the killers. "His crackup was as public and spectacular as any in recent history," says Allen. He drank "heroic" amounts of alcohol and kept pill pushers in business. Largely deserting his longtime emotional



Truman Capote's 1970s "crackup was as public and spectacular as any in recent history," says critic Brooke Allen.

anchor, Jack Dunphy, Capote took up with a series of "inappropriate" lovers. In 1975, nine years after throwing his black-and-white ball, dubbed the party of the century, at the Plaza Hotel in New York, he committed social hari-kari: *Esquire* published excerpts from his work in progress, *Answered Prayers*, in which he skewered—in thinly disguised fiction—his rich and

beautiful society pals.

In reading the early Capote, however, the grotesque that he later became is nowhere in evidence, says Allen, whose praise is occasioned by the publication of new editions of *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms* and *The Complete Stories of Truman Capote*. “It is a stunning experience to reread this fiction—mostly written when he was in his early twenties—and to realize

how very golden this golden boy was,” she effuses. “The image of the unhappy middle-aged clown dissolves. . . . Norman Mailer’s judgment that Capote was the most perfect writer of their generation—‘he writes the best sentences word for word, rhythm upon rhythm’—seems true and just.” Capote deserves enduring fame, says Allen, of the kind that will “outlive the mere notoriety of his final years.”

Designing Utopia

“Why Don’t the Rest of Us Like the Buildings the Architects Like?” by Robert Campbell, in *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, 136 Irving St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Architecture has become a troubled profession. For every Sydney Opera House or Museo Guggenheim Bilbao—buildings that become instant icons and transform a cityscape—there are hundreds of buildings such as Peabody Terrace. The latter, designed by Sert, Jackson & Associates to house Harvard University graduate students along Boston’s Charles River, consists of functional modernist towers “enlivened, at street level, by the bright color accents of the shops and cafés.” As Campbell, an architect and *Boston Globe* design critic, explains, the architects were trying to devise a strategy to make their project blend with the surrounding neighborhood. He admits to admiring the work but acknowledges that its “architectural language remains, for most people, unfamiliar and offensive.” Indeed, even though the design won the Gold Medal of the American Institute of Architects, “everybody else did, and does, hate it.”

In Campbell’s view, this conflict between architects’ visions and their buildings’ reception by the general public is an indication that “the connection between memory and invention has been severed in our culture.” Architects and laypeople who pay attention to design, Campbell says, mainly fall into two camps, “trads” and “rads.” The trads—traditionalists—want all buildings to “look like the buildings of the past they have learned and been conditioned to love.” The rads—radicals—want to “use computers to make groovy new shapes that will broadcast

our daring, our boldness, our march into the future.” Despite their seeming difference, both rads and trads “seek to substitute a utopia of another time for the time we actually live in. The trads find utopia in the past; the rads find it in the future.” Instead of grappling with “the complex reality of a present time and place,” both camps “inevitably create architecture that is thin, bloodless, weak, and boring.”

Campbell himself defines architecture as “the art of making places,” but argues that “you appreciate a work of architecture in only one way, by inhabiting it.” His definition would likely anger university professors of architecture, who “dream up totally unreadable theories” whose only purpose seems to be to “send smoke signals to [their] peers in other places.” Campbell likewise faults architecture critics like himself, who have encouraged the notion that a building can be appreciated as a separate thing, outside its own spatial context. This invites treating buildings as commodities, which then allows people to think of a “Frank Gehry” the way they do a Picasso or a Rembrandt. Campbell’s definition would probably not find favor even with most architects, who tend to “build for their peer group, and the hell with the rest of the world.” Rather than design with “an eye to the media world, not the physical world,” says Campbell, architects need to find a way to anchor their creations in the here and now, or risk having them become merely a succession of totems “in the worldwide stream of images.”

The Soviet Might-Have-Been

A Survey of Recent Articles

Was the Soviet Union doomed to collapse, as it did in 1991—or might further reforms have saved it? Stephen F. Cohen, a well-known commentator on Soviet and Russian affairs who teaches at New York University, stirs up a far-reaching debate in the pages of *Slavic Review* (Fall 2004) by arguing that such reforms were indeed possible.

Nations and systems can change, Cohen contends. “Can it be plausibly or morally argued that an original Soviet evil was greater, more formative, or more at odds with the state’s professed values than was slavery in the United States?”

The prevailing scholarly view is that the failure of Mikhail Gorbachev’s effort over six years (1985–91) to remake the Soviet Union along democratic and market lines shows that the Soviet system could not be reformed. That’s just “retrospective determinism,” Cohen says, countering that the “relatively free speech, political activity, and elections” permitted by 1989 opened the door to wide political participation. And while popular support for reform was growing, “very large majorities . . . continued to oppose free-market capitalism and to support fundamental economic-social features of the Soviet system—among them, public ownership of large-scale economic assets, a state-regulated market, guaranteed employment, controlled consumer prices and other standard-of-living subsidies, and free education and health care.” In a referendum in Russia and eight other republics in March 1991—just nine months before the Soviet Union was abolished—76 percent voted to preserve the union. “Nor is it true that a mass anti-Soviet ‘August Revolution’ thwarted the attempted coup by hard-line officials” in 1991 and left Boris Yeltsin in a commanding position.

As Cohen sees it, there were many forks in the road, and if Gorbachev had chosen differently at one of them—for example, by sending Yeltsin into “remote ambassadorial exile” in the 1980s—the Soviet Union

(minus the Baltics and some other republics) might live today.

Archie Brown, a professor of politics at Oxford University, agrees with Cohen that the Soviet Union was reformable, noting that even President Ronald Reagan recognized and applauded Gorbachev’s reforms. But reform was not enough. The Soviet Union needed to be *transformed*, and that was a process it would not have survived.

The Soviet system under Gorbachev did take remarkable strides toward political transformation. In March 1990, for example, the Communist Party gave up its constitutionally guaranteed monopoly on political power. As early as 1985, Gorbachev considered splitting the party in two, with his own social democratic party facing a party of “true communists.”

Economic transformation, however, was an impossible project, Brown says. Gorbachev couldn’t simultaneously streamline the existing command economy and move to a market system. Yet that’s what he tried to do, leaving the Soviet economy “in limbo.”

Stephen E. Hanson, a political scientist at the University of Washington, finds unpersuasive Cohen’s “explicit rejection of all attempts to explain the Soviet collapse in terms of deeper underlying contradictions within Leninist ideology and Soviet institutions.” The collapse followed so soon after Gorbachev’s reforms, Hanson observes, that it’s only natural to consider the possibility of a causal connection.

Karen Dawisha, director of the Havighurst Center for Russian and Post-Soviet Studies at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, accuses Cohen of attempting to keep the Old Left’s dream alive, of asking “us to believe that the USSR was reformable, but also that it was worth reforming.” If Cohen wants to play with counterfactual history, she says, he should ponder the fact that Vladimir Putin, the iron-fisted authoritarian, would have had a much better chance than Gorbachev of salvaging the old Soviet system—and may yet succeed in recreating it in modern Russia.

Adios, Mr. President

"Latin American Presidencies Interrupted" by Arturo Valenzuela, in *Journal of Democracy* (Oct. 2004), 1101 15th St., N.W., Ste. 800, Washington, D.C. 20005.

In Latin America, where dictatorship was the norm not so long ago, elected governments now rule in all but two (Cuba and Haiti) of its 37 countries. That's the good news, but here's the bad: Popular enthusiasm for democracy is waning. Many elected presidents have proven ineffectual, and 14 presidencies have ended in impeachment or forced resignation since 1985. Valenzuela, director of the Center for Latin American Studies at Georgetown University, warns that "democracy's future now hangs in the balance across a huge swath of the Western Hemisphere."

Four of the presidential departures came under unusual circumstances involving fraud and corruption: Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti (1991 and 2004), Alberto Fujimori in Peru (2000), and Joaquín Balaguer in the Dominican Republic (1996). In the other 10 cases, the early exits came "amid severe economic, political, and social turmoil," though there still were some positive signs. In Guatemala, for example, the military joined other groups in forcing out Jorge Serrano in 1993 when he began subverting democracy, but then stepped aside to let another democratic leader assume command—a far cry from the bad old days.

In several cases, protests against economic austerity measures were a major factor. In oil-rich Venezuela, which was hard hit by declining oil prices, President Carlos Andrés Pérez

was impeached after he pushed fuel-price increases and other unpopular measures approved by the International Monetary Fund, then imposed martial law to quell the resulting violence. But refusing to grasp the economic nettle can also be fatal: Five "stand pat" presidents were also shown the door.

"Although the citizenry expects a head of state to resolve deep-seated problems," says Valenzuela, "Latin American democratic presidents are for the most part extraordinarily weak," with feeble or fragmented parties and, consequently, with little support in the legislatures. In only three of the cases Valenzuela studied did chief executives take office after winning an absolute majority in a single round of voting. Only two commanded legislative majorities. Frustrated presidents face a powerful temptation to attack the legislative branch and bypass it with decrees, and many succumb, giving voters even more reason to become disaffected with democratic politics.

A parliamentary system, in which the prime minister serves at the pleasure of a legislative majority and legislators hold responsible cabinet positions, would do much better, in Valenzuela's view. Most of Europe's new democracies have chosen some form of parliamentary government. Unfortunately, most Latin Americans, living in "the continent of presidentialism par excellence," are plainly opposed to a switch.

A New Indonesia

"Indonesia's Quiet Revolution" by Lex Rieffel, in *Foreign Affairs* (Sept.–Oct. 2004), 58 E. 58th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Terrorism has drawn the world's attention to Indonesia in recent years—the 2002 bombing by Muslim extremists that killed 202 people in Bali, and the bombing a year later at the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta that killed 12. Meanwhile, hardly anybody has noticed that the world's largest Muslim-majority nation (population: 235 million) has also been carrying out a democratic transfor-

mation of the political system: *Reformasi*.

The change began in 1998, when huge protests drove President Suharto from office after more than three decades of iron rule. The next year, a new 550-member national parliament (the DPR) was chosen, in the first openly contested elections since 1955. A central element of *Reformasi* was a constitutional amendment calling for direct election of the

president beginning in 2004. This past September, Susilo Bambang Yudhono, a retired army general, defeated incumbent president Megawati Sukarnoputri (the daughter of Indonesia's first president, Sukarno) in a landslide vote, and a smooth transition to a new government followed. That was "a major achievement," says Rieffel, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington.

When Indonesia declared its independence from the Netherlands in 1945, its new constitution rested on a strong presidency. But the president was chosen by a People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) that included members of parliament and rep-

resentatives of "functional" groups, such as the military—all controlled by Suharto during his reign.

After his removal, the MPR began to introduce "critical checks and balances" through constitutional amendments. The "functional" representatives and groups in the MPR were replaced with a senate composed of 128 directly elected, nonpartisan members from the country's 32 provinces. Today, the MPR is much reduced in power and more democratic: Its only components are the senate and parliament. Only the parliament can enact laws, though the president must concur.

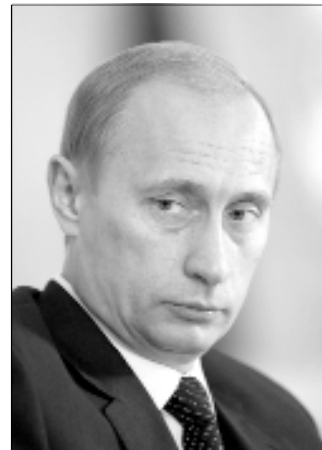
The Indonesian military continues to cast

EXCERPT

The New Putin

Everything has changed at the outset of President Putin's second term. He has defeated all his adversaries: oligarchs, regional governors, Communists, liberal parties, the parliament as such, and even the apparatus of the Council of Ministers. His concentration of power is excessive, provoking a power vacuum. Initially, two forces have come to the fore to fill this vacuum. The first power can be traced to President Putin's old KGB friends from St. Petersburg and the second . . . to the managers of the remaining state enterprises. Despite Russia's impressive growth and oil prices at levels approaching \$50 per barrel, one large state enterprise after another reports declining profits, suggesting that their masters are robbing them blind. After toying with the successful Anglo-American model of competing private enterprises in the resource industries under Yeltsin, Russia now seems on the course of adopting the failed OPEC model of state-owned monopoly enterprises in its energy sector.

Reform successes are often achieved when a leader is trying to consolidate his power. He then has to appeal to broad constituencies and pursue attractive policies. After consolidating power, he can focus on implementing all the bad things he may really want to see in place. Considering that Russia has become structurally quite similar to Latin America, analogies with Carlos Menem of Argentina and Alberto Fujimori of Peru may be quite relevant. They were viewed as shining successes during their first terms, just as they are now excoriated as miserable failures in their second. Similarly, we should be careful about assuming that Putin's policies in his second term will resemble those in his first, because the nature of Russian policymaking and his power base have completely changed.



Vladimir Putin

—Anders Åslund, director of the Russian and Eurasian Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in *Eurasian Geography and Economics* (Vol. 46, No. 6, 2004)

“a long shadow” over the country’s political life, says Rieffel, but its influence is much diminished. Though retired military officers appeared as candidates and supporters in the 2004 election campaigns, they were scattered among 24 political parties.

Yudhyono’s Democratic Party is secular, and last year’s elections “reaffirmed the

strength of moderate Islam in Indonesia,” notes Rieffel. But most Indonesians—long accustomed to violence against innocent civilians from various sources (including the military)—do not regard fighting terrorism as a high priority. Far more important to them are the fights against chronic corruption and unemployment.

Chicken Economics

“Cheap Chickens: Feeding Africa’s Poor” by G. Pascal Zachary, in *World Policy Journal* (Summer 2004), World Policy Institute, New School Univ., 66 Fifth Ave., 9th fl., New York, N.Y. 10011.

Why did the chicken cross the ocean? Answer: to get from Brazil to Ghana, where it sells for half the price of a local bird. Brazilian chickens aren’t the only imports that compete with Ghanaian foods—incredibly, so do Thai rice, Italian tomatoes, even Indonesian chocolate bars, though Ghana is the world’s second-largest producer of cocoa beans.

Ghana’s 20 million people, especially urbanites, eat a wider range of foods than ever before. But these food imports, while pleasing to the palates and pocketbooks of consumers, hurt the country’s food producers, notes author and journalist Zachary.

Since the 1960s, Africa’s share of world agricultural exports has shrunk from eight percent to two percent, according to the International Food Policy Research Institute. Over that same period, the sub-Saharan region—with some of the world’s poorest farmers—has switched from being a net food exporter to a net food importer. Yet foreign-aid donors and African governments are spending less on African agriculture than they did 20 years ago.

The “green revolution” didn’t transform Africa the way it did parts of Latin America in the 1950s and, later, India, China, and other Asian countries. A number of factors worked against Africa: poor soil quality, new crop varieties unsuitable to Africa’s climate, and civil wars. But even after overcoming these obstacles, productive sub-Saharan farmers are often doomed to frustration by inadequate food-processing capacity and transport infrastructure.

Pineapples and coconuts, both plentiful in Ghana, illustrate the story there. Virtually no unprocessed pineapples are exported. One do-

mestic bottler makes pineapple juice, but only for domestic consumption, and better-off locals prefer imported pasteurized juice. The roads are so bad and gasoline so expensive that it’s hard to get the crops to Ghana’s cities. About 40 percent of the pineapple crop rots before it can be sold. Coconuts sell for a pittance in the streets of Ghana’s capital, but Ghana has no coconut juice bottler or processor, and thus no juice exports. Years of government meddling and mismanagement led Ghana to its current state.

Kenya, however, provides a hopeful model. There, fruit and vegetable growers export 30 varieties of fruit and 27 different vegetables, mainly to Europe. The real value of the country’s farm exports has quadrupled in the past 30 years. Kenya succeeds for several reasons: It has a long history of specialty agriculture, and in 1967, after the nation gained independence, Kenya’s new government had formed an agency to coordinate the industry and improve farm output and exports. But it adopted a hands-off approach to the market. Foreign investment by international companies, tourism, and increased coordination between suppliers and European supermarkets also boosted exports.

Zachary thinks there are a few things poor countries like Ghana can do. Among them: ensure that neglected farming regions get a share of new and improved roads to remedy transport problems; reform land ownership rules so that, over time, farmers gain title to land now owned by rural tribal authorities; and support effective farm-assistance organizations so that farmers who want to improve their methods have somewhere to turn.

CURRENT BOOKS

Reviews of new and noteworthy nonfiction

Shakespeare & Co.

*THE SHAKESPEARE COMPANY:
1504–1642.*

By Andrew Gurr. Cambridge Univ. Press. 339 pp. \$65

Reviewed by Ron Rosenbaum

Andrew Gurr's study does more than offer a detailed portrait of Shakespeare's theatrical company: It offers a new and somewhat controversial vision of what kind of artist Shakespeare was.

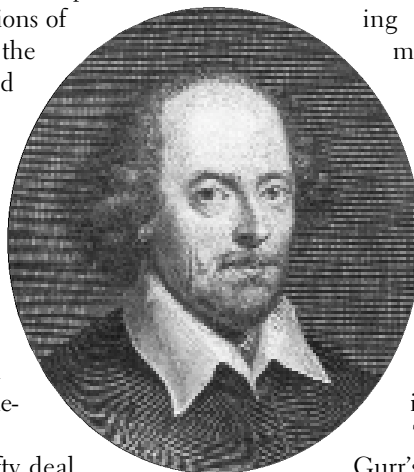
Gurr has become the chief chronicler of the playhouse culture of Shakespeare's age—and a key arbiter of the way Shakespeare is played today. His groundbreaking research on Shakespeare's two playhouses, the open-air Globe and the indoor Blackfriars, has shaped the present-day reproductions of those theaters and the way the plays are staged there and elsewhere. Here he considers not the physical structures or the audiences (topics of his classic 1987 study *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*) but the team: the company who built the audiences, acted the plays, and helped create the phenomenon of Shakespeare.

Gurr explains the crafty deal that gave birth to what he calls "duopoly," the domination of London playgoing by two companies for nearly half a century. In 1594, seeking to keep public performances out of the inns, where they'd been a source of disorder, the Lord Chamberlain gave just two companies licenses to put on

plays; one, the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later, under James I, the King's Men), featured William Shakespeare as actor, writer, and partner. The stability of this arrangement (the company kept going for a quarter-century after his death in 1616) seems to have given Shakespeare the ability to develop his art, and it gave his plays the continuing production that helped entrench them in the canon.

Gurr, emeritus professor at Reading University in England, modestly characterizes *The Shakespeare Company* as a "footnote" to our understanding of Shakespeare's plays. But as a footnote, it offers a new way of looking at the plays. And it's important, as well, for what it tells us about the direction of Shakespeare studies today.

The implicit argument of Gurr's book is that the phenomenon we know as "Shakespeare" was the product not so much of a single man as of a team, and that Shakespeare himself should be looked at less as a lone genius than as a team player, his works really the product of "a collective." At first glance, this may seem yet another variation on the postmodern "death of



the author” theoretical tendency, a death first announced by Roland Barthes and subsequently elaborated by Michel Foucault, who proposed the substitution of an ill-defined “author function.” In the United States, the New Historicists, led by Stephen Greenblatt, saw the plays as less the product of an autonomous author than of “material culture” that imprinted itself on Shakespeare’s consciousness. The plays are notable not so much for literary value (whatever that is) as for the way they reflect or illuminate the power relations of “the hegemony” at that moment in history.

But even Greenblatt has lately discarded the trappings of Theory and returned to a reinvigorated but traditional biographical criticism in his new Shakespeare book, *Will in the World*. And in some ways Gurr’s work, while giving a nod to the notion that an abstract “collectivity” can somehow “author” a work—very important to the Theory devotees who still demand the rejection of “the Romantic fiction of individual genius” and the “autonomous bourgeois self”—can nonetheless be seen as a salutary return to actual history, as opposed to abstract “historicizing.” Gurr’s focus is on the bourgeois selves involved in creating the phenomenon we know as “Shakespeare,” with Shakespeare himself merely one among many responsible.

This is Shakespeare the Company Man, and the company in some ways is coequal with the author. Thus, while Gurr claims he’s only providing a footnote to Shakespeare’s plays, he’s actually giving us a new version of Shakespeare: Shakespeare diminished to, if not a footnote, then a foot soldier. “A company of Elizabethan players had to work as a team, and it is misleading to pick out individual members as the key creative forces,” Gurr admonishes us. He does admit that some merit special note. “One of course was Shakespeare.” Giving Shakespeare special note might not seem lavish praise, but it is an advance over the death of the author entirely.

Another figure singled out—Richard Burbage, chief actor of the company—certainly deserves the attention Gurr gives him as chief impresario and charismatic embodiment of Shakespeare’s characters on stage. A case can be made that Burbage’s theatrical

charisma is as responsible as any factor for making Shakespeare the phenomenon he came to be.

But the emphasis is on “The Team,” as Gurr calls it. And in Gurr’s account, Shakespeare’s most notable contribution to the team was his “reliability” as a writer. “He supplied Burbage with the kind of role that gave best recognition to his skills as a ‘character’ actor, the art of ‘personation’ that became the company’s most lasting credential. Writing plays that competed with [those of Christopher Marlowe’s company, the Lord Admiral’s Men] through Hal’s, Brutus’s, and Hamlet’s self-searching was effective teamwork.”

Effective teamwork. Gurr’s unwillingness here to say anything more about these characters and plays—the aesthetic value of Shakespeare’s “self-searching” work, beyond its value as competitive fodder for the company—seems to be a deliberate tactic, although it’s not clear whether the refusal stems from a lack of interest in aesthetic questions or from a desire to reintegrate Shakespeare into a notion of material culture that has no room for questions of literary quality beyond material success.

Gurr then goes further in diminishing Shakespeare on the basis of what he must know is a still-controversial hypothesis. He tells us that “Shakespeare seems to have been most notable to the rest of the team as a willing oversupplier of words, never, as Jonson complained, bothering to blot out a line of what he wrote.” The reference is to Ben Jonson, Shakespeare’s chief rival after Marlowe died, who responded to claims that Shakespeare just poured forth his verbiage without revising or rewriting—“ne’er blotted a line”—with the riposte, “Would he had blotted a thousand.” There is, in fact, no unanimity among scholars on the question of whether this is an accurate account of Shakespeare’s writing habits, and a vigorous new faction has argued from textual evidence that he may have been a habitual reviser and blotter of lines.

But the key phrase in Gurr’s portrait is “willing oversupplier of words,” which papers over another controversy in Shakespeare studies: Why are so many of Shakespeare’s plays so long? If, as Gurr seems to believe, the playing time of most productions was only two hours, why do the texts of the plays that have come

down to us take three to four hours to perform uncut? Was Shakespeare being recalcitrant? Did he just not get the memo?

First of all, it's not universally accepted that the famous quote from *Romeo and Juliet* about the length of plays—"this two hours' traffic of our stage"—was accurate reportage rather than a tossed-off approximation, especially when it came to plays staged indoors, whose length wasn't dependent on daylight.

Gurr also makes the assumption that Shakespeare, supposedly a team player, wouldn't curb his "habitual overwriting" if that's what the company required. So we get a picture of Shakespeare habitually writing too long, and his manuscripts as "maximal" versions that he turned over to the company so they could pick and choose which scenes they wanted to play.

Nor does Gurr give more than a footnote's mention to the much-discussed recent work of Lukas Erne, the latest advocate of an equally controversial but opposing view that Shakespeare wrote long because he considered himself at least as much a literary artist writing for the page as a dramatic artist writing for the stage. In this view, the long versions were not something he cared little for, but were in fact his ideal vision of his work.

Instead, Gurr advances his most controversial theory: The versions of the plays Shakespeare's audiences saw were closer to the "Bad Quartos," the short, sometimes awkwardly worded versions of some of Shakespeare's plays. Many scholars have long disparaged these as "pirated," "reported," "memorially reconstructed" texts—unauthorized versions. Others have seen the Bad Quartos as Shakespeare's first or early drafts of his plays. Gurr contends that they are more likely the company's own cut versions of Shakespeare's longer drafts.

Gurr first advanced this theory in his Oxford edition of the Quarto version of *Henry V*, which is about half the length of the "official" 1623 Folio version published by Shakespeare's collaborators after his death. Gurr argued that, contrary to received opinion, this version of *Henry V* was "a company version," created, authorized, and cut, if not exactly authored, by the company. In a footnote in *The Shakespeare Company*, Gurr tells us, "I stuck my neck out" to advance this theory, and "have yet to be decapitated."

This has emboldened him to pronounce here that "the extended versions [of Shakespeare's plays] that found their way into print mislead us about what Elizabethans saw on stage. Most of Shakespeare's printed texts [were] reworked for their slimmer stage scripts. . . . Shakespeare's readiness to accept such changes seems to mark him as a safe team-player." Not to disparage the contributions of others on the team, but is that why we remember Shakespeare, because he was "a safe team-player"? If Gurr hasn't been "decapitated," he has been criticized for the implications of his theory, especially when it is seen to feed into an aesthetic preference for the shorter, speedier, streamlined, so-called acting versions of Shakespeare.

In an essay published in the journal *Textual Practice* in 2003 (before Gurr's latest work), Edward Pechter, a highly regarded textual and theoretical scholar, sees this approach to *Henry V* as a symptom of the devaluation of literary value in Shakespeare studies in favor of such practical, commercial-company values as "fast-paced texts" with simple "throughlines." It's a concept of literary value that disdains moments of meditation, soliloquy, digression, "excess," and complication in Shakespeare—categories into which fall many of the passages we most value.

"All across the ranks up to the most influential senior scholars," Pechter charges, "Shakespeareans are investing themselves in a drastically diminished concept of theatrical value. . . . To claim that brevity and straight-ahead simplicity constitute in all cases the essence or totality of theatrical values seems, if not willfully perverse, at best to mistake a particular means for a general end."

Gurr doesn't explicitly say that the "company versions" are better than that habitual overwriter Shakespeare's maximal versions. But the stakes in the argument are high—our vision of what we value most in Shakespeare, why we value it, and the notion of value itself. And so, in addition to being grateful to Gurr for the wealth of historical detail about Shakespeare's company, we are in debt to him for provoking anew this important argument.

>RON ROSENBAUM has written about Shakespearean questions for *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*. He is working on a book about Shakespeare scholars and directors.

Crimes of History

PAST IMPERFECT:

Facts, Fictions, Fraud—American History from Bancroft and Parkman to Ambrose, Bellesiles, Ellis, and Goodwin.

By Peter Charles Hoffer. PublicAffairs.

287 pp. \$26

Reviewed by David J. Garrow

In 2001 and early 2002, a cascade of professional misconduct charges shook the history profession. The well-known popular historians Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin both were accused of serial plagiarism. Another highly visible historian, Joseph Ellis, the author of *Founding Brothers* (2000), admitted telling his students at Mount Holyoke College grandiose falsehoods about being involved in the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. A much-heralded book claiming that colonial-era Americans owned relatively few firearms, written by Emory University historian Michael Bellesiles, was exposed as containing mythical data about nonexistent records.

Pundits wondered whether the flurry of scandals represented a widespread deterioration in professional standards or just a fortuitous cluster. Ambrose died, Goodwin and Ellis publicly apologized, Bellesiles resigned his professorship, and the outrage abated. Yet the problem recurs: In recent months, two of Harvard Law School's best-known faculty members, Laurence H. Tribe and Charles J. Ogletree, have explicitly atoned for plagiarized passages that appeared in their books.

To anyone who has taught in a law school, where student research assistants are legion, or encountered the paid researchers employed by commercially successful authors such as Ambrose and Goodwin, the most common pitfall is readily apparent. Both Tribe and Ogletree, and perhaps Goodwin, if not Ambrose, had to apologize not for any wrongdoing they had personally committed, but for the egregious sins of ill-trained assistants whose sloppy handiwork they had carelessly incorporated into their own texts. A book with one name on the cover may turn out to have a team of contributors. Most

readers may never have pondered the difference, but a history book whose author alone has carried out all of the research and writing is almost always a more dependable work of scholarship than one whose multiple cooks can easily spoil the broth.

Exceptions to that generalization, as in the case of Michael Bellesiles, often involve misconduct far more insidious than simple plagiarism. Peter Charles Hoffer's *Past Imperfect* offers the most comprehensive and erudite analysis of the Bellesiles scandal to date, and his thoughtful and wide-ranging review of the full raft of recent plagiarism cases and other transgressions leaves no doubt that Bellesiles's were "the most egregious of our era."

Bellesiles's book *Arming America*, published in 2000 by Knopf, was preceded by a major 1996 article using the same supposed data in the *Journal of American History*, the discipline's most prominent periodical. According to the article, probate records indicated that relatively few colonial-era Americans owned firearms—evidence tending to undercut the argument that the Second Amendment was meant to enshrine a right of individuals to own guns. The Bellesiles study won an award for the best article in the journal that year; *Arming America* would likewise be honored with the prestigious Bancroft Prize. Bellesiles's work was highly visible among historians, but the first serious questions about the honesty of his scholarship emerged from outside the profession, from politically motivated "gun nuts" whom most scholars initially ignored.

In context, then, the most troubling questions concern not Bellesiles's intentions or mental processes but the unquestioning credence other historians accorded his work. Hof-

fer, a history professor at the University of Georgia, states that it's "almost impossible" for any journal or book editor to "double-check manuscript or archival reference notes" so as to confirm the content, or indeed the existence, of cited records. But anyone who has ever written for an academic law review knows that unpaid student editors at those journals painstakingly review photocopies of every footnoted source. A leading history journal supported by a major university could well do the same, even if a similar practice would be prohibitively expensive for most university presses and commercial publishing houses.

The same statistical presentation of supposed colonial-era probate records that proved to be the most fanciful part of *Arming America* appeared in Bellesiles's earlier article, but no professional historians raised warning flags. When questions about his book finally mushroomed, Bellesiles magnified and compounded his misdeeds by concocting a succession of increasingly implausible excuses for why he could not produce supportive documentation. The many historians who had unquestioningly jumped to Bellesiles's defense quietly slithered away as the conclusion that Bellesiles had "manipulated them and betrayed their trust" became inescapable. The Bancroft Prize was rescinded, and Knopf withdrew *Arming America* from publication.

Hoffer's most telling comment on the Bellesiles saga concerns a revised paperback edition of *Arming America* that a little-known press issued late in 2003. A table in the paperback presents data from 2,353 probate records; in the hardcover, the same table supposedly summarizes 11,170 such records. "What had happened to the data and records of the other counties [Bellesiles] said he consulted?" writes Hoffer. "If for his article and the Knopf book he had actually consulted probate records at the archives, libraries, courthouses, or repositories where the records were stored, he could have gone back and redone the count. But he did not." Hoffer deems this table "the strongest possible admission [Bellesiles] could have made without a full and honest confession" that his earlier data were indeed fabricated. "In his relentless drive to prove his thesis of a paucity of guns," Hoffer concludes, Bellesiles "had convicted himself of the charge

of professional misconduct in his earlier presentations of his research."

Past Imperfect offers an exceptionally astute survey of recent trends in the history profession, and Hoffer's subtle argument is that the more politically engaged "new history" that has emerged over the past 35 years almost inevitably led to the flock of scandals. It did so in two separate but related ways. First, as the profession became more politicized, and as the major professional organizations took on a more "distinct ideological cast" and moved leftward, a collective desire to make scholarly activity more politically relevant became increasingly pronounced. Hoffer sees the Bellesiles case as one deplorable result; during the Clinton impeachment battle, the embarrassingly partisan behavior of some historians, most of whom had no professional expertise concerning impeachment, was another.

Second, the evolution of the discipline away from the tastes of most nonprofessional readers encouraged the growth of "popular history" as a publishing phenomenon with few ties to the academy. Authors such as Doris Kearns Goodwin and the late Stephen Ambrose may have Ph.D.'s and even university affiliations, but the conception and marketing of their books is a commercial enterprise, not a scholarly one. Their "immunity from close professional scrutiny," Hoffer explains, has further encouraged the absence of originality in most mass-market works.

Ambrose, perhaps the quintessential popular history author, "compiled rather than composed" many of his books, Hoffer reports. In one of them, *The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys Who Flew the B-24s over Germany* (2001), extensive plagiarism was proved beyond any doubt. Hoffer correctly notes that slight wording changes in purloined prose are "the telltale marks of an intent to borrow illicitly, proof of a pattern of unethical conduct." Nonetheless, he says that evidence of conscious intent is not required for a finding of literary theft, and he applies that standard in concluding that Goodwin did plagiarize, even if not purposely.

When Hoffer examines how Joseph Ellis falsely "projected himself into the center of the decade's most important events" while teaching about the 1960s, he acknowledges that Ellis "falsified his credentials before his stu-

dents,” but otherwise minimizes the seriousness of the offense. “All he had done was falsify his life experiences,” and such imaginative storytelling, Hoffer speculates, merely reflects how “a man’s ability to invent himself and his ability to reinvent the past in his books” draw upon the same creative skills. But Hoffer’s declaration that “Ellis did not mean the lies to hurt anyone” betrays undue sympathy, as the same excuse could also be offered in behalf of Ambrose, Goodwin, and even Bellesiles. Ellis betrayed his students’ trust in a profound way, even if equivalent wrongdoing has never manifested itself in any of his widely praised books.

Hoffer ends his impressively intelligent book on a pessimistic note. From 2002 until 2004, he served in the Professional Division of the American Historical Association (AHA). Long responsible for adjudicating accusations of professional misconduct against historians, the division had considered serious allegations in the early 1990s that a less-noted popular historian, Stephen B. Oates of the University of Massachusetts, had committed plagiarism in his biography of Abraham Lin-

coln. Oates challenged the association’s authority to adjudicate the charges against him, and the AHA held back from issuing an explicit verdict on Oates’s guilt.

Hoffer says that, even a decade later, the association’s handling of the Oates case “was still an embarrassment to the Professional Division,” and in mid-2003 the AHA shamefully decided to discontinue review of *any* professional misconduct charges against historians. Hoffer blames this “retreat from professional responsibility” on historians’ “unwillingness to act in cases of misconduct.” The AHA rhetorically proclaims a strong commitment to professional integrity, but its “hypocritical refusal to enforce ethical precepts,” Hoffer writes, gives the lie to that declaration. More cases like Ambrose’s, if not Bellesiles’s, will certainly occur, and when they do, interested Americans unfortunately will not be able to look to academic historians’ professional organizations for expert guidance on what has gone wrong.

>DAVID J. GARROW is the author of *Bearing the Cross* (1986), a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Martin Luther King, Jr., and *Liberty and Sexuality* (1994), among other works.

Grace and the Grotesque

FLANNERY O’CONNOR’S SACRAMENTAL ART.

By Susan Srigley. Notre Dame Univ. Press. 208 pp. \$42 (hardcover), \$20 (paper)

FLANNERY O’CONNOR AND THE CHRIST-HAUNTED SOUTH.

By Ralph C. Wood. Eerdmans. 272 pp. \$22

Reviewed by Charlotte Allen

Flannery O’Connor (1925–64) is now recognized as one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century, perhaps second in stature only to fellow southerner William Faulkner. This despite the fact that, because she died at age 39 of hereditary lupus, her literary output was small: just two novels and 32 short stories, nearly all set in or near her native

Georgia, and nearly all bearing her signature qualities of extreme physical and emotional violence, mordant wit, and fascination with the “Christ-haunted” (her words) consciousness of the Protestant fundamentalist South.

The characters in O’Connor’s fiction typically flail in semicomical, semitragic misery as they strive to break free from



Flannery O'Connor stands in front of a self-portrait at her home in Milledgeville, Georgia.

their religious pasts and remake the world in their own images, but find themselves pinned like butterflies by a God who will not leave them alone. In her novel *Wise Blood* (1952), the anti-Christian protagonist Hazel Motes winds up blinding himself with lye and dying in a ditch; in her short story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," a prison escapee called the Misfit shoots an entire family to death; in another story, "Good Country People," the smug intellectual Hulga has her wooden leg stolen by a traveling Bible salesman. Not a single one of those novels or stories seems dated some 40 years after the author's death.

O'Connor herself was a Roman Catholic, and not just any sort of Catholic, but a daily Mass-goer when her health permitted and a ferocious defender to friends and correspondents of every last embarrassing Catholic teaching, from the Real Presence to the ban on birth control. At the same time, she despised the smarmy "Pious Style," as she called it, of conventional midcentury Catholic writing, and, like her fellow anti-sentimentalist Evelyn Waugh, she chose mostly not to write

about Catholics.

For these reasons, as both Susan Srigley and Ralph C. Wood point out in these additions to a burgeoning corpus of O'Connor criticism, Flannery O'Connor has been systematically misinterpreted by critics. When O'Connor's work began appearing in the 1950s, she was pigeonholed as "Southern Gothic" in the tradition of Faulkner and Tennessee Williams. A little later, she got lumped with John Hawkes, Terry Southern, and the rest of the nihilistic black humor crowd of the 1960s: She was the Diane Arbus of literature.

Many of today's critics, led by Frederick Asals, the author of *Flannery O'Connor: The Imagination of Extremity* (1982), attempt to sever O'Connor the writer from O'Connor the Catholic, putting her literary and religious aims utterly at odds with each other. Mary Gordon, the dissident Catholic novelist, considers O'Connor's sensibility cruelly Jansenistic. It views humans as essentially lacking free will and condemns most of them, à la Hazel Motes, to unredeemed death. Oth-

ers have characterized O'Connor, who never married and seldom wrote about carnal matters, as sexually immature (and hence limited as a writer), or as a premature feminist who, as one critic put it, seethed with "repressed rage," or as a lesbian. On the other side, many Christian critics have offered simplistically allegorical readings of O'Connor, interpreting "Good Country People," for example, as a satirical critique of the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, the notion that "Scripture alone" is the source of God's revelation.

Srigley and Wood try to correct this state of affairs through sophisticated reconciliations of O'Connor's artistry and her Catholic religious intentions, with varying degrees of success. Wood, a longtime professor of theology and literature at Baylor University, is the more eloquent and interesting of the two, but also the more disappointing. He frankly admits that he is offering not a "close literary examination of O'Connor's individual stories and novels," but rather a study of her work "as it bears on the life of the contemporary church and one of its regional cultures," the South. Many of his readings of O'Connor's work strike me as spot-on, as when he observes that the Grandmother, a casually racist, self-satisfied chatterbox who is the last family member shot in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," is no mere Southern grotesque, but redeems herself just before her death when she cries out to the Misfit in a sudden gesture of Adamic solidarity, "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children." Elsewhere, however, Wood's book tends to turn into a florilegium of generalized observations about southern culture, American religion, and the emptiness of modern secular life, with long quotations from Dostoevsky, Walker Percy, Pope John Paul II, and others only tangentially connected to Flannery O'Connor.

Srigley's book, a revision of her doctoral dissertation (she teaches at Nipissing University in Ontario), is more focused, but could use some of the larger context that Wood serves up in overabundance. She aims to counter the theory of Asals and oth-

ers that O'Connor's religion was irrelevant to her art, as well as the view of critics such as Gordon that the comic cruelty in O'Connor's fiction suggests that she was a quasi-Manichaean dualist who regarded the physical world and the spiritual world of God's grace as radically separate.

O'Connor was a devoted reader of the 13th-century theologian Thomas Aquinas, whom she had encountered in the writings of Jacques Maritain, a famous mid-20th-century French neo-Thomist. Maritain's book *Art and Scholasticism and the Frontiers of Poetry*, translated into English in 1962, interpreted Aquinas's theories about nature and grace to devise an aesthetic philosophy holding that when an artist creates something from the materials of the natural world, the creation, even if uninspiring, is good and partakes of God's grace. Art is thus "incarnational," imitating God's becoming part of the natural world through Christ, and also "sacramental," using the materials of the natural world to invoke God's grace. Supporting her claims with many detailed citations from Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, Srigley makes a case that O'Connor intended to represent human nature as ever open to salvation—unless we willfully blind ourselves with self-regard, like Hazel Motes.

This is an interesting argument, although Srigley does not, perhaps cannot, offer any evidence that O'Connor, for all her devotion to Aquinas, actually read many of the specific passages in the monumental *Summa* that Srigley cites. O'Connor's voluminous correspondence does not make it clear that Aquinas himself, rather than Maritain's interpretation of Aquinas, inspired her aesthetic. Still, Srigley's book, as well as Wood's, puts to rest any notion that Flannery O'Connor can be regarded as just another of the 20th century's secular specialists in the grotesque. Anyone seriously interested in her well-deserved place in America's literary pantheon should take a look at both books.

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ARTS & LETTERS

WODEHOUSE:

A Life.

By Robert McCrum. Norton.

530 pp. \$27.95

Comedians have a hard time getting respect, as the late Rodney Dangerfield could attest, and literary humorists usually have the same problem of being dismissed by the intelligentsia. The shining exception is P. G. Wodehouse (1881–1975), the legendary writer's writer whose gloriously inconsequential tales of country-house high jinks in impossibly idyllic English locales left him treasured by a century-spanning range of contemporaries, from Rudyard Kipling and Arthur Conan Doyle to John le Carré and John Updike. A phenomenally prodigious font of fun, Wodehouse produced more than a hundred books and plays in a life that lasted well into his nineties. The lovable, moneyed moron Bertie Wooster and his magically capable butler Jeeves are only two of his delicious creations. He also contributed memo-

rable lyrics to many Broadway shows, including *Show Boat's* eccentric "Bill": "I love him because he's—I don't know, / Because he's just my Bill."

Onto a field that contains several previous biographies ventures Robert McCrum, literary editor of the London *Observer*. He admits that the eager-to-please gentleman-author (Alistair Cooke found Wodehouse's voice "tuned entirely in C major") is an elusive character. Neglected by his parents and raised by undemonstrative relatives, then denied a college education, the young Wodehouse seems to have codified the traditional British stiff upper lip into an absolute denial of personal feelings ("One has deliberately to school oneself to think of something else quick") and an inability to grasp world conflict ("this Belsen business"). His self-willed detachment from reality seems frustrating and disingenuous to modern sensibilities, and McCrum doesn't hesitate to critique it with a clear eye. He calls Wodehouse's epistolary memoir *Performing Flea* (1953) "a bravura demonstration of tact, evasion, and wishful thinking," and he appraises Wodehouse's underconceived decision to broadcast playful talks about his wartime civilian internment by the Nazis over their own radio network as "incredibly stupid, but . . . not treacherous."

Still, this book is a manifest and impressive labor of love. McCrum's research has been exhaustive, and he marshals his facts articulately and forcefully. He cites apt passages from the supposedly frivolous tales to parallel difficult turns in their author's life ("Fate lurks to sock you with the stuffed eelskin"), and though he makes no claims for the truth of these speculations, they are always thought-provoking and always plausible. As Bertie Wooster might say, that's exerting the old cerebellum, Mr. McCrum.



Winston Churchill chats with P. G. Wodehouse, a member of the House of Lords, during the 1923 general election campaign.

Wodehouse's massive output and unforgettable characters have gotten him compared to Dickens and Shakespeare, but McCrum prefers the spirit of Jane Austen, calling P. G. a "miniaturist" whose language "danced on the page like poetry, marrying the English style of the academy with the English slang of the suburbs." Evelyn Waugh famously opined, "He will continue to release future generations from captivity that may be more irksome than our own. He has made a world for us to live in and delight in."

There are some surprises: Wodehouse disliked *South Pacific*, *My Fair Lady*, and the works of Graham Greene, yet he was a fan of the TV soap opera *Edge of Night*. His long marriage was affectionate but apparently asexual, though, unlike another glamorous Jazz Age husband, Cole Porter, he professed to dislike "homosexualism." There is also more here about publishing contracts, payments, taxes, old school rugby and cricket scores, little Pekingese dogs, and who ate what when—though to be fair, these are details that compose a real life rather than a novel—than any but a devoted Wodehouse fan would want to learn. And that, of course, will limit this biography's sales to thousands and thousands and thousands.

—MARK O'DONNELL

**WHAT THE BEST COLLEGE
TEACHERS DO.**

By Ken Bain. Harvard Univ. Press.
207 pp. \$21.95

This school year, classes began on August 30. I hustled in from Nova Scotia at noon on the 30th and that evening taught a humdinger of a class, thoughts thrumming through my mind like the wheels of my Toyota rolling along the Mass. Pike.

What the Best College Teachers Do is sensible, literate, and well meaning. Bain notes, among many other things, that good teachers are humble, know their subjects, and believe teaching is a serious intellectual endeavor. They are also kind. Years ago, when I first started teaching, an old boy told me, "Sam, if you think the best of people, they will give you their best." The man was right. Once or twice, tricksters have asked me to throw them into briar patches, provoking

laughter rather than anger. But all in all, the kids have done well by me.

Bain's book is good. People who read it will stop and think. Perhaps some will become better teachers. Yet the book lacks poetry. Bain analyzes the mechanics of teaching well, but he doesn't probe the things that made so many of us teachers. The teaching life is wonderful for many reasons, not all of which occur in the classroom but most of which influence classes.

Bain studied 63 good teachers. Yet we know nothing about them, and, as a result, really don't care about what they do in the classroom. Did these people have pets and families? What flowers did they plant in their gardens, or did they plant only herbs? In Grace Paley's wonderful story "A Conversation with My Father," the narrator refuses to face the fact that her father is dying. The father asks her to tell him a story, and she shapes a clever tale, one so witty that it deflects attention from life as it is lived. When the narrator says that whether or not her heroine is married does not matter, the father replies in exasperation, "It is of great consequence." Life lived beyond the lecture hall is of great consequence and may influence teaching more than any pedagogical technique. A sick child, an alcoholic mother, daffodils suddenly bright in a green dell—such things determine the course of classes.

I studied *What the Best College Teachers Do* in bits and pieces, and between chapters read portions of *Prospero's Cell* (1945), by Lawrence Durrell, an account of his years in Corfu before World War II. Durrell's book raised my spirits and awakened my imagination. Quick with life, the book invigorated me, not simply perking me up enough to read more of Bain but so stirring me that I taught better the next day (of course, I teach English). Bain's book resembles a head with its chicken cut off, thoughtful but bloodless. Read Bain's study, but balance your diet by also reading *Masters: Portraits of Great Teachers* (1981), a collection of appreciative essays edited by Joseph Epstein.

When anyone writes about teaching, even when I write about teaching, my nose twitches and I become suspicious. Much of what we learn has little to do with the classroom. "Extreme busyness, whether at school or college, kirk or market," Robert Louis Stevenson wrote

in “An Apology for Idlers,” “is a symptom of deficient vitality: and a faculty for idleness implies a catholic appetite and a strong sense of personal identity.” So much is unknown about learning and teaching, even after Bain’s years of research. Does the Pentecostal, transforming teacher really exist? Or is she just one of the many platitudinous figures wandering our social minds?

Testimonials of appreciation fall into a pattern, beginning, “You may not remember me, but . . .” In the middle of the letter come accounts of life influenced and well lived, then the obligatory “I will never forget you.” After a teacher receives her first hundred of these letters, she realizes the student never knew her, and maybe didn’t know her subject either.

—SAM PICKERING

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

THE ESCAPE FROM HUNGER AND PREMATURE DEATH, 1700–2100:

Europe, America, and the Third World.

By Robert William Fogel. Cambridge Univ. Press. 191 pp. \$70 (hardcover), \$23.99 (paper)

From our present perch of affluence, we forget the abject misery, malnutrition, and starvation that most people endured for most of recorded history. In a fact-filled book geared toward scholars, Nobel Prize-winning economist Robert Fogel of the University of Chicago reminds us of the huge strides in conquering widespread hunger and of the immense economic and social consequences of that achievement.

It may shock modern readers to learn how poorly fed and sickly most people were until 100 or 150 years ago, even in advanced countries. In 1750, life expectancy at birth was 37 years in Britain and 26 in France. Even by 1900, life expectancy was only 48 in Britain and 46 in France. With more fertile land, the United States fared slightly better, with a life expectancy that was greater than Britain’s in 1750 (51) but identical to it in 1900 (48). Urbanization and industrialization in the 19th century actually led to setbacks. As Americans moved from place to place, they spread “cholera, typhoid, typhus . . . and other major killer diseases,” Fogel writes. Urban slums abetted sickness and poor nutrition. Fogel questions whether rising real wages in much of the 19th century signaled genuine advances in well-being. “Is it plausible,” he asks, “that the overall standard of living of workers was improving if their nutritional status and life ex-

pectancy were declining?”

By contrast, life expectancy in advanced countries is now in the high 70s (77 in the United States). Compared with those of the early 1700s, diets are 50 percent higher in calories in Britain and more than 100 percent higher in France. Summarizing his and others’ research, Fogel calls this transformation “technophysio evolution.” It has had enormous side effects.

First, we’ve gotten taller. A typical American man in his 30s now stands 5 feet 10 inches, almost five inches taller than his English counterpart in 1750. (Societies offset food scarcities in part by producing shorter people, who need less food.)

Second, we’ve gotten healthier. Although Fogel concedes that advances in public health (better water and sewage systems, for instance) and medicine (vaccines, antibiotics) have paid huge dividends, he argues that much of the gain in life expectancy stems from better nutrition. With better diets, people become more resistant to disease—their immune systems work better and their body tissue is stronger—and they have healthier babies.

Finally, better diets have made economic growth possible. An overlooked cause of the meager growth before 1800, Fogel argues, is that many people were too weak to work. In the late 1700s, a fifth of the populations of England and France were “effectively excluded from the labor force.” As people ate better and lived longer, they worked harder. Fogel attributes 30 percent of Britain’s economic growth since 1790 to better diets.

This conclusion seems glib. After all, better diets came from technology that enabled

more productive agriculture—better cultivation techniques, better seeds, more specialization. What, specifically, were these advances? Fogel doesn't say. His overwhelming focus on scholarly research on diets also makes his comments on the Third World an elaboration of the obvious (in effect: lots of people are still hungry), with little in the way of recommendations for what could be done. Fogel is always illuminating and, in his omissions, often frustrating.

—ROBERT J. SAMUELSON

OBSESSIVE GENIUS:

The Inner World of Marie Curie.

By Barbara Goldsmith. Norton. 320 pp. \$23.95

Marie Curie's family donated her workbooks, diaries, journals, and other papers to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris at the end of the 20th century. In what may have been a cataloging first, the library initially had to sort the collection into three groups based on level of radioactivity.

Barbara Goldsmith's new biography uses these literally and figuratively hot resources (and others) to take a fresh look at the past century's most famous woman scientist. Goldsmith, the author of *Little Gloria . . . Happy At Last* (1980) and other books, portrays Marie Curie (1867–1934) as a blend of brilliance, resolve, passion (for work and at least three men), recurring depression, obsession (this is not the first biography of Curie to include that trait in its title), achievement, and pragmatism.

Most scientists make only incremental contributions to the corpus of scientific knowledge. Curie's accomplishments were numerous, monumental, and, like the elements she discovered, radiant. She won two Nobel Prizes—one in 1903 with her husband, Pierre, and another colleague, and a second, solo prize in 1911—and her scientific heirs, her daughter and son-in-law, won their own Nobel in 1935.

Of course, Curie couldn't have foreseen that the papers documenting her life would intimidate archivists many decades after her death. Her discoveries were anti-ecclesiastical. In 1898, she found something entirely new under the sun, the highly radioactive element radium. The mysterious, invisible, silent substance did, though, share one im-

portant property with the sun itself: It emitted energetic rays (hence the name Curie gave it) that could activate and burn living cells. Although Curie called radium "my child," it was an ungrateful offspring, contaminating not just her papers but her body—she died at 67 of radiation poisoning.

Curie understood that radium, like the sun, could have both therapeutic and destructive uses. Her interest resided exclusively in the salubrious applications. For example, she designed mobile x-ray units during World War I, when other chemists and physicists were adapting the new chemical elements to novel weaponry. Curie and her daughter drove "Les Petites Curies" to hospitals at the front, x-rayed wounded soldiers, and made calculations to help surgeons locate shrapnel and bullets in tissue.

Curie plumbed the unseen and the unknown. Outside the laboratory, she frequented séances in hopes of communicating with Pierre, who had been knocked down, crushed, and killed in 1906 by a horse and dray. Inside the laboratory, her ghostly lures were radium and another of her discoveries, polonium (named for Poland, her homeland). Curie extracted both elements from pitchblende—a dark, complex mineral—by fractionation, a tedious separation process. Pitchblende could be a symbol for Curie's dark and complex life: Embedded in both were elements of extraordinary bril-



Marie Curie, c. 1900

liance and intensity. Disjunctions between the ethereal world of the spiritualist and the data-bound world of the scientist seem not to have troubled Curie. Or perhaps her brain simply fractionated them.

What did plague and sometimes hinder her were relentless prejudices—against women in the world of science, against women generally in the wider society, against immigrants,

against people battling depression. Goldsmith's account of the persistent injustices Curie encountered has a contemporary ring. Today as then, social and political factors block women from fully participating in certain areas of science. How sad that these senseless barriers to human betterment and equity seem as enduring as the sun.

—RUTH LEVY GUYER

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

THE HEART OF THE WORLD:

A Journey to the Last Secret Place.

By Ian Baker. Penguin. 511 pp. \$27.95

When I was in Tibet in 1993, there were rumors of an expedition to the Tsangpo Gorge in the southeastern part of the country—the deepest gorge on earth, and a place that had been closed to Westerners since the 19th century. It seemed unlikely that the expedition would succeed, given the restrictions on travel and the rumored dangers of the area. How thrilling, then, to read, in Ian Baker's *The Heart of the World*, a vividly rendered account of that expedition and the several that followed.

Baker, a longtime resident of Kathmandu and a student of Tibetan Buddhism, first became interested in the Tsangpo Gorge through inquiries into *beyul*, sacred hidden lands whose full meaning can be grasped only through spiritual preparedness. The Tsangpo Gorge lies in the heart of an area known as *beyul Pemako*, or “Hidden-Land Arrayed like a Lotus.” Unlike most of arid Tibet, Pemako's terrain ranges from snow-covered peaks to steamy, orchid-filled forests. Tibetans, Baker writes, consider it “the most dangerous as well as the greatest of all the hidden lands.”

Early in his quest, Baker is told by a Tibetan lama, “In Pemako, don't try to avoid suffering, but accept whatever comes.” And suffering does seem to be the norm. In the course of his eight journeys to Pemako, Baker encounters local women rumored to have a penchant for poisoning travelers, Chinese authorities ordering several-day detours for no clear reason, and porters demanding higher and higher wages. But none

of these hardships compares to the weather—“a veritable hell of nearly incessant rain”—which itself pales in comparison with the leeches: “They burrowed through our gaiters and the strips of green canvas that the porters had wrapped around their calves and ankles in an attempt to seal them out. It wasn't until the end of the day, when we took off our sodden and blood-filled boots, that we could see their handiwork.”

Baker's book, though, is neither a catalog of suffering nor a simple travelogue. More than anything, it is an introduction to the precepts of Tibetan Buddhism, especially Vajrayana, or Tantric Buddhism—the path through which enlightenment can be attained in a single lifetime. And while Baker focuses more on his own spiritual journey than on the characters he encounters, some of them prove memorable. A Tibetan lama, good natured to the point of absurdity, accompanies Baker's group for part of the journey and seems to bring with him the only breaks from the rain. Baker's close friend Hamid is a kind of spiritual Lothario who manages to encounter attractive and willing partners in even the most dire and unlikely circumstances.

But ultimately it is the landscape that emerges as the strongest character. Baker's treks to the Tsangpo Gorge are for him both physical quests and spiritual quests, and his descriptions of the landscape are charged with meaning on both the physical and spiritual levels. In the artfully rendered, detailed descriptions of a leech-infested, rain-drenched, breathtakingly beautiful world, the book comes most to life.

—JOHANNA STOBEROCK

HISTORY

**HAROLD LASKI AND
AMERICAN LIBERALISM.**

By Gary Dean Best. Transaction.
204 pp. \$34.95

Although his voluminous writings are little read today, Britain's Harold Laski (1893–1950) was one of the most influential public intellectuals of his time. Unlike others to whom he can be compared, such as Raymond Aron in France and Walter Lippmann in the United States, Laski was a major force on both sides of the Atlantic. At home, he became a famous professor at the London School of Economics and the British Labor Party's leading theoretician. In the United States, his books and articles reinforced the conviction, acquired by some American liberals during the Great Depression, that political democracy required "economic democracy," that is, socialism—a view, Gary Dean Best rightly points out, that "fractured the liberal movement" during the New Deal and ended up hurting the cause of progressive reform.

Laski cut a memorable figure. As historian James MacGregor Burns recalls, "With his slight physique, large round spectacles, and small mustache, he seemed almost a caricature of David Low's caricature of the little man." Blessed with a photographic memory and encyclopedic knowledge, Laski gave riveting lectures on the history of political thought and issued a cascade of writings.

Laski also worked tirelessly for the Labor Party. He was party chairman during its stunning electoral victory in 1945, when Winston Churchill was rejected in favor of the colorless Clement Atlee (a modest man, Churchill dryly noted, with much to be modest about). Soon, however, Laski was crushed by the loss of a libel suit he had brought against a newspaper for reporting that he had advocated violent revolution—a charge that was literally untrue but that a jury found might have been inferred from his writings. He soldiered on, but found himself increasingly at odds with the party leadership on its

foreign policy, which he thought too confrontational toward the Soviet Union and a betrayal of the promise to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

In this workmanlike exegetical account, Best, a professor emeritus of history at the University of Hawaii at Hilo, traces Laski's evolution from pluralism to Marxism. From 1931 onward, Laski doggedly insisted that capitalism's day was done and that the American working class must create its own labor party to usher in the socialist future. He thought the harsh realities of Soviet socialism would pass, and he minimized critical differences between Europe and America. In 1957, Max Lerner, whom Laski had all but anointed his chief American acolyte, observed wryly that Laski's *The American Democracy* (1948) reminded him of Clifford Odets's play *Waiting for Lefty*: "The stage is set for the hero . . . but he never shows up."

As Best points out, it would be difficult to imagine anyone "more biased in his perception of America than Laski." Best would have done well to try to explain why. Laski, after all, knew better—in *The American Presidency* (1940), he noted that "there was no residuary feudalism" in the United States, and that most American workers of the 19th century "enjoyed conditions far higher than anything the European peasant or industrial worker has ever known." Had he followed up on these insights, Laski might have recognized the grip on the American psyche of what Louis Hartz was to call, in *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955), "irrational Lockeanism"—the dogged worship of individualism even in times of economic hardship, and the rejection of class-based ideologies as "un-American."

"*De mortuis*," Laski once punned, "*nihil nisi bunkum*." Freely translated: Of the dead speak only baloney. In his own case, alas, history has pronounced a less cosmetic verdict.

—SANFORD LAKOFF

***THIS GREAT BATTLEFIELD
OF SHILOH:***

***History, Memory, and the
Establishment of a Civil War
National Military Park.***

By Timothy B. Smith. Univ. of
Tennessee Press. 178 pp. \$28.95

Visiting Shiloh National Military Park last Fourth of July weekend, I was apprehensive about having to wade through crowds to see the Hornet's Nest, the Peach Orchard, the Sunken Road, and other highlights of the Tennessee battlefield. I needn't have worried. The visitors' center and the picnic area had attracted a few people, but the battlefield itself was deserted. I could have waded into Bloody Pond and caught carp for supper without attracting notice.

Now, as in 1862, Shiloh is a seriously isolated place. Timothy B. Smith, a historian on the staff of the park, even titles his first chapter "Isolation." Shiloh was so hard to reach that General William T. Sherman, camping there on April 5, 1862, scoffed at the idea that Confederate troops might be nearby. But 44,000 enemy were camped next to him. On the 6th and 7th, they fought Sherman's forces in one of the most terrible battles in the history of North America, a

confrontation that produced some 24,000 casualties.

After the Civil War, veterans on both sides fought to preserve Shiloh and other sites where their comrades had died and, in many cases, still lay buried in unmarked and forgotten graves. In "an effort to limit controversy over the war," writes Smith, Congress in the 1890s created national military parks at Antietam, Gettysburg, Vicksburg, Shiloh, and elsewhere.

Smith dedicates his book to the father of the Shiloh park, the indefatigable David W. Reed. A veteran wounded at Shiloh, Reed became secretary and historian of the park. Between 1900 and 1908, he wrote and positioned interpretive markers in the fields and woods. The markers still dominate the battlefield, even though, according to Smith, they're probably wrong. Reed's "subjectivity and desire to create tangible points of interest for visitors caused him to create myths" about the fighting, myths now graven in stone. The Hornet's Nest, which Reed deemed the most important site in the battle, turns out to have been the scene of comparatively light fighting. Bloody Pond, now one of the most popular sites in the park, isn't even mentioned in contemporaneous accounts. The scenes that visitors find deeply



Visitors to Shiloh in the early 1900s pause near historical markers erected by David W. Reed. A veteran wounded in the Civil War battle, Reed was a champion of the battlefield's preservation.

affecting may be largely Reed's inventions.

When I first visited Shiloh, in the winter of 1997, the peach trees in the orchard stood barren against a leaden sky. When I returned last summer, the sun was blazing and the peach trees were gone, replaced by tiny saplings. It was a lesson in preservation. Unlike artifacts and buildings, battlefields are organic. They grow and die and evolve.

This Great Battlefield of Shiloh is a fascinating study of the institutional forces that created our battlefield parks, a social history of the era of their formation, and a meditation on time, change, and conservation.

—TIM MORRIS

THE LAST OF THE CELTS.

By Marcus Tanner. Yale Univ. Press.

398 pp. \$30

The Last of the Celts maps out the seemingly irrevocable decline of a great world culture. Calling upon a torrent of histories, facts, statistics, and anecdotes, Marcus Tanner, the author of *Ireland's Holy Wars* (2001), argues that the traditional cultures of the Celtic lands—Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany, and the Isle of Man, with Nova Scotia's Cape Breton Island and Argentina's Patagonia thrown in for extra weight—are very near extinction. Gloomy as this premise may be, Tanner tells the tale with considerable style and feeling, and backs it up with impressive research. The book is part ancient history, in which colorful characters from the past struggle over politics and religion, and part contemporary travelogue, in which today's Celts are examined for signs of cultural life.

"This is a book," Tanner tells us straight off, "about the disappearance of . . . the Celts." Don't be fooled by the seemingly worldwide interest in such attractions as Celtic music and dance: This "new-baked Celticism" is "a marketing device" that signifies nothing so much as "the community's death rattle."

More than anything, *The Last of the Celts* is a book about language. Although Tanner admits in his conclusion that "language is not the sum total of a culture,"

the bulk of his text does equate culture with language, suggesting in case after case that as language goes, so goes the culture. And the Celtic tongues are not doing well. The last Cornish speaker, one Dolly Pentreath, died in 1777, and "the last native-born Manx speaker, Ned Madrell, died in 1974." Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, the big three of the Celtic world, as well as Brittany, still have native-born speakers, but their ranks are dwindling in spite of language preservation measures. While Tanner doesn't dismiss these efforts, he is skeptical that any Celtic language will ever stage a serious comeback.

After language, only music emerges in *Last of the Celts* as a truly significant element in the composition of cultural identity. Tanner cites it, for example, as an important cultural marker in Cape Breton, a largely Scots island where fiddlers and traditional music abound. But though Tanner regards traditional music as a sign of hope in Cape Breton, he dismisses it as "homogenized" and "manufactured" in Ireland: "Most of what is called 'Celtic culture' is just junk, a marketing device re-playing to visitors the comforting images that they themselves have constructed." There is certainly plenty of schlock passing for Irish music these days, but there is also a vital and genuine music and dance tradition in Ireland and throughout the Irish diaspora that seems to have escaped Tanner's notice.

A few simple maps would have been helpful in a book that covers so much terrain, as would a comprehensive definition of the nature of culture and cultural identity. This book fits into a larger, passionate discussion of the global threats to smaller cultures and their languages. (In the United States, for example, the assault on Native American cultures since Columbus has brought about the loss of hundreds of Indian languages.) It remains to be seen whether Tanner's pessimistic vision will come to pass. Most of the world's peoples, Celts included, tend to resist the erosion of cultural identity and to negotiate new ways of defining themselves in the confrontation with the forces of mass culture.

—TERENCE WINCH

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

ISLAM IN URBAN AMERICA: *Sunni Muslims in Chicago.*

By Garbi Schmidt. Temple Univ. Press.
242 pp. \$64.50 (hardcover), \$22.95
(paper)

Perhaps seven million strong, the Muslim population of the United States continues to mystify most Americans, a situation that fuels prejudice on the part of non-Muslims and fear of marginalization on the part of Muslims. Any study of the group is therefore welcome. Garbi Schmidt, a senior researcher at the Danish National Institute for Social Research in Copenhagen, spent a year and a half in the 1990s doing fieldwork among Muslims in Chicago. She has produced a straightforward, low-key account, with no grand theoretical frame. Readers must come to their own conclusions—a sensible approach in the current climate.

Looking at Islam through the microcosm of the Chicago community, Schmidt considers two related questions: After a century-long encounter with America and with American religion, is Islam simply a temporary transplant that will never take root? And do Muslim Americans constitute a single community? These questions are central to the future of Muslims in America. If Islam becomes deeply woven into the nation's religious fabric, Muslim Americans will gain public acceptance and a big stake in the country's future. And if Muslims establish themselves as a unified voice in American society, then, given their potential numbers plus their economic and educational assets, they may make a substantial impact at many levels.

As Schmidt suggests, the blending of Islam with contemporary American life today is especially significant. When I visited the Averroes Academy, a Muslim school in Chicago, I saw children learning about computers as well as Islam. The girls wore traditional Islamic dress, but the boys wore ties. The multinational background of the community impressed me, too: There were Muslims from Bosnia and the United States as well as India, Pakistan, and elsewhere in South Asia. Indeed, more than 400 people

from nearly every ethnic background in Chicago, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, attended the academy's annual dinner.

But the cultural integration is far from complete. Schmidt reports that in 1997 and 1998 the FBI questioned and, by some accounts, harassed Arab Muslims in Chicago about their alleged affiliation with the Palestinian-Islamist movement Hamas. "Federal investigations fueled mistrust and feelings of social exclusion, especially because most of the community tended to see the investigations solely as products of prejudice," writes Schmidt. "Although the FBI may have had serving American interests as its goal, one consequence of its actions was that an entire community found itself intimidated, misrepresented, and isolated." And this was *before* September 11. Schmidt's solid study is a laudable step toward ensuring that such misunderstandings do not recur.

—AKBAR S. AHMED

NATURAL LIFE: *Thoreau's Worldly Transcendentalism.*

By David M. Robinson. Cornell Univ.
Press. 234 pp. \$24.95

In a bookstore the other day, I saw a desk journal whose cover proclaimed, "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you've imagined.—Thoreau." Henry David Thoreau (1817-62) might be spinning in his grave at the thought of being cataloged with calendars and gift books, but the desk journal does reveal something: Nearly a century and a half after his death from tuberculosis, Thoreau lives.

Think of the phrases that have entered our lexicon. "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation"—more relevant than ever. "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer." And the refrain repeated by every bar mitzvah boy, "Beware of all enterprises that require new clothes." Why is Thoreau read and remembered long after the reputations of most of his contemporaries have faded? What is there about this

oddball loner who never married and who probably had more communication with the muskrats of Walden Pond than with humans?

From the time he was a student at Harvard College, Thoreau understood that the United States was breaking free of the intellectual chains of Europe. He took his mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson's spirit of self-reliance and built on it. He also built on the philosophy of transcendentalism—the intellectual movement that celebrated heightened consciousness, the power of inspiration, and the divinity of the individual—and melded it with environmental concerns and abolitionism. Individualism, anti-materialism, environmentalism: No wonder we still read him.

In this critical study, David M. Robinson of Oregon State University painstakingly describes the unfolding of Thoreau's life and ideas. We meet the spiritual ancestors of the earliest transcendentalists, men such as Orestes Brownson and Victor Cousin. We watch Thoreau blossom under Emerson's guidance. And we learn, tantalizingly, about a relationship between Thoreau and Emerson's wife, Lidian, that seemed to grow stronger during Emerson's long trips to England. In one journal entry, Thoreau addresses an unnamed "Sister," whom some scholars believe was Lidian: "You are of me & I of you I can not tell where I leave off and you begin." Henry Seidel Canby and other critics have maintained that Thoreau was in love with Lidian Emerson.

Robinson hesitates to speculate about such matters. Instead, he devotes himself to explicating observations that stand perfectly well on their own, and in the process often smothers Thoreau's vivid, concrete language beneath his own clunky prose. "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation," for instance, is followed by this from Robinson: "They have become convinced that their financial entrapment is inescapable, and thus have lost any larger sense of the purpose of life." Readers who seek a connection with Thoreau would be better off turning to *Walden*, *Civil Disobedience*, or *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.

—DEBRA BRUNO

BORN AGAIN BODIES:
Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity.

By R. Marie Griffith. Univ. of California Press. 323 pp. \$55 (hardcover), \$21.95 (paper)

When Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee's weight-loss crusade gained national publicity last spring, so did the deep-fried traditions of his Southern Baptist heritage. In his weekly radio address to one of the nation's fattest states, Huckabee told a story about schoolchildren who were asked to display symbols of their faith at show-and-tell: "The Baptist boy brought a casserole."

Streaks of religion do indeed run through our food and fitness culture, and R. Marie Griffith thinks it's time we cop to it. The metaphor of salvation through slimness, the need for sacrifice, the guilt associated with "sinning" by overeating—these are not coincidences. An associate professor of religion at Princeton University, Griffith traces the religious overtones of America's body obsession from early Puritan fasting, to the New Thought movement's attempts to will away the body completely, to the present-day ideal exemplified by the diminutive white models in such magazines as *Today's Christian Woman*. Modern Christian dieting is populated by the likes of Gwen Shamblin, a string bean in a business suit who heads up a Christian diet corporation called the Weigh Down Workshop. A cornucopia of Christian diet titles have hit the market, including *Slim for Him* (1978), *More of Him, Less of Me* (1998), and *What Would Jesus Eat?* (2002), plus the culprit-fingerer "*Help, Lord: The Devil Wants Me Fat!*" (1977).

Unfortunately, Griffith doesn't allow herself a moment's levity, even when describing early-20th-century fasters who sought a state of such purity that their excrement wouldn't stink. Her most provocative argument—that religion, primarily Protestant, has had a hand in America's exaltation of slender white bodies over all others—dribbles away among caveats that make her sound as though she's afraid of giving offense. And she does no more than mention research showing that Christians on average are heavier

than non-Christians in the United States. Surely this observation raises questions about the connection between religion and excess that deserve more than the hors d'oeuvre of a brief aside.

Born Again Bodies does, however, demonstrate that religious sensibilities—among them the assumption that inner beauty is reflected in the flesh—thoroughly pervade the way Americans see the human body. In the final chapters, Griffith quotes interviews

with Christian women. Here the material begins to come alive, as we hear articulated the struggle to reconcile spirituality with body weight. A Mormon woman recalls receiving instruction at her church on how to make pies and pastries—and how to avoid eating them herself. One faith, Griffith reports, remains above the fitness fray: When Catholics urge abstinence, a “cradle Catholic” explains, they’re not talking about food.

—SARAH L. COURTEAU

CONTRIBUTORS

Akbar S. Ahmed, the chair of Islamic studies at American University, is the author of *Islam under Siege: Living Dangerously in a Post-Honor World* (2003). **Debra Bruno** is special reports editor at *Legal Times* in Washington, D.C. **Sarah L. Courteau** is assistant editor of *The Wilson Quarterly*. **Ruth Levy Guyer** is a visiting professor at Haverford College, where she teaches courses in bioethics, social justice, infectious diseases, and writing. **Sanford Lakoff**, professor emeritus of political science at the University of California, San Diego, and a former Wilson Center fellow, is the author of *Max Lerner: Pilgrim in the Promised Land* (1998). **Tim Morris** is a professor of English at the University of Texas at Arlington. **Mark O'Donnell** is a novelist and the co-author of the Broadway musical *Hairspray*. **Sam Pickering**, a professor of English at the University of Connecticut and the author of the newly published *Letters to a Teacher*, was the model for the teacher in the film *Dead Poets Society*. **Robert J. Samuelson**, a columnist for *Newsweek* and *The Washington Post*, is the author of *The Good Life and Its Discontents* (1995) and *Untruth: Why the Conventional Wisdom Is (Almost Always) Wrong* (2001). **Johanna Stoberock** is the author of the novel *City of Ghosts* (2003). **Terence Winch**, the son of Irish immigrants, is the author of a book of short stories, three books of poems, and a newly published book of nonfiction stories based on his experiences playing traditional Irish music, *That Special Place: New World Irish Stories*.

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PORTRAIT: Bicycle Corps



Before the motor age, the U.S. army considered various alternatives to the high-maintenance horse (an 1850s flirtation with imported camels ended with their discharge into the deserts of the Southwest). By the 1890s, observes David Herlihy in *Bicycle: The History* (2004), European armies were experimenting with bicycles. Stateside, Lieutenant James A. Moss formed the 25th Infantry Bicycle Corps in 1896 with eight black army volunteers at Fort Missoula, Montana. He is shown above (left foreground) on maneuvers in Montana in 1897, and that summer, he led 20 men nearly 2,000 miles to meet cheering crowds in St. Louis. But the corps was soon disbanded. In 1899, the army bought its first automobiles—three electric cars. By 1918, it owned more than 82,500 trucks. The bicycle industry had hoped that military contracts would prove a bonanza, but the roar of engines drowned out the whirl of wheels.

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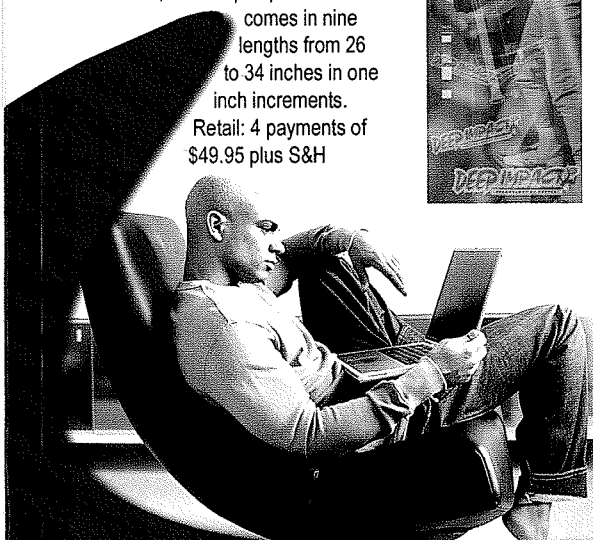
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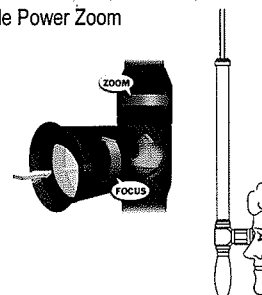
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