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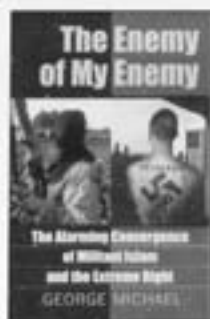
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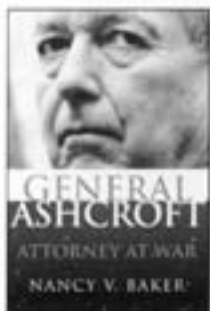
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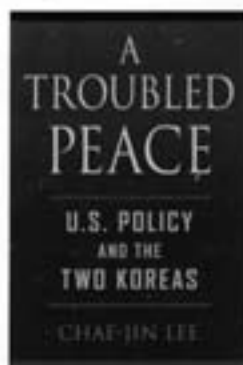
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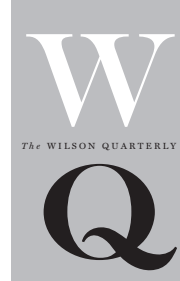
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EDITOR'S COMMENT

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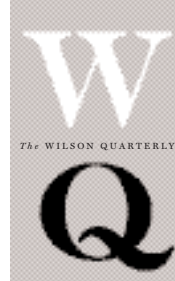
Historians tell us that childhood as we know it was an invention of the 18th century. Someday they will write about the 20th century as the era when we invented retirement as a distinct stage of life, a time of relative ease and freedom from care. Not unlike childhood, in fact.

We're almost as sentimental about retirement as we are about childhood, though for different reasons. Retirement comes with old age, and, sooner or later, diminishing capacities, illness, and death, earning the gray-haired their *carte blanche*. The thought that anything more could be asked of America's seasoned citizens is heresy. Yet with earlier retirements and longer, healthier life spans, retirement and old age are often no longer quite the same thing. While working Americans complain of vanishing leisure time, for example, nobody points out that one group celebrates its growing freedom to putter about and play. In a sense, we have redistributed leisure.

Judging by the paucity of scholarship on retirement as a social state and the great quantities of writing on aging, few scholars and specialists want to explore this new territory. They are not alone. The nation's inconclusive debate over Social Security last year was dominated by discussions of money and political morality, with hardly a word said about the underlying questions: What is the nature of this stage of life we are underwriting? What *should* it be? As our contributors in this issue suggest, these are questions we need to answer now, before unkind necessity answers them for us.

Congratulations are overdue for two friends and contributors to the *WQ*. Blair Ruble, director of the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute, published *Creating Diversity Capital: Transnational Migrants in Montreal, Washington, and Kyiv* last year. And Kennan senior associate Margaret Paxson published *Solovyovo: The Story of Memory in a Russian Village*, a chapter of which appeared in the Spring '02 *WQ*. More recently off the presses is contributing editor Stephen Miller's *Conversation: A History of a Declining Art*.

—STEVEN LAGERFELD



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LETTERS

TALK OF THE FUTURE

KUDOS TO THE *WQ* FOR ITS 30TH-anniversary issue, "Reading the Future" [*WQ*, Winter '06], particularly for David Rejeski and Robert L. Olson's article "Has Futurism Failed?" Given their limited space, the authors gave a surprisingly thorough history of futurism. I would only add that the "golden age" of futurism in the 1960s was a phenomenon in Europe as well as in the United States. During this period, noted futurist Bertrand de Jouvenel founded the Association Internationale Futuribles in France, the Club of Rome was formed in Italy, and the first International Futures Research Conference took place in Oslo, Norway.

The subsequent decline in futurism was evident worldwide, followed by renewed interest around the turn of the millennium. Whatever happens to futurism in the coming decades, we can reliably predict that it will gain popularity again at the turn of the next century. Beyond this cyclic artifact of the Western calendar, what might be said of the near-term future of futurism? Rejeski and Olson note with optimism the work at the Santa Fe Institute, and they argue that corporations are intensely interested in the future.

Others point to the Government Performance Results Act of 1993, which requires government agencies

to produce strategic plans. While many of the resulting plans are quite perfunctory, the act is at least an official acknowledgment of the importance of longer-range thinking.

Another tip-off that serious thinking about the future is alive and well is the existence of the Long Now Foundation, which is thinking out as far as 10,000 years. (If that sounds silly, consider the problem of how to warn people 10,000 years from now about the dangers of the nuclear waste we are depositing today.) The Long Now Foundation is attracting a fascinating collection of thinkers to figure out how to educate the public about the importance of thinking in the longer term.

Still further evidence of engagement with the future is the work that we at the RAND Pardee Center and others are doing on robust decision making. Rather than try to limn the future, as was common practice in the 1960s, we are working to develop methods for producing policies that can be effective in a wide variety of plausible futures. Using the insights on decision making of people like Nobel laureate psychologist Daniel Kahneman (whom Rejeski and Olson wisely cite) and the increasing power of computers to do bookkeeping on tens or thousands of plausible futures, robust decision making works to improve longer-range policy—

whether or not we are able to predict the future.

James A. Dewar

*Director, RAND Frederick S. Pardee Center
for Longer Range Global Policy and the
Future Human Condition
Santa Monica, Calif.*

ALL CREATURES LIVE EMBEDDED in time, but only humans lift their heads to lament the past or worry over tomorrow. Our unique prefrontal lobes—the "lamps on our brow"—peer ahead while swaths of our older cortex flood with memories of yesterday. Crucial to our species' success, these relatively new organs let us probe tentative futures, sometimes spotting errors before we can make them. Yet the process remains clumsy and fraught with the human inclination toward self-deception.

Obsession with the past or future can define a civilization. Many cultures believed in a lost golden age, when people were close to gods. But a few impudently replaced this tradition of nostalgia with the notion of progress, relocating their golden age to the future. The rise and fall and recent renewal of futurism, described by David Rejeski and Robert L. Olson, parallels the ups and downs of a brash "modernist agenda" that aims to steer progress, guiding us past myriad dangers to better days.

As science writer and *WQ* contributor Edward Tenner showed in his book *Why Things Bite Back* (1996), the tragedy of unintended consequences can be exacerbated [Continued on Page 6]

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[Continued from page 4] when ambition turns arrogant. In figures ranging from Karl Marx to Le Corbusier to Robert McNamara, we've seen enthusiasm outstrip competence so many times that modernism seemed discredited. From left to right, nostalgia has regained ascendance. Now we seem to be drawing back, no longer viewing the future as a frontier.

Martin Walker cited the late Georgetown history professor Carroll Quigley's view that societies prosper when people "prefer the future to the present." Likewise, historian Arnold Toynbee, scanning the chronicle of nations, saw vigor and success occurring whenever a populace invested in its "creative minority" of problem solvers, sharing pride in their accomplishments—a spirit rejected today by both gloomy forecasters and those trusting the undeliberated "wisdom of markets."

Chastened by past hubris, can a restored modernism rise to confront new challenges? Our growing awareness of complexity shows how hard it is to use those lamps on our brows. Anticipation will always be iffy, so we need its companion, a robust resilience toward the unexpected. Above all, touchy human egos have to accept criticism, the only known antidote to error.

The new futurism accepts all this. Our projections must be varied, worried, ardent, imaginative, yet thorough and never satisfied. Error avoidance is the new maturity. But it must retain that verve we knew in childhood when, peering eagerly ahead, we hoped to become something far better, upon growing up.

David Brin

Author, The Postman (1985) and The Transparent Society: Will Technology Force Us to Choose Between Freedom and Privacy? (1998)
San Diego, Calif.

THE UNITED STATES, THE WORLD'S most overpopulated nation, has no domestic population policy. Population size and growth rate are largely absent not just from national policy but from public discourse, even though virtually every environmental problem and many social problems nationally and globally are exacerbated by population growth. The scientific community has issued repeated warnings about this, notably in the 1993 statement on population growth's grave dangers, which was signed by representatives of 58 scientific national academies.

Of course, one doesn't need to be a rocket scientist to see the connections. More people, all else being equal, mean more greenhouse gases emitted to the atmosphere (hence more-rapid climate change), more natural ecosystems disrupted or destroyed, more intensive crop agriculture and grazing, more toxic substances released into the environment, more water needed for irrigation, industry, and domestic use, etc.

But all is *not* equal. Human beings bring the richest land under cultivation first, get water from the most convenient sources first, mine the most concentrated and accessible ores first, and exploit the shallowest, most extensive oil deposits before drilling down thousands of feet or beneath shallow seas. And most economies of scale are far behind us. So, on average, each person added to the population has disproportionate negative impacts on the environment as poorer soils are cultivated and fish populations driven toward extinction, drinking water is brought from more-distant and polluted sources, poorer ores are mined and oil wells drilled deeper and farther away to manufacture and run each SUV. Energy use, the best overall measure of a society's negative impact on the environment, has increased almost fivefold since

1950 due to growing population and consumption per capita.

Nonetheless, otherwise knowledgeable people overlook all this and tout wealth increases and improved health over the last century, unaware that part of the cost is mortgaging our future. These analysts neglect to consider that human well-being would likely have *increased more* but for rapid population growth. Could the "Asian Tigers" have reached their present level of prosperity if they had not first reduced their once-high birthrates? Would China be achieving such remarkable economic expansion without its prior success in curbing population growth? Might India have achieved more if its family planning programs had met with greater success?

Can Nicholas Eberstadt ["Doom and Demography"] name any country with a high birthrate (other than a few oil-rich oligarchies) that has attained a high level of well-being for its population? Two billion people are living in misery today—as many as the entire world population in the 1930s. Close to a billion of them are now significantly underfed. Not much support for Eberstadt's claim that the incidence of severe poverty has "been markedly curtailed over the past 100 years."

**Paul R. Ehrlich and
Anne H. Ehrlich**

*Department of Biological Sciences
Stanford University
Stanford, Calif.*

AS A PRACTICING FUTURIST FOR SOME 40 years, and as someone who worked with Herman Kahn, Ted Gordon, and Willis Harman, I found your articles on futurism remarkably good. However, your focus was on futurism as a normative activity, a projection into the future of

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FROM THE CENTER

BRIDGING THE GULF

IN FEBRUARY, I TESTIFIED BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. The subject was the Wilson Center and, specifically, the annual appropriation we receive from the United States Congress, which amounts to nearly 40 percent of our budget.

Having sat on the other side of the committee dais—albeit as an authorizer and not an appropriator—I am sympathetic to a central challenge of congressional oversight: assessing the impact of a particular government agency or program. This is a topic that I have addressed before on this page, and my task before the committee was once again to convey just what makes our work worthwhile to the American taxpayer. Our diligent overseers in the Congress and the Office of Management and Budget have been very clear and helpful in their guidance to the Wilson Center: Among other things, our work should be relevant, and our work should reach the public. To address these concerns, I had to consider just how the Center makes an impact to achieve those goals.

There are, of course, statistics to tick off: 600 events we hold and 150 scholars and policy practitioners from around the world who pass through the Center each year, working with 22 regional and topic-based programs; some 60,000 subscribers to the *WQ*; a dozen books published or copublished annually by the Wilson Center Press; distribution of the Center's *dialogue* radio program on more than 160 public and commercial radio stations in the United States, and access to some 50 million European and Japanese listeners through NPR Worldwide.

But sometimes anecdotes speak louder. A week or so before my testimony, leading Cold War scholar John Lewis Gaddis had a book launch at the Center for his widely acclaimed new work *The Cold War: A New History*. Professor Gaddis told me that his book would not have been possible had he not been able to draw upon the work being done by our Cold War International History Project, which has collected, organized, and made available scores of documents from the former Soviet Union and other Communist-bloc countries. Indeed, nearly all scholarly

work on the Cold War these days draws upon our Cold War project.

The same week that Professor Gaddis spoke at the Wilson Center, we received an e-mail from a 14-year-old high school student in Eldridge, Iowa, who was working on an entry for the National History Day Competition. His project dealt with the 1953 East German uprising, and he had a slew of questions about Cold War documents and events that he had researched on our website, www.wilsoncenter.org. By connecting the Center's work to people like our young researcher in Eldridge, our website has increasingly been a focal point of our outreach, and now receives 100,000 unique visitors each month. We also offer about three live "webcasts" each week, so that anyone with an Internet connection can watch and listen to Center events.

On February 9, one of our webcasts covered an event that may have been a first for Washington: the Israeli ambassador, Egyptian ambassador, and PLO representative came together for a frank dialogue on the situation in the Middle East. Coming on the heels of Hamas' victory in Palestinian legislative elections, the forum could not have been more timely. The gulf between the parties was apparent, particularly on the question of whether and how the Israeli government should deal with Hamas. Yet the very fact that the three could come together for a discussion was important. As one of the participants said, "In the Middle East, if we stop, we fall." Exchanges like this meeting increase understanding and take one more step, however small, down a road that will one day end in peace.

Why did this extraordinary meeting take place at the Wilson Center? I think that is part of what explains our impact. People know that we represent no agenda—only a commitment to open dialogue. And people know that our tools of outreach enable us to reach out to diverse audiences—from leading scholars and policymakers to a teenager in Eldridge, Iowa, or, we hope, teenagers with an Internet connection in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

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[Continued from page 7] careful. Perhaps one day we will have more-systematic surveys of experts' predictive accuracy, such as psychologist Philip Tetlock undertook for his 2005 book *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?* Until then, I think our best hope comes from betting markets. Let's legalize betting on predictions and require prognosticators to place substantial bets on their own guesses. Prognosticators would have better incentives to strive for accuracy with their money on the line and with the knowledge that their track records would be followed.

Even better, once betting markets had odds to track, we could ignore who said what when and just take the odds established by all bettors as our best estimate. Not only are such estimates numerically precise and continuously updated, but they can directly reflect insights from millions of people. Betting markets emphasize the more accurate sources, whoever they are. And that is not just abstract theory; in all field comparisons made so far, such markets have been at least as accurate as competing institutions.

Robin Hanson

Associate Professor of Economics

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Fairfax, Va.

GENOCIDE DEBATE

GUENTER LEWY IS ENTITLED TO BE skeptical about the genocidal character of the wholesale liquidation of the Ottoman Empire's Armenian population during World War I in his article in *Middle East Quarterly* [see "Was It Genocide?" in the *WQ*'s "In Essence" section, Winter '06]. However, unless such skepticism bears a measure of relationship to solid facts, it

risks being exposed as falsehood or, worse, as sheer propaganda. It seems that Mr. Lewy finds himself in such a position.

In the Winter 2006 issue of *Middle East Quarterly*, published after Lewy's article appeared, and in *Commentary* (February 2006), which printed responses to another Lewy article, readers and scholars pointed out a host of historical and factual errors. In Lewy's account, which disputes the Armenian genocide, it is evident that he went astray mainly because he heavily utilized Ottoman and modern Turkish primary sources but had to depend on others to translate them.

In a mere 10 months, from 1915 to 1916, the bulk of the empire's Armenian population, comprising more than one million people, swiftly disappeared from their ancestral territories. Henry Morgenthau, the U.S. ambassador to Turkey at the time and a witness to this calamity, decried it as "the murder of a nation." Even more significant, in a "private and confidential" report dated November 18, 1915, Morgenthau confided to President Woodrow Wilson, "I am firmly convinced that this is the greatest crime of the ages. . . . It was a great opportunity for them to put into effect their long cherished plan of exterminating the Armenian race."

Some Holocaust experts are intent on maintaining the uniqueness of that experience, but in manifesting the denial syndrome in the Armenian case, they may unwittingly help extend it to the Holocaust itself. As Holocaust scholar Katherine Bischoff has declared, "The future of Holocaust denial may be foreshadowed by the persistent denial of the Armenian genocide."

Armen Baghdoyan

Watertown, Mass.

TIMETABLE FOR KOSOVO

MARTIN C. SLETZINGER AND NIDA Gelazis ["Kosovo: Mission Not Yet Accomplished," *WQ*, Autumn '05] provide a thoughtful review of the dangers and opportunities confronting all concerned parties as talks begin on the future status of Kosovo.

To many in the Balkans, granting Kosovo independence seems the best way to deflect the threat of renewed violence. In Washington, it's desirable as a way to rid the United States of its Balkan commitments. But the major strategic question policymakers should be asking is whether, after some semblance of peace and stability has returned to southeastern Europe, a premature rush to make Kosovo independent is worth setting in motion a potentially uncontrollable chain of events that could destabilize a region of some 50 million people.

Certainly, the people of Kosovo deserve to know what their future will be. (Most observers believe that some form of conditional independence is likely.) But the timetable for determining this future should not be dictated by extremists or American electoral politics. Lasting peace in Kosovo requires patient diplomacy, stable democratic institutions, workable security guarantees for neighboring states, and an agreement recognizing the legitimate interests of everyone in the region. Such a solution cannot be rushed or imposed; as Sletzinger and Gelazis note, this would only prolong the cycle of violence in southeastern Europe.

Many Albanians openly claim that once Kosovo's status is resolved, the Albanian "national question" throughout the southern Balkans

should be revisited. Kosovo's late president Ibrahim Rugova said not long before he died that independence for Kosovo represents a compromise—insofar as Kosovo Albanians are not seeking outright unification with Albania. Leading Albanian politicians in Macedonia have called for a partition of that country (as have some leading Macedonian politicians). In Bosnia, some Croat leaders have called for a revision of the Dayton Accords and a sovereign Croat entity. In Belgrade, the Serbian Radical Party is openly irredentist in its program, and some Serbian politicians do not refrain from connecting Kosovo's future to that of Bosnia. With good reason, the International Commission on the Balkans has warned that "the region is as close to failure as it is to success."

Moreover, fewer boots on the ground and less money to spend means weaker leverage for the international community in southeastern Europe. The United States is consumed by Iraq and Afghanistan, and the European Union remains wobbly with enlargement fatigue and the blow dealt by rejection of its proposed new constitution. Thus, the energy and resources these main players have to devote to the Balkans is declining, which ultimately will hurt moderates and encourage extremists in the region. And as recent Western European experience has shown, if France can't control ethnic violence in its own cities, we should beware the hubris of thinking that we can manage the complexities of ethnic nationalism and territorial realignment in the Balkans.

In the early 1990s, many people believed that the international com-

munity could control the course of Yugoslavia's disintegration. Now we know how tragically mistaken that belief was. We should not make the same mistake again.

Gordon N. Bardos

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THE WQ'S MAKEOVER

I'VE SUBSCRIBED TO THE *WQ* FOR some years now and have consistently found your articles to be the most scholarly, intelligent, and evenhanded of any publication. I am, however, somewhat disappointed with the new format. The higher glare, cheaper paper, smaller print, and boxier shape (I was partial to the taller, slenderer, patrician model) definitely do not constitute improvements.

Vincenzo Pierotti

San Francisco, Calif.

The Editors respond:

We redesigned the *WQ* partly in response to the many complaints we received over the years about its readability. The heavier but slightly smaller font, whiter paper, and narrower columns of the new design are all intended to make the *WQ* easier to read. We encourage other readers to let us know what they think.

CORRECTION

THE REVIEW OF *THE HUDSON: A History* in the Winter 2006 *WQ* should have referred, on page 98, to the Dutch who owned vast lands along the Hudson River as "patroons." We regret the error.

FINDINGS

BRIEF NOTES OF INTEREST ON ALL TOPICS

The Ape That Hummed

In the beguine...

Why do we sing? Is music-making simply “auditory cheesecake,” an entertainment invented by humans for no particular evolutionary reason, an offshoot of language that leads nowhere? That was the dismissive view of linguist Steven Pinker in his groundbreaking 1997 book *How the Mind Works*. But it’s a notion that rings hollow for music lovers, not to mention poets. If nothing else, our ancestors must have found music useful to soothe the savage breast.

Steven Mithen, professor of early history at Reading University, England, thinks our ancestors used music for far more than that. Music,

he argues in *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind, and Body* (Harvard Univ.

Press), is no offshoot of language; it’s right there at the root. Music and language show such deep similarities, along with such significant differences, he reasons, that they must have evolved from a common ancestor. We can hear vestiges of it in chanted mantras, or in the way people coo and chatter to very new babies.

Mithen dubs this prelinguistic, premusical form of communication “Hmmmm” (for “Holistic, manipulative, multi-modal, musical, and mimetic” communication), and he thinks early hominids used it for hundreds of millennia to convey emotions and to create rituals, teamwork, and companionship. When Neanderthals evolved and settled in Ice Age

Europe some 250,000 years ago, splitting from the line that produced *Homo sapiens*, they continued to use “Hmmmm,” Mithen believes. If he’s right, that might explain why, though they could make tools, there’s little evidence that Neanderthals ever developed “symbolic” behaviors such as drawing, building, or decoration. With *Homo sapiens*, by contrast, “Hmmmm” began to separate into phrases, which took on specific meanings. Language became a

communication system specializing in the transmission of information, while music came to specialize in the expression of emotion.

It follows that music is the best way for modern humans to connect with their protohuman selves. “Listen to Vivaldi’s Concerto in B-flat Major for trumpet,” Mithen recommends, “and imagine a member of *Homo heidelbergensis* showing off a hand ax” to impress potential mates. Or turn the dial to some mellow jazz, and picture a group of tired but triumphant hunters chilling out in a cozy cave.

Someone’s in the Kitchen

Whipping up the human recipe

Since the human genome was sequenced in 2001, and particularly since the human and chimp genomes were meticulously compared in 2005, we’ve been able to say, with some precision, what makes us human: It’s that one to two percent of the human genome that we don’t share with chimps. But statistics don’t satisfy; the effort to name that special something continues apace. For Alfred W. Crosby, the key ingredient isn’t singing—it’s cooking.

In *Children of the Sun: A History of Humanity’s Unappeasable Appetite for Energy* (Norton), Crosby



Learning to Hmmmm.

notes the importance of the moment, sometime in the Upper Paleolithic period, when our ancestors became, to use the term coined by Harvard anthropologist Richard Wrangham, not herbivores or carnivores, but “cookivores.” Cooking allowed humans to do some of the work of digestion outside the body, clearing the way for a smaller gut and larger brain, and enabling that gut to harvest stored solar energy from previously unappetizing or inedible sources, such as hard grains.

“Cooking, like hunting, obliged human hunters, gatherers, fire tenders, and cooks to plan and cooperate—to think—and this may have helped drive the transformation,” Crosby writes. “Chimps spend six hours a day chewing; cookivores only one.”

Room With a View

Needing some space

Our ancestors may have evolved crucial characteristics while cooking and singing around a communal

fire, but natural selection apparently continues, as is clear from modern divergences in behavior once the food is cooked and set out. The American tendency to eat on the run—in the car, in the living room, or in fast-food restaurants, where kids can nibble fries between dashes to the play area—shows indications of becoming hard-wired. In *House Thinking: A Room-by-Room Look at How We Live* (Harper-Collins), Winifred Gallagher recounts how NASA ran into difficulty when it designed living areas for the multinational crews of the International Space Station, launched in 2000.

The agency hired a noted French interior designer, who decided that “to feel homelike, the station needed three things: a porthole to the outside, a private place for sleep and personal time, and face-to-face dining. After the first generation of trips, however, the American astronauts refused to eat in the companionable manner. . . . They just hated

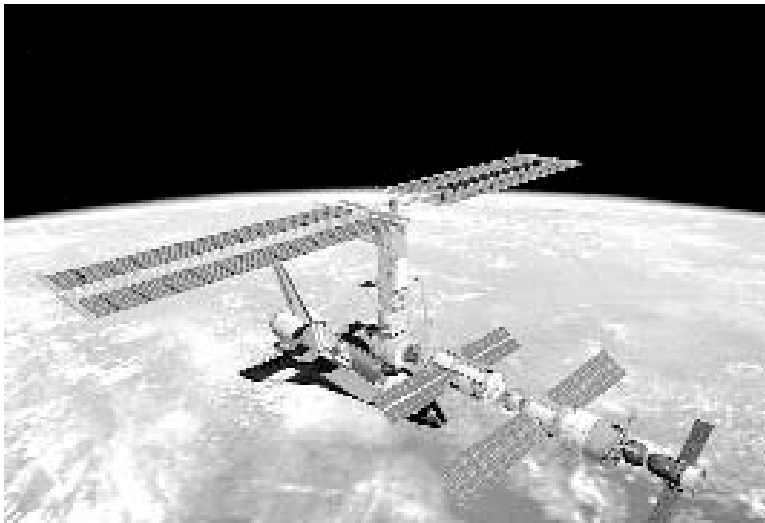
it,” says [environmental psychologist Jamie] Horwitz. . . . “The crew’s Europeans would still prefer to eat face-to-face.” No word on whether Europeans subjected to the evolutionary pressure of being cooped up with crew mates 24/7 might eventually sour on the notion of breaking bread with them at the end of every day.

Green Grows the Flow Chart

Balancing principles against the bottom line

The newsletter of the Society for Conservation Biology, headquartered at Stanford University, recently published an editorial taking a hard line on growth: It urged readers to “acknowledge a fundamental conflict between economic growth and biodiversity conservation” and to push for a change to a “steady-state economy.”

“We recognize that this editorial may generate discussion,” the editors wrote, and sure enough, the February issue carried a response from reader Nicola Koper. After expressing doubts about the desirability of steady-state economies, she wrote, “I did not even have to turn the page to find support for my cynicism. The Treasurer’s report, on the page facing the editorial . . . was full of praise for the growth of [the Society for Conservation Biology] itself! Within the report, the growth of the investments of the Board Designated Reserve is celebrated, we are warned that a challenge is to maintain growth of Sections outside North America, and, finally, we are assured that the Board of Governors is committed to expanding our funding base.”



A Frenchman designed the living quarters of the International Space Station (shown here in an artist's conception) but American crews found its companionable dining area to be no place like home.

Spore Lore

Are mushrooms nature's Internet?

For an organism committed to clean, green (or greenish) growth, you can't do better than



mushrooms. In *Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Help Save the World* (Ten Speed Press), mushroom enthusiast Paul Stamets lauds the humble fungus, which he calls “nature’s Internet”: “Interlacing mosaics of mycelium infuse habitats with information-sharing membranes. These membranes are aware, react to change, and collectively have the long-term health of the host environment in mind.” Stamets urges a future of myco-forestry, myco-pesticides, myco-filtration (to remove impurities from ground water), and myco-restoration (to break down and neutralize toxic wastes).

Stamets’s main challenge, though, may not be scientific but psychological. Back in 1992, *Nature* reported the startling discovery of what was thought to be the largest living organism on the planet—an underground fungus stretching some 30 acres in Michigan. Eight months later, when a different team discovered a much larger single organism in Utah, 47,000 interconnected quaking aspen trees, *The New York Times* published an editorial expressing relief that the largest known living organism was no longer “that creepy giant fungus.”

Media Therapy

Read two newspapers and call me in the morning

You may think you read the paper or watch the news to stay informed, but it’s much more complicated than that, as Silvia Knobloch-Westervick and Scott Alter explain in the January issue of *Human Communication Research*. They investigated whether readers use the media for “mood adjustment,” choosing to read upbeat articles if they want to feel better and negative articles if they want to stay mad. They found that men and women in the study adjusted their moods differently: Men who were provoked and then told they would get a chance to retaliate against their provoker read more negative articles, as if building a head of steam. Women presented with the same scenario read more upbeat articles, as if trying to calm down.

Men, the authors conclude, use mass media to “ruminate,” women to “dissipate,” an angry mood. Pun-

ditions who worry about excessive media consumption, they add, are missing the point, since “mood adjustment . . . has great value for the individual,” not to mention society, which runs much more smoothly when everyone is using the media to self-medicate.

The Poetry of Numbers

You are so 404!

“Twenty-four seven,” or 24/7, the term we used on the facing page, is one entry in a three-page addendum to the gigantic *New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, edited by Tom Dalzell and Terry Victor (Routledge). Having exhausted the alphabet, the dictionary offers a closing catalog of slang expressions derived from numbers. “Twenty-four seven” is identified as an adverb meaning “all the time,” along with its intensive form: “Twenty-four seven, three-sixty-five.” Of course, not all the numbers come from the calendar or clock. A “one eighty-seven” is a homicide, derived from the California penal code number for that crime, often used as shorthand on police radio; by extension, it also means “No chance” or “Any possibility is dead.” Information technology remains a fruitful source (“four-one-one” means “gossip” or “information”), but as usual the best words come from technology’s failures. The adjective “four-o-four,” meaning “mentally lost, very unaware,” refers to the Internet message that pops up when your computer can’t find the Internet address you’re looking for: “404, URL not found.”

Europe's Mosque Hysteria

Terrorist bombings, riots, and an uproar over satirical cartoons have inspired talk of a Europe under siege by Muslim immigrants. Will minarets rise in place of the continent's steeples, or is this vision of invading Muslim hordes a mirage?

BY MARTIN WALKER

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE OTTOMAN TURKS were hurled back at the siege of Vienna in 1683, Europe has been gripped by dark, even apocalyptic visions of a Muslim invasion. The Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci has sold more than a million copies of her 2004 book *The Force of Reason*, in which she passionately argues that "Europe is no longer Europe, it is 'Eurabia,' a colony of Islam, where the Islamic invasion does not proceed only in a physical sense but also in a mental and cultural sense. Servility to the invaders has poisoned democracy, with obvious consequences for the freedom of thought and for the concept itself of liberty."

Renowned scholars in the United States have sounded similar notes of warning. Princeton professor emeritus Bernard Lewis, a leading authority on Islamic history, suggested in 2004 that the combination of low European birthrates and increasing Muslim immigration means that by this century's end, Europe will be "part of the Arabic west, the Maghreb." If non-Muslims then flee Europe, as

Middle East specialist Daniel Pipes predicted in *The New York Sun*, "grand cathedrals will appear as vestiges of a prior civilization—at least until a Saudi-style regime transforms them into mosques or a Taliban-like regime blows them up." And political scientist Francis Fukuyama argued in the inaugural issue of *The American Interest* that liberal democracies face their greatest challenges not from abroad but at home, as they attempt to integrate "culturally diverse populations" into one national community. "In this respect," he wrote, "I am much more optimistic about America's long-term prospects than those of Europe."

These views flourish in the heated context of recent headlines. The crisis earlier this year over Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad, with repercussions felt more in the Middle East than Europe, was preceded in October by the eruption of riots in France, in which the children of mainly North African immigrants torched some 10,000 cars and burned schools and community centers in some 300 towns and cities. A terrorist attack by four suicide bombers killed 52 in the London subway in July, and was swiftly followed by a second, abortive attack. In famously tol-

MARTIN WALKER, the editor of United Press International, covered the London bombings and the French riots last year. He is a senior scholar at the Wilson Center and the author of many books, most recently the novel *The Caves of Périgord* (2002).



Not since the student-worker riots of 1968 has France seen urban unrest on the scale of the immigrant riots that erupted this past October in a Paris suburb. The violence spread throughout the country, leading to nearly 3,000 arrests over the course of 20 days, and an official state of emergency remained in effect until January.

erant Holland, the gruesome murder by a young Islamist fanatic of the radical filmmaker Theo van Gogh in November 2004 was followed by the petrol bombings of mosques and Islamic schools. In Madrid, 191 people were killed on the city's trains on March 11, 2004, in a coordinated bombing attack by Al Qaeda sympathizers, an event that was as traumatic for Europe as the September 11 attacks were for the United States.

Less noticed in the United States was the shock that ran through Germany a year ago after the "honor killings" of eight young Turkish women by their own families in the space of four months. The women's crimes were that they refused the husbands their families had chosen for them or had sought sexual partners outside their religion and close-knit communities. This became a national scandal when a school headmaster, outraged when his Turkish pupils insisted on one of the victims that "the whore got what she deserved," wrote to press outlets and to other headmasters across Germany denouncing this "wave of hidden violence" beneath the placid surface of German life. His warning was reinforced by the German government's first detailed survey of the lives of

Turkish women, in which 49 percent of them said they had experienced physical or sexual violence in their marriage. One in four of those married to Turkish husbands said they had met their grooms on their wedding day. Their curiosity at last roused, Germans were shocked to find that the homepage of Berlin's Imam Reza Mosque (until quickly revised) praised the attacks of September 11, described women as second-class human beings who must defer to men, and denounced gays and lesbians as "animals."

While these events are disturbing, it is dangerous to merge them into a single, alarmist vision of a Europe doomed to religious division, mass terrorism, white backlash, and civil war. Most immigrants continue to come to Europe to better themselves and to secure a brighter future for their children, not to promote an Osama Bin Laden fantasy of re-establishing the Caliphate and converting the Notre Dame and St. Paul cathedrals into mosques. Most Muslims in France did not riot or burn cars. Muslim clergy and civic leaders in Britain overwhelmingly denounced the London bombings.

The Islamic immigration of some 15 million to 18 million

people is not exactly swamping Europe's population of more than 500 million. Nor is religious violence altogether new for a continent that spawned the Crusades, the 16th- and 17th-century wars between Catholics and Protestants, and the Holocaust. Furthermore, a Europe that within living memory produced Italy's Red Brigades, Germany's Red Army Faction, France's OAS, Spain's ETA, and the IRA in Northern Ireland is hardly innocent of terrorism.

Despite political scientist Samuel Huntington's warning of "a clash of civilizations," the Arab world is not so very alien to Europe. Judeo-Christian civilization has been shaped by the Mediterranean Sea. Its waters constituted a common communications system from which flowed a shared history. North Africa was a Roman province, and Egypt's Queen Cleopatra was a Greek. Southern Spain was a Muslim province for seven centuries, and the Balkans were dominated by Islam until the 19th century. The Crusades were a kind of civil war between two monotheist belief systems that originated in the deserts of the Middle East. More than just a war, the Crusades were also a prolonged cultural exchange from which Europe's Christians emerged enriched by "Arabic" numerals and medicine, the lateen sail, and the

evident threat of terrorist attack. In this unhappy context, several alarmist myths are defining the debate about the impact of mass Islamic immigration into Europe. It is important to examine each one with some care.

The first myth is that there is any such phenomenon as European Islam. This misapprehension may be the most pervasive, and the most easily exploded, for, once examined, the various waves and origins of the Islamic immigration reveal themselves as remarkably diverse. In Germany, although the immigrants are usually described as "Turkish," they include not only ethnic Turks, but Kurds, who speak a different language and come from a significantly different culture. Neither Kurds nor Turks can communicate with the newest wave of mainly Moroccan immigrants in any language but German. In France, the immigrants are usually described as being "of North African descent," but this is misleading. At least a quarter of the estimated six million such immigrants and their descendants in France are Berber, primarily Kabyle and Rif. They are mainly Sunni in their religion, but few of them speak the Arabic of

Algeria or Morocco. Many more, from Mali and Niger, countries separated from the Maghreb by the Sahara, identified themselves to me during the French riots of last autumn as "blacks" rather than "*beurs*" (the French slang term for young Arabs).

DESPITE WARNINGS of a "clash of civilizations," the Arab world is not so very alien to Europe.

table fork. The Arabs, having already benefited from the wisdom of Greece and Rome mislaid by Europe in its Dark Ages, returned it to Europe while Venice and Genoa grew rich on the Levant trade and spurred the growth that fueled Europe's great surge of oceanic exploration.

At that point the European and Arabian-Islamic histories began to diverge, only to converge again in the 19th century in the poisoned relationship of colonial rule. The British, in India and the Persian Gulf and along the Nile, and the French and Italians, in North Africa, imposed notions of racial and cultural superiority that deeply complicate the assimilation of today's immigrants into the homelands of the old colonial masters. Those complexities have been sharpened by the urgencies of policing and domestic intelligence-gathering against the

The rich variety of Muslim immigration is most evident in Britain, where the ethnic and linguistic divisions among British Muslims mean that they form several distinct communities whose only common language and culture (outside the mosque and the Qur'an) is English. According to the 2001 census, 69 percent of Britain's 1.6 million Muslims come from the Indian subcontinent, and just more than half of them were born there. The rest were born in Britain. Recent research at the University of Essex by Lucinda Platt suggests that the British melting pot is working rather well, and producing considerable social mobility. She found that some 56 percent of children from Indian working-class families go on to professional or managerial jobs in adulthood, compared with just 43 percent of those from white, nonimmigrant families.



Clash or coexistence? Outside a rundown public housing project in East London last year, passersby stare as Bangladesh-born Muslims perform their Friday prayers.

The largest group of Britain's Muslims, more than half a million, are of Pakistani birth or descent, and of them almost half come from the poor district around Mirpur where the building of the Mangla dam in the late 1950s and early 1960s created a vast pool of homeless, landless, and barely literate peasants, who were then recruited to low-wage jobs in the textile industry of northern England. They clubbed together to bring over imams from home to run mosques and teach the Qur'an, imported wives from Mirpur through arranged marriages, and created urban versions of their traditional Mirpuri villages under the gray English skies. When the British textile industry declined, this community of poor and ill-educated people was locked into a grim cycle of unemployment, welfare, female illiteracy, and low expectations. The rust belt that stretches across Lancashire and Yorkshire is the region where the anti-immigration British National Party, a thuggish group with neo-Nazi links, gets up to 20 percent of the vote from an almost equally ill-educated and hopeless white working class. This is also the area that produces most of the dozen or so honor killings carried out each year by angry fathers or brothers, when a Pakistani girl falls in love with a British boy.

The next largest cohort, nearly 400,000, comes from Bangladesh, mostly from the Sylhet region. These people are very different: They speak Bengali rather than Urdu, eat rice

rather than roti, apply less rigid dress codes to women, follow a notably more relaxed form of Islam, and are concentrated in East London rather than northern England. They tend also to be more entrepreneurial and open to educational opportunities for their children, who have a far better record of university attendance than the Pakistanis.

The third major group is the Muslims of Indian origin, many of whom came to Britain in the early 1970s as refugees from East Africa after being expelled by Uganda's dictator, Idi Amin. Along with the 16th-century Huguenots from France and the 19th-century Jews from Russia, they have become one of the most desirable and successful immigrant groups that Britain ever welcomed. They have produced more millionaires and college graduates than any other ethnic group—the British included. One in 20 is a doctor.

The 31 percent of British Muslims from outside South Asia are mainly from Somalia and Turkey, each cohort totaling about 60,000. Another 100,000 come from Nigeria, Malaysia, and Iran. The students, refugees, political exiles, and Arab intellectuals who have come from all over the Islamic world and given the city the nickname "Londonistan" make up most of the rest.

So the reality behind the monolithic term "British Muslim" is a potpourri: the wealthy London surgeon, the unemployed and barely literate textile worker in Oldham, the

Malaysian accounting student intent on attending business school, the fiery newspaper columnist who dares not return to Saudi Arabia, the government clerk living with her English boyfriend and estranged from her outraged Iraqi family, the prosperous Bengali restaurant owner in East London.

These are the individuals that Prime Minister Tony Blair hopes to rally—after the cultural and political shock of the London bombings—to the common identity of Britishness, by which he means a full-hearted commitment to democracy, and the freedom of speech and religion and lifestyles that it involves. And in these days of Al Qaeda, Blair has sought to convince such individuals that being British may include detention of terrorist suspects without trial for up to 90 days, closed-circuit television cameras in their mosques, and government licenses for their imams. An estimated 1,800 of

does it say this, and in fact what you will get is hellfire.”

It is ironic that in the wake of the London bombings, the British political establishment and media, and even many Muslim groups in Britain, are now speaking of the Muslim community as a single entity. This may yet emerge, especially if others persist in viewing all Muslims as one mass, although so far various Muslim groupings seem to compete for the title of spokesman, and to criticize one another for being more or less radical or devout or co-opted by the British government (a phenomenon that is also evident in France, as it was in the 1960s civil rights movement in the United States). The fact is that the various Muslim associations in Britain, speaking Urdu or Pashtun or Bengali at home, have little in common except the sense of alarm that somehow they will share in the blame, or suffer the backlash, for the bombings.

But some of the things they do have in common are striking. Around 15 percent of Muslims, both male and female, are registered as unemployed, compared with four percent of the rest of the population. The British government's Labor Force Survey found that Muslims are more likely than any other group to be in long-term

ONE OF THE GREAT MYTHS is that Muslim immigrants' higher birthrates threaten to replace traditionally Christian Europe with an Islamic majority.

Britain's 3,000 full-time imams come from overseas, mainly from Pakistan, and many arrive with Saudi funds and sponsorship and after some study in Saudi Arabia, which usually means a commitment to that country's puritanical and dominant Wahhabi creed.

Many of the moderate elders of Britain's Muslim community go along with Blair's plans, which also have the backing of the Muslim members of Parliament. The mainstream of Muslim opinion is now prepared to admit that the four British-born bombers of the London transport system were influenced by extremists at their mosques in Britain and during visits to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and that this radicalization of some young Muslims is a community problem.

“The Muslim communities are not reaching those people who they need to engage with and win their hearts and minds,” says Sadiq Khan, the Muslim Labor MP for the London suburb of Tooting. “What leads someone to do this? The rewards they are told they will get in the hereafter—it is incumbent on Muslims to tell them that nowhere in Islam

unemployment or not even seeking work—in either case, not reflected in unemployment data. In the same survey, 31 percent of employed Muslims had no qualifications and, therefore, little prospect of advancement from menial work. Muslims are five times more likely to marry by age 24 than other Britons. Muslims have the youngest age profile of all religious groups: 34 percent are under the age of 16, compared with 18 percent of Christians. Muslims tend to live together; nearly two-thirds of the 600,000 Muslims who live in London reside in the two East End boroughs of Newham and Tower Hamlets. And Muslims are more likely to reside in rented public housing than any other ethnic or religious group.

Figures such as these have seeded a number of misleading submyths, of which the most common is that the “Pakis” live in ghettos and are beginning to dominate in a significant number of parliamentary constituencies. A by-election in the northwest London suburb of Brent East shortly after Blair's government invaded Iraq alongside U.S. forces became the prime exhibit of this argument. Traditionally a safe Labor con-

stituency, Brent East fell to the Liberal Democrats when many Muslims voted against Labor in protest of the war. In the general election of last year, a former Labor MP, George Galloway, who had been expelled from the party after his outspoken attacks on the war and on "Tony Blair's lie machine," narrowly won reelection in East London as an independent MP, unseating the only MP who was both black and Jewish, the Labor Party's pro-war Oona King. In his first two election victories, Blair carried more than 70 percent of the Muslim vote, but in the 2005 election, exit polls suggest that he got just 32 percent. This seems to have been a direct result of the Iraq war and draws a sharp limit on previous assumptions of common ground between Islam and Blair's Labor Party.

But the fact is that there are only 17 electoral constituencies in Britain, out of 646, where a complete shift of the immigrant vote would be sufficient to unseat the incumbent MP. Although television images depict whole districts where most shop signs are printed in Urdu or where Sikhs and other immigrants predominate, there are few places that fit the classic definition of a ghetto. In some detailed research at the University of Manchester, Ludi Simpson analyzed the 1991 and 2001 census data for 8,850 electoral wards in England and Wales. A ward is a subdistrict of a constituency, containing roughly 10,000 voters. Simpson found that the number of "mixed" wards (defined as wards where at least 10 percent of residents are from an ethnic minority) increased from 964 to 1,070 over the decade. In only 14 wards did one minority account for more than half the population, and there was not one ward where white people made up less than 10 percent of the inhabitants.

The reality is that as immigrant families become established and their children get education and jobs, they tend to move out to more prosperous districts with better schools and housing. In short, just as Britain learned with its West Indian immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s that what was defined as a problem of race was just as much one of social and economic class, so it is finding with its Muslims that race and class and religion all play into a context of social and economic mobility. Britain has been fortunate—this mobility has been possible because the country has enjoyed a booming economy over the past decade, with much lower levels of unemployment than France or Germany.

Despite all this, a small number of educated and apparently well-assimilated young Muslims, mainly but not exclusively of Pakistani origin, have been drawn to the extreme militancy of Al Qaeda. Sources in MI5, Britain's security service,

cite a formula devised by their French equivalent, the *Renseignements Généraux*, to calculate the number of fundamentalists in a given population. Based on an extensive analysis of the French scene, the formula says that in a given Muslim population in Europe, an average of five percent are fundamentalists, and up to three percent of those fundamentalists should be considered dangerous. By that calculation, in France's Muslim population of six million, there are 300,000 fundamentalists, of whom 9,000 are potentially dangerous. Applying the formula to Britain's 1.6 million Muslims produces 80,000 fundamentalists, of whom some 2,400 may be dangerous—a figure very close to the number of MI5 agents.

Assessing the scale of the problem brings into focus the second great myth that confuses the issue of Islam in Europe, which is that native Europeans have been so sapped of their reproductive vigor that Muslim immigrants' higher birthrates threaten to replace traditionally Christian Europe with an Islamic majority within this century. The birthrate of native Europeans has fallen sharply since the baby boom of the 1960s. The usual measure is total fertility rate (TFR), the number of children an average woman will bear in her lifetime. A TFR of 2.1 is required to maintain population stability; the current average level in the 25-nation European Union is just under 1.5, and as low as 1.2 in Italy and Latvia. A study for the European Parliament suggests that the EU will need an average of 1.6 million immigrants every year until 2050 to keep its population at the current level. To maintain the current ratio of working-age population to pensioners, more than 10 million immigrants a year would be required. Omer Taspinar, director of the Brookings Institution's program on Turkey, suggests that the Muslim birthrate in Europe is three times higher than that of non-Muslim Europeans, and that since about one million new Islamic immigrants arrive in Western Europe each year, by 2050 one in five Europeans likely will be Muslim.

But this is to ignore the clear evidence that immigrant birthrates fall relatively quickly toward the local norm. A recent survey by Justin Vaisse of the French Foreign Ministry, who is also an adjunct professor at the Institut d'Études Politiques in Paris, suggests that, on the basis of French statistics, this change can occur within a single generation. In Britain, Muslims of Indian origin now have a TFR of less than 2.0, and while there are striking regional differences in the birthrates

of young women of Pakistani origin who have been born in Britain and educated in British schools, the overall trend is toward fewer children.

Moreover, in Sweden, France, and Britain, the native birthrate has started to rise again, with a marked surge among women who start having children in their early thirties. In Britain, the TFR climbed from a record low of 1.63 in 2001 to 1.77 in 2004, when the number of babies born rose by almost three percent from the previous year. There is no doubt that immigrants tend to have higher birthrates; one in five of those new babies was born to a mother from outside Britain, a significant rise from the one in eight of a decade earlier. But the disparity of birthrates across Europe is so wide—from TFRs of 1.98 in Ireland and 1.89 in France to 1.18 in the Czech Republic—that it is not meaningful to speak of a single European phenomenon.

Furthermore, public policy is not helpless in the face of demographic challenges. Scandinavia has higher birthrates than the rest of Europe, despite relatively low immigration rates, thanks in part to government policies that provide generous maternity leave, family allowances, and good child care for working mothers. Parenting in these days of easy contraception is an essentially voluntary matter. And if a society chooses to have fewer children, it does not have to resort to mass immigration to maintain a high proportion of workers to consumers. Other accommodations can be made, from delaying the age of retirement to accepting lower growth rates and less intensive patterns of consumption.

And thus we arrive at the final myth about Islam in Europe: that a shrinking and aging population of native-born Europeans and a large and growing Islamic population can only be alarming. It certainly looked that way last fall in France during the riots, which seemed to demonstrate, in the ugliest possible way, that something fundamental in the French social system, and thus in its broader European counterpart, is in deep trouble. There are, in fact, two different crises of the European social model, and they collided in the riots. The first is the familiar problem of economic sluggishness that has stuck France, Germany, and Italy with double-digit unemployment for a decade. One cause is the power of the labor unions and the longtime understanding that workers and management are “social partners” in an agreement under which those with jobs are protected, paid well, and given generous pensions and social

security. In return, managers get high productivity rates and very few strikes in the private sector. But as a consequence, it is extremely hard to get a secure job, since managers find it almost impossible to lay off surplus employees. The low-wage entry-level jobs that have brought so many of the unskilled British and American dropouts into the workforce barely exist in France, where the minimum wage and employer-paid social insurance costs are very high.

This first crisis has now intersected with the second: that of the largely immigrant underclass, whose young dropouts find it difficult to get any work at all. The problem is most acute in France, where immigrants constitute more than 10 percent of the population, compared with five percent in Britain. They live in what the French now admit are so many ghettos of high-rise public housing blocks with few whites, poor schools, sparse social amenities, harsh policing, and little evidence that they can ever partake of the broad prosperity of mainstream Europe. “They are the lost lands of France,” says Jacqueline Costa-Lascoux, a professor at the prestigious school of public administration at the Institut d’Études Politiques. And yet these grim urban nightmares contain, in demographic terms, much of the country’s future, even though their precise numbers are not counted under that other French myth—dating back to the revolution of 1789 with its Rights of Man—that there are no ethnic subgroups, only citizens. No affirmative action is necessary, the line goes, because *La République* has abolished racism.

“France is not a country like others,” intoned the prime minister, Dominique de Villepin, in November. “It will never accept that citizens live separately, with different opportunities and with unequal futures. For more than two centuries, the Republic has found a place for everyone by elevating the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. We must remain faithful to this promise and to Republican demands.”

The best estimates suggest there are now more than five million Muslims and two million blacks in France, and their birthrates are more than twice as high as that of French whites. So while the brown and black inhabitants of France account for one-eighth of the total population, they account for almost a quarter of those under the age of 25. They also account for more than half of the prison population, and close to half of the unemployed. France’s future therefore depends on a sullen and ill-educated underclass of future workers and consumers whose taxes are supposed to finance the welfare state and the pensions of French whites, who at age 60 retire after a lifetime of leisurely 35-hour workweeks. After the

scenes that disfigured France last fall, this does not seem to be a promising proposition.

And this problem of France is the problem of Europe on a slightly less urgent scale. Alarmists say that without mass immigration, the European social system cannot be funded; but with mass immigration, the European social fabric is visibly and violently tearing apart. And with Jean-Marie Le Pen, the right-wing extremist who leads the Front National, winning almost five million votes in the last presidential election, France has less room for political maneuvering than most countries. If the myth of de Villepin's Republic is gently retired, and France tries some of the detested Anglo-Saxon remedies of affirmative action to produce a black and Muslim middle class, and puts black and brown faces onto its television screens as announcers, into the higher ranks of the police and civil service and armed forces, and into the National Assembly and the Senate and the prefectures and the corporate boardrooms, then it risks strengthening the white backlash that has already given the demagogue Le Pen some 18 percent of the presidential vote.

It is, nonetheless, a risk that will have to be taken because no other course is practicable. Modern democracies cannot realistically, or legally, impose ethnic cleansing by mass deportations of Muslim minorities or their permanent subjugation by some odious incarnation of a

discriminatory police state. The policy alternatives therefore are assimilation or apartheid. The former will be difficult, since it will require fundamental economic reform to tackle the problems of unemployment, education (of both Muslims and those poor whites most likely to resort to backlash), reform of immigration rules and border policing to control illegal immigration, and profound religious reform by the Muslims themselves. European societies should not be expected to tolerate subgroups that seek to impose sharia within their communities, nor imams who preach anti-Semitism or demand the death penalty for Muslims who convert to Christianity or for writers such as Salman Rushdie. But equally, European societies will have to accept the political implications of a significant and growing electoral vote that will agitate strongly for respect of Islam as well as jobs, oppor-

tunities, and affirmative action, and that will demand influence over foreign policy.

The challenge is serious but not hopeless. To suggest that European civilization is too feeble and insecure to survive an Islamic population that is currently less than five percent of the total is a counsel of cultural despair. It ignores the example of the United States, which seems to be successfully assimilating its own Muslim minority, just as the vibrant and open American economy assimilated so many previous waves of immigrants. It also ignores the degree to which European Muslims increasingly think and live like the populations they have joined. An opinion poll conducted in Britain for the BBC after the London bombings found that almost nine in 10 of the more than 1,000 Muslims surveyed said they would and should help the police tackle extremists in Britain's Muslim communities. More than half wanted foreign Muslim clerics barred or expelled from

IS EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION too feeble and insecure to survive an Islamic population that is currently less than five percent of the total?

Britain. Fifty-six percent said they were optimistic about their children's future in Britain. And only one in five said that Muslim communities had already integrated too much with British society, while 40 percent wanted more integration.

Muslims are being changed by Europe just as much as they are changing their adopted countries. The honor killings of young Turkish women in Germany are appalling, but the actions of the women also demonstrate that many Muslim women are no longer content to abide by their parents' wishes. They want the same freedoms and opportunities enjoyed by the German girls with whom they went to school. The French-born children of immigrants who rioted in the Paris suburbs were demanding to be treated as French by the police, potential employers, and society in general. The riots, as French scholar Olivier



Tariq Ramadan, one of a new generation of European Islamic thinkers who seek to reconcile Islamic ideas with Western values, has the distinction of having been banned from Saudi Arabia and prevented from teaching at an American university by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Roy has noted, were “more about Marx than Muhammad.”

Across Europe, there are significant numbers of potential terrorist cells, radical Islamist activists and organizations, and mosques and imams that cleave to an extreme and puritanical form of Islam. Many of these reject the idea that Muslim immigrants can or should assimilate into their host societies, and also reject Western democracy or any separation of church and state. One such group is the well-organized Hizb-ut-Tahir, which seeks to reestablish the Caliphate as a pan-Islamic system of government based on the Qur'an. Hizb-ut-Tahir is outlawed in Germany, where it has been described as “a conveyor belt for terrorism,” and Blair threatened to ban it in Britain after the London bombings.

But there are other, more promising currents of modern and reformist Islamic thought in Europe that seek assimilation not only with European societies but also with Western values of individual human and political rights. The best known of these currents is associated with Tariq Ramadan, grandson of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood and author of *To Be a European Muslim* (1999). Ramadan

believes that an independent and liberal Islam is emerging in Europe among young, educated Muslims who have been profoundly and positively influenced by modern liberal democracy with its free press and separation of church and state. He moved from Geneva to Oxford, where he currently teaches, after the U.S. Department of Homeland Security barred him in 2004 from taking a teaching post at Notre Dame University. (He was also banned in Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Egypt after calling for a moratorium on sharia's corporal punishment, stoning, and beheading.) Ramadan identifies himself as a European born and bred, with Muslim roots, whose modernized Islamic faith needs to uproot Islamic principles from their cultures of origin and plant them in the cultural soil of Western Europe. “We've got to get away from the idea that scholars in the Islamic world can do our thinking for us. We need to start thinking for ourselves,” Ramadan insists.

Some Muslims see Ramadan as an apostate, while many Christian and Jewish activists regard him as an Islamic Trojan horse. But he seems to represent a significant current in Islam that seeks reform in the Arab world and accommodation with the West. There are traces of this same current in the speeches of Dyab Abou Jahjah, the Belgium-based trade unionist who founded the Arab European League (though he is denounced by the Belgian government). It is also evident in the extraordinary appeal of the Arab world's first Muslim televangelist, Amr Khaled, who was in Britain during the London bombings and repudiated them as un-Islamic.

There is nothing ineluctable about any clash of civilizations between Islam and the West. Current demographic trends are not immutable, and it would be foolish to extrapolate from them a spurious forecast about Muslim majorities in Europe. That the renewed encounter between Europe and its Islamic minorities will result in terrorism or sectarian and ethnic tensions is not foreordained, and a white backlash is by no means inevitable. But the clear prospect that these poisonous predictions could be realized may itself become the antidote. The countries of Europe and their Islamic minorities have had a series of awful warnings, similar to those in the United States in the 1960s. The American response to the civil rights movement is an example to Europe of how open, liberal democracies may address the problems of Islamic immigration and mobilize public opinion and public policy to resolve them. It will not be easy, and the task will endure for generations, at constant risk of being derailed by spasmodic riots and terrorist outrages. But the alternatives are worse. ■



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Pearl's Great Price

Pearl Buck's chronicles of everyday life in China won her millions of readers and a Nobel Prize. They also won her the scorn of highbrow Western critics and the venom of China's Communist leaders. Now her adopted land is rediscovering the work of this woman once denounced as a cultural enemy.

BY SHEILA MELVIN

AS PEARL BUCK NEARED HER 80TH BIRTHDAY, SHE became obsessed by the idea of returning to China. It was the early 1970s, and Buck, the American author who had won the Nobel Prize for her books set in China, had not set foot there herself in nearly four decades, as the country was transformed by the Japanese invasion, civil war, and the triumph of communism.

Although she had been born in West Virginia in 1892 while her missionary parents were home on leave, China was the country where she had grown up, first married, and written her most famous novel, *The Good Earth* (1931). Chinese was her first language, the one in which she mentally composed sentences before putting them to paper in English. China had provided much of the material for many of her 70-odd books, mostly novels but also plays, short fiction, children's stories, biographies of her parents, essays, and poetry. China had inspired her humanitarian work. And it was in China that her adored mother, her father, two brothers, and two sisters lay buried.

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"I grew up in a double world," Buck recalled in her 1954 memoir, *My Several Worlds*, in which she described her early years with affection. "The small white clean Presbyterian American world of my parents and the big loving merry not-too-clean Chinese world. . . . When I was in the Chinese world I was Chinese, I spoke Chinese and behaved as a Chinese and ate as the Chinese did, and I shared their thoughts and feelings."

As a child in this Chinese world, the blonde, blue-eyed Pearl Sydenstricker roamed the countryside visiting peasant neighbors, eating foods forbidden by her mother, and burying the dead babies she found discarded on hillsides (she carried a specially sharpened stick to beat off the dogs that fed on the tiny corpses). The family had to flee the 1900 Boxer Rebellion, in which numerous missionaries were killed, but Buck recalled her childhood as a happy time despite her sternly religious father's long absences and her mother's sorrow at living in "exile" so far from home. As an adult, she taught English at Nanjing University from 1920 to 1933 (she had to leave for a year in 1927 when foreigners were again attacked). During these years, she mingled with China's top intellectuals; the

renowned romantic poet Xu Zhimo was a close friend, and some suspect the two were lovers.

Buck journeyed to the United States in 1934 assuming that she would soon return to China, but life turned out differently. She divorced her missionary husband of 17 years, John Lossing Buck, and rather scandalously married her publisher, Richard Walsh, in Reno on the same day. Her new marriage and her desire to be close to her severely retarded daughter, Carol, who was in a special-education institution in New Jersey, led Buck to settle on a sprawling farm in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. It became all but impossible for Americans to visit China after the Communist victory in 1949, but the thaw in U.S.–Chinese relations

that began with the ping-pong diplomacy of 1971 gave her hope that she not only would be allowed to return but would be welcomed back.

Because the United States and China still did not have formal diplomatic ties, she wrote letters to anyone who might conceivably help her wangle an invitation back, including President Richard Nixon. Finally, in May 1972, she received a response from the Chinese government through the intercession of a former State Department official:

Dear Miss Pearl Buck:

Your letters have been duly received.

In view of the fact that for a long time you have in your works taken an attitude of distortion, smear, and vilification towards the people of new China and its leaders, I am authorized to inform you that we cannot accept your request for a visit to China.

Sincerely yours,

H. L. Yuan
Second Secretary



For the final half of her life, Nobel laureate Pearl Buck, shown here in a 1950s photograph, was not permitted to return to China. Her books' frank portrayal of the country embarrassed its image-conscious officials.

Buck was stunned.

"The letter—the letter!" she wrote. "It lies there like a living snake on my desk—a poisonous snake. . . . [It] threatens me now and refuses to allow my return to the country where I have lived most of my life . . . [it] is an attack, not a letter. It is violent, it is uninformed, it is untruthful."

The letter was indeed all those things. Buck had devoted most of her life to writing about China, promoting its culture, and supporting China-related causes, largely because she was "appalled and oppressed by the discovery that American people are almost totally ignorant of China, nor have they any great desire to learn more about this ancient and mighty nation who will and must affect our own nation and people in the future more than any other."

Her most popular work, *The Good Earth*, was the

The Several Worlds of Pearl S. Buck

In the first chapter of The Good Earth (1931), Chinese peasant Wang Lung awakes on his wedding day and performs his morning regimen.

HE HURRIED OUT INTO the middle room, drawing on his blue outer trousers as he went, and knotting about the fullness at his waist his girdle of blue cotton cloth. He left his upper body bare until he had heated water to bathe himself. He went into the shed which was the kitchen, leaning against the house, and out of its dusk an ox twisted its head from behind the corner next the door and lowed at him deeply. The kitchen was made of earthen bricks as the house was; great squares of earth dug from their own fields and thatched with straw from their own wheat. Out of their own earth had his grandfather in his youth fashioned also the oven, baked and black with many years of meal preparing. On top of this earthen structure stood a deep round iron cauldron.

This cauldron he filled partly full of water, dipping it with a half-gourd from an earthen jar that stood near, but he dipped cautiously, for water was precious. Then, after a hesitation, he suddenly lifted the jar and emptied all the water into the cauldron. This day he would bathe his whole body. Not since he was a child upon his mother's knee had anyone looked upon his body. Today one would, and he would have it clean.

He went around the oven to the rear and, selecting a handful of the dry grass and stalks standing in the corner of the kitchen, he arranged it delicately in the mouth of the oven, making the most of every leaf. Then from an old flint and iron he caught a flame and thrust it into the straw and there was a blaze.

This was the last morning he would have to light the fire.

In My Several Worlds (1954), Buck describes her first home after her marriage to John Lossing Buck, in a remote town in Anhui province.

AND YET I WAS NEVER really lonely. The Chinese were delightful and of a kind new to me. Their language fortunately was still Mandarin, and I had only to make a few changes of pronunciation and tone to understand and be understood perfectly, and soon I was rich in friends. As usual the people were ready to be friends, intensely curious about our ways, and since my little house was so accessible a fairly steady stream of visitors came and went, and I was pressed with invitations to birthday feasts and weddings and family affairs. I enjoyed it all and soon was deep in the lives of my neighbors, as they were in mine. I played with their babies and talked with the young women of my own generation and they told me their problems with their mothers-in-law and

other relatives and as usual I felt profoundly the currents of human life. . . .

Nothing was demanded of me, or almost nothing, and so I busied myself in house and garden, I began to keep bees for their honey, and I experimented with jams and jellies made from the abundant dates of our region and the dark red haws that are a cross between damson plums and crab apples. I was in and out of neighbors' houses, as they were in and out of mine, and I enjoyed again the wonderful deep sense of the richness of friendships. More than once I almost began to write, but each time I put it off, deciding to wait yet a little longer until mind and soul were fully grown.

Strangest of all, the vivid intellectual and political turmoil of the country did not reach us here. We lived as serenely as though the nation were not in revolution. Without exception none of my friends knew how to read or write and felt no need of either accomplishment. Yet so learned were they in the way of life that I loved to listen to their talk. An ancient people stores its wisdom in succeeding generations, and when families live together, young and old, each understands the other. Moreover, I delighted especially in the humor of my Chinese friends and in their freedom from inhibitions. These made life a comedy, for one never knew what the day might bring forth.

best-selling novel of both 1931 and 1932. It won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932, was made into an acclaimed Hollywood movie in 1937, and was instrumental in leading the Swedish Academy to award her the Nobel Prize for literature in 1938, making her the first American woman to be so honored. The book became so influential in the United States that some scholars credit it with contributing to the 1943 repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which had barred virtually all Chinese emigration to the United States since 1882.

Other scholars go even further, claiming that Buck's writings so changed the average American's impression of Chinese people in the years before World War II that Americans became eager supporters of China in its war against Japan. As the Chinese scholar Kang Liao wrote in 1997, Pearl Buck "single-handedly changed the distorted image of the Chinese people in the American mind through literature. Chinese people were no longer seen as cheap, dirty, ridiculous coolies or sneaky, vicious, insidious devils. The majority of Chinese were seen for the first time in literature as honest, kindhearted, frugal-living, hard-working, gods-fearing peasants who are much the same as American farmers." In 1992, historian James C. Thomson Jr. called Buck "the most influential Westerner to write about China since 13th-century Marco Polo."

Although she was an intellectual educated in both the Chinese and Western classics, Buck took up her pen with a populist approach, one that was phenomenally successful with the public even as it earned her the derision of the literary elite, many of whom considered her writing too lacking in stylistic complexity and irony, too didactic and moralistic, and—perhaps most important—too extraordinarily popular to be awarded the Nobel Prize. William Faulkner, who won the Nobel himself 11 years after she did, wrote to a friend that he would rather not win it than be in the company of "Mrs. Chinahand Buck."

Buck's writing is simple and vivid, full of telling details and minute observations that bring her subjects to life. Some scholars compare her style to that of the Bible—which she studied under the rigorous tutelage of her father. Others note that its narrative arc is similar to that of the Chinese novels she so loved. The prose sometimes seems stilted, but this is likely a result of her internal translating from Chinese to English, and in any case



Paul Muni and Luise Rainer starred in MGM's 1937 big-screen version of *The Good Earth*. Most of the movie had to be shot again in the United States after the film was damaged—by Chinese government agents, Pearl Buck suspected—at the conclusion of filming on location in China.

conveys a sense of the linguistic universe inhabited by her characters.

I first read *The Good Earth* during the 1980s as a sophomore in an all-girls high school run by cloistered nuns. The book was racy, at least by our standards, and riveting, and we were instantly caught up in the struggle of the peasant farmer Wang Lung and his big-footed wife O-lan, whose lives are intertwined with the "good earth" from which they struggle to eke out a living. Endless natural calamities are visited upon them, but none are so destructive as the greed, lust, and idleness that are the byproducts of their eventual wealth. At school, one of my best friends was soon nicknamed O-lan because of her size-nine shoes, and the name of the concubine Lotus became a slur we used to refer to girls who cared too much about boys.

Before I read *The Good Earth*, I had given little thought to China, but the book brought the country alive for me and made me want to learn more. After graduating from college a few years later, I got a job in a bar and saved enough money to travel to China with O-lan and another best friend from that *Good Earth*

class. One thing led to another, and I lived in China off and on for years to learn the language, work, write, and ultimately marry a man who is Chinese.

Pearl Buck did more than write books that influenced people like me. She used her celebrity status to raise money for war-relief efforts in China in the 1930s and '40s, fight racial stereotypes in the United States, and promote cultural understanding. She publicly opposed the American decision to isolate China after the Communist victory in 1949 and warned that "there is not the slightest chance" that China would ever let Taiwan be independent.

Earlier, she had devoted her Nobel Prize lecture to a passionate discussion of the Chinese novel, arguing that edu-

"foreign" philosophy that had no place in China. In 1950, just one year after the Communist victory, a Chinese literary journal published a translation of a Soviet article called "Pearl Buck: An Old China Hand Gone Bankrupt," which condemned her family background and erroneous political viewpoint. Her books disappeared from shelves in China and her name from public discourse, except for a brief period in 1960 when several literary journals labeled her a "reactionary writer" and a "vanguard of United States imperialist cultural aggression."

Buck was aware of these attacks but apparently assumed that they were just politics and would easily be forgotten. That the Chinese government did not relent—as it had when Richard Nixon was permitted to visit—probably had less to do with anger over her politics than with the general dismay

with which Chinese of all political persuasions regarded her writing. For Buck wrote about China as she saw it, not as it wanted to be seen, and her unflinching honesty angered and embarrassed many in the nation's intellectual and political elite.

One of *The Good Earth's* first Chinese translators—at least eight translations were made in the 1930s and

BUCK WROTE ABOUT CHINA as she saw it, not as it wanted to be seen, and her unflinching honesty angered and embarrassed many in the nation's intellectual and political elite.

cated people everywhere should know such classics as *The Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Three Kingdoms*. To help make that possible, she spent five years translating into English the centuries-old novel *Shui Hu Zhuan*—one of Mao Zedong's favorites—which was published in 1933 under the title *All Men Are Brothers*. Angry that Amerasian children (a term she coined) were deemed unadoptable, in 1949 she established Welcome House, the first international and interracial adoption agency in this country, an organization that prospers to this day as a part of Pearl S. Buck International. She also adopted seven children herself. And she became closely associated with American social causes, especially equal rights for women and blacks. All this public activity brought her acclaim, criticism, and—because J. Edgar Hoover suspected she might have Communist sympathies—an FBI file almost 300 pages long.

The Chinese government never had any such suspicions. Officials knew that Buck opposed communism as a

'40s—prefaced his work with a lengthy essay in which he faulted Buck for making China look bad and asked rhetorically whether she had a feeling of "white supremacy." The much-esteemed writer Lu Xun was more subtly damning, commenting that it was always better for Chinese to write about China. Other intellectuals later echoed Lu, sniping that the Nobel Prize for writing about China should have been given to a Chinese (someone like Lu Xun, for instance).

Politicians in the image-conscious Nationalist government that ruled China from 1911 to 1949 were infuriated by *The Good Earth's* depiction of starving peasants, concubines, and banditry. When MGM began filming the movie version in China in 1934, government officials were determined to prevent the portrayal of anything they considered embarrassing. According to Buck, they "allotted one village to the motion picture company, and they insisted that the women all wear clean jackets and flowers in their hair. They also objected to the water buffalo, which they thought would make China appear



Pearl Buck and former Republican presidential candidate Wendell Willkie stand in front of a portrait of Madame Chiang Kai-shek in 1941 at the launch of a fundraising campaign by the United China Relief, aimed at aiding Chinese civilians during wartime. Until her death in 1973, Buck devoted herself to humanitarian work for China.

medieval, and they wanted to substitute a tractor, although at this time there were only two tractors in the whole of China.” In the end, even these face-saving measures weren’t sufficient, and someone—Buck blamed government agents—burned down the director’s Shanghai studio and poured acid into the film containers as the crew departed China. The film had to be almost entirely reshot in the United States before it was finally released in 1937.

Early antipathy of critics in the United States toward Buck has had a lasting influence, as have Buck’s prolific output and her popularity with readers, either of which is often reason enough within the American academy to regard an author with slight contempt. Perhaps more critical to her legacy is that as a consequence of her rejection by the critical establishment, she has not been included in college syllabuses, though she remains a perennial favorite on high school reading lists. And at a time when critics and academics seek to add diverse authors writing

about their own cultures to the literary canon, a white American writing about China can’t compete with the likes of Chinese author Maxine Hong Kingston, as critic Edmund White maintained in *The New York Times* in 1993. But while Buck remains largely ignored in America, she is finally finding a home in China.

As China has grown stronger and more confident during the past two decades, the old sensitivities have gradually receded. “The Party has done a 180-degree turn on Pearl Buck,” says the author’s son, Edgar Walsh. “They now see her as a friend of China and someone who has always been supportive of the Chinese people.”

The rehabilitation dates from the late 1980s, when an odd assortment of Chinese scholars and local government officials realized that Buck’s work had both intellectual and commercial value. One of the first to do so was Professor Liu Haiping, of Nanjing University, who is now an internationally recognized Pearl Buck scholar. “I went to the United States in 1984 and everyone asked me about Pearl Buck,” he explains. “But I didn’t know who she was. I didn’t even know

she had taught at my university for 12 years! So I decided to find out about her.”

Liu was fascinated by the intimate details of ordinary Chinese life that Buck revealed in her books, the very same details that had once mortified intellectuals and bureaucrats alike. “More and more I realized the relevance of Pearl S. Buck to China. The kind of society Pearl S. Buck was describing is no more. Her writing is like a storehouse of what Chinese culture was once like.” To illustrate his point, Professor Liu cites the first few pages of *The Good Earth*, in which Buck describes the morning regimen of the peasant Wang Lung on his wedding day. The near-photographic precision of her description—the tasseled black cord that he weaves into his long braid, the care he takes not to waste a single leaf as he kindles the fire—are telling details that most Chinese authors of the era did not record because they would have seemed obvious or inconsequential.

Liu was equally drawn to Buck’s determination to make Americans understand China and the other nations she wrote about, including Korea, India, and Japan. “Especially now when China is strong and there is a growing sense of national pride and xenophobia, I think it is very important that China be aware of other cultures,” he says.

Other scholars have expressed similar views, and in the late 1990s new Chinese-language editions of *The Good Earth* and half a dozen of Buck’s other novels were published, replete with scholarly essays on her life and work. A number of doctoral students at Chinese universities are currently writing dissertations about her, and international conferences on her writings and humanitarian work are held regularly in China.

Another powerful source of interest in the rehabilitation of Pearl Buck’s reputation in China is the local elites in the places where she once lived. Foremost among these former homes is her childhood home of Zhenjiang, a city on the Yangtze River about an hour’s drive from Shanghai, where she is now regarded as something of a patron saint, or at least as the city’s best hope for enticing foreigners to visit and invest. Buck lived in Zhenjiang for nearly 20 years as a girl and young woman, mostly in her family’s nondescript Western-style house in the city’s rural outskirts.

In 1992, the Zhenjiang government renovated the house, which miraculously had survived the chaos of the 20th century, and opened it to the public, with financial assistance from Zhenjiang’s sister city of Tempe, Arizona. In 2002, Zhenjiang marked the 110th anniversary of Buck’s birth by convincing the provincial government to declare

her former residence a historic landmark. And in 2004, it unveiled a monument to Buck and even renamed a city park “Pearl Square” in her honor, a rare distinction in a nation of “People’s Squares.”

Other locales have followed Zhenjiang’s lead. The mountain resort of Lushan has renovated Buck’s summer home and the church where her father preached. The house in Anhui where she lived in the first years of her unhappy marriage to John Lossing Buck is long gone, but the county where it stood is nonetheless planning to build a Pearl Buck museum. Nanjing University has for some time had plans to renovate the house where Buck wrote *The Good Earth* in the attic study.

Buck’s rehabilitation in Chinese academic circles and at the grass-roots level finally led to a reevaluation of her work by the government. In the early 1990s, cultural officials refused to let a PBS affiliate from Buck’s home state of West Virginia film a documentary about her, but in 1999, when the U.S.-based Chinese actress Luo Yan sought permission to film an adaptation of Buck’s novel *Pavilion of Women*, it was easily granted. The script—about an unhappily married Chinese woman who falls in love with a Western priest—raised no hackles, and the makers were allowed to film in protected historic sites. The movie attracted large crowds and considerable publicity in China, where it fared much better than in the United States.

Since then, China’s Central Television network has produced several documentaries and docudramas about Buck, including one that aired this past summer in which she is played, rather fittingly, by an American expatriate named Aly Rose who learned fluent Chinese while living among Chinese peasants. And events related to Buck are regularly covered in the national press. When Oprah Winfrey chose *The Good Earth* for her book club in autumn 2004, the English-language newspaper *China Daily* reported on the selection, noting that “the Pearl S. Buck phenomenon used to be controversial and rejected by both the Chinese and American literary worlds,” but that it has recently become “a friendly cultural bridge between the East and the West.”

Unfortunately, Pearl Buck was unable to cross back over this bridge she had devoted her life to building. She died in 1973, less than a year after the Chinese government denied her request to visit. But her Confucian education had taught her to see things from a different perspective. In the months that passed between her receipt of the letter and her death, she wrote: “Are you going back to China?” people ask me. ‘I have never left China,’ I reply. ‘I belong to China, as a child, as a young girl, as a woman, until I die.’” ■

Mali's Unlikely Democracy

Why is one of Africa's most successful democracies taking hold in an impoverished Muslim country half-covered in the sand of the Sahara desert? In Mali, the seeds of change are rooted in tradition.

BY ROBERT PRINGLE

AS JOURNALIST ROBERT KAPLAN FLEW INTO BAMAKO, Mali, in 1993, he saw tin roofs appear through thick dust blowing off the presumably advancing desert. He used this image of a “dying region” to conclude his *Atlantic Monthly* article “The Coming Anarchy,” in which he drew a connection between environmental degradation and growing disorder in the Third World, a hypothesis that certainly seemed to fit not only Mali but most of West Africa. When the article was published in February 1994, it made a considerable splash in Washington policy circles.

But even as Kaplan predicted doom, the situation on the ground in Mali did not quite fit his thesis. Yes, life was hard in this impoverished West African nation of 12 million people, and remains so. The 2005 United Nations Human Development Index, based on a combination of economic, demographic, and educational data, lists Mali as fourth from the bottom among 177 countries. Only Burkina Faso, Niger, and Sierra Leone rank lower. But despite persistent poverty and ongoing turmoil in neighboring states, in a single decade Mali has launched one of the most successful democracies in Africa. Its political record includes three

democratic elections and two peaceful transitions of power, a transformation that seems nothing short of amazing.

When I served in Mali as American ambassador, from 1987 to 1990, I had never spent time in a country with such an apparent absence of political life of any kind. The military ruler, Moussa Traoré, presided over a typical single-party African dictatorship. In the early years after he took over in 1968, he survived several coup attempts, but by the time I arrived everyone seemed to have given up and gone to sleep. The government controlled all print and radio news, and, at first, there was no sign of dissident activity.

Mali, along with the rest of the region, had been wracked by drought in the late 1970s and again in the mid-1980s, and the government was making a serious effort to improve an economy dominated by peasant agriculture. Although the United States' significant interests in this poor, landlocked country were solely humanitarian, American economic aid to Mali almost tripled during my tour as ambassador. But I never imagined that tradition-bound, predominately Muslim Mali might soon become something of a poster child for African democracy.

There was a clue to what was coming, if I'd recognized it.

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On my daily commute to the embassy through the potholed streets of Bamako, Mali's capital, my driver would listen to the seemingly endless half-song, half-chant recitals that were standard fare on the only radio station. He told me that the singers were griots, the hereditary musician-historian-entertainers of West Africa, singing about Mali's ancient history. He was a griot himself, and could explain some of the songs, often about the epic of Sunjata, the outcast-turned-hero who became the first emperor of old Mali in the 13th century. I recall wondering how people facing such a daunting present could be so preoccupied by stories from a distant past. I certainly did not envision how they might put their history to creative political use.

By the time my ambassadorial tour ended in 1990, Mali was on the cusp of momentous change. People were weary of the old dictatorship, which like many in Africa was vaguely

real authority to previously voiceless local governments. From the beginning, Mali's founding fathers claimed that decentralization was a return to traditional practice. The term for it in Bambara, the principal local language, is *mara segi so*, which means "bringing power home."

Mali's electoral track record since 1991 has been just messy enough to suggest that the country's democracy is genuine, not the creation of one strong, quasi-permanent leader in the background, as is the case in a number of other African states. The new constitution established a five-year presidency with a limit of two terms. Alpha Konaré, a journalist who had led the pro-democracy movement, won the first election in 1992. It was generally free and fair. Konaré and his ADEMA party also won in 1997, but this second election was a procedural shambles because of an inadequate electoral commission, and the opposition boycotted it. The electoral commission was

expanded and repaired, and the third national election, in 2002, went much more smoothly.

After his second term, Konaré—who reputedly once said that what Africa needs is more living ex-presidents—gracefully accepted retirement. Malian law wisely pro-

MALI'S ELECTORAL TRACK record since 1991 has been just messy enough to suggest that the country's democracy is genuine.

Marxist-Leninist in organization; further, the demise of communism in the Soviet Union had destroyed whatever legitimacy such regimes still had. In March 1991, Mali's military dictator made the fatal mistake of ordering his troops to fire on students protesting in the capital, and several hundred were killed. In the wave of shocked public reaction that followed, a key military commander, Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré, joined the pro-democracy forces, and the dictatorship collapsed. Touré, better known as "ATT," promised to hand over power to an elected government. Like Cincinnatus, the Roman farmer who took up arms and then returned to his fields, Touré kept his word, surprising many of his fellow Malians.

Mali's new leaders immediately convened a national assembly, a kind of constitutional convention with representatives from all social classes. The government that emerged was influenced by the example of France, Mali's former colonial master. It included a specifically secular constitution, a strong executive, and a weak legislature. But most remarkable, and radically different from the French model, was a wholly Malian emphasis on decentralized administration that gave

provides a comfortable personal residence for term-limited ex-chiefs of state, on the theory that it will help to discourage post-retirement coup plotting. But Konaré didn't need it: He is now chairman of Africa's top regional organization, the African Union. With Konaré out of the picture, ATT, Mali's erstwhile Cincinnatus, retired from the army, ran for election in 2002, and won handily. Meanwhile, the former dictator, Traoré, had been tried and sentenced to death for political and economic crimes. But Konaré pardoned him, and he is now living comfortably in Bamako with his once-controversial wife, whose extended family had been the economic power behind his regime.

During its first decade, Mali's democratic government settled a serious rebellion in the Saharan north, halted endemic student unrest, and established comprehensive political and religious freedom. These accomplishments were all the more remarkable given the chain-reaction conflicts that had spread across the region to Mali's south, from Liberia to Sierra Leone and most recently to Ivory Coast, once a model of developmental progress.



Mayor Manguran Bagayoko greets a constituent in front of his office in Keleya, one of the 702 rural communes that form the backbone of Mali's fledgling democracy.

Was Mali's record simply the result of fortuitous good leadership, or was something more fundamental at work? To find out, I returned in 2004 and traveled throughout the country conducting interviews. When I asked Malians to explain their aptitude for democracy, their answers boiled down to "It's the history, stupid," of course expressed more politely.

That history is intimately intertwined with Mali's geography. The country lies at the center of the great bulge of West Africa. Its northern half is part of the Sahara desert and mostly uninhabitable. Moving south toward the Atlantic Ocean, rainfall increases steadily, and Mali's southern half is arable. Bamako, in the country's midsection, gets as much rain as Washington, D.C., although precipitation falls entirely during the summer months. The once-fabled city of Timbuktu, on the desert's edge, receives less than one-tenth that amount. Roughly dividing Mali's two halves is the 2,600-mile-long Niger River, which rises in the hills of Guinea, not far from the coast, makes a vast arc to the northeast

through near-desert, then plunges south through Niger and Nigeria to the sea. Halfway through Mali, this "strong brown god" meets progressively flatter territory, losing momentum and spreading into a vast, seasonally flooded wetland or "inner delta," home to manatees, hippos, migrating birds, a mosaic of farmers, herders, and fisher folk, and a huge, French-era irrigation project. Mali's population still consists primarily of peasant farmers and herders.

The Niger River was the launching point for trade routes across the Sahara until they were marginalized by colonial-era commerce through coastal ports. Trans-Saharan trade nurtured ancient cities, the most famous in Mali being Jenné and Timbuktu. There were three early states: Ghana (eighth to 11th centuries), Mali (13th to 15th centuries), and Songhai (14th to 16th centuries). Two of the three lay largely outside modern Mali: Old Ghana inspired the name of modern Ghana, but was located in today's Mali and Mauritania, while old Mali was mainly in modern Mali, with a portion in Guinea. There were other states, but it is these three that the Malians refer to when they talk about the "Great Empires."

It is because of the Great Empires that Malians—from vil-

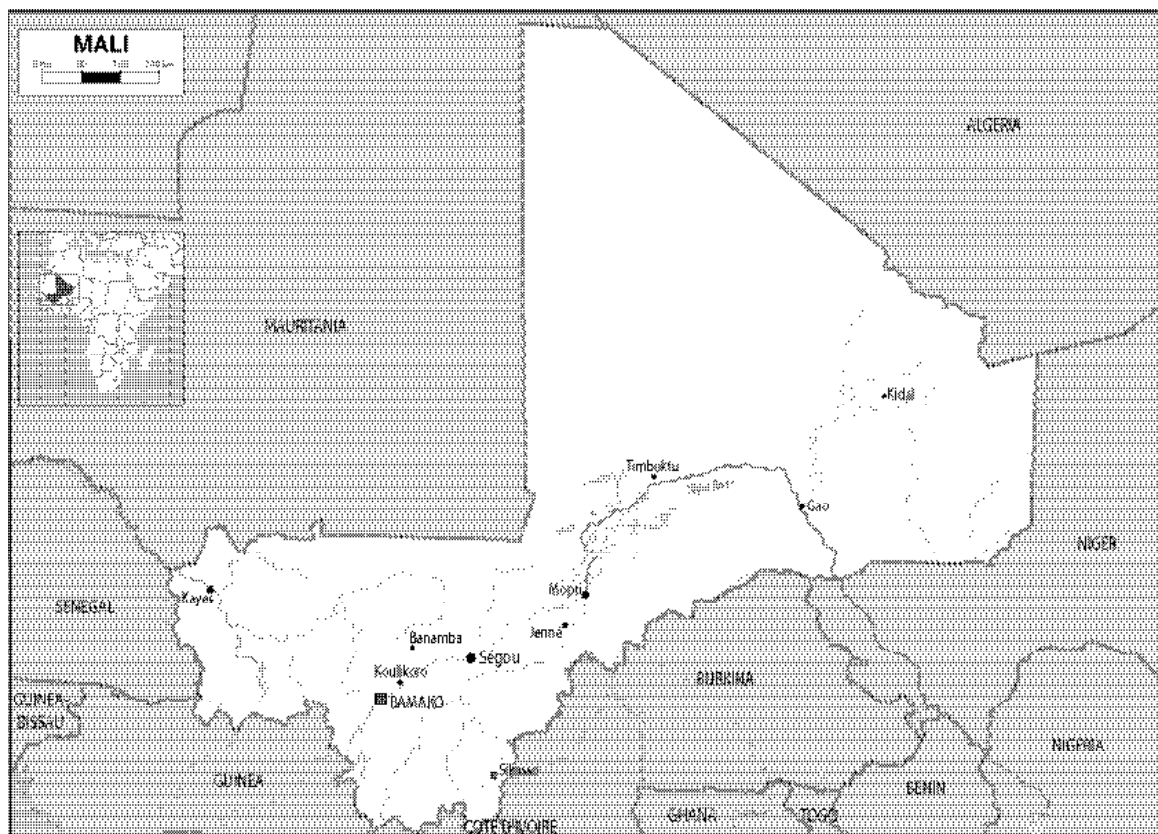
lagers to college professors—believe they have a gift for democracy and its twin, conflict resolution. The history they cite is not merely their extensive experience of precolonial, multiethnic government, unusual elsewhere on the continent, but also an associated system of beliefs and customs. The centerpiece of this tradition is the epic of Sunjata Keita, who overcame exile and physical handicap and founded the Mali Empire in the 13th century. Sunjata's story, primarily oral and circulated in numerous versions, has played a role in West Africa similar to that of the Homeric epics in Western civilization.

In Mali, it is fashionable to cite the “Constitution of Sunjata” as the inspiration for democratic decentralization. According to one of several versions of the epic, Sunjata gathered his chiefs on the slopes of a mountain not far from Bamako after his final unifying victory, and each chief presented Sunjata with his spear, in a symbolic act of submission. Sunjata then assumed the title of *mansa*, often translated “emperor,” and returned all the spears, signifying that the chiefs would rule autonomously. Today, some Malians see this oral constitution as equivalent to the Magna Carta.

Malians have redefined the term “consensus” to comport with the decentralization model. Whereas under the dictatorship “consensus” meant African-style democratic centralism, often smacking of communist practice, today it is understood to suggest reaching compromise on tough issues—more in the mode of Daniel Webster than Vladimir Lenin. No doubt this revisionism owes something to the fact that democracy is now the regime du jour, especially among big foreign-aid donors, while democratic centralism has been consigned to history's dustbin.

Malians believe that the Great Empires encouraged intermarriage and an almost-but-not-quite melting pot, which they refer to by the French term *brassage* (brew). Mali's ethnic diversity is about average for an African state. Malians speak a half-dozen major languages, none of which is used by a majority, although Bambara is widely used as a lingua franca. French is still the official language.

Malians say that their history and culture have nourished interethnic tolerance. They cite a whole tool kit of conflict resolution and avoidance mechanisms. There are, for example,



The distribution of Mali's 12 million people maps its water supply. The arid Sahara desert renders much of the country's northern half virtually uninhabitable; the 2,600-mile-long Niger River, known as the “strong brown god,” nourishes the south, which is home to the country's many peasant farmers, fishers, and herders.

“joking relationships” between clans and tribes. People involved in such relationships are licensed to greet each other with jocular insults. My Tuareg research assistant liked to remind my Dogon driver that the latter’s ancestors had once been slaves of his Tuareg ancestors. The driver would joke back in kind. While it always made me a bit nervous, this traditional practice seems to relieve tensions among Malians, perhaps because it is well understood as a substitute for tribal hostility. In a more subtle way, the joking relationships are an affirmation of a broader Malian identity.

Malian griots do double duty as conflict resolution specialists. So do Muslim imams. In the Ségou region, queens, descended from founding monarchs, traditionally acted as peacemakers. There is a tremendous corpus of customary law, varying from region to region, that still regulates issues of land, inheritance, and relations between communities and ethnic groups. Although most of the tool kit is oral, there is also a written element contained in ancient, often privately owned libraries in Timbuktu and elsewhere that were, until recently, maintained in secret. For years their contents were assumed to be overwhelmingly Arabic, hence not quite

African. It is now becoming more apparent that the old libraries, like the ancient trade routes, are highly diverse. They include material in black African languages transcribed in Arabic script, much as these languages are written with the Roman alphabet today. There is even material in Ladino, the language of Sephardic Jewry. The subject matter is fascinatingly various, ranging from science to interethnic governance, as well as Islam. A Malian commentator recently observed that the old books are “like a lamp at our feet.”

From these many materials, Malians are creating a national foundation mythology. Like Americans, they are selective. We stress the Bill of Rights, not the Pullman strike or what we did to Native Americans, and we like to believe the story about the young George Washington making a clean breast of it after he chopped down his father’s cherry tree, even when we know that this appealing story was invented by an early biographer. The Malians emphasize the three Great Empires and pass lightly over their ancestors’ later complicity in the Atlantic slave trade, though they do not deny it.

What is most important about Mali’s mythology is not

whether or to what extent history is being embellished, but rather the underlying assumption that reason and creativity can maintain harmonious relations among people of different cultural backgrounds. The Malians believe that equitable, responsive government has become a national tradition in part as a response to harsh conditions. Malian historian Doulaye Konaté, a leading scholar of the subject, notes, “It is precisely because violence was omnipresent that West African societies developed mechanisms and procedures aimed at preventing or, if that didn’t work, at managing conflict.” The value of such a mindset in a modern African setting, with warring, unsettled, or dictatorial neighbors still all too common, is hard to overestimate.

Mali’s new decentralization has created a three-tiered system: regions (think states), circles (think counties), and communes, which usually comprise several villages. Com-

THE MALIANS BELIEVE that equitable, responsive government has become a national tradition.

mune inhabitants elect local councils, which choose their own mayors and send representatives to the two higher tiers of the system. The 702 rural communes are widely regarded as the backbone of Malian democratization.

During my recent trip to Mali I visited Keleya, a commune an hour’s drive south of Bamako that includes 22 villages and a total population of 17,200. Mayor Manguran Bagayoko was greeting constituents in front of his office, a modest but attractive building in traditional adobe style. He has succeeded in getting more primary-level classrooms, he explained later. Now he needs secondary-level classrooms for their graduates. He also wants an improved marketplace, a local radio station, and some small irrigation works, all listed in his development plan (required by the central government). About 80 percent of Keleya’s citizens have paid their development tax, levied on all adult Malians, which is earmarked for commune expenditures—a very good record given that Malians do not like paying taxes any more than anyone else does. But Bagayoko is still perpetually short of funds.

As I proceeded down the road to visit other communes, I saw that Keleya was not typical—indeed, there was no such thing as typical. While some communes, like Keleya, seemed to be doing well, others were floundering amid apathy, corruption, or divided leadership. But for all its teething troubles, decentralized local government has already transformed rural Mali. Fifteen years ago the countryside was bowed under a resented, opaque central authority. Now political springtime is in the air.

The symbol of the new order is the ubiquitous speed bump, installed by communes on highways where the vehicles of the relatively rich and powerful used to roar through with scant regard for chickens or children. Whether villagers are doing well or poorly, they are certainly enjoying a new sense of hope and potential. In areas where daily life is not only hard but often boring, the jet contrails overhead have signaled, especially to village youth, an exciting realm of

rural communes of resources and then complaining that the resulting ineffectiveness shows the need to restore central control. In one sense this is a healthy democratic debate, but it's not clear who's winning.

Mali has as much political freedom as anyone could ask. There are about 15 daily newspapers, compared with the single government-run sheet prior to democratization. Most seem to exist on thin air, and reporters can be bought. Nevertheless, the better papers do not hesitate to criticize the government, and a leading editor insisted to me that if his paper uncovered a serious scandal involving the president, he would not hesitate to report it. But newspapers are a product available only to the elite. Most of them cost 50 cents a copy, the equivalent of at least \$10 for the average Malian. None has a distribution network outside Bamako.

It is FM radio, not print, that has truly democratized the media in Mali. One popular program features two elderly men sitting around the Malian equivalent of a cracker barrel, poking fun at the contents of the day's newspapers, in a manner reminiscent of Finley Peter Dunne's immortal character Mr. Dooley. Indeed, with some 140 radio stations in Mali, broadcasters have little choice but to rely heavily on the newspapers (and each

MALI HAS ASSUMED new importance in America's eyes, not only because it is democratic but also because it is a 90 percent Muslim country in a rough neighborhood.

wealth and modernity as inaccessible as the aircraft miles above them. Now, thanks in part to decentralization, they can begin to feel part of a nation and the greater world beyond.

In Bamako, there is less optimism. The educated middle classes complain about poor education, a dysfunctional justice system, and political parties whose leaders have no agendas beyond landing as many ministerial positions for their members as possible. They say that corruption has been democratized, that in the bad old days it was monopolized by the dictator and his family, but now everyone is on the take, from schoolteachers to hospital workers. Decentralization, which is praised by foreigners and emulated in some neighboring countries, is under fire in Mali itself, especially from the professional civil servants who ran the old centralized system. Proponents of decentralization believe that these mandarins are deliberately starving the

other) for content. The spread of rural radio got a big boost from a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) program that introduced suitcase-size FM transmitters developed for use in the Canadian north and Alaska. These little stations are a mainstay of decentralized local government. They also can be quite creative. A favorite entertainment is to tap a newly arrived American Peace Corps volunteer to play disc jockey and practice his or her Bambara language skills on the air, a performance that Malian audiences find most entertaining.

In general, Malians deeply appreciate their new liberty. In the countryside, the once-feared Department of Water and Forests, which controls a great deal of Mali's rural land beyond village boundaries, no longer uses its quasi-police powers to persecute the rural dwellers for sometimes-fictional infractions. In the cities, political intimidation is absent; instead, some complain that the police can't

or won't get tough about anything anymore. Most important, Malians seem well aware that their new freedom depends on the continued democratic alternation of political power, and as yet display no nostalgia for the old dictatorship.

After Mali's highly successful local elections of 2004, Yaroslav Trofimov of *The Wall Street Journal* wrote a front-page article headlined "Polling Timbuktu: Islamic Democracy? Mali Finds a Way to Make It Work." Malians were gratified by the big-time publicity but mildly annoyed by the assumption that Mali's democracy is "Islamic" and by the implication that any Muslim country with a democracy qualifies for freak-show status.

Mali has indeed assumed new importance in America's eyes, not only because it is democratic but also because it is a 90 percent Muslim country in the middle of a rough neighborhood. U.S. strategists, especially at the European Command, which is responsible for Europe and Africa, worry that the Malian

Sahara, with its huge expanses and uncontrolled borders, could become a haven for terrorism. Islamic extremism could then move from desert redoubts through the impoverished, conflict-plagued states of West Africa, eventually threatening U.S. oil interests in the Gulf of Guinea. It is assumed that such extremism would be doubly dangerous in a poor, weak region where Islam has long been gaining ground. It is also assumed that Malian Islam is increasingly polarized between a moderate but enfeebled traditional variety and a virulent fundamentalist strain with growing foreign support.

The truth is messier but less alarming. Mali has a centuries-long history of conflict stoked by fundamentalist, back-to-the-Qur'an reformers who sometimes waged jihad against their opponents. These included both non-Muslims and members of still-powerful Muslim brotherhoods that performed rituals often steeped in magic and mysticism. This historical tension is embodied in the famous 14th-century mosque of Jenné, the world's largest adobe building, which was destroyed by a jihadist reformer in the mid-19th century because he considered its man-made beauty heretic.



Villagers travel to market near Hombori in central Mali amid the spectacular scenery that could, with development, make the country a tourist destination.

cal. It was later rebuilt by less fundamentalist Muslims, with a little help from the French.

Today the degree of polarization among Mali's Muslims is routinely exaggerated by global strategists who know little of its long history. There are, to be sure, still Islamic extremists in Mali, some influenced by Wahhabi doctrine as well as by other fundamentalist traditions. But there are also moderate clerics willing, for example, to help USAID promote family planning, as long as this is done in the interest of maternal health, and condoms are not brandished in public. Christian missionaries, including evangelicals, are free to proselytize in Mali, although they don't make much headway. Most telling, there is as yet no significant movement to revise Mali's secular constitution and incorporate Islamic sharia law, a major issue in nearby Nigeria and elsewhere in the region.

U.S. policymakers routinely conflate two separate issues: the danger of Islamic extremism and unrest in the Saharan north bordering Mauritania and Algeria. Desert unrest is serious but has little, if anything, to do with Islam. For decades the Malian state has been struggling to integrate the north, which covers more than half of Mali's land area but is home to less than five percent of its population. The people of the north are a complex group including Tuareg nomads, the famed "Blue Men" of the desert, so named because the men's traditional head wrappings leave blue pigment on their faces. The Tuaregs were romanticized and given special privileges by the French, and were therefore regarded with suspicion by Mali's post-independence rulers. From 1990 to 1995, the north seethed in a bitter rebellion led by local Tuaregs trained in Libya. To achieve peace, the newly democratized Malian government withdrew its military forces from much of the north and offered local self-government, which has been highly successful.

While the rebellion is over, the desert has remained hospitable to bandits, smugglers, and traffickers in illegal immigrants heading for Europe. The trans-Saharan road through Mali, safe for tourists before the rebellion, is no longer. There has been at least one case of infiltration by Algerian Islamist rebels, who in 2003 fled into Mali with 15 captured European tourists, mostly Germans. The tourists were ransomed without loss of life, save one woman who died of heat stroke, and the Algerians retreated into Chad, where they were allegedly captured with the help of U.S. Special Forces.

In formulating its policy on Mali's northern unrest, the United States has displayed a certain degree of inconsistency. Washington welcomes and praises Malian democratization. But when it comes to the north, the U.S. government would like Mali to forget about due process and get tough with suspected terrorists, in the manner of neighboring Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania, none of which is exactly democratic. The Malians welcome U.S. military assistance but are deeply concerned that rough tactics could unravel the hard-won peace in the north. Those knowledgeable about northern Mali, including Malians and officials of foreign nongovernmental organizations, agree that economic aid crafted to the special needs of the desert region, not strong-arm tactics, is more likely to keep the peace.

For all its political progress, Mali has yet to break the vicious cycle of poverty. Although there has been no catastrophic drought since 1983–84, per capita economic growth—the best measure of progress against poverty—averaged only 3.4 percent from 1993 to 2003. In part, that is because the population is growing rapidly: 2.4 percent in 2003. People still have many children because it is economically rational to do so in a labor-intensive agricultural economy where the infant mortality rate is high. Mali's official debt, owed mainly to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, is more than 100 percent of its gross domestic product. Aid donors are eager to reward Mali for its democratic record—it was by 2003 the leading per capita aid recipient in West Africa—but much of the new aid must be recycled to pay off old debt. Thus far it is clear that Mali's decade-old democracy is not producing sufficiently rapid economic growth to meet popular expectations. Malians are agreed that until it does, democracy will not be on firm ground.

Cotton and gold, the country's chief exports, are both unstable sources of revenue. Gold production depends on unpredictable future discoveries, while cotton is notoriously vulnerable to a world market depressed by developed countries' self-subsidization. The U.S. government's payments to its own cotton farmers probably cost Mali more, by depressing world cotton prices, than Mali gains financially from U.S. economic aid. The Malian economy remains reliant on traditional rain-fed agriculture, including cotton, grain, and cattle raising, all of which suffer in dry years.

Yet the country is not threatened by inexorable economic catastrophe, as the popular image of the advancing desert suggests. Scientific research shows with some precision that the Sahara has been both wetter and drier over the past 40,000 years than it is at present. Most of the land degradation now evident, and there is plenty of it, results from human activity—population increases combined with the use of primitive technology and overgrazing. There is nothing inexorable about it.

Moreover, Mali does not lack for economic resources. It has an abundance of irrigable land, especially along the Niger River and its tributaries, which could produce fruit and vegetables for winter export to Europe. It has spectacular tourist possibilities—ancient cities, elephants in scenery reminiscent of Arizona's Monument Valley, and an increasingly renowned array of art and music. But neither agriculture nor tourism has been significantly developed since I served in Mali 16 years ago, despite shelves of donor-financed studies. Malian conservatism, an almost instinctive tendency to move slowly and favor traditional values, has been a tremendous political asset, but at the same time it sometimes induces lethargy and resistance to needed change. Commercial agriculture, for example, requires skills and attitudes alien to a society in which subsistence is the primary objective and noneconomic values are sometimes entrenched. Malians still prefer to accumulate cattle as symbols of wealth until a bad rain year requires surplus animals to be sold at fire-sale prices. What venture capitalism exists remains in the hands of foreign ethnic minorities—Lebanese and, now, even Chinese, who have arrived in the wake of recent Chinese construction projects.

Malians have made the most of their dependence on foreign aid by managing and manipulating their aid donors, a complex and fluctuating congregation of foreigners with the World Bank in the lead. (The United States contributes only a small fraction of Mali's total aid.) In so doing, they employ all the diplomatic skills and persistence derived from centuries of multiethnic politics. They are developing a reputation for signing aid agreements and then avoiding implementation if it requires doing something distasteful. Thus, in 2004 Mali backed away from a key agreement with the World Bank to privatize the government-owned cotton-processing company. Malians are quite aware that the donors are not about to abandon democratic Mali, especially with conflict raging nearby in the once-prosperous Ivory Coast. As one leading Malian academic told me, "For

us, democracy is as good as money in the bank."

Foreign aid remains essential to Mali as a source of new ideas and needed policy changes as well as financial support. To cite only one example, foreign donors, led by the United States, prodded the Malians into reforms that have made the country self-sufficient in food production except in drought years. But Mali's democratization will not be complete until Malian leaders take charge of economic as well as political policy, and develop a vision for Mali's economic future and a strategy for reaching it. In general, they need to worry less about securing foreign aid and more about realizing Mali's own potential. And they should eschew their customary politesse with foreign friends who do unconscionable things. To the United States their message might well be, "If you want us to worry about your survival (and help thwart terrorism), you should worry about ours (and support our agriculture)."

The most striking thing about Malian democracy is its success in drawing intellectual and spiritual sustenance from an epic past, and actively incorporating homegrown elements, such as decentralization. If there is occasional fiddling with historical truth, the past provides plenty of room for differing viewpoints and for shaping tradition to meet modern needs. It is this aspect of the Malian experience that is least appreciated, and it deserves more attention from policymakers, both African and foreign, who have a tendency to assume that "tradition" equates with "bad."

Not every African country has Mali's wealth of history and culture, but all of them, no matter how wracked by war or poverty, can draw on the positive aspects of their own experience for support. Aid donors can help by encouraging cultural preservation, exemplified by the U.S. embassy-sponsored small projects program, which in Mali is helping to preserve the old libraries in Timbuktu. Schools across the continent remain woefully deprived of textbooks that could, among other things, help preserve and stimulate pride in the positive aspects of local tradition. Where customary law is of critical importance, as it is in Mali, both government officials and their foreign advisers should be trained to make better use of it, rather than dismiss it out of hand as an awkward anachronism.

The underlying message from foreign friends to Malians and other Africans should be that they can proudly use the past to help make a better future. ■

True Believers

President George W. Bush has attracted a good deal of criticism for looking to his religious faith for political guidance. Why has the hand God played in Woodrow Wilson's idealism and Harry Truman's Cold War crusade been so easily forgotten?

BY ELIZABETH EDWARDS SPALDING

SINCE GEORGE W. BUSH ASSUMED THE PRESIDENCY five years ago, arguments about the proper role of religious faith in politics have been at the center of American political debate. To many members of the intellectual and media establishments, and to others in the wider world, Bush seems a disturbing historical aberration. Not only does the president talk openly about God, but his political beliefs are plainly informed by his religious faith. He regularly incorporates Bible scriptures into his political speeches, asserts that he heard God's call to run for the presidency, and has said that he has prayed for God's help since taking office, including when he decided to lead the United States into war in Iraq. In the minds of his critics, Bush represents a radical departure from established precedent. That religious faith should play any part in decisions made in the Oval Office seems an alarming possibility.

A moment's thought, however, should be sufficient to put these fears in perspective. From the Founding era to the 19th century (in which Abraham Lincoln is only the most obvious example) to the modern era, presidents have all spoken about God and looked to their respective faiths for guidance. During the 20th century, the spirit of the Social Gospel was a prevailing political wind in American politics, helping to shape the civil rights movement and protests

against the Vietnam War. Yet it wasn't thought at all remarkable that this religious idea, which used the language of traditional morality to advance progressive political reform, was embodied in the person of the nation's twenty-eighth president, Woodrow Wilson.

But some persist in misreading history. Wilson's progressivism is usually divorced from his faith, and the religion of other presidents—except for Jimmy Carter—is considered quaint. Harry S. Truman, for example, is now remembered as a colorfully plainspoken and profane man who brought the bourbon and cigar smoke of Missouri politics into the White House. But Truman also brought a deep religious faith, and it played no small part in inspiring him to confront communism and lead America into the Cold War.

The real question about the role of religion in the White House is not "whether" but "what kind." Indeed, by broadening the discussion beyond Wilson to include Truman as a model for understanding Bush, we gain a better understanding of how presidential faith can and does shape America's view of the world.

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As the president who led the United States while it was becoming a world power, Wilson casts an especially long shadow. He learned from his father, a prominent Presbyterian minister, and his mother, whose

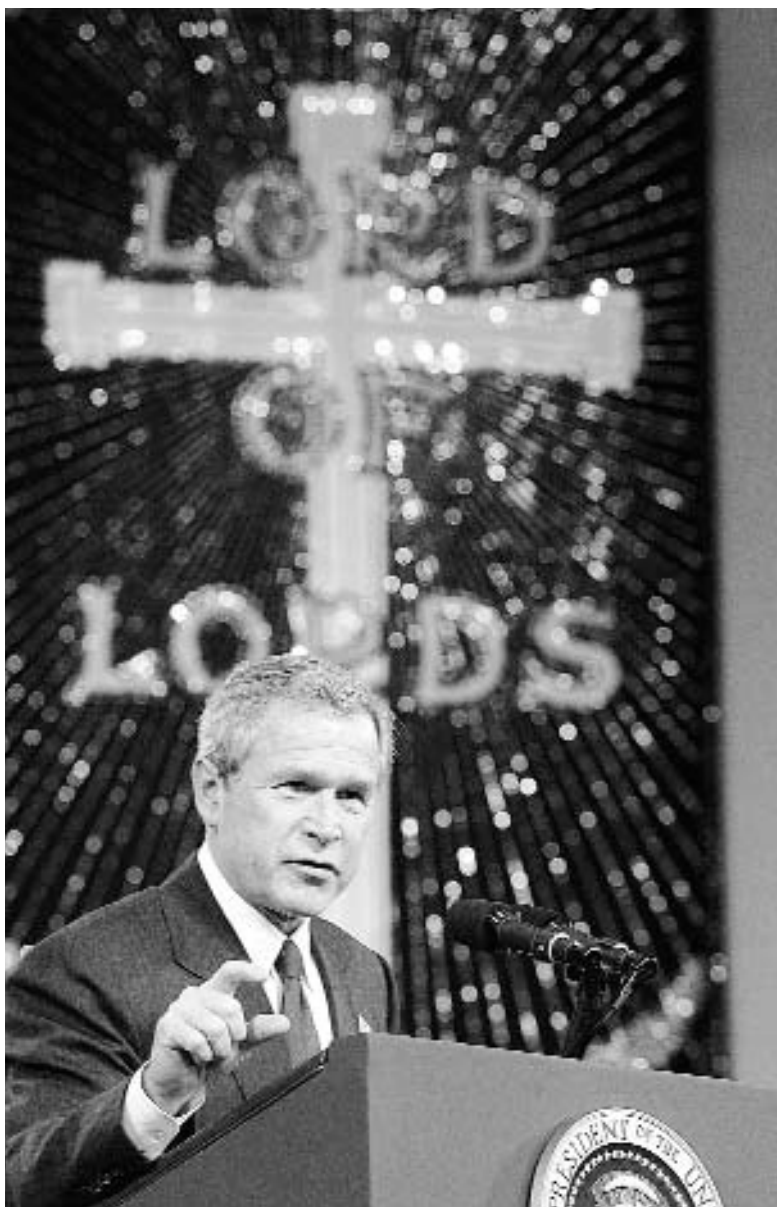
father was also a Presbyterian minister, that he was one of God's special people. This Presbyterian elect was predestined to achieve salvation in the next world and to show signs of that saved state in this world. Its responsibilities were apparent to Wilson. The Bible, he wrote, "reveals every man to himself as a distinct moral agent, responsible not to men, not even to those men whom he has put over him in authority, but responsible through his own conscience to his Lord and Maker." Wilson believed that he was called to carry his private, saved state into his public, political life. His understanding of Christianity gave him a strong sense of selection, even a destiny he perceived as prophetic.

Imbibing the Social Gospel of the late 19th century, Wilson came to trust in the promise of redemption in politics, especially foreign policy. In 1911, a year before he won the White House, he declared that America was born a Christian nation "to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scripture." The administrative hand of modern social science would bring about needed political reform at home and, eventually, abroad. In Wilson's eyes, World War I was a crusade in which the New World would redeem the Old World, first in battle and then in the Covenant—a biblical word Wilson quite deliberately chose—of the League of Nations. While only the elect could be saved for eternity, he thought it his Christian duty to save the world temporally.

Though Bush has sometimes been compared to Wilson, the religious sentiments he expresses have a different ring. He appears to have rejected the patrician faith of his father in favor of that old-

time religion, which is precisely what the Social Gospel meant to overcome by stripping away earlier Christianity's concern with individual sin and traditional morality.

As integral as Bush's faith is to his domestic agenda of compassionate conservatism, faith-based initiatives, and an ownership society, it is even more central to his foreign policy, and he has said as much in media interviews. As with Wilson, this influence has generally been misread—misunder-



President George W. Bush has not shied from expressing the strong faith that is a source of unease among some more secular Americans. Here, he dedicates a Christian youth center in Dallas in 2003.

estimated, to use the president's own telling neologism.

When he first campaigned for the presidency, Bush argued that America had failed to articulate a coherent post-Cold War foreign policy; the humanitarian internationalism of the Clinton era had spread the United States too thin. Such views led some to say that Bush was a hard-eyed foreign-policy "realist" and others to call him a nationalist. What these arguments missed is that Bush, in fact, had a powerful worldview built on his evangelical beliefs that God is loving and compassionate, that every person is a child of God and thus endowed with equal dignity, that everyone should love his neighbor as himself, and that the hand of God is at work in good government.

TRUMAN THOUGHT THAT the restatement of the Great Commandment and Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan applied to both domestic and foreign policy.

For Bush, the principles of freedom, democracy, and self-government should protect *individuals*, allowing them to enjoy their God-given freedom in this world, including the free will to strive for salvation in the next world.

Many of Bush's subsequent public statements set forth this worldview. In his second inaugural address, which some regard as the speech that marks his "Wilsonization," Bush said that "America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one," and the rhetoric continued in that vein. "Across the generations, we have proclaimed the imperative of self-government, because no one is fit to be a master, and no one deserves to be a slave." He concluded that "it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world. . . . History has an ebb and flow of justice, but history also has a visible direction, set by liberty and the author of liberty." Bush aimed to link America's first principles and most Americans' faith in God to the nation's purpose in the world. Had he been transformed into a Wilsonian idealist?

In Bush's mind, he had not, in fact, changed—international circumstances had. "We have a place, all of us, in a

long story," he proclaimed in his first inaugural address, "a story we continue, but whose end we will not see. It is the story of a new world that became a friend and liberator of the old, the story of a slaveholding society that became a servant of freedom, the story of a power that went into the world to protect but not possess, to defend but not to conquer." In that same speech, delivered the better part of a year before September 11, he also spoke of America remaining engaged in the world by history and by choice, "shaping a balance of power that favors freedom." After the terrorist attacks, Bush depicted the new conflict as a battle between good and evil, memorably remarking at Washington's National Cathedral on September 14, 2001, that "three days removed from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance of history. But our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil."

In speeches and statements throughout his presidency, Bush has defined a

relationship between freedom and peace that is distinctly un-Wilsonian. His 2005 State of the Union address encapsulates his reasoning: The peace that freedom-loving peoples seek will be achieved only by eliminating the conditions that feed radicalism and ideologies of murder and tying U.S. efforts to specific regimes and allies, rather than to an international organization and collective security as Wilson did. "The only force powerful enough to stop the rise of tyranny and terror, and replace hatred with hope, is the force of human freedom," he said, and then repeated the main policy goal of his second inaugural. "Our enemies know this, and that is why the terrorist Zarqawi recently declared war on what he called the 'evil principle' of democracy. And we've declared our own intention: America will stand with the allies of freedom to support democratic movements in the Middle East and beyond, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world."

Bush has also been likened in some respects to Ronald Reagan. Think of the presidential rhetoric of the two—Reagan's "evil empire" and Bush's "axis of evil" immediately come to mind—or their status as polit-



After FDR's death in 1945, Harry S. Truman took the oath of office on a closed Bible, but at his 1949 inauguration it lay open to the Ten Commandments.

ical leaders with Western sensibilities (both cowboy and civilizational) who rejuvenated the Republican Party. When it comes to faith and foreign policy, however, it is more fruitful to compare the Methodist Republican Bush with the Baptist Democrat Harry Truman.

As it is for Bush, the touchstone for Truman was Jesus' life and teachings. Before, during, and after his presidency, he frequently referred to the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, and he would trace the biblical connections between the Ten Commandments and the sermon, with special attention to Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Micah, and Joel. All of this led him to conclude that people should live by the Great Commandment as imparted by Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. "If you will read this tenth chapter of Luke," said Truman, "you will find out exactly what a good neighbor means. It means to treat your neighbor as you yourself would like to be treated. Makes no difference whether he is of another race or another creed or another color. He is still your neighbor." Truman thought that the restatement of the Great Commandment and Jesus'

story of the Good Samaritan applied to both domestic and foreign policy, teachings that Bush has clearly internalized as well.

While fighting in World War I and commanding the predominantly Catholic Battery D, Truman wrote to his future wife, Bess, in 1918 that "all churches, even the Roman Catholic, can do a man a lot of good. I had a Presbyterian bringing up, a Baptist education, and Episcopal leanings, so I reckon I ought to get to heaven somehow, don't you think so?" Writing again to Bess many years later, he summarized the distinction he made between faith and religion: "It was a pleasure to hear of Margaret [their daughter] going to the Baptist Sunday school. She ought to go to one every Sunday—I mean *a* Sunday school. . . . It makes no difference what brand is on the Sunday school." And Bush—despite a widely publicized comment during his 1994 gubernatorial race that some say means he believes only Christians go to heaven—has pointedly praised faith as a good thing, regardless of the particular denomination and inclusive of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

As president, Truman linked his politics and his faith, nowhere more clearly than in his conduct of the Cold War. The strategy of containment redefined liberal internationalism and involved the United States in world politics to an unprecedented degree. In the mid-to-late 1940s, Truman also tried to unite the world's religions in a spiritual crusade against communism. He sent his personal representative to Pope Pius XII to coordinate not only with the Vatican but also with the heads of the Anglican, Lutheran, and Greek Orthodox churches. "If I can mobilize the people who believe in a moral world against the Bolshevik materialists," Truman wrote to Bess in 1947, "we can win this fight." Since the Catholic Church was his strongest religious ally in the moral battle against international communism, Truman put Rome first in his global strategy, even trying to confer formal diplomatic recognition on the Vatican. At home, he received solid support from Catholics and overwhelming resistance from Protestants, especially Southern Democrats

in recognition "that the central issue of our time is intellectual and spiritual, and that the heart of the present conflict is a struggle for the minds and loyalties of mankind." Truman promoted the campaign in key speeches, always linking the political, moral, and religious challenges of the Cold War. Again, he turned to the Vatican as an anticommunist stalwart. Once more, he met fierce resistance from Protestants, and so, with regret, he scaled back his goals but continued to work with the Catholic Church and to expand institutions of public diplomacy, such as the Voice of America and the new freedom radios (Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty).

From the first day of his presidency, Truman invoked the Almighty. He believed that America had been called to foster peace in the world, and that it had dodged that responsibility after World War I. He often explained that this duty now extended from U.S. participation in the United Nations to combating the onslaught of communism worldwide. Only in the

context of freedom, he believed, could humankind exercise the free will necessary to achieving peace and happiness. Here is the conclusion of his inaugural address in 1949: "But I say to all men, what we have achieved in liberty, we will surpass in greater liberty. Steadfast in our faith in the

BOTH BUSH AND TRUMAN perceived good and evil as the primary forces in global battles, their worldviews fundamentally shaped by their faiths.

who rejected anything "popish," and his political-diplomatic effort to formalize a public, faith-driven, ecumenical international campaign failed.

In 1950, his administration's own National Security Council paper 68 (NSC 68)—the document that definitively explained the threat of communism and America's commitment to its containment—and the onset of the Korean War served as confirmation for Truman that, in the end, the East-West struggle would be won or lost on moral grounds. In the early 1950s, he again endeavored to take the moral high ground in the Cold War, this time in what he called the Campaign of Truth—a political strategy involving the mass media, the world's major religions, and the governmental and private sectors. Legislation that Truman had urged from behind the scenes was introduced in a Senate resolution for "a Marshall Plan in the field of ideas,"

Almighty, we will advance toward a world where man's freedom is secure. To that end we will devote our strength, our resources, and our firmness of resolve. With God's help, the future of mankind will be assured in a world of justice, harmony, and peace." The challenge, as Truman understood it, was that the free world faced a foe who denied that "human freedom is born of the belief that man is created equal in the image of God and therefore capable of governing himself."

Truman later turned to the prophets to illustrate his understanding of peace. He argued that major and minor prophets alike "were all trying to get the people to understand that they were on this earth for a purpose, and that in order to accomplish that purpose they must follow a code of morals." He cited the words of Isaiah that God would judge among the nations and rebuke many people,

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"Never for a moment have I had one doubt about my religious beliefs," Woodrow Wilson once declared, and critics have detected more than a trace of such zealous certainty in the president's political beliefs as well.

and they would beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. But then he quoted the prophet Joel (3:10), who seems to make the opposite point: "Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak say: I am strong." Truman maintained that the passages were not contradictory: "Which one do you want? It depends on what the condition is." Joel, Truman explained, was trying to teach the people that they had to protect their regime if they "expected ever to have a free government." The prudent leader—Isaiah,

Joel, or Harry Truman—must determine whether the time demands plowshares or swords.

In Truman's mind, the Decalogue laid the cornerstone of peace, the prophets contributed to its structure, and the Sermon on the Mount completed the edifice. He maintained that the sermon, in chapters five through seven of Matthew's gospel, can never be read too often. In presidential speeches and press conferences he frequently referred to living by the golden rule, and in one of his earliest foreign-policy speeches as president, he argued that this rule should direct international affairs. In a typical statement, he wrote in 1952: "Confusius [sic], Buddah [sic], Moses, our own Jesus Christ, Mohomet [sic], all preached—'Do as you'd be done by.' Treat others as you'd be treated. So did all the other great teachers and philosophers." In comments to a Methodist audience after he retired from office, Truman emphasized the fifth chapter of Matthew

and quoted from the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." Here, he believed, was the universal wish of all people of goodwill: "That is exactly what we all want to be. We want to be peacemakers. Not just individually, but *internationally*."

The Cold War both modified and moderated Truman's optimism about the possibilities of global peace. On the one hand, he rejected the idealism of those (and there were many at the time) who ignored reality—he may have

preferred plowshares, but he knew that his was a time for swords. On the other, he rejected the narrow view of foreign-policy “realists” (and there were many of those, too) who failed to recognize the moral challenge of communism. The Cold War, for all of its complications, was for Truman a battle between “the world of morals” and the “world of no morals.” Only the combined strength of the West—military, political, economic, and moral—could defeat the immorality of communism and bring international peace. Freedom, justice, and order emerged in his writings and speeches as the principles that created the circumstances under which a real and durable peace might be possible. And of those principles, Truman reasoned, freedom was the first to have to take root and be defended. Peace was the fruit of liberty, he concluded, not its precondition.

Truman and Bush were both considered unprepared, especially in foreign-policy matters, when they assumed the presidency. Before taking office, Truman had been only to Europe, as a captain during World War I, and Bush, in a more cosmopolitan age, had traveled abroad just three times in his adult life. Both men professed deep, direct, at times simple religious faiths, which they had chosen with deliberation when they were adults. Both spoke of the importance to them of daily prayer and Scriptural reading. Both identified themselves as biblical Christians, mainstream in that world but evangelical, even “conservative,” when compared with either mainline Protestant or secular sensibilities. Both brought to their presidencies worldviews previously and fundamentally shaped by their faiths. Truman expressed his faith more explicitly and frequently in his presidential rhetoric, often asserting in public and private that if everyone would live by the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, the world would be free and at peace.

Both presidents faced transformative foreign-policy challenges. Truman saw Cold War totalitarianism as the great threat to democracy and free peoples, while Bush

views the war on terror as the leading edge of a larger religious and philosophical division in the 21st-century world. Both perceived good and evil as the primary forces in global battles, and, consequently, have been accused of oversimplifying complex questions, and their foreign-policy responses have often been deemed Manichaeic and without nuance. (For Truman, this was especially true of the for-

THROUGH HIS writings and presidency, Wilson constructed a detailed theology of politics in which all peoples and nations were properly placed in the global order.

eign-policy doctrine named for him.) But at bottom, both brought to the presidency a belief that when it comes to religion and politics, there is no strict barrier between faith that is public and social, on the one hand, and personal and private, on the other. And though neither man’s statesmanship could accurately be called Wilsonian, in both cases it reflects the liberal international practice of U.S. foreign policy first forged by Wilson as an alternative to the amorality of European power politics.

So we must return to Wilson. Over the years many have argued that Truman attempted to resurrect Wilsonian internationalism and apply it to the Cold War, and it is often said today that Bush underwent a Wilsonian conversion. But Wilson is unique. Through his writings and his presidency, he constructed a detailed theology of politics, in which the individual, the church, society, and the nations of the world were all properly placed in a progressive global order. Christian doctrine played an essential role in his political thought. Because Wilson’s sense of religious predestination shaped his politics, his Christianity is far different from Truman’s or Bush’s biblical evangelicalism, in which God is loving and can certainly be providential, but in which individuals must exercise their free will, with the hope, not the guarantee, that they are doing God’s will.

Wilson’s worldview stressed the primacy of peace as the fulfillment of progressive history—a narrative he thought he was uniquely suited to understand, direct,

and bring to fruition—and that the freedom and self-government of specific regimes were subordinate to global peace. (He first wrote about world federation in 1887.) In 1916, the same year that he campaigned for reelection on the theme that he had kept the United States out of war, Wilson focused on the world after the Great War and expressed confidence “that the world is even now upon the eve of a great consummation,” which would result not only in some sort of international security organization but also in coercion being put only “to the service of a common order, a common justice, and a common peace.”

While acknowledging the rights of individual peoples and nations, Wilson emphasized that the world had an overarching right—specifically, to be free from “every disturbance of its peace that has its origin in aggression and disregard of the rights of peoples and nations.” As he said in 1917, “There must be, not a balance of power, but a community of power; not organized rivalries, but an organized common peace.” In Wilson’s theology of politics, since he couldn’t save each soul, he would save the world through new technocratic administration and the resulting social progress. The contrast with Truman and Bush is clear: Because of the problem of sin and the promise of redemption, they sought to improve—not perfect—the lives of individuals through the promotion of good political regimes. Wilson thought he could establish an ideal City of Man, if only everyone would follow him.

In addition to key religious and philosophical differences between Wilson, on the one hand, and Truman and Bush, on the other, there are important personality differences. Political leadership calls for confidence and a thick skin. Both Truman and Bush fit the requirement. Wilson went beyond confidence. He was certain that he had a special understanding of international politics and of what the world needed after the Great War, flowing from his conviction that he was the chosen instrument of God’s will in the world. Since adolescence he had wanted to become a “leader of men,” and while he was still a law student at the University of Virginia, his calling cards were inscribed “Thomas Woodrow Wilson, Senator from Virginia.” On his 33rd birthday, in 1889, he made this entry in his “Confidential Journal”: “Why may not the present generation write, through me, its political *autobiography*?” Unlike Wilson, who

believed that divine destiny made him superior to others, Truman and Bush have affirmed their equality with the rest of humankind.

To this fundamental internal similarity must be added a fundamental external one. Truman came into office when World War II was drawing to a close. He was then president at the dawn of the conflict that dominated the second half of the 20th century, the Cold War. Bush became president during what many considered a post-Cold War era of relative peace and prosperity, only to face 9/11 and its aftermath. Whether the war on terrorism will be of the length and magnitude of the Cold War remains to be seen, but as defined and fought by Bush, it is global in scale and no less encompassing.

There is also a religious dimension to the external conflicts faced by Truman and Bush. In the Cold War, the relevant factor was communism’s *rejection* of God and religion—though communism went on to become a “religion” in the totalitarian state, and the only religion at that. In the war on terrorism, the enemies have perverted a major world religion to justify their goals and actions. Radical Islam rejects Christianity, as well as what it deems lesser or “moderate” forms of Islam.

Of course, there are some important differences to note. Truman kept reminding people of the meaning of the Cold War, in addition to setting forth a grand strategy. He could do so in part by pointing to the regime that was the main problem, the Soviet Union. By contrast, in the war on terror, America and its allies are fighting no specific regime. So Bush ends up promoting abstractions such as freedom and democracy.

Over the years, Harry Truman’s stock has risen and fallen. Today, he is once more considered a strong and effective leader, who laid the foundations for America’s most successful policies in the Cold War. Yet scholars have been slow to attribute Truman’s understanding of international politics to his religious worldview. By contrast, many have been all too quick to dismiss Bush’s understanding of world politics as merely a religious worldview. It is the aberration of Wilson’s idealism—and its emphasis on moral absolutism—that has obscured the fact that religious faith has always played a role in White House decision making. Bush’s approach to the war on terrorism may prove to be a success, a failure, or something in between. Yet in the long run, history and hindsight will likely view the religious worldview of this president as consistent with the principles and practices of the larger American political tradition. ■

The Sovereign State of Retirement



THE COMEDIAN GEORGE BURNS, WHO LIVED TO BE 100, ONCE QUIPPED THAT it was ridiculous to think of retiring at 65—he still had pimples at that age. Americans may have laughed, but most thought it ridiculous to wait even that long. Exiting the world of work earlier than ever before and living longer, they have created a whole new and, in some ways, privileged stage of life. Now, as the first baby boomers enter their sixties, it is becoming clear that the old dream of retirement as a quiescent golden age is itself a bit long in the tooth.

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What Is Retirement For?

The Social Security system gave birth to the modern idea of retirement as a golden age of life after work. That concept was never very carefully thought out, and now that it is more than 70 years old it looks ripe for retirement.

BY W. ANDREW ACHENBAUM

MARKING LIFE'S TRANSITIONS IS A BIG BUSINESS in America. The modern bride and groom take counsel from scads of magazines, consultants, and vendors even before they exchange the golden rings and set off on their honeymoon, spending an average of \$26,000 to tie the knot. The celebration of births, birthdays, and graduations keeps entire industries afloat, and even teenagers get to don evening clothes and settle into rented limousines for that all-American rite of passage, the high school prom.

In contrast, the rituals that attend what can be one of life's most significant changes—retirement—tend to be cheap and awkward. The invitation to the “goodbye” party is typically circulated in a corporate e-mail along with all the other digital ephemera of bureaucratic life, with little check boxes where attendees can indicate their menu choices, which, more likely than not, they will pay for out of their own pockets. No longer does the nearly departed get a fancy gold watch or crystal bowl. Instead, party planners buy

mugs and gag gifts. For the extravagant, an eight-foot banner reading “Good Luck, Fred!” can be bought on the Internet for \$3.99. In giving toasts, the Master of Ceremonies, the Boss, the Spouse, even the Person Retiring need only fill in details in texts available online. The intent is to make the retirement party as upbeat as possible—because no one is really sure how upbeat life after work will be.

The uneasiness surrounding retirement celebrations reflects the fact that sometime during the past couple of decades we lost a shared vision of what retirement is or ought to be. The majority of retirees in the past may not have been handed a gold watch, yet the timepiece still symbolized a certain set of ideas: the steady passage of years spent largely with one employer, and the golden time to come, when all the long-delayed dreams of relaxation and travel would at last be realized. Much of that is gone now. Not only do careers often involve more employers than there are hours in a day, but, in part because of the sheer number of people entering them, the postwork years can now go in any number of directions. In many cases, they're not even postwork.

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No golf clubs or cruise wear await the elderly in this characteristically grim mid-19th-century depiction of the stages of life.

Yet the golden-age scenario of retirement was itself a fleeting thing, one of a succession of hazy visions that evolved one after the other as demography, economics, and social trends dictated, usually without any conscious effort by society at large to consider what life in old age ought to be like. As the first baby boomers cross the 60-year threshold this year, the advance guard of a cohort likely to live far longer than their grandparents, that lack of reflection is a luxury we can no longer afford. With its unprecedented personal expectations, its enormous demands on the public weal, and its reservoir of education and skills likely to be needed by a country entering a period of challenge, this generation will force us to face the question: What is retirement supposed to be?

“R”etirement” simply did not exist during much of the American experience. In the colonial era and early decades of the Republic, older men labored as long as health permitted. The elderly were a small part of the population; a white baby born in 1800 couldn’t expect to live to see its 40th birthday (though

those who survived the deadly perils of childhood could expect to live considerably longer). That 90 percent of all Americans worked the land gave elderly farmers certain advantages. Infirmary did not preclude them from exercising authority over their lands, sharing advice and expertise, feeding the livestock, or managing the books. More important, most elders owned the land they farmed, rarely ceding total control until death. If love and filial obligation did not compel their children to care for them, self-interest did. Typically, widows got a third of the property and the rest of the estate. As late as 1850, men between the ages of 70 and 99 held real estate valued on average at what was then a very substantial \$2,500, a sum 10 times the value of land held by men in their twenties.

Yet the simplest adversities could have cruel consequences for the elderly. Unwilling to wait for their inheritance, sons moved west. Poor crop yields and land speculation wiped out family farms. Even luminaries were at risk. Thomas Jefferson brushed with bankruptcy several times: Forfeited notes, debts, fluctuations in land prices, and his own preoccupation with establishing the University of

Virginia nearly cost the ex-president his homestead at Monticello. (Presidents James Monroe and Ulysses S. Grant also scrambled to make ends meet after leaving office.)

The professions and crafts provided opportunities for older men. Although the aged made up less than two percent of the population, many “young Men of the Revolution” subsequently held government posts until their eighties. Clergy kept their pulpits for more than five decades. Octogenarian tradesmen and innkeepers were not uncommon; clock makers and silversmiths labored into old age, calling on apprentices to shoulder more and more of the burden. Americans distinguished between vigorous “green old age” and sickly “superannuation.”

IN FORMER TIMES, older people had to rely on the kindness of neighbors and kin, and many entered almshouses.

The vicissitudes of superannuation diminished the quality of late life. Older people had to rely on the kindness of neighbors and kin, and increasing numbers of the aged poor entered almshouses, bare-subsistence charities operated by local governments where they shared space with delinquents, criminals, and the disabled. Widows became subservient to in-laws, relegated to a single room in the homes they once owned. The economic utility of aging slaves was recorded with frank brutality in a plantation ledger book: “Charley,” aged 60, was registered as a quarter-hand.

With few exceptions, work opportunities for older people diminished after the Civil War as the United States metamorphosed into an urban-industrial order, inaugurating a second phase in the history of retirement. The village blacksmith became an anachronism as the craftsman retreated before the new mass-production industries. Semi-skilled workers who were getting on in years could not meet quotas. “The old man today,” wrote an economist in 1906, “slow, hesitating, frequently half-blind and deaf, is sadly misplaced amidst the death dealing machinery of a modern factory.” To get by, men begged, accepted whatever

menial jobs were available, and relied on family for support.

The obsolescence of the older worker is one reason the period around 1890 marks the beginning of the long-term trend toward the withdrawal of the elderly from the work force. In that year, about two-thirds of men aged 65 and older were still in the labor force—roughly the same proportion found today in developing countries such as Brazil and Mexico. By 1920, that number had dropped to 56 percent, and by 1940 it was down to 42 percent. Today it is 27 percent.

It is probably more accurate to describe most of these turn-of-the-century elderly as “not working” rather than “retired” in any modern sense. Few had resources beyond what they had saved themselves, and while successful merchants, farmers, and professionals might amass significant assets, many others did not. A few skimpy corporate pensions were paid, but they were offered as much as departure incentives designed to promote business efficiency as expressions of altruism.

Yet it was significant that many leaders of the era’s new big corporations felt that they could not afford to be heartless. Older workers were kept on as floor sweepers and in other menial jobs, if perhaps only for the sake of work-force morale, and the corporate interest in pensions arose in part out of a desire to find a better way to deal with what had become a growing burden. The American Express Company broke the ground in 1875, when it began to pay small sums to workers past 60 who were willing to quit.

One large group did receive outside support during this period. By 1893, a million aging Union Civil War veterans and their widows were receiving military pensions from the federal government, an expense that consumed 42 percent of the federal budget. Technically, the beneficiaries were required to show some war-related disability, but the program was increasingly liberalized until Congress declared in 1906 that any veteran 62 or over qualified. Yet even as European nations were establishing broad-based social insurance schemes for the elderly, beginning with Germany in 1891, Congress refused to consider military pensions a precedent for creating a pension system for veterans of industry. The federal pensions died out as the veterans did.



In 1940, Ida M. Fuller of Ludlow, Vermont, drew the nation's first Social Security check. The retired bookkeeper lived to the age of 100, eventually drawing \$22,888.92 in benefits after having contributed \$24.75 to Social Security.

The pension movement spread slowly: In 1918, only one of every 100 retired workers received any support from corporations or unions. Indeed, labor unions were generally indifferent or even hostile to the nascent pension movement among liberal reformers. Many labor leaders feared that pension contributions would reduce wages or that employers offering pensions would win more worker loyalty than the unions.

Yet there were advantages to life in the booming industrial cities. Wages were higher there than they were on the farm, and they began rising fairly rapidly in real terms toward the end of the 19th century, allowing many workers to save enough to purchase a home while avoiding the heavy labor that comes with farm life. And many city dwellers were able to retain some of the virtues of close-knit rural life. In ethnic enclaves, younger kin helped their elders secure part-time employment, and they shared family resources during economic downturns.

At the elite level, age had definite advantages. Old men dominated most of the nation's institutions, from corporations to the Protestant churches. A series of reforms in the nation's capital after 1880 established the seniority

system in Congress, putting more power in the hands of gray-haired legislators. When World War I broke out, nearly half of the nation's millionaires were over 60, as were 56 percent of what one business journalist dubbed the "men who control America."

A third and more recognizably modern era of retirement was born of crisis. The Great Depression struck an America equipped with only the most rudimentary safety net, and the cataclysm struck the aged with particular brutality. Old-age unemployment exceeded even the appalling national averages, driving many middle-class senior citizens into poverty. Bank failures, business bankruptcies, and 19,000 farm foreclosures took an especially heavy toll on the assets of older people. Families helped as much as they could, but couples put their children's interests above the needs of their parents. Once deemed a minor problem, old-age dependency now seemed a crisis requiring dramatic intervention.

"We can never insure one hundred percent of the population against one hundred percent of the hazards and vicissitudes of life," Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared as he signed the Social Security Act in 1935, "but we have tried to frame a law which will give some measure of protection to the average citizen and to his family against the loss of a job and against a poverty-ridden old age." (The system's architects considered a variety of ages from 60 to 75 as the magic threshold of retirement, fixing on 65 after consulting actuarial tables and budget projections, looking at other nations' retirement systems, and putting a finger to the political winds.) Social Security checks made a difference in the lives of ordinary Americans, who on average were living longer than their grandparents. Ida May Fuller, the first Social Security beneficiary, contributed \$24.75 to the system during her last two years of work; between 1940 and her death in 1975, she collected \$22,888.92.

Few profited as much as Ms. Fuller, but Social Security served its purpose, making it possible for older people to leave the work force assured of a floor (not necessarily carpeted) to support them. For many, the carpeting came from private pension plans, which proliferated during World War II, when Congress conferred tax advantages on corporations that offered them, and were extended to ever-larger numbers of Americans after labor unions took up the cause in the late 1940s. The incidence of old-age poverty fell

from 50 percent in 1935 to 15 percent four decades later. As Social Security benefits increased and coverage expanded, and as private pensions kicked in and the nation as a whole entered an era of remarkably steady and widespread prosperity, middle-class workers envisioned a new golden age of retirement ahead.

On New Year's Day 1960, the first day of an explosive decade in American history, real estate entrepreneur Del Webb opened the doors to his daring gamble that the newly retired masses were ready for something different from the somnolent precincts of Florida. He billed Sun City, Arizona, as a place where people "55 and better" could pursue "an active new way of life." He need not have worried about the response: One hundred thousand people came the very first weekend to explore the new world Webb promised. Webb wasn't the only person with a sense that there was something new in the way Americans were approaching life beyond work. Two years before Sun City began rising in the Arizona desert, Ethel Percy Andrus had founded the American Association of Retired Persons, the colossus now known simply as AARP.

In the decade of heightened social concern that began when Sun City was born, old age suddenly came into focus as a status in need of greater protection. Medicare was created to provide health care; Medicaid covered institutional care for the aged poor. In retrospect, both are crowning achievements of the decade's many social reforms. The Older Americans Act (1965) created opportunities for retirees to volunteer their talents in the community. The Age Discrimination in Employment Act (1967) protected older members of the work force—though ironically it didn't apply to people over 65 until amended 10 years later. A "gray lobby," now consisting of 100 interest groups, formed a coalition to demand more benefits in addition to greater entitlements for senior citizens. Election-year politics in 1972 resulted in a 20 percent increase in Social Security benefits, henceforth pegged to an automatic cost-of-living adjustment.

Not surprisingly, given the diversity of U.S. citizens over 65, some segments of the older population were more privileged than others. The poverty rate of older women was roughly double that of older men. Aged Hispanics and African Americans tended to be poorer than aged whites; they also had less access to health and other social services. Nor was "retirement" uniformly celebrated. Some sociolo-

gists described it as the "roleless role"; union leader Walter Reuther once rather bleakly described retirees as "too old to work, too young to die." In 1968, nearly half of Americans over 55 surveyed by the Social Security Administration said they preferred not to retire—many because they could not afford to.

But for the vast middle class, life after work promised dazzling possibilities. No longer as dependent on their children to make ends meet, older Americans retired earlier and earlier. Seniors hit the road. "Snowbirds" wintered in the Sunbelt; some of their contemporaries became residents year-round. Florida developers beckoned older folks to what they called "the land of sunshine, the state of dreams." Modest apartments for seniors gave way to condominiums and age-gated communities with state-of-the-art recreational amenities and health care facilities. Political leaders in California, North Carolina, Texas, and other warm-weather states took senior-citizen issues especially seriously, because the older residents who were drawn to those states voted regularly and had the time and tenacity to mobilize support for their causes. It seemed that the day might come when we would have to abandon red and blue America for a new model: hot and cold.

With enhanced status, the image of retirees changed. Some senior citizens were deemed pitiable and desperate, to be sure, but this rising cohort of "golden agers" aroused so much envy that, in the mid-1980s, the media decried them as "greedy geezers." Contributing to the new attitude was a growing recognition of the fiscal challenges posed by Social Security and Medicare as the senior population grew. Journalist Phillip Longman warned that youth were "born to pay" for their parent's profligacy. Speaking in terms of generational injustice, other pundits observed that the interests of white, leisured senior citizens were being pitted against the needs of minority children and youth and their underemployed or jobless mothers. Social Security, the nation's most successful social welfare program, became less a sacred cow than a golden calf.

For better or worse, as the first baby boomers celebrate their 60th birthdays this year, they are destined to begin creating a fourth era of retirement. It is not just the looming crises of Social Security and Medicare that ensure the end of the "golden age" of retirement. The shrinkage of younger age cohorts means

that the nation will need to turn to older workers if the economy is to remain globally competitive. About 12.4 percent of the U.S. population is already over the age of 65, and within the next two decades this proportion will rise to 20 percent.

At the same time, old age is lengthening. At the dawn of the golden age, in 1950, Americans who reached age 65 could look forward to almost 14 more years of life. Today's 65-year-olds can expect to live, on average, more than 18 years longer, and to enjoy better health. And most Americans retire several years before the magic age of 65. The nation cannot afford to underwrite two or three decades of leisure for mature workers capable of contributing to our collective prosperity. And many older Americans, given the gift of extra years, will not want to spend all of their remaining good years at play.

Whereas a century ago obsolescent elders were a problem, now older workers are a part of the solution to the anticipated shortage of competent employees. In the current decade, some 400,000 Americans per year will turn 65; during the next decade, that number will rise to 1.4 million. But we have yet to create all the institutional mechanisms that would make "retirement" flexible enough to meet the demands of an aging society. A report last year by the Conference Board, an organization of large corporations, noted that "the maturing work force is often seen as an issue to be dealt with instead of a great opportunity to be leveraged," and it urged employers to wise up. Yet some pathways to "unretirement" are already in place. Companies give older workers flexibility, offering part-time jobs, seasonal work, and on-call tasks to veteran work-



Since the mid-20th century, affluence and good health have given many Americans a shot at improvising the good life in retirement havens such as Sun City, Arizona.

ers who can serve as mentors and role models. Some firms have designed creative work arrangements, “repotting” senior employees, offering job-sharing options, or relying on the Web so that projects can get done at home. Education and retraining can enrich the lives of older people even as they prepare them for new work.

Changes the baby boomers and their immediate elders are already making suggest that their experiences as a group in their sixties and beyond will be more variegated than those of any previous group of retirees. Many will have the opportunity to re-create the golden age on a grander scale, not only by drawing on

sourcing, and a job market that makes it hard for displaced middle-aged workers to get back on track, may be compelled in some cases to stay in the labor force full time. Yet shocking numbers of gainfully employed Americans are likely to find themselves still laboring in their sixties and seventies because of their own failure to save for the future. Among those American families headed by people aged 55 to 64 that have any savings at all apart from equity in their home, the average total is only \$78,000. A stake three or four times that size is generally considered essential to sustain a modest retirement.

The Conference Board’s survey of older workers captures the new mixture: Fifty-five percent of the employees said they were not planning to retire because they still found their jobs interesting, while 75 percent said that financial concerns were a factor that would keep them working.

MANY OF TOMORROW’S affluent and not-so-affluent fresh retirees will not choose simply to take to their deck chairs.

their own accumulated resources, but with the help of what will be the greatest intergenerational transfer of wealth in U.S. history, as the children of postwar affluence inherit some \$7 trillion—assuming the costs of caring for their aging parents or some economic catastrophe don’t exhaust the loot. Experience so far suggests that many of these affluent (as well as many not-so-affluent) retirees will not choose simply to take to their deck chairs if their health allows them to remain active. Even today, older Americans are eagerly starting fresh careers, working part time, consulting, dipping in and out of full-time employment, or seeking out other new work arrangements. Baby boomers can also be expected to succeed their parents as volunteers in religious, educational, and civic institutions because in middle age they are already contributing significant amounts of time while working and raising families.

For some, work in their later years will be a necessity rather than a choice. Not only poor people, but middle-class folk who were the victims of collapsing pensions, corporate takeovers and out-

Still, the markets for upscale retirement communities, continuing education, travel, and other trophies of a comfortable retirement remain extremely strong. Retirement as a predictable phase of life is a creation only of the last century, and as each successive aged cohort has grown larger, a phenomenon that always defied easy generalization has grown increasingly difficult to characterize. Now more than ever, however, we need to form a clearer collective conception of what retirement ought to be.

A decent standard of living, freedom from discrimination, and the best possible health care have come to be seen as the necessary foundations for life “after work.” In the past, having enough money, loving kin and friends, and healthful attitudes and habits made superannuation fruitful. Poverty, isolation, and debility not only resulted in old-age vulnerability; they also diminished the capacity of senior citizens to grow, to share, and to be satisfied. In the 21st century, we may return to older notions of a “green old age,” as growing numbers of seniors who retain their energy and health find additional fulfillment in new forms of work without the rat race. ■

Sweating the Golden Years

Dignified retirement is still a cherished part of the American dream, but for some that dream is only a fantasy. A rickety retirement system means more U.S. workers have to stay on and on at the job.

BY BETH SHULMAN

IT'S LUNCHTIME AT A MCDONALD'S IN COLLEGE PARK, Maryland, and William Pratt is bent over a mop, moving it slowly across the floor between bustling customers. Later he wipes off dining tables, carries trash to an outside Dumpster, washes dishes, and scrubs the toilets, sinks, and floor in the men's restroom. With white hair at his temples and a balding head, Pratt looks like anyone's grandfather. He is 71 years old.

To get to work, Pratt takes a bus from the boarding house where he lives alone. Rent is only \$140 a month, but even so, he's a month behind in his payments. He eats mostly peanut butter and bread washed down with coffee. A few of his teeth are missing because he can't afford to go to a dentist, and he owes the doctor money for his last visit. His retirement income: a Social Security check that works out to about \$100 per week. He has no savings.

"I can't retire," he says. "I have to work."

Pratt's story is going to become more familiar very soon. For

more than 30 million low-wage workers like him, the day they reach retirement age will be just another day at the office—cleaning it, guarding it, or washing dishes in its cafeteria. This is not the dignified retirement after a long life of honest work depicted in such movies as *On Golden Pond*. In fact, for more and more Americans, it's no retirement at all.

Of the 36.3 million Americans over age 65 today, 3.6 million, or 10 percent, live below the federal poverty level for a single-person household of \$9,570 in annual income. The poverty rates for women and minorities are double that or worse. Unmarried women living alone have a rate of 20 percent. (Many women earn less than men during their lives and work part time or leave the work force intermittently to attend to family responsibilities, and are thus less likely to participate in pension plans.) In 2004, nearly one-quarter of elderly African Americans and one-fifth of elderly Hispanics lived in poverty. And these numbers are calculated according to the federal government's poverty line figure, which the Economic Policy Institute, a nonprofit think tank, says is a gross underestimate of what is actually required for a person to get by. It's not surpris-

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ing that the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 5.2 million Americans over 65 are still working.

The U.S. retirement system has been compared to a three-legged stool, each leg essential: Social Security first, of course; then private pensions from employers; then private savings. At the moment, two of these legs are collapsing.

During the postwar economic boom of the 1950s, companies competing for workers and responding to union demands for secure retirement began to offer private pension plans. Since 1970, the average participation rate in such plans has hovered around 50 percent of the work force. But that number is misleading. Employers decide whether they will provide private pension plans and who will get them. The resulting choices have heavily skewed coverage toward workers with the highest incomes.

The Congressional Research Service reports that 75 percent of workers in the highest quartile of income are offered a pension plan and nearly all of those participate. Low-wage workers, who make around \$9 per hour (the official poverty level) or less, are about half as likely to be offered a pension plan. They are also the least likely of all workers to take part in a private plan. CRS says that of workers earning in the lowest fourth of the income range, only 41 percent are offered a private retirement plan and only 29 percent participate. In other words, the workers least likely to have other resources are also those least likely to have a pension. These low-wage workers also can't afford to contribute to independent retirement accounts—which confer tax advantages and aren't dependent upon employment. Only eight percent of families with incomes below \$20,000 own an IRA.

For these workers, the situation is worsening. During most of the late 20th century, employers offered a "defined-benefit plan," under which retirees received a fixed monthly sum based on their length of service and income. The new norm is "defined contribution," 401(k)-type plans, in which wage earners get a tax break for putting their own money, up to a certain percentage of their income, into an account they can draw on after retirement; the size of the benefit will vary depending on the performance of the invested savings. Most employers match a percentage of the employee contribution up



Eighty-year-old McDonald's employee Angela DiNoto wields a broom and dustpan at a fast-food restaurant in Eastpointe, Michigan, where she works full time.

to a maximum level of worker's earnings. But even given this incentive, the money to participate is something that low-wage workers just don't have.

Employers prefer 401(k)-type plans. Matching workers' contributions is only an option, and some companies choose not to do so. The number of workers covered by these 401(k)-type plans rose from 14.4 million in 1980 to 59.9 million in 2000. Meanwhile, the number of private-sector workers covered by defined-benefit plans has plummeted to one in five. This dramatic shift widens the already great divide between the haves and have-nots in retirement.

Linda Stevens was married for 15 years before her divorce five years ago. Her ex-husband paid child support and alimony for two years, but then he was injured in a construction accident and was unable to work. Now Stevens has to rely on her earnings alone. Stevens used to work as a lunch supervisor at a Flint, Michigan, public school and as a supermarket cashier late into the evening. Yet the \$5.50 an hour she earned from the

school and the \$5.00 she made as a cashier just weren't enough to support her and her daughter, Sharon. So from January through April, she worked from 4 to 10 PM as a receptionist at the tax-preparation company H&R Block, where she earned \$6.50 per hour. She was exhausted all the time and saw her daughter only early in the morning and on weekends. She worked more than 40 hours a week, and not one of her three jobs offered health care, sick leave, vacation time, or a retirement plan.

Stevens recently moved to a full-time position at the supermarket and got a raise—to \$6.25 per hour. She also qualified for the health plan, which costs her \$68 a month. But she has had to keep her second job to make ends meet, and she has no savings of any kind. "I want my daughter to have a future, go to college, have the opportunities I didn't have," she says. "But it is hard when you can't save for the future."

Millions of Americans are like Linda Stevens, only scraping by in their working lives and unable to save for retirement. CRS says that less than five percent of low-wage workers' retirement income is from savings. Their rate of savings is the lowest, but middle-income Americans are also having trouble saving. Wages remain stagnant as the cost of living rises steadily. Consumer debt is growing, and assets such as houses tend to be mortgaged to the hilt. For too many Americans, the savings leg of the retirement stool just isn't there.

With their pensions disappearing and their savings minimal, most Americans can be sure only of receiving Social Security income once they retire. But that won't be enough to live on either, because it was never intended to be. The United States deliberately created the Social Security system during the Great Depression to provide only a bare-bones level of support. By the 1950s, everyone assumed that personal savings and employer pensions would be available to supplement their Social Security. Yet today, for nearly one-quarter of Social Security recipients, it is their sole source of income. A larger number of the elderly—39

percent—rely on Social Security for 90 percent of their retirement income.

The average benefit in 2005 was around \$12,000. But even with Supplemental Security Income, which provides additional money to workers over 65 with the greatest need, low-wage workers like Stevens and Pratt will receive something closer to \$7,000 or \$8,000 a year—less than that bare-bones federal poverty level of \$9,570. For those in the bottom 20 percent of wage earners, Social Security replaces only 55 percent of a couple's income. Most experts agree that it takes 75 percent to 85 percent of workers' incomes to maintain their pre-retirement standard of living.

**MILLIONS OF AMERICANS are only
scraping by in their working lives and
unable to save for retirement.**

In her twenties, Ethel Roberts left her native Birmingham, Alabama, and came to Washington, D.C., to find work. After a succession of jobs caring for the elderly, she married and stayed home to raise her two children. Now divorced, Roberts works nights at the Christian Community Group Home, taking care of eight elderly residents. Starting at 11 PM, she helps them to the bathroom, gives them medicines, and responds to their nocturnal emergencies. In the morning, she wakes and dresses them. It can be difficult work. "Standing up all the time is hard on your legs," she says. On Sundays, she brings some of the residents to church with her. "They like that," she says. After work, Roberts visits a friend who has Alzheimer's disease, just to help out.

For this work, Roberts earns \$8.50 per hour, less than poverty wages. She is 64 years old. "I can't retire now," she says. "Maybe I could do it in my seventies or eighties." When she starts receiving Social Security next year, she will get around \$500 a month, but her apartment rent is \$390 a month and food expenses run at least another \$100. She can't afford a telephone. "It would be nice to be able to visit my brother in Chicago," she says, "but I just don't have the money."

The reality is that most retirement funds go to people who already have a cushion. The top 40 percent of American wage earners receive more than 70 percent of the pension wealth. To add insult to injury, Americans who aren't offered pension plans or can't afford to contribute to one still end up subsidizing their richer fellow citizens. Americans in pension plans receive \$70 billion to \$80 billion in government subsidies through exclusions in the tax code. Most of these go to families earning more than \$100,000 a year.

With the rising costs of housing, heating, fuel, transportation, and especially health care (Medicare covers only some of it), it's no wonder many low-wage earners must

continue to work. But it is one thing to keep working as a lawyer. It is quite another to continue sweeping floors and washing dishes, lifting and turning other elderly people as a nursing home aide, or standing all day at a supermarket cashier's station. Low-wage jobs are the most hazardous in our economy. Nursing aides, home health-care workers, and orderlies suffer more back injuries than all construction workers combined.

If aging low-income workers like Roberts have to rely on their meager Social Security benefits alone, the conclusion to their lives is likely to be grim. They are four times more likely than the nonpoor to have their utilities cut off. Those who face skipping meals or being unable to pay the rent



Marvin Wilson, 94, walks near the house where he has lived alone for the past 15 years in order to survey the damage a tornado did to his home town of Spencer, South Dakota. For Wilson and many other others like him, old age is marked at least as much by isolation as by poverty.

could consider moving in with their children, yet many don't have that option. Their own children often face the same economic challenges they do.

The grim truth is that low-wage workers may not be the only ones to weather a harsh old age. As more and more employers shift to 401(k) plans, middle-class Americans may also come up short. The government reports that only 39 percent of families with incomes between \$25,000 and \$49,000 participate in a 401(k) or defined-contribution plan. Americans who do have plans aren't putting enough into them:

The median amount of money in a 401(k) plan for individuals ages 55 to 64 is only \$23,000. It will require savings of \$200,000 to \$300,000, in *addition* to Social Security, for the average American to have a secure retirement, according to Alicia Munnell, director of the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College.

Many middle-income Americans believe that their family homes and the equity they've gained from years of rising housing prices are their retirement security blanket. But those who have refinanced their houses—for instance, to pay for their children's education—could be making mortgage payments well into retirement. Selling the house to capture all of the equity requires a stable housing market and the availability of affordable housing elsewhere. Economists have grown hoarse warning that the housing market is a bubble soon to burst.

Meanwhile, aging baby boomers, whether low wage or middle income, will confront

escalating health-care costs. Their needs are growing just as employers hastily retreat from their promises of guaranteeing health care for retirees, and Medicare copayments keep ratcheting up. In a very few years, all but the most affluent Americans may need to continue working when they reach what should have been retirement age.

If we are to preserve the American dream of a dignified retirement for all Americans, we need to change the system. Social Security is an efficient vehicle for providing guaranteed benefits to retirees of every income level, ensuring that virtually all American workers will have some basic income when they retire. Social Security can and should be strengthened and improved to fulfill its promise, especially for low- and moderate-income workers.

Private pensions are also an integral part of the retirement system. We should establish incentives for companies to maintain their pension plans and to ensure they keep their promises to their workers. We could promote new hybrid plans that combine the best of defined-benefit plans—employer-paid guaranteed payments that can't be outlived—with the most appealing components of 401(k) plans, including their portability and simplicity. If voluntary participation doesn't work, we should explore mandatory arrangements, perhaps requiring employers to provide or participate in a hybrid defined-benefit plan or allocate a certain percentage of every worker's pay to a universal 401(k).

One sure-fire way of bringing in more low-paid workers would be to reverse the matching-funds idea: Require employers to contribute to a 401(k) for every worker first, then allow employees to match the amount if they can. To help lower-wage workers contribute, those earning below a certain level might get tax credits for their deposits.

These suggestions are just a beginning. What is important is that all Americans have enough retirement income to live out their last years in dignity. As Hubert Humphrey said in 1977, "The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life—the children; those who are in the twilight of life—the elderly; and those in the shadows of life—the sick, the needy, and the handicapped." At the moment, our government—and those of us who elect it—are failing that moral test. For now, William Pratt remains on the job. ■



Paying for It

While America dithers, Sweden and other countries have pioneered creative and surprisingly hard-headed reforms to cope with the mountain of retirement costs that lie ahead.

BY SYLVESTER J. SCHIEBER

THERE AREN'T MANY MYSTERIES ABOUT THE FINANCIAL challenges posed by the aging of America's population. While little consensus exists on how to shore up Social Security, there is widespread understanding that the system will be in deficit within a decade of the first baby boomers' retirements, which start in 2008. The Medicare financing outlook is even bleaker; the federal health-insurance program for the elderly is already in the red even as a costly new prescription drug benefit is being implemented. Front-page stories about corporate pension plans that go belly up or are cut back, at the same time that retiree health-benefit programs are curtailed, add to the general anxiety.

But perhaps the biggest concern Americans should have about their retirement system is the sheer inertia that has prevented the nation from addressing its problems. For more than two decades, we have known about the demographic challenges facing Social Security. We knew before prescription drug benefits were added to Medicare coverage that the system was in trouble. It

makes for a sad spectacle indeed that we enjoy the rare advantage of being able to see the future with clarity yet are unwilling to act.

Meanwhile, other countries have started to address some of the same challenges, and they have done so with greater inventiveness and determination than the United States has shown. The list of pioneers ranges from the familiar example of Chile to the less noted examples of Sweden, Germany, and Canada. All offer lessons from which America can learn.

By some measures, America's aging problem is relatively minor compared with what other developed countries face. For every retired person in America, there are currently about four working people. (Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom have similar ratios.) In Japan, the ratio is closer to three workers per retired person; in Italy, it's down close to two, and Germany is not much better off than that.

The demographic future also looks at least as favorable for the United States as for any other developed country. The retirement burden on American workers is not expected to be any greater in 2030 than it already is today in Germany or Italy. By that year, Germany's burden is expected to be twice and Italy's 2.5 times Amer-

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These lucky Swedes enjoy a notably generous public pension system. But Sweden has cut future benefits and mandated more personal saving.

ica's. Italy will have only one active worker per retiree. Other developed countries, such as Switzerland and the Netherlands, will be in better positions than that but will still face bigger burdens than the United States.

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from abroad comes from countries that are less reliant on pensions to provide income security to older people. They do not rely as much on pensions for the simple reason that many older people in these countries are still working. Japan presents an especially interesting case. It has the most rapidly aging population in the developed world, but its retirement burden in 2030 is expected to be attenuated because older people in Japan tend to work later into life than their counterparts in most other developed countries. The average retirement age for Japanese men is nearly 67.

The undeniable fact is that many people, especially in the world's developed economies, are retiring at ages when they could still be highly productive. An astonishing 38 percent of Italians in the 50-to-54-year-old bracket are already out of the labor force, and hardly anyone in Italy between 60 and 64 still works. Granted, Italy is an extreme case; even in Sweden, workers are less likely to retire early. But the trend toward early retirement is widespread.

The most significant influence on when the majority of people leave work behind is the structure of the retirement system: An earlier "normal" retirement age or more generous benefits for early retirement lead, predictably, to more retirements. In Iceland, 81 per-

cent of the population between the ages of 60 and 64 is still in the labor force, largely because of incentives in the retirement system that encourage people in that age bracket to continue working. Even in the United States, 47 percent are still economically active during those years. In Europe, the comparable numbers range from 22 percent in Germany to only 14.5 percent in France.

In Iceland, the average man works until age 67. In France, his counterpart retires at 59. Such variations help explain the range of costs associated with different retirement systems. In France, the average remaining life expectancy for a male at the typical retirement age is 20.5 years. It is 13.7 years in Iceland. All else being equal, a male retiree in France will cost about 60 percent more in retirement benefits than one in Iceland simply because of the longer duration of retirement.

**THE STRUCTURE OF THE U.S. system
leads Americans to the mistaken belief that
they have “paid for” their benefits.**

Pension payouts are not the only cost of retirement. By withdrawing their labor from the economy, retirees also slow economic growth, making it harder to underwrite retirement costs. If a country has a growing elderly population that does not contribute to national output and workers have an incentive to retire in their fifties, the particular method of financing retirement—pay-as-you-go, like Social Security, or fully funded retirement accounts—doesn’t matter a great deal. There will, in any case, be trouble down the road.

Most government-run retirement systems around the world operate similarly to the U.S. Social Security system: Benefits paid to current retirees are financed on a pay-as-you-go basis, out of revenues from current workers. There’s little or no “money in the bank.” Beneath this level of general similarity, however, there are some significant differences in how public pension systems are structured, how large a

role private pension plans play, and, most important for our purposes, how willing policymakers have been to make the hard choices needed to ensure the survival of these systems.

One little-appreciated difference between the American system and most others has to do with its basic architecture. Most other countries have two-tier publicly financed retirement systems. The United States has a single tier.

In most of those other countries, virtually every citizen is entitled to a basic first-tier benefit upon reaching retirement age. In some cases, this benefit comes in the form of a universal “demogrant”; in others, recipients face income or assets tests that may reduce the size of the benefit or, in some cases, eliminate it.

On top of this basic benefit, these countries provide

a separate, second tier of retirement benefit that is proportional to a worker’s preretirement earnings. The second-tier benefit usually accounts for the largest share of the total retirement pension.

What’s important is that the first tier is explicitly funded by general tax revenues, not by earmarked employer and employee contributions. As a result, the first-tier basic benefit seems to voters less like “their” own money, less like something they are entitled to. And that makes it politically easier for policymakers to adjust this part of the retirement system.

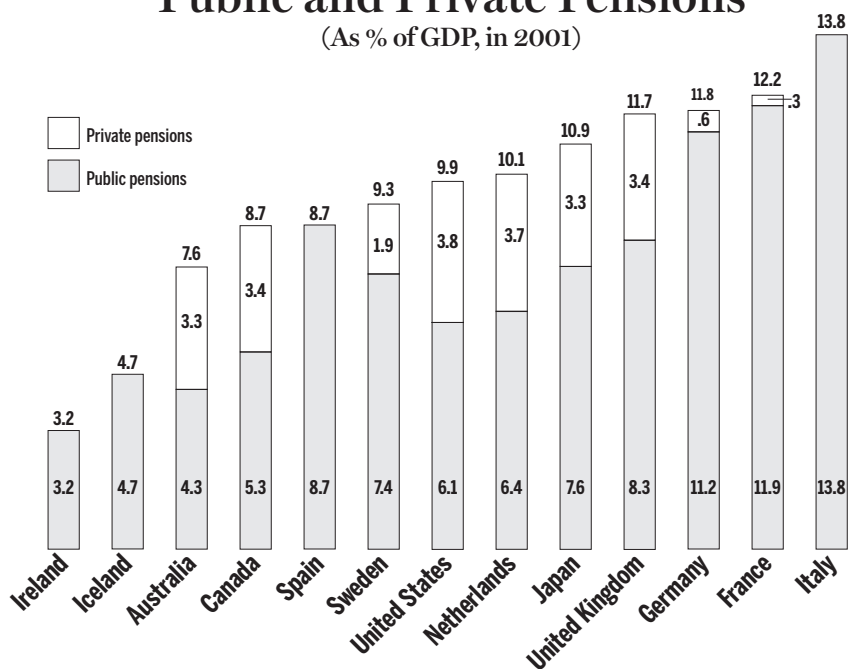
In the United States, the whole Social Security benefit is based on earnings, but it includes elements of the first- and second-tier benefits provided in other countries. Low-wage workers receive larger benefits relative to their earnings than those with high earnings, an arrangement that hides the character of the implicit basic benefit in our system. Yet workers with higher levels of covered earnings receive larger absolute benefits, which links payouts to covered earnings levels, albeit indirectly. Virtually all benefits are financed through payroll tax contributions. The structure of the U.S. system has led people to believe that they have “paid for” their benefits even though the benefits are highly subsidized.

Many Paths to Retirement

	Payroll Contributions (% of Covered Pay)	Labor Force Participation Rate, By Age			Average Retirement Age (Male)	Retirees as % of Workers	
		55-59	60-64	65+		2000	2030
Australia	9.0	60.7	34.7	5.8	62.0	28.0	49.2
Canada	9.9	63.0	36.5	5.8	61.7	27.3	54.7
Chile	13.0	57.3	42.3	14.1	NA	20.2	39.2
France	16.5	58.8	14.5	1.3	58.8	44.1	73.9
Germany	19.5	66.0	21.7	2.6	61.0	43.4	79.5
Iceland	15.6	88.6	81.3	20.9	67.2	NA	NA
Ireland	18.8	54.7	36.5	8.0	62.9	28.1	42.9
Italy	32.7	38.7	19.2	3.3	59.7	53.9	100.4
Japan	13.6	76.1	55.5	22.7	66.6	30.0	58.3
Netherlands	28.1	56.5	19.5	3.0	59.9	32.9	67.5
Spain	28.3	51.5	28.9	1.6	61.0	44.7	82.3
Sweden	18.9	81.5	52.3	NA	64.4	39.9	67.4
Switzerland	23.8	65.1	65.1	9.5	64.5	23.7	47.5
United Kingdom	23.8	66.1	37.8	5.1	62.9	25.8	41.3
United States	12.4	68.8	47.1	12.6	63.6	24.5	42.0

Public and Private Pensions

(As % of GDP, in 2001)



SOURCES: Top, data and projections drawn from the author's study, *The Economic Implications of Aging Societies* (2005), coauthored with Steven A. Nyce. See tables 10-2, 4-1, 3-5. Payroll contribution data from *Social Security Programs Throughout the World, 2004*, U.S. Social Security Administration. Note: Payroll contributions include employer and employee contributions. Participation rate and retirement age data from 2000. Bottom, *Net Social Expenditure*, 2005 edition, OECD.

Such perceptions matter a great deal. In Canada, for example, legislators were able several years ago to impose a means test on the basic pension through the income tax system, reducing benefits for higher-income retirees. Australia, too, has cut back its basic benefit, though with a twist. All Australians are still entitled to a relatively generous basic benefit, set at roughly 25 percent of the average worker's earnings, but it is subject to a means test that reduces recipients' benefits as their earnings and assets increase. In the past, Australians nearing retirement age did everything they could to avoid losing out under the means test—going on shop-

Some countries have shifted their retirement programs to a more fully funded basis—meaning they are now putting “money in the bank” to pay for future benefits. In the late 1990s, for example, Canada raised the contribution levels of employers and employees and created a separate, non-government board to invest the the money in stocks and bonds, seeking higher returns. The United States has been reluctant to pursue similar policies because of political concerns over how the government might manage what could become the largest pool of investment capital in the world.

Traditional defined-benefit programs guarantee people

a certain fixed payout in the future. But several countries have moved toward a bigger role for “defined-contribution” plans. In such systems, the ultimate payout is not fixed in advance but is determined by the level of return on the invested money. In some countries, employers select the defined-contribution plan

CHILE MANAGED TO transform its severely dysfunctional, pay-as-you-go system into mandatory private individual retirement accounts.

ping sprees, taking round-the-world voyages, or doing whatever else it took to jettison some of their wealth. As a result, Australia in the early 1990s implemented a mandatory retirement savings program designed literally to force workers to save so much that many would fail the asset and income tests.

There has been a lot more innovation around the world in the second tier of public pensions. These pay-as-you-go programs are usually financed by contributions from both employers and employees, and they have traditionally promised workers a future “defined benefit” linked to their earnings during their working years. Social Security is such a system. Americans of working age are reminded of this every year when they receive a statement in the mail from the Social Security Administration showing, based on their contributions so far, how big a Social Security check they can expect in retirement. Such defined-benefit programs are in the deepest trouble, and reforms are under way from Canada to Japan and Sweden.

provider. In others, individuals choose from a series of authorized private-fund managers. The investment risk in both cases is largely borne by the individual account holder, although some systems provide a guaranteed minimum return of some sort. The theory here is that at retirement, workers will simply receive benefits in accordance with what they have contributed.

Since the 1980s, a number of countries have even adopted defined-contribution plans as the primary element of their second tier. The example that has received the most attention is Chile, which radically reformed its pension system in 1981. In essence, the Chileans transformed their severely dysfunctional pay-as-you-go system into private individual retirement accounts. The accounts are mandatory, fully funded, fully vested, and portable. Workers must contribute 10 percent of their annual earnings to their retirement accounts and choose where to invest their savings from funds offered by highly regulated, specialized, private-fund management companies. Workers also must purchase term life insurance and disability insurance from their pension managers. All told, the package comes to about 13 percent of



No public pension awaits 63-year-old Luis Oyarze, a self-employed handicrafts peddler in Santiago, Chile. The country's radical 1981 pension reform has benefited many, but the self-employed and others who fall outside the system's umbrella escape its mandatory personal saving and must often keep working in old age.

gross pay. At retirement, participants have a retirement nest egg whose size will vary depending on how the investments have performed.

Two main criticisms have been leveled against the Chilean system: The fund management companies have extracted very high fees, and large numbers of Chileans are not covered because they are self-employed or too poor, or for other reasons. However, the system has been reasonably successful, with many workers enjoying more secure retirement prospects than they did under the old system. A number of other Latin American countries have followed the Chilean example.

Roughly a decade after Chile acted, Australia embarked on an equally radical reform. Beginning in 1992, employers were obliged to contribute a share of workers' pay (now nine percent) to privately operated retirement funds. As a result, most workers will accumulate enough assets so that they will not qualify for Australia's means-tested first-tier basic pension until

much later in their retirement (as they exhaust their savings) than under prior policy. Australian voters accepted this change because there would not be significant reductions in basic pensions for many years and because those affected would have a bigger pot of personal savings at retirement.

Sweden created supplemental private accounts without much fuss during the mid-1990s as part of a larger reform of its pension system; it now requires that workers contribute 2.5 percent of covered pay to individual accounts invested through government-approved investment managers. At the same time, Sweden made a revolutionary change in the traditional pay-as-you-go system that still provides the main pension benefit for Swedes. Under the new setup, workers continue to pay contributions to the system, and they amass retirement accounts—even though in reality their contributions are quickly paid out to current retirees. But as the change is phased in, workers' accounts will be treated as what

they really are: virtual or “notional” accounts, with no assets backing them. The accounts are bookkeeping devices. As a result, there is no defined benefit. Benefits are not determined until a worker reaches age 61, when they will be set in a two-step process.

In the first stage, a basic benefit will be determined on the basis of the group’s remaining life expectancy. As life expectancy increases in the future, monthly pensions will decrease to keep the total lifetime value of pensions relatively constant. In the second step, the benefit will also be adjusted so that each age group’s expected lifetime benefits will be covered by what is anticipated in worker contributions during the course of its retirement period. This latter demographic adjustment will keep the system in balance as the number of retirees grows relative to workers. The result will almost certainly be a reduction in benefits, as well as much less strain on the Swedish economy.

The individual accounts Sweden mandated in the 1990s were not hugely controversial. Political leaders educated the public about the need for reform, and

the accounts were part of a larger overhaul. The system’s alterations were to be implemented in the future on a gradual basis. It is remarkable that attempts in the United States to shift toward such supplemental personal accounts in our Social Security system, most recently by the Bush administration, have proved so controversial, denounced as somehow being an abrogation of the “social” character of the U.S. system. The accounts that most American supporters have talked about range from 2 percent to 4 percent of earnings, not much different from the 2.5 percent Sweden has legislated.

Policymakers in Germany and Japan took a long, hard look at the Swedish example several years ago when they grappled with their own painful reforms. Neither was willing to move to Swedish-style notional accounts, but in both cases they adopted provisions for their defined-benefit systems that mimic the demographic adjustment the Swedes will use in determining future benefits.

German and Japanese leaders took that route, most observers agree, in part because they thought it would be easier to get people to accept reforms if it were not so clear what the implications of the changes would be.

Americans are now experiencing—unwittingly, for the most part—the effects of just such a delayed reform undertaken in 1983, during Ronald Reagan’s presidency. Congress raised the age at which Social Security benefits would be paid, but it deferred implementation until 2000. As a result of the reforms, people retiring this year will need to wait until eight months after their 65th birthday to stop working if



“There are more and more old people,” says the first man in this Italian cartoon. “They’d better be skinny, or they’ll have to make longer park benches,” responds another. Italy’s population, already straining pension systems, will get much grayer in the next 25 years, with more than twice as many people over age 60 as under 20.

they want to receive full benefits; people who are now 46 or younger will need to wait until their 67th birthday. There is a lesson in the fact that this delayed reform provoked virtually no protest in 1983 or when it began phasing in 17 years later.

Priate pensions are the other big element involved in thinking about how to pay for retirement. Such pensions loom larger in the retirement landscape of some countries, such as the United States, than others, but it seems clear that their role is likely to grow everywhere. As a rule, where public pensions are rich, private pensions tend to be spare, and where public plans are small, private pensions tend to be more substantial. In the past, it made little sense for a German employer to provide a generous pension, for example, since the country's public pension already allowed workers to retire at virtually the same standard of living they enjoyed while working.

But the remorseless logic of demographic change has led even the Germans to try to strike a new balance between public and private pensions. As part of a controversial package of public-pension tax increases and benefit cutbacks in 2000, the Social Democratic government of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder created tax incentives designed to encourage employers to establish voluntary supplemental retirement savings plans for workers and thus to take some of the pressure off the public system. Schröder's successor, Angela Merkel, recently declared that private pensions must be increased and that it will be necessary for Germany to push the normal retirement age up to 67.

Because Americans as a whole are not as dependent on the national pension, the United States enjoys some advantages in addressing the challenge of an aging society. Shoring up Social Security should be a much more manageable task than it has been in countries such as Germany and Sweden, where retirees are heavily dependent on public pensions. And mandating private pensions or savings programs, as many countries have already done, should not

be as disruptive or expensive as it might be in countries where employers and workers do not already have a lot of experience with voluntary private plans. Requiring that all workers have supplemental accounts to bolster the national pension, as Sweden has done, would seem to play to the generally successful American experience with 401(k) plans.

What remains an obstacle is the fear that such accounts will unduly expose workers to the risks of the stock and bond markets. There are risks in financial markets, and anyone who argues otherwise is misleading us about the choices

AMERICANS ARE NOW unwittingly experiencing the effects of a delayed reform undertaken in 1983. Many will have to wait until their 67th birthday to retire.

we face. At the same time, many Americans have forgotten the painful 1977 Social Security reforms that reduced benefits for the "notch babies" (people born between 1917 and 1922) by as much as 20 percent relative to prior law. If U.S. workers aren't required to save some added amount of their pay in individual accounts, the Social Security benefit reductions that loom in the future probably will be far more widespread. If America doesn't address this problem soon, the eventual cutbacks will likely have to include some people on the verge of retirement, if not those already retired. Every path has risks, but the risks are greater in doing nothing until the onset of a crisis.

If the United States does not take to heart the lessons that some other countries have learned, it will be forced to repeat the unpleasant experiences of those that refused to act until there was no alternative. The Germans discovered that they had no choice but to reduce pension benefits, not just for future retirees but for existing ones. The Japanese learned that legislators confronted with such a crisis may come to blows on the floor of parliament. The future that looms before the United States is neither a blur nor a mystery. Its outlines can be seen with all the clarity of an actuarial table, and so can the choices. ■

An AARPer's Life

Americans enter the brave new world of retirement with a lot of silly fantasies. And, says this writer, thank goodness for that.

BY JAMES MORRIS

I'D LOST NO SPOUSE, FAMILY MEMBER, LIMB, OR faculty, suffered no financial reversal, been accused of no crime. I'd merely decided to retire—opted, that is, to appear no longer in the workplace. And the response from friends was a level of concern better suited to a soul in intensive care.

"But what will you do?" Or, more accurately, "But what will you do??!!"

There was nothing chronologically premature about my decision to retire. It wasn't one of those coltish age-55 withdrawals, after which, 55 being the new 35, the retiree decides to start a second family, aspiring to be a PTA president at 72. No, this was a traditional age-65 entry into standard senior citizenry: the potential double-whammy of old age and idleness. My first discount movie ticket (in Florida, at age 55), as fondly remembered as first love, had launched a decade of other such randomly served hors d'oeuvres. Now I was to sit down to the full feast of privileges and entitlements our society prepares for its upper-aged, needy or not: "Full price, my ass! I'm a senior."

But maybe the alarmists knew something I didn't. Retired time, in my conception of it, was to be essentially free time—leisure—which is not the same as time spent doing nothing. Rather, you're free to do whatever you want, so long as you keep your dignity. Your empty hours won't take care of themselves. So I decided to do some proper

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research about what I was getting myself into. And where better to learn the ropes of dignified retirement, I thought, than in the pages of publications I had been sent for years by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), as a perk of membership, but had never quite gotten around to reading?

AARP was founded in 1958 by Ethel Percy Andrus, a retired high school principal with a strong ethic of service to society. Andrus died in 1967, and you can't help but wonder what she would have made of today's AARP, which boasts more than 35 million members (at an annual fee of \$12.50 a pop). Its website says that the organization continues the legacy of Ethel Andrus by sponsoring programs for "tens of thousands of volunteers who help over 2.6 million people annually." But AARP has also become an advocacy and marketing behemoth, with offices in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, and a downtown Washington headquarters that will never be mistaken for a neighborhood senior center, except by aging Medici.

I'm guessing that Andrus heard the acronym for her association, and expected others to hear it, as a conjunction of discrete alphabetical sounds that stood like a quartet of loyal sentries before the group's identity: A-A-R-P. So A-A-R-P it was for many years, with no ambiguity about what any of the letters meant. But once the association reached out to the nonretired too, the letters closed ranks in the late 1990s and came to stand for nothing beyond themselves, like



When surf's up, who cares whether PSA levels are up too?

mercenaries. They were compressed into “aarp,” the sound a goldfish might make if it tried to bark.

These days, you're eligible for AARP membership long before you turn in your office ID—at age 50, while you can still use rollerblades, eat spicy food, and fold yourself into a new sexual position. And membership is expected to grow steadily with the recruitment of boomers, who'll stake a birthright claim to a fulfilled old age just as they've staked a claim to fulfillment through each of life's passages since emerging victorious from their first toddler temper tantrum. AARP has to take account of these active types if it's to keep their interest and their dues.

Which made me think that, even if I were to set a retirement course by AARP publications such as the magazine *Modern Maturity*, I might not have to forgo completely the irresponsible fantasy life I'd indulged with other magazines. I might still linger, for example, over the nifty gear in *Men's Journal*: parkas and pup tents, pitons and grappling hooks, vehicles of Her-

culean power, boards for skimming every conceivable surface on Earth, mountain bikes with side-mounted rockets to clear debris from the path ahead. In the pages of *MJ*, individuals scale the sides of tall buildings during their lunch breaks and paraglide into volcanoes. So what if the month's “ultimate workout” pictorial (“Six hours a day to a new you!”) turns out a couple of months later to be penultimate at best? You still want to believe the continually updated promise of abs with the texture of a kitchen-counter surface: steel, granite, marble, Corian, and maybe something more (coriander).

“If only I had the time. . . . But one day I will.” The thought lent the fantasizing the cachet of research. Take the magazine's periodic features on the most desirable places to live, by nation, hemisphere, planet. Why not relocate to one of these spots after retirement? I marveled at the cliffs and waterfalls, the nine months of snow a year, the whorled, looming waves, the single-mindedness of the morays, the thickness of the rope used to lash yourself and a comrade to a tree in typhoon season. And I thought, “But is there a CVS?”

So *Modern Maturity* it was to be, then, where life, or what

was left of it, would move at a statelier pace. But when I retrieved the latest issue from its place between *Consumer Reports* and a thermal underwear catalog, I found that *Modern Maturity* had gone the way of its ancient and medieval forebears. What I held was *AARP The Magazine*. A little website research revealed that AARP had discontinued publication of *Modern Maturity* in early 2003. I had also missed completely the speed-of-light trajectory of *My Generation* (b. 2001, d. 2003), a magazine for AARP's boomer members. Three years ago, *My Generation* and *Modern Maturity* were folded into the eponymous *AARP The Magazine*, which is now, per its cover, the "world's largest circulation magazine," though the circulation of many of its readers is nowhere near as large as it once was.

In addition to *AARP The Magazine* (hereafter in these pages *AARPTM*), there's a second regular publication, *AARP Bulletin*, not so glossy as *AARPTM*—it looks like Sunday morning's *Parade* supplement without the page 2 celebrity gossip column—but with the same agenda of interests and lifestyle

The best is yet to come? That's a falsehood of governmental proportions, absurd on its smiling face and no more plausible after the smile contracts. But it has become one of the lies we live by. Forget the millions for whom old age is not a boundless commercial opportunity but a relentless financial constraint. The "senior citizens" who have replaced the former "old" in a powerful national myth are curious and adventurous, well-heeled and free—but for the doctors' appointments and hospital stays around which they have to schedule their adventures. They frolic and couple, but carefully, like porcupines, and according to an instruction manual that's more tentative than tantric: "Wait. Not there. No, that doesn't move anymore. Ow!" They've no strings attached, though they may sport an array of other medically mandated paper, plastic, or metal products. It's not the best that's yet to come, it's more of the same, and worse. We haven't lived so long not to know this.

Flipping the pages of *AARPTM*, I learn that I'm to be a consumer still. No slowing down there. Remove the profusion of

cards and inserts from the magazine, and you've a pile that could sustain a bonfire. AARP's a mighty merchandiser, offering, inter alia, lapel pins, sweatshirts, ball caps, beach coolers, bumper stickers, office supplies, leisure and travel gear, bookmarks, magnifiers, and a special gas cap that you don't have to remove when filling up. Arthritic fingers don't have to twist the thing, and arthritic minds

don't have to remember where they put it. And there's a portfolio of insurance packages: health, dental, auto, life, long-term care. There's enough variety overall to interest members who may still have an office to go to, those on the move, those slowing down, and those coming to a full stop.

I learn that the new Medicare prescription drug program won't yield up its secrets easily. Having lobbied for the benefit, AARP may feel an obligation to take a shot, or a fusillade, at explaining how it works. The attempt is likely to become a continuing AARP service, lasting long past the lifetimes of great numbers of the drug-dependent old, for the program's intricacies would fluster the steeliest student of Talmud.

I learn that Americans above the age of 55 are now the fastest-growing market segment of the nation's fitness indus-

THE "SENIOR CITIZENS" who have replaced the former "old" are curious and adventurous, well-heeled and free—but for the doctors' appointments and hospital stays around which they have to schedule their adventures.

advice. Tips for what to do when you pass 50, for example, include: "Wear comfortable clothes." "Buff up your brain." "Sit still." "Jump off a bridge." This last is largely a metaphorical injunction (I think), an attention-getting way of urging you to, say, use the Internet. In any case, you're not to begin with the Brooklyn Bridge, and you're probably to wear a harness.

What did these publications—and visits to the AARP website—have to teach me about how AARPers are to pass their days? Well, at the top of a list of topics on the magazine's website, next to a photo of a 60-year-old female movie star who's been airbrushed to teenage perfection, is "money," above "health." Lesson one, I guess. Unless that honor goes to the larger lesson that's implicit and pervasive, and, at least once, explicit too: "Discover what AARP has to offer. The best is yet to come."

try. We're not talking here about individuals who merely bob up and down in the shallow end of the pool without getting their hair wet. No, these are lifters and toners and the aerobically enhanced. Being a longtime gymgoer myself, with an A for attendance rather than achievement, I'm glad to know that I'll have company through the years of cooldown to come. The gym's a scary place for us seniors to make our way these days, past the yoga studios and Pilates parlors, the beach balls of Busby Berkeley dimensions to which the pliant attach themselves, the cadres of personal trainers reckoning gain and loss on their clipboards with the bloodless precision of recording angels on Judgment Day. The smell of protein powder is in the air, along with the barbaric yelping of instructors urging stationary bikers to "Find it!!! Reach it!!!," as if the stalled spinners were close to a mountain's crest and not the room's mirror. Can we seniors claim victory for the hard-won loosening of a joint when all about us the lithe dangle from crossbars and blow the motors on treadmills? A workout tip: Even the darkest despair can be lightened by lobbing in the direction of the heedless fit the words "Just wait."

I learn that I need to find "ways to get more touch" into my life, because touching is powerful therapy that releases feel-good hormones in humans. Am I to be toucher or touchee? Both. Is the touching contingent on the availability of another human being? Not necessarily. Would a visit to a petting zoo (other than the seniors' club scene) suffice? Yes. Hugging even a hamster will do in a pinch, though dogs, cats, horses, and a neighbor are preferable. And don't shy away from baths, loofas, and massages (and masseurs and masseuses). Begin in first gear, and find your redline: "Start by making a habit of greeting friends with a hug or a cheek-to-cheek air kiss. (Of course, you'll want to check first to make sure your embrace is welcome.)" That caution shouldn't be confined to a parenthesis. Let's get it out in the open. Even in old age, with passion's outlets fragile and few, a sexual harassment defense is the last thing you want to mount.

I learn how to write a resumé not for my tombstone but to help me land on my feet in today's job market, just in case. Without calling attention to my age, I have to sell my skills and experience, which are entirely a consequence of my age. I learn that I should be inspired by how others, in particular *famous* others, have coped with adversity. I learn how to downsize recipes when a household is down to only two; the right two can "enjoy a romantic dinner." For a household of only one, the upside of the recipes presumably is leftovers the next day. I learn of "a hidden epidemic": "a whopping 3 million to 5 million Americans over 50 (out of 85 million) are currently in abusive

relationships." Once again, the solitary household is not without its upside.

And in a feature on managing your portfolio (it's pretty much assumed in *AARPTM* world that you've got one), I learn that I shouldn't shy away from mutual funds. In the article, gaudily colored scoops of ice cream, stacked on cones and crammed into cups, stand for cash, bonds, and stocks, and the size of the scoops is adjusted to investment strategies at various stages of life. There's a terrifying photo of an upside-down cone, its scoop smashed, to instill in the careless old investor the psychic distress of an unsteady five-year-old.

I learn that travel is a compulsory activity for the retired. The plush, glassy bus and the extravagantly decked vessel are to be second homes. Of course, the young can travel with just a backpack and a dream, and maybe a discount railroad pass and a little weed to fuel the dream. You can measure mortality's encroachment by the distance that separates the young's "I wonder what's on the other side of that hill" from the old's "Dear God, not another hill." The movement of mature travelers is as spontaneous as a NASA mission. There may still be a backpack, but it's full of Celebrex and Actonel and Boniva, Vytarin and Lipitor and Vasotec, Colace and Beano and Imodium D—the stash the mature pilgrim, on land and sea and in the air, draws on each day to buy time. To fuel the dream, there's Lunesta.

Nothing in *AARPTM* so intrigues as a three-page announcement for "Life@50, AARP's National Event and Expo," which is to occur this fall in Anaheim, California. The words "Lights, Camera, Anaheim!" leap off a page that promises speakers, exhibits, new technologies, entertainment, lots of tours, and miles of beaches. The true-believing AARPer will make the pilgrimage and can foot the bill for airfare, hotels, Elton John, and optional tours (e.g., the Crystal Cathedral, Knott's Berry Farm, Newport by Bike, and Richard Nixon's birthplace). For three days, "Life's a beach," says the AARP website. It stops short of "What happens in Anaheim stays in Anaheim."



I closed the magazines, exited the websites, and resolved to let lapse neither my AARP membership nor my *Men's Journal* subscription. Why so? Because I've a hunch that a retirement bookended by fantasies has a better chance of staying upright. Besides, the fantasies play off what I know to be the realities. There are no one-size-fits-

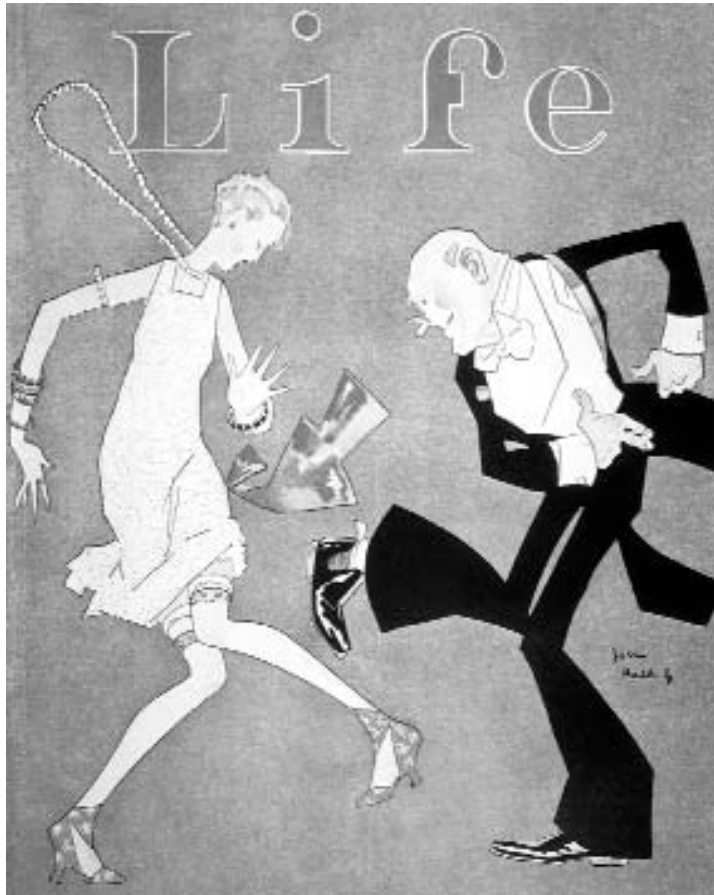
all careers, marriages, vacations, or friendships. Why should retirements be any different? Each needs to be as customized as a signature. There's retirement chosen and sought, plotted beforehand and properly cushioned. There's retirement inattentively accepted. There's retirement embraced prematurely and retirement deferred till it is no more than a peremptory coda. And there's retirement unwelcome and resisted, ill provided for, crushing and

identity. The trick is to find a motive. That seems too obvious to bear saying, and it surely doesn't apply only to the retired state. (You can die at 35 and live another 40 years.) It's a comprehensive life insurance policy, and Socrates was one of its earliest regional agents: "The unexamined life is not worth living."

Yet the examined life can stop you in your tracks: We're born, we develop expectations, the expectations

are met, or not, we suffer satisfaction or disappointment, we age, we slow, we die, we're dust. Yikes! Why get out of bed in the morning? No one can answer the question for you. "Because there's someone whose face I never tire of seeing." "Because the world's not perfect yet." "Because this day's light could be the last I'll see." "Because I've one stanza still to write in a poem." "Because I'm competing on *Senior American Idol*." "Because I have a ticket for Anaheim in October." "Because I can."

As for me, I won't be staying in bed, but I'll be skipping Anaheim, preferring dinner for one to AARP's banquet. And if I have to make my own dinner conversation, well, at least I'm compatibly matched. Talking to yourself should be an allowable indulgence of age anyway, though it's a potential embarrassment too. If you pace and mutter at home, you may forget to leave the habit at the front door when you go out, and one-sided exchanges of Wildean aplomb are just creepy in a supermarket aisle. But thanks to technology, we vocal soliloquizers can now move about in society without leaving a judgment of madness in our wake: Wear a microheadset, and win an automatic pass! You won't



On the cover of *Life* magazine in 1926: "Teaching an Old Dog New Tricks."

diminishing, imposing financial hardship and physical and spiritual want. In every case, a new vacuum of time needs to be filled—or not—and the resources brought to filling the time *before* retirement, by no means financial resources only, will be invaluable in the days after.

One day you're a plastic-IDed, benefits-laden, purposeful employee; the next, you're on the sidewalk. It's as if you'd gone into a witness protection program, except that you have no protection at all. Even surrounded by family and friends, you're on your own making that new

need a phone to go with the headset, because you're on both ends of the line anyway. Just don't let any wires dangle too conspicuously free. The penalty is that you'll be thought to have joined the zombie ranks of public cellars. Conversations come no smaller than theirs and swarm now like gnats through the common air. Is the pardon worth the shame? Your call. Once again.

The essential thing is to keep moving, with your headset or without, dodging and weaving, even while you're perfectly still, to evade the Pale Rider's expert lasso. ■

In ESSENCE

REVIEWS OF ARTICLES FROM PERIODICALS AND SPECIALIZED JOURNALS HERE AND ABROAD

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FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

It's Not Vietnam!

THE SOURCE: "Seeing Baghdad, Thinking Saigon" by Stephen Biddle, in *Foreign Affairs*, March–April 2006.

LIKE SOME OF ITS CRITICS, THE Bush administration seems to regard Iraq as another Vietnam. Taking a leaf from the Nixon administration, it is seeking to win the hearts and minds of Iraqis while handing off more and more of the fighting to indigenous forces. But this strategy is based on a set of dangerously false Vietnam analogies, argues Stephen Biddle, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

The conflict in Iraq is not a Maoist people's war, a "struggle for good governance between a class-based insurgency claiming to represent the interests of the oppressed public and a ruling regime portrayed by the insurgents as defending entrenched privilege." It is instead a brewing "communal civil war" between groups whose loyalties are already established. In a people's war, insurgents and regime compete for the allegiance of the people, who could go either way. In such a case, a strategy like "Vietnam-

ization," by strengthening the government's claim to legitimacy, might make sense, says Biddle. "But in a communal civil war, it throws gasoline on the fire. Iraq's Sunnis perceive the 'national' army and police force as a Shiite-Kurdish militia on steroids." Yet integrating more Sunnis into the army and police would probably only make these forces less effective, more prone to internal strife and penetration by insurgents.

The administration's critics are just as wrong-headed in their Vietnam analogies, according to Biddle. Some military analysts, for example, argue that the United States is not "refighting Vietnam properly," and should abandon the early Vietnam strategy of search-and-destroy missions for the more successful later strategy of pacifying certain areas. Journalists, meanwhile, lavish praise on military officers who adopt the late Vietnam strategy of promoting local democracy initiatives and pursuing service improvements, such as getting the trash picked up, while commanders who employ the "bad" Vietnam tactic of using massive

firepower get critical coverage. And advocates of rapid withdrawal cite the old war's battle for hearts and minds in arguing the battle for Iraq has already been lost.

Biddle argues that none of the underlying "lessons" of Vietnam is relevant in Iraq. "The fight is about group survival," not ideology, good governance, or loyalty.

He believes that the buildup of Iraqi security forces "must follow a broad communal compromise, not the other way around." That would require "a constitutional deal with ironclad power-sharing arrangements protecting all parties." To achieve such a deal, Washington should exploit the insecurities of Iraq's major groups, using the prospect of a U.S.-backed Shiite-Kurdish force to compel the Sunnis to come to the negotiating table while threatening the Shiites and Kurds with an early U.S. withdrawal or even support for the Sunnis.

Biddle acknowledges the obstacles to his plan. It would be hard to sell to the American public, since it would offer no early troop withdrawal. The Iraqis might not be willing or able to settle their differences. But "whatever the prospects for peace, they would be considerably better if Washington stopped mistaking Iraq for Vietnam and started seeing it for what it really is."

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Black Hat Humanitarians

THE SOURCE: "Humanitarianism Transformed" by Michael Barnett, in *Perspectives on Politics*, Dec. 2005.

FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY AFTER Henry Dunant founded the International Red Cross in 1863, the principles of humanitarian aid were plain. Most humanitarian groups devoted themselves to the "impartial, independent, and neutral provision of relief" to the victims of natural disaster or war, carefully avoiding involvement in political questions of any kind. That all began to change during the 1990s, according to Michael Barnett, a political scientist at the University of Minnesota. Today, "the purpose of humanitarianism is becoming politicized, and the organization of humanitarianism is becoming institutionalized."

Traditional humanitarianism has obvious limitations. In steering clear of politics and insisting on simply serving

the afflicted, humanitarian groups pass up the opportunity to address the root causes of human suffering. In any case, change may have been unavoidable, writes Barnett. The end of the Cold War brought a slew of humanitarian crises around the world, from Rwanda to Kosovo. At the same time, governments became more willing to engage in or subsidize humanitarian efforts; their outlays tripled during the 1990s, reaching \$6 billion and producing a bumper crop of aid-giving nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Some humanitarian agencies were ambivalent, but a partnership seemed to make sense. A few, such as Oxfam and Save the Children, had already made the leap into politics. "Many lobbied states to apply military and political muscle to stop the bloodletting. . . . Agencies occasionally sought outside intervention to provide armed protection to help deliver relief." Worthy causes, perhaps, but Barnett thinks the results were disastrous: "Humanitarian principles were completely shattered in places like Kosovo, Afghanistan, and

Iraq, where many agencies were funded by the very governments that were combatants and thus partly responsible for the emergency."

As humanitarian groups began accepting money from governments, they found strings attached. In Kosovo, NATO insisted on "coordinating" relief efforts. In Iraq, the United States has put relief organizations under pressure to "show the American flag." As one NGO official put it, the choice has become to "play the tune or they'll take you out of the band." Increasingly, grant-giving governments even play a role in determining which countries receive humanitarian aid, with places where few major powers have interests, such as Sudan, Congo, and Uganda, getting short shrift.

Swelling budgets and government involvement have also fostered a new institutional culture in the humanitarian world, with a growing emphasis on formal systems of rules and measuring results. "Rising concerns with efficiency in getting 'deliverables' to 'clients' hinted of a growing corporate culture," notes Barnett, prompting some in the field to wonder why private firms couldn't just as well be hired to carry out the work. And, like other bureaucratic organizations, the humanitarian agencies became increasingly preoccupied with institutional self-preservation and responsiveness to funders, further compromising their disinterestedness.

Two big questions of self-identity face humanitarian groups. Now that so many are large organizations, with bureaucratic interests of their own and budgets sometimes rivaling those of the governments in the countries where they work, can they continue to insist that they operate strictly on behalf of the unfortunate? And as they intervene



Red Cross workers evacuate children from a Rwandan hospital under attack in 1994. Such conflicts have made it difficult for humanitarian relief organizations to maintain their historical policies of neutrality.

Archive password: SWALLOW

in the politics of developing countries, can they still claim to be disinterested representatives of humanity, or are they, as a growing number of critics in those countries claim, merely part of an effort to impose Western values on the world?

Humanitarianism, in other words, doesn't seem to be wearing a snow-white hat anymore.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

A 'Realistic Wilsonianism'

THE SOURCE: "After Neoconservatism" by Francis Fukuyama, in *The New York Times Magazine*, Feb. 19, 2006.

WHEN THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION ends three years from now, so, in all likelihood, will the effective life of neo-

conservatism, the ideology that inspired the war in Iraq. Francis Fukuyama, the onetime neoconservative oracle, writes that neoconservatism "has evolved into something I can no longer support." But it would be "a huge tragedy" if, in reaction to neoconservative overreaching in Iraq, America retreats from the Wilsonian ideals of democracy and human rights that the movement embodied and embraces instead either isolationism or "narrow and cynical" Kissingerian foreign-policy "realism."

"The problem with neoconservatism's agenda lies not in its ends, which are as American as apple pie, but rather in the overmilitarized means by which it has sought to accomplish them," Fukuyama argues.

The "war against terrorism," for example, is the wrong name and the

wrong concept for what must be a long-term struggle for the "hearts and minds of ordinary Muslims around the world." Contrary to what many "realists" argue, it is in America's interest to continue to promote good governance abroad:

Democracy, the rule of law, and economic development are "critical to a host of outcomes we desire, from alleviating poverty to dealing with pandemics to controlling violent conflicts." Yet the United States shouldn't imagine that it can impose democracy where it is not wanted; it can only cultivate favorable conditions.

Contrary to neoconservative hopes, democracy and modernization in the Middle East will not solve the problem of jihadist terrorism. In the short run, they will likely exacerbate tensions, as Hamas's victory in the recent Palestinian

EXCERPT

The Shame of Darfur

During the Holocaust, the world looked the other way. Allied leaders turned down repeated pleas to bomb the Nazi extermination camps or the rail lines leading to them, and the slaughter attracted little attention. My newspaper, The New York Times, provided meticulous coverage of World War II, but of 24,000 front-page stories published in that period only six referred on page one directly to the Nazi assault on the Jewish population of Europe. Only afterward did many people mourn the death of Anne Frank, construct Holocaust museums, and vow: Never Again.

The same paralysis occurred as Rwandans were being slaughtered in 1994. Officials from Europe to the U.S. to the UN headquarters all responded by temporizing and then, at most, by holding meetings. The only thing President Clinton did for Rwandan genocide victims was issue a magnificent apology after they were dead.

Much the same has been true of the Western response to the Armenian genocide of 1915, the Cambodian genocide of the 1970s, and the Bosnian massacres of the 1990s. In each case, we have wrung our hands afterward and offered the lame excuse that it all happened too fast, or that we didn't fully comprehend the carnage when it was still under way.

And now the same tragedy is unfolding in Darfur, but this time we don't even have any sort of excuse. In Darfur genocide is taking place in slow motion, and there is vast documentary proof of the atrocities. . . .

In my years as a journalist, I thought I had seen a full kaleidoscope of horrors, from babies dying of malaria to Chinese troops shooting students to Indonesian mobs beheading people. But nothing prepared me for Darfur, where systematic murder, rape, and mutilation are taking place on a vast scale, based simply on the tribe of the victim. What I saw reminded me why people say that genocide is the worst evil of which human beings are capable.

—NICHOLAS KRISTOF, columnist for *The New York Times*, in *The New York Review of Books* (Feb. 9, 2006)

election shows. "Radical Islamism is a byproduct of modernization itself, arising from the loss of identity that accompanies the transition to a modern, pluralist society." Yet even without U.S. encouragement, "greater political participation by Islamist groups" is probably inevitable, and "will be the only way that the poison of radical Islamism can ultimately work its way through the body politic of Muslim communities around the world." The realists' prescription of striking deals with friendly authoritarians to keep a lid on

things simply won't work anymore.

Finally, Fukuyama believes that the United States must commit itself to building effective new international organizations. He dismisses the United Nations as unreformable, saying that it lacks "both democratic legitimacy and effectiveness in dealing with serious security issues," but he also thinks that the ad hoc "coalitions of the willing" the United States has assembled in Iraq and elsewhere lack international legitimacy. Washington should instead "promote what has been emerging in any

event, a 'multi-multilateral world' of overlapping and occasionally competing international institutions that are organized on regional or functional lines." NATO is an example. An East Asian counterpart might be useful.

"What is needed now," Fukuyama concludes, "are new ideas... for how America is to relate to the rest of the world—ideas that retain the neoconservative belief in the universality of human rights, but without its illusions about the efficacy of American power and hegemony."

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

The Limits of Limits

THE SOURCE: "The Truth About Term Limits" by Alan Greenblatt, in *Governing*, Jan. 2006; "The Effects of Term Limits on State Legislatures: A New Survey of the 50 States" by John M. Carey et al., in *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Feb. 2006.

IT'S BEEN A DECADE SINCE TERM limits began taking effect in state legislatures, and in the capitals of the dozen states where they are in force, it's apparent who the big winners have been: the governors and the executive bureaucracies. "The crumbling of legislative power is clear" in those states, one political scientist tells *Governing* staff writer Alan Greenblatt.

The legislators' inexperience and lack of relevant knowledge put them at a decided disadvantage vis-à-vis the executive branch, as does the desire of many to land top-level state jobs once their short stints as lawmakers end. Several studies in California and elsewhere have found that term-limited

legislators make far fewer changes in governors' proposed budgets than their predecessors did.

One southern legislator-turned-lobbyist tells Greenblatt why he often bypasses the legislature and goes directly to agency officials. "There are some legislators who know as much as agency people do," the lobbyist explains, "but they're few and far between and they'll be gone very quickly. Agency heads... can outwait and outlast anyone and everyone on the playing field and they have consolidated their power."

In 1990, voters in California, Colorado, and Oklahoma made their states the first to adopt term limits for lawmakers. Eighteen other states followed suit, but their numbers were reduced by court reversals and legislative changes of heart. Twelve states now have term limits, and they are scheduled to go into effect in three others.

In the old days, legislative leaders often held sway for more than a decade, far longer than the governors usually did. Now the leaders' time at the helm is fleeting. Freshman legislators in the Florida House have taken to immediately selecting the speaker who will lead them five years hence. But those anointed are essentially lame ducks even before they take office.

A 2002 survey of state legislators by political scientist John M. Carey of Dartmouth College and three colleagues found that those in term-limited chambers were less responsive to their constituents and spent less time securing money and projects for their districts than legislators in other states. By their own accounts at least, the term-limited lawmakers paid more heed to their own consciences and to the needs of the state as a whole—an effect that Carey and his colleagues label a "Burkean shift," after the 18th-century Anglo-Irish legislator Edmund Burke, who advocated just such a stance.

Some dire predictions made when term limits were introduced have

proven off the mark. Lobbyists haven't gained the upper hand, Greenblatt notes. "Term limits have been a mixed bag for lobbyists, who must introduce themselves to a new, skeptical set of legislators every couple of years. . . . Nor is there much evidence that legislative staff have taken advantage of member turnover to impose their own views on inexperienced legislators." Staff turnover is often as great as turnover among lawmakers.

Among the legislators, staff, lobbyists, and reporters who work in the state capitals, however, the opinion is "nearly universal . . . that term limits are obstacles to careful legislation and effective oversight," reports Greenblatt. "Travel a bit farther from the capital, though, and you get a different point of view." As political scientist Alan Rosenthal, of Rutgers University, puts it: "The public voted initially for term limits because they don't like politicians and political institutions. That disfavor has continued."

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Partied Out

THE SOURCE: "Public Images of Political Parties: A Necessary Evil?" by Russell J. Dalton and Steven A. Weldon, in *West European Politics*, Nov. 2005.

WHAT'S WIDELY CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL to representative democracy, yet looked upon with growing distrust in modern democracies? The political party. No one's writing its obituary yet, but the distrust has some unsettling implications, argue Russell J. Dalton, a political scientist at the University of California, Irvine, and Steven A. Weldon, a graduate student there.

The pervasive distrust is obvious in opinion polls. Respondents in 17 of 20

In the European Union, the public judged political parties less trustworthy than corporations.

Western democracies surveyed in 2004 identified political parties as the institutions most affected by corruption. In surveys conducted between 1996 and 2000 in 13 advanced industrial democracies, only 30 percent of those polled (38 percent in the United States) said they believed that parties care what ordinary people think.

It's not only the parties that are in bad odor with the public. But in the European Union, the public judged political parties the least trustworthy of a long list of institutions in annual surveys between 1997 and 2004. They won the trust of only an average of 17 percent of the EU population. Even big corporations, with the second-lowest trust level,

did much better than that, passing muster with 33 percent of those polled.

What difference does the distrust make? It reduces voter turnout, for one thing. Still, most people who are cynical about political parties continue to go to the polls. Some in Denmark and elsewhere opt for far-right "antiparty" parties. (Far-left parties seem to have much less appeal to distrustful voters except in countries where there's no far-right alternative, such as Sweden.) Most distrusters tend to hold their noses and vote for an established party, usually one that's out of power. In the 1996–2000 surveys of 13 industrial democracies, only 16 percent of the distrusters did not vote. In the United States, however, that number rose to 30 percent.

Particular national conditions and scandals explain some of what's occurring, but the spreading dissatisfaction is "a general pattern across the Western democracies," say Dalton and Weldon.



Distrust of political parties is not confined to the United States. In one survey of people in advanced democracies, only 30 percent said that the parties care what ordinary people think.

That dissatisfaction has spurred electoral reforms in the United States (e.g., term limits), Italy, Japan, New Zealand, and elsewhere. It's also prompting "more involvement in non-partisan forms of political action," such as citizen interest groups and referendums. And, the authors believe, it will eventually lead to louder demands for direct citizen involvement in the details of policy administration. This "public skepticism about political parties is one piece of a general syndrome involving the public's growing doubts about representative democracy, and a search for other democratic forms."

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Senile Justice?

THE SOURCE: "Life Tenure on the Supreme Court: Time for a Change?" by Kevin T. McGuire, in *Judicature*, July–Aug. 2005.

THE RECENT APPOINTMENTS OF 50-year-old John G. Roberts and 55-year-old Samuel Alito reduced the previous 8–1 majority of senior citizens on the Supreme Court, but in the age of ever-lengthening life spans, the worry that justices stay on the bench far too long

isn't likely to go away. The Founding Fathers, acting when life expectancy was less than 40 years, could hardly have foreseen the danger that lifetime tenure might mean a superannuated Court rarely refreshed by new appointments.

Yet a hard look at the historical record shows that the danger is exaggerated, contends Kevin T. McGuire, a political scientist at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Before 80-year-old Chief Justice William Rehnquist's death last year, the median age of the justices was 69. That was only five years more than the Court's average median age since the dawn of the 20th century.

What about length of service? Rehnquist served 33 years, one of the Court's 10 longest tenures in history, and retired Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, 75, served only a decade less than he did. The median length of service for sitting justices before the recent departures was 18 years. Before the Civil War, the median length of service reached a high of 24 years. Since 1869, when Congress began offering financial support to justices who retired, the median length of service has seldom

exceeded 15 years, so rookies Roberts and Alito return the Court close to the historical norm.

From the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries, justices generally were appointed in their mid-50s, leaving the Court when they were about 70 years old, often only at death. Of the justices appointed since the 1950s, all those who left the Court before Rehnquist went willingly into retirement—but at the more advanced median age of 77. Even so, that is not much different from the age-75 maximum that reformers have proposed be adopted by constitutional amendment.

All in all, McGuire concludes, the historical evidence indicates there's no need to tinker with lifetime tenure for Supreme Court justices. But if Congress decides it wants to speed up turnover on the Court, a much simpler remedy is at hand: Just offer justices who step down before they reach age 75 or complete 15 years of service the opportunity to retire at twice their current salary. Let the record show that the pension bait of 1869 revealed that even the lofty Supremes aren't immune to financial incentives.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

High Tech's Log Cabin

THE SOURCE: "A Garage and an Idea: What More Does an Entrepreneur Need?" by Pino G. Audia and Christopher I. Rider, in *California Management Review*, Fall 2005.

"BIRTHPLACE OF SILICON VALLEY" reads the plaque outside one of California's official historic landmarks: a

garage on Addison Avenue in Palo Alto where, in 1938, the cofounders of Hewlett-Packard began their ascent to fame and fortune. It's a sacred item of American mythology that big dreams are born in humble places. The Walt Disney Company, Apple Computer,

and Mattel all have garages in their pasts, and other firms can boast a basement (United Parcel Service), a dorm room (Dell Computer), or a kitchen (Lillian Vernon) in theirs. Indeed, business school students in one recent survey estimated that nearly half the entrepreneurs in the country get started that way.

That estimate is way too high, say Pino G. Audia and Christopher I. Rider, a professor of organizational behavior and a graduate student,



David Packard (seated) and William Hewlett launched their first product, an audio oscillator, in a Palo Alto garage in 1938. Their working capital was \$538, most of which was spent on a used Sears drill press.

respectively, at the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley. But far more important than the number of garage-style start-ups is the misunderstanding of their character. The myth of lone-wolf entrepreneurs casting aside all connections to the corporate establishment on their way to glory obscures the vital “social” dimension of these success stories. The entrepreneurs often “acquire the psychological and social resources necessary to form new companies through prior experiences at existing organizations in related industries.” In one study, 70 percent of 890 founders of new businesses had had such experiences.

Take William Hewlett and David Packard. Before they began building custom electronic devices in that Addison Avenue garage, Packard had worked at General Electric, and with an inventor at Litton Engineering Laboratories. The pair had met as students at Stanford University, where both took a graduate course in radio engineering from Frederick

Terman, the authors note. “Terman was instrumental in introducing the two to potential customers and suppliers and in arranging for fellowships and jobs to pay for the co-founders’ living expenses. Litton provided space and equipment for the production of many of Hewlett and Packard’s early orders.” From his courses at Stanford and his work at

The Walt Disney Company, Apple Computer, and Mattel all have garages in their pasts.

GE, Packard had “gained confidence in his ability to handle the legal and business matters of the young company.” HP’s first “real product” was an audio oscillator Hewlett had developed in Terman’s lab.

After about a year, Hewlett and Packard moved out of the garage. It certainly had played a role in their success, but hardly the starring one that legend assigns it.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

The Case for Cheap Gasoline

THE SOURCE: “The Uneasy Case for Higher Gasoline Taxes” by Ian W. H. Parry, in *The Milken Institute Review*, 2005: No. 4.

THE LOGIC OF INCREASING TAXES on gasoline seems a no-brainer to many people who worry about America’s dependence on foreign oil, global warming, and traffic congestion. At an average of 40 cents per gallon, federal and state taxes on gas are about the same, in inflation-adjusted terms, as they were in 1960, and they are a fraction of taxes paid in Europe. Yet raising gas taxes wouldn’t be the most effective way to address these problems, argues Ian W. H. Parry, a senior fellow at Resources for the Future, a Washington-based think tank.

Consider the costs of oil dependence. America currently gets 56 percent of its oil from abroad, and that percentage is expected to grow. This dependence leaves Americans vulnerable to oil price-related disruptions; also, since Americans are the world’s largest consumers of oil, their purchases may drive up the world price. Taking those risks into account, economists estimate the costs of oil dependence at no more (and perhaps much less) than about 30 cents a gallon—in other words, less than the average taxes already imposed.

The geopolitical costs of oil dependence—that it might undermine U.S. foreign policy or national security—are virtually impossible to quantify, Parry notes, but upping fuel taxes would be unlikely to

affect them much. Doubling the current federal tax of 18.4 cents per gallon, for instance, might reduce U.S. oil demand by 500,000 barrels a day—a drop in the bucket in a world that consumes 85 million barrels a day.

What about global warming? It's hard to put a price tag on future damage, but Parry thinks the best estimate is Yale economist William Nordhaus's \$15 per ton of carbon emitted today. However, gasoline is not very rich in carbon; imposing a carbon tax equivalent to \$15 per ton of carbon would translate into a gas tax of less than 4 cents per gallon. Coal and other fuels release much more carbon.

"Broader-based taxes that cover all fuel uses—electricity generation, in particular—would make more

sense" than a gas tax, says Parry. "By the same token, extending fuel taxation to other petroleum products (jet fuel, heating oil, petrochemicals, etc.) would be a more logical first step to reducing oil use than raising gasoline taxes."

Targeting traffic congestion raises another set of complications. In theory, the costs of traffic congestion are large enough to justify a gas tax of between 60 cents and \$1 per gallon. But if such a tax were imposed, many drivers would switch to more fuel-efficient vehicles. That's a good thing, of course, but it would have a perverse effect on congestion. By keeping the cost of driving down, fuel efficiency would wash out more than half the positive effects of the higher tax.

Parry has a better idea: Tax driv-

ing directly, not fuel. He thinks that new electronic metering systems like those coming into use in the United Kingdom offer a superior path. (Britain already has the highest fuel prices *and* the worst congestion in Europe.) Metering would make it possible to charge people "according to where and when the vehicles are in use." People who insisted on driving in gridlocked cities during rush hour would pay a premium price per mile, while those zipping along on empty rural roads would pay a fraction of that sum. Add a carbon tax to attack global warming and a push to develop fuel cells and other alternatives to the internal-combustion engine, and America would be on the road to rational management of its energy problems.

SOCIETY

Health Care's Continuing Crisis

A SURVEY OF RECENT ARTICLES

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH'S low-key call in his State of the Union speech for an expansion of health savings accounts has momentarily put America's simmering health care problems back in the spotlight. At last count, in 2004, more than 45 million Americans had no health insurance—an increase of six million since 2000, caused mainly by the erosion of employer-

sponsored health benefits. At the same time, the cost of health care has continued to rise rapidly.

Several articles by noted specialists in *Boston Review* (Nov.–Dec. 2005) offer a good overview of the current state of the debate in the field. John Geyman, a professor emeritus of family medicine at the University of Washington, Seattle, argues that after all the failed reform efforts of the last 30 years—from managed care to health maintenance organizations to preferred provider organizations and consumer-

directed health care—the time has come for national health insurance.

Under such a plan, every American would be covered for "all medically necessary services." There would be no copayments or deductibles. Though insurance would be publicly financed, perhaps by a payroll tax, health care delivery would remain private, and individuals would be free to choose their own physicians and other providers. Hospitals and other institutions would negotiate their compensation with the government. Bulk purchases of prescription medicines alone would save \$50 billion annually. In essence, says Geyman, establishing a national health insurance system would be equivalent to extending the Medicare program for the elderly to all Americans. With 41 million highly satisfied customers and administrative

costs of only 3 percent (versus 26.5 percent for investor-owned Blue Cross), Medicare is hard to beat.

Surveys over the last half-century typically have shown that most Americans favor national health insurance, “even when they are told that taxes will be raised and the program will be ‘government-run.’” He thinks that businesses hurt by ever-rising health care costs will soon be ready to sign on too.

Wishful thinking, say Ezekiel J. Emanuel of the Magnuson Clinical Center, National Institutes of Health, and Victor R. Fuchs, a professor emeritus of economics at Stanford University. The single-payer method has some virtues and at least one big problem: Its one-size-fits-all approach, along with its prohibition against individuals buying additional insurance and services on their own, runs counter to “deeply entrenched American values.” Unlike Canadians and Europeans, Americans value individualism and personal choice at least as much as they do equality. And, as a practical matter, conservatives and business will never consent to a single-payer plan.

Single-payer plans are also “bad policy.” For one thing, they would institutionalize the costly and inefficient fee-for-service reimbursement of doctors. And by promising comprehensive benefits while lacking the private market to restrain rising costs, single-payer plans invite “financial disaster.” Medicare, far from being the model program Geyman claims, illustrates the problem. By 2020, the Medicare Trust Fund will be empty and the program will be devouring five percent of gross domestic product; in 75 years, costs are

projected to exceed all of the federal government’s tax revenues.

But there is a practical way to extend health care coverage to all, Emanuel and Fuchs say: a universal voucher system. All Americans under 65 would get a federal voucher (financed by a new value-added tax or other levy) for “basic” health services underwritten by a qualified insurance company or health plan of their choice. Providers would not be permitted to exclude individuals because of their medical histories, and people who wanted to buy more than the basic services would be able to do so.

Most Americans favor national health insurance, reports one analyst, “even when they are told that taxes will be raised and the program will be ‘government-run.’”

“By guaranteeing everyone a basic benefits package but not comprehensive services, the program would be able to offer universal coverage without opening the government piggy bank to every intervention devised by pharmaceutical companies or device manufacturers,” Emanuel and Fuchs argue. Those companies would still have plenty of customers among those who carried their own supplementary insurance. A federal health board, modeled on the Federal Reserve Board and aided by regional boards, would manage and oversee the voucher program.

Jill Quadagno, a sociologist at

Florida State University, is skeptical that the insurance industry would accept the needed regulation. Without it, “insurers would reject high-risk individuals, just as they do today.” That would send costs for those people through the roof.

Barbara Starfield, a professor at Johns Hopkins University’s Bloomberg School of Public Health, is also pessimistic about prospects for a comprehensive solution. She urges more modest measures. Only about one-third of U.S. physicians are in primary care, for example, and that is one explanation for Americans’ relatively poor health. (The United States ranked 23rd in the world in 2000 for both male and female life expectancy.) Specialization has become a plague with extraordinarily high costs. One-third of surgical and medical interventions today are thought to be unnecessary; an estimated 275,000 people die each year from adverse effects of medical treatment. “There is lots of evidence that a good relationship with a freely chosen primary-care doctor, preferably over several years, is associated with better care, more appropriate care, better health, and much lower health costs.”

But there’s still no getting around the problem of health insurance. “If primary care is to improve significantly,” writes Starfield, “the health insurance system must also be reformed.”

What about the Bush proposal? It falls into the category of consumer-oriented reform, working on the premise that people who have a more acute awareness of the costs of health care will be shrewder shoppers. Some three million Americans currently have health savings accounts, which

were launched in 2004.

Under the plans, consumers must buy relatively inexpensive health insurance with a very high deductible while placing up to \$5,450 (for a family of four) into tax-advantaged savings accounts to cover some of the potential costs before insurance kicks in. Among other things, the president wants to increase the amount people can save.

Bush's proposal has received the usual criticism from liberals and applause from conservatives, all of it delivered almost ritualistically. Whatever the fate of his ideas, both camps know that the larger debate will go on for years.

SOCIETY

The Busy Class

THE SOURCE: "Busyness as the Badge of Honor for the New Superordinate Working Class" by Jonathan Gershuny, in *Social Research*, Summer 2005.

"KEEPING BUSY?" ONE VICTORIAN gentleman would ask of another. The answer often had little to do with what modern folk might think of as work. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the pursuits that occupied the time of the moneyed classes—"sports, politics, the armed services, academics, and the arts"—fell into a category that economist Thorstein Veblen described as "leisure." Precisely because such leisure pursuits were separated from the necessary but grubby business of making money, they identified participants as members of the class of privilege.

How things have changed! Today, according to Jonathan Gershuny, a sociologist at the University of Essex, England, "long hours of paid work are

The most privileged now work more than the less privileged, a British sociologist concludes.

associated with advantaged social positions." The best-off are "increasingly employed in paid jobs that are intrinsically as well as financially rewarding," such as corporate management, and the legal and medical professions. Stranger still, this phenomenon has occurred despite an overall decline in the number of hours people are working. The inescapable conclusion: "The most privileged now work more than the less privileged."

In Gershuny's view, several factors account for this evolution. Longer life spans have reduced the flow of inherited wealth, forcing the children of the wealthy—mainly through higher education—to develop and use professional skills in order to maintain the same economic status enjoyed by their parents. At the same time, "innovations in the technology of production have led to enormous increases in the volume of professional and technical work." Such jobs guarantee high wages, and Gershuny cites a number of studies showing that "those with higher levels of earning power will choose longer hours of paid work time."

Gershuny believes that "busyness" at work has succeeded leisure as "the signifier of high social status." He bases this on time-budget diaries that indicate that even lower-earning workers and the unemployed seem as busy as high-wage earners. Why is this? Partly it is because of the range

of activities—errands and family responsibilities as well as traditional leisure pursuits—crammed into their nonwork hours. The steady rise of women in the workplace has also led to the sharing of a greater proportion of home responsibilities. But Gershuny suspects that at least part of this "I'm-so-busy" attitude pervading modern life is the perception that busyness—or at least its appearance—has now become a mark of social prestige.

SOCIETY

Education Takes a Baby Step

THE SOURCE: "A Decade of Effort" by Lynn Olson, "A Second Front" by Ronald A. Wolk, and "National Standards" by Diane Ravitch, in *Education Week's Quality Counts 2006*, Jan. 5, 2006.

THE STATES' EFFORTS SINCE THE early 1990s to hold public schools to explicit standards of academic achievement seem to have had a fairly positive impact. The improvement in students' test scores in mathematics and reading is "heartening," though certainly far from sufficient, says Lynn Olson, executive editor of the 10th edition of an annual report card issued by *Education Week*, a leading trade publication of the education industry.

Between 1992 and 2005, scores in fourth-grade math increased by almost 19 points on a 500-point scale used by the federal government, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). That's the equivalent of nearly two grade levels. The increases were even greater for black (28 points) and Hispanic (24 points) fourth graders. Had white students'

scores not also improved, Olson points out, the black-white achievement gap that existed in 1992 would have shrunk by 80 percent.

Eighth graders made less dramatic but still significant gains in math, increasing their NAEP scores by 11 points nationally.

The record was less encouraging in reading. The national average score inched up just two points in both grades four and eight. Even so, the reading scores for black and Hispanic fourth graders, and for all low-income kids at that grade level, increased an amount nearly triple the national average. That is about two-thirds of a grade level.

Did the states' embrace of standards-based education help boost the NAEP scores? Such assessments are tricky, but the research arm of the nonprofit Editorial Projects in Education, which is the publisher of *Education Week*, concludes that it did.

However, Diane Ravitch, a research professor of education at New York University, is critical of the fact that there are no *national* standards: "The idea that mastery of eighth-grade mathematics means one thing in Arizona and something different in Maine is absurd on its face." The states use their own standards, not NAEP scores, in assessing achievement, and most claimed that large majorities of their fourth and eighth graders were "proficient" in math and reading in 2005. Scores on the NAEP told a different story.

Ronald A. Wolk, chairman of the board of Editorial Projects in Education and an early supporter of the standards movement, now believes that the movement is "more part of the problem than the solution." It reinforces "the least desirable features

of the traditional school," including "obsession with testing and test prep, [and] overemphasis on coverage in curriculum and memorization."

Wolk sees more promise in replacing inadequately performing schools with more innovative institutions, such as charter schools. More than a decade of standards-based reform, he concludes, "has raised some test scores that were abysmally low to start with, but produced little else. Not a promising return for an all-or-nothing bet."

SOCIETY

Toy Stories

THE SOURCE: "Selling Compromise: Toys, Motherhood, and the Cultural Deal" by Allison J. Pugh, in *Gender & Society*, Dec. 2005.

IF YOU'RE A WORKING MOTHER grappling with the high-anxiety conflict between the demands of home and work, everybody from Oprah to your mother-in-law is lined up to give you advice. Then there's the potent stuff that comes in subliminal form, through

media such as films and advertisements. The multibillion-dollar toy industry, for example, sends a very clear message, writes Allison J. Pugh, a fellow at the University of California, Berkeley. Toy ads uphold "the contemporary received wisdom of children as needing nurture or an emotional connection but with one important compromise: The child does not need people, specifically a mother, actually to provide it."

In 11 mail-order toy catalogs ranging from FAO Schwartz's to the more offbeat Natural Baby Company's, Pugh sees the promotion of an idealized concept of mother-driven parenting. The advertising copy feeds mothers' anxieties by declaring what skills children should develop, then offers the soothing solution of educational toys. If working mothers worry that they neglect a child's reading skills because they can't find time to read aloud, they can just buy a Winnie-the-Pooh bear programmed to "read" books to children instead.

In the world of toy catalogs, childhood is a solitary and learning-driven time, with toys serving as proxies for

parents or even other children. Thus mothers are enticed to buy Rocket the robotic dog, an electronic aquarium that lulls babies to sleep, and the talking Pooh bear. The vast majority of catalog images in Pugh's survey depicted a child playing alone. The catalogs "are not selling toys as the means for deepening the bonds between other



A classic childhood scene, driven by the toy industry: A young child dresses her doll up, learning how to be a parent with no parent in sight.

caregivers and children or as a way for groups of kids to establish friendships and community," she asserts. "Rather, in these catalogs the child has no other human option for attachment or love but the mother; without her, the child can turn only to toys."

Fathers remain on the outskirts of the idealized play world. When they appear in the ads, it is either as a role model or playmate who doesn't supplant the mother's position as the dominant caregiver. An ad for a tree fort sold by Magic Cabin Dolls promises that it will "captivate children three years and older (especially men—they love this)." And for men who are too busy providing for the family to go camping or fishing, another company offers a miniature camping set complete with father and son dolls that provides "great fun even if it's only pretend!"

SOCIETY

The Invisible Class

THE SOURCE: "The Dispossessed" by William Deresiewicz, in *The American Scholar*, Winter 2006.

A VAST GROUP HAS GONE INCONSPICUOUSLY missing from American culture: the working class. The population to whom the rusting phrase "blue collar" applies has become invisible largely because class itself isn't part of a national conversation anymore, con-

EXCERPT

Becoming Modesty

In my experience, any man who says he's humble is not. True modesty is when a person who might have a right to boast does not do so. It's when people return praise rather than soak it up. It's not feeling entitled. It is what Judge Learned Hand once called the spirit of liberty, the spirit that is not too sure that it is right. It is the idea that we seek to understand by listening, by weighing other interests rather than merely our own, by walking around in someone else's shoes.

—RICHARD STENGEL, author of *You're Too Kind: A Brief History of Flattery* (2000), in *In Character* (Winter 2006)

tends William Deresiewicz, an English professor at Yale.

It's been a long time since TV shows such as *The Honeymooners* and *All in the Family* focused on people who earn an hourly wage and look like they live on it. Working-class characters are all over the place, but they're usually there to do a job (cop, nurse), not to serve as the focal point. The omissions aren't confined to the small screen. Mainstream movies are far more likely to depict trailer-trash stereotypes (see *Million Dollar Baby*) than the nuanced portraits of working-class characters in exceptions such as *Mystic River* and *Good Will Hunting*. And whither have gone American literature's Steinbecks and Dos Passoses?

The reasons the working class is missing in action are no mystery, says Deresiewicz. The creators of main-

stream American culture—"journalists, editors, writers, producers"—are children of the middle class themselves, and suffer from the usual myopias. Furthermore, it's "kind of a bummer" to watch the struggles of real working-class life; the movies and shows that do so, such as Roseanne Barr's *Roseanne*, are so rare they're called "edgy."

In a land where we're all supposed to belong to one great middle class, sexuality, gender, and, above all, race are the dominant identifiers. That being black is a stand-in for being working class is evident everywhere. When

the nation was shown images of Hurricane Katrina's victims, it saw that they were black, not that they were laborers, waitresses, and bus drivers.

Class hasn't entirely vanished from the national discourse. John Kerry's loss to George W. Bush in the last presidential election has been painted as a drubbing of "blue state" elites by "red state" rednecks, otherwise referred to euphemistically as "ordinary Americans."

But country music and NASCAR don't sum up the working-class life, which "breeds its own virtues: loyalty, community, stoicism, humility, and even tolerance." The middle class talks a lot about the latter, but "working-class people, because they can't simply insulate themselves from those they don't like with wads of money, are much more likely, in practice, to live and let live."

PRESS & MEDIA

Poll Perversity

THE SOURCE: "Of Polls, Mountains: U.S. Journalists and Their Use of Election Surveys" by Thomas E. Patterson, in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 2005: No. 5.

WHEN THE NEWS MEDIA REPORT the results of public-opinion polls during presidential campaigns, they rush to explain the latest ups and downs in terms of the flaws and strengths of the candidates. That may seem natural, says Thomas E. Patterson, a professor of government and the press at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, but in reality it's peculiar. Why not look for explanations in the voting public itself?

The focus on candidates and their campaigns "derives from the age-old definition of news as events," Patterson says. "Candidates' activities are events. Voters' attitudes are not. Although voters' partisan loyalties and policy preferences are the major influ-

ence on the vote, these influences are complex and not easily analyzed or reported. Moreover, because these influences are relatively stable, they are poorly suited to journalists' need to say something new each day."

When news reporters explain poll results, they tend to say unfavorable things about a faltering candidate and favorable things about a surging one.

When a candidate is doing well or poorly in the polls, reporters have relatively free rein to explain why, and "the temptation to say unfavorable things about a faltering candidate," and favorable things about a surging one, is hard to resist. "When

George H. W. Bush languished in the polls during the 1988 campaign, reporters said it was because he looked weak. *Newsweek* ran a Bush cover story entitled 'Fighting the Wimp Factor.' However, when Bush took the lead in polls after the GOP national convention, *Newsweek* declared that Bush had 'banished . . . the wimp factor.' No doubt Bush's convention performance helped, but anybody who studied the polls more closely would have seen that the surge in his support came mainly from Republican-leaning voters who simply hadn't been paying much attention to the campaign before.

By using the polls to focus so intensely on politicians as poll-minded strategists, and then pinning "flimsy, poll-derived images" on them, the press not only misses the bigger story of the underlying forces at work in elections, says Patterson. It also adds needlessly and destructively to Americans' disenchantment with the presidential candidates who would lead them.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Fuel for Fantasy

THE SOURCE: "Angels and Engines: The Culture of Apocalypse" by Marina Warner, in *Raritan*, Fall 2005.

IN THE AGE OF MASS MEDIA, THE Book of Revelation is reaching far beyond the church pulpit. Revelation's lush numerology and colorful charac-

ters—consider the Whore of Babylon astride a scarlet beast, or the famed Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse—prompted George Bernard Shaw to dismiss the book as "a curious record of the visions of a drug addict which was absurdly admitted to the canon under the title of Revelation." But Revelation's

ridiculers can no longer "mock it out of meaning," writes Marina Warner, professor of literature, film, and theater studies at the University of Essex, England, for the visions and violence that drive this final book of the Bible are tailored for a culture in which the line between reality and fantasy has blurred.

Revelation's symbolic violence—its rivers of blood, mass slaughter, and bodies eaten and torn limb from limb—invites us to dissociate atrocity and its flesh-and-blood consequences. In part, this is because that

violence is done to evil-doers, while a blessed few, with whom readers identify, are saved. But it required modern technologies for these themes to find their fullest expression.

The advent of photography and “moving images” has distanced us from the true effects of violence even as it has disseminated apocalyptic culture. “The distinction that used to seem so clear between fantasy and memory, actual and imaginary events, has been fading,” Warner writes. “Technological media act as the chief catalysts of a new phantasmagoria masquerading as empiricism. They wrap us in illusions of monsters and angels, turning myth into history and vice versa.”

Consider the big-screen incarnation of J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* fantasy novel series, which depicts apocalyptic battle between the forces of

A “terrifying number” of people in a recent poll thought that the orcs’ defeat at Helms Deep in *The Two Towers* actually occurred.

good and evil. A “terrifying number” of people in a recent British poll thought that Hitler was imaginary and that the orcs’ defeat at Helms Deep in the movie version of Tolkien’s *The Two Towers* actually occurred.

Revelation exerts a political influence as well. A book about an engulfing conflict and a remnant of chosen survivors offers tempting tropes for the makers of foreign policy these days. In his 2002 “axis of evil” speech, President George W.

Bush drew on apocalyptic phrases. In his second inaugural speech, he referred to September 11, 2001, as “the day of fire.” Meanwhile, Tony Blair explained his decision to go to war in Iraq as prompted by the “revelation” of September 11, and warned, “We are in mortal danger of mistaking the nature of the new world.” Meanwhile, the hugely popular books in the *Left Behind* fiction series identify the Antichrist as the new leader of the United Nations and unfold a present-day apocalyptic final battle, encouraging readers to connect real-world events with Revelation’s prophecies.

In the recently released photos of Iraqi captives at Abu Ghraib prison, in which prisoners were forced to stage punishments and degradations for the



The movie versions of J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* saga, depicting an apocalyptic struggle between good and evil, show the Book of Revelation’s cultural stamp.

camera, Warner discerns the damage that cinematic realism has wrought in the age of apocalyptic culture. The perpetrators, when caught, defended themselves by saying that the violence wasn't real.

But in the public's revulsion at the Abu Ghraib photographs, Warner sees hopeful evidence that "affectless disassociation hasn't altogether triumphed."

Still, Revelation's "phantasmagorias" have never been as fully conceptualized as they are today. And unless the public redraws the line between artifice and reality, and decides to "keep faith with the laws of time and the flesh, with the reality of pain and suffering, . . . we risk deepening the current disregard for the consequences of violence."

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Browsing Faith

THE SOURCE: "God on the Internet" by Jonathan V. Last, in *First Things*, Dec. 2005.

WHAT'S THE NEXT-BIGGEST thing on the Internet after pornography? Religion. According to a 2004 survey, 82 million Americans turn to the virtual world for religious purposes of one sort or another, from seeking out information to making donations, blogging, and, most often, sending "spiritual" e-mails and online greeting cards. Jonathan V. Last, online editor of *The Weekly Standard*, finds some of this pious online activity troubling.

Consider Beliefnet.com, the largest religious website, which gets 20 million page-views per month and dispatches some nine million advertising-laden e-mail newsletters to sub-

scribers every day. It's "a commercial, one-stop-shopping portal which serves evangelicals, Catholics, Scientologists, Earth worshippers, and everyone in between." By answering questions posed by the site's "Belief-O-Matic" survey, visitors can find out whether liberal Quakerism, Unitarian Universalism, neopaganism, or something entirely different would best suit them.

Beliefnet.com is helping people meet their *perceived* spiritual needs, says Last, but these "aren't always the same thing as genuine needs." Without the tutelage and guidance of a real church, some spiritual seekers become lost in cyberspace, communicating only with like-minded others and forming insular online communities. "Something is happening at the intersection of religion and the Internet that is like the old denominationalization of American sects raised to a new and frightening power."

Last also worries that the Web's promotion of "transparency" may be leading to a demystification of religion. Among the world's religious bloggers are some 50 Catholic priests, who sometimes reveal priestly conversations about such matters as how to keep Mass short enough to avoid putting parishioners to sleep. There's a loss of mystery that Last thinks diminishes the power of the rituals of the liturgy. The next step may be virtual religious practice. "At Absolution-Online.com, for instance, you can enter the virtual booth, select your sins from five general classes of misdoing, and then proceed to the automated confessor, which doles out punishments normally consisting of some combination of fasting,

Our Fathers, and Hail Marys." Virtual confessions aren't sanctioned by the Catholic Church, however.

Steve Waldman, Beliefnet.com's founder and a former *U.S. News & World Report* editor, regards the Internet's impersonality as a virtue. "The anonymity of the Internet is what makes it work so well for religion. It's the flip side of why porn spreads." Just as with pornography, he says, "you can explore religious matters in the privacy of your own home; ask questions you might be embarrassed to ask; have conversations with people with some anonymity; and do it anytime day or night."

But just as pornography is a far cry from real sex, Last says, so virtual churching isn't real religion.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Why the Jews Got Ahead

THE SOURCE: "Jewish Occupational Selection: Education, Restrictions, or Minorities?" by Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein, in *The Journal of Economic History*, Dec. 2005.

ONE OF THE ANCIENT CALUMNIES against the Jews holds that an inborn instinct for sharp practices led them into the ranks of moneylenders and other urban occupational groups. Among scholars, the prevailing view has been that Jews were driven from the land centuries ago by local legal barriers to landownership and other privileges, and had no choice but to make their living as townspeople.

Economic historians Maristella Botticini of Boston University and Zvi Eckstein of Tel Aviv University have

another argument: Beginning with religious reforms in the first century AD, Jews placed a strong emphasis on literacy and education that later gave them a big advantage in the skilled urban occupations that burgeoned first in the Middle East and then around the world.

After the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in Jerusalem in AD 70, the balance of power within Judaism shifted from the Sadducees to the Pharisees, a sect that rejected the old emphasis on sacrifices and other priest-led rituals. Instead, the Pharisees made it a prime requirement of the faith that every Jewish male read the Torah and teach it to his sons in the synagogue. In the main centers of Jewish life—Eretz Israel, Mesopotamia, and Egypt—virtually all Jews were still farmers and herders at the beginning of the 5th century AD, but literacy levels were high. Then Jews began a movement into the towns, where they worked as shopkeepers and artisans in industries such as tanning, silk, and glassware.

The Muslim Empire started to grow

Beginning with religious reforms in the first century AD, Jews placed a strong emphasis on literacy and education that gave them a big advantage.

in the seventh century AD, and by the ninth century, lands under Muslim rule experienced a burst of urbanization that increased demand for skilled workers in professions such as moneylending, bookselling, shipbuilding, and long-distance trade. This accelerated the movement of literate rural Jews into Baghdad (which had been established only in AD 762), Basra, and other rising cities.

The argument that Jews were legally forbidden or otherwise prevented from owning land is contradicted by a great deal of evidence, the authors say. Documents from the era, including contracts, wills, court records, and especially the rabbinic Responsa—scholarly letters written in response to questions

submitted from the Jewish community—show that Jews could and did own land. Like Christians and other non-Muslim minorities, they faced but one occupational or economic restriction: a tax on land. The largely illiterate Christians stayed on the farm; the Jews, increasingly, chose the towns and cities. Farming may have been a minority occupation among Jews as early as the ninth century.

By then, Jews seeking economic opportunity were beginning to migrate to North Africa and southern Europe. Their ability to communicate by letter and to understand contracts and trade laws gave them a natural advantage as merchants and moneylenders, and allowed a number to live as well as some local aristocrats. As trade revived in medieval Europe and throughout the Mediterranean, Jews' literacy and far-flung social networks proved an enormous advantage, and enterprising Jews established enclaves as far away as China. A religious transformation was remaking a people and the world they inhabited.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Why Your Mind Has A Mind of Its Own

THE SOURCE: "The Vulcanization of the Human Brain: A Neural Perspective on Interactions Between Cognition and Emotion" by Jonathan D. Cohen, in *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Fall 2005.

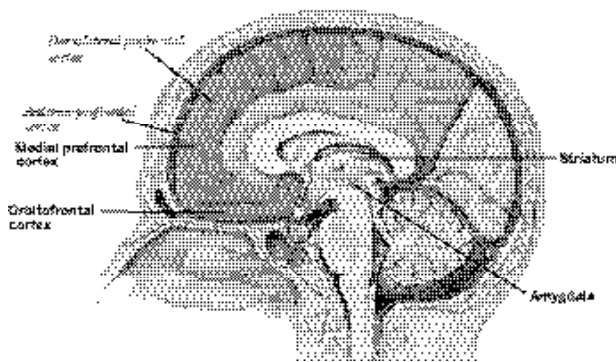
HOW DO WE MAKE DECISIONS? Why do we allow our emotions to get in the way of rational response? What

we think of as emotional behavior may be the result of "evolutionarily old" mechanisms winning out over areas of the brain that developed later in the course of human evolution, argues psychologist Jonathan D. Cohen, director of the Center for the Study of the Brain, Mind, and Behavior at

Princeton University. While emotional behavior sometimes seems irrational in a modern setting, it may have been perfectly reasonable in the early days of our evolutionary history.

In this view, the human mind is best thought of not as a unified whole but rather as a "society of minds," each capable of independent action. So although the brain's prefrontal cortex enables the individual to act in accordance with abstract goals or principles, it doesn't always run the show. The older, "limbic" system of the brain acts more quickly and thus may win the battle to determine behavior.

A Society of Minds



Immediate moral quandaries trigger activity in the emotional processing regions of the brain (in bold). Under other conditions, regions of more-rational thought processes (in italics) come alive.

This theory resolves long-standing conundrums in various fields, such as the inconsistencies of individual moral behavior illustrated by the switch and footbridge scenarios.

In the switch scenario, individuals are asked if they would flip a switch to divert a trolley car onto a sidetrack if it would kill one person but save five others who are on the main track. Most people say yes.

In the footbridge scenario, they are asked if they would push a man off a footbridge onto the track below to save the same five people; in this instance, most people say no. We instinctively recoil from the idea of pushing someone off a bridge, but if we can flip a switch from a distance, we seem able to make the rational choice.

What explains the difference? In his work using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to monitor brain activity, Cohen sees an answer in the “society of minds” theory.

In people faced with dilemmas like the footbridge scenario, MRIs revealed activity in the emotional processing regions of the brain, such as the medial prefrontal cortex. The switch scenario, however, triggered activity in the ante-

rior and dorsolateral areas of the prefrontal cortex, home of more-rational thought processes.

Cohen is careful to note that MRIs, which measure changes in blood oxygen in specific areas of the brain, are not a decisive indicator of brain activity. And even a correlation between brain activity and behavior does not prove that one *caused* the other.

Why would people have developed a negative emotional response to pushing someone off a bridge? One possibility is that an aversion to killing arose because it fostered the creation of cooperative social structures that conferred an evolutionary advantage.

Many seemingly irrational human decisions observed by behavioral economists can also be explained by the dominance of evolutionarily old emotional responses. In the ultimatum game, for example, a player is given a sum of money and instructed to make an offer to a partner about how it should be split between them. If they can't agree on a split, both players get nothing. Surprisingly, people in tests run in many different cultures generally reject offers of less than 20 percent of the sum, often walking away empty handed.

This, too, seems to be a deeply embedded response—Cohen suggests that early humans living in small groups needed to show their fellows that they couldn't be taken advantage of—and it's associated with activity in more primitive areas of the brain. The contemporary human preference for immediate consumption (think failure to save) also falls into this category; the best place for our evolutionary ancestors to store food was in their bellies.

It's the rational mind that has created today's complex technological societies, Cohen observes, but the often discordant “society of minds” in our heads isn't always up to the challenges those modern societies pose.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Drinking Lessons

THE SOURCE: “Shape of Glass and Amount of Alcohol Poured: Comparative Study of Effect of Practice and Concentration” by Brian Wansink and Koert van Ittersum, in *BMJ*, Dec. 2005.

FROM THE FRONTIERS OF SCIENCE comes important insight into how to pour yourself a drink. Or, more to the point, what kind of glass to use.

Brian Wansink and Koert van Ittersum, marketing professors at Cornell University and the Georgia Institute of Technology, respectively, armed a group of 198 college students and 86 bartenders with bottles of ersatz rum, whiskey, and vodka, and asked them to pour a shot (1.5 ounces) to make a mixed drink. But some participants were given short, wide tumblers while others were given tall, slender highball glasses. The result: Virtually all those given tumblers

poured with a heavier hand than those given highball glasses.

Maybe it's not surprising that the college students overpoured by 30 percent, but even experienced bartenders who were told to take their time poured 20.5 percent more into the tumblers than they did into the highball glasses. So if you down two rum and cokes at a bar, chances are you have actually consumed closer to two and a half.

These findings have far-reaching consequences. Surveys of alcohol consumption, for example, fail to take into account the tumbler effect. Bar owners with an eye on the bottom line obviously would be well advised to switch to highball glasses, while parents who want their children to drink more milk should switch to tumblers. And while the authors don't make this suggestion, tipplers who want to cut back might consider sipping their next Absolut from a bud vase.

A subject for further research: the influence of stemmed versus unstemmed martini glasses on the pouring of clear spirits.



A short glass makes for a bigger pour.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Medicine's Mirage

THE SOURCE: "Conservatives, Liberals, and Medical Progress" by Daniel Callahan, in *The New Atlantis*, Fall 2005.

REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THE health care system is market-dominated, as in the United States, or government-financed, as in Canada and Western Europe, expenditures keep increasing faster than the rate of inflation, with only small health gains the result. That suggests that both conservatives and liberals err in thinking that there's an organizational fix for rising costs, argues Daniel Callahan, cofounder of the Hastings Center, a bio-ethics think tank. It's time to look at a deeper cause: society's war against death.

Economists calculate that "progress-driven technological innovation"—both the development of new technologies and the intensified use of older ones—is responsible for up to half of the annual increase in health care expenses. Certain drugs to treat colorectal cancer, for example, can cost up to \$161,000 for a 12-week course of treatments, yet the gain can be as little as seven additional months of survival. Society is rightly reluctant to say such added months of life "aren't worth it," Callahan acknowledges. But the dollars spent on "expensive medications at the end of life" could be spent instead on "other goods and obligations, including the obligation to provide basic medical care to the poor."

New attitudes toward death can be seen in the rise of the palliative care movement, which emphasizes giving comfort to the dying and relieving their suffering, fostering an acceptance of death. But much of mainstream medicine still strives through research

to find cures for all lethal diseases, and regards death as the enemy—as, in effect, a curable disease itself.

"Much of the health care cost pressure in developed countries can be traced to the war against death," Callahan writes. The National Institutes of Health, with a budget of \$28 billion, has spent much more research money on combating lethal diseases such as cancer and heart disease than on fighting chronic diseases such as arthritis and osteoporosis, which affect many

Because the leading lethal diseases "are primarily diseases of aging," an ethicist believes they should have a lower priority.

more people and can drastically diminish their quality of life. Because the leading lethal diseases "are primarily diseases of aging," he urges, they should have "a lower research priority."

"At the clinical level, it would seem appropriate to insist on a strong likelihood of success—a decent prospect for more years, not just months, of life in good health—before proceeding with treatment in intensive care units or the prescription of enormously expensive devices and drugs."

Meanwhile, says Callahan, there should be "more research and clinical work on the disabilities and frailties of old age," and more emphasis on long-term care. "In caring for the elderly, we should focus on quality of life, not length of life. . . . At age 75, I do not look for medicine to give me more years, but I do want my remaining years to be good years, with mind and body reasonably intact."

ARTS & LETTERS

Grand Dams

THE SOURCE: "Power for the People" by Tom Vanderbilt, in *The Oxford American*, Fall 2005.

THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE TENNESSEE Valley Authority, created by an act of Congress in 1933, were as enormous as the dams it built.

Constructed to make the Tennessee River more navigable and less flood prone, as well as to reclaim the "marginal lands" of the Tennessee Valley, the TVA's several dozen dams were also meant to bring electricity to the region and, thereby, "social uplift" to people living in a "seemingly antediluvian world of sorghum mills, wood-fired stoves, and one-room schoolhouses," writes Tom Vanderbilt, a Brooklyn-based writer.

The problem was, the hardscrabble people of the river basin weren't keen on changing their way of life, and Americans were of two minds about whether public utilities should be government owned. To court a skeptical public, Hungarian-born, Bauhaus-affiliated architect Roland Wank—now unjustly sunk into relative obscurity—was commissioned to head the TVA

design team, and he set about to woo people with an avant-garde vision of unornamented efficiency reflected in "brute, geometric architecture."

Wank "imbued a technological imperative with beauty and humanity," writes Vanderbilt, "and created structures that, as modern as they must have seemed at the time, still resonate today." The dams, approached on winding roads through

the Appalachian foothills, featured panoramic visitor centers and marble-and-aluminum powerhouse lobbies, and were "veritable theme parks of progress and utopian ideals." They attracted national acclaim and eventually became sites of pilgrimage for tourists and foreign dignitaries alike. Architects such as Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier visited, as did Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the TVA powerhouses and many of the old visitor centers were closed to the public, but this act was merely a coda to the erosion of the TVA

dams' national eminence. Automation, budgetary belt-tightening, and changing political winds have rendered the dams little more than historical relics, and the TVA has become a "watered-down utility company" that derives most of its power from coal-fired and nuclear power plants.

But in the challenge to which the TVA's soaring dams rose in the Depression era, Vanderbilt sees a call to arms for the future, particularly as the United States grapples with catastrophes on the scale of Hurricane Katrina: "We inhabit a diminished age in which grand public works are supposed to be replaced by small private acts of faith and profit. The TVA was born of crisis, and its architecture is a monument to an enlightened response."

EXCERPT

Through Art's Lens

One of the things that contributed to the demise of modernism was the preposterous notion that art itself is an encoded system that only scholars can properly decipher. But we know that for two millennia art has been an integral part of society's everyday life, accessible on many different levels. Today, we need help in finding our way back to that kind of understanding between artists and public. After decades of proselytizing the hermeneutics of Foucault and Derrida, having achieved what has turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory (the end of art), the cultural elite now find themselves confronting an abyss that leaves the West spiritually defenseless. . . . Hopefully, we are rediscovering that the arts help us see—that art is a microcosm, a lens, to God, the universe, civilization; that art is a connection to the eternal, the true, and the beautiful.

—JAMES F. COOPER, editor and publisher of *American Arts Quarterly*, in the Fall 2005 issue

ARTS & LETTERS

The Birth of Opera

THE SOURCE: "Why Venice? Venetian Society and the Success of Early Opera" by Edward Muir, in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Winter 2006.

THE MYSTERY OF WHY OPERA AS WE know it emerged in 17th-century Venice might make a best-selling Dan Brown novel. The answer, says Edward Muir, a Northwestern University humanities professor, owes everything to the city's unique position as a locus of resistance to papal power, a hotbed of libertinism (given full flower in its carnival tradition), and a home to a supportive Italian nobility that sustained, among other things, a notorious secret society.

Opera was not invented in Venice. That distinction belongs to the 16th-century Medici courts of Florence, but operas produced there were one-time entertainments for special royal occasions. Venice opened its first permanent opera theater in 1637, and by 1678, says Muir, "all the elements of a flourishing enterprise were in place: competition among opera houses, the cult of the diva, . . . season-ticket holders, sold-out performances, . . . and tourists who came to Venice just to hear operas."

That opera might catch on would scarcely have been thought possible as the 17th century dawned, with Venice chafing under the dictates of the resident Jesuit order, empowered by Rome to enforce stern moral codes regarding public entertainment. The most common shows were satirical productions by *commedia dell'arte*

troupes, allowed only during the less-constrained carnival season leading up to Lent. But renegade Venetian writers were beginning to openly challenge church authority, which provoked a papal interdict in 1606 withholding the most fundamental sacraments from Venetians for almost a year. The city fathers responded by expelling the Jesuits from the city, making Venice, for the next two generations, "the one place in Italy open to criticisms of Counter Reformation papal politics."

Many of these critics found their voice within a secretive society known as the *Incogniti*, whose ranks included, says Muir, "nearly every important Venetian intellectual of the mid-17th century and many prominent foreigners." A number of the *Incogniti* were also notorious libertines of the



This elaborate stage design was for a production of Giacomo Torelli's *Venere Gelosa*, performed in 1643 at Venice's Teatro Novissimo.

patrician class, and the operas they staged often strained the bounds of decency as well as political rhetoric. Yet so long as they “refrained from criticizing the Venetian government they were reasonably safe from governmental prosecution, even if many of them ran afoul of the Holy Office.”

What was happening on stage was not the only scandalous aspect of Venetian opera. A prominent and novel feature of the new opera theaters, such as the Teatro S. Cassiano, built in 1637, was theater boxes, which Venetians quickly learned to use, writes one historian, “as if they were modern motel

The mystery of why opera emerged in 17th-century Venice might make a best-selling Dan Brown novel.

rooms.” With opera season coinciding with carnival and many in the audience masked, the scene was set for audiences to take “full advantage of the collective anonymity.”

But as time passed, says Muir, commercial opera gradually became “just a subset of a whole new literary economy during the 17th century,” which

helped connect the city “to the broader intellectual and political developments of Europe.” Venice’s loss of the spice trade to other European shipping rivals actually boosted investment in commercial entertainment, and Venetian opera began importing talent from other cities, becoming, Muir writes, “less of a self-contained genre and more of a stop on the burgeoning opera circuit.” Opera offered audiences a welcome escape from their daily lives, which were wracked by economic concerns and worries about war and disease. Once it caught on in the other great cities of Europe, opera was there to stay.

OTHER NATIONS

Nepal’s Backward Trek

THE SOURCE: “Nepal: The Politics of Failure” by Barbara Crossette, in *World Policy Journal*, Winter 2005–06.

NESTLED IN THE HIMALAYAS BETWEEN China and India, the Hindu kingdom of Nepal has a reputation among foreigners as a prime destination for exotic adventure. Less widely known to the outside world are the tempests of its political life.

An outpouring of popular support for democracy in the late 1980s forced the king to accept a constitutional monarchy in 1990, but since then democracy has foundered. Now, tensions among the autocratic King Gyanendra, fractious political parties, and brutal Maoist guerillas threaten the country’s stability, warns Barbara Crossette, former *New York Times*

chief correspondent in South Asia. The buffer mountain kingdom could easily become a source of trouble for the entire region.

Crossette says that travel warnings “give little hint of the depth of the country’s political collapse and the despair, confusion, and powerlessness of its people.” In 2001 King Birendra and nine members of the royal family were shot dead at a royal dinner, allegedly by the crown prince, who is said to have then committed suicide. Birendra’s brother Gyanendra assumed the throne, and since then has placed restrictions on civil liberties and freedom of speech, dismissed several prime ministers, and, in February 2005, arrested political leaders and dissolved the government.

Gyanendra’s actions have strength-

ened connections between the now-impotent political parties and the Maoist insurgency. The Maoists, formerly the Communist Party of Nepal, have grown in strength since the mid-1990s and are now estimated to have 10,000 members. They face an “inept and lawless” army. The armed Maoists draw recruits from isolated, impoverished mountain villages by “playing on the hopelessness and weariness of the poorest people,” says Crossette, and they “have amply demonstrated their contempt for democracy.”

In the international community there is growing alarm about the rise of Maoism, but “there is no focal point around which to build a solution” to Nepal’s governance crisis. Even before Gyanendra’s royal coup, leaders of the dominant Congress Party “let the country down, comprehensively,” indulging in corruption and infighting and producing legislative gridlock.

As Nepalis abandon hope in the promise of democracy and embrace extremism, the Nepalese experience is

a warning “for those who still nourish the shaky conviction that democracy can be established simply through an outburst of people power . . . , a constitution, and an election or two, without the vital dedication of a political class willing to put aside differences.”

OTHER NATIONS

Goodbye and Good Riddance

THE SOURCE: “Mexico’s Wasted Chance” by Fredo Arias-King, in *The National Interest*, Winter 2005–6.

REFORM WAS IN THE AIR WHEN Vicente Fox was elected president of Mexico six years ago, ending more than 70 years of one-party rule. Yet as the July 2 election of a new president nears, reforms have been few, “corruption has actually increased, and the quality of government has deteriorated,” writes Fredo Arias-King, the founding editor of *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, who worked as a speechwriter for Fox’s campaign.

Fox’s two immediate predecessors, Carlos Salinas (1988–94) and Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000), from the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), had instituted some economic reforms, but essentially they “only replaced the existing crony socialism with crony capitalism.” To do better, the popular Fox and his center-right National Action Party (PAN) needed to tackle “bureaucratic red tape, monopolies, obstacles to foreign investment, the byzantine tax code, criminal networks in government, a bloated public sector, [and] the lack of property rights.”

Instead of breaking completely with the old regime, however, Fox chose to work with elements of the PRI, while slighting his own supporters and his party’s coalition partner, the Green Party. Members of the old guard were installed as the national security adviser and the ambassador to Washington, while others ran the Finance Secretariat and Fox’s own presidential office. Fox “resurrected some of the most notorious figures of the pre-Zedillo PRI,” including two men who had served with the secret police during Mexico’s “dirty war”

cooperation, he was disappointed, notes Arias-King. “The PRI has blocked Fox’s most important proposals in Congress, including labor, energy, and tax reform, and has used its networks inside the federal government to continue funneling resources to its campaigns.” The PRI regained its congressional plurality in 2003, and the Green Party left Fox’s coalition for an alliance with the PRI.

It’s not Fox’s fault that Mexico’s economic growth has been feeble in recent years (America’s lagging economy is mostly to blame for that), says



Many hoped that Vicente Fox would bring much-needed reform to Mexico when he was elected president in 2000, but his administration has been disappointing, with corruption worse than before he took office.

against the country’s leftist guerrillas in the early 1970s. He also rejected an offer from some 50 newly elected PRI congressmen to break with their party and vote with PAN and the Greens, in return for minor favors. The legislators, said Fox, should “stay in the PRI, since we need a strong and united PRI to negotiate better with it.”

If Fox hoped that his unilateral concessions to the PRI would win its

Arias-King, but “the worsening quality of government largely is.” Surveys by Transparency International and other organizations show increased corruption and inefficiency. Mexicans’ faith in political institutions has eroded. “If this trend continues,” Arias-King warns, “the party system itself could be discredited, opening the door to a Hugo Chávez-like figure” in Mexico and an increase in guerrilla activity and terrorism.

Also in this
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Ann J. Loftin on
Bernard Malamud

David J. Garrow
on the freedom
riders of 1961

Yasmine Bahrani
on one woman's
struggle for equality
within Islam

Ann Finkbeiner
on an 18th-century
eccentric

Martin Walker on
the history of
chemical warfare

Roland Flamini on
Italy under Benito
Mussolini

J. Peter Pham on
Africa's finest
playwright

Daniel J. Weitzner
on who owns the
Internet

David Lindley on
a quantum vision
of the cosmos

CURRENT BOOKS

REVIEWS OF NEW AND NOTEWORTHY NONFICTION

Bombing Away the Past

Reviewed by Tom Lewis

IN HIS GREAT POEM "LAPIS LAZULI," William Butler Yeats indirectly foretold the events that would soon consume the world: "Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out,/Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in/Until the town lie beaten flat." Yeats died in 1939, a few months after publishing his poem and shortly before the world began to realize his words to a degree unimagined by earlier ages. The poem evokes the constant destruction throughout history of art and architecture, and the ceaseless human desire to build again in the face of an unending parade of "old civilizations put to the sword." It is this long history of material and cultural destruction, brought to unprecedented intensity in the 20th century, that Robert Bevan documents.

To be sure, armies have been destroying cities since the days of the Old Testament and Homer. But as Bevan demonstrates, science and the increasing mechanization of the last two centuries have given combatants the ability to increase vastly the thoroughness (and the precision) of the devastation. *The Destruction of Memory* presents a dark account of how that devastation is brought about, along with a cogent argument for why it deserves recognition as an atrocity separate from the human carnage it so often accompanies.

Bevan argues that the destruction of buildings, be they historic, symbolic, or merely utilitarian, "is often the result of political imperatives rather than simply military necessity." Architecture, he contends, "is not just maimed in the crossfire; it is targeted for assassination or mass murder." Significant buildings may be destroyed as an adjunct to genocide, as propaganda for a cause, as a way of demoralizing an enemy, or out of simple personal vindictiveness on the part of the attackers or the victors. Bevan offers a veritable taxonomy of heritage destruction. He considers genocide and its attendant "cultural cleansing" in cases from Armenia to Bosnia; symbolic attacks upon buildings by terror groups, including, of course, the attacks of 9/11; the carpet-bombing of densely packed cities such as Hamburg and Dresden in World War II; wholesale cultural annihilation, as in the attempted Germanification of Warsaw by its Nazi occupiers in 1944; religiously motivated destruction, such as the Taliban's obliteration of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan in 2001; and the brutally dividing walls erected in Berlin, Belfast, and Israel's occupied territories, where architecture serves

THE DESTRUCTION OF MEMORY:

Architecture at War.

By Robert Bevan.
Reaktion Books.
240 pp. \$29.95

as an instrument of suppression or exclusion.

Bevan's grim statistics force readers to confront yet another dimension of the savagery of our age. In the fighting that accompanied the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, "more than 1,386 historic buildings in Sarajevo were destroyed or severely damaged. . . . Gazi Husrev Beg, the central mosque dating from 1530, received 85 direct hits from the Serbian big guns." During the 1914–18 world war, the Turks engaged in atrocities against the Armenians, and "Armenian churches, monuments, quarters, and towns were destroyed in the process." The Armenian city of Van "was almost entirely flattened." After the fall of Warsaw in World War II, "of 957 historic monuments . . . , 782 were completely demolished and another 141 were partly destroyed."

Attacks from the air upon cities might have symbolic value, but they have little practical effect.

The historian Max Hastings found that by the end of Operation Gomorrah, the Allied air raids against Hamburg in 1943, "40,385 houses, 275,000 flats, 580 factories, 2,632 shops, 277 schools, 24 hospitals, 58

churches, 83 banks, 12 bridges, 76 public buildings, and a zoo had been obliterated." In Stalin's Russia in the 1930s, where secular iconoclasm ruled, "an estimated 20–30 million painted icons were destroyed—used for fuel, chopping boards, linings for mine workings, and crates for vegetables."

Such numbers do more than just reveal the extent of these cultural atrocities; they point to an essential aspect of their purpose. As Bevan shows, "the link between erasing any physical reminder of a people and its collective memory and the killing of the people themselves is ineluctable." Genocide must be thorough. In Sarajevo, Serbs intended to obliterate the Bosnians' cultural heritage by destroying their national library. The national museum met a similar fate.

Bevan's account of what befell the Polish capital, Warsaw, in World War II makes a similar point. After the Nazi occupation of 1939, which included the mass murder of Polish nobility, clergy, and Jew-

ish intellectuals, among others, Nazi town planners meant to use the city as the site of a German garrison. But the Warsaw Uprising against the Nazis by the Polish underground in 1944 changed German attitudes. Regarding the city as "one of the biggest abscesses on the Eastern Front," Heinrich Himmler set up special forces "to demolish the city street by street" and ordered the death of all inhabitants, declaring that "the brain, the intelligence of this Polish nation, will have been obliterated." In the end, a quarter of a million people died and just a third of Warsaw's buildings remained standing.

Nor did one side hold proprietary rights to wanton destruction in that war. Bevan writes of the British discovery early in 1942 of "burnable towns," densely packed wooden buildings at the heart of the medieval precincts in many German cities. With the consent of Winston Churchill's war cabinet, which after contentious discussion decided that such attacks would demoralize the German people, the Royal Air Force, led by their commander, Arthur "Bomber" Harris, leveled the medieval port city of Lübeck with firebombs. The wooden houses ignited "more like a fire-lighter than a human habitation," the commander recalled. The destruction of Rostock, a city of no strategic value, followed. In just 17 minutes Harris dropped a thousand tons of bombs on Würzburg, a cathedral city without industry or defense. Hitler meanwhile was unleashing violence on Exeter, Bath, Norwich, York, Canterbury, and Coventry, each a three-star Baedeker city with no great industrial capacity. Three years later, in February 1945, when Hitler was near defeat, Harris and the U.S. Army Air Force struck a final and completely unnecessary blow, visiting a firestorm upon Dresden, a cultural center.

Harris himself contended that indiscriminate bombing was essential to winning the war. After all, he wrote later, "a Hun was a Hun." But his bombing had little effect upon Germany's war effort, as the commander chose to avoid oil depots that were heavily defended. The scale of destruction produced qualms on the Allied side. "The moment has come," Churchill wrote after Dresden, to review the policy of bombing German cities



In Afghanistan, Taliban soldiers labored with explosives for 20 days to blast the ancient Bamiyan Buddhas from their cliff-side niches.

“simply for the sake of increasing terror.”

From their own fierce reaction to the bombing of London, the British should have understood that while such attacks from the air upon cities might have symbolic value, they have little practical effect. In what is surely the most famous photograph of wartime London, the unyielding dome of St. Paul's Cathedral rises in stark relief above the smoking ruins of the razed city. Taken during the Blitz of 1940, it appeared in *The Daily Mail* above a caption that read in part, “It symbolises the steadiness of London's stand against the enemy: the firmness of Right against Wrong.” It served to inspire Londoners' determination in their darkest days. Just last summer, Bevan notes, a British tabloid published the picture “once again . . . following terrorist bombings on the London Underground.”

Contemporary terrorists who use the destruction of architecture as a powerful weapon of propaganda do not always travel with Baedeker guidebooks. As Osama Bin Laden and his like-minded followers have shown, modern buildings with little or no significant architectural

merit can make attractive targets because of their symbolic value. The Twin Towers, the critic Paul Goldberger wrote after their destruction, “were gargantuan and banal, blandness blown up to a gigantic size.” Striking at the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, Bevan writes, was intended to send a message to Islamic militants across the world that the time to act had come. Americans and others in the Western world received a different message: Banal as the towers might have been, they had now become “unintentional monuments.”

Such unintentional monuments become intentional ones in their rebuilding, for reconstruction must take into account destruction. Memory must have a place in the new. “History moves forward,” Bevan observes, “while looking over its shoulder.” But how much to commemorate? And how? Such questions become the focus of the final chapters of *The Destruction of Memory*. Amid the rubble, we sometimes see lost opportunities to make buildings an affirmative statement of the human spirit, while at other times we see their power to restore that spirit. Gazi Husrev Beg, the great mosque in Sarajevo, survived the Serbian onslaught only to have its interior

suffer a 1996 whitewashing that obliterated its spectacular decorations; the “restoration” funds came from Saudi sources that demanded that an austere Wahhabi interior replace the richly decorated walls characteristic of Balkan Islamic architecture. As early as 1945, Poles began to reconstruct Warsaw. In producing an exact replica of what had been razed, the builders rescued their old city, but they also created an amnesia about their recent history. In the great crater that was the World Trade Center, those who consider rebuilding an act of resistance are in conflict with those who want to make the site a permanent memorial to the thousands who died on September 11. The tension between creation and memorial is all the

greater because we are so near to the horror of the event.

“All things fall and are built again,” Yeats wrote in “Lapis Lazuli,” “And those that build them again are gay.” The poem suggests that people will go forward and rebuild with undiminished hope despite the ever-growing weight of cultural destruction. But we cannot shrug off the terrible devastation that is so much a part of our contemporary condition. Better to follow the words inscribed on a plaque attached to the ruined wall of Sarajevo’s national library: “Remember and Warn.”

■ Tom Lewis, a professor of English at Skidmore College, is the author of *The Hudson: A History*.

In the Shadow of His Sadness

Reviewed by Ann J. Loftin

I NEVER STUDIED WITH Bernard Malamud (1914–86) at Bennington College, but I remember seeing him at a party on campus in the mid-1970s. He’d brought along a pedometer and was telling everyone within earshot that it didn’t measure what they thought it measured. I remember thinking his clowning unseemly for the renowned author of *The Fixer* and other dark tales of the Jewish and immigrant experience. Reading this memoir by his daughter, I realized that it was also the sort of behavior he rarely displayed at home. Once, she writes, Malamud began telling her a story from his childhood, about stealing some movie tickets: “Quickly embarrassed, he stopped himself midway through the recollection. I was in my thirties.”

Now a therapist practicing in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Janna Malamud Smith remembers a father who guarded a tender nature behind a reserved and formal persona. She describes a psychologically probing mind that drew the line at self-revelation. The survivalist humor that lofted

MY FATHER IS A BOOK:

A Memoir of Bernard Malamud.

By Janna Malamud Smith.
Houghton Mifflin.
304 pp. \$24

otherwise dark stories such as “The Jewbird” and “The Magic Barrel” appeared in life only episodically. No doubt her father’s own reticence colored the essay she wrote for *The New York Times* in 1989, three years after his death, “Where Does a Writer’s Family Draw the Line?,” in which she considered the competing claims of posterity and privacy and came down on the side of privacy.

The book that followed, *Private Matters: In Defense of the Personal Life* (1997), began with Smith’s childhood memories of a family “organized to protect” her father’s need for privacy—tiptoeing past her father’s study, diving for the phone lest it disturb him, keeping voices down so he could work. In life, all bowed to the magnitude of his absence, and for many years after her father’s death it seemed only right to keep him out of sight still. However, as Smith observes in *My Father Is a Book*, “One day I realized that my father’s life had shifted from something overshadowing into something disappearing from view.” And suddenly she felt it urgent to bring him back into the foreground for her consideration—as a father, writer, and fellow human—before letting the biographers and historians take their turn.

Children of celebrated writers have a tricky time of it. As Cynthia Ozick observed, writers are cannibals, devouring family at every meal. Certainly the two Malamud children (Smith and her older brother, Paul) and their mother could not have relished reading the veiled account of their father's affair with a Bennington student, in Malamud's 1979 novel *Dubin's Lives*, any more than Janna Malamud relished her similarities to Dubin's daughter. A memoir about the famous father is the child's chance for payback, therapy, or wishful thinking. Smith seems to have resisted those lures.

But by limiting herself mostly to what her father wished her to know about his life (he left his journals and some letters), Smith cannot avoid a certain Janna-centric perspective. Her brother barely features in the drama. She devotes a chapter to her father's relationship with the Bennington student but declines to interview the woman in question (who, interestingly, became a therapist, like Smith herself). Finally, writing about her father's childhood proved challenging because Malamud hated talking about his childhood. The one time she asked him to reminisce on tape as a record for his grandchildren, he obliged for a few minutes, then stopped and asked her to erase the tape.

Malamud was the elder of two sons born to a poor, Yiddish-speaking couple in Brooklyn. His father, Max, a grocer who worked seven days a week, was a kind but ineffectual man, a first-generation Russian immigrant whose ambitions had been winnowed down to mere survival. His mother suffered from mental illness, probably schizophrenia, and became obese. Bernard came home from school one day, at age 13, to find her on the kitchen floor eating Drano. He rushed to a pharmacist and managed to save her life, but she died a few years later in a mental hospital, possibly as a result of suicide. Malamud's younger brother, Eugene, likely inherited the mother's schizophrenia and also died young in a hospital. So Malamud's was a childhood useful primarily for its motivating sense of dread—what not to become—and for the abiding guilt and shame he would later extend to his fictional characters.

As did many Brooklyn-born writers and intellectuals of his era, Malamud received a first-rate classical education in New York City's public schools, first at P.S. 181, then at Erasmus Hall (built by the 18th-century Dutch to resemble Oxford) and City College. While working and tutoring, he later earned a master's degree from Columbia University, with support from a government loan.

Malamud began recording ideas for short stories in his notebooks at age 21; though ambitious, these earliest writings showed no special promise. Smith observes that her father didn't progress much beyond a derivative literary style until he discovered Freud. Psychoanalytic ideas, she argues, "were part of what permitted him to stop fleeing himself and his life." The revelation that moral codes weren't handed down from on high but originated in psychological conflict allowed Malamud to draw characters from his childhood and to see the struggles of untaught, unsung immigrants as worthy of high literature.

Janna Malamud was born in 1952 in Corvallis, Oregon, as far as could be wished from the immigrant experience. The Malamuds bought a pleasant house within walking distance of Oregon State University, where Malamud had taken his first full-time teaching job. While the disciplined young author worked on his days off to produce his first novel, *The Natural* (1952), followed by *The Assistant* (1957) and the award-winning short-story collection *The Magic Barrel* (1958), Janna savored a privileged American childhood of back yards, Girl Scouts, and rides in the family's pale green Plymouth. From the time she was little, Smith writes, she rested secure in her father's love. She also knew what her father expected in exchange: "I . . . understood early and deeply that he was wary, quickly betrayed, easily hurt. He disliked being challenged, and I protected him instinctively. I felt acutely his massive, silent sadness."

In 1961, to Janna's dismay, her father jumped at the chance to leave the anti-intellectual West for the high air of Bennington College in Vermont. Any fantasies of scenic New England quickly gave way

as Janna discovered what we graduates well know: There's nothing wholesome about Bennington. Though the college gradually lost some of its intellectual luster after the 1960s, it retained its dire sophistication, deadpan promiscuity, and cult-of-personality atmospherics. Janna and her brother struggled to adapt while their parents embraced the new culture and did as the Romans did. Malamud got involved with a student. At some point, Smith tells us, her mother took similar license, though at least her love object was off campus and long past consenting age.

Apart from a two-year visiting professorship at Harvard, Malamud remained on the faculty at Bennington for the rest of his life, clearly finding the atmosphere conducive to work. He published another collection of short stories (*Idiot's First*, 1963), then his third novel, *The Fixer* (1966), based on the true story of a Jew in czarist Russia. It won a National Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize, cementing Malamud's fame. He published four more books—*Pictures of Fidelman* (1969), *The Tenants* (1971), *Dubin's Lives* (1979), and *God's Grace* (1982)—to mixed reviews. Some critics said his argument with God seemed to wither into a seminar once his characters left the urban Jewish milieu of his early works. Others applauded Malamud's willingness to take on larger themes, such as black/white relations in America and man's survival in the nuclear age.

Smith barely discusses her father's later books, but she recalls in great detail a traumatic incident that Malamud wove into the semi-autobiographical *Dubin's Lives*. On Thanksgiving weekend in 1968, she reluctantly consented to drive her father to his office on the Bennington campus. (He didn't drive.) A novice at the wheel, she felt enraged, she remembers, by her father's implicit assumption "that his writing needs trumped all other hands." Just before the college's stone gate, she lost control of the car and crashed full force into a tree. Her injuries were minor, but the impact broke two of her father's fingers and a rib, and an internal head injury took many months to heal. As parent and child staggered from the car, Smith recalls, "[he]

looked at me and finally spoke. 'Where is my manuscript? . . . I need my manuscript.' He somehow opened the back door [and] retrieved his pages."

"I'd nearly killed him," she writes, and in doing so "[I], so particularly trusted and heretofore innocent, had joined the ranks of endangering, near-deadly women." He forgave her, of course, but upon whose shoulders does a near-patricide rest easily? For Smith, no doubt this memoir serves as a form of expiation; her father, in *Dubin's Lives*, simply recast the incident as the fault of his main character and alter ego.

When Janna went off to college the following year, guilt propelled her need for independence. She went so far as to cut the phone line in her dorm room lest her father call. "I found his need for me oppressive, felt angry at his oversize, insistent presence. . . . I had a dreamlike vision of him as a large hot-air balloon, at once lifting the family and consuming all our heat to fire his updraft." Not surprisingly, what Smith remembers most vividly about her father's final two decades—years in which she married, had children, and pursued a career in social work—are the health problems that beset him. Malamud's heart, always his weakest organ, required bypass surgery a week before his 68th birthday, in 1982. He lived another four years, but he never fully recovered his ability to write.

Smith ends her memoir with a letter Malamud wrote to her in college. Tender on the surface, Malamud's words implicitly contrast his daughter's easy passage through life with the hardships of a boyhood he often summarized with the phrase, "I was gypped."

"I miss you," he wrote. "It was a pleasure to have you here most of the summer. At the same time I'm glad you're back at college because I know that's where you want to be. . . . You're one of the happy few who can make their own world." As this memoir makes clear, Smith did make her own world, but not without facing down some of the shame and sadness Malamud imparted to all his creations, as they struggle to break free of the past.

■ Ann J. Loftin is a writer and editor in New York.

Down the Highway to Freedom

Reviewed by David J. Garrow

THE “FREEDOM RIDES” ARE a familiar historical name to many older Americans, but for most people under age 50 the words may stimulate only a vague association with the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Even readers with more extensive

knowledge, as Raymond Arsenault notes at the outset of his excellent new history, may recall the Freedom Rides “as little more than a dramatic prelude to the climactic events of the mid- and late 1960s.”

The Freedom Rides were “largely the story of a single year,” Arsenault writes, involving “a rush of events that took place during the spring and summer of 1961.” The actual concept, however—“the provocative idea of an interracial bus ride through the South” at a time when racially separate seating was mandated in every form of public transit—actually dated back to 1947. That was when Bayard Rustin and George Houser, two young activists in a nascent civil rights organization called the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), came up with a plan to test whether a 1946 U. S. Supreme Court ruling that segregation could not be imposed upon *interstate* travelers was actually being obeyed on southern long-distance buses.

Their resulting venture, the “Journey of Reconciliation,” entailed a small, all-male band of dedicated pacifists taking integrated seats on a bus trip southward through Virginia and North Carolina. The riders sought no publicity whatsoever, and their journey was relatively successful until they were threatened and then arrested in the ostensibly liberal university town of Chapel Hill. They escaped unharmed, but Rustin and two colleagues later were convicted of refusing an order to move to “colored” seating and served three weeks in prison after the North Carolina state courts affirmed the convictions.

Arsenault rightly terms Rustin “the intellectual godfather of the Freedom Rider movement,” and

FREEDOM RIDERS:
1961 and the
Struggle for
Racial Justice.

By Raymond Arsenault.
Oxford Univ. Press.
690 pp. \$32.50

quotes him advocating the necessity of resistance to segregation through “non-violent methods which can be used by the rank-and-file” in 1947, a full eight years before the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott of 1955–56 made that idea famous. (Rustin went on to be a chief architect of the March on Washington in 1963.) Early in 1960, a loosely linked network of black southern college students expanded upon the successful Montgomery protest by mounting a series of lunch counter “sit-ins” that peacefully challenged segregated seating in privately operated public accommodations. A year later a new set of CORE activists, energized by yet another Supreme Court ruling affirming the unconstitutionality of segre-



A Klan-led mob attacked freedom riders in Montgomery, Ala., as local police looked on, leading to the mobilization of the National Guard.

gated bus seating, made plans to repeat the 1947 venture, this time under the new “Freedom Ride” name.

The 1961 riders made their way successfully through Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia before encountering horrific violence in Alabama. One of the two buses on which they were traveling was attacked and burned by a white segregationist mob outside Anniston, and the second busload of travelers was brutalized by Ku Klux Klansmen in Birmingham while city police purposely held back. Those assaults received extensive national press

coverage and forced the new Kennedy administration—President John and his brother, Attorney General Robert—to immediately confront the issue of violent opposition to civil rights activism.

Even before the bloodied CORE riders decided to fly out of Birmingham rather than continue southward by bus, a group of younger activists from Nashville, Tennessee, most of them members of the fledgling Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), resolved to take up the ride and push onward to Montgomery. The Kennedy brothers believed that Alabama authorities would protect the new riders, but that trust was quickly betrayed when a Klan-led mob assailed them, again with police complicity, as they arrived in Montgomery.

The violent crisis quickly worsened when screaming segregationists attacked and tried to enter a black Montgomery church where a mass rally featuring Martin Luther King Jr. was welcoming the riders. Federal agents and National Guardsmen rebuffed the assault, but the young riders' determination to continue on into Mississippi forced the Kennedys to try again to guarantee their safety. This time the administration succeeded, but only at the price of countenancing Mississippi's immediate peaceful arrest of the riders at the Jackson bus station.

Yet the Freedom Rides, in the plural, were just beginning. The Alabama attacks, coupled with the Mississippi arrests, inspired multiple small bands of civil rights supporters from all over the continental United States to head southward too. The first such group featured prominent clergymen from Yale and Wesleyan universities, but subsequent travelers represented a wide range of backgrounds and occupations. CORE and allied civil rights groups provided some coordination and support, yet Mississippi's strategy of arresting and jailing every arriving rider soon threatened to turn the successful protest into a legal and financial nightmare. CORE lacked the funds necessary for such a burgeoning movement, and with state courts convicting rider after rider, "a war of attrition that seemed to favor the defenders of segregation" soon set in.

Arsenault does a superb job of narrating these complex developments and capturing the striking

diversity of the later groups of Freedom Riders. He also rightly emphasizes that while their courage and sacrifice are nowadays universally applauded, aversion to direct action protests at the time was widespread. A 1961 Gallup Poll found that although 66 percent of respondents believed that segregated seating must be ended, only 24 percent supported the rides. Even NBC anchorman David Brinkley declared that the riders were "doing positive harm" and "accomplishing nothing whatsoever."

In fact, the Freedom Rides had two crucial effects. First, under pressure from Robert Kennedy's Justice Department, the Interstate Commerce Commission, which had regulatory power over interstate buses and terminals, ordered an end to racial segregation in all waiting room and lunch counter facilities effective November 1, 1961. Compliance with that mandate was not immediately universal, but Arsenault accurately highlights how the order sent a clear message to southern whites "that desegregation of other institutions was inevitable and even imminent."

Even more important, the rides occasioned "a functional rebirth" of CORE and, particularly, SNCC. Before the rides, SNCC was indeed simply a "coordinating committee" linking student activists across the South. But the experience of being jailed together in Mississippi's infamous Parchman Penitentiary gave the young riders "a new sense of collective purpose and pride." Mississippi's strategy of punishment and repression thus had the ironic effect of sparking "the emergence of a powerful movement culture," which in turn spurred some SNCC members to become full-time civil rights workers who pioneered the local-level community organizing that was essential for subsequent racial change.

From these modest beginnings came the great social and political revolutions that transformed the South. Raymond Arsenault's authoritative, perceptive, and well-written book is as good a work of modern U.S. history as any you will read this year.

■ David J. Garrow, a senior fellow at Homerton College, Cambridge University, is the author of *Bearing the Cross* (1986), a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Martin Luther King Jr.

IN BRIEF

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Women in the Mosque

ASRA NOMANI WANTS AMERICAN Muslim women to be able to enter mosques through the front door—literally. She wants them to be able to pray in the main hall without a barrier dividing them from men and to be permitted to address any member of the congregation. The campaign she describes in this book is a noble one, but it's not clear whether the American Muslim community can be persuaded to embrace it.

Nomani, a 39-year-old former *Wall Street Journal* reporter and unmarried mother, is not the first Muslim woman to seek such equality within an Islamic religious context. Moroccan scholar Fatima Mernissi, American professor Amina Wadud, and others have pushed for women's rights within Islam and have cited the Qur'an itself in defense of those rights. Their efforts have led to some modest successes. Wadud, for example, gained prominence when she led a mixed prayer service in New York last winter.

But such women struggle against enormous and complex cultural forces. In her first memoir, *Tantrika* (2003), Nomani told of coming to terms with the contradictions of being a Muslim born in India and raised in the United States. This second memoir takes up the story as she has a child out of wedlock and struggles against the barriers to full belonging in the religious heritage she feels is her birthright. At one point, she takes her son on a pilgrimage to Mecca and feels a profound identification with the woman Hajar (known in Jewish and Christian tradition as Hagar), who was cast out in the desert and wandered there in search of water for her son Ismail (Ishmael), revered as the ancestor of the Prophet Muhammad.

**STANDING ALONE
IN MECCA:**

An American
Woman's Struggle
for the Soul
of Islam.

By Asra Nomani.
HarperCollins.
320 pp. \$24.95

After returning from hajj, Nomani throws herself into the enormous task of trying to change American Muslim attitudes. In Morgantown, West Virginia, her hometown, she goes with her father to pray at the new mosque, only to hear a firm order from the board president, "Sister, take the back entrance!" "He expected me to take a wooden walkway along the right side of the building to a back door," she writes. "It opened into a back stairwell that led to an isolated balcony considered the 'sisters' section.'"

Most American Muslim men would surely prefer to see their sisters, wives, and mothers enter mosques through the front door, and many view the alternative as a departure from traditional practice, inspired by the rigid Wahhabi ideology—an ideology that is spreading in America as a result of Saudi Arabian funding of mosques and schools. Some progressive Muslim groups have encouraged Nomani in her quest. She writes that the secretary-general of the Islamic Society of North America, perhaps the largest of the mainstream groups, told her hometown mosque that it should back down from its backdoor policy. (It eventually did.) But "progressives" are a difficult group to measure. One can be progressive on social issues while retaining thoroughly traditional positions on religious and ritual matters.

Conservative Muslims, Wahhabi and otherwise, are, not surprisingly, among Nomani's most aggressive critics. (She has attracted a lot of very vocal opposition, especially online.) Some conservative religious scholars may intimidate moderate, flexible Muslims less confident about their knowledge of what the Qur'an requires. In fact, Nomani contends, the Wahhabi school has departed more than most from the original teachings of the Prophet. She describes arguing with one extremely conservative spokesman on his own ground. The man asks Nomani whether she believes a specific hadith (a tradition relating to the sayings or doings of the

Prophet) that states, “A woman’s honor lies in her chastity and her modesty. When she loses this, she is worthless.” If Nomani does not believe this hadith, he insists, then she is not a Muslim. Nomani, recalling that according to tradition, it is wrong to judge a person’s faith based on a single hadith, responds that a question that does not allow for *ijtihad*, or critical thinking, is unacceptable. She thus demonstrates not only that her defense of women’s roles is based on an understanding of Islam but that her religious scholarship is a match for his.

What’s compelling about Nomani’s effort is that it is not about the Westernization of Islam; it’s about competing approaches to Islam. The outcome of that competition will eventually reveal whether Nomani, who stood alone in Mecca, will have more company in America.

—Yasmine Bahrani

The Birth of Religious Inspiration

HALF A CENTURY AGO, THE German existential philosopher Karl Jaspers put forward a sweeping scheme to account for the appearance of so many of the world’s great religions and philosophies between 800 and 200 BC. Buddhism in India, Confucianism in China, Zoroastrianism in Persia, ethical monotheism in ancient Israel, and the Socratic tradition in Greece all arose in what Jaspers dubbed the “Axial Age,” when, he argued, the inheritors of prehistoric societies with tribal and place-bound sacred traditions were driven by anxiety and technological change to develop grander, more universal visions.

Such broad schemes have fallen out of fashion among historians, but a new generation of students in religion, the history of philosophy, and archaeology has eagerly taken up Jaspers’s formulation. Karen Armstrong, the gifted British popularizer of religion and religious history, in this book embraces the idea of the Axial Age, linking it to a vision of reli-

gion she has touched on in many earlier works.

Armstrong seems to have been attracted to the Axial Age idea as a description of the genesis of selflessness, personal and communal responsibility, and compassion—values that she believes survive only in theory in today’s religions. She argues that our society is in danger of recreating the fractious and hostile milieu from which the Axial Age philosophers sprang, partly because of the growth in so many religions of fundamentalism, with its rigid and uninspired interpretations of doctrine.

Armstrong has never shied away from big subjects. In earlier books she has taken on the evolution of the Judeo-Christian God, the holiness of Jerusalem, and the lure of fundamentalism. She returns continually to the importance of universalist religious ideas, those that reach out widely rather than seek to exclude, and the Axial Age is perhaps the only historical concept of antiquity that fits within this broad vision. *The Great Transformation* is, in that respect, the culmination of her worldview.

Unlike Jaspers, whose emphasis was on the origins of philosophies, Armstrong is drawn to what she calls religious geniuses. Finding none in the modern world, she seeks transcendence, she told a recent interviewer, in the “galaxy of spiritual stars in the Axial Age”—whether Socrates, Confucius, or Zoroaster. These geniuses looked around them at a world bereft of true morality, she believes, and they responded to it with the great insights that then spread worldwide.

Armstrong is a remarkable storyteller, folding detailed information from historical, archaeological, and literary sources into her narrative without overwhelming the reader. But her grasp of this vast scholarship is not always reliable, and a knowledgeable reader soon gets the nagging sense that *The Great Transformation* has more an agenda than a premise. On ancient Israel, for example, some of her conjectures fly in the face of current academic consensus. In an otherwise scholarly description of Israelite settlements in the hill country of the Levant in the first millennium BC, she abruptly concludes, seemingly based only on the biblical Book of Judges, that in

THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION:
The Beginning of
Our Religious
Traditions.

By Karen Armstrong.
Knopf, 469 pp. \$30

these apparently peaceful settlements without fortifications “the archaeological record shows that life was violent.” In fact, it shows just the opposite. But Armstrong’s version fits with her thesis that Axial Age spirituality was the product of a violent time in which religion and religious factions caused death and ceaseless struggle.

That vision, while intriguing, is altogether too facile. The Axial Age philosophies emerged from a violent milieu, true; but in almost every case they also came from societies that were becoming less closely knit and more misogynistic, possibly because of changes in technology. Armstrong attempts to draw parallels between Axial Age violence and today’s global inequities and other problems, but the references only highlight what has always been the most serious scholarly criticism of the Axial Age idea—its failure to consider social and economic strains that may have helped push these societies to such dramatic shifts in worldview.

Social justice and compassion did become key elements of Axial philosophies, but Armstrong fails to convince us that these were primarily the products of a spiritual transformation. Couldn’t the moral breakthroughs she attributes to spiritual geniuses have been the early stirrings of an underclass as society became more complex and produced more pressing inequities? A book less driven by Armstrong’s preconceptions might have allowed room to consider the down-to-earth changes that may have played a role in these revolutions of the spirit.

—Sandra Scham

Was He Crazy?

IN 1737, A MAN NAMED ALEX-
ander Cruden published an index
to all substantive words in the
King James Bible. It was 1,200
pages long and took 12 years to
compile. Cruden completed it
with no financial backing and,
unlike the authors of other biblical
concordances, with no one’s help.
And he did so in his spare time,

**ALEXANDER THE
CORRECTOR:**
The Tormented
Genius Whose
*Cruden’s
Concordance*
Unwrote the Bible.

By Julia Keay.
Overlook.
269 pp. \$23.95

when he wasn’t working or being hospitalized for insanity. Cruden’s earlier biographers make much of his insanity. Julia Keay, a writer and broadcaster, thinks they’ve got him wrong. “Such monumental and meticulous scholarship” could not have come from an insane mind, she says, and to prove it, she begins by laying out the few ascertainable facts of Cruden’s life.

Cruden was raised in Aberdeen, Scotland, and wanted to be a minister. But before he could begin religious training, he fell in love with a clergyman’s daughter who turned out to be pregnant by her own brother. She rejected Cruden, who pursued her so persistently that his friends had him locked up as a lunatic. On being released he left town, ending up in London as a “corrector of the press,” or proofreader. There he began working on his concordance: If he couldn’t be a minister, he could at least aid the spread of God’s word. When it was done, he published it himself by selling subscriptions. Concordances had been compiled before, but none was as comprehensive as Cruden’s.

He courted a rich widow, who told him he’d misread her friendliness and rejected him. Another of her suitors had him committed to a madhouse again. While there, Cruden kept a diary in which he referred to himself as “The Prisoner.” When he got out, he published his diary and brought a lawsuit against the madhouse, which he lost. His sister recommitted him when he got into a violent incident after apparently trying to break up a street fight. Again he kept a diary, this time referring to himself as “Alexander the Corrector,” and, upon his release, not only published the diary but tried unsuccessfully to get the government to appoint him the official corrector of the people’s morals. Turned down, he took correction to the streets and meekly asked people to go to church and not to swear.

A second edition of the concordance in 1758 made



Alexander Cruden

him famous and financially secure, and he stopped calling himself the Corrector. He began helping people in need (prisoners, destitute families), did a third edition, moved back to Aberdeen, drew up a will, and died while praying. His only personal bequest was to Christiana Blackwell, the daughter of an Aberdeen clergyman.

The question, then, is how Cruden's scholarship and productivity, and the diligence necessary to "unwrite" the Bible into index form, could have coexisted with insanity. Keay contends that he wasn't insane at all but the victim of a sequence of wrongful committals, all resulting from the first. She tries to fill in the biographical gaps. The first committal to a madhouse, she argues, must have been ordered by the clergyman father of Cruden's first love, to keep the shame

The more Cruden published and sued and argued that he was sane and the object of conspiracy, the crazier he seemed.

of the girl's pregnancy by her brother secret, though Keay has no evidence of who the girl or her father was, or of whether Cruden knew she was pregnant. But

Keay thinks the episode shaped Cruden's life, so she identifies the girl by arguing that Christiana Blackwell's mother, Elizabeth, must also have been Christiana's father's sister. In this version, Cruden's first committal was fraudulent, his second the action of a jealous suitor, and his last that of a malevolent sister. And the more Cruden published and sued and argued that he was sane and the object of conspiracy, the crazier he seemed.

The story is plausible—psychiatric treatment was still in the age of leeches and bleeding, and committals and releases must have been frequently arbitrary. But it has too much unsupported guesswork, too many imagined motives and unlikely villains. Couldn't Cruden have been as insane as everyone said he was, but with an insanity that came and went—a condition that psychiatrists might recognize and diagnose today? Keay argues her version of Cruden's story intensely, but she doesn't claim certainty. Making up stories based on the little you know about other people is one of life's pleasures. This book is fun in the same way,

and so well written that the pages turn themselves. And whether or not Cruden was insane, his concordance has gone through some 60 editions and, 250 years later, is still in print.

—Ann Finkbeiner

HISTORY

Weapons of Fear

LIKE MANY OTHER JOURNALISTS, I covered the 2003 Iraq war with my gas mask close to hand. Fumbling it onto my face while dashing down to some Kuwaiti basement, or bundling it into a pillow to snatch some sleep inside Iraq, I came to see it as a constant part of life. But more than that, it was a talisman against the creeping fear of a most dreadful kind of war. The fear had to be taken seriously because Iraq had, in fact, used chemical weapons and nerve gas before—on its own Kurds at Halabja in March 1988, and against Iranian troops on the Al Faw peninsula the following month.

For all its psychological comfort, the gas mask would not have afforded much protection. Saddam Hussein favored the odorless sarin, a lethal nerve gas that had been developed by the IG Farben group in Nazi Germany. Like other classic nerve agents, sarin can be absorbed through the skin, causing convulsions, paralysis, and other symptoms, so for serious protection a full-scale protective suit of activated charcoal with sealed cuffs is required. This book begins with a chilling description of young recruits at the U.S. Army Chemical School in Missouri training in these "MOP suits," exposed to sarin and to a series called the V-agents, produced jointly by the British, Canadians, and Americans during the Cold War.

There remains a powerful taboo against the use of chemical weapons. Just as the Cold War was defined in one sense by the determination on both sides not to use nuclear weapons, our current war on terrorism will be shaped in large measure by

WAR OF NERVES:
Chemical Warfare
From World War I
to Al Qaeda.

By Jonathan B. Tucker.
Pantheon. 479 pp. \$30



In 2003, these U.S. Marines underwent chemical weapons training in Kuwait prior to the launching of the military strike against Iraq.

whether terrorists “graduate” from conventional explosives to the use of chemical and nerve agents. They are not, by comparison with nuclear weapons, all that difficult to produce, and their psychological effect can be devastating.

Jonathan Tucker, a specialist in chemical and biological weapons formerly with the U.S. government and more recently at the Monterey Institute, has produced a serious history of these weapons for the general reader. His title is something of a misnomer: There is relatively little about World War I. But he does note that by that war’s end about 10 percent of U.S. Army shells were chemical. This underestimates the significance they had taken on. By the late summer of 1918, the British were routing the German field army with barrages that used as many gas shells as high explosives, and, as minister of munitions, Winston Churchill had begun to triple gas output for the expected campaigns of 1919.

One of the victims of British gas, Tucker writes, was the young Adolf Hitler, who understandably developed an awed respect for the weapon. While

Hitler strongly supported the development of vast stocks of chemical weapons and nerve agents in World War II, he refrained from their use for fear of Allied retaliation. He was probably right to do so. The budget of the U.S. Army Chemical Warfare Service rose from \$2 million in 1940 to more than \$1 billion in 1942, and large stocks of mustard and phosgene gas were readied for use if Hitler ignored the clear warnings of massive retaliation from President Franklin Roosevelt.

Tucker’s excellent account shows how Allied intelligence failed to discover the extent of the German program and above all missed its technological breakthrough into nerve agents. Even when British Army intelligence sent back from North Africa a detailed report of the interrogation of a German officer with personal knowledge of the program, British officials took no action, although they were developing their own (inferior) agent, called DFP. After the Third Reich fell, the discovery of its chemical programs, and the realization that the Soviet Army had captured almost intact the Nazi nerve gas production center at Dyhernfurth (in what became East Germany), launched a chemical arms race that lasted throughout

the Cold War. Although some Soviet-produced chemical weapons were used by Egyptian forces in Yemen in the 1960s, the taboo against them broadly held—until the Iraqis broke it in 1988.

The taboo has now been largely reinstated by diplomacy and treaty, and even Saddam never actually used gas in the 2003 Iraq war, maybe because of the impact of international inspections in destroying Iraqi chemical warfare stocks and production facilities. But Tucker's study of the spasmodic progress of international conventions and the painfully slow destruction of the vast Cold War stocks in Russia and the United States does not make comforting reading. Perhaps that is why, like others who spent time in Iraq, I have not thrown away my gas mask.

—*Martin Walker*

The People's Voice

THERE IS A TIDE IN THE AFFAIRS of politicians, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925) caught the tide in 1896 in the Chicago Coliseum, where the Democratic Party was in session to nominate its presidential candidate. Bryan was there as a 36-year-old Nebraska delegate. His career to that point, as Michael Kazin describes it in a new biography, had been interesting but not extraordinary. Bryan had been elected to the House of Representatives twice but defeated in a run for the Senate. Neither he nor the other delegates believed that he would leave the convention as the Democratic Party's nominee for the presidency.

Then it happened. The convention platform speakers were repeating themselves. The delegates were restless and bored. A journalist friend sitting nearby handed Bryan this note: "You have now the opportunity of your life. Make a big, broad, patriotic speech that will leave no taste of sectionalism in the mouth." Bryan scribbled a reply: "You will not be disappointed. . . . I will speak the sentiment of my heart and I think you will be satisfied."

In fact, Bryan stunned the delegates. His "Cross of

Gold" speech was a historic event, a ringing populist attack on the gold standard that was "crucifying" America's small farmers and laborers. Bryan owned one of the great political voices of all time: It rolled out to every corner of the hall with no need of artificial amplification. The words he spoke that day became a sort of cassette that he would play and replay hundreds of times all across the land, at good rates and before sellout crowds. Although he lost the election, he was forevermore the spokesman for a large and passionate constituency.

Kazin, a professor of history at Georgetown University and the author of a history of American populism, wishes to reclaim Bryan as a "godly" spokesman for a vanished combination of muscular economic populism and conspicuous Christian virtue. Bryan is remembered mostly for his disastrous role in the Scopes trial of 1925, but in the reform era of the 1890s to the 1920s, Kazin argues, only Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson had a greater impact on politics and political culture. Bryan championed the small farmers and wage earners and preached democracy, piety, and a belief in absolute moral values (though some of those "values," notably on race, were repellent). Politically, he combined the

A GODLY HERO:
The Life of William
Jennings Bryan.

By Michael Kazin.
Knopf. 374 pp. \$30



William Jennings Bryan's electrifying "Cross of Gold" speech at the 1896 Democratic convention propelled him to the nomination.

appeal of Thomas Jefferson and the Bible, an unbeatable formula.

But of course it wasn't. The Democratic Party nominated Bryan for president twice more, in 1900 and in 1908, and twice more he lost. In 1912, Bryan saw in Woodrow Wilson a man of high religious purpose and gave Wilson his support at the Democratic convention. Wilson acknowledged Bryan's crucial help by naming him secretary of state, but Bryan resigned in 1915 over what he considered Wilson's overly aggressive handling of the sinking of the *Lusitania* by German torpedoes. Kazin says Bryan was quite happy to exchange the only powerful office he had ever held for a return to the lecture halls. He could add to his résumé that he was the man who had resigned from high office rather than compromise his principles.

Bryan contributed to many accomplishments now seen as progressive: He helped bring about the election of senators by popular vote and the establishment of a graduated income tax; he spoke for women's rights and labor's right to organize. Then he made the mistake of getting involved in the Scopes trial. He accepted an invitation to be called as a witness for the prosecution and to opine that every word of the Bible was factual. Clarence Darrow cross-examined him, and H. L. Mencken made fun of him, and he died shortly after the trial concluded.

Popular history, says Kazin, has unfairly embalmed Bryan in that trial. Kazin's effort to revive him and his reputation is only partly successful, but it tells a rollicking story and brings back the resonant echoes of a glorious political voice.

—Jacob A. Stein

Italy's Fascist Mirage

SOMEWHERE AMONG THE family memorabilia there should be a 1939 photograph of me on a visit to Italy with my parents. I'm posing with members of the Italian Fascist youth movement outside Rome's Termini Station, watching a parade to welcome an

MUSSOLINI'S ITALY:
Life Under the
Fascist Dictatorship,
1915–1945.

By R. J. B. Bosworth.
Penguin Press.
692 pp. \$35

arriving foreign dignitary (it could have been Hitler). Behind the group is a row of tanks, but even in the picture it's obvious that they are wooden replicas, no more menacing than carnival floats. From the distant station entrance, however, they would have looked impressively like the real thing.

As R. J. B. Bosworth makes plain in his massively researched study, this was Italian Fascism, a regime that slips and slides. Like the elusive image of a distant hill town shimmering in the heat of the Italian sun, it presents itself as a blend of characteristics—rhetoric, make-believe, feverish bursts of action, and violence. The challenge for the historian is to identify the fault lines between reality and the version that party ideologues said was reality, labeling it “the Italian truth,” which had to be accepted by every good citizen.

Bosworth, who has also written a prize-winning biography of Benito Mussolini, has produced what amounts to a collective biography of the Italians, spanning the 30-odd years of Fascist power. His finely detailed account (there are 88 pages of chapter notes) interweaves the experiences of ordinary Italians, foreigners living in Italy, Fascist party bosses, Mussolini's son-in-law Galeazzo Ciano, and, of course, Il Duce himself.

Ultimately, the book is about national self-delusion, culminating in the biggest delusion of all, one that led Italy disastrously into a world war for which it was neither militarily nor mentally prepared. (To illustrate its unprepared state, Bosworth points out that to go to war, Italy needed 150,000 tons of copper, but the nation produced only 1,000 annually.) In civil war-weary Spain, Francisco Franco, a much less charismatic and arguably nastier brand of Fascist, had a good excuse to resist German pressure to join the Axis, and he used it, ending up the darling of the United States. Mussolini's legacy, on the other hand, was a devastated country facing a long, painful road to recovery.

Fascist Italy was an empire of words. Yet one of its failures, as Bosworth points out, is that its rhetoric was

Italian Fascism blended
rhetoric, make-believe,
feverish bursts of action,
and violence.

ambivalent, and the regime never succeeded in clearly defining itself. Other failures were legion: “The [work] absences, the cynicism, the corruption, and the incompetence outweighed the rest in building a legacy for those Italians who survived into the new Republic in 1946. Every one of the great slogans of Fascism turned out to be false.”

And yet in contemporary Italy, the neo-Fascist group now known as the Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance), supposedly reconstructed along democratic lines, was politically respectable enough to occupy the right flank of Silvio Berlusconi’s right-of-center coalition. It attained this respectability without ever having explicitly rejected Mussolini’s misdeeds. Il Duce’s granddaughter is a parliamentarian. Is all forgiven? No—just swept under the carpet. Hence, Bosworth. The nation that turns its back on its past has its history written by foreigners.

—Roland Flamini

ARTS & LETTERS

An African Adulthood

WOLE SOYINKA, WHO IN 1986 became Africa’s first recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, has long been one of the continent’s most imaginative writers. He also embodies the effort by its native cultures to reclaim their identities after colonialism by a return to the rhythms of native ritual. It’s a complicated task, as Soyinka illustrates repeatedly in this third installment of his memoirs.

The tale of his first professional homecoming is typical. After early studies at the elite Government College in Ibadan, in western Nigeria, near his birthplace, Soyinka had gone to England to earn a degree in drama from the University of Leeds. He then worked a few years at London’s Royal Court Theatre before returning to Nigeria with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. He had also won a competition to produce a play as part of the new nation’s independence day celebrations on October 1, 1960. *A Dance of the Forests* presented Africa’s

YOU MUST SET FORTH AT DAWN: A Memoir.

By Wole Soyinka.
Random House.
528 pp. \$26.95



Nigerian author and playwright Wole Soyinka continues to lend his support to causes, such as this Lagos protest against fuel prices last year.

“recurrent cycle of stupidities” through a complex use of Yoruba traditions combined with European modernism. Nigeria’s new rulers, recognizing themselves in the drama’s depiction of corruption and abuse of power, branded it subversive on the basis of rehearsals and canceled the performance. Pan-Africanists meanwhile attacked the play’s embrace of Western dramaturgical devices.

Despite this initial setback, Soyinka persevered in his pursuit of an Africa where traditional cultures freely assimilate those elements of modernity consistent with their own proud identities. This vision draws on the writer’s own fruitful encounters between a rich African heritage and the “greats” of the Western literary and modernist canon. Soyinka’s first memoir, *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981), told how these two influences mingled from the beginning. Born in 1934, Soyinka grew up at the Anglican mission of Aké, where his father was headmaster of the primary school and his mother, nicknamed “Wild Christian,” was a social worker. Though raised in an English-speaking and Christian environment, Soyinka regularly visited his father’s ancestral home in Ìsarà and nourished an affinity for the mythic, ritual, and cultural world of the Yoruba, where sorcerers, spirits, and gods were living realities.

A second memoir followed, in 1994, describing his early pro-democracy activities (*Ibadan: The Penkele Years—A Memoir, 1946–1965*) and the difficulties they caused him. Soyinka’s appeal for peace during the 1967 Biafran conflict led to his arrest and two years’ imprisonment, most of it spent in solitary

confinement. The exile that followed was the start of a period of extraordinary literary productivity as well as political activism. That period, the subject of the current memoir, brought Soyinka into contact, and eventual conflict, with Nigeria's increasingly corrupt and abusive regimes, culminating in repeated bitter exiles, emotional returns, and his own sentencing to death in absentia by the brutal General Sani Abacha. (The memoir's title evokes Soyinka's repeated flights from repressive regimes; his preferred ploy was to pretend to head off into the bush to hunt.) In 1995, Abacha executed Soyinka's fellow playwright Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other human rights activists.

In his 1986 Nobel Lecture, Soyinka shattered taboos by reminding his audience that many of the most revered names of the European Enlightenment—including Locke, Montesquieu, Hume, and Voltaire—were “unabashed theorists of racial superiority and denigrators of the African history and being.” However, he quickly reassured his listeners that his purpose was “not really to indict the past, but to summon it to the attention of a suicidal, anachronistic present.” This new memoir is not an easy read, but it is a profoundly rewarding one. Soyinka weaves the adventures of his adult life into a rich, dramatic narrative that is evocative of African storytelling by word of mouth. Perhaps he intends the complex tapestry of *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* to be understood in the same light: as the synthesis of a wealth of ancient myths and traditions with the best of humanism and modernity, addressing the drama that is not only the author's life but Africa's contemporary reality.

—J. Peter Pham

Unhappy Endings

IT'S COMMON TO THINK OF the late works of creative geniuses as mature, luminous, settled, like Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or Rembrandt's last canvases. Edward Said (1935–2003), the literary critic and Middle East polemicist, had a different and darker vision. For some great artists, he believed, old age brings works of art that feel not serene but

belated, “untimely,” at odds with the world around them and full of “intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradictions.” He quotes the German critic Theodor Adorno: “In the history of art late works are the catastrophes.”

The idea makes intuitive sense—why shouldn't artists, like other mortals, have their certainties thrown into confusion by the approach of death? Even the greatest creative spirits may feel rebellious, or simply detached from a changing world, as they age. Said sees these emotions in Euripides's *The Bacchae*, in the late works of Ludwig van Beethoven and Richard Strauss, in Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard* (1958), and in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912).

The meaning of lateness seems to shift from chapter to chapter of this book—with some excuse, since Said died before finishing it, and his wife, along with friend and colleague Michael Wood, assembled the book from lectures, articles, and seminar notes. And the readings can be idiosyncratic.

Beethoven's late *Missa Solemnis* and *Hammerklavier Sonata*, for instance, express for Said the quality of lateness because of their technical difficulty and their “disjointed, even distracted sense of internal continuity.” With Strauss, it's just the opposite: The works are ambrosial, and highly popular, but “late” because they flee the world around them to hide in the anachronistic harmonies of the 18th century.

Sometimes the shifting meanings make the idea richer. Said contends that Mann's *Death in Venice* contains qualities of lateness—the loss of previous certainties, the clash of opposites without resolution—even though it was written early in Mann's career. Those qualities emerge more plainly, he writes, in Benjamin Britten's late opera version of the story (1974). He even argues that all of literary modernism has some of this “late” quality, turning to primitive beginnings and strange forms as a way for artists to flee a sense of having lived past the logical end of the history of art. At times, the concept seems stretched to the breaking point. But the attractiveness of the central insight

Even the greatest creative spirits may feel rebellious, or simply detached from a changing world, as they age.

ON LATE STYLE:
Music and Literature
Against the Grain.

By Edward W. Said.
Pantheon. 208 pp. \$25

inclines the reader to forgive inconsistencies. The same was true of Said's reputation-making *Orientalism* (1978).

Armchair analysts will have no trouble linking the themes of this book to Said's own life. Though he made his name as a literary critic and was tenured at Columbia University, Said was best known for his fierce Palestinian nationalism and for views that, in his later years, seemed overtaken by and frequently at odds with the politics of the actual Palestinian Authority (which at one point banned his books). In 1999, *Commentary* magazine, a longtime critic of Said, published a blistering compilation of evidence that he had misrepresented major facts about his childhood—accusations Said never convincingly refuted and seemed tacitly to confirm in his own memoir *Out of Place*, published later that year. But if those last years made him seek reflections of his own troubled emotions in literature, art, and music, his critic's eye remained original and compelling. Not all lives end in philosophical harmony, and the approach of death undoes the sense that there is still time for everything to turn out right.

—Amy E. Schwartz

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Law and Order in Cyberspace

WHEN THE INTERNET BEGAN to reveal its promise in the mid-1990s, utopian rhetoric was the order of the day. At the 1996 World Economic Forum, in Davos, Switzerland, John Perry Barlow, a Grateful Dead songwriter and cofounder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, an Internet civil liberties group, issued a "Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace" to governments. It read in part, "I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. You have no moral right to rule us nor do you possess any methods of enforcement we have

true reason to fear. . . . Cyberspace does not lie within your borders."

That cyberspace has not ended up independent of national sovereignty is apparent to all of us. Consumer fraud occurs but is prosecuted by attorneys general; obscenity, though available, is generally illegal; and businesses make contracts online that sometimes are broken and get adjudicated by the same courts that enforce offline contracts. In the face of this inexorable civilization (Barlow called it colonization) of cyberspace, Jack Goldsmith and Tim Wu, professors at Columbia and Harvard law schools respectively, seek to convince us that despite the hopes of the early digerati, or Internet enthusiasts, the medium's users have properly recognized its subservience to national law. The authors argue that the very openness of the unregulated space that is the Internet demands borders and national laws, in contrast to the independence sought by Barlow (for whom I worked at the Electronic Frontier Foundation from 1991 to 1994).

Consider what happened when the French government tried to stop Yahoo from offering Nazi memorabilia for sale. Sale of such material is legal in the United States, where Yahoo is based, but illegal in France, where Yahoo does some business. French courts claimed authority to enforce their law. U.S. courts considered whether such control over a U.S. company infringes upon American sovereignty or violates the First Amendment. But in 2000, the French courts prevailed: Yahoo now blocks access to such sales from French websites.

Similar conflicts abound. In libel law, the United States favors free expression, while other countries offer more protection to those harmed by sloppy reporting. Pornography is subject to controls in the United States but not in Europe; hate speech is outlawed in Europe but not in the United States. The authors cite these differences as evidence that we will have to accept national sovereignty, even where it may make us uncomfortable.

No argument there. Yet Goldsmith and Wu are so busy correcting the romantic technological determinism of the digerati that they fall into a sort of legalistic

WHO CONTROLS THE INTERNET?

Illusions of a Borderless World.

By Jack Goldsmith and Tim Wu.
Oxford Univ. Press.
272 pp. \$28

determinism. Having established that nations *should* have some role on the Internet, and that borders do have some value, they swing us alarmingly from the anarchy of Barlow's cyberspace to a realpolitik that places national sovereignty above all other moral and political values. After a vividly documented chapter on the challenges that Chinese censorship and political repression pose to the Internet, our law professors tell us that on the bordered Internet "there is no legitimate basis for giving any single law a kind of global constitutional status." So the Chinese laws must be given effect online along with all other national laws. Are Goldsmith and Wu so convinced of the legitimacy of state power that they are prepared to toss out international norms of human rights?

As the international community (governments as well as leading companies such as Google, Microsoft, and Yahoo) wrestles with the response to Chinese demands for censorship of political speech, what theory we adopt about the relationship between the Web and national law is far more than just a theoretical matter. The authors present us with a false dilemma in opposing to Barlow's utopian anarchy a state-dominated, bordered Internet. It would be worse than ironic if the spread of a speech-enhancing medium caused us to turn our collective back on the centuries-old project of expanding the right of individual expression.

—Daniel J. Weitzner

The Private Lives of Eugenicians

IS ANYTHING STILL A SECRET about America's regrettable flirtation with eugenics in the early 20th century? In this new history, Harry Bruinius, a professor of journalism at Hunter College in New York, tackles the troubling story of the effort to sterilize Americans deemed to be of poor stock. He is far from the first to tell it: Many authors, most notably Daniel Kevles in his book *In*

the Name of Eugenics (1985), have ably charted the lengths to which American eugenicists were able to go. Nor did the movement's main proponents try to hide what they were doing. They lobbied state legislatures to get laws enacted that would allow for the medical sterilization of men and women who threatened to dilute the American gene pool.

Bruinius's is a "secret" history in the sense that it concentrates on mostly unknown aspects of key eugenicists' private lives. He offers detailed personal portraits of figures such as Charles Davenport, who introduced eugenics to the United States, and Harry Laughlin, a Davenport protégé who headed a large-scale project to identify "unfit" families throughout the country. The tone of these profiles is odd, gossipy, and almost malicious. Davenport's daughter Millia married a Jew (Jews were considered poor stock by Davenport) and never had children; Laughlin had seizures, one of the conditions for which he and his colleagues advocated sterilizing others.

The author uses the lives and work of these men as a window through which to view our contemporary debate over genetic enhancement. He argues that eugenics and genetic tinkering have a particular appeal because conceptually they mesh with aspects of the American dream. It's a provocative, if not highly original, claim. But Bruinius weakens his comparison of the past with the present by focusing on the personalities involved in eugenics, rather than on the social milieu in which their ideas took hold—a milieu marked by the new supremacy of science, a rising tide of immigration, and changing sexual mores.

He has greater success in his highly sympathetic portrayals of those personally affected by sterilization. The book starts with an excellent description of the notorious 1927 case *Buck v. Bell*, in which the Supreme Court ruled 8–1 that involuntary sterilization was constitutional. Bruinius delves deep into the lives of plaintiff Carrie Buck and her relatives, suggesting that Buck's foster parents disowned her when she announced her pregnancy in part to protect a nephew of their own, whom she charged with paternity. Buck's trial, Bruinius shows, was a sham,

BETTER FOR ALL THE WORLD:
The Secret History of Forced Sterilization and America's Quest for Racial Purity.

By Harry Bruinius.
Knopf. 401 pp. \$30.

with the chief evidence of her feeble-mindedness coming from schoolteachers who had taught not her but her relatives.

He puts an even more personal face on sterilization with an extended visit to Lucille, a 78-year-old Colorado woman who, declared legally insane after a troubled childhood, had been sterilized with her parents' consent. The loss of her reproductive capacity haunted her for half a century, further complicating the depression and other mental troubles that compromised her life. In a painstaking picture of this desolate soul, Bruinius tells us that Lucille, who refused to discuss the subject of children with him, spends her final days in a nursing home watching *Perry Mason* reruns.

The portrayal of these two women may be Bruinius's chief contribution to the history of eugenics. By showing that real people's lives were changed irrevocably by the movement, he provides, by implication, a persuasive argument against forging ahead with efforts to genetically enhance the next generation. Promises of collective benefit to all humankind are all very well, but they don't mean much if individuals are left worse off than they began.

—Shari Rudavsky

The Cosmic Computer

SOME 14 BILLION YEARS ago, just after the Big Bang, the universe was a strange but fundamentally simple place, a hot dense blob of stuff teeming with elementary particles. So how did we get from there to here? How did that mostly featureless goo evolve into the universe we find today, with its galaxies and stars, planets and rocks, oceans and weather, bacteria, beetles, and, of course, our own estimable selves?

Seth Lloyd, a professor of mechanical engineering at MIT, would like us to think he has the answer, or at least the beginnings of one. Lloyd does not build bridges or design power stations. His interest is in computing, specifically the novel discipline of

quantum computing. A conventional computer operates on classical bits—the familiar ones and zeroes of binary arithmetic. The “qubits” of a quantum computer, by contrast, can exist in several states at once—superpositions, to use the official word—that resolve into particular outcomes only when some suitable measurement is made. What this means in principle, as Lloyd explains, is that a quantum computer—if it can ever be made to work—is just the thing for doing massively parallel calculations, where you want to perform the same operations on lots of data at once.

Lloyd's cosmic ambitions hinge on two points. First, in a precise sense, the whole universe *is* a quantum computer. That is, it's a physical system running according to the rules of quantum mechanics and generating an observable outcome. Second, the complexity of the universe today, as contrasted with its simpler origins, can be thought of as an increase in information content. You need more data to describe a motley collection of stars and planets and animals than you do to describe a uniform blob of hot particles.

Connecting these two points is the marvelous fact that a quantum computer can actually generate information. Because quantum events are only partially predictable, and can lead to a range of possible outcomes, a quantum system can grow in information content as it evolves. By thinking in these terms, Lloyd asserts, we can get a handle on how the universe came into its present state.

Lloyd's writing is engaging but not always easy. Following his explanations is sometimes like trying to solve horrible chess problems in one's head. Still, the general idea comes across.

Yet I read this book with mounting skepticism. Is Lloyd offering an explanation of the universe, or merely a new description? In the 19th century, at the peak of the industrial age, it was commonplace to regard the world as a giant machine. Now, in the information age, the universe has apparently become a giant computer. Lloyd's argument is that describing the universe in terms of quantum computations provides a new way to tackle pressing theoretical problems in physics.

**PROGRAMMING
THE UNIVERSE:**
A Quantum
Computer Scientist
Takes On
the Cosmos.

By Seth Lloyd.
Knopf. 221 pp. \$25.95

But a chicken-and-egg question arises: Can the informational approach lead to new physics, or do we need to understand the physics in order to work out the evolution of information? On this crucial point, Lloyd's eager presentation falls short. It's nice to know, in a broad sense, that the growing complexity of our cosmic habitat does not contravene any basic laws. But what we really want to know, surely, is not just how any old complex universe came into being, but how this particular universe and our cozy planet, with its odd collection of life forms, came to pass.

—David Lindley

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

Iran's Authentic Voices

FOR SHIA MUSLIMS IN IRAN who oppose the theocratic repression of the last 25 years, one of the holiest statements ever uttered was that of Hossein, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, when

WE ARE IRAN:
The Persian Blogs.

*Edited and translated
by Nasrin Alavi.*
Soft Skull Press.
336 pp. \$15.95

he refused to submit to the corrupt Islamic tyrant Yazid in AD 680. "The most honorable jihad," he declared, "is a just word spoken to an unjust ruler."

It's probably coincidence, but Hossein is also the name of the journalist who taught Iran to blog. In 2001, a recent immigrant to Canada named Hossein Derakhshan was moved by the attacks of 9/11 to launch a weblog in Farsi. Then, writes Nasrin Alavi, the editor of this remarkable book, Derakhshan "created a simple how-to-blog guide in Farsi. With the modest aim of giving other Iranians a voice, he set free an entire community." By 2004, the number of Persian-language blogs was 64,000 and counting.

Published by the Brooklyn-based Soft Skull Press, the publishing equivalent of an alternative record label, this is a new kind of book: half guidebook to contemporary Iran, half greatest hits from a remarkable flowering of free speech in a country described by Reporters Sans Frontières as "the biggest prison for journalists in the Middle East." Alavi (the pseudonym of an Iranian writer and academic who now lives in the United Kingdom) innovates with exceptional clarity and taste. Banish all thought of blogging as self-indulgent verbiage. Her selections range from the boldly polemic to the beautifully poetic. Here are some examples:

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"You say Father can get a second wife; but we don't ever want the familiar scent of our mums' beds to change. . . . You say Father is allowed to give Mum a beating once in a while; well, when we grow up we'll show you who needs a beating. . . . When you say I am valued twice as much as my sister, you're essentially asking all of us men to be unchivalrous and we don't like it." —*Antidepressant*

About a foreign reporter who condescended to a group of Iranian women: "May she rest in peace! My grandmother could shoot an apple in half while galloping on horseback. Yet after all these years they think it's amazing that we drive cars!" —*Barhar-Goler*

It's good to travel in a foreign country. It's better to do so with a savvy guide.

By October 2004, several Iranian Internet journalists and bloggers were being held in undisclosed locations awaiting trial.

Best of all is to do so with a guide who is not only well informed but also well connected, so you can meet a lot of different people. Books help, but they cannot provide the

feeling of meeting people directly. This book can. It elicits something of the same complex emotional response as a prolonged period of face-to-face contact. After you read it, you'll start e-mailing the people who open their hearts to you in its pages.

And you'll be distressed whenever an e-mail bounces back. In April 2003, the regime began doing to bloggers what it was already doing to print and broadcast journalists. By October 2004, writes Alavi, "several Internet journalists and bloggers were [being] held in undisclosed locations awaiting trial," and new laws were being decreed against such "cybercrimes" as "disturbing the public mind." The election of a hardline president in July 2005 could mean further tightening.

These efforts make blogging more difficult and dangerous, but they are unlikely to succeed completely, any more than the Soviet Union's efforts to silence its poets succeeded. Human voices have a way of refusing to be silenced altogether—perhaps because, as the Persian poet Rumi once wrote, "the wine God loves is human honesty."

—*Martha Bayles*

The Lives Beside Us

A DISHWASHER AT THE DELI

where I worked during graduate school once asked me out for coffee. He'd heard I was a writer interested in life stories, and he wanted to meet me every week and tell his, starting with the day he was born. Hearing his whole story was the only way anyone could really understand him, he said. No one ever had.

The author of *Orange County Housecleaners*, anthropologist Frank Cancian, a professor emeritus at the University of California, Irvine, offered seven housecleaners, all women, the opportunity to tell their stories. The result is a collection of intimate confessions from strangers who might otherwise sit silently next to us on a bus. Cancian recorded the subjects as they recounted their histories; then he edited the transcripts and added the women's family photographs and pictures he took himself.

These are tales of marital squabbles, family births and deaths, illegal border crossings, religious faith, personal triumphs and shortcomings. "I have to go way back for you to understand . . . where I am today," says Tina Parker, who started cleaning houses at the age of 12, shortly after her Jehovah's Witness mother,

**ORANGE COUNTY
HOUSECLEANERS.**

By Frank Cancian.
Univ. of New Mexico
Press. 116 pp. \$22.95



When Leidi Mejia became pregnant with her daughter Monica, the father abandoned her. The living room walls of their Orange County home are decorated with Monica's tae kwon do and school awards.

believing that the world would end before her daughter could use an education, withdrew her from school. We want to nudge the tellers and ask, "And then what happened?" for they frequently digress, or are reticent about the parts of their lives that remain tender to the touch. Says Leidi Mejia, in a brief and rueful account of her relationship with the father of her second daughter, "When I realized I was pregnant . . . he began to want to go to parties and he didn't take me. I started to lose my figure. And because this bothered him that I was losing my figure, he left my house."

Five of the seven women Cancian interviewed are Latina immigrants who left their families to forge a better life for themselves in the United States. None seems ashamed of the work she does, though some are tired of it, and more than one has tried her hand at other work. Esperanza Mejia, Leidi's sister, trained to become a medical assistant but dropped her plan when her mother died after an American doctor said she was faking her illness. "I told my sister, 'I don't want to work for stupid doctors who could have helped Mother and didn't do it.'"

Perhaps the most surprising thing about *Orange County Housecleaners* is how little the subjects talk

about their work. (You'll read little that echoes Barbara Ehrenreich's acerbic social commentary in *Nickel and Dimed*, her 2001 account of trying to make ends meet with earnings from low-wage jobs.) These women have developed long-standing relationships with many of their clients. They speak highly of their employers, and only obliquely of humiliations or bad treatment. Men and dreams come and go, but dirty houses in Newport Beach remain, providing them with work that offers a measure of freedom and more earning power than most other available jobs.

What the speakers convey is a sense not of the labor that fills their days but of their children's accomplishments and teenage rebellions, of their own new loves and old hurts. Cancian clearly earned the trust of these women, and it's a pity he confined his formal interviews to roughly an hour, for some stories feel as though they've only just gotten under way. But a whole life is as difficult a burden to bear as it is to unload, which is why I told the dishwasher no when he asked to share his story with me. Cancian goes a shorter distance with his subjects, but it's a journey well worth taking.

—Sarah L. Courteau

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PORTRAIT



*Peter Benchley in front of a
painting by Richard Ellis, 1974
By Henry Grossman*

Shark Shift

When Peter Benchley (1940–2006) spawned *Jaws* in the early 1970s, little was known about sharks. In the absence of scientific knowledge, Benchley—a Harvard English major and former presidential speechwriter—drew on his imagination and memories of summers in Nantucket. His tale of a man-eating great white that trolls the waters off a resort town was published in 1974 and hit the big screen the following summer. *Jaws* became America's first blockbuster movie—and made sharks its most popular menace. Inadvertently, Benchley later wrote, he had tapped “a profound, subconscious, atavistic fear in the public.” He also cemented sharks’ reputation as grudge-bearing, human-hunting, boat-bashing killers—misconceptions since refuted by research. Humans drastically reduced shark populations in the post-*Jaws* years, and Benchley, surveying the damage, devoted himself to ocean conservation. His book was fiction, he insisted, and ought to be read that way, but still he declared, “If I were to try to write *Jaws* today, I couldn’t do it.”



Guest speakers include . . .



Sam Donaldson
Award-winning
television journalist,
ABC News



Martin Walker
Editor, *United Press*
International, and noted
author *America Reborn*
and other books



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