

houses lack yesteryear's basements and—thanks to the shift from rafter roof framing to trusses—attics. Americans frequent entire stores devoted to organizing their stuff, but the clutter is beyond what even the best-organized closet can hold.

Unfortunately for self-storage's entrepreneurs, the industry has a ramshackle, even seedy, image. Facilities tend to be considered eyesores that take up a lot of real estate but yield little employment and taxes to a community in return. Because they are manufactured to serve transients and are located on towns' peripheries, storage units have "long seemed to attract people doing something they don't want to be caught doing at home." A character based on the serial killer Aileen Wuornos is shown living in

one in the recent movie *Monster*; Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh kept chemicals in a storage unit.

Whatever their warts, self-storage facilities seem here to stay, and now they're undergoing a bit of a makeover. Some boast air conditioning, architecture that wouldn't be out of place in a subdivision, and extensive landscaping. Still, a certain gloom surrounds them, notes Vanderbilt. All those self-stored possessions "are mementos we somehow can't live with, and yet can't live without, and [they] exemplify the downside of acquisition, the moment when you realize there are more bread machines, plastic lawn chairs, and treadmills than anyone could use in a lifetime."

PRESS & MEDIA

Another Vietnam?

"War Policy, Public Support, and the Media" by William M. Darley, in *Parameters* (Summer 2005), U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Ave., Carlisle, Pa. 17013-5238.

Has the relentless drumbeat of pessimistic reporting by the news media been souring the public on the Iraq war? Bush administration officials at times have suggested as much. But Darley, an army colonel and the editor in chief of *Military Review*, points out that much scholarly research on past conflicts shows that the public outlook is little affected by the news media's editorial tone or bias.

Peter Braestrup, a former Vietnam war correspondent (and the *WQ*'s founding editor), showed in *Big Story* (1977) that despite the news media's misinterpretation of the January 1968 Tet Offensive as a U.S. military defeat, public support for the war remained steady—and even increased, according to Louis Harris polls, from 61 percent in December 1967 to 74 percent in February 1968. In *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (1973), Ohio State University political scientist John Mueller demonstrated that over most of the lengthy course of that war, public support followed much the same pattern as it had during the Korean War, which the press covered less extensively and less critically.

Mueller and other researchers have

found a habitual "rally round the flag" tendency in times of international crisis, regardless of press criticism or even presidential performance. "The worse I do, the more popular I get," observed President John F. Kennedy after the 1961 Bay of Pigs debacle.

Darley argues that the public doesn't tote up casualties and make cost/benefit analyses; rather, it responds viscerally to "bold leadership and action," out of what military theorist Karl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) called "primordial hatred and enmity" for the foe. But when national policy is seen as weak, that collective emotional response dissipates. It was only when President Lyndon B. Johnson announced his resignation in 1968 and seemed to give up on Vietnam that the supportive public began "an irrevocable, permanent" turn away from the war. The news media's pessimistic slant on the war had little direct impact on public opinion, but it apparently had "a decisive effect" on Johnson.

"Assuming the correctness of the policy in its articulation and the boldness of its execution," Darley concludes, "domestic public support will take care of itself."