THE ABUSABLE PAST

The Abusable Past

R. J. Lambrose

With this issue, the Radical History Review *inaugurates a column of notes and comment on recent news stories that have a direct bearing on the work of historians and on the character of popular memory. The items will range from the ephemeral to the immediately threatening, and we hope that readers will clip and send us contributions of their own.*

The Little Drummer Boy

The silver-haired historian in a Brooks Brothers jacket sidles into an empty microfilm room. He taps his pipe in his hand and looks around cautiously. After a final survey of the room, he sits down at one of the readers and switches it on. A recorded voice breaks the silence: "Your mission, Dan, should you choose to accept it..."

Sound like late-night TV? Not according to an unclassified article on "The Historian as Foreign Policy Analyst: The Challenge of the CIA" published in *The Public Historian*. The author of this informative memo, Sumner Benson, holds a Ph.D. from Harvard and "the intelligence community's Exceptional Intelligence Analyst Award" for his work in the CIA's Office of Political Analysis. Benson seems anxious to show how his work in the CIA exemplified the "increasingly fruitful relations" that have developed between "pro-

RADICAL HISTORY REVIEW 28-30 1984 PAGES 511-524

fessional historians and the institutions of American foreign policy . . . in the years since WW II." The CIA, Agent Benson briefs us, "has closer ties with the academic community, including the historical profession, than most other federal agencies." For that reason, respectable SAT scores and a solid squash game may not be enough to gain admission to the Agency's prestigious ranks. The CIA, he says pridefully, "has maintained a reputation as probably one of the two most academically selective agencies in the federal government." After all, William Langer "of Harvard," Sherman Kent "of Yale," and Joseph Strayer "of Princeton" all worked for the Company. And that's a lot of tweed, any way you cut it.

What is it about historians, you may ask, that so attracts the CIA Personnel Office? Well, according to Agent Benson, it's their objectivity; "the CIA's mission," he says, "makes it one of the government agencies most inclined to encourage the detachment and long-term perspective valued by historians." Right. Tell that to Patrice Lumumba, Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, Mohammed Mossadegh, and Salvador Allende. As an example of this "detachment" in action, Benson points to the Russian historian, Richard Pipes ("of Harvard"), who chaired the semi-official "B-Team" of strategic affairs experts within the Agency, using "a historical approach." No mention, of course, of the relation between the B-Team's extravagant promotion of the Soviet military "menace" and the current arms build-up. If this was the achievement of the B-Team, one shudders to think what the A-Team was up to.

Not surprisingly, such moral or political concerns do not appear in Agent Benson's brief. Indeed, the article appears to be little more than a self-help manual for the historian contemplating "the challenge of the CIA." Besides his implicit expectation that one should hold an Ivy League degree, Benson has two pieces of advice in the concluding section of his article, which he labels "Lessons:" "First, the historian must be an entrepreneuer who is always alert for opportunities to apply his [sic] skills." (Here we learn how our Algeresque hero, Agent Benson, "took the initiative to persuade his superiors that an examination of historical resources" would provide new "insights.") "Second, the historian must couple his [sic] entrepreneurial bent with a sensitivity to shifts in expectation and policy within the government." "Detachment," it seems, means knowing which way the wind is blowing before sticking one's neck out. Appropriately enough, the first page of Benson's article carries —in small print—the following disclaimer:

> This material has been reviewed by the Central Intelligence Agency to assist the author in eliminating classified information. However, that review constitutes neither CIA authentica-

> tion of material presented as factual nor a CIA endorsement of the author's view or those ascribed by the author to others (including current or former officials of any nation.)

The agency might just as well have added: "As always, should you or any member of your Historial Task Force be caught or killed, the Secretary will disavow any knowledge of your actions. This article will self-destruct in five seconds."

Hack Culture and Hack Consciousness

For some time now radical historians have been grappling with one another over the place of culture in the history of the oppressed. Some scholars and activists insist that culture is the medium within which a particular class, gender, or radical consciousness is formed; culture, they say, is a "resource" that inspires groups in the best of times and sustains them in the worst. Others, more jaundiced perhaps, see culture as the consolation prize that the Left awards itself for the decisive political and economic defeats it has repeatedly suffered. "Sure we lost," the litany runs, "but by golly we had all the good songs."

The debate has blown hot and cold for almost a decade, leaving behind scores of books, numerous broken friendships, and a distinctively homespun culturalist jargon. Metaphors of weaving (rhythms, fabrics, threads) abound in the writings of culturalist historians, assimilating as they do the intricate "texture" of history to the equally intricate text of the historian. Still, one cannot help wondering whether all these "interventions"—as left intellectuals are wont to call them—have left the faintest mark upon life outside the yellowing backlists of university presses. Have the echoes of the culturalist controversy actually reached what one whimsical journal used to refer to as "the other shore?"

Well, wonder no more. Culturalism has penetrated to the farthest reaches of the Right Bank, and no one has yet reached for his revolver. If the business reporters at the *New York Times* are to be believed, a vogue of interest in "company culture" is currently sweeping corporate boardrooms and racquetball courts across the nation. Prompted by the suspicion that culture may somehow be the secret to the Japanese success in the international marketplace, MBA's fresh out of their business-school courses in corporate anthropology have seized upon the notion of culture as a handy synonym for corporate loyalty. (No oppositional culture here!) Every company worth its salt, therefore, has its own cultural history; every company creates its own set of "beliefs, mythology, values and ritu-

als that, even more than its products, differentiates it from other companies." IBMers sing company songs, Mary Kay salespeople drive pink cadillacs, McDonalds' aspirants attend Hamburger University. As between companies, the cultural consultants are careful to avoid any invidious judgments. They've all read Coming of Age in Alcoa, of course, and are judicious cultural relativists. The point, as one of their prominent representatives, Allan Kennedy, puts it, is for the companies to find out what they want to be about.

Before the word "profits" leaps to your lips, however, be reminded that this quest for ritual and mythological significance is a very serious one in the eyes of these corporate consultants. And considering the fees at stake in such cultural consultation, we should not be surprised to see the growing ranks of corporate historians rifling through the pages of their old anthro notes in an effort to get leverage on their next account. In a year or two, you can no doubt look forward to a whole new list of culturalist titles spilling off the corporate vanity presses. *The World the Stockholders Made,* they will be called, or, perhaps, "The Retail World of Love and Ritual." And remember, you read about it here first.

Happy Days

According to briefing papers presently circulating among Washington's right-wing think tanks, a new phrase has entered the baroque lexicon of neoconservatism. The phrase is "memory gap" and though it has yet to win the kind of notoriety that the "window of vulnerability" once drew, it should be of some interest to historians, especially to those on the left. For when Reaganites speak of "memory gaps" in the nostalgic sense, they are referring specifically to the fifties—a period whose distinctive virtues the passage of time appears to have eclipsed in the public mind. And a public ignorant of the fifties, Reaganites fear, might fail to repeat it.

For would-be pundits like Jeffrey Hart, the fifties were a very special moment when everything in America was in its place. Families were in the TV room, gays were in the closet, and reds were under the bed. Neoconservatives and neoliberals look back fondly to a time when the national security state operated in an almost perfect rapprochement with intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic. All they can recall are those salad days when defense and foundation money flowed like manna into the pockets of those social scientists and humanists for whom the major intellectual and political question of the day remained the form their anti-communism should take.

Inspired by the example of the wartime alliance of Allied intelligence agencies, Fifties' politicians and intellectuals built a network of research and policy-making institutions to foster "Atlanticism" in Europe and "modernization" in the Third World. While Ford and other foundations financed the first centers for area studies and international affairs on American campuses, the CIA bankrolled the National Student Association, the American Congress of Cultural Freedom, and, through it, *Encounter* magazine. Considering the nature and conditions of such support, it is not altogether surprising that the small, still voice of conscience failed to make itself heard above the cheerful jingle of the coin. In the market-place of ideas, thoughts were commodities, and one was a fool to exact less than a fair price for them. If "tough-minded liberals," as they liked to style themselves, wished to denounce the Marxist "opium of the intellectuals," what better ambiance could they have imagined than the heady atmosphere of the isle of Rhodes — where the Congress of Cultural Freedom held its international conference in 1958. Even at this late date, one can almost see the conferees deplaning in the bright Mediterranean sun, watch them shake out their travel-wrinkled summer poplins, and hear the unctuous tones of Tattoo as he asks: "And what is their fantasy, Meester Roarke?"

Whatever the fantasy was, it died a slow and painful death during the Vietnam War. Atlanticism grew faint-hearted as European youth march against American neo-colonialism. And in the United States, files disclosing the complicity of respected faculty members in a criminal war were thrown out the university windows, carrying with them the intellectual and moral authority of cold-war liberalism. Military-industrial complexes, like the Institute for Defense Analysis, were forced to close at least some of their doors; others merely changed their names. Harvard's Center for International Affairs, for example, suddenly saw fit to introduce an F into their acronym, thus hoping to avoid any identification with the intelligence agency it had once embraced. The "democratic distemper" of the late sixties and seventies — as the CFIA's Sam Huntington liked to put it — erased the memories of fifties' anti-communism, anti-neutralism, and pro-Americanism. And that "memory gap," Reaganites argue, still haunts the West despite the recent electoral victories of the Right in Britain, Germany, and the United States.

Seen in this way, "memory" appears to be little more than a euphemism for "loyalty," and the "memory gap" a relic of what was once called the "generation gap." At least, that is how the neoconservatives put the case. In a recent article in *Public Opinion* magazine, for example, William Schneider warned readers that a "sharp distrust of the United States" had developed "among young Euro-

peans," particularly among the "university-educated cohort from which future European leadership will be drawn." In fact, Stephen Szabo, an occasional analyst for the RAND Corporation, has gone so far as to edit an entire book on *The Successor Generation in Europe.* "We've got to close the memory gap between older Europeans—whose image of America was shaped by Care packages, Marshall Plan aid, and the Berlin airlift—and their children, who have been influenced by Vietnam and Watergate," Szabo told the *New York Times.* In keeping with that imperative, the Reagan administration is currently drawing up plans to restore some of the "cultural exchange" programs with Europe first introduced in the fifties.

The plans for the home front, however, are somewhat more ominous. In a sobering article in the June 25 issue of *The Nation,* Andrew Kopkind revealed the details of a scheme—proposed by political scientist Robert E. Ward and supported by the Reagan administration—to "fund the major research projects in international studies" through the National Security Council (NSC). The plan envisions a Byzantine organizational structure, composed of university presidents, "distinguished scholars," and representatives from various professional groups and federal agencies (including the CIA, the Pentagon, and the State Department) to oversee the allocation of funds to scholars and the circulation of their research summaries to the "appropriate" parties. The bottom line would undoubtedly be drawn in Washington, and it is that line, as Kopkind observes, that graduate students in area studies would be expected to toe.

It should be said here that scholars — historians prominent among them — have already been testing these rather brackish waters. As far back as the summer of 1980, Harvard hosted a three-day conference at which "distinguished" military and diplomatic historians mused about the history of intelligence-gathering with CIA and other intelligence officials. The very dullness of the affair impressed the *Times* reporter, who remembered Harvard as a place where meetings of this kind had once occasioned vigorous protests. But, as Ernest R. May was quick to assure him, "Harvard has always been intimately involved in the diplomatic and military spheres... and the period of the late 60's and early 70's was only an interruption of that."

Still, May's outward confidence is belied by the delicacy and discretion with which lobbyists for the NSC scheme have pursued their object. That is perhaps because a tighter subcontracting relation between the universities and the defense and intelligence establishment is but one of their aims. As Kopkind discovered from his interviews, the Reaganites' long-term goal is to use the resources of

the state to midwife a "successor generation" to the cold-war academics whom the Vietnam War discredited. "Memory gap" is thus a code-phrase to describe a deliberate effort to use the educational infrastructure on both sides of the Atlantic to conciliate a generation that events would seem to have permanently alienated.

Now, if ever one needed a reminder of the politics of intellectual life in this country, this elaborate and well-financed plan is it. Was it not George Bush, after all, who, while Director of the CIA, remarked that intelligence-gathering had always relied more "on a community of scholars than on a network of spies?" To those of us who have occasionally wondered whether the university is not a sterile and petty political terrain, such observations should give us pause. For if the "community of scholars" does not hold its ground in this instance, it shall surely cede to it a "network of spies." And then the "memory gap," as the Reaganites are all too well aware, may be ours, and not theirs.

Historical Crime

Those who wonder about the long lists of bizarre and incongruous qualifications to be found in history job ads ("Nineteenth-Century American Social Historian who can also teach seventeenth-Century Korean history, the history of animals in medieval France, and run the college bookstore") may soon find another requirement staring them in the face—police-work. As the Superintendent of the National Parks Service's national historic sites in Manhattan put it to the *New York Times:* "Once, we would hire someone with a good public-speaking manner and a solid background in history, but now, that wouldn't be enough. Today, we want somebody with some law enforcement background, or at least someone who has that potential." The problem, it seems, is crime and vandalism at the various sites: the theft of guns from Teddy Roosevelt's birthplace ("Roosevelt was very proud of his weapons,"); drug dealing and sexual "encounters" at Federal Hall; and graffiti at Grant's Tomb. Parks Service officials also expressed shock that someone (or something?) had broken into Castle Clinton several times to perform "some kind of ritual" involving chicken parts and some blood."

Perhaps it was Frank Perdue seeking to ward off the evil spirits of union organizers.

An Officer and an Historian

The morning light has just begun to stream through your bedroom blinds as

the angry ringing of the phone jars you awake. It is 0700 by your watch, and though you've been anticipating this call for the past few days, you find yourself automatically snapping to attention as the distant voice of your director at the Command Center at Headquarters Marine Corps gives you your instructions. The 22nd Marine Amphibious Unit, in place in Grenada since 2 October, requires the services of a crack oral historian, and that means you. You grab your pack and hustle over to the Marine Corps Historical Center in the Washington Navy Yard to get your orders, tape recorders, and tapes. By 1630 you are enroute by helicopter from Bolling Air Force Base to Norfolk, where you board (at 2400) a large Air Force transport for Barbados. Twenty-four hours later you're landing at Grenada's Point Salines airfield, not yet long enough for Soviet bombers but big enough for you. And you're just in time. The scene is one of utter confusion, and no one seems to know where the 22nd can be found. But that's why the Director called on you. It's a tough job, and someone has to do it: search and record.

Fantasy? Hardly. According to an only somewhat less breathless account in a recent oral history newsletter, Benis M. Frank received just such a call five days after Reagan's "pre-dawn vertical insertion" in Grenada. As head of the Oral History Section of the Marine Corps History and Museum Division, it was Frank's mission to record the musings of the amphibious command and staff following their conduct of Operation Urgent Fury. From Grenada, it was off to Lebanon aboard the carrier *Guam*. More interviews and then back to the States by Thanksgiving. A rugged assignment for "the oldest individual in the whole damn flotilla."

Perhaps that's why Frank's report seems so short on details. All we learn (and this by hearsay) is that the *Guam's* Executive Officer decided—the night before the Grenada invasion—to replace the regularly scheduled shipboard movie with a showing of the *Sands of Iwo Jima*. When you come to think about it, the experience of the Marines was not all that different, from the rest of us, who were compelled to watch network file tapes of military maneuvers for the first few days of the invasion. Frank's report raises, as they say, more questions than it answers. Was he among the 19,600 American servicemen and women who are expected to receive medals for their participation in the invasion? (Only 7000 actually landed on the island.) And what, actually, is the military insignia of the Marine Corps oral historian? A screaming eagle in a Walkman? An owl of Minerva in oak leaf cluster? On these and other important questions, Benis M. Frank is silent. Perhaps he's saving his answers for the forthcoming Marine monograph on "the Grenadan operation" due off the press this year. Perhaps not. In any event, we think we'll just wait for the movie.

Remembering the Thirties

While Reagan and a compliant press continue to insist that "Happy Days are Here Again," residents of many industrial and urban communities are recalling a different legacy of the 1930s. Faced with double-digit unemployment and growing lines at soup kitchens, organizers have revived some of the survival strategies used by radicals during the Great Depression. From Philadelphia to Baltimore to the Monongohela Valley, jobless workers have created "unemployed councils" and have mobilized the sorts of eviction protests that were a familiar sight fifty years ago. A number of state labor history societies have appropriately chosen unemployed organizing in the 1930s as the theme of their 1983 and 1984 conferences.

Perhaps not surprisingly for a period that has mixed the social attitudes of the 1920s and 1950s with the social conditions of the 1930s, others have chosen to re-remember the Depression without the vulgar intrusion of breadlines, unemployed demonstra tions, and sit-in strikes. One remarkable example of this reconstruction of the past comes from the sleekly-designed, glossy program to the Art Deco Society of Washington's 1983 Art Deco Ball. The first page of the program breathlessly announces: "After years in which elegance seemed to be a vanished commodity, we look upon the 1930's with a sense of revelation. We behold the spectacle of Fred Astaire striding forth to the music of 'Top Hat, White Tie and Tails as essentially mystical."

The apparent purpose behind this "evening of Deco Delight" was what the program called a "night of stylistic tribute." "We gather," the author of the program gushes, "to bask in the atmosphere of 1930's indulgence: to luxuriate in our niftiest clothes to the music of Doug Sorensen; to be dazzled by the foxtrot, tango, quickstep and swing of those consummate ballroom dancers, Laurie Anderson and Larry Miller; to flirt amid a backdrop of Hollywood portraits and waft in and out of a ballroom adjacent to the promenade 'Birdcage Walk.'" Lest anyone find this all just a wee bit frivolous at a time when homeless men and women are increasingly visible on Washington's downtown streets, the program rushes to assure us that the Art Deco ball is merely a "pause" in the "serious work" of the Art Deco Society of Washington—"preserving the style from the 1925 Paris exposition." "We're a popular movement," they explain, "with serious aims and a thoroughly bewitching appeal."

One might be inclined to dismiss this version of the history of

the 1930s as the foolishness of the old moneyed rich or the new moneyed gentry—the sort of folks who patronize the high-toned boutiques, restaurants, art galleries, and hotels that filled the Ball program with their advertisements. Yet millions of Americans—more disposed to fast food than fad food—are encountering the same sanitized version of the Great Depression among the ephemera of mass culture, not the least of which is the restaurant placemat. Seeking to celebrate its fiftieth anniver sary, the Valle's restaurant chain has issued a placemat which boldly announces: "WE'RE BRINGING BACK THE GOOD OLD DAYS." And the "good old days" turn out to be the decade in which one out of every three Americans was unemployed. Naturally, no mention is made of this uncomfortable fact. No hollow-eyed Okies look up at you as you finish off the last of your sirloin. For Valle's what is worth remembering about the 1930s is the kind of cars rich people drove, the programs broadcast on the radio, and, most important, the opening of Valle's in Maine. The Valle's commemorative placemat also prominently features the silhouette of the patron saint of the Art Deco Society—Fred Astaire.

It is the kind of placemat into which a Barbara Tuchman could gaze as into a distant mirror. In fact, a few years ago Tuchman singled out Astaire as the epitome of a respect for quality (the "Big Q") that she saw as sorely lacking in the 1980s. Her rant on the decline of excellence—appropriately lodged in the *New York Times Magazine*—seems to have prefigured a new historical revisionism—a "motion picture" synthesis of the American past. With its triumph, students will begin to learn about Betty Grable instead of World War II, Doris Day instead of McCarthyism, and Clint Eastwood instead of the Vietnam War. Which all goes to show that whenever history goes to the ball, the mat, or the movies, it emerges as unrecognizable.

Tricentennial Missiles

On October 6, 1683 thirteen Quaker and Mennonite families from Krefeld, Germany arrived in William Penn's colony and settled in Germantown, Pennsylvania—the first of millions of Germans to make the journey to the United States. Since these colonists were religious pacifists fleeing conscription and religious persecution, one might naively suppose that the 300th anniversary of their arrival would commemorate the anti-militarist heritage of many American immigrants. To do so would, however, fatally

underestimate the ingenuity of the Reagan administration to twist the past to support its present foreign policy.

For when Ronald Reagan created the German-American Tricentennial Commission and filled it with the likes of former National Security Advisor Richard V. Allen (the Commission Chairman), Chief Justice Warren Burger, Chief Taper Charles Z. Wick (Reagan's personal representative on the Commission), and John J. McCloy (fondly remembered for his role in the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II and the refusal of the American government to bomb railroad lines to German concentration camps), pacifism was the furthest thing from his mind. In fact, the only thing on Reagan's mind was the growing German peace movement and his plans to deploy Cruise and Pershing II missiles in Germany in late 1983—just weeks, as luck would have it, after the upcoming Tricentennial. As the *New York Times* observed, "the tricentennial was the most visible product of several years of fretting by officials in Washington and Bonn about the souring tone of relations between the two countries, particularly the symptoms of anti-Americanism among young West Germans."

It was apparently United States Information Agency Director Wick who came up with the brilliant idea of transforming the Mennonite settlers into progenitors of the NATO alliance. And it was Wick's propaganda agency that staffed the supposedly private and self-supporting commission. (The Commission itself, composed largely of corporate, political, and military figures, including the son of a missile scientist, did not even bother to seek out token representation from the Quakers and Mennonites whose arrival was ostensibly being celebrated.) The German government was hardly less ardent in its efforts to make the tricentennial a prelude to the deployment of the new nuclear weapons in their country. "We intend to make the 300th anniversary of the first German immigration wave to America," declared Hildegard Hamm-Brucher, then Minister of State in the West German Foreign Office, "the political climax of our common effort to intensify German-American relations."

The key events of the "tricentennial year" repeatedly played on the theme of German-American military cooperation. In June Vice President Bush journeyed to Krefeld to commemorate the departure of the Mennonites and Quaker families. Speaking at the official ceremony at the Krefeld Civic Center, Bush began with "history." He mouthed the usual cliches about the "hard, honest work" and upward mobility of the German immigrants ("They felled the timbers of Minnesota and Wisconsin. They cleared the

plains of Illinois.") and carefully avoided mention of the pacifism of the earliest settlers or the radicalism of many later German immigrants. Then, he came to the real message of his speech: "Our histories are thus utterly intertwined . . . . Yet we must remember that our peace and prosperity are ceaselessly threatened by hostile ideologies and states . . . . Membership in the NATO Alliance does indeed impose burdens . . . . Let us make the sacrifices we must to keep our defenses strong." Bush's speech gladdened the hearts of Krefeld's conservative town fathers, who hoped to use it to erase the city's pacifist image stemming from an anti-missile manifesto (the "Krefeld Appeal") issued from the town back in 1980. (Bush's trip also gladdened local entrepreneurs who were hawking neckties, scarves, and jogging suits commemorating the tricentennial.) The celebration of German-American military cooperation continued into October when West German President Karl Carstens made a return visit to the United States for a state dinner in Philadelphia. Even the issuance of a commemorative stamp in April turned into another promotion for U.S.-German nuclear policy.

Despite the determined effort of the Reagan administration and the German government to deny and distort the heritage of the migrants from Krefeld, peace groups in Germany and the United States (particularly the spiritual descendants of the original settlers) did manage some commemorative activities more in keeping with the spirit of the occasion. In Krefeld fifteen to twenty-five thousand demonstrators gathered to protest Bush's visit and "to draw attention to the fact that the first migrants . . . were pacifists who sailed to the new world seeking religious freedom." (Others, less pacifist in inclination, pelted Bush's motorcade with rocks and bottles and carried signs that read "Bush Go Home" and "USA, Hands Off Nicaragua.") When Carstens and Bush met for the state dinner in Philadelphia, more than 15,000 demonstrators protested the planned deployment of Cruise and Pershing missiles and the perversion of the tricentennial. At the dinner itself, seven women were arrested when they attempted to remove dinner clothes to reveal underneath t-shirts with the slogan: "No Euromissiles."

Representatives of the Mennonite and Quaker groups whose history was stolen were understandably bitter about the Reagan version of the tricentennial. "A heritage of religious pacifism is being misappropriated and vulgarized to promote a German-American alliance based on arms," declared Betsy Beyler of the Mennonite Central Committee's Washington Office. One Quaker leader drew on another religious heritage to emphasize his disgust:

"Only an administration that could dub the MX missile 'Peacekeeper' would have the hutzpah for such double talk."

Towards an Old Past

For many years conservative historians were so confident of their hold upon their profession that they felt no particular obligation to distinguish, much less to justify, the aims and methods of their own brand of history. Why try to legitimate a perspective that was, after all, a professional patrimony? an inheritance at once so familiar and so illustrious in its genealogy as to serve as its own rationale? Fortunately, the events of the sixties and seventies shook that confidence and forced the Right onto the defensive. But now, emboldened by the Reagan Reign of Error and bankrolled by the new foundations of the Right, a host of conservative academic enterprises has materialized in recent years, including academic grants, institutes, chairs, prizes, and journals. One of the more obscure, though sturdy, of these ventures is an historical review called *Continuity*, which counts among its editorial board members the likes of Max Beloff, Aileen Kraditor, Richard Jensen, Forrest McDonald, Gray McWhiney, and that peripatetic expert on the present danger, Richard Pipes. We urge you to leaf through this small journal, where you can find it, for it provides a strong, if somewhat sour, taste of the kind of historical thinking that is presently informing and legitimating conservative political policy. As such, the journal shares the general ideological confusion and contradictions that characterize Reagan's own recipe for the past: two parts U.B. Phillips, two parts Dan Boorstin, two parts Frank Capra.

Take a recent contribution to *Continuity* issue 6 by Clyde Wilson, for example. The piece is at bottom a lament that American historians have abandoned their proper mission of nationalist mythmaking. History, Wilson argues, requires "the elaboration of a commonly shared mythology that provides part of the cohesion of a national or cultural group through the celebration of common ancestors." This is mythology not in the "trivial" but in the "highest sense." Such history does not oppose the "factual;" rather it "transcends the merely factual." The historian works within the "objective record," of course, but only to serve "the purpose of social mythmaking." He (and he is indubitiably a "he") aims to produce a "civic inspiration" with which his young reader may identify. "The young person must be able to make his nation's

history his own, make it a history of his own 'fathers,' just as it was done, until a generation or so ago, by thousands of young men who sincerely modeled themselves on Abraham Lincoln or Daniel Webster or Theodore Roosevelt."

Well now, doesn't that sound familiar? Can we not hear in this appeal to historians the same demand for a "usable past" about which so many on the Right complained during the sixties and seventies? Yes indeed. But where radical historians rejoiced at history "from the bottom up," Wilson opens his own child's fourth-grade textbook with the same apprehension as he would feel when entering a New York subway car or an OAH meeting. Who *are* these people, he seems to be asking. What is this "ethnic collage history" that "identifies Thomas Jefferson *and* Frederick Douglass as the greatest Americans of the early nineteenth century?" [emphasis added] Why aren't the Harriet Tubman's and Enrico Fermi's at the back of the book, where he remembered them?

Politics, that's why. Unlike the "old nationalistic historiography," which was a "natural product of American experience," the new ethnic history "is an officially promulgated and enforced history" that has "made its way by subsidy and bureaucratic directive" (as if George Bancroft never took a government dollar himself!) and by something he calls the "Marxist elan." Doubly offended by this turn of events, Wilson looks wistfully across the Atlantic to the fairytale wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Di. Now there was an occasion of communal pageantry in which even he, an American, could participate. No "officially promulgated and enforced history" there; no subsidies or bureaucratic directives either. Just good taste, good genes, and good sense rising "naturally" to the top.

So, read Wilson's piece. It is a rare and revealing articulation of knee-jerk conservativism in history—what used to be called "reaction." For those of you who teach, you might even consider assigning the article to your students, perhaps in tandem with some of the essays in Eric Hobsbawm's and Terence Ranger's new collection, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press), especially David Cannadine's fine piece on the fabrication of royal pageantry in modern Britain. Having read these two views of tradition, your students will probably yearn for an historical "truth" that lies comfortably "in the middle," but whatever *that* is, it is unlikely to be the muddle into which Clyde Wilson and his colleagues at *Continuity* have gotten themselves. □