It's Colossal!! It's Stupendous!!
It's American Popular Culture!!

SEE BLACK-FACED WHITE MEN, FUNNY JEWISH SINGERS, BEJEWELLED RAPPERS, CARBURETOR COWBOYS, FREAKS FOR THE FESTIVAL, AND A CAST OF THOUSANDS

Inside:
A Review of LeRoy Ashby’s With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture since 1930

left: T. Rice as Jim Crow
Courtesy Harvard Theatre Collection, The Houghton Library

right: Al Capp’s Li’l Abner: The Frazetta Years Volume 4
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Below: Sophie Tucker

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Have Words, Will Travel

Professor Gerald Early

I am not sure what my Washington University colleagues thought of Beijing during the several days we spent there this August as part of an international conference jointly sponsored by the Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies Department of Tsinghua University and the Center for the Humanities at Washington University. For my own part, the first few days made me think Beijing was a place where the sun does not shine, the air is heavy with humidity and dirty with pollution, and the streets choked with traffic. In other words, I could have been in an American or European city of the mid-nineteenth century spending a few summer days, a city combining the strangest sum of features of an infernal paradise. Beijing, a city that seems to sprawl with the energy of an uncontrollably dividing single-cell organism, lacks the sleek sophistication and steel hubris of Seoul, another Asian city I have just recently visited. But Beijing has a pure, old-fashioned vitality derived from the manic dissonance of extreme poverty buttressed against burgeoning wealth.

Many of my colleagues who had been to Beijing ten or fifteen years ago spoke of how dramatically the city had changed in that short time, from a city of millions of bicycles to a city largely of cars. Like Seoul in 1988, Beijing will serve as host for the Summer Olympic Games in 2008. And it seemed very much to me during this visit that Beijing was a city in the midst of sprucing itself up to prepare for its showcase moment when that traveling global carnival of kitschy but transcendent drama, doping scandals, petty tantrums, and national glory known as the Olympics arrives. I liked Beijing, probably less for its character as a particular city than for the fact that it was where the associate director of the Center, Jian Leng, was born and reared. I met members of her family, including her father, an impressive man, and I even saw a bit of the neighborhood where she grew up, and so Beijing seemed more than a tourist stop to me or more than seeing the Great Wall or the Forbidden City. Jian seemed very happy there, and it made me think Beijing was a place where you would feel relaxed, quite at home. Because of Jian, Beijing had, I am pleased and relieved to say, a human face, with all the complexity of sentiment that entails. Also, because of Jian, I doubt that I will ever go to any other city for which I hold as much affection.

But none of us from Washington University went to Beijing to be tourists primarily but to be participants in a conference entitled “Translating Global Cultures.” Globalism is all the rage these days among the thinkers and intellectuals, the elite types. Maybe it will displace nationalism, which has become a thoroughly nasty and provincial business where people imagine they have some special relationship with some particular piece of land. Maybe it will give us a cosmopolitan world, free from the obscurant rage of fundamentalism and the dementia of anarchy and mass murder. Maybe it will give us a homogenized world of huge corporations that will make every place you visit seem very much like the place you left, and Americanism will reign from sea to shining sea. I mentioned to someone once that I suppose globalism was the rage back during the age of New World chattel slavery, too, and not too hard to take if you weren’t on the bottom of a slave ship. Slavery gave us cheap, mass-produced items—sugar, tobacco, cotton—and lots of wealth that most people were never burdened with in their own lives. Perhaps this new globalism is simply another of those political and economic arrangements with winners and losers, the usual suspects winning and the usual suspects losing. It is hard to know whether globalism is good, but it certainly seems inevitable, according to those who love it and to those who hate it. The masses might still be wondering what this is all about: What is global culture? How is it translated? Why hold a conference about this subject? And what do you talk about when you do? Let me try to explain it another way.

In 1943, Vice President Henry Wallace gave an address about globalism. At that time, it was clear that the Allies were going to win the war and the United States would have a major voice in reshaping the world. Wallace didn’t want the mistakes of the past to be repeated, so he called for a new way to look at the world that he called “global.” In this global world, according to Wallace, there should be mutual cooperation between nations, open markets, sharing of resources, and cultural exchange. There should be an international body to adjudicate conflicts and disputes. And we had to learn to live with one another. Air travel, he said, had made the world a different and smaller place. How many times have you heard that since? It was time for us to have “open skies.”

Republican representative Clare Booth Luce, in her maiden speech, responded scathingly to Wallace, saying that the need to protect American producers and to secure America’s safety from attack meant that we had to live apart and above other nations. Air travel to her meant American fighter jets must circle the globe to protect American producers and to secure America’s safety from attack meant that we had to live apart and above other nations. Air travel to her meant American fighter jets must circle the globe in the interest of American security and hegemony.

This well-known story captures as well as anything the divide in America over globalism, a divide that still exists today, more or less, on these same terms. Does the United States wish to be just another house in the village or does it want to be a fortress of solitude and sovereignty? It is this division that has made the United States an unsure empire, which may be the worst kind: empires that don’t quite have the heart to throw their weight around either arrogantly or benignly, and so they do both at the same time while denying they are doing either. Luce called Wallace’s vision “globaloney.” Globaloney became so noted a term that economist Michael Veseth used it as a title for one of his books. His argument was that among those who were for and against globalization there was a tendency to take one aspect of it and let that stand for the whole. Synecdoche may be a wonderful rhetorical device but not often a good analytical tool.

University of California at Irvine professor J. Hillis Miller reminded us during our conference in Beijing that globalism is a series of processes, happenings, transformations taking place at different rates of speed. It is not a series of exchanges but a mosaic of
Other speakers reinforced this idea of the complexity of globalism, and even more, its magnitude not simply as an economic, political, and cultural force, but as a metaphor, a condition, an obsession, a thought cliché, an apocalyptic belief, a temperament, a stylization, a ritual. It was in this context that the discussion of various novels and films took place, from Miller’s extraordinary reading and discussion of Wallace Stevens’s “The River of Rivers in Connecticut” to Chinese scholar Feng Zongxin’s consideration of the translations of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland into Chinese, from WU professor Henry Schvey’s remarkable account of staging Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman in Beijing to WU professor Ignacio Prado’s incisive analysis of Kar-Wai Wong’s 1997 film, Happy Together.

The vastness of the range of ideas about globalism and its effect on language, literature, the humanities generally expressed at the conference was breathtaking. There was no globalization here. Everyone had an aspect but no one took it for the whole.

The heady mix of papers here took us from a consideration of the cross-cultural practices of the law (WU professor Jane Aiken) to global feminism and its limitations (WU professor Linda Nicholson), from the act of mis-translating material objects (WU professor Angela Miller) to the history of cultural studies in China (Tsinghua professor Wang Ning).

One of the great pleasures of the conference was getting to hear many of the papers of my WU colleagues. I had not had a chance to hear their scholarship before, and I was exceedingly grateful to hear it at last and quite proud, in the end, to have such people as my colleagues. But I was equally impressed by the Chinese professors and graduate students who presented their work, but not for their erudition alone, but for their kindness for being willing to hold a conference in English, their second language. It was more than a professional courtesy. It was an act of friendship.

I am grateful to Wang Ning, his staff, and his students for organizing the conference. Washington University in St. Louis was the co-sponsor for the event but not the co-organizer. It was Wang Ning and his assistants who did the heavy lifting.

This conference was a historic occasion for Washington University, the opening of a door, the realization of an opportunity. We have made new friends in China, and we hope that they will be permanent ones. We look forward to the day when we might have our Asian colleagues visit St. Louis to continue our conversations and strengthen the ways we can learn from one another.

Perhaps it would be good in the meantime to think of some of the things we did not consider in this conference: 1) how children and children’s culture have become a global phenomenon; 2) the uses and abuses of popular music, the extent of its audience, the influence of its creators and its marketers; 3) further considerations of diasporas: Are there significant Chinese communities in Canada? How influential is Asian American literature? 4) Finally, a bit more on sports, the one major global activity that seems to both defy and transcend translation.

It is probably a bad habit for conference sponsors to think about the conference that was there and the conference that wasn’t. In this instance, the conference that was there was so rich, so wonderfully stimulating, and cracklingly alive, that one hardly missed the conference that wasn’t.

(This article is a somewhat altered copy of a set of closing remarks that Gerald Early wrote for the conference but had no occasion to deliver.)
Review of

*With Amusement for All* combines being a remarkably quixotic endeavor with being something of a monumental achievement of scholarship and pure perseverance. (It apparently took the author ten years to write it [p. xi].) On the one hand, why would anyone attempt to write a history of American popular culture, a subject so broad and so atomized, so mercurial and so churlish, that it would seem to defeat any attempt to make sense of it? And why try to make sense of something that makes its reason for being so self-evident: to make money by attracting the greatest number of purses to pay the highest possible price for something that serves no useful purpose other than being a momentary diversion? The beauty of popular culture, if beauty it is, as critic Dwight MacDonald pointed out years ago in his essay “M ascult and M idcult” is that it is so obvious that no audience has to guess how to receive it or react to it. The cues steer the audience with the blunt prompting of a laugh track in a sitcom. Thus, one wonders why so many academics and professional critics, so many learned and opinionated thinkers, are so attracted to explain and assess it, the writer of this review numbering himself frequently among this herd in search of the heuristic in the trivial. What the clever debunkers and de-mystifyers of popular culture fail to understand is that they, too, have been taken in by the con game, by the illusion. Popular culture prides itself on making its audience seem smarter than what they are experiencing, smarter than the people who created the experience. That’s how cons work: on either greed or hubris or both. And as Professor Ashby points out so tellingly, popular culture’s roots lie in deception and the con game. Explainers of popular culture should note the story that Professor Ashby tells of one of P. T. Barnum’s fraudulent exhibits: when one group of disappointed viewers returned by ferry to warn a fresh group, the new customers cheered and paid their admission anyway (p. 36).

Moreover, despite Professor Ashby’s warning of “[having] to make choices” and “the limits of time and space” (p. xi), he has written a book that will be immediately open to criticism for what it lacks. I myself was a bit unsettled that black gospel and soul music were never touched upon in this book—no mention of James Brown, Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, Lou Rawls, Isaac Hayes, or Barry White, which I think greatly compromises Professor Ashby’s discussion of rap music. No less dismayed was I that his consideration of comics did not include any mention of Miss Victory, Miss Fury, the Blonde Phantom, or the construction of femme fatale. What, no writers Paddy Chayefsky and Budd Schulberg, whose films *Network* and *A Face in the Crowd* were such powerful commentaries on popular culture? No James A. Michener, the most popular novelist of the 1950s and 1960s? No Tennessee Williams, the most influential playwright of the 1950s and whose plays were almost invariably made into films? No Miles Davis, the jazz trumpeter who defined cool in the 1950s and invented jazz-rock in the 1960s? No Chubby Checker and the Twist, the dance craze that changed the nation in the early 1960s? No mention of band-leader Kay Kyser, who was far more popular than virtually any other bandleader of the 1930s and 1940s and with several movies to his credit? Nothing about the marriage of M ai Britt and Sammy Davis, Jr., an interracial marriage that shook American popular culture in 1960 and got Davis dis-invited to John Kennedy’s inauguration despite the fact that Davis campaigned hard for him? And how can one discuss sexual liberation in American movies and not mention Russ Meyer, particularly his films *The Immoral Mr. Teas* and *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*? Nothing about pop culture’s attempt to marry itself to high culture through such instances as composer George Gershwin’s
Rhapsody in Blue, commissioned by bandleader Paul Whiteman (who is discussed in the book) or the rise of operatic singer Mario Lanza in the 1950s? Nothing about The Amos and Andy Show when it was televised in the early 1950s? My goodness, where are The Flintstones and Bugs Bunny? But Professor Ashby ultimately is right about limitations in such a work as this, particularly because it is dealing with popular culture. Because popular culture is so experiential, so deeply related to our self-understanding, so much related to the memory of having lived in it and through it, so personal in any assessment of it, nearly everyone has his or her own version of it, his or her history of it. Fortunately, there is a great deal of overlap in what much of us have experienced, which explains why popular culture could function in America as something like a consensus builder, even as it rebelled against consensus: for a time, popular culture was successful in making all of us believe in the great white way of life even as it undid our conception of that life.

Professor Ashby sees popular culture as the “ongoing exchanges and sometimes brutal struggles between society’s outsiders and insiders” (p. viii). In other words, what popular culture dramatizes and displays are the contradictions in American life, a country that believes in freedom but had slavery and a network of legalized, government-sanctioned discrimination that amounted to a brutal form of apartheid; a democracy fettered by fear of anarchy and a leveling down that undermined merit and distinction; a “classless” culture built on “a perennial rural/urban split” (p. 505), secular cosmopolitan snobs versus fundamentalist country hicks played out in everything ranging from the teaching of evolution to the ownership of guns; a society that has always distrusted leisure as sinful and self-indulgent as it has revealed in the pleasure of consuming for the sake of consuming, in the right, so to speak, to be self-indulgent as a form of liberation and therapy. (And therapy is no accidental word, as Americans are among the most hypochondriac and medicated people who have ever lived.) How else could the American economy exist unless a number of people bought things they didn’t need and, in many cases, did not even know they wanted, in great quantity and were never satisfied with what they had? Popular culture is the engine for that surfeit.

The most fascinating part of Professor Ashby’s book is his recount of the early days of American popular culture, before the twentieth century and right after the collapse of Puritanism and ultraorthodox Protestantism as a controlling social force in American life, the rough, frontier days of bear-baiting and bare-knuckle prizefighting, of blackface minstrelsy (America’s first true indigenous theater) and harsh ethnic stereotypes, of P. T. Barnum’s dime museums of hokum, hoax, and humbug, the coming of department stores and the dime novel, tabloid newspapers and the circus, of Buffalo Bill and Jenny Lind, of Horatio Alger and Stephen Foster. There seemed a sort of lyric energy in this popular culture, a directness and a sense of discovery in it, because there was less technology mediating how the audience received it, or how the audience could react to it. And so much of popular culture at that time was truly ephemeral.

In the twentieth century, the major technological innovations gave popular culture a deeper reach and an archival existence, as it was both endlessly chronicled and preserved in electronic copies that circulated everywhere. And each further improvement in electronics made popular culture flow into the home rather than people leaving their homes for it. Its thorough infiltration of the home has made it more feared for the values or the lack of them that it seems to promote. That is probably why the culture wars are so intensely fought around its presence in the home as parents ask, as they did during the age of the rise of public education, whose children are these, anyway, mine or do-good elites or businesses that smell profits? Although I find the story of twentieth-century popular culture less interesting, Professor Ashby does an excellent job, in a series of historical and sociological vignettes, in providing a wonderful overview of it: the rise of collegiate and professional athletics including the N C A A, the N F L, M L B, and the N BA; the growth of the movie and the popular music industries from nickelodeons to T h e Passion of the Christ, from coon songs and ragtime to rap and the D i x i e C h i c k s; the impact of television, radio, and sound recordings. I appreciated that Ashby mentions such early 1960s shows as East Side, West Side and T h e D e n d e r s, shows of social consciousness that my family watched and that are rarely remembered. He also provides a solid historical account of the sitcom. His sections on the 1960s and 1970s are especially strong. Ashby is strong as well in providing an account of the business side of popular culture and the growing corporate control of popular culture through both the manufacturing of popular-culture products and advertising through various media. Threaded through this account is the story...
of how the presence of various outsiders—African Americans, Jews, poor white southerners—shaped the content of popular culture. We learn, too, about how women have shaped popular culture as an audience of considerable power, as they have been shaped by it in both their consumer habits and their sense of gender roles. Trends in popular culture, from jazz to rock and roll to rap, from Playboy magazine to comic books, have been feared by the middle class but ultimately absorbed by them, as the middle class is astonishing in its adaptability and its cultural reflex to deflect and to consume the criticism of itself, largely generated by itself. Popular culture may be nothing more than the institutionalization of the middle class's sense of contradiction about its need for the sort of amusements it gets.

Has 9/11 had any impact on American popular culture? Ashby writes: “Within a relatively short time, it seemed that the immediate effects of 9/11 on entertainment were, in fact, negligible or, at best, ephemeral” (p. 498). The lackluster box office of films like United 93 and Oliver Stone’s World Trade Center seems to confirm this judgment.

Professor Ashby’s book is informative, highly readable, and very enjoyable to read. If anything, it is, despite its considerable length, too short for its subject. Ashby does not consider theory in his book or give any account of the history of theories about popular culture, of which there are many, from the Frankfurt School to Roland Barthes, from Walter Benjamin to Stuart Hall. This absence is understandable from the standpoint of the book’s organization, but it is keenly felt, nonetheless.

There are three final observations I wish to make: first, when Professor Ashby discusses the culture wars and incivility and intolerance in popular culture toward the end of his book, he rightly indicts the conservatives but the liberals have their share of guilt as well. It was liberals who have invited and disinvited Justice Clarence Thomas to speak, thrown pies at shock right-winger Ann Coulter, refused to publish ads by David Horowitz challenging the idea of reparations for slavery, and hooted relief pitcher John Rocker from professional baseball for his insanely intolerant remarks about gays in New York. It was liberals who invented the brainwashing quackery called sensitivity training. There is much incivility and intolerance on both sides. Second, I am made a bit uneasy when Professor Ashby discusses sitcoms like The Simpsons, Roseanne, and Married with Children (Roseanne discussed on p. 460 and The Simpsons and Married with Children on pp. 461 and 462), shows about “dysfunctional” working-class families which seem, to him, an improvement over idealized middle-class families in shows like Father Knows Best. But this equates working class with dysfunctional, with problems, which seems, in its way, patronizing and as much of a distortion as any other way that the bourgeois and the elite romanticize the working class as the Other. What’s wrong with idealized family life? And why can’t the working class be idealized? Finally, Professor Ashby ends his book quoting a Chilean slum dweller who doesn’t want his “dreams” taken away from him, doesn’t want popular culture criticized or censored. But is popular culture really about dreams? Its depth of simplistic idealizations, its deceptions, its fraudulence, its fixation on consumption and the superficial might be seen, in the eyes of some, like, say, crazed novelist Louis-Ferdinand Celine, as a form of hell. Perhaps popular culture is really nothing more than our Nightmare Alley and perhaps the famous film noir of that name, with its carnival tents and welter of debunkers, deceivers, and self-delusions, symbolically has told the story better than anyone.

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Bruce Springsteen Meets Pete Seeger: The Political Art of the Apolitical

Review of
We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions by Bruce Springsteen
Sony Label CD, 200

In the summer of 1987, Bruce Springsteen released Tunnel of Love, an exquisitely understated suite of songs about the rewards and frustrations of romantic relationships. It was the sixth in a string of classic studio recordings, which began with 1975's breakout Born to Run and ran through Darkness on the Edge of Town, The River, Nebraska, and Born in the U.S.A. His legendary live performances earned him a devoted following, but it was the consistent excellence of Springsteen's studio work that solidified him as an artist of the first order. In the rock era, only Otis Redding started his career with such a lengthy run of assured work; among established performers, only Aretha Franklin, after her move to Atlantic, and Bob Dylan, during the height of his dazzling '60s ascendance, enjoyed periods that yielded such an uninterrupted string of landmark albums.

Of course there is a key difference here: Redding's impressive body of work came over a four-year period prior to his death in 1967; both Franklin and Dylan compressed their creative zeniths into prolific five-year stretches. But the six albums in Springsteen's most fruitful period took more than twelve years to be released. One early delay came when he was trapped in a legal battle with a former manager, but the main reason it took so long between albums was because Springsteen was a notorious perfectionist in the studio. His was a different sort of exactitude than that of most rock auteurs. Unlike the Beach Boys and Beatles at the height of their “concept album” pretensions of the '60s, Springsteen's recording technique was never very complicated. Instead what took him so long was the sheer volume of his recordings, and then the sorting, sifting, and sequencing of the songs, many of which had similar settings and themes.

It became part of Springsteen's legend that albums were never going to be released on time, and that even after final sequencing and mastering, he might still have second thoughts and balk at releasing them (as he did with the album The</eras T hat Bind which, recast and expanded, became the heart of the double-album The River in 1980). Anecdotal accounts of marathon sessions in the studio indicate that these ongoing deliberations could be maddening for Springsteen and his collaborators alike. But there was a method to the painstaking process. His albums were taut, filler-free records Springsteen and his collaborators alike. But there was a method to the painstaking process. His albums were taut, filler-free records Springsteen and his collaborators alike. But there was a method to the painstaking process. His albums were taut, filler-free records.
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o now comes Springsteen's newest record, which seems a
conscious reaction to many of the instincts that have guid-
ed him through his musical career. We Shall Overcome The
Seeger Sessions finds Springsteen for the first time perform-
ing an album of someone else's music. He has bypassed the reunit-
ed E Street Band (with the exception of his wife, Patti Scialfa, and
the violinist Suzie Tyrell) in favor of an eclectic mix of New York
City musicians who stir up a musical stew containing elements of
folk, bluegrass, jazz, gospel, and soul. Instead of the typical year-
long siege in the studio, Springsteen has put this record together in
three one-day recording sessions, the last two of which were held
in the living room of his New Jersey farmhouse. Many of these
recordings are first and second takes, with Springsteen calling out
the key changes to the band. (And at times, as in his introduction
to the liner notes, he seems almost too proud of the circumstances.
The promotional video of the rousing "Pay Me My Money Down"
has at least a dozen shots of Springsteen drinking beer, as though
at pains to show what an impromptu, off-the-cuff hootenanny this
was. May be so, but there was a film crew on hand.) If there's a
spiritual antecedent here, it's the music that Bob Dylan and the
Band made that was released as The Basement Tapes. We Shall
Overcome doesn't possess the offhand brilliance of that record,
but it does emit some of the same anarchic charm.

The songs themselves are folk standards, many of which
were brought to a large audience by the folk giant Pete Seeger. A
founder of the modern folk and protest movement, Seeger has had
one of the longest and most fascinating careers in American music;
he was an idealistic, big-hearted music scholar (his father was a
musicologist, and the young Seeger worked at the Archive of
American Folk Music in New York City). Pete Seeger's youthful
indiscretions were greater than most; he joined the Communist
Party and was an apologist for Stalin long after any justice-loving
person in his right mind ought to have been.

It was not the only time Seeger would turn up on the wrong
side of history. He, famously, hated Bob Dylan's venture into elec-
tric music at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965 (though he has
since argued that it was the sound quality, not the mere fact of
Dylan going electric, that led him to urge pulling the plug on
Dylan and the Paul Butterfield Blues Band).

But Seeger's virtues far outweigh his sins. He brought the
cornucopia of American folk music to a broad audience, and also
served as a musical rallying point for social-justice issues— civil
rights, workers' rights, women's rights— long before these causes
were fashionable, or this sort of protest was entirely safe. There is a
chirpy earnestness to Seeger's singing style but also an abiding love
and respect for musical forms. The critic Dave Marsh wrote of
Seeger that throughout his career, "he remained fixed on the idea
of the song as a source of information, as a link between the past
and the present, as a window into other worlds."

In this sense one can most clearly see the connection that
Springsteen felt to Seeger's music. Though he's released three large-
ly acoustic albums (Nebraska, The Ballad of Tom Joad, Devils &
Dust) and played some gigs on the folk circuit in New York in the
early '70s, Springsteen has been a folkie more in spirit than fact.
For him, rock 'n' roll has always been the compelling myth. He
once jumped the fence at Graceland in a vain attempt to meet
Elvis Presley, used Phil Spector's "wall of sound" as the basis for the
sound he wanted to create on the song "Born to Run," began that
album with a lyric that mentioned "Roy Orbison singing for the
lonely," and once told an interviewer that he listened to Buddy
Holly before going onstage every night "to keep myself honest."
For decades, Springsteen's live shows with the E Street Band have
served as rock 'n' roll revival meetings, evoking every bit of promise
and passion that the music has ever presented.

While Springsteen has been an eloquent voice for social jus-
tice, he's done so in a far different manner than Seeger, often prefer-
ting to remain circumspect about his political views. When he
played the Musicians United for Safe Energy benefits (also known
as No Nukes) in 1979, he was the only performer on the Madison
Square Garden bill who didn't write a commentary for the concert
program on why he was playing. In 1984, after rebuking Ronald
Reagan's efforts to co-opt him during the presidential campaign,
Springsteen also distanced himself from Democratic opponent
Walter Mondale. Rather than onstage harangues against political
leaders, Springsteen has done steady good work; for more than a
quarter-century, he has supported community food banks at each
of his shows, invited them to take up collections for their cause
afterward, and accompanied those public pitches to the crowd with
a significant donation of his own. (Though his support for John
Kerry in the Vote for Change concerts during the 2004 campaign
moved him more explicitly into the political realm, his political
statements have remained more unifying than polarizing. For
Springsteen, it's never Them vs. Us. It's always the belief that there
is no Them, only all of Us.)

It's significant that while Springsteen's album is named after
Seeger, almost all of the songs were popularized rather than penned
by Seeger (though Seeger updated the choruses and arrangements
on a couple of these songs), having been passed down from the
American folk canon. Seeger's own compositions, like the treacly
"Turn, Turn, Turn" or the wide-eyed "If I Had a Hammer," are
nowhere to be found here.

Many of the thirteen songs are familiar to anyone over the age
of forty who grew up in middle-class America. They are songs that
were played in schools, in churches, around campfires, and—dur-
ing the Civil Rights movement— on the nightly news. Springsteen

LPs, not merely because they lacked the warm hiss of needle falling
into groove but also in physical packaging, where they were smaller,
harder to open, and more difficult to read than LP sleeves.

Springsteen's first eight studio albums had made the most of the
physical limitations of LP recording— two sides of the vinyl record
serving as a kind of musical play in two acts, with a total
possible running time of about forty-five minutes and a particular
need for the last song of the first side to serve as both the end of a
thematically movement (think of "Backstreets" on Born to Run) while
at the same time setting the stage for the beginning of side two.

With CDs, the rules changed. There were no longer two sides,
much less four corners, to an album. And there was no need to
limit the length of the music to forty-five minutes because CDs
could hold another half-hour besides. This hurt all artists, not just
Springsteen, because it encouraged them to put more of their least
impressive work onto CDs. Albums routinely run sixty or seventy
minutes these days, but artists have the same difficulty coming up
with forty-five minutes of quality music as they have ever had. In
short, the rise of the CD ensured that popular music became easier
to play, but harder to sit through.
and his loose, rollicking band of players invigorate much of this music, adding instrumental muscle and sinew, and expanding the folk palette to encompass Dixieland jazz, full-blown gospel, and a strong dose of rhythm and blues.

His brassy vocal on "John Henry" captures the mythic component of the tale of man vs. machine, and the lusty stomp of "Jacob's Ladder" is well-served by the ragged but right assemblage of fiddle players, tub-thumping percussionists, and blaring horns. At its best, the album shows Springsteen's versatility (as in the assured reading of the Negro spiritual "O, M ary Don't You Weep") and depth (his coiled vocal on "Eyes on the Prize" conveys a sense of burning urgency that makes the song sound tougher than it has before).

Yet one can't help wonder how this album might have differed if Springsteen were working in the old confines of the forty-five-minute LP. "O, M ary Don't You Weep," which Seeger performs in two-and-a-half minutes, and which Sam Cooke immortalized in three, runs six minutes here. And it's unlikely that Springsteen, the master of the album-closing knockout punch, would have chosen twenty years ago to end an album with "Froggie Went A-Courting," one of the slightest of folk standards (and yet, as far as I know, the only common song recorded by Springsteen, Elvis Presley, and Bob Dylan).

Some of his fans resent Springsteen's forays into folk or acoustic albums, in the same way that Woody Allen fans used to despair of his dramatic films. But of course, Springsteen has earned the right to play whatever he wants. As he mused once, "What are you going to do, worry that people won't cheer as much?" Springsteen has spent much of the past two decades trying to move away from the rote, blind adoration brought by the behemoth success of Born in the U.S.A. The critic Jimmy Guterman writes eloquently about this in his new book Runaway American Dream: Listening to Bruce Springsteen (2005), noting that when Springsteen went on tour to support Tunnel of Love he was intent on creating a series of concerts that were far removed from the stadium shows of the Born in the U.S.A. hysteria. Retiring the obligatory set-closer "Rosalita (Come Out Tonight)" was the most remarked-upon change, but Springsteen even went so far as to put the E Street Band members in different places on the stage.

This instinct, to stay out of his rock 'n' roll comfort zone, persisted into the '90s and beyond. H is 1994 Oscar-winning song "The Streets of Philadelphia" opened with a hip-hop drum track. The 1995 album The Ballad of T om Joad was populated with different sorts of losers than the heartland everymen that predominated on his earlier records. Joad anticipated the illegal immigrant debate by a good ten years, and its keenly wrought songs were eventually rewarding. But it was the most musically sparse of any of his albums (Entertainment Weekly described the album as "tune-less") and it had a pedantic feel, with a reading list accompanying some of the songs on the lyric sheet. It is a hard-and-fast rule that great rock 'n' roll doesn't need footnotes.

Yet the departures and detours have kept Springsteen fresh, and kept him out of the trap that has ensnared some of his contemporaries, who have been reduced to touring the summer concert sheds playing oldies, then sneaking in a couple of cuts from their desultory new albums. Springsteen's restless quest for new musical horizons can be seen in his improved musicianship (on his solo Devils & Dust tour, he was a literal one-man band, playing everything from guitar to electric piano, from ukelele to pump organ) and his more assured singing. It's also helped him maintain the freshness and drive of what he does best, which is still rock 'n' roll.

So it is that the most revealing and revelatory song that Springsteen has performed with the Seeger Sessions band is a cut that didn't make the record. In April at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, where he and the band opened their American tour, they debuted a radical reworking of Blind Alfred Reed's Depression-era lament "H ow C an a Poor M an Stand Such Times and Live?" to which Springsteen added three of his own verses, inspired by the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

It is a glorious performance, with a vicious slide guitar accompanying a swelling chorus, that neatly distills Springsteen's encyclopedic musical sensibilities—he once described his songwriting as heedng his blues influences in the verses and gospel influences in the choruses. The music is as angry and apocalyptic as the last two verses of Springsteen's lyric, which finds not only tragedy but outrage in the Katrina disaster.

There's bodies floatin' on Canal and the levees gone to Hell
And then who ain't got left to drown
Tell me, how can a poor man stand such times and live?

I got family scattered from Texas all the way to Baltimore
And I ain't got no home in this world no more
Gonna be a judgment that's a fact,
A righteous train rollin' down this track
Tell me, how can a poor man stand such times and live?

The song feels more powerful, more relevant, and more vibrant than any of the songs on the record. Springsteen's voice sounds more natural; the lyrics have an edge and depth lacking on many of the simple standards on We Shall Overcome. And unlike so much of the record, this song carries the palpable urgency of something at stake. It's rock 'n' roll, but one suspects that if he heard it, Pete Seeger would be pleased.

Excluding various live recordings, greatest-hits packages, and the sprawling set of outtakes known as Tracks, Springsteen has now released six albums since Tunnel of Love. The Rising is the closest thing to being a great record, while The Seeger Sessions will have to stand as a pleasant departure, an instance in which Springsteen threw out the playbook and started drawing plays in the dirt. It will also reward those Springsteen loyalists who have followed him through his artistic ramblings. Unlike The Ballad of T om Joad or Devils & Dust, We Shall Overcome is an album that can be enjoyed every bit as much as it can be admired.

If, in the process Springsteen succeeds in doing what Seeger was doing fifty years ago—using his popularity and loyal following to introduce yet another generation of listeners to the bottomless reservoir of American folk music—then it will stand not only as Springsteen's most surprising album in two decades but his most important one as well.

In the eyes of many Americans, Phyllis Schlafly's leadership of the campaign to “STOP ERA” in the late 1970s brought a new face to the fore of American political life. The Equal Rights Amendment, banning any infringement of rights “on account of sex,” had been passed in both houses of Congress by overwhelming majorities in 1971 and 1972, and all signs initially pointed to quick ratification by the required thirty-eight states. Schlafly's campaign, which soon looked like a women's antifeminist movement in its own right, helped stall ratification by 1975, when Schlafly founded her Eagle Forum (named for the phrase in Isaiah saying the godly rise “on eagles' wings”) as “the alternative to women's lib,” she said. Having halted the ratification drive, the movement Schlafly personified killed it by 1982. Schlafly addressed rallies and debated feminists all over the country, in great auditoriums, on radio and television, with a kind of aplomb that ERA proponents—who knew polls showed more support for their position—found utterly galling. And amid this whirlwind of conservative activism, Schlafly even had time to take a law degree from Washington University in St. Louis, her hometown.

Yet anyone unfamiliar with Schlafly's name when STOP ERA began in the fall of 1972 had not been looking in the right places. She had appeared on the national stage before, as the best-selling author of a 1964 campaign biography for Barry Goldwater, *A Choice Not an Echo,* which served as the main propaganda text helping Goldwater win the crucial California primary for the Republican presidential nomination. Closer to home, she had begun to cut a political figure for herself as early as 1952, when she ran for Congress from Illinois's 21st district. Failing to unseat the Democratic incumbent but proving her mettle against the moderate Republican leadership, Schlafly was thereafter a stalwart of anticommunist activism, before serving as president of the Illinois Federation of Republican Women and vice president of the National Federation of Republican Women. Only a purge of Goldwaterites following the 1964 electoral debacle blocked her from assuming the National Federation's top spot. She was, in other words, a longtime organizer of the Republican Party Right apparently vindicated by Ronald Reagan's election, for which, this book argues, she deserved much of the credit.

In this superb and readable, distinctly political (rather than personal) biography of Schlafly, Saint Louis University historian Donald Critchlow skillfully recounts her long career as both conservative activist and Republican Party stalwart through the ups and downs of the American Right all the way from the Truman administration to Reagan's ascendancy and beyond. From a close, solidly middle-class Catholic family strapped by Depression-era unemployment, Phyllis Stewart attended an upper-echelon girls' parochial school and worked her way through Washington University, before earning a master's degree in political science at Radcliffe University in 1945 and taking a one-year apprenticeship in conservative journalism in Washington, D.C. Work as publicist for the St. Louis Union Trust Company followed. By the time she married Fred Schlafly, a successful lawyer of a wealthy Alton, Illinois, family, she had already demonstrated enormous vigor, ambition, intelligence, and flair as a writer and public speaker. Her first run for Congress—which came about after Fred declined the entreaties of the district's party conservatives—portrayed her as a “simple housewife,” indeed a twenty-seven-year-old mother of one (who would bear five more children in the next dozen years). By 1962, the family purchased a mansion from the Olin family overlooking the Mississippi.
A good part of Critchlow's portrait entails an ideological outline of the “Right” to which Schlafly belonged. It was in many respects deeply rooted in U.S. history, bearing comparison with the norms of what Critchlow calls “moral republicanism,” as it appeared in the nineteenth-century: anti-Jacobinical, committed to moral reform in temperance and other crusades, and insistent that “the nation must not stray from its religious foundations and values lest society collapse into anarchy.” In delineating this heritage, Critchlow fudges some key issues of nineteenth-century moral politics, particularly the place in it of anti-Catholicism and especially the issue of slavery—where conservatives, insofar as we can identify figures warranting this label in retrospect, defended the peculiar institution, and moral reformers often seized on abolitionism with a fervor their opponents regarded as Jacobinical indeed. Nonetheless, he stands on firm ground in claiming that a combination of economic individualism and laissez-faire politics, moral piety, and nationalist devotion are hardly contradictory, as contemporary liberals like to suggest; rather, these elements flow together in a long-running main current of American political ideology. The stout defense of property rights and self-reliance, along with ardent hostility to “reform” that would coddle the poor and expand the state—reforms that thereby, in league with other forces of radical subversion, threatened the integrity of “the republic”—began to assume the form of a modern conservatism by the late nineteenth century, though the fervor of religious piety was then just as likely (if not more so) to surface on the other, rebellious or “populist” side of American life. The Schlaflys' provenance can be located more nearly in the twentieth century's “old Right,” the laissez-faire dogma that survived the New Deal in Ohio senator Robert Taft's wing of the Republican Party, which was inclined to call Roosevelt's and Truman's reforms "creeping socialism" and remained intent on protecting United States sovereignty against international, collective-security agreements and organizations. The pietistic heritage remained strong, inclined to see departures from the verities of nationalism and market economy as tantamount to moral decay (since "welfare" encouraged people to expect "something for nothing"), and the antisubversive fervor whose target had moved from Catholic conspiracy to "anarchism" in the 1880s settled firmly on communism during the interwar and postwar years. All that remained to set the mold of a genuinely new Right of the 1950s was the weakening of American anti-popery, since many of the Church's orthodox teachings, wedding a family-based moralism to a true "old world" (hierarchical) conservatism, offered a heritage that right-wing Catholics could easily bring to bear. That's where the Schlaflys came in. After Radcliffe, Phyllis worked as a researcher at the new American Enterprise Association (later, Institute), where she was steeped in the adamantly anti-New Deal, free-market, and anticommunist principles of Henry Hazlitt, Friedrich von Hayek, and John T. Flynn. This turned her from a kind of Willkie Republican to the hard right, a perspective cemented by 1949 as her new husband insisted that "communism, internationalism, and liberalism were intrinsically linked." Willkie's "one-worldism," and all collective-security organizations including NATO, endangered the necessary link between the sovereign power of the American state and the moral virtue of the Republic. Hence the sharp antagonism of this Right to the "liberal" and "moderate" forces of the Republican Party, identified with Nelson Rockefeller and George Romney but also including Eisenhower, George H.W. Bush of the 1960s and Gerald and Betty Ford of the 1970s—all "me too" Republicans to Schlafly—"echoes" of welfare-state internationalism who posed no alternative or "choice." Schlafly's libertarian streak led her to oppose the military draft, and old-style nationalism made her suspicious of foreign ventures—including the Korean and Vietnam wars, and today Iraq—although her circle insisted that the true goal in dealing with world communism was "victory—not containment." The battle at home and abroad was an urgent one, even apocalyptic, for American society was firmly on a course "toward collectivism and statism" as liberals promoted "the illusion of a false equality—economic equality among people, international equality among nations" and communists strove to undermine American government and morale. Committing their lives to the struggle, the Schlaflys avidly supported the Taft wing of the Republican Party while also founding in the mid-1950s the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation (named for the cleric imprisoned by Hungarian Communists)—the Catholic counterpart to the evangelical Christian Anti-Communist Crusade led by Dr. Fred C. Schwarz. Like Schwarz's group, the foundation spread the word through study programs throughout the United States, drawing tens of thousands of participants. Schlafly wrote and published the foundation's monthly reports as well as The National Defender, newsletter for the Daughters of the American Revolution. She spoke on self-produced syndicated radio programs such as "America Wake Up" and "The Dangers of Apathy" and built a network of friends and supporters in the Illinois Federation of Republican Women. The combination of Schlafly's work as movement organizer and anticommunist crusader with her dedication to the Republican Party proves crucial to understanding her career, especially in defending her, as Critchlow insists, against charges of "extremism." That label was often affixed to her by opponents inside and outside the Republican Party who claimed she belonged to the John Birch Society (untrue, though the Schlaflys never denounced it) or even the far-right paramilitary Minute-Men. Critchlow's defense is warranted insofar as Schlafly never entertained any idea of extralegal action, no matter how threatening the curse of subversion and decay. Rather, she remained intent on helping the Republican Right gain control of her party. However much she criticized presidents Eisenhower and Nixon for disastrous internationalist illusions, her own campaigns for Congress—her second in 1970—adapted to the party center, going so far as to stump for increased Social Security benefits, the most opportunistic move she made throughout her career. Augmenting her party loyalty, of course, was her unique ability to rally conservative women to work in public advocacy. Besides circulating anticommunist tracts, she labored to teach like-minded women the basics of publicity, lobbying, debate, oratory, and the practical means of influencing officials. That she understood, and took seriously the day-to-day grind of politics and government and taught her legions how to tap the sensibility of state legislators, explains much of STOP ERA's success in the face of greater numbers and funds deployed by ERA proponents.
Beyond Schlafly's career, however, Critchlow offers an analysis of the right turn in American politics that brought her to prominence, an analysis he intends to counter historians' stubborn Whiggishness, the tendency to describe historical development as a single arrow heading directly toward the "modern" achievements of the present. Critchlow wisely, and accurately, argues that the "conservative triumph"—both within the Republican Party and then within the polity at large in the 1980s—was far from "linear," on a path of continuous ascent, but rather remained "an interrupted tale of fits and starts," an "episodic" affair in which the Right's victory was, even until the late 1970s, "[not] at all certain." This is good historical practice. Schlafly's career was mercurial. An outcry in the press and government in the early 1960s against "right-wing extremists" hit hard and led Schlafly to turn her energy away from a preoccupation with "subversion" and toward issues of international affairs, national security, and military preparedness, where she argued against arms-control negotiations and the nuclear strategy of "mutual assured destruction" (for accepting, she thought, the idea of a stalemate between Soviet and American arsenals). Richard Nixon won her support in 1968 by promising to restore the United States to "nuclear superiority"; in any case, she had already suffered the purge of the party Right by moderate forces after the Goldwater debacle, and Nixon seemed the best thing on offer. Conservative disappointment with him over arms-limitation treaties as well as his continued acceptance of "big government" pushed Schlafly back into party opposition, at a time when Gerald Ford still believed the party center held strong. The surge of the party Right in the last years of the 1970s leading up to Reagan's nomination surprised not only Democrats but Republicans as well.

Besides his opposition to "linear" accounts, and likewise part of his anti-Whiggery, Critchlow wants to free Schlafly of the taint of "reaction," as the head of a movement resisting "progress," geared to a backward yearning for old standards of order that are in principle undemocratic and inegalitarian. Indeed, the "grassroots" dimension of his analysis addresses both concerns. To account for the surprising turn of political events, Critchlow portrays the Right's revival as something of a popular insurgency, and a sign of dramatic disenchantment "when New Deal liberalism was perceived as a failure by the American people." Moreover, rather than anxiously desiring to keep old hierarchical ways in resistance to the tide of modernity, the surge of the Right itself appeared as a new "opposition to the status quo, rebellion against the establishment, a democratic faith in the people, and a deep suspicion of the wisdom of the liberal elites in government, the media, and academia." Thus too, Critchlow insists that Schlafly's Right, contrary to liberal or left-wing slanders, did not truckle to big corporate business interests, neither embraced nor promoted white racial resentment, and never opposed women's equality (since Schlafly backed equal opportunity for women in occupations and politics, opposing only the "anti-family" motives of the "radical" ERA).

Critchlow is right in one respect. Despite the persistent element of popular piety in conservative American traditions, Republican conservatism of the twentieth century had long been identified with the most affluent part of the electorate and the business community. In the wake of the D epression, appeals to the law-and-order sensibilities of common people did little to dislodge a widespread impression of Republicans as a wealthy elite, which left them a minority among the electorate (of which many conservatives, conscious of their antidemocratic heritage, might be proud). Only in the 1970s and 1980s did a breakthrough occur toward a "majoritarian" conservatism, a conservatism that not only claimed to represent the simple moral inclinations of the people but managed to seize on that appeal and effectively label D democrats and liberals instead as "the elite." Indeed, Schlafly herself called her constituency "grassroots Republicans" arrayed against the party's "Eastern" corps of "king-makers." Yet this was a "grassroots" campaign only in the sense that rank-and-file party activists on the local and regional level pushed it along. These cadres were far from the earthy layers of the citizenry: Schlafly and her cronies, Critchlow notes, were decidedly "wellbred," "middle- and upper-class, white-gloved Republicans" (p. 252). And if the Schlaflys occasionally showed a deep-seat suspicion of "Eastern financial interests" and other corporate bigwigs (resembling "populistic" paranoids), they also thrived on connections to concentrated wealth—from Phyllis's work at the American Enterprise Association, founded by the Johns Manville Corporation, to Fred's law practice with prominent corporate clients. For them, it was immoral "to equalize possessions and incomes." The "grassroots" interpretation looms large in this book, mainly to justify Schlafly as republican and democract (both lower-cased) and thus to tame her even while celebrating her insurgent battle against "the establishment." Yet if as Critchlow argues "extremist" is not quite right, "zealot" would hardly be unfair to describe someone who entertained dinner guests with showings of the filmstrip Communism on the M ap, who felt a mission to "redeem the nation," and who told a friend that "only a pitiful few like you . . . Fred and me . . . devote our whole lives to fighting Communism . . . to save our country in spite of the apathy and indifference of our friends." Critchlow argues as well that Schlafly was not a "crank," because unlike the Birchers, she and Fred never called Eisenhower a "Communist agent" and usually refrained from so labeling liberals as well: they only claimed liberals and moderates were too foolish to understand that their principles put them on a continuum with communism. Be that as it may, many of Schlafly's declarations—like her 1962 complaint about "the hoards of international socialists who control
our government to this day” or her charge that Robert McNamara had embarked on a “policy of unilateral disarmament”—were just plain nuts.15 And the insistence that Schlafly never evinced racial prejudice barely excuses the Republican Right to which she belonged of standing stoutly against civil rights advances. William Buckley’s National Review, in just one of many such outrageous statements, wrote in the 1950s that the white race of the South was “entitled to take such measures as are necessary to prevail, politically and culturally, in areas where it does not predominate numerically.”16 This may not tar Schlafly directly but testifies to part of the modern American Right’s heritage.17 In any case, we have here a record of Schlafly’s direct collaboration with Strom Thurmond in 1968, drawing a promise from Nixon to clear Supreme Court appointments with southern conservatives and oppose the busing of white children, as well as her prominent role—anticipating Lee Atwater—in publicizing the Willie Horton case in 1988. In ventures like this, the “grassroots Right”—“once on the fringe of American politics”—was indeed able to tap “mainstream” anxieties, which doesn’t mean that the bulk of Schlafly’s zealotry is likewise of the norm. Contrary to Critchlow’s assumption, it is not at all clear—as resistance to privatizing Social Security and popular interest in some kind of improved and guaranteed health care benefits show—that the American people have “repudiated” the terms of the New Deal order.18

Schlafly emerges as a remarkable figure—highly intelligent, politically adept, indefatigable, and for the most part principled in pursuit of her rightwing, Christian, laissez-faire nationalism. In impeccable research and an assured professional fairness and fidelity to his sources, the book is a success, though the author’s effort to “mainstream” this strange figure remains only partially effective and perhaps even half-hearted. Critchlow laments the “religious and cultural polarization” and “intensifying partisan politics” he sees and wonders whether “conservatism is viable in an age of rights unrestrained by obligation, of Wilsonian promises of international transformation, and of unbridled demands on government spending.”19 His stance is hard to interpret. H as Critchlow’s subject, calling Jeremiah-fashion for national redemption, been vindicated by events? While clearly drawn to her, Schlafly’s latest biographer remains unsure.

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Schlafly speaks at Harvard Law School in 1984 about the ten-year battle of ERA. Courtesy of Eagle Forum Archives.
Sometime in the early 1960s, as a neophyte graduate student in American history at the University of Wisconsin, I wandered into Madison's largest used bookstore on State Street and bought, among other volumes, a well-worn copy of John Hope Franklin's best-seller history of "Negro Americans," From Slavery to Freedom (first published in 1947 with numerous editions that followed).

During my teenage years, I had read a few biographies of African Americans (George Washington Carver and Frederick Douglass readily come to mind) and Harriet Beecher Stowe's antislavery novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852). Late in my undergraduate college career I had also absorbed the riveting fiction of Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin. Franklin's book was, however, unknown to me, nor had I read any other surveys of the African American past. So far as I can recall, my father, a retailer and rare bookseller, had not stocked Franklin's book in his bookstore. Nor was it assigned or recommended in my high school social studies and history courses. I had no idea whether it was even in my hometown public library, which, during my youth, was not welcoming to African-American patrons and had very little in the way of African-American literature.

Remembering all that now, I have come to understand why Ellison's Invisible Man (1952) made such an impact; how for me, as a white person, African Americans were, for the most part, nonexistent during my childhood and adolescence, no matter that they were a significant minority in strictly segregated Frederick, Maryland, where I was born and raised.

Franklin's book thus served to concretize for me in narrative historical terms the story of African Americans as a people, from their arrival in this country as slaves, their emancipation from bondage, their own efforts in that achievement, and their continuing struggle, after 1865, to attain freedom from racial discrimination and segregation in America.

John Hope Franklin's autobiography is a recording of his own encounters with racism over a significant portion of the history described in From Slavery to Freedom, but the book is also about his remarkably successful academic career despite incidents of racial intolerance, insult, and offensive behavior by others against him. Age ninety in 2005, Franklin was born at a time when segregation and discrimination were the law and the custom throughout the nation, whenynchings were not uncommon and were occasions for ritual celebrations of white supremacy, and when virtually every form of racial indignity and hypocrisy was endured by African Americans in the United States.

Franklin frames his own life story within the broader framework of the racial divide defined by William E. B. Du Bois as "the problem of the twentieth century" and, for Franklin, also of the twenty-first century. This is the major theme of the autobiography and the meaning of the title, Mirror to America.

Franklin personalizes the issue from the first chapter to the last in the book. "Born in 1915," he writes, "I grew up in a racial climate that was stifling to my senses and damaging to my emotional health and social well being... . This climate touched me at every stage of my life" (pp. 3–4). And again, in the epilogue, he somberly reflects that his "experiences in the American race jungle, some large and impersonal, some immediate and deeply personal, have touched me throughout my life and in more ways..."
than I can count” (p. 374). With bitter irony and seeming resignation, he concludes that “I regret that in this beautiful and bountiful county, the specter of race has been ever present. In a country whose founding was not only predicated in large measure on race but also on a profound commitment to the exploitation of one race by another, it could hardly have been otherwise. For ninety years I have felt the consequences” (p. 374).

Assertions such as these might convey a sense of victimology and prescience that threaten to deprive African Americans historical agency. Yet this image is repudiated not only by Franklin’s stunning success as an eminent scholar but also by his portrayal of African Americans in the books he has authored and in the many classroom and public lectures he has delivered.

Beginning with his examination of free blacks during the antebellum period (Franklin’s published doctoral dissertation), in his extensively researched biography of George Washington Williams, a little-known nineteenth-century black author of a two-volume History of the Negro Race in America, 1619–1880 (1882), in his study of runaway slaves, and in his other works, Franklin has consistently emphasized as he did in From Slavery to Freedom the continuing struggle by black Americans “against racism and for civil rights,” stressing “the problems [they] faced and how they had attempted to solve them” (p. 233). For Franklin, the freedom in From Slavery to Freedom is an unfinished task.

Exactly how Franklin felt “the consequences of racism” beyond specific humiliations of the moment is much less clear. Despite documented episodes of racism in his own life, Franklin overcame such obstacles, managing to obtain a Ph.D. from Harvard University (1941), securing a position as full professor and chair of the history department at then all-white Brooklyn College (1956), becoming chair of the history department at the University of Chicago (1967), and, later, the James B. Duke Professor of History at Duke University (1982). As he ascended the academic ladder, Franklin also earned numerous national and international appointments and awards, including, in 1995, a Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor.

How does Franklin account for such extraordinary accomplishments? The answers that he gives are located in his family background and upbringing, his resilient, tenacious efforts to overcome racial barriers and poverty, and the encouragement and assistance from individuals it was Franklin’s good fortune to know and, in the case of Aurelia Whittington, to marry. These factors defined Franklin’s success story, and he reaped the benefits during the early part of his life. In short, Franklin was dealt some favorable cards at birth, and he seized them in ways that empowered him to prevail in an otherwise closed racial system that dared him to try. This account makes for an engaging and revealing reading of the first third of the book, after which much, though not all, of the remaining autobiography is of interest primarily to professional academics, most notably historians.

That Franklin was born and spent the first ten years of his life in Rentiesville, one of several all-black towns in Oklahoma, was critical to his development, as was the fact that both of his parents were practicing professionals: his mother a primary-school teacher, his father a lawyer. While neither position made the Franklin family well-to-do (their economic status made more difficult by considerable friction between Baptists and Methodists in Rentiesville—the Franklins were Methodists and Democrats; the Baptists, mostly Republican, controlled the town’s economy and politics and became increasingly hostile toward the Franklins), John Hope grew up in a nurturing family environment, deeply admiring his parents and their achievements, and he was, during his childhood, spared the most egregious forms of racism. His mother and father greatly valued education and, most significantly, denounced and refused to comply with segregation practices in Oklahoma. Because of their examples, Franklin had role models to guide his own outlook and behavior as a child and, later, as an adult.

In 1921, when Franklin was six, his father, Buck, moved to Tulsa, despite its racially segregated character, to improve his law practice and the family income. Before the rest of the family could join him, however, there occurred in Tulsa what John Hope Franklin writes was “one of the bloodiest and costliest race riots in American history” (p. 16). Vigilante white mobs completely torched Tulsa’s all-black neighborhoods, murdering an unknown number of blacks. While Franklin’s father was personally unharmed, his rented house and office, his private belongings, and his legal papers and records were totally lost. The riot delayed the Franklin family reunion for four years while Buck labored to recover from the devastation and rebuild his law practice.

Nonetheless, Franklin says, “Tulsa remains the only place I have ever called home” (p. 37).

It was in Tulsa that Franklin completed his primary education and graduated from Booker T. Washington High School, which, he writes, had “a first-rate faculty dedicated to teaching and, perhaps more importantly, the development of their students’ self-confidence” (p. 25). His parents were determined that he, like his siblings, should attend college as they had. Franklin was admitted to Fisk University in Nashville in 1931 when he was sixteen. It was there that he met Aurelia, whom he would marry, and it was while enrolled at Fisk that he decided to become a historian. “My decision to focus [my] ambition on a career as a scholar, as opposed to a lawyer or some other pursuit, was not a response to... racial injustices,” Franklin notes, “but can be directly attributed to a single individual” (p. 44).

The person who made the difference was a white professor of history at Fisk, Theodore S. Currier, whose courses Franklin found “so exciting and satisfying that I took every one that he offered” (p. 45). Currier guided Franklin’s undergraduate career, and it was he who convinced Franklin to apply successfully to Harvard University’s graduate program in history. It was also
Currier who loaned Franklin $500 so that he was able to travel to Cambridge, pay his tuition, and provide for his living expenses in the absence of any financial aid from the university. “Money,” Franklin recalls Currier saying, “will not keep you out of Harvard!” (p. 60).

Franklin recites in frequently tedious detail his ascent into the academic world in which he earned his eventual great distinction. Through it all, he reminds his readers, racism was ever present. He challenged those who insulted him or sought to exclude him, and he employed his scholarly credentials to actively combat racial inequality. Most significantly, he rescued and revised African American history. Others, such as Rayford Logan, Carter Woodson, Charles Wesley, and Du Bois, had earlier contradicted the traditionally stereotyped and inaccurate depiction of African Americans (particularly during and after the Reconstruction era) as “ignorant dupes of white radicals whose sole interest was amassing wealth for themselves” (p. 195). It was, however, Franklin’s books and speeches that ultimately garnered major attention and circulation in the 1960s and after. Franklin acknowledges, for example, the enormous sales of a third, paperback edition of From Slavery to Freedom (1969), which benefited from the Civil Rights movement of the period and had created “the great demand for a book that related the way the African American story was inextricably woven into the history of the United States” (p. 246).

John Hope Franklin is too accomplished a historian and has lived long enough to know that, in his words, “the victories of the civil rights era did not wipe away three centuries of slavery, degradation, segregation, and discrimination” (p. 378). He is, at the same time, sharply critical of those blacks, mostly males, who have succeeded in beating the odds and gained fame and fortune in areas such as music and professional athletics, or in illicit careers in the narcotics trade, but who have “shown little or no interest in the well-being of their fellows” (p. 381). Sold on the narcissistic consumer culture of American society, Franklin laments, “privileged Americans, black or white... have manifested little or no interest in the well-being of their fellows” to the detriment of “our national enterprise” (pp. 381–82).

Franklin’s alternative is that of “a world beyond race” (p. 377), rooted in core values he adopted long ago and which echo the philosophic preaching of Booker T. Washington applied to all races in American society: “hardworking, highly respected, and self-respecting loyal citizens...” (p. 382). Such a vision requires an equality that Franklin knows does not exist in an America in which class, as much as race, divides the nation (e.g., the top 20 percent of Americans own 83 percent of the wealth; the bottom 20 percent have no wealth and the minimum wage has decreased 35 percent in real terms between 1968 and 2006). Moreover, loyalty, which has always been a contested terrain in the United States, has become even more so since 9/11.

Confronting our past, as Franklin has done, can demonstrate the unhappy consequences of these fractures in the place Americans call democracy. To deny or to ignore the history will further imperil the individual and collective citizenship so terribly cherished by John Hope Franklin.

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Faculty Fellows at the Center for the Humanities, selected competitively, are relieved of all teaching and administrative duties during their semester in residence at the Center. Any tenured or tenure-track faculty member of Arts & Sciences is eligible to apply. As many as three fellows are selected annually.

Our First Alumni Faculty Fellows’ Lecture and Workshop Series, Spring 2006

Leslie Morris (University of Minnesota, German Department and Director of Center for Jewish Studies)
Lecture, February 16
“How Jewish is it? Translations of Jewish Memory in Contemporary German Culture”
Workshop, February 17
“German Studies / Jewish Cultural Studies / Diaspora Studies: The ‘Place’ of Germany”

Harriet Stone (WU, Department of Romance Languages and Literatures; Comparative Literature)
Lecture March 2
“Objects for the Table: La Bruyère, Descartes, and Dutch Golden Age Painters”

Peter Kastor (WU, Department of History)
Lecture, March 9
“An Accurate Empire: How American Explorers Described Their Country and Themselves”

Martha Sandweiss (Amherst College, Department of American Studies and History)
Lecture, March 23
“Western Photographs, National Culture”
Workshop, March 24
“American Material Culture: Reading Photographs from Local Collections”

Erin McGlothlin (WU, Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures)
Lecture, April 17
“Narrative Transgression in Contemporary German-Jewish Holocaust Literature”

Mariët Westermann (New York University, Director, Institute of Fine Arts)
Lecture, April 24
“In the House of Mirrors: Painting and Experience in the Dutch Republic”
Workshop, April 25
“Silence and Noise in Dutch Paintings of Manners”
Learning About the Larger University: My Semester as a Faculty Fellow

When I think about my experiences as a Faculty Fellow at the Center for the Humanities and what I achieved there, I realize that one of the most profound benefits, apart from the obvious luxury of having the time, support, and resources to pursue my own research, was the way in which my involvement with the Center granted me the opportunity to better know the university I had been working at for over four years.

When I arrived at Washington University in 2001, I, like many other junior faculty straight out of graduate school, faced a daunting task: I had to establish myself both as a member of a vibrant, active, and prominent department and as a scholar in the diverse fields in which I work (German Studies, Jewish Studies, Holocaust Studies). I thus set about focusing my attention and efforts within my department (as a teacher and member of the faculty) and on developing my research, which included creating working relationships with colleagues outside the university. On the one hand, I believe this was an effective strategy; I now feel both at home in my department and comfortable as an emerging scholar in my field. On the other hand, however, such focused concentration on establishing myself meant that I had little time to look around my own university, get to know my colleagues in other departments, and take advantage of the intellectual opportunities a university like WU has to offer. Although I did get to know faculty in related fields as the result of teaching in the Jewish, Islamic, and Near Eastern Studies program and chairing the WU Holocaust Memorial Lecture Committee, I still felt unfamiliar with what my colleagues in other WU departments were up to. Like many of us, I was to a certain extent “in my own world.”

Such isolation and relative unawareness of what is going on in other disciplines on campus seem to contradict the idea of the university as a place that brings scholars together in the joint pursuit of knowledge. Unfortunately, however, it is all too common an experience at modern universities, where we are so caught up in our specialized research that we find few opportunities for common discussion and little time to learn about the research that others are doing. I think of this as a sort of centrifugal effect: by nature of the force of our own individual work, we are to a certain extent thrown outward, away from the common project of the university. Fortunately, at least for those of us who work in the humanities, there is an institution that was created to counteract this effect. The Center for the Humanities functions centripetally to draw us together, providing a forum for discussion and the exchange of ideas. That, after all, is precisely the idea of a center, a place to which we, coming as we do from the sometimes diametrically opposite directions of our respective fields, can converge on common ground.

My semester as a fellow at the Center for the Humanities was one of such convergence. I left the comfortable nest of my own department in Ridgley Hall and traveled to a city all, which seemed at first to be on the other side of campus but turned out to be closer than I had thought. While at the Center I moved out of my own zone of research, contemporary Jewish Holocaust literature, and ventured into the fields of the other Faculty Fellows. I journeyed to the Netherlands of the seventeenth century, where Harriet Stone guided me through Golden Age Dutch painting, and to the early American Republic, where I explored the West with Peter Kastor. Along the way I made stops to visit the research of Martha Sandweiss, Mariët Westermann, and Leslie Morris, the guests we had each invited to come and share their work with us. I was fascinated by the ways in which our projects resembled their research; at the same time, however, I realized by listening to their presentations the extent to which our work had taken on a unique, individual character. Moreover, I came to realize that I was not the only one on this intellectual journey; it was rather a joint endeavor, in which Peter, Harriet, and I each made forays into the intellectual world of the others, each of us in turn guiding the other two through the terrain we know so well. And we met on common ground (in the Center) to discuss various approaches to our work and to suggest strategies for solving particular problems in our research. I became more intimately acquainted with both their work and their styles of working, which were not only fascinating, but also stimulated me to rethink the ways in which I work. In this way, I left my own little world for a while and ventured out into the larger universe (or, as it were, the university). It was an intriguing journey.

Throughout my semester in residence at the Center for the Humanities, I was keenly aware of the ways in which I profited as a Faculty Fellow there. First and foremost, this included an extended period of time (with the support of the Center’s staff) that I could devote exclusively to reading, researching, and writing. In addition, I developed valuable working relationships with colleagues both within the university and without, including my invited guest, my fellow Faculty Fellows, Gerald Early, and the board of the Center. All of these people took an interest in my work and gave me helpful suggestions about how to shape my project. Finally, the Faculty Fellowship not only opened up the work of the other fellows to me it also made me and my work known better to colleagues across campus. But, looking back now, I realize that, as enormously helpful and gratifying as these benefits were, they only made up part of my fellowship experience. The other, equally important part was what I, in turn, contributed as a Faculty Fellow. I interacted with scholars from...
other disciplines and thought more about their methodologies in general, and I participated in a sustained engagement with Peter's and Harriet's research projects in particular. Together with them, Gerald Early, and other colleagues who attended Center for the Humanities events, I entered into a larger dialogue about the role of the humanities at Washington University. My own contributions were thus as meaningful to me as the things I gained as a result of my fellowship, for through this reciprocal process I finally felt that I had become a full-fledged faculty member at Washington University.

Erin McGlothlin, Assistant Professor of the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures at Washington University in St. Louis, Humanities Faculty Fellow, Spring 2006.

What I Did on My Semester Vacation

"S
 o just exactly what are you doing?" That was the question posed by friends and colleagues last semester when I told them I was a Faculty Fellow at the Center for the Humanities. Colleagues in history and in American culture studies asked the question primarily to learn the particulars of my current research project, for they understood about leaves in the humanities. But for people in the social sciences and natural sciences, it was all something of a mystery. In the absence of collecting or analyzing data, some asked if I was not simply taking a long vacation. They might occasionally put it as a joke, but they expected an answer.

I want to use that question as a point of departure for discussing my semester at the Center. In this inaugural year of the fellowship program, it seems an important question to answer. So while I will explain the specifics of my research during the semester, I do so primarily to address the broader topic of how a fellowship program that brought a semester's leave propelled my scholarship.

When asked what I was doing, I answered that I was writing a book, but also that I was benefiting from a unique opportunity in collaboration that seemed to defy the fact that I was often working alone. Then I would ask them two questions. How do you read a book? How do you look at a map? I hadn't arrived at an answer, but I believed that my fellowship at the Center would help me get there. I was trained as a political historian, a discipline that often suffers from a rather superficial consideration of texts. Much of my work consists of reading other people's mail. As a result, I felt very much at home with correspondence or with the other common documents of the political world: legislation, pamphlets, or tracts in political theory. In all these cases, the objects themselves—printed pages—were usually a means to an end, since they provided the evidence I could use to explore what people believed and how they acted.

But recently, a more careful consideration of print and visual culture had become vital to the way I was studying politics. Teaching and researching the frontiers of North America had informed a new book project examining the ways Americans described the expanding western domain of the United States in the half-century after independence. The topics I intended to investigate remained those of a political historian: expansionism, the public policy of the federal leadership, the actions and aspirations of western officials. Nonetheless, it became increasingly clear to me that the written descriptions and numerous maps were essential to those matters of politics and policy. The worlds of policy and aesthetics often seem to be worlds apart, but I was struck by how often they came together.

Learning how to do a better job of reading print and visual culture was obviously going to be the greatest challenge of this project, and making progress on that rather steep learning curve was the greatest benefit of my fellowship at the Center for the Humanities. The fellowship brought with it both time and space. A semester's leave from teaching and administrative responsibilities provided the time to read both more broadly and more carefully. Perhaps more importantly, however, getting away from the familiar intellectual turf provided the space to begin thinking in new ways. Critical to establishing that space was the presence of colleagues who specialized in exactly the fields I hoped to understand better and who were familiar with the very modes of thought I hoped to incorporate into my own scholarship. Harriet Stone and Erin McGlothlin brought a skill with the careful reading of texts that I lacked. Learning how they posed questions—let alone how they arrived at conclusions—not only proved fascinating intuitively but also proved immeasurably useful intellectually. The same applied to our outside speakers, all of whom provided important lessons in how other disciplines go about the project of examining words and pictures.

Equally important was the fact that all three Faculty Fellows were beginning new projects with various linkages. Harriet and I were both struggling to learn about visual culture; seventeenth-century painting in her case, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century
Descartes, Vermeer, and the Science of Art in the Seventeenth Century: My Faculty Fellow Project

My selection as a Center for the Humanities Faculty Fellow came at an important juncture. My research in seventeenth-century French literature had broadened considerably over the years to include not only philosophy, whose greatest exemplars of the classical period, Descartes and Pascal, had long been considered part of the French literary canon, but also art history. The art in question primarily involved France’s neighbor to the north, the Dutch Republic, which in the seventeenth century was emerging from a sustained battle for independence from Spain, France’s neighbor to the south. During my semester as a Humanities Center Fellow, I brought to a close one book, Tables of Knowledge: Descartes in Vermeer’s Studio (Cornell University Press, 2006), and began to configure another that looks further into seventeenth-century French culture within a European context. My leave allowed me to concentrate more fully on connections between the French court, the Dutch Republic, and the Spanish court. While this complex history was played out most dramatically in royal marriages and wars, it was honed through the production, circulation, and collecting of works of literature and art. Writers and artists conveyed much knowledge through their depictions of individual objects. These objects are the subject of my new project.

To develop additional grounding in art history during my semester as a Humanities Fellow, I audited two courses: High Renaissance, taught by William Wallace, and The Baroque, taught by Paul Crenshaw. As luck would have it, the courses met back to back on Tuesdays and Thursdays, thereby anchoring my week at the art school. Both courses were immensely enriching; I am grateful to my colleagues for so generously allowing me to enter their classrooms.

I dedicated the remainder of my semester to exploring the links between science, literature, and art in the seventeenth century. In France this period owed much to Descartes’s celebrated scientific method. Consisting of four rules for conducting...
experiments, the method facilitated the construction of a body of knowledge based on reason. Descartes provided a way to understand the world that depended not on God but rather on man's own ability to observe and interpret God's creation. Descartes moved to the northern Netherlands following Galileo's condemnation by the Inquisition. I consider Descartes's presence there merely a happy coincidence, however. No direct historical link explains my association of Descartes with Dutch painters such as Vermeer. Rather what justifies my approach is their common dedication to identifying and organizing the things that they observe. In contrast to the preponderance of French seventeenth-century art dedicated to promoting the image of the monarchy at Versailles through a reliance on myth, the Bible, and history, much Dutch art from this period represents scenes of ordinary life. I argue that Dutch artists view the things of their world much like scientists study the elements of planets, light, and the human body. In each case a pair of discerning eyes and the mind's precise judgments combine to produce knowledge.

My public lecture on March 2, 2006, was situated at the intersection of the book I was concluding and the new work I was commencing. I brought French moralist La Bruyère into the picture because his acerbic critique of the court of Louis XIV develops through elaborate lists of material goods. Profits amassed through commerce allowed the wealthiest bourgeois to provide the crown with much needed cash. Their fortunes afforded them extraordinary access to the king, a situation that provoked the resentment of the nobles. The bourgeoisie, however, lacked the culture and breeding that distinguished members of the nobility. La Bruyère condemned the bourgeoisie's intrusion into court life by enumerating their faux pas, brash behavior, and persistent efforts to obtain through material objects the very quality—nobility—that the princes and their descendants identified as their exclusive birthright. In its emphasis on material culture, La Bruyère's text presents a striking parallel to Dutch genre paintings. Where La Bruyère depicts the threatening rise of the middle class through its excesses, however, artists in the Dutch Republic affirm the power of the expanding middle class through a display of prosperous burghers' possessions. Descartes's method, I believe, offers a model that enables us to piece together the various objects present both at the French court and in Dutch cities. To develop this more comprehensive view of cultural activity during the seventeenth century, I take the scientific method in a different direction. I use it not, as Descartes intended, as a guide for developing reliable experiments but rather as a guide for compiling in a table of knowledge the data that result from these experiments.

Throughout the semester I attended the talks of my fellow Fellows Peter Kastor and Erin McGlothlin and their guests. I thank these colleagues for enlivening the intellectual terrain this term.
The Moral Writer: A Lecture

This address by Larry May was given at the fourth annual Faculty Book Celebration on December 7, 2005.

I am grateful to Gerald Early for inviting me to step in for Vartan Gregorian,\(^1\) whom I admire quite a bit. In his e-mail to me of a month ago, Gerald asked me not to speak about my research or my published books but, instead, "about any aspect of the task of being an academic author or the role of academic authorship in our society or whatever." I don't normally write about writing, unlike some of my colleagues in literature, but I thought I could tackle the "whatever" part, so I agreed. I here offer a series of stories and vignettes, interspersed with some of my favorite quotations, about the role of the academic writer as moralist.

Twenty-five years ago, when I was in my first tenure-track academic position, I sent an unsolicited essay to the New Yorker magazine. It was a piece pointing out the moral failings of the Reagan administration. In a few weeks I received a short, hand-written note from the magazine's editor, William Shawn. He rejected my essay and then offered some advice. Write about what matters to you, as you have, he said, but also write about your own experiences. For Shawn, writing morally and writing from one's own experiences were intimately connected. The New Yorker style under Shawn's editorship was aptly described as having a "commitment to a rhetoric and even a poetry of facts."\(^2\)

Notice that while I have mentioned my letter from Shawn, I have not directly quoted him. Nonetheless, as you will see, I have taken his advice to heart in my career as a writer, where we aren't moral writers because we fear for our lives if we express our moral opinions in our writing. Yet, even in recent times there have still been true heroes who faced death threats for what they wrote, especially if they went against Hume's advice and confronted the conscience of their communities. One can think of the otherwise conservative judges on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in the 1950s who wrote opinion after opinion striking down Jim Crow laws, especially the "separate but equal" doctrine for public schools. These conservative, Republican jurists, with odd sounding names such as John Minor Wisdom and Elbert Parr Tuttle, stood against their friends and colleagues, experiencing death threats for being "unlikely heroes," to quote the title of Jack Bass's wonderful book about them.\(^3\) A few recent academic humanists have also faced death threats for what they wrote.

While in graduate school, I was a research assistant to Hannah Arendt—she held the most distinguished endowed chair at the New School for Social Research, and since every good chair needs a footstool, that was me. One day Arendt called me and surprisingly asked me to come to her apartment to accompany her to a talk she had to give across town. She told me that the reason she wanted a "chaperone"—even though I was in my very early 20s and she in her late 60s—was that the previous evening a
man had come to her door and threatened her life, yelling obscenities about her book, Eichmann in Jerusalem (1963). The book had appeared twelve years earlier, and she had had numerous death threats because of her contention that some German Jewish leaders were complicit in the Holocaust. It did not matter that Arendt was herself a Jew, who had helped relocate orphaned Jewish children and recover stolen Jewish property after the war. Nor apparently did it matter that Arendt argued strenuously in the book that Eichmann should be executed. In the last few lines of the epilogue, she has imaginary judges in Jerusalem declare to Eichmann:

Let us assume for the sake of argument, that it was nothing more than misfortune that made you a willing instrument in the organization of mass murder; there still remains the fact that you have carried out, and therefore actively supported, a policy of mass murder. For politics is not like the nursery; in politics obedience and support are the same. And just as you supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations—as though you and your superiors had any right to determine who should and who should not inhabit the world—we find that no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you. This is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang.9

Arendt epitomized the moral writer in the style of William Shawn. Indeed, Arendt's book on Eichmann was originally serialized in the New Yorker—she had been asked to cover the Eichmann trial for the New Yorker, by whom else but William Shawn.

Some of the best writing about morality throughout the centuries is by those who experienced the cruelty of war. Arendt's close friend, J. Glenn Gray, has one of the best modern books on the morality of war. Gray, according to Arendt, received his Ph.D. diploma in philosophy in the same mail as his military induction notice. In his book The Warriors (1959), Gray says he "tried to comprehend what the practice of total war did to a man as warrior" while he sat in the trenches during World War II.10 Here is one of the most striking experiential conclusions he reaches:

Battlefield dead are so passive.... Soldiers fall and die in such contorted and unnatural positions, as a rule, that even their comrades find it hard to believe that, shortly before, they were alive. This is part of the mystery of death; those who enter its realm are quickly far removed from the living.... In mortal danger, numerous soldiers enter into a dazed condition in which all sharpness of consciousness is lost.... Most of us remember with a shudder those endless pictures of Hitler's troops... all humanity had eroded from those faces... so it often is in combat itself. Death comes to thousands who are only minimally conscious and snatches them away from life without their awareness of the moment or its significance.11

But just as soldiers see death and destruction all around, they often cannot comprehend the significance of death. Gray's battlefield reminiscences provided a powerful base for his moral theorizing about war as well. He wrote:

"The enemy was cruel, it was clear, yet this did not trouble me as deeply as did our own cruelty. Indeed, their brutality made fighting the Germans much easier, whereas ours weakened the will and confused the intellect. Though the scales were not at all equal in this contest, I felt responsibility for ours much more than for theirs."

It is interesting to ask whether one needs to have battlefield experience in order to write well about responsibility during war. Having wartime experience certainly makes Gray's pacifist-sounding comments more poignant. Wartime cases are perhaps sui generis, although I doubt it.

Gray's moral reflections on war are similar to those that some have documented concerning periods of extreme medical emergency as well. In Albert Camus's novel The Plague (1948), based on Camus's experiences in North Africa, death is again morally problematic.

No, it wasn't medical aid he dispensed in those crowded days—only information.... Indeed, for Rieux his exhaustion was a blessing in disguise. Had he been less tired, his senses more alert, that all-pervading odor of death might have made him sentimental. But when a man has only four hours' sleep, he isn't sentimental. He sees things as they are; that is to say, he sees them in the garish light of justice—hideous, witless justice.... Before the plague he was welcome as a savior.... No, on the contrary... they would have liked to drag him, drag the whole human race, with them to the grave.12

Camus, like Arendt and Gray, is often linked to the school of philosophy called existentialism. One of the central tenets of this school—that concrete existence rather than abstract essence should be the subject matter of philosophy—fits well with William Shawn's advice to the writer.

As far as I can tell from watching from the gallery, the camp guards that make up the vast majority of defendants at The Hague are no different from the gang members I have defended here in the United States.
published Baldwin's piece under the title "Letter from a Region in My Mind"—that region of the mind was deeply influenced by the social experiences of the writer.14 Shawn transformed the New Yorker from an effete journal in the 1950s to a magazine with a social conscience in the 1960s and also gave us a model of the moral editor by inspiring those he encountered to become moral writers.

In The Plague, Camus similarly provides a metaphor for how the moral writer should approach a subject. Summoned to give evidence... he has exercised the restraint that behooves a conscientious witness. All the same, following the dictates of his heart, he has deliberately taken the victims' side and tried to share with his fellow citizens the certitudes they had in common—love, exile, and suffering. Thus he could truly say there was not one of their anxieties in which he did not share, no predicament of theirs that was not his.... Thus decidedly it was up to him to speak for all.15

Camus speaks clearly for the victims. And he does so in a voice that is not afraid to speak from our shared conscience. Indeed, such examples invoke what in international law is called the conscience of humanity.16

A more recent and powerful voice on behalf of the victims is that of the feminist legal scholar Catherine MCKinnon. At her own expense she traveled to Bosnia and interviewed women who had been raped and tortured by Serbian soldiers. And she then wrote movingly about her experiences. I here quote one of her main moral conclusions:

No state effectively guarantees women's human rights within its border.... Wartime is largely exceptional in that atrocities by soldiers against civilians are always state acts. But men do in war what they do in peace, only more so. When it comes to women, at least to civilian casualties, the complacency that surrounds peacetime extends to war, however the laws read. And the more a conflict can be framed within a state, as a civil war, as social, as domestic, the less human rights are recognized as being violated. In other words, the closer a fight comes to home, the more "feminized" the victims become no matter what their gender, and the less likely international human rights will be found to be violated, no matter what was done.17

MCKinnon again speaks loudly for the victims. Some, including myself, have urged that we also take seriously the other perspective, of the perpetrators, or the "defendants" as we prefer to call them.

Somewhat contrary to what Shawn told me, the kind of experience that one builds on sometimes has to be that of others, especially when one attempts to represent our shared conscience, that is, the consensus about what is right in a given society. We must at least supplement our own experience with that of many others. We are sometimes unlucky in that we lack a rich set of experiences to draw on. Normally, for good writing in the humanities we cannot get by without some investigation of history as well as our own experiences. Jonathan Glover says that in writing what he called a "moral history of the twentieth century" he realized from the beginning that "no one can have experienced more than a small number of these episodes." But we can compensate by "using ethics to interrogate history [so as] to help understand a side of human nature often left in darkness."18

In Arendt's book, The Human Condition (1959),19 she similarly urges that we think sub specie aeternitatis, that is, under the appearance of the eternal, although of course always recognizing that we can never get any closer than the mere approximation of such a perspective, only to the half-truths E. B. White discussed. Sometimes the task of the moral writer is not merely to reflect the shared conscience but to awaken or forge a new shared conscience. Clearly that is what William Shawn did by publishing Rachel Carson's Silent Spring, James Baldwin's Fire Next Time, and Arendt's Eichmann in Jerusalem in the New Yorker. Carson's work made people see the risk of environmental hazards in ways they had not before; and Baldwin's made us see the prevalence of racism. These writings did not represent a moral consensus but forged a new one.

Throughout this talk I have relied mainly on the experiences and writings of others, but I now return to my own experiences and writings. Eight years ago, I decided that I wanted to focus my writing on issues in the morality of law. I felt that to do respectable work in this area I needed to learn a lot more about law—so I hiked across campus and enrolled in our law school. I learned a lot in the first two years—but this was all knowledge of the law from the experiences of others, however valuable this knowledge was. I also gained that larger historical perspective on law, but gained little firsthand experiential knowledge.

It was in my third year that I gained invaluable firsthand experience. I enrolled in several clinics that allowed me to do some rudimentary practice of law, interviewing clients who were in police cells manacled to the floor, or in jails and prisons where they weren't allowed to get close enough to shake my hand. I represented, or accurately co-represented, someone accused of being
a multiple murderer, as well as someone accused of being a serial murderer. Here I was deeply humbled by how unsuited I was to help these people, especially the ones that seemed to me to be innocent, but how important their stories were to someone like me interested in the morality of law. I have written several essays trying to give some of these people the voice that they lack, although so far I have been much less successful with their criminal appeals.

I have also become increasingly interested in the plight of defendants standing before international criminal tribunals. In my most recent work,20 I try to reshape the public conscience to see that we also need to take the defendants’ position seriously in addition to that of the victims’ in international criminal law. It is interesting that groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have championed the rights of defendants in domestic U.S. contexts but have advocated only for the victims in international contexts. But surely there are at least half-truths that need to be represented on behalf of both victims and defendants. As far as I can tell from watching from the gallery, the camp guards that make up the vast majority of defendants at The Hague are no different from the gang members I have defended here in the United States; some are innocent and in any event as small fry they all do not match up well with the enormity of what they are accused of doing. The genocide or crime against humanity is a group crime, not an individual one, and those who planned these mass crimes are far more appropriately prosecuted than are the camp guards and low-ranking soldiers.

In writing about defendants accused of horrific crimes I have tried to remain faithful to the advice I received from William Shawn and not merely to settle for writing about the experiences of others, even though there is a strong temptation to do this in our comfortable academic offices. Of course, often one has to settle for an intermediate kind of experience where one learns from those who had the firsthand experience. This has drawn me more and more to interdisciplinary projects, including those thoroughly miserable three years in law school, and occasionally to take a legal case of my own.

John Gardner, contentiously to be sure, said that all good writing is moral writing, not when it preaches, but when it has a clear positive moral effect, presenting valid models for imitation, eternal verities worth keeping in mind, and a benevolent vision of the possible which can inspire and incite human beings toward virtue, toward life affirmation as opposed to destruction and indifference.21

And in his book On Moral Fiction, Gardner begins with this story:

The wisdom god, Woden, went out to the king of the trolls, got him in an armlock and demanded to know of him how order might triumph over chaos. “Give me your left eye,” said the king of the trolls, “and I’ll tell you.” Without hesitation, Woden gave up his left eye. “Now tell me.”

The troll said, “The secret is, watch with both eyes!”22

But perhaps even the half-blind Woden could still see the half-truth in this story. The point seems to be that moral writing does not require courage but only common sense. If this is the point, then I respectfully disagree with the troll. Good moral writing often takes courage—where it does make sense to risk one’s eye.

William Shawn is now dead and the New Yorker magazine is greatly in his debt. This is no more clearly seen than in a new generation inspired to be moral writers. In the late 1990s a different editor was then at the helm of the New Yorker. She sent Philip Gourevitch to Rwanda to write about the aftermath of the genocide. Gourevitch’s powerful book, We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families (1998), was brought out, as was Arendt’s book on Eichmann, in installments in that magazine. The book ends as follows:

I’ll leave you to decide if there is hope for Rwanda with one more story.... The prisoner... explained that... [d]uring their attack on the school in Ginesyi, as in the earlier attack on the school in Kibuye, the students, teenage girls who had been roused from their sleep, were ordered to separate themselves—Hutus from Tutsis. But the students had refused. At both schools the girls said they were simply Rwandans, so they were beaten and shot indiscriminately.

Rwandans have no need—no room in their corpse-crowded imaginations—for more martyrs. None of us does. But mightn’t we all take some courage from the example of those brave Hutu girls who could have chosen to live but chose instead to call themselves Rwandans?23

That is moral writing at its best. Moral writers are perhaps the true humanists (although I don’t think that Gardner is right that they are the only ones). They sometimes write in a way that represents the shared conscience of humanity, but more often
they write in a way that awakens or helps forge a new, shared conscience. Sometimes it takes courage; sometimes we must take a stand, often quite an unpopular one, and write about what we believe in, from our own experience. Sometimes this means feeling good about ourselves as we speak for the victims; but sometimes it means taking the uncomfortable position of speaking for those accused of mass murder. The moral writer must sometimes take what does not appear to be the moral high ground. I’d like to end by giving two short quotations from my most recent book, Crimes against Humanity: A Normative Account (2005).

I begin the book by recounting one of my own experiences: I sat in the gallery of the Yugoslav Tribunal in mid-June of 2001. The prosecution had just completed its case in chief, and one of the judges had asked the prosecutor what evidence had specifically been presented that proved the charge of genocide. The judge said that most of the evidence had actually established the crime of persecution, a crime against humanity. The prosecutor responded with a largely moral argument: The defendant had engaged in especially gruesome acts against Muslims, and the world expected that he would be prosecuted on the most serious of the charges—namely, genocide, not merely persecution. I went to lunch with several newspaper reporters who were unanimous in agreeing that the defendant must be convicted of genocide to mark his horrible acts. I disagreed, as did the judges who dismissed the genocide charge.24

Dismissing this charge is not without its costs, as is true for pardon and amnesties as well. But there are other good reasons to look at collective remedies.

I end my book by wondering about the moral justifiability of alternatives to criminal trials.

One reason why amnesties may be a good collective remedy has to do itself with the core idea underlying shared and collective responsibility...[namely] bystanders and perpetrators are on the same side. Most members of a society, including most victims, are also bystanders, or as it is often put, somehow complicit. Are any of us all that different from one well-known Yugoslav philosopher who was previously known for his moral courage and who is now known for his support of ethnic cleansing—both apparently on principled grounds? Are our own attitudes any different from his? If we acted as he did, given how much alike he and we are, is it inconceivable that he (that we) should be pardoned, that our acts should be forgiven, even forgotten as if there were a collective temporary amnesia, so that we can heal?25

The moral writer, as I first learned from William Shawn, writes from a moral point of view infused with personal experience and urges readers to confront that often uncomfortable point of view in their own moral thinking. In general, we deal in half-truths but perhaps because of that we only need to have one eye open.

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1 Editor’s Note: Carnegie Corporation president Vartan Gregorian had originally been invited to be the keynote speaker at the annual Faculty Book Celebration, sponsored by the Center for the Humanities. Unfortunately, he had to withdraw.


3 Quoted in ibid., p 244.


5 Ibid., p 83.


11 Ibid., 101–2.

12 Ibid., p 6. As I reflected on this passage I couldn’t help but think of Abu Ghraib today.


14 See Yagoda, About Town, 313–16.

15 Camus, The Plague, 272.

16 The so-called Martins Clause of the Preamble of Hague Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, 1907, declares that “until a more complete code of the laws of war has been issued...the inhabitants and the belligerents remain under the protection and the rule of the principles of the law of nations, as they result from the usages established among civilized people, from the laws of humanity, and the dictates of the public conscience.”


22 Ibid., 1.


24 May, Crimes against Humanity, 4.

25 Ibid., 251–52.
The Center for the Humanities is pleased to announce the establishment of the Washington University International Humanities Prize, which will be awarded for the first time in 2006. The prize is generously supported by both the Center for the Humanities of Arts & Sciences and the McDonnell International Scholars Academy.

The International Humanities Prize will be awarded biannually to a literary author (adult or children's literature), scholar, journalist, museum curator, musician, or filmmaker who has exemplified both excellence and courage throughout his or her career and has made, through his or her art or criticism, a contribution to the promotion and preservation of the traditions of the humanities in the public sphere. The winner of the prize will be given the Distinguished Humanist Medal and a cash prize of $15,000. He or she will give a thirty-minute acceptance speech on the occasion of the Annual Faculty Book Celebration, sponsored by the Center for the Humanities. The speech will be published subsequently in Belles Lettres, the literary journal of the Center. No one will be given the award in absentia. Foreign and American artists and scholars will be considered for the prize.

Our first recipient is Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk. He will receive the prize on November 27, 2006, at the Center for the Humanities’ fifth annual Faculty Book Celebration. Mr. Pamuk’s books have been translated into more than forty languages. His most popular work in English is the novel My Name Is Red. He has been short-listed for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Pamuk was born and educated in Istanbul. He became a writer after failing to fulfill his family’s dream of becoming an engineer or an architect. In 2005, criminal charges were brought against Mr. Pamuk when he made a statement about the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and the massacre of thirty thousand Kurds. It is a crime in Turkey to publicly mention the genocide. Charges were dropped against Mr. Pamuk in January 2006, although there is always the possibility that he could be charged again. A number of writers around the world spoke out on his behalf including Salman Rushdie and John Updike. Because of the overall literary excellence of his work and its broad recognition around the world, and because of his courage to speak out about the Armenian Genocide in his country, Mr. Pamuk is an ideal initial recipient of the Washington University International Humanities Prize.
Orhan Pamuk’s Complex Patriotism

I want to be a bridge in the sense that a bridge doesn’t belong to any continent, doesn’t belong to any civilization, and a bridge has the unique opportunity to see both civilizations and be outside of it. That’s a good, wonderful privilege.—Orhan Pamuk in a 2002 interview with Elizabeth Farnsworth on the PBS Newshour

Orhan Pamuk made these comments as he gazed out from his Istanbul apartment at a bridge between Europe and Asia. He has called Istanbul home for most of his life, and his endless fascination and love for it are infectious. But these feelings are conflicted—both for Pamuk and for the characters and narrators in his novels. Rather than providing a smooth crossing between East and West, the bridge he envisions all too often entails pain, confusion, and resentment.

Born into a wealthy Turkish family in 1952, Pamuk could have followed the comfortable life in architecture planned for him. Instead he found himself intrigued—indeed haunted—by issues of cultural and personal identity, which led eventually to becoming a novelist. Captivated initially by painting, a pursuit that provided a setting for the solitary reflection so important to him and many of his characters, he later moved to writing. But his early experiences laid the groundwork for some of his most powerful works, especially My Name Is Red (English translation, 2001), a story of intrigue, murder, and love in sixteenth-century Istanbul over whether miniaturists should use forms of Western representational art.

Now considered Turkey’s greatest living novelist, Pamuk is the winner of numerous international honors, including the first Washington University International Humanities Prize to be awarded by the Center for the Humanities. The visibility he enjoys has given him a platform for speaking out on historical and political issues, and over the past few years this has led him into dangerous waters. His public commentary on contested, if not reprehensible, episodes from Turkey’s past gave rise to threats from nationalists and state authorities who believe they can enforce silence. But as is so often the case, this has only delayed—and perhaps heightened—the need to come to terms with these matters, and Pamuk insists on the need to do so today.

Pamuk’s troubles stem from an interview he gave in February 2005 to the Swiss publication Das Magazin in which he said, “thirty thousand Kurds and a million Armenians were killed in these lands and nobody but me dares to talk about it.” And in a BBC interview that same year he said, “what happened to the Ottoman Armenians in 1915 was a major thing that was hidden from the Turkish nation; it was a taboo. But we have to be able to talk about the past.” The reaction to these comments in Turkey were so menacing that Pamuk stayed out of the country for several months. And when he did return, he was charged under a new section of the penal code that states, “a person who explicitly insults being a Turk, the Republic or Turkish Grand National Assembly, shall be imposed to a penalty of imprisonment for a term of six months to three years.” The charges were dropped on a technicality, but the message was clear.

These events are somewhat ironic because Pamuk in reality is a great Turkish patriot—but a profound one who insists on dealing with complexity. Reflecting the turbulent history of his country over the past century, a history of imperial decay, radical westernization, and brutal repression, his life and novels are suffused with a tension between love for things Turkish and admiration for things Western. As he tells us in Istanbul: Memories and the City (English translation, 2005), an autobiography of his early years: “part of me longed, like a radical Westerniser, for the city to become entirely Western. I held the same hope for myself; but another part of me yearned to belong to the Istanbul I had grown to love by instinct, by habit and by memory.” As a mature novelist, this tension has become less a matter of opposition and more one of complex hybridization, in some cases leading to the disappearance of boundaries between self and other for characters and narrators.

An arena where much of this is played out is memory. Pamuk would seem to agree with the historian Jan Assmann that “the past is not simply ‘received’ by the present. The present is ‘haunted’ by the past and the past is modeled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present” (Assmann, M. 2019. The Egyptian, p. 9). In Pamuk’s case this means that writing is a constant exercise in modeling, inventing, reinventing, and reconstructing the past in an effort to understand himself and Turkey today. In Snow (English translation, 2004) and The Black Book (English translation, 1994) Pamuk’s characters struggle with the tension between Turkey and the West in the contemporary world, but his characters in other novels such as My Name Is Red (English translation, 2001) and The White Castle (English translation, 1990) do so in settings from centuries ago.

The past modeled on the present in Pamuk’s novels invariably gives rise to uncertainty over identity boundaries. This uncertainty shapes Pamuk’s characters, but it takes on even more fascinating form in the narrative voices that depict them. His use of multiple, constantly shifting narrative voice is part of the intrigue in My
Name Is Red, where he employs some dozen narrating voices, including a gold coin. Each chapter is titled with the name of one of these narrators, but the reader is left to track down who they really are and why they present the stories they do. And in The White Castle, a Turk and a Venetian from the early seventeenth century are thrown together and in the end switch places in a captivating way that is unnerving to the reader.

Pamuk's characters and narrators live in a world populated by what the Russian literary analyst Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975) called the "word with a sideward glance." Everything must be understood as a response to real or imagined utterances of others. Just as the characters in Dostoyevsky's novels are often obsessed with what others around them are thinking, Pamuk's Turkish characters seem to be never far from reflecting on what "they" in the West see. As he notes:

To some degree, we all worry about what foreigners and strangers think of us. But if anxiety brings us pain, clouds our relationship with reality, becoming more important than reality itself, this is a problem. My interest in how my city looks to Western eyes is— as for most Istanbulers— very troubled; like all other Istanbul writers with one eye always on the West, I sometimes suffer in confusion. (Istanbul, p. 211)

Pamuk's quest for authenticity in this context is what brings him to the bridge between East and West. He characterizes his apprenticeship in becoming a writer in terms of a self-contradiction or what "a Westerner would call...a paradox" (Istanbul, p. 244). Namely, it involved coming to recognize that "we acquire our own identity by imitating others" (ibid.). This first came to him as a young painter when he discovered that "I could not fend off that deepening melancholy that spread like a stain: the almost-but-not-quite shameful truth was that I could paint only when I thought I was someone else" (ibid.). When it came to writing, he eventually came to realize that "just as I had to identify myself with Utrillo in order to paint Istanbul—it was by falling under [the] influence [of Western authors such as Flaubert] and arguing with them by turns that I forged my own identity" (p. 260).

The upshot is that Pamuk has metamorphosed into a unique voice, and Western reviewers find it impossible to locate him in known categories. Proust and Mann are often mentioned, as are Calvino and Borges, by as John Updike notes about My Name Is Red, "Pamuk's boxes are bigger [than the boxes within boxes of Borges], but the toylike feeling persists, of craftsmanship exulting in its powers...Pamuk's eminence...looms singularly."

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Orhan Pamuk's Books:

*Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları (Cevdet Bey and His Sons)*, novel, Istanbul: Can Yayıncılık, 1982

Orhan Kemal Novel Prize award (Turkey 1983).

*Sessiz Ev (The Silent House)*, novel, Istanbul: Can Yayıncılık, 1983

Madaralı Novel Prize (Turkey, 1984)

French translation won the 1991 Prix de la découverte européenne award


*Beşaz Kale (The White Castle)*, novel, Istanbul: Can Yayıncılık, 1985


Independent Foreign Fiction Prize (United Kingdom, 1996)

*Kara Kitap (The Black Book)*, novel, Istanbul: Can Yayıncılık, 1990


French translation won the Prix France Culture

*Yeni Hayat (The New Life)*, novel, Istanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 1995


*Benim Adım Kırımı (My Name is Red)*, novel, Istanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 1998


Prix Du Meilleur Livre Etranger winner (France 2002)

Premio Grinzane Cavour prize winner (Italy 2002)

International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (Ireland 2003)

*Kar (Snow)*, novel, Istanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 2002

English translation by Maureen Freely, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004

Prix Medicis Etranger prize winner (France 2002)

*Istanbul: Hıtralar ve Şehir (Istanbul: Memories and the City)*, memories, Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2003

English translation by Maureen Freely, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005
Orhan and his Brothers

As a child, Orhan Pamuk would sit at his mother's dressing table and swing the two wings of her mirror triptych until he could see "thousands of Orhans shimmering in the deep, cold, glass-colored infinity." It was, he notes, "a game very similar to the one I would later play in my novels." The game is that of late international postmodernism, which stage-manages the emergence of Orhan, bespectacled novelist, at the end of The Black Book (English translation, 1994) and of Snow (English translation, 2004), breaks the narration of My Name Is Red (English translation, 2001) into myriad voices (including those of a horse, a drawing of a dog, and the color red itself), alternates the narrator's quest for the journalist Celal in The Black Book with the articles appearing in Celal's name (in the mode, say, of Vargas Llosa's Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter, 1997), and rejoices in the all but untranslatable play of long Turkish sentences with unexpectedly subversive endings. It has won him much national and international recognition, including the IMPAC prize for My Name Is Red in 2003, as well as comparisons to more or less every leading exponent or precursor of any feature of his writing, such as Kafka, Borges, Calvino, Ballard, or Grass.

Yet his art has a local habitation, Istanbul. "My imagination requires that I stay in the same city, on the same street, in the same house, gazing at the same view. Istanbul's fate is my fate." And, just as Istanbul's fate is to be uniquely double, both European and Asian, so the many perspectives of Pamuk's writing are generated by his "ghostly other." Here is the opening sentence of his wonderful memoir, Istanbul: Memories and the City (English translation, 2005): "From a very young age, I suspected there was more to my world than I could see: Somewhere in the streets of Istanbul, in a house resembling ours, there lived another Orhan so much like me that he could pass for my twin, even my double." Both memoir and fiction record a double sense of Istanbul itself, its former glories contrasted with the time of Pamuk's experience in which it was "a city of ruins," "poorer, shabbier and more isolated." The narrators of both My Name Is Red and The Black Book have similar intuitions. The mood passes to Kars in Snow, with the sense of a deep history (Armenian, Russian, and Ottoman) diffused in "end-of-empire melancholy." Pamuk's central figure in his fiction is a flâneur, a walker through cities, in a specifically Turkish city where he observes himself as, like the city itself, another. He strives to become that other: the Turkish Hoja of The White Castle (English translation, 1990) changes identities, memories, and place with his Italian slave; the lawyer Galip in The Black Book laboriously transforms himself into the missing Celal, and takes over his writing, in order to try to recover his lost wife, Rüya ("the dream"); the narrator of The New Life (English translation, 1997) assumes the name of his double, Mehmet, and tracks him down to a cinema in eastern Turkey where he murders him. In The Black Book the pursuit of the alter ego is equally fatal, though in this case inadvertently, both to Celal and to Rüya.

There is generally a murderer lurking in Pamuk's mature fiction, whose target is so like himself as to be both a rival and a brother. It is a story that extends to both family and nation. Galip's family in The Black Book appears to live in the Pamuk family apartment building and shares their maidservant, Esma hanim; Istanbul speaks of Orhan's serious boyhood fights with his older brother, who is now a respected Turkish medieval historian; The White Castle is presented as an archive discovered by the historian brother featured in Pamuk's earlier novel Sessiz Ev in 1983 ("The Silent House"—strangely not yet translated into English, though it has appeared in French as La maison du silence). In all Pamuk's work the desire to address present issues is mingled with family and mediated by a use of the historical in which present concerns are mirrored, such as the effect of Western influence on Turkish art in My Name Is Red.

Is the rather lopsided cultural interchange, as here or in The White Castle, a source of gain or loss—and, if loss, what is it that is lost? The historical parallels drawn in Pamuk's work are an enigma of modernity at a time of cultural crisis. They never fail to speak, if indirectly, of modern Turkey.

Pamuk used to insist that his work is apolitical. Here is another version of the two Orhans—the other of whom has recently faced charges of defaming the Turkish state by mentioning its slaughter long ago of Armenians and, all too recently, of Kurds and has been hailed by Salman Rushdie as a "freedom fighter." Against this are ranged some voices on the Turkish left, who accuse Pamuk of excessive sympathy for the Islamisticts currently in power and—"the most emotive of examples—of failing to speak in solidarity when thirty-five secularists writers and artists died by arson in a hotel fire in Sivas in 1995. But Pamuk, who has in fact long been outspoken on the treatment of Kurds, has never claimed perfect sympathy with the Turkish secularist and nationalist (though westernizing) left, which he sees as historically too ready to hide behind the army's unrelenting interference in the political process. No reader of Mark Manzower's Salonika (2006) should be surprised by Pamuk's long view: he understands the suffering and alienation brought about by twentieth-century cultural and ethnic cleansing in the name of Turkish, Greek, and various Balkan nationalisms, by forced "Turkification" in the Istanbul of his boyhood, and by the turning away from more inclusive Ottoman traditions in Atatürk's drastic legal and educational reforms, even to the point of effacing Arabic words in the "new Turkish" language. Pamuk's own Turkish prose has been an influence in the recent revival of interest in the Ottoman era, and his sense of living history goes back into the Ottoman and
Seljuk past in revulsion from the twentieth century’s noisy and homicidal nationalism.

Pamuk does not entertain the possibility of reversing the past. Empire has gone, and there remains the “haunting” of invisible doubles and pervasive hüüzün, melancholia on the individual and social levels. But change left “a spiritual void,” and Pamuk seems to want to understand how religious people seek to remedy it. He writes in Istanbul of his unexpected discovery that “religious people were harmless” (though this is not an insight one would want to apply unmodified to the United States). He seeks traces of an Istanbul in which dervish houses thrived, and his fiction fantasizes a kind of collective paranoia that modern political upheavals are oblique continuations of much older religious movements. The figure of Rumi (1207–73)—poet, mystic, and founder of the Mevlana dervishes—haunts much of his fiction. The body in the well with which My Name Is Red opens recalls the fate of Rumi’s soulmate and lover Shams, which plays an important role in the political allegory of The Black Book. Indeed, Turkey’s long history exists as if it were underground—a thought especially appropriate in Istanbul, with its miles of cisterns and tunnels. Visualizing the family apartment turned upside-down as a deep shaft to the underworld, Pamuk fantasizes a subterranean city full of lifelike mannequins representing the real aspect of mid-twentieth-century Turks, abandoned and unwanted in the wake of westernization and its “erasure of the past.” His concerto has affected younger Turkish writers such as Elif Shafak, now writing in English and herself now facing possible charges of defaming the Turkish state. There is surely a tribute to Pamuk in the British writer Edward Carey’s Observatory Mansions (2001), whose main character assembles in tunnels beneath his apartment block a museum crypt comprising dolls, antique clothes, prosthetic limbs, miscellaneous body parts, and—his great secret—the mortal remains of a long-dead brother.

It is risky, and sometimes perhaps demeaning, to try to construct an author’s politics from his fiction; but one of the morals of Snow, as of My Name Is Red, is that there is no independent place for art that can be sealed off from its contemporary world. If brother is not to kill brother, they should practice nuance as well as tolerance. In Snow Pamuk eloquently refuses to demonize “terrorists” or “Islamic fundamentalism.” On the contrary, the mainstream Islamic politicians of eastern Turkey are said to be political-ly able, caring, and shrewd, though their slogans, like others’, can provoke murder. The most harrowing dialogue in the book is between the local government director of schools and the Islamist who will kill him; but that killing is counterbalanced by the crackpot secular nationalism of an old actor mouthing Atatürk-era scripts, who launches a violent and futile coup. The trigger for both events is the ban on headscarves in schools. This is upheld sternly in real life by the Turkish state and army. President Sezer of Turkey, a principled jurist, has consistently refused to admit to his presence women, even the prime minister’s wife, wearing headscarves. Sezer sees the headscarf as the outer sign of a religious system that profoundly oppresses women; he would be backed in this by some women writers from Islamic countries, such as Taslima Nasreen. Pamuk, on the other hand, bases his plot on girls’ suicides after their right to wear headscarves is refused. It seems that Snow would ask us to keep a sense of proportion, to count the cost; and Istanbul for its part offers a comic but unsatisfic image of God as an old woman in a white headscarf.

The politics of Snow, like them or not, are embedded in the life of the novel, as in Dostoyevsky. For all Pamuk’s writerliness, we cannot separate a merely aesthetic object to admire any more than its central figure, the poet Kâ, can escape the violence of his times. Most extraordinary of all Pamuk’s novels is The New Life (English translation, 1997), in which the certainties of left and right are portrayed as equally fantastic and surreal. The plot convolutions do no more than match the murderous entanglements of Turkish politics during the dark period in which Pamuk came of age, when the student partisans of right and left were killing each other prolifically and without compunction in the streets of Istanbul and other major cities—provoking the army to mount coups, in 1971 and in 1980, by which the state reasserted order. There is a vital paradox in the more honestly it appears to a global audience—the more it presents itself, for all its difficulty of plot and language, as translateable. Fresh from collaborating on a second translation of The Black Book into English, Pamuk understands both the power of translation and the resistance to it by a Turkish state whose version of identity is being rubbed raw by its writers.

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The Washington University International Humanities Prize

The first Washington University International Humanities Prize will be awarded to Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk. See page 27.