



# The Key Reporter

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## Souter Becomes Sixth ΦBK Member on Supreme Court

When David H. Souter (Harvard '61) joined the U.S. Supreme Court in October, he became the sixth ΦBK member there. The others are Harry A. Blackmun (Harvard '29), Anthony M. Kennedy (Stanford '58), William H. Rehnquist (Stanford '48), John Paul Stevens (University of Chicago '41), and Byron R. White (University of Colorado '38).

Lewis F. Powell, Jr. (Washington and Lee '29), who retired from the Supreme Court but continues active in the circuit court system, also is a member of the Society.

## All ΦBK Association Members to Receive Copies of 1989-90 Associations Newsletter

For more than a century, members of Phi Beta Kappa have been forming associations in communities throughout the country, and occasionally abroad, to provide intellectual stimulation and social activities for members and guests and to bring to the attention of these communities the goals and ideals of the Society. Many associations sponsor lectures, discussions, and tours. Many others concentrate on encouraging academic achievement through the award of scholarships, certificates, or books to high school or college students. Some recognize outstanding graduate students or professors. Several associations publish their own newsletters and directories for members. Membership in associations ranges from more than 1,000 to two or three dozen.

Each autumn the Society publishes a newsletter detailing the activities of the associations during the previous academic year as reported to the Society's headquarters in Washington, D.C., by the associations themselves. This year, for the first time, the Society is mailing copies of the current newsletter of the associations to all active members of the associations for which address lists could be obtained.

If you wish to receive a copy of the newsletter of the ΦBK associations, or if you are interested in organizing members in your area, write to the Society at 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20009.

## Multiculturalism: E Pluribus Plures

By Diane Ravitch

QUESTIONS OF RACE, ETHNICITY, and religion have been a perennial source of conflict in American education. The schools have often attracted the zealous attention of those who wish to influence the future, as well as those who wish to change the way we view the past. In our history, the schools have been not only an institution in which to teach young people skills and knowledge, but an arena where interest groups fight to preserve their values, or to revise the judgments of history, or to bring about fundamental social change.

Given the diversity of American society, it has been impossible to insulate the schools from pressures that result from differences and tensions among groups. When people differ about basic values, sooner or later those disagreements turn up in battles about how schools are organized or what the schools should teach. Sometimes these battles remove a terrible injustice, like racial segregation. Sometimes, however, interest groups politicize the curriculum and attempt to impose their views on teachers, school officials, and textbook publishers. When groups cross the line into extremism, advancing their own agendas without regard to reason or to others, they threaten public education itself, making it difficult to teach any issues honestly and making the entire curriculum vulnerable to political campaigns.

For many years, the public schools attempted to neutralize controversies over race, religion, and ethnicity by ignoring them. The textbooks minimized problems among groups and taught a sanitized version of history. Race, religion, and ethnicity were presented as minor elements in the American saga; slavery was treated as an episode, immigration as a sidebar, and women were largely absent. The textbooks concentrated on presidents, wars, national politics, and issues

of state. An occasional "great black" or "great woman" received mention, but the main narrative paid little attention to minority groups and women.

With the ethnic revival of the 1960s, this approach to the teaching of history came under fire, because the history of national leaders—virtually all of whom were white, Anglo-Saxon, and male—ignored the place in American history of those who were none of the above. The traditional history of elites had been complemented by an assimilationist view of American society, which presumed that everyone in the American melting pot would eventually lose or abandon those ethnic characteristics that distinguished each from mainstream Americans. The ethnic revival demonstrated

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Diane Ravitch

## Lamm, Norris, Wheeler To Complete ΦBK Senate, Committee Terms

The ΦBK Senate has elected Donald S. Lamm, president of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., to complete the Senate term of Jaroslav Pelikan, Sterling Professor of History at Yale University, who resigned earlier this year to participate in the work of several agencies dealing with the problems faced by the emerging East European democracies.

ΦBK President Otis A. Singletary has also announced two appointments to the Council Nominating Committee to complete terms that expire in 1991: Emma C. Norris, secretary of the Conference of Association Delegates and director of the honors program at Troy State University, Troy, Alabama; and Burton M. Wheeler, professor of English at Washington University. The committee, which met in Washington, D.C., in October, presents slates of nominees for the Society's leadership to the triennial Council, scheduled for October 1991.

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## Multiculturalism

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that many groups did not want to be assimilated or melted. Ethnic studies programs popped up on campuses to teach not only that “black is beautiful,” but also that every other variety of ethnicity is “beautiful” as well; everyone who had “roots” began to look for them so that they, too, could recover that ancestral part of themselves that had not been homogenized.

As ethnicity became an accepted subject for study in the late 1960s, textbooks were assailed for their failure to portray blacks accurately; within a few years, the textbooks in wide use were carefully screened to eliminate bias against minority groups and women. At the same time, new scholarship about the history of women, blacks, and various ethnic minorities found its way into the textbooks. Today’s history textbooks routinely incorporate the experiences of women, blacks, American Indians, and various immigrant groups.

As a result of the political and social changes of recent decades, cultural pluralism is now generally recognized as an organizing principle of this society. In contrast to the idea of the melting pot, which promised to erase ethnic and group differences, children now learn that variety is the spice of life. They learn that America has provided a haven for many different groups and has allowed them to maintain their cultural heritage or to assimilate, or—as is often the case—to do both; the choice is theirs, not the state’s. They learn that cultural pluralism is one of the norms of a free society; that differences among groups are a national resource rather than a problem to be solved. Indeed, the unique feature of the United States is that its common culture has been formed by the interaction of its subsidiary cultures. It is a culture that has been influenced over time by immigrants, American Indians, Africans (slave and free) and by their descendants. American music, art, literature, language, food, clothing, sports, holidays, and customs all show the effects of the commingling of diverse cultures in one nation. Paradoxical though it may seem, the United States has a common culture that is multicultural.

This understanding of the pluralistic nature of American culture has taken a long time to forge. It is based on sound scholarship and has led to major revisions in what children are taught and what they read in school. The new history is—indeed, must be—a warts-and-all history; it demands an unflinching examination of racism and discrimination in our history. Making these changes is difficult, raises tempers, and ignites controversies, but gives a more interesting and

accurate account of American history. Accomplishing these changes is valuable, because there is also a useful lesson for the rest of the world in America’s relatively successful experience as a pluralistic society. Throughout human history, the clash of different cultures, races, ethnic groups, and religions has often been the cause of bitter hatred, civil conflict, and international war. The ethnic tensions that now are tearing apart Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Kashmir, and various republics of the Soviet Union remind us of the costs of unfettered group rivalry. Thus, it is a matter of more than domestic importance that we closely examine and try to understand that part of our national history in which different groups competed, fought, suffered, but ultimately learned to live together in relative peace and even achieved a sense of common nationhood.

### Particularism

Alas, these painstaking efforts to expand the understanding of American culture into a richer and more varied tapestry have taken a new turn, and not for the better. Almost any idea, carried to its extreme, can be made pernicious, and this is what is happening now to multiculturalism. Today, pluralistic multiculturalism must contend with a new, particularistic multiculturalism. The pluralists seek a richer common culture; the particularists insist that no common culture is possible or desirable.

The new particularism is entering the curriculum in a number of school systems across the country. Advocates of particularism propose an ethnocentric curriculum to raise the self-esteem and academic achievement of children from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds. Without any evidence, they claim that children from minority backgrounds will do well in school *only* if they are immersed in a positive, prideful version of their ancestral culture. If children are of, for example, Fredonian ancestry, they must hear that Fredonians were important in mathematics, science, history, and literature. If they learn about great Fredonians and if their studies use Fredonian examples and Fredonian concepts, they will do well in school. If they do not, they will have low self-esteem and will do badly.

The particularistic version of multiculturalism is unabashedly filiopietistic and deterministic. It teaches children that their identity is determined by their “cultural genes”—that something in their blood or their racial memory or their cultural DNA defines who they are and what they may achieve; that the culture in which they live is not their own culture, even though they were born

here; that American culture is “Eurocentric,” and therefore hostile to anyone whose ancestors are not European. Perhaps the most invidious implication of particularism is that racial and ethnic minorities are not and should not try to be part of American culture; it implies that American culture belongs only to those who are white and European; it implies that those who are neither white nor European are alienated from American culture by virtue of their race or ethnicity; it implies that the only culture they do belong to or can ever belong to is the culture of their ancestors, even if their families have lived in this country for generations.

The pluralist approach to multiculturalism promotes a broader interpretation of the common American culture and seeks due recognition for the ways that the nation’s many racial, ethnic, and cultural groups have transformed the national culture. The pluralists say, in effect, “American culture belongs to us, all of us; the United States is us, and we remake it in every generation.” But particularists have no interest in extending or revising American culture; indeed, they deny that a common culture exists. Particularists reject any accommodation among groups, any interactions that blur the distinct lines between them. The brand of history that they espouse is one in which everyone is a descendant of victims or oppressors. By taking this approach, they fan and re-create ancient hatreds in each new generation.

Particularism has its intellectual roots in the ideology of ethnic separatism and in the black nationalist movement. In the particularist analysis, the nation has five cultures: African American, Asian American, European American, Latino/Hispanic, and American Indian. The huge cultural, historical, religious, and linguistic differences within these categories are ignored, as is the considerable intermarriage among these groups, as are the linkages (like gender, class, sexual orientation, and religion) that cut across these five groups. No serious scholar would claim that all Europeans and white Americans are part of the same culture, or that all Asians are part of the same culture, or that all people of Latin American descent are of the same culture, or that all people of African descent are of the same culture. Any categorization this broad is essentially meaningless and useless.

Particularism is a bad idea whose time has come. It is also a fashion spreading like wildfire through the education system, actively promoted by organizations and individuals with a political and professional interest in strengthening ethnic power bases in the university, in the education profession, and in society itself. One can scarcely pick up an educational



journal without learning about a school district that is converting to an ethnocentric curriculum in an attempt to give “self-esteem” to children from racial minorities. A state-funded project in a Sacramento high school is teaching young black males to think like Africans and to develop the “African Mind Model Technique,” in order to free themselves of the racism of American culture. A popular black rap singer, KRS-One, complained in an op-ed article in the *New York Times* that the schools should be teaching blacks about their cultural heritage, instead of trying to make everyone Americans. “It’s like trying to teach a dog to be a cat,” he wrote. KRS-One railed about having to learn about Thomas Jefferson and the Civil War, which had nothing to do (he said) with black history.

### *Ethnomathematics*

Pluralism can easily be transformed into particularism, as may be seen in the potential uses in the classroom of the Mayan contribution to mathematics. The Mayan example was popularized in a movie called *Stand and Deliver*, about a charismatic Bolivian-born mathematics teacher in Los Angeles who inspired his students (who are Hispanic) to learn calculus. He told them that their ancestors invented the concept of zero; but that wasn’t all he did. He used imagination to put across mathematical concepts. He required students to do homework and to go to school on Saturdays and during the Christmas holidays, so that they might pass the advanced placement mathematics examination. The teacher’s reference to the Mayans’ mathematical genius was a valid instructional device: It was an attention-getter and would have interested even students who were not Hispanic. But the Mayan example would have had little effect without the teacher’s insistence that the class study hard for a difficult examination.

Ethnic educators have seized on the Mayan contribution to mathematics as the key to simultaneously boosting the ethnic pride of Hispanic children and attacking Eurocentrism. One proposal claims that Mexican-American children will be attracted to science and mathematics if they study Mayan mathematics, the Mayan calendar, and Mayan astronomy. Children in primary grades are to be taught that the Mayans were first to discover the zero and that Europeans learned it long afterward from the Arabs, who had learned it in India. This will help students see that Europeans were latecomers in the discovery of great ideas. Botany is to be learned by study of the agricultural techniques of the Aztecs, a subject of somewhat limited relevance to children in urban areas. Furthermore, “ethnobotanical” classifications of plants

are to be substituted for the Eurocentric Linnaean system. At first glance, it may seem curious that Hispanic children are deemed to have no cultural affinity with Spain; but to acknowledge the cultural tie would confuse the ideological assault on Eurocentrism.

This proposal suggests some questions: Is there any evidence that the teaching of “culturally relevant” science and mathematics will draw Mexican-American children to the study of these subjects? Will Mexican-American children lose interest or self-esteem if they discover that their ancestors were Aztecs or Spaniards, rather than Mayans? Are children who learn in this way prepared to study the science and mathematics that are taught in American colleges and universities and that are needed for advanced study in these fields? Are they even prepared to study the science and mathematics taught in *Mexican* universities? If the class is half Mexican-American and half something else, will only the Mexican-American children study in a Mayan and Aztec mode or will all the children? But shouldn’t all children study what is culturally relevant for them? How will we train teachers who have command of so many different systems of mathematics and science?

The interesting proposal to teach ethnomathematics comes at a time when American mathematics educators are trying to overhaul present practices, because of the poor performance of American children on national and international assessments. Mathematics educators are attempting to change the teaching of their subject so that children can see its uses in everyday life. There would seem to be an incipient conflict between those who want to introduce real-life applications of mathematics and those who want to teach the mathematical systems used by ancient cultures. I suspect that most mathematics teachers would enjoy doing a bit of both, if there were time or student interest. But any widespread movement to replace modern mathematics with ancient ethnic mathematics runs the risk of disaster in a field that is struggling to update existing curricula. If, as seems likely, ancient mathematics is taught mainly to minority children, the gap between them and middle-class white children is apt to grow. It is worth noting that children in Korea, who score highest in mathematics on international assessments, do not study ancient Korean mathematics.

Particularism is akin to cultural Lysenkoism, for it takes as its premise the spurious notion that cultural traits are inherited. It implies a dubious, dangerous form of cultural predestination. Children are taught that if their ancestors could do it, so could they. But what happens if a child is from a cultural

group that made no significant contribution to science or mathematics? Must children find a culturally appropriate field in which to strive? How does a teacher find the right cultural buttons for children of mixed heritage? And how in the world will teachers use this technique when the children in their classes are drawn from many different cultures, as is usually the case? By the time that every culture gets its due, there may be no time left to teach the subject itself. This explosion of filiopietism (which, we should remember, comes from adults, not from students) is reminiscent of the period some years ago when the Russians claimed that they had invented everything first; as we now know, this nationalistic braggadocio did little for their self-esteem and nothing for their economic development. We might reflect, too, on how little social prestige has been accorded in this country to immigrants from Greece and Italy, even though the achievements of their ancestors were at the heart of the classical curriculum.

In school districts where most children are black and Hispanic, there has been a growing tendency to embrace particularism rather than pluralism. Many of the children in these districts perform poorly in academic classes and leave school without graduating. They would fare better in school if they had well-educated and well-paid teachers, small classes, good materials, encouragement at home and school, summer academic programs, protection from the drugs and crime that ravage their neighborhoods, and higher expectations of satisfying careers upon graduation. These are expensive and time-consuming remedies that must also engage the larger society beyond the school. The lure of particularism is that it offers a less complicated anodyne, one in which the children’s academic deficiencies may be addressed—or set aside—by inflating their racial pride. The danger of this remedy is that it will detract attention from the real needs of schools and the real interests of children, while simultaneously arousing distorted race pride in children of all races, increasing racial antagonism and producing fresh recruits for white and black racist groups.

### *The Effects of Particularism*

The rising tide of particularism encourages the politicization of all curricula in the schools. If education bureaucrats bend to the political and ideological winds, as is their wont, we can anticipate a generation of struggle over the content of the curriculum in mathematics, science, literature, and history. Demands for “culturally relevant” studies, for ethnostudies of all kinds, will open the classroom to unending battles over whose

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## Multiculturalism

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version is taught, who gets credit for what, and which ethno-interpretation is appropriate.

The spread of particularism throws into question the very idea of American public education. Public schools exist to teach children the general skills and knowledge that they need to succeed in American society, and the specific skills and knowledge that they need in order to function as American citizens. They receive public support because they have a public function. Historically, the public schools were known as “common schools” because they were schools for all, even if the children of all the people did not attend them. Over the years, the courts have found that it was unconstitutional to teach religion in the common schools, or to separate children on the basis of their race in the common schools. In their curriculum, their hiring practices, and their general philosophy, the public schools must not discriminate against or give preference to any racial or ethnic group. Yet they are permitted to accommodate cultural diversity by, for example, serving food that is culturally appropriate or providing library collections that emphasize the interests of the local community. They should not, however, be expected to teach children to view the world through an ethnocentric perspective that rejects or ignores the common culture.

For generations, those groups that wanted to inculcate their religion or their ethnic heritage have instituted private schools—after school, on weekends, or on a full-time basis. There, children learn with others of the same group—Greeks, Poles, Germans, Japanese, Chinese, Jews, Lutherans, Catholics, and so on—and are taught by people from the same group. Valuable as this exclusive experience has been for those who choose it, this has not been the role of public education. One of the primary purposes of public education has been to create a national community, a definition of citizenship and culture that is both expansive and inclusive.

The multicultural controversy may do wonders for the study of history, which has been neglected for years in American schools. At this time, only half of our high school graduates ever study any world history. Any serious attempt to broaden students’ knowledge of Africa, Europe, Asia, and Latin America will require at least two, and possibly three, years of world history (a requirement thus far only in California). American history, too, will need more time than the one-year high-school survey course. Those of us who have insisted for years on the importance of history in the curriculum may not be ready to assent to its redemptive power, but hope that our new allies

will ultimately join a constructive dialogue that strengthens the place of history in the schools.

### Some Solutions

As cultural controversies arise, educators must adhere to the principle of “E Pluribus Unum.” That is, they must maintain a balance between the demands of the one—the nation of which we are common citizens—and the many—the varied histories of the American people. It is not necessary to denigrate either the one or the many. Pluralism is a positive value, but it is also important that we preserve a sense of an American community—a society and a culture to which we all belong. If there is no overall community with an agreed-upon vision of liberty and justice, if all we have is a collection of racial and ethnic cultures, lacking any common bonds, then we have no means to mobilize public opinion on behalf of people who are not members of our particular group. We have, for example, no reason to support public education. If there is no larger community, then each group will want to teach its own children in its own way, and public education ceases to exist.

History should not be confused with filiofetism. History gives no grounds for race pride. No race has a monopoly on virtue. If anything, a study of history should inspire humility, rather than pride. People of every racial group have committed terrible crimes, often against others of the same group. Whether one looks at the history of Europe or Africa or Latin America or Asia, every continent offers examples of inhumanity. Slavery has existed in civilizations around the world for centuries. Examples of genocide can be found around the world, throughout history, from ancient times right through to our own day. Governments and cultures, sometimes by edict, sometimes simply following tradition, have practiced not only slavery, but human sacrifice, infanticide, cliterodectomy, and mass murder. If we teach children this, they might recognize how absurd both racial hatred and racial chauvinism are.

What must be preserved in the study of history is the spirit of inquiry, the readiness to open new questions and to pursue new understandings. History, at its best, is a search for truth. The best way to portray this search is through debate and controversy, rather than through imposition of fixed beliefs and immutable facts. Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of school history is its tendency to become Official History, a sanctified version of the Truth taught by the state to captive audiences and embedded in beautiful mass-market textbooks as holy writ. When Official History is written by committees responding to political pressures, rather than by scholars synthesizing the

best available research, the errors of the past are replaced by the politically fashionable errors of the present. It may be difficult to teach children that history is both important and uncertain, and that even the best historians never have all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle, but it is necessary to do so. If state education departments permit the revision of their history courses and textbooks to become an exercise in power politics, the entire process of state-level curriculum-making becomes suspect, as does public education itself.

The question of self-esteem is extraordinarily complex, and it goes well beyond the content of the curriculum. Most of what we call self-esteem is formed in the home and in a variety of life experiences, not only in school. Nonetheless, it has been important for blacks—and for other racial groups—to learn about the history of slavery and of the civil rights movement; it has been important for blacks to know that their ancestors actively resisted enslavement and actively pursued equality; and it has been important for blacks and others to learn about black men and women who fought courageously against racism and who provide models of courage, persistence, and intellect. These are instances where the content of the curriculum reflects sound scholarship, and at the same time probably lessens racial prejudice and provides inspiration for those who are descendants of slaves. But knowing about the travails and triumphs of one’s forebears does not necessarily translate into either self-esteem or personal accomplishment. For most children, self-esteem—the self-confidence that grows out of having reached a goal—comes not from hearing about the monuments of their ancestors but as a consequence of what they are able to do and accomplish through their own efforts.

As I reflected on these issues, I recalled reading an interview a few years ago with a talented black runner. She said that her model is Mikhail Baryshnikov. She admires him because he is a magnificent athlete. He is not black; he is not female; he is not American-born; he is not even a runner. But he inspires her because of the way he trained and used his body. When I read this, I thought how narrow-minded it is to believe that people can be inspired *only* by those who are exactly like them in race and ethnicity.

*Diane Ravitch, adjunct professor of history and education at Teachers College, Columbia University, is the author of five books, including The Schools We Deserve, Troubled Crusade, and The Great School Wars. She is also the editor of The American Reader: Words That Moved a Nation (HarperCollins, 1990). This article is an abridgment of an article in The American Scholar (Summer 1990).*



# Recommended Reading

## Book Committee

**Humanities** Frederick J. Crosson, Robert P. Sonkowsky, Jean Sudrann, Lawrence Willson  
**Social sciences** Earl W. Count, Richard N. Current, Leonard W. Doob, Thomas McNaugher, Madeline R. Robinton, Victoria Schuck, Anna J. Schwartz  
**Natural sciences** Ronald Geballe, Russell B. Stevens

### Frederick J. Crosson

**Real Presences.** George Steiner. Univ. of Chicago, 1989. \$19.95.

Here is an essay by an eminently thoughtful and perceptive writer, graced by language that is a pleasure to read, on the issue of the relationship among the arts, the human, and the transcendent. Is the traditional premise of the presence of disclosure, of meaning, in the arts only part of the myth of the Logos, to be succeeded by the fluid play of signifiers? Steiner concedes that the current discussion takes us to be already in the "after-Word" of that tradition and is perhaps irrefutable on its own ground. But he argues, by appealing to experience, that no reading, no viewing, no hearing encompasses the meaning encountered through the form of a work of art. What we encounter is something more than markers and intertextuality; it is something beyond all those deferrals of meaning; it is finally, he affirms, a wholly autonomous other: God. But this is not some novel exercise in natural theology; it is an engaging reflection on the sense of art. Recommended.

**Diderot's Dream.** Wilda Anderson. Johns Hopkins, 1990. \$29.95.

The Enlightenment was, of course, more diverse and less unified than the term encourages us to think. Indeed, to be a consistent materialist, as Diderot strove to be, for whom thoughts are material and hence as unstable and revisable as clusters of matter in motion, is to pose a question concerning what people are to be enlightened about (not laws of nature or unchanging truths, anyway). The author analyzes six works of Diderot, trying to address the question of how to read literature self-consciously composed not merely to espouse materialism but to exhibit it in the language and form of the writing. She shows that Diderot's conviction that science is always totally in need of revision reflects his view that ideas are always in interaction with other bits of matter, and carries over into his stories in terms of the interaction of the reader and the text—*D'Alembert's Dream* makes a fine example. There are overtones of contemporary postmodernism in all this, but they do not overwhelm Anderson's close and sensitive con- strual of the texts.

**Interpreting Maimonides.** Marvin Fox. Univ. of Chicago, 1990. \$27.

Although the 12th-century Jewish thinker is generally believed to be one of the greatest to philosophize in the Judaic tradition, no comprehensive treatment of his philosophical views exists, perhaps in part because of the wariness with which philosophy has often been regarded in that tradition. The greater salience of his commentary on the Mishnah

and the elusive nature of his rhetoric in the *Guide for the Perplexed* no doubt contributed, too. Fox aims at such a comprehensive account and largely succeeds. He challenges the esoteric reading of Leo Strauss, offers his own careful analysis of Maimonides' manner of writing, and arrives at a defensible interpretation of a dialectical relationship between reason and revelation in which neither subverts the other and which is as appropriate today as then. Readable and accessible for a general audience.

**Aristotle's Psychology.** Daniel N. Robinson. Columbia, 1989. \$28.

Imagine an intelligent contemporary psychologist undertaking to present a coherent overview, not just of Aristotle's treatise *On the Psyche*, but of all the topics that are studied by psychologists today and are spread throughout the philosopher's treatises: emotions here, behavior there, developmental questions in a third place, etc. Such is the project of this small (150 pp.) volume, and it comes off fairly well. Aristotle is not always easy to follow, and his perspectives are often different from ours, but his combination of acute observations and systematic conceptions, when well presented, gives us a useful partner for thinking. This is not a popularization—parts of it are slow going—but it can repay some effort.

**Peirce's Philosophy of Religion.** Michael L. Raposa. Indiana, 1989. \$25.

Arguably America's greatest philosopher, Peirce has made his best-known contributions in the areas of language and philosophy of science, so one might suppose that an interest in God would be a kind of side issue for him. But anyone who has read some of his essays in the former areas knows that the word *God* keeps weaving through those writings like an ineliminable category, elusive and yet central to Peirce's views about nature and knowledge and history. Raposa has not merely brought together these loci and some little-known explicit essays on God's reality, but he succeeds in showing how critically central to Peirce's notion of the development of scientific knowledge that reality is. Nor was his concern merely cognitive: It is in terms of "love" that evolution and history yield their ultimate meaning.

**Heidegger's Pragmatism.** Mark Okrent. Cornell, 1988. \$29.95.

A small but increasing number of American readers of Heidegger have been claiming him for pragmatism and formulating his ideas in our analytic universe of discourse. This is one of the most helpful discussions of the import of the first part of *Being and Time* and of the shift in Heidegger's views in the latter half of his career. It is not a mere explication of the text (though many readers will find it helpful for that): Okrent does not hesitate to call some

claims false, to justly denounce the confusion caused by shifting terminologies, and to place the overall project of Heidegger in an illuminating perspective. His conclusion is that although the meaning of "being" remains pragmatic to the end, what came to be called the "truth of being" was located beyond being and beyond any ground of understanding.

### Jean Sudrann

**Daniel Defoe: His Life.** Paula R. Backscheider. Johns Hopkins, 1989. \$29.95.

Backscheider's massive, almost continuously fascinating, biography of Daniel Defoe has at its center not Defoe the novelist but Defoe the pioneer journalist and propagandist, in the service of both his country and his (Dissenting) Church, and Defoe the entrepreneur merchant: wholesale hosier, owner of a brick and tile factory, real estate tycoon, and early master of "leveraged buy-outs." Backscheider treats Defoe's private life only where it illuminates his public career: the exploited in-laws, ne'er-do-well sons, and shadowy wife who bears 14 children to a husband who is, at the time of each birth, likely to be off in Scotland plotting and pamphleteering for the successful Union of Scotland and England, or fighting in the service of the duke of Monmouth's claim to the English throne, or standing in the City in the pillory for bankruptcy.

Crammed with wonderful details about the knitting and weaving of stockings for the hosiery trade, what it literally was like to stand in the pillory, and how to move around 18th-century England evading arrest, Backscheider's narrative develops dramatically with well-reasoned support of her claims for Defoe. She sees a fine line by which Defoe can honestly claim loyalty both to England and the Dissenting Church whose members were effectively outlawed from full participation in English schools and the English power structure. She recognizes the creative power of Defoe's business acumen, however often, and for whatever reasons, it failed him. This creative power enabled Defoe's vision of London as the prime trade center of the world and prompted one of his last projects: a maritime atlas of the world, with full directions on what kind of trade benefits were available in each area and how they might best be secured. He saw how a partnership of land, trade, and credit could bring England to the height of the world's wealth and power. Within 150 years, the vision had materialized; Defoe died impoverished and under threat once again of imprisonment for debt.

### Anna J. Schwartz

**The S&L Insurance Mess: How Did It Happen?** Edward J. Kane. Urban Institute Press, 1989. \$29.95; paper, \$10.95.

Written before the S&L bailout bill was enacted, this monograph reviews the history of actions by the industry, its regulators, and politicians that led to massive insolvencies among thrift institutions. The author rejects the attribution of thrift losses to deregulation or to bad management and fraud because of inadequate legal penalties. He traces the roots of the mess to deposit-insurance subsidies to risk taking. To preserve the subsidies, regulatory clients and their political allies enlisted

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## Recommended Reading

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cover-up and forbearance by regulators unwilling to incur the displeasure of the politically powerful. The study provides a record both of federal laws since 1932 and of regulatory changes during the past decade affecting thrifts, as well as a list of the top beneficiaries in the House and Senate from S&L PAC donations. In addition it offers an outstanding compilation of statistics measuring various dimensions of the problems in the industry that were recognized but papered over while the cost of postponing overhaul mounted.

The author stresses the need for deposit-insurance reform as the main way to prevent another generation of thrift insolvencies. It remains to be seen whether the 18-month government study of deposit insurance that the S&L reform act calls for will achieve that end. Other reforms the author sought are not part of the act: inclusion each year in the federal budget of the market value of federal deposit guarantees, reports to the banking and ethics committees by members of Congress of their efforts to win forbearances for individual constituents, and enforcement by deposit insurers of capital requirements on a market-value accounting basis at individual institutions.

**A History of Economic Theory: Classic Contributions, 1720–1980.** Jürg Niehans. Johns Hopkins, 1990. \$59.95.

This highly readable account of the history of economic doctrines is in three parts: the classical era before 1830, the marginalist era during the following century, and the era of economic models since 1930. The book is organized primarily around the principal contributions of individuals, introduced by a biographical sketch and a brief characterization of the main works of each person. The author states that he produced this pantheon of economic theory after reevaluating his earlier judgments of who had made significant contributions. Some of his choices are unconventional.

**Productivity and American Leadership: The Long View.** William J. Baumol, Sue Anne Batey Blackman, and Edward N. Wolff. M.I.T., 1989. \$29.95.

No reason for alarm exists concerning recent U.S. productivity growth, measured in absolute terms, according to this careful survey of the historical statistical record, but several economies in recent decades have nearly caught up to the U.S. absolute productivity level and per capita output. One explanation for this result which these authors examine is the convergence process that is thought to occur as a result of the dissemination of innovation in general and of technology transfer in particular. The export of imitative entrepreneurship provides an opportunity for followers to move steadily closer to the leader's productivity position. Hence it is normal for the productivity growth rate of the leader nation to be lower than that of the economies catching up with it. Postwar deterioration of the U.S. position may, however, be worrisome if it is comparable to the British decline before World War I from which it did not recover.

To avoid such an outcome and to preserve the international economic leadership of the United States, the authors propose policies to achieve by the year 2020 growth in U.S. productivity 0.8 percentage point higher than

that averaged over the 1950–79 period. The policies apply to the prime determinants of an economy's productivity performance: incentives to increase the investment rate as well as the size of basic and applied research and to improve the education of the labor force, principally of minorities. As a fail-safe measure, the authors also advocate tax rebates based on the percentage rate of growth of a firm's profits over the preceding five years—an index of productivity, in their view.

In addition, the study exposes the falseness of the thesis of deindustrialization; the illusoriness of the differential between U.S. rates of capital formation and its industrial competitors' rates, as measured by standard data; and the reasons why resource depletion is not an inevitable result of society's growing per capita output.

**Thinking About Growth: And Other Essays on Economic Growth and Welfare.** Moses Abramovitz. **Studies in Economic History and Policy: The United States in the Twentieth Century.** Cambridge Univ., 1989. \$49.50.

The 13 essays assembled in this collection are the fruit of 40 years of study of the process of economic growth here and in Japan and Western Europe by a preeminent scholar of the subject. The first of the four parts deals with the change in economists' approach to the phenomenon over this period. This change is well illustrated by the difference between the initial essay, written especially for this volume, and the following one, which was published in 1952. Five essays in the second part analyze the proximate causes of long-term economic change, including the contributions of capital formation, education, and technology. Why levels of economic performance diverge and converge is also examined in two essays on the experience of capitalist countries in the postwar period. The third part comprises two celebrated essays on long swings in U.S. economic growth, the first about their historical validity from the 1840s to 1914, the second about their subsequent demise. The upswings were characterized by internal migration and waves of immigration, investment, and capital imports. Financial disturbances brought a collapse until a new upswing began. The change in the economy's underlying structure and institutions after 1914 rendered the long-swing model defunct. The final section deals with growth and welfare, again affording the reader a recent and an early statement of the author's views.

### Lawrence Willson

**The Life of Langston Hughes. Vol. II, 1941–1967. I Dream a World.** Arnold Rampersad. Oxford, 1988. \$24.95.

Hughes was a writer who became the poet laureate of blacks by dedicating himself and his work to the proposition that blacks are beautiful and their culture worthy and that Jim Crow must be banished from the land, even though Hughes resisted the black-power movement that flourished during his last years. The second volume of Rampersad's monumental biography deals with those years and the troubles Hughes faced because of his earlier association with communism and in general the causes of the left. He made enemies (quite possibly the right ones) of Aimee Semple McPherson, the Mothers of America, the American Legion, J. Edgar Hoover, and

Joseph McCarthy; he suffered much for what appeared to be militancy but was more nearly political ignorance and the innocence of a gentle man with a single aim: to bring dignity to his people and their culture.

**Wallace Stevens: The Later Years, 1923–1955.** Joan Richardson. Beech Tree Books/William Morrow, 1988. \$27.95.

Stevens, a man of exquisite sensibility who stands today as the last eminent poet of the old order and the first equally eminent poet of the new, inhabited two worlds: the world of business as an insurance executive and the world of the abstract imagination, where he sifted the experience of the first world and resolved it into poetry, what Henry James called "felt life." His life and his poetry became inextricably intertwined, the one (poetry) being the completion of the other, "not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing itself." "Poetry," he wrote, "is a response to the daily necessity of getting the world right." That he, "a most inappropriate man in a most unpropitious place," had two worlds to get right made it doubly difficult. Richardson shows admirably how he did it, thus earning the gratitude of those who have found Stevens's poetry elusive, but unavoidable.

**Studies in the American Renaissance, 1988 (Vol. 12); 1989 (Vol. 13).** Ed. by Joel Myerson. Univ. of Virginia, 1989; 1990. \$35; \$40.

Joel Myerson twice more deserves the plaudits of all who are interested in the texts and the history of American literature in the 19th century. In the 12th volume of the series, we have, among other papers, an essay on the response of the Transcendentalists to religion and science, two hitherto unknown papers of Margaret Fuller (delivered in Providence in 1838, one on progress in society, the other on a musical soirée with Mme. Caradori), 18 letters of Caroline Sturgis to Fuller (which supplement Fuller's letters to her, to be found in volumes II, III, and IV of Hudspeth's edition), a study of Thoreau's textual alterations, three papers dealing with Hawthorne, and a final brief essay titled "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Defenses: Twain and the Text of *The Deer-slayer*." Probably most interesting for the non-specialist scholar is "With Hawthorne in Wartime Concord," which contains Sophia's diary for 1862, telling much about the weather, the activities of the children and "my husband," and their famous neighbors. On May 7 she records the touching detail that Una and Rose "gathered violets for Mr. Thoreau," who had died the previous day.

Volume 13 has an essay about the early writing of F.H. Hedge and nine letters from him about his reminiscences of Emerson, addressed to Emerson's biographer, J.E. Cabot. There are two essays about the works of Emerson, one on "Friendship," one on *Parnassus*, and a long series of letters of W.E. Channing, Jr., Thoreau's frequent walking companion, written mostly to Margaret Fuller (his sister-in-law), Emerson, and Thoreau.

**A Mirror for Americanists: Reflections on the Idea of American Literature.** William C. Spengemann. Univ. Press of New England, 1989. \$25; paper, \$9.95.

William Spengemann is a great one for asking questions that seem simple enough on the surface and easy enough to answer, like What is literature? What is America? and What does it mean when you put them together into "American literature?" But for him the questions become endlessly complicated the more

one ponders them. It does not appear that he provides final answers. Indeed, he says that to define American literature is a "task both necessary and impossible for the same reason: what we call American literature simply does not have the sort of *prima facie* identity that the North American continent and the United States do. Even the most original and idiosyncratic works of American literature were written in a European language by persons steeped in transatlantic culture and whose idea of literature itself was based primarily upon European poetry, fiction, and drama."

The ultimate problem is language, for there is no *American* language; our books must be written in English, and they naturally become a part of *English* literature (but to be categorized as American, not *British*). Spengemann is all for revising old categories, doing away with such labels as Romantic, Victorian, and American, in favor of plain and simple 19th-century English literature. He addresses his questions with intelligence and sprightly good humor, and the seven chapters in his book are well worth reading.

It is refreshing nowadays to come across 183 pages of literary discussion in which, if I did not blindly skip over them, the word *structuralism* appears only once (and not very approvingly), and *semiotics* and *deconstruction* not at all. Is this a happy portent for the 1990s? My only major quarrel with Spengemann, indeed, and maybe it is better described as a quibble, is over his use of the revolting word *Americanist* to describe himself and others like him. Why not be again plain and simple with, say, "student of American literature"? Otherwise, why not "Britishist," too, which ought to put a quietus on discussion.

#### Earl W. Count

**Mennonite Society.** Calvin Redekop. Johns Hopkins, 1989. \$40; paper, \$14.95.

The author is both a Mennonite and a sociologist, an unusual blend that delivers at once an informative, succinct, and readable portrayal of, well, a worthy folk. They are not many, yet they are scattered almost worldwide. "Church," "denomination," "sect" fit them poorly; they lack—and do not miss—a central organization. Their local communities are autonomous and autochthonous and they splinter rather readily; paradoxically, this very proneness seems to sustain their identity. Their 16th-century European homeland hardly knows them today (Anabaptists). Over almost a half-millennium they have learned to bend and not break, whatever vicissitudes befall them.

The author calls them a "family of believers" whose constitution is the Bible. The nearest thing to a Supreme Court is the local bishop, but the analogy is a bit forced. The early Anabaptists sought to reform the Reformation. The Bible was open to everyone's interpretation of it; but within a "family of believers," individuals were not likely to deviate far, and the Mennonites were not given to theological speculation. Religion to them was and is pragmatic, earthy, and adequate to shape and monitor life's secular side.

The author confines his limning to North America. His more technical *obligato* he reserves, chapter by chapter, for the end, plus a bibliographical critique.

**Earth-Sheltered Dwellings in Tunisia: Ancient Lessons for Modern Design.** Gideon S.

Golany. Univ. of Delaware, 1987. \$35.

A leading modern architect finds worthy of study what cave-dwellers and earth-burrowers have practiced for millennia. In Tunisia (Golany has explored elsewhere, too) the geotecture had molded a way of life, with privacy, safety, and thermal tempering. Water and sewage problems have proved soluble even in this grudging land.

Subterranean fourmillage is quite a modern thing: basements, underground emporia, restaurants, offices, and throughways are space-savers. The Tunisian Matmata Plateau and the long-abandoned Roman Regia are teachers still. The architect's drawings, diagrams, and photographs are soberly explicit: buildings and places are for people.

**French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment.** Paul Rabinow. M.I.T., 1989. \$35.

In the previous century, anthropologists devoted themselves to capturing "nonmodernized" cultures. In our century, they have striven to salvage the records of vanishing cultures or to observe how they strive to "modernize." Rabinow is of a growing company that explores the anthropology of "modernization."

Europe "modernized" after the Napoleonic era. Rabinow concentrates on the French style between 1830 and 1930—"about the emergence of certain practices of reason in France . . . about fields of knowledge (hygienic, statistical, biological, geographical, and social); about forms (architectural and urbanistic); about social technologies of pacification (royal, industrial, colonial, and socialist); and about new social spaces (liberal disciplinary spaces, agglomerations, and new towns) . . . the diverse constructions of norms and the search for forms adequate to understand and regulate what comes to be known as modern society."

France is a relatively small and compact country, crowded with centuries of history and life. The book is a pioneering bit of anthropology. The reviewer respects pioneers.

#### Russell B. Stevens

**Peacemaking Among Primates.** Frans de Waal. Harvard, 1989. \$29.95.

In his earlier book, *Chimpanzee Politics*, de Waal dealt with the many and varied social in-

teractions of a single species. Here he contrasts four species—five, if one includes the chapter on humans—in relation to the different ways in which they deal with conflict, the apparent tendency to elicit conflict, and above all the techniques by which conflicts are limited and resolved. In so doing, he argues that far too much emphasis has in the past been placed on aspects of aggression *per se*, and too little on the resolution of conflicts arising therefrom. This, of course, is what he means by peace-making, with its message for humans.

**Patenting the Sun: Polio and the Salk Vaccine.** Jane S. Smith. William Morrow, 1990. \$22.95.

Only those who were adolescents, or parents, during the frightening days of infantile paralysis some decades ago can fully appreciate the story that unfolds here. The author not only provides, in commendably readable style, an account of Jonas Salk's search for an effective vaccine but shows how that search was buffeted by competition from other laboratories, by the political climate of the times, and by the role of the organization most simply thought of as the "March of Dimes."

**Gene Dreams: Wall Street, Academia, and the Rise of Biotechnology.** Robert Teitelman. Basic Books, 1989. \$19.95.

This is a readable, even breezy, account of the interplay of two cultures—quite possibly three—rather different from those proposed so powerfully by C.P. Snow some years ago. Teitelman traces the rise and the faltering, if not fall, of several organizations hurriedly established when the enormous possibilities of biotechnology first came to be fully realized. This movement broke many of the barriers separating established corporations, financial institutions, and the academic community. Not surprisingly, the subsequent interactions were, to say the least, chaotic and at times bordered on the disastrous. It's an intriguing tale.

**Evolution and the Myth of Creationism: A Basic Guide to the Facts in the Evolution Debate.** Tim M. Berra. Stanford, 1990. \$29.50; paper, \$7.95.

It is a tragedy of our educational system that it remains essential to continue writing books to counteract creationism and to continue recommending that they be read. For the foresee-

(continued on back cover)

#### A special offer. . .

Diane Ravitch's article on multiculturalism in American education, reprinted in this issue of *The Key Reporter*, is just one of a fine selection of articles from the Summer 1990 issue of *The American Scholar*. Others include Matthew Stevenson's recollections of his visit to Guadalcanal, the place where his father fought the "Good War"; Gertrude Himmelfarb's assessment of Victorian philanthropy compared with our "progressive" social institutions and arrangements; and Lewis M. Dabney's portrait of Edmund Wilson as a student at Princeton, and his influence among his artistic and literary friends, Scott Fitzgerald included.

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## Recommended Reading

(continued from page 7)

able future these efforts must continue. Berra's volume is succinct and well done.

**Genethics: The Clash Between the New Genetics and Human Values.** David Suzuki and Peter Knudtson. Harvard, 1989. \$25.

There is a wide spectrum of opinion as to the relative seriousness of the ethical questions raised by the "new" genetics—and even as to just how new the "new" genetics is. For people who tend to view the techniques now available to biological scientists with a measure of alarm, Suzuki and Knudtson have provided a summary review, as it were, of what these techniques are and what they can do. Then the authors discuss eight or more conspicuous aspects that they describe as "genetic parables," from each of which they derive an ethical theme. They candidly recognize, at the outset, that their moral arguments are not intended to be completely objective. Given that, however, their views well deserve consideration.

**The Compassionate Beast: What Science Is Discovering About the Humane Side of Humanity.** Morton Hunt. William Morrow, 1990. \$18.95.

It is in no way intended as derogatory to say that Hunt's study is largely anecdotal. Whether the human species is for the most part aggressive, or fundamentally altruistic, has intrigued the specialists for many years. Whether these attributes, in whatever mixture, are genetically inherent or culturally instilled is no less at issue. This author tends to argue for the existence of a basic altruistic component in the human personality and even

## Dissertation Compares Colleges With, Without $\Phi$ BK

A doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina, Rhonda Pearl Richburg, has completed a thesis comparing all 17 accredited, private, liberal arts colleges that have  $\Phi$ BK chapters in the 11 southeastern states with all 12 similar colleges in South Carolina that do not have  $\Phi$ BK chapters. She reported differences in numerous characteristics in nine categories:

1. Historical (three-quarters of colleges with  $\Phi$ BK chapters, versus one-third of those without, began as single-sex institutions);

2. Academic programs ( $\Phi$ BK institutions offered four times as many interdisciplinary and interdepartmental programs in liberal arts and sciences as non- $\Phi$ BK institutions);

3. Admission requirements (SAT scores were far higher in  $\Phi$ BK colleges);

4. Selectivity (most  $\Phi$ BK colleges were categorized as "highly selective" on the

1987 Carnegie Classification of Institutions; none of the non- $\Phi$ BK colleges was);

5. Graduation requirements (many more  $\Phi$ BK than non- $\Phi$ BK institutions required foreign languages for graduation, and more non- $\Phi$ BK than  $\Phi$ BK institutions required sciences);

6. Undergraduates (non- $\Phi$ BK institutions had larger proportions of "nontraditional"—older—and African-American undergraduates);

7. Faculty ( $\Phi$ BK colleges had a much higher proportion of full-time faculty members with earned doctorates and tenure, and paid much higher salaries at all professorial ranks);

8. Income ( $\Phi$ BK colleges had much more income—tuition, endowment, gifts, grants, contracts—than other colleges); and

9. Expenditures ( $\Phi$ BK colleges spent more than twice as much on educational and general expenses as other colleges).

for the capacity to augment that feature through specific educational and training regimes. Whatever the answer turns out to be, here is a fascinating contribution to the search for it.

**Alternative Agriculture.** Committee on the Role of Alternative Farming Methods in Modern Production Agriculture, Board on Agriculture, National Research Council. National Academy Press, 1989. \$29.95.

**Field Testing Genetically Modified Organisms: Framework for Decisions.** Committee on Scientific Evaluation of the Introduction of Genetically Modified Microorganisms and Plants into the Environment, Board on Biology, National Research Council. National Academy Press, 1989. \$19.95.

What might be called adversarial advocacy seems ever more conspicuous in our national life; the debate becomes increasingly shrill, for the proponents speak all too frequently in absolutes. The reports noted here represent what must be done, by painstaking review of available data, to arrive at maximally dependable positions on two of the many controversial is-

ssues now much debated: (1) the practicability of adopting unconventional farming techniques into commercial agriculture and (2) the advisability of testing genetically "engineered" organisms in the field. Neither report is "easy" reading. Both are well within the comprehension of educated laypersons. Nothing less than studies of this sort will be adequate to achieve the balanced, informed analysis without which wise policy decisions are all but impossible.

**The Ants.** Bert Hölldobler and Edward O. Wilson. Harvard, 1990. \$65.

One searches for the appropriate adjective—"awesome" may be the best choice. There are more than 700 large pages in a volume that weighs some seven pounds—crammed with a bewildering array of meticulous detail and thoughtful analysis. Granted this book is in one sense a monograph only for the specialist, one section after another throughout the book addresses topics of interest to and understandable by nonbiologists. Fortunately, also, the writing is both clear and attractive.

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