

share of GDP and the workforce halved, even as aggressive small firms built jobs and assets. From the late '60s to the 1980s, deregulation dramatically hardened competition in such industries as trucking, airlines, telecom, and oil.

Meanwhile, entrepreneurs like Microsoft's Bill Gates, Intel's Andy Grove, Wal-Mart's Sam Walton, FedEx's Fred Smith, and GE's Jack Welch were flattening corporate hierarchies, boosting competition, and demanding accountability for results. In the financial world, hard-edged entrepreneurs like Michael Milken and Henry Kravis brought growth-inducing innovations that strengthened the economy's sinews. The rise of 401(k) plans spread this culture of personal responsibility broadly through the middle class.

Our welfare system began to Harden in the late '80s, with the breakthrough federal welfare reform of 1996 dramatically reducing dependency and child poverty. Public schools have mostly resisted Hardening. They remain our nation's weakest institutions, though Barone does see the beginnings of possible improvement.

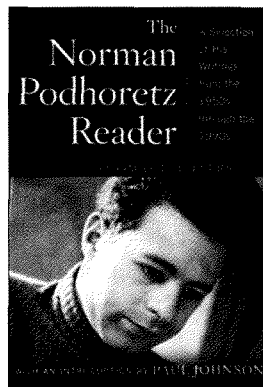
Although he stresses that the proper boundaries of Soft and Hard America are always debatable, Barone has no doubt as to which is primary. "Soft America lives off the productivity, creativity, and competence of Hard America," he writes. "We have the luxury of keeping parts of our society Soft only if we keep enough of it Hard."

TAE contributing editor Scott Walter is vice president of The Philanthropy Roundtable.

MAN OF LETTERS

By David Evanier

The Norman Podhoretz Reader: A Selection of His Writings from the 1950s through the 1990s
 Edited by Thomas Jeffers
 Free Press, \$35, 496 pages



and niches by his enemies on the left. Yet he regularly springs out of them by force of intellect and originality. Writers who come to mind when reading Podhoretz include Edmund Wilson and George Orwell. But no one writing today can be so closely compared to him as Paul Johnson, the British editor and historian who provides the penetrating introduction of this volume. Johnson writes that Podhoretz's thoughts are "deep, sinewy, often very direct and even strident, but equally often surprising and unexpected, never predictable."

As Johnson suggests, Podhoretz is at heart a surprier; he never lands quite where you expect. This tendency derives from an open-ended intellect and a capacity for literary criticism and political analysis that strives, as Matthew Arnold wrote, "to see the object as in itself it really is." In his 1963 essay, "My Negro Problem—and Ours," Podhoretz turned from the social-protest writing of the period to reflect, without an ounce of racism and fully supportive of the struggle for integration, on his own experience growing up in the poverty-stricken Brooklyn neighborhood of Brownsville: "For a long time I was puzzled to think that Jews were supposed to be rich when the only Jews I knew were poor, and that Negroes were supposed to be persecuted when it was the Negroes who were doing the only persecuting I knew about—and doing it, moreover, to me." He writes that "it was the whites, the Italians, and Jews, who feared the Negroes, not the other way around." This is Podhoretz the troublemaker from way back, offending his

New York City writer, polemicist, and man of letters Norman Podhoretz is consistently con-

signed to pigeonholes brethren on the left with truth-telling that adds nuance and complexity. As politically incorrect as it is, that essay has made its way into many anthologies of black-white dialogue, its brilliance overcoming its detractors.

"Israel—With Grandchildren" is another powerful essay. Its argument against the Israeli Left's undermining of its country's capacity for survival (a clear parallel to the role of the Left in the U.S. in opposing a strong military) is intensified by the naked emotion Podhoretz expresses in his fear for his grandchildren in Israel. Podhoretz's writing is clear and pure.

Whether as memoirist, political thinker, or literary critic, Podhoretz unravels complex issues with iron logic and honest emotion. He is a shrewd—but appreciative—critic of Philip Roth, Mark Twain, Vladimir Nabokov, and Milan Kundera. He is generous and fair, and does not shrink from criticizing friends and praising foes.

He offers, for instance, a devastating appraisal of the limitations of Saul Bellow. Bellow is as close to Podhoretz's ideological camp as any living writer, and one who has attempted "a sense of joyous connection with the common grain of American life." But in Podhoretz's perceptive view, what emerged in *The Adventures of Augie March* was a strained optimism, a "willed buoyancy" expressed by a protagonist "who is curiously untouched by his experience, who never changes or develops, who goes through everything but undergoes nothing." Podhoretz concludes with regret that all of Bellow's voices are the author's own, not autonomous creations, and that Bellow has written a series of essays in the form of novels. Podhoretz had a similar take on Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Deeply appreciative of Solzhenitsyn as hero and man and historian in *Gulag Archipelago* and *The Oak and the Calf*, he sadly dismisses Solzhenitsyn's fiction (except *Ivan Denisovich*) as hopelessly wooden.

It is personal experience clearly

observed that has shaped Podhoretz's politics more than anything else. He has approvingly cited Irving Kristol's definition of the neoconservative as "a liberal mugged by reality." Podhoretz was part of the liberal establishment in the 1950s, but when the counterculture brought hatred of America, open-hearted support for the enemies of the United States, and glorification of crime and drug addiction, Podhoretz began to question the perceptiveness of his friends like Norman Mailer, Lillian Hellman, and Allen Ginsberg.

He was particularly sensitive to the New Left's scorn for literature of any kind—except the literature declaring the uselessness of literature itself. Like "Soviet realism," it held that reflection and introspection were enemies of revolutionary change. Literary nuance, complexity, and ambivalence in writing of the human condition were despised. The outcome of these attitudes, in Podhoretz's view, was a diminution in the scope of literature, a loss from which it has yet to recover.

Podhoretz still feels guilt for having been part of a process that caused so much harm to America in the artistic and political realms. It was a short step from that realization to deciding which way of life was worth defending and fighting for. Even while he was a critic of the Vietnam War, Podhoretz could not accept the idea that "the entire policy of trying to check the spread of communism was...morally wrong as well." In *Commentary*, the journal he edited, Podhoretz launched an offensive against the New Left in 1970, with the aim of supporting anti-communism in American foreign policy. It was in large measure an atonement for the part he felt he had played in the destruction of American will. He published two major books in that period, *Why We Were In Vietnam* and *The Present Danger*, and until the fall of communism two decades later virtually abandoned his literary interests to help repair the cultural damage done by

the radical Left in the 1960s.

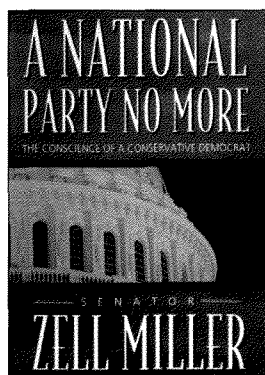
Having retired in 1995 from 35 years as editor of *Commentary*, Podhoretz went on to write some of the best prose of his life in scores of essays and three recent books, including his small masterpiece *My Love Affair With America*. In this collection, the reader is left with a feast of 50 years of prescient and often luminous writing. Podhoretz's essays from the 1950s and '60s are often devoted to literary and cultural issues. The '70s and '80s works focus mostly on the questions of totalitarianism, the Left, communism, and Vietnam. In the '90s, with the collapse of communism, Podhoretz returns to such cultural matters as censorship, free speech, the autonomy of art, Philip Roth, Ralph Ellison, and even the beauty of Central Park and New York in the spring. Throughout this body of writing, Podhoretz conveys a passionate commitment to literature, culture, and politics that is leavened by indelible logic and reason.

David Evanier is author of *The One-Star Jew*, *Red Love*, and *Making the Wiseguys Weep*.

SOUTHERN MANIFESTO

By Susanna Dokupil

A National Party No More: The Conscience of a Conservative Democrat
By Senator Zell Miller
Stroud & Hall, 256 pages, \$26



opens with stories of his youth that shaped his moral and political values. He

acknowledges his debt to his mother, his wife, and the Democratic Party, to which he remains staunchly loyal. But Senator Miller believes his party has lost its way, beholden to special interest groups and liberal causes that do not represent mainstream America.

Senator Miller is one of a dying breed—the conservative Democrat. As he spells out his political positions in chapters targeting key election issues, he reveals he has much in common with Republicans. He favors cutting taxes (and reducing spending). He hates the obscene exhibits sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts. He opposes gun control. And he favors drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. No wonder the Republicans wanted him to switch parties when they lost their majority in the Senate.

Miller reminds Democrats that Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and John Kennedy were all tax cutters. He warns Democratic would-be Presidents against abandoning the Bush tax cuts or announcing new spending programs, because such measures will cost them votes. He believes cutting the capital gains tax would not only help the American middle class invest in the stock market and save for retirement, but also *increase* tax revenues. Most emphatically, Miller would like to replace the income tax with a simpler flat tax or consumption-based tax.

Although he does not use the term, Senator Miller is essentially pro-life. He believes modern ultrasound technology "has proved the unborn baby is human" and that *Roe v. Wade* will be rejected as surely as was *Dred Scott* (a monumental comparison for a Senate Democrat). In both decisions, Miller suggests, the Supreme Court misdefined human life in order to reach a desired political result.

Miller grew up around guns, and though he instituted an instant background check in Georgia that prevented convicted violent felons from purchasing firearms, he views gun ownership as an