



PHI BETA KAPPA

THE KEY REPORTER

FALL 2011



A KEY TO SUCCESS
JOHN ARNETT MITCHELL
AT BOWDOIN COLLEGE



Volume 76, Number 3
Fall 2011

Editor & Designer: Kelly Gerald
Consulting Editor: John Churchill

The Key Reporter (ISSN: 0023-0804) is published quarterly by the Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1606 New Hampshire Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009. Periodicals postage is paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional addresses. IPM #1213423

Opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the editors or the officers of the Society. Circulation for this issue: 559,894.

For nonmembers, single copies are available for \$2; one year's subscription is \$5. Printed by Brown Printing Company, East Greenville, Pa.

Copyright © 2011 by the Phi Beta Kappa Society. All rights are reserved. The Phi Beta Kappa name, key and *The Key Reporter* name are registered trademarks of the Phi Beta Kappa Society.

The Society's privacy policy prohibits the distribution of member information.

Postmaster: Send change-of-address notices to: *The Key Reporter*, The Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1606 New Hampshire Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009.

Website: www.pbk.org

Circulation Policy

All four quarterly issues of *The Key Reporter* are sent to members who support the Society by donating to ΦΒΚ's annual giving program.

Checks made out to the Phi Beta Kappa Society may be sent to the attention of Annual Gifts, 1606 New Hampshire Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009. Contributions are fully tax-deductible.

Newly initiated members receive all four issues for one year.

The spring and fall issues are mailed to every ΦΒΚ member living in the U.S. for whom the membership records office has an address.

Puppy Love

Lovers of liberal learning may have been disheartened by recent reports from researchers who have looked at the consequences of college students testing out their opinions by arguing them against opposing views. Surely, this is what we had thought we wanted: Give reasons! Tell us why you think that! Let me offer you my reasons, and we'll sort this out!

But no, apparently not. The evidence seems to be that people's positions actually harden under such circumstances. That is, all parties became even more firmly convinced of their initial views, and more firmly convinced that their opponents were just wrong. Apparently confirmation bias feeds on contradiction. Sigh.

But Plato knew about this problem. Some readers will know by now that I am very fond of a certain passage in Book VII of *The Republic*. Socrates is talking about the education of those who would be worthy to rule. In a democratic society, all of us get a voice in that. Not that Plato favored any such thing, but let that pass for the moment. His point is that those who rule should know how to think critically, to understand definitions, to compare concepts, to seek reasons and to critique and defend different views in conversation. His interlocutor objects that there is danger in this "dear delight" (Benjamin Jowett's translation). It is likely that people trained in these skills will be "always contradicting and refuting others in imitation of those who refute them; like puppy dogs, they rejoice in pulling and tearing at all who come near them."

I think this image is captivating: Those who possess only the techniques of argumentation are like puppies, tugging and ripping at things for sport. Anyone who has ever waited on a Labrador Retriever to outgrow puppyhood can relate to this. I once had a Lab who ate the lawn furniture, the cannas and a small tree. This illustrates Plato's timeless genius.

So there's risk. That's what the study referenced above detected. Plato thought overcoming this problem was a matter of age and training. But some old dogs never overgrow young stunts. The real question is this: What differentiates mere pulling and tearing from the dialogical pursuit of truth?

The answer is, of course, the aim of the interlocutors. What game is being played? If the game is defined as competition and the aim is "my side wins," then of course we stiffen and become more fixed in our views when confronted with opposition. I learned this playing football. When they hit, hit back. And keep hitting back no matter where the ball is on the field. Who doesn't love a goal line stand? Or a touchdown on fourth-and-goal?

However much we might love it, though, this isn't the pursuit of truth. It's a contest of will and power. If there are things to love beyond that, then the game must be structured differently. The structure of the game flows from the character of the interest we bring to it. Plato thought you could overcome the competitive emphasis on winning the argument by bringing people to love the truth.

Dress it up how you like, something like that must be the case. Even the very thing we are most apt to value — critical thinking — turns out to be risky without worthy dispositions among those who wield it. Did we want a puzzle of consuming importance and compelling interest? How's this? What dispositions, what stake in the game, transform the mere contest of argument into the dispassionate pursuit of better opinions for all? I keep thinking that our Founders knew what they were doing when they put up three stars and threw in Morality and Friendship along with Philosophy.

John Churchill
Secretary

Read John Churchill's weekly "From the Secretary" blog about issues of importance to Phi Beta Kappa and to higher education in the liberal arts and sciences at www.pbk.org.

SPOTLIGHT



Jane Harman (ΦBK, Smith College, 1966), former Congresswoman from California and the director, president and CEO of the Woodrow Wilson Center.

Smith College was a major contributing factor to the empowerment of a generation of women like me. Smith offered a nurturing environment in which I began to develop confidence as a leader, and it gave me the tools to think critically and reach higher. It is hard to imagine now that I had to travel to all-male Amherst to take the LSAT — not then offered at Smith — and was one of a small group of women at Harvard Law. But my liberal arts education equipped me very well then — and since.

— Jane Harman

Jane Harman resigned from Congress on February 28, 2011, to join the Woodrow Wilson Center as director, president and CEO.

Representing the aerospace center of California during nine terms in Congress, she served on all the major security committees: six years on armed services, eight years on intelligence and four on homeland security. She has made numerous Congressional fact-finding missions to hot spots around the world including North Korea, Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Guantanamo Bay to assess threats against the U.S.

During her long public career, she has been recognized as a national expert at the nexus of security and public policy issues. Harman received the Defense Department Medal for Distinguished Service in 1998, the CIA Seal Medal in 2007 and the National Intelligence Distinguished Public Service Medal in March 2011.

A product of Los Angeles public schools, Harman is a *magna cum laude* graduate of Smith College, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and

Continued on page 10

CONTENTS

FROM THE SECRETARY

Puppy Love 2

ΦBK NEWS

Martha Nussbaum to Receive Hook Award at 43rd Triennial Council 4

The American Scholar Wins Best Writing Award 4

“Are the Humanities Now a Luxury?”: ΦBK-ACAD Conference November 10-12 5

ΦBK Lecture Series Presents David M. Abshire 5

Feed Your Head with the ΦBK Video Series 5

Archaeology and Funerary Art in Magna Graecia: Interview with Sibley Fellow Tiziana D’Angelo 6

Final Flight of Space Shuttle Atlantis: The U.S. Space Program and Its Future
by Tom Jones 7

A Key to Success
by John R. Cross 8

Laugh, I Thought I’d Die — Satiric Greek Epitaphs
by Michael Wolfe 11

FROM OUR BOOK CRITICS

Reviews 12

ON THE COVER

A popular place for Arizona State University students to study between classes is under new shade structures outside Memorial Union on the Tempe campus. (Photo courtesy of Arizona State University.)

Martha Nussbaum to Receive Hook Award at 43rd Triennial Council

American philosopher Martha Nussbaum has been selected to receive Phi Beta Kappa's Sidney Hook Memorial Award. The award will be presented at the 43rd Triennial Council in Florida next year.

Nussbaum is the Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago, a position appointed in the philosophy department, law school and divinity school. She is also an associate in the classics department and the political science department, a member of the Committee on Southern Asian Studies, and a board member of the Human Rights Program, as well as the founder and coordinator of the Center for Comparative Constitutionalism.

From 1986 to 1993, Nussbaum was a research advisor at the World Institute for Development Economics Research in Helsinki, a part of the United Nations University. She has chaired the Committee on International Cooperation, the Committee on the Status of Women of the American Philosophical Association and the Committee for Public Philosophy. Nussbaum has been a member of the Council of the American Academy of

Arts and Sciences and a member of the board of the American Council of Learned Societies.

Her book *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Harvard University Press, 1997) won the Ness Book Award of the Association of American Colleges and Universities in 1998 and the Grawemeyer Award in Education in 2002. Her most recent titles include *From Disgust to Humanity: Sexual Orientation and Constitutional Law* (Oxford University Press, 2010), *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton University Press, 2010) and *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Belknap Press, 2011). Her current book in progress is *Political Emotions: The Public Psychology of a Decent Society*; it is under contract to Harvard.

Established in 1991 in memory of the distinguished American philosopher Sidney Hook (1902-1989), who was elected to Phi Beta Kappa at City College of New York, this award recognizes national distinction by a single scholar in each of three endeavors: scholarship, undergraduate teaching



Martha Nussbaum

and leadership in the cause of liberal arts education.

The award of \$7,500 has been presented five times in conjunction with the meetings of the Council of Phi Beta Kappa. Funding for the award was made possible by a grant from the John Dewey Foundation.

The 43rd Triennial Council will be held at The Breakers in Palm Beach, Fla., Aug. 2-4, 2012. For more information about the Sidney Hook Memorial Award or about the 2012 Council meeting, call (202) 745-3235 or write to awards@pbk.org. ■

The American Scholar Wins Best Writing Award

On May 19, *Utne Reader*, the best of the alternative press, presented nine publications with the Utne Independent Press Awards for outstanding journalism in 2010. *The American Scholar* was among them, receiving the award for Best Writing. The *Scholar* was also a finalist for the General Excellence award.

The *Scholar*, along with the other winners, was featured in the July-August issue of *Utne Reader*.

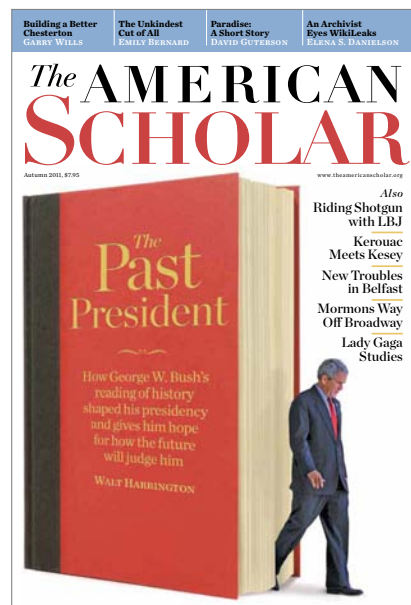
The Utne Independent Press Awards recognize the excellence and vitality of alternative and independent publishing. *Utne Reader's* editors select nominee publications through an extensive reading process and yearlong examination, rather than via a competition with entry forms and fees. In this way, the magazine honors the efforts of

small, sometimes unnoticed publications that provide innovative, thought-provoking perspectives often ignored or overlooked by mass media.

"Individual essays and articles, poems and stories, are often picked for the best of the year anthologies, but this Utne Award is particularly gratifying because it honors the quality of all the writing in the magazine throughout the year," said Robert Wilson, editor of *The American Scholar*.

In recent years, the *Scholar* has been nominated for a number of National Magazine Awards and has won for general excellence, for best essay and twice for best feature story.

For more information about the *Scholar* or to subscribe, visit their website at www.theamericanscholar.org. ■



“Are the Humanities Now a Luxury?”

ΦBK-ACAD Conference November 10-12

The American Conference of Academic Deans and the Phi Beta Kappa Society are hosting their fourth biennial conference this fall, “Are the Humanities Now a Luxury?” The conference will be held Nov. 10-12, at the Francis Marion Hotel in Charleston, S.C.

The conference is designed to promote sustained inquiry about the role of the humanities in American higher education. Within the academy, colleges and universities make cuts in order to focus on programs with more enrollment appeal and apparent practical relevance. At the same time, the humanities also receive wider public critique, and conservatives and liberals alike, differing in their perceptions of the humanities’ role, stand to share an imputation of shortcoming, even failure. Questions abound, and we hope you will join us in South Carolina for lively, thought-provoking conversations that will attempt to answer the question “Are the humanities now a luxury?”

Plenary speakers include Lynn Pasquerella, president of Mount

Holyoke College; Ronald A. Crutcher, president of Wheaton College; and Mark Bauerlein, professor of English, Emory University.

For more information about the conference, including a preliminary program, please visit the ACAD website at www.acad-edu.org where you can register online, download a form to mail in with payment, and view the conference hotel rate and relevant contact information.

ΦBK members with questions about the event please write to Rhiana Quick at rquick@pbk.org.

ACAD and ΦBK have successfully co-sponsored three previous conferences on matters of importance to the intellectual and pedagogical work of the academy; “Promoting the Liberal Sciences: Science as Liberal Education” was held in 2007, “Liberal Education in America and the World” in 2005 and “Intellectual Leadership in the Liberal Arts” in 2003. ■

ΦBK Lecture Series

Presents

David M. Abshire



October 13

The George Washington University

David M. Abshire is president of the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress in Washington, D.C., and also president of the Richard Lounsbery Foundation of New York, which gives grants in the fields of science and education. He is vice chairman of the board of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, D.C., which he co-founded with Admiral Arleigh Burke in 1962, and served as its chief executive for many years. In 2002, he led in the establishment of the Abshire-Inamori Leadership Academy at CSIS.

Abshire’s lecture, “Heroic Leadership in American History,” will take place the evening of Oct. 13 on The George Washington University campus in Washington, D.C. A reception will follow.

For more information about this and other ΦBK Lecture Series events, call (202) 745-3287 or write to lectures@pbk.org. ■

Feed Your Head with the ΦBK Video Series

If you’re like most of us, you’ll somehow manage to find time to watch the latest viral video or scroll through that email forward so amazing it was sent to 40 strangers before it got to you. But because you’re also ΦBK, your brain might like to see something a bit more thoughtful in your inbox from time to time. Sign up now to stimulate your mind with the ΦBK Video Series!

Currently in its second year, the ΦBK Video Series is a program for our members and friends who enjoy thought-provoking lectures from eminent scholars and industry leaders. The program includes 25- to 40-minute videos from experts on diverse topics.

Upcoming lectures include “Handwriting after Gutenberg: John Milton to Steve Jobs” by Edward Tenner from *The Atlantic*, “Trade

Policy Protectionism and the Great Recession” by Chad P. Bown from the World Bank, and “The June 5, 2012, Transit of Venus” by renowned astronomer and long-time *Key Reporter* book reviewer Jay M. Pasachoff.

To receive the next ΦBK Video Series installment straight to your inbox, please write to communications@pbk.org. ■



Archaeology and Funerary Art in Magna Graecia

Interview with Sibley Fellow Tiziana D'Angelo

The winner of the Mary Isabel Sibley Fellowship in Greek Studies is Tiziana D'Angelo, a doctoral candidate in classical archaeology in the Department of the Classics at Harvard University.

D'Angelo will use the fellowship to travel to Rome and southern Italy in order to complete research for her dissertation, "Painting Death with the Colors of Life: Funerary Wall Painting in Magna Graecia (IV-II BCE)". Her project explores the phenomenon of polychrome wall painting in funerary contexts in Magna Graecia during the critical period that stretches from the crisis of the Greek hegemony to the consolidation of Roman power.

D'Angelo received her B.A., *summa cum laude*, in classics from the Università degli Studi di Pavia, Italy, and her master's in classical archaeology from the University of Oxford, where her thesis focused on the iconology of Macedonian tomb paintings.

Before departing for Italy, she took time for an email interview with Phi Beta Kappa about her research and about winning this year's Sibley fellowship.



ΦBK: *Your current research focuses on funerary wall painting in Magna Graecia. For the uninitiated, what would you say is unique about this form of expression and the historical context for your project?*

D'Angelo: Since the eighth century BCE, Magna Graecia had been a cultural and ethnical milieu, a region populated by several different local groups and yet dominated by Greek colonists. During the fourth and third centuries

BCE the indigenous elites from Lucania, Campania and Apulia were striving to define their own ethnic identities and political independence from the Greeks. It is within this turbulent social and cultural context that the phenomenon of the development of polychrome tomb painting took place. With their iconographies, stylistic features and technical devices, these paintings

wall paintings and of their archaeological contexts.

ΦBK: *What inspired you to study archaeology? How did you become interested in funerary art?*

D'Angelo: Brought up in Italy, surrounded by ancient art and archaeology, I soon fell victim to their irresistible charm. However, it was only with my first fieldwork experience in northern Etruria that I found inspiration and motivation to study archaeology, as I realized that no verbal picture could match the complexity of material realities. Over the years, my academic, curatorial and fieldwork experience has confirmed and strengthened this impression, and has shown me both the artistic side and the scientific rigor of this discipline.

Within archaeology, the funerary sphere occupies a special place. I started to work on funerary monuments for my undergraduate thesis, which focused on the Etruscan Amazons Sarcophagus from Tarquinia. During my graduate studies, I then continued to explore various funerary cultures across the Mediterranean, from Archaic Anatolia to Imperial Rome. What has always intrigued me about this particular type of art is that when images and objects were transferred to a funerary context, they underwent a process of redefinition of their usual meaning and function. Death was for the ancients a moment of transition, one of the rites of passage that marked human life. The actual practice of funerary rituals was a fundamental moment, during which the social cohesion of the living community and/or household was reinforced, and the physical remains of this act, for example the tomb and its decoration, testified to the transformation that the community undertook while dealing



Tomb 123 from the necropolis of Spinazzo at Paestum. (Photo courtesy of Tiziana D'Angelo.)

did not simply celebrate the social status of the deceased, but they operated as cultural and religious markers of their community. Preliminary research that I have conducted on Hellenistic wall painting shows that these paintings were both the expression of indigenous cultures and local artistic trends, and a part of a wider and more complex phenomenon, that is the diffusion of wall painting in ancient funerary contexts during the Hellenistic period. Methodologically, I am approaching the topic from an interdisciplinary perspective and use the conceptual tools provided by cultural historians and anthropologists to reach a new understanding of these ancient

Continued on page 10

Final Flight of Space Shuttle Atlantis

The U.S. Space Program and Its Future

By Tom Jones

In July, I witnessed at NASA's Kennedy Space Center the thunderous launch and graceful landing of the space shuttle Atlantis. The last of 135 shuttle missions marked the end of an era, wrapping up 30 years of space achievement. Atlantis' final crew — my colleagues Chris Ferguson, Doug Hurley, Sandy Magnus and Rex Walheim — executed a flawless supply run to the International Space Station (ISS), equipping it with vital spare parts, supplies and research equipment. The Station, designed around the shuttle's lifting power and resupply capacity, is NASA's human spaceflight focus for the next decade and beyond. The laboratory outpost must now learn to survive using a varied fleet of far less capable robotic supply craft, some yet to fly.

The space shuttle for three decades has represented the nation's robust engineering prowess, and has shown us, too, the limits of human judgment in dealing with complex technology. The shuttle was our classroom in space, teaching us how robotic systems and human insight could together tackle the most complex space operations ever attempted. Shuttle astronauts and ground controllers launched planetary probes, repaired and serviced the Hubble telescope, monitored our changing planet from a superb orbital vantage point and created an international research outpost in the advantageous environment of space.

But the shuttle never lived up to its designers' promise of affordable, airline-like access to Earth's orbit. The most complex machine ever built, it was always an experimental vehicle. Shuttles lacked an effective crew escape system, exposing astronauts to needlessly high risks. When in 1986

and 2003, NASA's decision-making and free-flowing lines of communication broke down, two shuttle crews were lost in terrible, preventable tragedies. Retiring this 1970s-era spaceship in favor of safer and more affordable technology is the right first step toward the future of exploration.

However, the nation's policy makers have retired the shuttle without pro-

threatens the Station, we are sure to miss the shuttle's heavy-lift capacity, its versatile robot arm, and its space-walking astronauts.

Equally serious is our lack of a clearly reasoned and well-supported national direction in space. NASA has been given neither the budget nor the schedule to fulfill President Barack Obama's stated goal of sending humans to explore nearby asteroids by 2025. Until both the president and Congress agree that investment in space leadership is in our vital national interest, our explorers will not reach the moon or nearby asteroids, or even venture beyond the Space Station. The required resources are indeed modest: a mere 0.6% of the nation's budget, up from 0.5% (\$19 billion) annually.

The shuttle's long list of achievements reminds us that America does not lack skill in space so much as the will to see our ambitions through. We must ask our leaders for clear goals, aggressive but realistic schedules, and the resources to achieve them. Scientific discovery and economic wealth await our nation in space, if we are wise enough, and determined enough, to seize them.



Atlantis at the NASA Kennedy Space Center on July 7, 2011, the night before the historic final flight of the Space Shuttle Program. (Photo courtesy of NASA/Bill Ingalls.)

viding a worthy — or timely — successor. Commercial transport ships to carry crews to the ISS are at least five years away, leaving us no choice today but to rent seats from our Russian partners. They will charge \$63 million per astronaut. NASA has no near-term plans to backstop the commercial firms, and in late August a Russian booster failure grounded, one hopes temporarily, their Soyuz crew transport and Progress cargo ships.

The space shuttle and Station teams are largely being laid off; their departure will come at great cost to America's future abilities in space. When, over the next decade, crisis

Tom Jones (ΦBK, University of Arizona, 1988) is a planetary scientist and four-time NASA astronaut. He speaks and writes frequently about the United States' future in space. His latest title is Planetology: Unlocking the Secrets of the Solar System (with Ellen Stofan; National Geographic, 2008). For more information, please visit www.AstronautTomJones.com.

A Key to Success

By John R. Cross

Over the years I have watched as my mother braided oval wool rugs from strips of fabric remnants and “deconstructed” clothing, carefully selecting colors and patterns for each braided strand to achieve a harmonious overall effect in the coiled rug. It is a skill that she learned from her grandmother and refined through years of experience. At times I feel as though the act of rug braiding is analogous to creating intertwined strands of historical narrative from scraps that may include individual objects, biographical details and the ways in which the past occasionally intersects the present.

This story begins with an object listed on eBay, the online auction site — a Phi Beta Kappa key, inscribed “1912 Bowdoin J.A. Mitchell.” Bowdoin College’s Phi Beta Kappa chapter, Alpha of Maine, was established in 1825 as the academic honor society’s sixth chapter. The key is a square gold medallion with the engraved symbols of the Society — the Greek letters ΦΒΚ, a hand pointing to a cluster of stars, the date of the society’s founding (December 5, 1776), the initials “S.P.” (“Societas Philosophiae”) — and the name, college and year of induction of the member. At a time when pocket watches were in fashion, many members wore the key as a watch fob, and in the 19th century a stem or post for winding watches became part of the key’s design.

J. Arnett Mitchell of Gallipolis, Ohio, entered Bowdoin as a member of the class of 1913 and graduated in three years as a member of 1912, *cum laude* and as a member of Phi Beta Kappa. He was the fourth African-American to enroll at Bowdoin as an undergraduate and was the second African-American elected to Phi Beta Kappa at the college (the first was Samuel Dreer of the class of 1910). The 1912 *Bugle* entry for “Mitch” indicates the high regard with which he was held by his classmates, although the quote selected by the editors to accompany his photo — “I stood

among them but not one of them — and yet at heart I was” — speaks volumes about the attitudes and expectations that on occasion must have left Mitchell feeling alone in a crowded room of his fellow students. I wish that I could read his commencement address on “Race Relations,” but, unfortunately, there is no copy in the college’s archives.

Following his graduation, Mitchell studied in Germany, taught English at Tuskegee and was dean of the academic department at Southern University in Louisiana. Considered ineligible for military service during World War I because of problems with his health and his vision, Mitchell wrote to Dean Kenneth C. M. Sills [1901], asking for assistance in obtaining a position in intelligence work to help the war effort. In 1921 Mitchell became the principal of Champion Avenue Middle School in Columbus, Ohio, a position that he held for 38 years.

Further research brought to light Mitchell’s significant contributions to public education in America. Champion was an all-black, *de facto* segregated school in a northern urban context. In a 1924 article in the *Educational Research Bulletin* on race and IQ, Mitchell challenged the conventional interpretation that lower scores on standardized tests for African-Americans measured ability. He pointed out that African-American students scored higher “in states where educational opportunity was better,” and that there was “no evidence to support the belief that this difference is any greater than that existing between different economic levels of whites — professional class, skilled laborers down through the unskilled laborers.”

Mitchell earned a master of arts degree from Ohio State University in 1925 and encouraged all of the teachers at Champion to earn advanced degrees. Adah Ward Randolph of Ohio University has written extensively on Mitchell’s tenure at Champion, pointing out that “Mitchell and his cadre of hand-picked teachers expected respect, order, and success.” One passage in her 2004 article in the journal *Urban*

Education jumped out: “...Mitchell stressed educational excellence. *To serve as a role model, he always wore his Phi Beta Kappa key at Champion*” [emphasis mine].

In searching for clues as to why Mitchell came to Bowdoin and what inspired his life-long commitment to educational excellence, I found some hints in his hometown of Gallipolis, which sits across the Ohio River from West Virginia. In 1908, Gallipolis’s all-black Lincoln High School had a new principal. Edward Alexander Bouchet had taught chemistry and physics for 26 years at the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia before accepting the position at Lincoln. He was the first African-American to have graduated from Yale (1874), the first African-American to have earned a doctorate from an American university (physics, Yale, 1876), and, but for a technicality, would have been the first African-American officially inducted into Phi Beta Kappa. Yale’s chapter was inactive for 13 years, so Bouchet’s delayed induction in 1884 followed the induction of George Washington Henderson at the University of Vermont in 1877. Mitchell’s younger sister, Lillian, recalled that Bouchet was a frequent visitor in the Mitchell home and that Arnett would talk extensively with him when he returned from Bowdoin each summer. Bouchet’s intellectual brilliance, achievements and desire to “pay it forward” so that a new generation of students might have opportunities matched to their abilities are still inspirational more than a century later; I can only imagine the profound effect that those conversations might have had on Mitchell.

Whatever Mitchell’s experiences were as an undergraduate at Bowdoin, he became a popular and well-liked member of his class. His letters to college officials and classmates express his gratitude that Bowdoin’s voice was heard among the speeches at his retirement celebration in Columbus in 1959 and that a photo and story appeared in the alumni magazine. In his words, “The days I spent at Bowdoin mean more and more to me as the years pass

Right: John Arnett Mitchell's Phi Beta Kappa key, rescued from eBay by his alma mater, Bowdoin College.

Below: Profile of Mitchell from the 1912 Bowdoin College *Bugle*.



John Arnett Mitchell, Gallipolis, O. 3 W. H.

Provisional Commencement Appointment (4); Deutscher Verein (3).—Lincoln High School.

*I stood among them but not one of them—
and yet at heart I was.*

"Mitch" is our only representative from the Buck-eye state. Although he never has taken less than five courses he has always complained of having too much spare time. Last fall he decided to leave our class and enter 1912. We are sorry that it had to be such an unworthy aggregation that received him. But when we think that he has been able to "kid" the professors so successfully, and to do in three years what we must take four to accomplish, we are truly envious.



on. Bowdoin taught me the spirit of idealism, of a dissatisfaction with things as they are; it taught me the joy of achievement. And I find that these things bring a happiness which transcends race or color."

The final strand in the braided narrative concerns the recent history and the future of the key itself. How did it end up on eBay? The auction listing only indicated that the key had come from an estate. Mitchell died in 1969, and his wife and four children are all now deceased. A Phi Beta Kappa key is

small enough to be lost among the contents of a desk drawer or box of jewelry in an estate sale. While we may not know about the circumstances that brought the key to an online auction, there is greater certainty about its future. Karl Fattig, secretary-treasurer of Phi Beta Kappa at Bowdoin, entered into the last-minute, nerve-wracking online auction and, thanks to an anonymous gift from a member of the Bowdoin faculty, had the winning bid. Mitchell's Phi Beta Kappa key has returned to his alma mater in time for

the 100th anniversary of his graduation in 2012. As the sight of his Phi Beta Kappa key inspired students at the Champion Avenue Middle School for 38 years, so may its story and the life of its owner teach us about the joy of achievement. ■

John R. Cross is secretary of development and college relations at Bowdoin. This essay originally appeared in the Bowdoin Daily Sun on April 25, 2011.

Jane Harman
Continued from 3

Harvard Law School. Prior to serving in Congress, she was a top aide in the United States Senate, deputy cabinet secretary to President Jimmy Carter, special counsel to the Department of Defense, and in private law practice.

Married for over three decades to Sidney Harman, founder and chairman emeritus of Harman International Industries and chairman of *Newsweek* magazine, she has four adult children and four grandchildren. Sidney Harman died in April 2011. ■

“Interview”
Continued from 6

with the mourning process.

ΦBK: *You’ll be working on research in Rome and southern Italy this fall toward completing your dissertation, “Painting Death with the Colors of Life: Funerary Wall Painting in Magna Graecia (IV-II BCE).” Can you give us some sense of what the scope of your research will include on this visit?*

D’Angelo: One of the main goals of my research is to explore the dialogue between wall paintings, tomb structure and grave goods, in the attempt to understand the role that each of these elements played within the burial. This involves a careful autoptic analysis of archaeological material, often inedited, that is housed in several museums across southern Italy. By spending the coming academic year in Italy, on the one hand I will be able to conduct my research in Rome, benefiting from the great resources and the lively intellectual atmosphere of the American Academy and of the other international schools of classical studies; on the other hand, I will be able to travel easily to southern Italy to view the material and collect the data I need in order to complete my research.

ΦBK: *Phi Beta Kappa’s Sibley Fellowship is named for Mary Isabel Sibley. In 1908, she received her Ph.D. from Connell University, a rare accomplishment among women of her time. She then pursued a year of post-graduate work in Europe studying Greek language and history. How do you feel about winning a fellowship named for this pioneering woman scholar in*

Greek studies?

D’Angelo: When I learned about the Mary Isabel Sibley Fellowship and its history, I immediately thought that it would fit perfectly my personal and academic formation and my research project. I thought that, to a certain extent, my journey was similar and symmetrical to that of Miss Mary Isabel Sibley. Six years ago, I left my country to pursue graduate work abroad, first in England and then in the United States, and today I continue to find this experience abroad highly enriching. However, now that my research takes me temporarily back to the Mediterranean, I am grateful to the Phi Beta Kappa Society for promoting this unique opportunity, and I am honored to be this year’s Mary Isabel Sibley Fellow. ■

The annual Sibley Fellowship is awarded alternately in the fields of Greek and French. The fellowship has a stipend of \$20,000 and is not restricted to members of Phi Beta Kappa or to U.S. citizens. For more information, go to www.pbk.org or write to awards@pbk.org.

See the forest, save a tree.

Read *The American Scholar* anywhere, anytime, on your iPad, Mac and PC.



www.theamericanscholar.org/zinio

Laugh, I Thought I'd Die – Satiric Greek Epitaphs

By Michael Wolfe

Phi Beta Kappa members, who by definition owe a certain debt to Hellenism, may like to know that the Greeks invented the epitaph here in the West. Memorial verses chiseled in stone in the seventh century BCE probably represent the first reading experiences in Europe.

Ironic humor soon became a staple of the form. Even a poet as grave as Simonides (c. 560-468) felt free to use it. By the mid-third century, the renowned Libyan poet Callimachus ranked humor alongside verse itself, using his own epitaph to do it:

*This tomb you are passing holds
Callimachus.
He wrote good poems,
And timed his jokes at parties so
That everybody laughed.*

Two later practitioners, Lucilius and Nicarchus, injected real gallows

humor into the epitaphic form and helped prepare the way for the Latin satirist Juvenal.

Here's a small group of chuckling epitaphs, all at least 2,000 years old, which demonstrate that in the face of death the Greeks remained sharp-eyed and capable of humor.

Anonymous

*I, the actor, Philistion
Soothed men's pain with comedy and
laughter.
A man of parts, I often died—
But never quite like this.*

Simonides

*After drinking a lot, eating a lot
And speaking badly of everyone,
Here I lie, Timocreon of Rhodes.*

Lucilius

Diphon saw the man beside him

*Hung up on a higher cross than he,
And died of envy.*

Lucilius

*Hermon the miser hanged himself,
Wracked with grief that in his sleep
He dreamed he'd spent some money.*

Nicarchus

*Yesterday, that sham Dr. Markos
checked the pulse of Zeus.
Today, though made of marble and
king of the gods,
Zeus is being carted to the graveyard.*

These epitaphs were translated by Michael Wolfe (ΦBK, Wesleyan University, 1968). His book, The Last Word: Selected Greek Epitaphs, with an introduction by Richard P. Martin, is forthcoming from Johns Hopkins University Press.



Phi Beta Kappa Membership Items

Phi Beta Kappa's distinctive key is the official symbol of membership in the Society. A complete line of solid gold and gold-plated key jewelry, as well as other items bearing the Society's insignia is available. Keys are made in three sizes in either 10-karat solid gold or 24-karat gold electroplate. The medium-size key is shown here actual size with matching 18-inch neck chain.

The Phi Beta Kappa bookmark is made of satin polished pewter, engraved with the Society's insignia. The bookmark is not personalized.

The popular membership wall display combines a membership certificate and a large gold-plated key in a handsome 12 x 16 inch walnut frame.

To order, complete the form below and mail it with your payment and a copy of your mailing label from the back cover showing your membership number to Hand & Hammer, 2610 Morse Lane, Woodbridge, VA 22192. You can also place an order or request the complete product brochure by calling (703) 491-4866 or by faxing (703) 491-2031. You can also order on line at www.hand-hammer.com. A four dollar shipping and handling fee is added to each order.

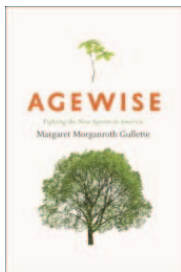
- Phi Beta Kappa bookmark (pewter 6 inches)..... \$15
- Medium-size key, 10-karat gold (1-3/8" high)..... \$130
- Medium-size key, 24-karat gold-plated (1-3/8" high)..... \$32
- 10-karat gold neck chain, 18 inches (for gold key)..... \$85
- 24-karat gold-plated chain, 18 inches (for plated key)..... \$12
- Phi Beta Kappa wall display (certificate and large key)..... \$99
- Shipping Fee (per order)..... \$4

Name, college, and date for personalization _____

— Check payable to Hand & Hammer is enclosed
 Charge my _____ Visa _____ MasterCard (VA residents add 5%)
 Card No. _____ Exp. Date _____
 Signature _____ Phone _____

From Our Book Critics

By G. Cornelissen-Guillaume



Agewise. Fighting the New Ageism in America. Margaret Morganroth Gullette. University of Chicago Press, 2011. 304 pages. \$29.00

Agewise is an eloquent fight against ageism, the stereotyping of and discrimination against individuals because of their age. It is also propaganda against the consumerism fueling fears of aging and making the illusion of youthful perfection glitter. Margaret Gullette's scholarship draws from history, economics, social and political studies, as well as biomedical, psychology and other literary works to offer a positive view on aging to counter what she calls the decline ideology, to which all of us are exposed, at all ages. It may start in childhood, when stereotypes against others seep in, and then turn against us later, tainting the imagination, damaging perceptions and spoiling life expectations.

Whereas ageism alone cannot be solely blamed for the recent economic meltdown, the author offers plentiful examples where being too old is too large a part of the problem to be ignored, with dire consequences also in terms of health care. Elders used to be respected for their wisdom and vast lifetime experience. But the erosion of seniority and respect for aging are diminishing the self-esteem of many midlife workers who are being marginalized because of age, even leading some to suicide. Examining reasons why excess deaths are suffered by the aged in catastrophic situations such as Hurricane Katrina, Gullette also identifies multiple discriminations.

Menopause demonization and the hype for hormonal replacement therapy are presented as two linked phenomena underpinning women's dread of aging and the fantasy of anti-aging medicine. Cosmetic surgery is attacked next for the lack of attention to pain, disfigurement and even death. Mortality and complication rates are, apparently, markedly higher for cosmetic surgeries than for

surgeries necessary for the treatment of disease. The author also makes the case that ageism needs to be fought so as not to deny and obscure the physical beauty and sexual expression in later life.

The book includes personal stories as well. In her essay on forgetfulness, Gullette warns us that the fear of memory loss may be exaggerated, a danger to our human relations, our mental health and public policy. She emphasizes a progress narrative that promises children not a charmed life but a resilient self. Progress is also the foundation of her Free High School for Adults in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua, where the underprivileged are offered a free education.

While this book deals with ageism and not aging, it is the (chrono)physiology of aging from which we may draw some insight, as evidenced by the following two examples. Every day, our peak expiratory flow changes by much more than it does during a lifetime [*Journal of Gerontology*, 36.1 (1981): 31-33]. Aging studies based on single samples can yield opposite results, even when the time of day of measurement is fixed. For instance, when changes with age affect the daily (circadian) extent of change and not the daily mean, and measurements are taken either at the daily peak or at the daily trough, an increase or a decrease with age will be observed, as in the case of time estimation [*Clinical Interventions in Aging*, 3.4 (Dec. 2008): 749-760]. Both examples support Gullette's point that aging should not be equated with decline. They also illustrate that aging cannot be discussed without the awareness of the many cycles that shape our physiology, a fascinating topic in its own right that, hopefully, the author may pursue in her next book?



How We Age: A Doctor's Journey into the Heart of Growing Old. Marc E. Agronin. Da Capo Press, 2011. 320 pages. \$25.00

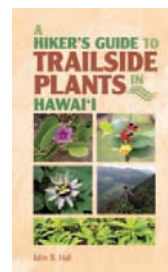
In this book, Marc Agronin, a geriatric psychologist at the Miami Jewish Health Systems, turns to his patients and their life stories to find

answers to the question of what old age means. Reflecting on the fact that medical students' first encounter with an old person is often a corpse in their gross anatomy class, he ponders how easy it is to become detached, forgetting that the formaldehyded body being dissected was once a human being.

Lessons from medical training tend to reinforce the perception that aging equals decline, dementia and death. The author offers a more balanced perspective on aging by exploring the experience of old age through the lives of his patients, illustrating that aging also equals vitality, wisdom, creativity, spirit and hope.

Defining the aging process scientifically, the author notes that people above 90 years of age tend to be healthier and more active than slightly younger cohorts, but that clinicians are often reluctant to intervene when problems arise. Many of the anecdotes in the book illustrate just how worthwhile it is to treat patients without any discrimination based on age. To do so, Agronin follows two maxims: "start low, go slow, but go" (older patients require a moderate, measured and persistent intervention, whether advice or medication is dispensed); and "treat the whole person who has the disease rather than just the disease itself."

Exploring aging to the very frontier of life, the author notes that the final months of life are often considered a living death, when every second of life should be regarded as precious. He stresses that the incredible degree of respect naturally accorded to the deceased should also be extended to the living. This is a thoughtful and compassionate book.



A Hiker's Guide to Trailside Plants in Hawaii. John B. Hall. Mutual Publishing, 2008. 240 pages. \$16.95

It would, of course, have been much more educative to appreciate this book while hiking the Hawaiian trails! Nonetheless, John Hall's book is quite interesting to read, even on a hot Minnesotan summer day.

It is organized in five sections, by climate zones, devoted to coastal plants, dry forest plants, mesic (intermediate) forest plants, wet forest plants and plants in the subalpine zone. In each section, the author systematically describes herbs, shrubs, trees, vines and ferns.

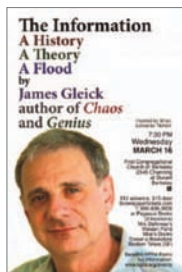
In most instances, both the common, usually Hawaiian, and scientific names are provided, along with family names indicating where the plant fits into the plant kingdom and a color photograph contributed by John Hoover and Ken Suzuki, with Robert Aldinger, Thomas H. Rau, Vincent T. Soeda and Bradley F. Waters. The pictures could have been larger for easier identification on the hiking trails, but this shortcoming is compensated for by the provision of detailed descriptions and legends summarizing key features of each plant.

This book's attraction, even away from hiking trails, lies in the stories the reader can learn about each plant: whether it is an endemic plant, found only in Hawaii, whether it was introduced by the original Polynesian settlers, or brought in after the arrival of Europeans or Americans. The Hawaiian Islands are particularly rich in endemic species.

Truly amazing is the varied usage of these plants, mostly for medicinal purposes or food, but also for multiple other applications. Through the history of the flora, the reader also gains a glimpse of the Hawaiian culture that has remained close to nature. This is a book that can be enjoyed by botanists and lay people alike. ■

Germaine Cornelissen-Guillaume is a professor of integrative biology and physiology and co-director of the Halberg Chronobiology Center at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

By Rick Eden



The Information: A History, A Theory, A Flood.
James Gleick.
Pantheon, 2011.
526 pages. \$29.95

The Information is a surprisingly engaging collection

of 15 short essays on a topic that could be considered dry — the rise of the information age. In 500 pages James Gleick manages to cover many of the major concepts, discoveries and inventions related to information: encoding and cryptography; uncertainty and entropy; bits, bytes and qubits; genes and memes; complexity and chaos; telegraphy and telephony; computers, of course, and many others. He also profiles many of the prodigiously brilliant men and women who played key roles in the rise of the information age, such as Claude Shannon, the father of information science, and Lord Byron's daughter Augusta Ada, an amateur mathematician credited with writing the first computer program (before the availability of a computer!).

The book's success is a triumph of style over substance. Gleick is a skilled writer with a poet's ear for musical phrasings and ease with metaphors. He routinely enlivens technical language with alliteration: "IPods and plasma displays," "short-lived technologies for tokenizing information," "far-flung family of phenomena." The result is the rare book that rewards reading aloud. Gleick is also able to explain arcane and complicated concepts concisely and clearly, reflecting the familiarity gained through his earlier books on chaos, Isaac Newton and Richard Feynman.

The Information is organized in a loose, shifting structure that will appeal to readers used to surfing the Web and jumping from one page to another via hotlinks. Gleick does not unroll the historical account linearly; rather, he links small nodes of exposition, narrative, and biography to construct a web. His erudition enables him to connect examples that are separated widely in time and space, drawn from different centuries and continents.

Despite the subtitle, *The Information* is neither a primer on information theory nor a true history of its development. Nevertheless, for many it will provide a useful and enjoyable introduction to information as a central theme and feature of our lives.



The Next Wave: Using Digital Technology to Further Social and Political Innovation.

Darrell M. West.
Brookings, 2011.
219 pages. \$26.95

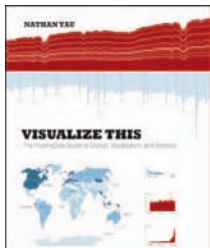
In *The Next Wave*, political scientist Darrell West presents a crisp set of case studies exploring the potential of technological innovation to improve the performance and efficiency of governmental agencies. As he notes, businesses have generally been quick to capitalize on new digital technologies in order to increase productivity and decrease their costs. By contrast, most governmental agencies have had less success. As a rule, they face more barriers to change and lack the key motivator to innovate — the threat of competition. (The salient exception, which West does not much attend to, are the military services, which face competition more profound than those faced by businesses. Military failure results, not in lost sales, but in lost lives.)

Among the specific technologies that West focuses on are cloud computing, high-speed broadband, mobile communication and social media sites. In addition to their impact on governmental performance, he also devotes chapters to how they are transforming the delivery of healthcare and the news.

West enumerates several benefits that can accrue to agencies that successfully implement new technologies. Improving the interface between bureaucracy and the citizenry is particularly beneficial: Citizens can more easily access services, participate in processes and provide feedback. Technology can also foster coordination and collaboration among the governmental employees themselves, within and among agencies. And technology can save money.

According to West, agencies must marshal multiple factors in order to implement new technology successfully. To students of organizational change, they will sound familiar, beginning with strong leadership, sufficient resources and favorable incentives. He also highlights the need for a supportive political environment and coordination with other agencies.

Each of the chapters in *The Next Wave* is based on studies conducted by West and his colleagues; their methodologies include case studies, interviews, surveys and data analyses. But West keeps the research in the background, writing in a popular and accessible style.



**Visualize This:
The Flowing
Data Guide to
Design,
Visualization,
and Statistics.**

Nathan Yau. Wiley,
2011. 384 pages.
\$39.99

Among many recent books on information graphics, *Visualize This* stands out for the success with which Nathan Yau demystifies the intimidating technical details of analysis and visualization. In doing so, he encourages even the uninitiated to dabble with data.

Although trained as a statistician, Yau has strong rhetorical instincts and understands that a good graphic requires not only something to communicate but someone to communicate to and a reason to do so. Accordingly, he frames *Visualize This* with a first chapter entitled “Telling Stories with Data” and a final chapter called “Designing with a Purpose.”

The other seven chapters address how to obtain, clean and manage data; the rudiments of data exploration and analysis (no advanced statistics); and the selection and construction of visualizations. Yau demonstrates the capabilities of the most common software packages and explains his personal preferences among them. Though he does illustrate lines of code, he doesn’t offer enough instruction to turn *Visualize This* into a textbook or manual. What he does instead is quite valuable: He gives the reader a sense of how complex contemporary information graphics are created, walking step by step through the rhetorical, analytic and aesthetic decisions that lead to a successful visualization.

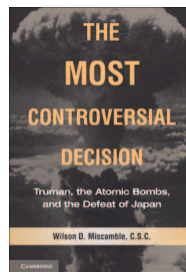
Also notable is Yau’s attention to the emotional power of graphical displays. He is open even to displays that are primarily psychological in intent, noting that “Charts and graphs have also evolved into not just tools but also as vehicles to communicate ideas — and

even tell jokes.” From his website *FlowingData.com* he reproduces a selection of his own data “comic strip,” called *Data Underload*. It features mock information graphics based on little if any information normally considered data — such as great lines from famous films.

Visualize This is written in a casual, idiomatic register not much more formal than blog-ese. It permits Yau’s personal warmth and good humor to shine through. ■

Rick Eden is a senior analyst and the associate director of research quality assurance at RAND, a nonprofit, non-partisan research institution headquartered in Santa Monica, Calif.

By Jay Pasachoff



**The Most
Controversial
Decision: Truman,
the Atomic
Bombs, and the
Defeat of Japan.**

Wilson D.
Miscamble.
Cambridge
University Press,

2011. 192 pages. \$24.99

Notre Dame professor Wilson Miscamble has previously written about the blindly unforeseen handoff of the American government from Roosevelt to Truman on April 12, 1945, during the endgame of World War II. He now brings his wise and wide-ranging knowledge of the complicated decisions left for the American president at that time to one specific major decision: whether to drop the atomic bomb on Japan.

Miscamble is well aware of the flap at the Smithsonian Institution a few years ago about its prospective exhibition on the Enola Gay, the plane that dropped the “Little Boy” uranium-235 atomic bomb on Hiroshima, and of the “revisionist” points of view that there were alternatives to dropping the bomb on first one and then another populated Japanese city. Only with the historical background that is lacking for most of us can we come to understand the circumstances and whatever alternatives there might realistically have been.

He starts his discussion by providing us with the history of the atomic-bomb project, from Einstein’s (prompted by Leo Szilard) unappreciated letter to FDR describing the possibility of a superbomb to the appointment of General Groves and J. Robert Oppenheimer to head the Manhattan Project with its major bomb-inventing site at Los Alamos. (See the review by Naomi Pasachoff and me of John Adams’ and Peter Sellars’ opera *Dr. Atomic* in *Nature Physics*, Nov. 1, 2005.)

He continues with the background of Truman, who became a U.S. Senator out of Kansas City’s Prendergast machine politics, and who was therefore scorned by Yale Skull and Bones alumnus Henry Stimson, the secretary of war. When Truman, in charge of a Senate committee to root out waste in defense work, tried to find out why the government had bought 200,000 acres of farmland in the Hanford-Pasco/White Bluffs region of Washington State, Stimson told Truman that it “was part of a very important secret development” and that he shouldn’t ask further. Stimson was later again annoyed when Truman tried to ask about waste in the “Pasco Project,” knowing only that there would be “a plant to make a terrific explosion for a secret weapon that would be a wonder.” (Near Hanford and Pasco, we now find a site of the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO), a major National Science Foundation project to open astronomical observation of space to an entirely new method.)

As is widely known, FDR’s health was precarious as he bargained with Churchill and Stalin at Yalta, but it was still a shock when Truman was called to the White House, expecting to see the president, but was told by Eleanor Roosevelt, “Harry, the president is dead.” Miscamble quotes the famous interchange when Truman asked, “Is there anything I can do for you?” And Mrs. Roosevelt responded, “Is there anything we can do for you for you are the one in trouble now?” In these 2011 days of the Arab Spring, it is rewarding to read about the smooth, unquestioned transfer of American power under the fierce, wartime circumstances of 1945.

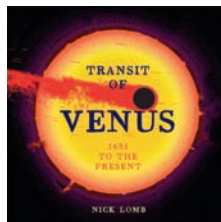
Miscamble makes clear the background of why Truman had been left out

of any conceivable loop of briefing about international affairs, and that such a decision as to whether a new type of bomb should be dropped was not only not conceivable at the time but also far from the most urgent decision the new president would have to make.

The key idea, as expressed by “Jimmy” Byrnes, whom Truman brought in as secretary of state (replacing Edward Stettinius) and a key political advisor, was that “both the public and their representatives would be outraged if the Truman administration were later shown to have displayed any reluctance to win the war with Japan as quickly as possible by forgoing the use of this weapon.” All other considerations, including those now cited by revisionists, were less important than domestic politics at the time. As Miscamble describes, “Whatever the subsequent controversy, Truman had to make no profound and wrenching decision to use the atomic weapon.” That question never came up as such. “Yet, one must acknowledge that Truman possessed neither the capacity nor the desire to question the logic of the bomb’s use.” Miscamble concludes, “The time has come at long last to explode permanently the myth of a Japan ready to surrender.”

I am someone whose father (who had landed at Normandy in the U.S. Army’s medical corps) had, at Germany’s defeat, orders in his pocket to redeploy to Japan. So it was not hard for Miscamble to convince me of his conclusion that Truman really had no choice: He had to try to save the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans by dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The lives of hundreds of thousands of others around Asia were also saved. Still, for all Americans and for the world at large, it is useful and important to see the history of the political and military situations laid out so clearly.

With so many young people born having no memory of World War II or even of its veterans, Miscamble’s short and clear book (with unobtrusive and skippable but academically reassuring footnotes), which includes 16 very well-chosen photographs, provides an important background that we should all share.



Transit of Venus: 1631 to the Present.

Nick Lomb.
Powerhouse
Museum/
NewSouth
Publishing,
Sydney, 2011.

230 pages. \$49.95 (Forthcoming in the U.S. from *The Experiment Publishing*, 2012.)

Transits of Venus, when Venus is silhouetted against the solar disk, have entranced astronomers for centuries. With the fascinating stories of Captain Cook’s voyage to Tahiti to study the 1769 transit of Venus, and of some of the hundreds of other scientific expeditions sent all over the world by many nations to study the 1761 and 1769 transits, the year 2012 will be especially exciting because it will be everyone’s last chance to see a transit of Venus, since the next pair won’t occur until the years 2117 and 2124.

Nick Lomb, with his background at Sydney Observatory in Australia and its parent Powerhouse Museum, is an ideal person to write about all aspects of transits of Venus. With a fortunate choice of Australian publisher, he has produced a lavishly illustrated book that covers the human side of transits of Venus in addition to describing the scientific interest.

That scientific interest goes back to the first prediction of a transit of Venus by Johannes Kepler in the 17th century, and the successful prediction and observation of the 1639 transit by Jeremiah Horrox in Much Hoole, England. Venus’ black silhouette on the sun proved to be much smaller than expected, with Horrox’s discussion finally appearing in a 1662 book by Johannes Hevelius along with the latter’s discussion of the 1661 transit of Mercury.

Much of the prospective science and the many expeditions flowed from Edmond Halley’s 1716 proposal of a way to find out the distance from the Earth to the sun, unknown at that time, by triangulating from observing points as far north and as far south on the globe as possible. Over 100 expeditions, therefore, from many countries went to observe each of the 1761 and 1769 transits. But Halley’s method was foiled by the so-called black-drop effect, described in Lomb’s book and not

solved until my own work with astronomer colleague Glenn Schneider with spacecraft observations of the 1999 transit of Mercury and then applied by us to the 2004 transit of Venus, the first to occur since the 1874/1882 pairs, of which the first was expertly observed in Lomb’s home country of Australia, at the Sydney Observatory and elsewhere.

In Lomb’s book, we learn about Guillaume Le Gentil, the French astronomer who, being prevented by the British from landing in India in 1761, decided to wait the eight years for the second transit of the pair, with unhappy results. We learn about Jean-Baptiste Chappe d’Auteroche, who gave his life to, no doubt, typhus in his zeal to observe the 1769 transit from Baja California. Lomb’s book covers so many aspects of transits that, with its clear writing and beautiful illustrations, it should be of great interest to all.

On June fifth (in the U.S.) and sixth (in Europe and Asia), everyone will be able to view the forthcoming transit of Venus over its six-hour duration, with only a simple solar filter for a dollar or so, or, even more inexpensively, with pinhole projection by holding up a piece of cardboard with a hole a few millimeters wide punched in it and looking down at the projected image instead of up at the hole. (Simple sunglasses won’t be safe; the solar filter needed is equivalent to about 70 pairs of ordinary sunglasses stacked up.) With the support of the Committee on Research and Exploration of the National Geographic Society, I plan to observe from the 10,000-foot volcanic crater rim of Haleakala in Hawaii at the solar observatory there, and I have arranged continental observatories such as that at Sunspot, New Mexico, and satellite observations as well. Still, the thrill of being able to see the exceedingly rare event with your unaided (though filtered) eye, as a black dot on the sun’s surface, should lead readers of this review to learn about transits from this book and then to see one for themselves. (See also my website at <http://www.transitofvenus.info>.) ■

Astronomer and author Jay Pasachoff is the director of Hopkins Observatory and Field Memorial Professor of Astronomy at Williams College.

THE KEY REPORTER
THE PHI BETA KAPPA SOCIETY
1606 New Hampshire Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20009
Tel: (202) 265-3808
Fax: (202) 986-1601

Periodicals Postage
PAID
at Washington DC
and at additional mailing addresses

The work of the Phi Beta Kappa Society is more important than ever before.

Join the Secretary's Circle, and help advance our efforts to
strengthen American education and the life of the mind.

*The liberal arts are the best preparation for a life of learning, for being
an active citizen, for business. I rely on my liberal arts education every
day to make sense of the world around me, to make contributions to my
community, and to succeed professionally.*

Richard A. Bidgood, Ph.D.

Banker

ΦBK Franklin and Marshall College '76, Philosophy



As a Secretary's Circle participant, you will be invited to attend an array of national and regional events of
extraordinary intellectual interest. To learn more, contact the Office of the Secretary at (202) 745-3287 or
secretaryscircle@pbk.org. The Secretary's Circle giving levels start at \$1,500.

The Secretary's Circle of
The
PHI BETA KAPPA
Society