

sion that the Nazis exploited.

Like others searching for Nazism's roots, Goldhagen is bothered that nineteenth-century German liberals like Wilhelm von Dohm and others hoped to liberate ghetto Jews by absorbing them into their own bourgeois Protestant civilization. Yet as Arthur Hertzberg has shown in a book about Jews and the French Enlightenment, the apostles of modernity and those they intended to emancipate often disliked each other thoroughly. Not only German liberals but French rationalists hoped to "free" Jews from a tribalism that not all of them wanted to abandon.

Goldhagen repeatedly makes two questionable assertions: that most Germans rejoiced over the destruction of European Jewry and that the *Einsatzgruppen* who carried out most of this killing were "Germans first and SS men, policemen, or camp guards second."

There are of course differing views, but Goldhagen ignores them. Historian Peter Merkl, for example, concludes after extended interviews with former Nazi Party officials that anti-Semitism had little to do with why most of them served Hitler. Merkl's interviewees seem to be moral dwarfs, and only a minority, typically in the SS, hold strong opinions against Jews. There are also histories, the best of them by Sarah Gordon, on the thousands of Germans who risked their lives to save Jewish neighbors. Gordon shows that among this group most were devout Christians. My own aunt benefited from encounters with just such people during her flight from Austria and Germany in 1943. Presumably the Germans she dealt with were all exceptions to Goldhagen's rule.

Goldhagen summarily rejects the ideas that most Germans in the early 1940s did

not know of the mass murder of Jews and that those who did were afraid to intervene. He gives the impression that Nazi Germany floated along on popular enthusiasm without needing to practice terror against its own subjects. His description of the attacks on Jewish lives and property during *Kristallnacht* exaggerates the popularity of this vicious pogrom undertaken by the SS. Contrary to Goldhagen's statements, outspokenly anti-Nazi (and anti-German) witnesses such as William Shirer and Howard K. Smith observed that most Germans were stunned by Nazi vandalism during *Kristallnacht*. These witnesses believed the brutality was partly intended to frighten Germans into submission. Goldhagen may not consider such testimony because it does not suit his incriminatory purpose.

One of the few strengths of this book is the lack of a bibliography. With one it would have been longer.



OVER-LOOKED, NEWLY RELEVANT, OR OTHERWISE DESERVING OLDER BOOKS

GRAIN OF TRUTH

By Nick Gillespie

In the American Grain

By William Carlos Williams; 1925

In the years after World War I, American society underwent dramatic changes. According to the 1920 census, for the first time more Americans lived in cities and towns than in rural settings. New York City's population swelled to 5.5 million, and over a dozen cities had over 600,000 inhabitants. A general rise in wealth obscured and challenged long-standing class distinctions, and a host of new (or newly affordable) consumer products such as movies, radios, tabloid newspapers, and automobiles contributed to a growing cosmopolitanism. The "American Century" had begun in earnest.

Not coincidentally, Americans became increasingly obsessed with defining who and what they were. Even as the country came into its own in business and industry, it suffered an identity crisis. Between 1901 and 1920, over 14 million immigrants arrived, largely from Southern and Central Europe. (Blacks migrated, too, especially to northern cities: During the '20s, New York's and Chicago's black populations doubled.) Prior to 1890, by contrast, about 80 percent of immigrants hailed from Northern Europe.

The American WASP establishment, historian Geoffrey Perret notes, reacted to such demographic changes with "a sense of being cornered within their own country." Respected "scientists" William C. McDougall and Carl C. Brigham asserted in 1923 that "the intellectual superiority of our Nordic group over the Alpine, Mediterranean and negro groups has been demonstrated." The *New York Times* fretted that the country was being "mongrelized." Nativist sentiments culminated in the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which established country-of-origin quotas to keep out Italians, Jews, and others. To paraphrase a popular slogan of the times, America had been kept safe for Americans.

This is the backdrop for the literary *tour de force* by William Carlos Williams, *In the American Grain*. Appearing in

1925, Williams's book is an amalgam of historical documents, speculative fiction, and contemplative essays. Through 21 chapters, he explores what it means to be American—and expands notions of who fits the bill. He writes about some predictable characters—the Pilgrims, George Washington, Daniel Boone, Abe Lincoln—but casts them in unfamiliar lights.

Williams also reconfigures the American experience to include the history of Indian, French, and Spanish America. (Critic Yvor Winters deemed "The Destruction of Tenochtitlan," which wavers between the viewpoints of Cortez and Montezuma, "superior in all likelihood to nearly any other prose of our time and to most of the verse.") And he presents such "foreigners" as Ponce de León, Champlain, and Jacataqua, "Sachem of the Indians of Swan Island," as fully in the American grain.

For its artistic achievement alone, the book is well worth reading. But contemporary debates over immigration and citizenship give it an additional relevance. For at the close of the American Century, defining what and who is truly "American" has hardly become easier.

Nick Gillespie is a senior editor of Reason. He recently completed a doctoral dissertation on American literature.

The Digest

SUMMARIES OF IMPORTANT NEW RESEARCH FROM THE NATION'S
UNIVERSITIES, THINK TANKS, AND INVESTIGATIVE PUBLICATIONS

POLITICS

"Reinventing" Government Employment

George Nesterczuk, "Reviewing the National Performance Review," in *Regulation* (Number 3, 1996), Cato Institute, 1000 Massachusetts Avenue N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001.

When Bill Clinton ran for President in 1992, he pledged to create "a government that works better and costs less." Nesterczuk, majority staff director for the House Civil Service Subcommittee, argues that while fewer people work for the federal government now than four years ago, the size and power of the federal government have not been reduced.

Between fiscal year '92 and fiscal year '96, federal employment dropped by 9 percent: The number of Pentagon employees fell by 16 percent, but civilian federal employment by only 4 percent. The administration says it is "in the process of eliminating more than 2,000 unnecessary field offices," but in congressional testimony, Office of Management and Budget personnel could not name a single field office that has closed.

The upshot is that while the federal work force is the smallest since the Kennedy era, that's only because the Pentagon employs 350,000 fewer people. It "would be a challenging but eminently commendable goal," says Nesterczuk, for the president to release a similar number of nondefense bureaucrats.

The FEC vs. Free Speech

Steven Hayward and Allison R. Hayward, "Gagging on Political Reform," in *Reason* (October 1996), 3415 South Sepulveda Boulevard, #400, Los Angeles, California 90034.

The Federal Election Commission created in 1974 does much to suppress political discussion in this country, according to Steven Hayward of the Pacific Research Institute and election attorney Allison R. Hayward. "Political expression, which the framers of the First Amendment clearly intended to be the most protected kind of speech, is in fact today the least protected," they write.

In *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976), the Supreme Court limited the FEC's regulatory scope, saying the commission only had power to oversee groups that "expressly advocated" support of a political candidate by using such words as "vote for," "elect," "defeat," or "cast your ballot for." Ever since, the agency has tried to expand its powers to cover all kinds of political speech, despite periodic rebukes from the courts.

The FEC has also expanded its reach into cyberspace. The authors observe that if you spend more than \$250 building a "Vote for Bob Dole" Web site and don't tell the FEC, you could face heavy fines or jail, even if you have no contact with the Dole campaign. CompuServe wanted to give Web sites to any presidential candidate who did not have one, but decided not to do so after the FEC declared that the gift would be an illegal

"in-kind" campaign contribution.

FEC regulations, the Haywards argue, have done little to stop influence peddlers but have severely restricted the rights of Americans to talk about politics. The best way to keep elections clean, they say, is sunlight: Require strict and immediate disclosure of all contributions, and let the public decide which politicians are too beholden to special interests.

Tomorrow's Wars

A.J. Bacevich, "Morality and High Technology," in *The National Interest* (Fall 1996), 1112 16th Street N.W., #540, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Our decisive victory in the Gulf War, many observers contend, indicates that the United States will dominate battlefields for decades. Bacevich, of the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, disagrees. The constantly changing nature of war, he says, could change things rather quickly.

Bacevich argues that U.S. military clout today is best compared to the British Navy's dominance prior to 1914. Britain had a mighty fleet of ships, yet when World War I began, Britain's military was reluctant to use them. Worse, the British Navy was also unable to counter Germany's new submarines.

