

ing of our sphere is so deplorable. Too few of us make any attempt to connect our ideas and subject matter to the rest of human experience and inquiry. Lehrer makes no claim to having found the secret bridge that might link the sciences and humanities, but he does suggest that my students might benefit by paying more attention to what Virginia Woolf penned about the emergent self and what Walt Whitman wrote about the body electric. He's right! We will never reduce feeling to physics, nor consciousness to chemistry—not so long as the voice of the artist remains alive.

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CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

The Poverty Myth

By Walter Reich

THE BELIEF THAT POVERTY is a root cause of Islamist terrorism has been thoroughly discredited. Numerous studies of terrorism have debunked the notion. Islamist terrorists themselves, as well as those who live among them and know them well, have repeatedly attributed Islamist terrorism primarily to religious and ideological motivations and to the logic that—against America and the West—terrorism is used because it works. As Abdel Aziz Rantisi—a Hamas leader until he was assassinated by the Israelis—said of suicide bombing, “It is the most effective strategy for us. For us it is the same as their F-16.”

Somehow, though, the idea that poverty is the culprit refuses to die. Journalists, academics, opinion makers, terrorism experts, and Nobel Prize winners (including those recognized for economics and peace) repeat it, as have U.S. presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush and British prime minister Tony Blair. Imbued with this belief, leaders are inclined to launch or sup-

port antipoverty policies that do little or nothing to stop terrorism.

Fortunately, in one small book, Alan B. Krueger, a Princeton economist, has collected much of the evidence that demolishes this argument. In *What Makes a Terrorist*, he performs a much-needed act of intellectual hygiene. Some of the evidence Krueger cites is based on examinations of the biographies of terrorists, as well as public polls and sophisticated economic analyses. A number of studies were carried out by Krueger and his colleagues.

It turns out that members of Islamist terrorist groups—Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, Hamas, etc.—tend to be from relatively privileged backgrounds. “As a group,” Krueger notes, “terrorists are better educated and from wealthier families than the typical person in the same age group of the societies from which they originate.” For example, one study compared 48 Palestinian suicide bombers from Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad with 18,803 fellow Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and found that the bombers were less than half as likely as the general population to come from families below the poverty line, and that “almost 60 percent of the suicide bombers had more than a high school degree, compared to less than 15 percent of the general population.”

The same general pattern holds for terror's most avid supporters. Opinion polls, Krueger notes, show that “the best-educated members of society and those in higher-paying occupations are often more radicalized and supportive of terrorism than the most disadvantaged. The illiterate, underemployed population is often unwilling to express an opinion about policy issues, probably because they have more pressing matters on their minds.” If anything, it has been the lack of civil liberties in their societies, rather than excessive poverty, that has helped foster terrorism.

Krueger concedes the possibility that well-to-do terrorists are motivated by the poverty and deprivation that bedevil their societies. But he is skeptical: “A range of socioeconomic indicators—

WHAT MAKES A TERRORIST:

Economics and the Roots of Terrorism.

By Alan B. Krueger.
Princeton Univ. Press.
180 pp. \$24.95

including illiteracy, infant mortality, and gross domestic product per capita—are unrelated to whether people become involved in terrorism.” Besides, if poverty breeds terrorism against the West, why isn’t it being carried out by people from places much poorer than many countries in the Muslim world—large swaths of sub-Saharan Africa, for example?

We shouldn’t need Krueger’s book to be persuaded of his conclusions. Arab writers have been making similar arguments for years. Saudi commentator Muhammad Mahfouz, for example, has argued that religious teachings inciting violence, rather than poverty, are the main cause of terrorism among Saudi youth. “These youths,” he writes, “were brought up in a special cultural atmosphere which finds its roots in a stereotyped understanding of religion. This understanding serves as a basic incubator to this group.”

Maybe a distinguished economist, surveying reams of social-scientific studies, will finally succeed in convincing Western opinion leaders, many of whom don’t consult Arab sources, of this truth. Perhaps they’ll read Krueger’s book and understand that if terrorism has identifiable root causes, they’re the ones most frequently cited by Islamists themselves—the desire to achieve what terrorists see as holy ends, and the conviction that, in the service of these ends, terrorism works.

I fear, though, that despite Krueger’s definitive and persuasive book, conventional wisdom and wishful thinking will keep alive the idea that poverty causes terrorism. Intellectual hygiene is an honorable enterprise but, alas, often unsuccessful—especially in a world in which familiar, easy, and hopeful explanations that leave us thinking the problem has a ready solution are preferred to explanations that leave us feeling vexed, powerless, and perpetually afraid.

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Gotham’s Melting Pot

By Mimi Schwartz

NEW YORK CITY, FOR many, means the borough of Manhattan, with its skyscrapers, Fifth Avenue shops, Central Park, and Wall Street. But just to the east is a lesser-known gem:

THE NEIGHBORHOODS OF QUEENS.

By Claudia Gryvatz Copquin. Yale Univ. Press. 265 pp. \$35

Queens. The largest of the city’s five boroughs (110 square miles) and the second most populous (after Brooklyn), Queens is unique. It is, as historian Kenneth T. Jackson points out in his introduction to *The Neighborhoods of Queens*, “the most heterogeneous place in the world.” Of its two million residents, 44 percent are foreign born—a population that tops Miami’s. One Queens neighborhood, Elmhurst, has immigrants from 110 countries. Another, Astoria, “has the largest Greek population outside the Mediterranean.” Richmond Hill is home to the largest population of Sikhs outside India. And on it goes.

The Neighborhoods of Queens—written by Claudia Gryvatz Copquin, a free-lance journalist raised on the turf—is a practical, easy-to-use guide to every one of the 99 neighborhoods and smaller yet distinct sub-neighborhoods of this fascinating, multi-cultural borough. Each chapter offers a brief narrative overview of the area it covers and is generously illustrated with photographs and a detailed map. Before Yale launched its “Neighborhoods of New York City” series (in collaboration with the Citizens Committee for New York City), to which this book is the latest addition, no one had attempted to map all the city’s neighborhoods.

My family arrived in the borough as refugees from Nazi Germany in 1937, three years before I was born. I grew up in Forest Hills, and when I opened to the chapter on that neighborhood, there was a photo of the West Side Tennis Club, where we used to watch the U.S. Open before it moved to Flushing Mead-