

fyng society for all or most of us, but it may also be that leveling tendencies have already gone too far, have produced an "unnatural" degree of equality inconsistent with individual liberty, social stability, and material progress. One thing we may be sure of is that the issue cannot be resolved, as Ackerman recommends, by playing a verbal game according to Ackerman's unworldly rules, that an attempt fundamentally to transform society and the world according to some carefully calculated system will result only in revealing some catastrophic error in the calculations.

Ackerman derides Burke's and Oakeshott's esteem for tradition and established institutions as a prejudice resulting from life on a "tight little island," but Ackerman's esteem for equality could as easily be dismissed as the product of living in the even tighter world of late twentieth-century American academia. The United States is a larger and more diverse place than Britain, but young (under 40) Mr. Ackerman spends most of his working hours on a campus in New Haven—indeed, in a small law school—where his beliefs and values can be inspired with every breath. □

NIETZSCHE: A CRITICAL LIFE

Ronald Hayman / Oxford / \$19.95

John Wettergreen

Well before he went mad in 1889, Nietzsche predicted that the twentieth century would be characterized by global wars, experiments conducted upon the whole human race, including the "merciless extinction" of whole peoples, and merely ideological politics. On the other hand, he predicted that during this century a global society of consumers and producers would develop, and that the deepest longing of its members would be for comfort and convenience. Such remarks gave Nietzsche a reputation for prescience even before he died in 1900, and the fact that he went mad after thinking about such matters enhanced this reputation.

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tion. For example, his sister, who cared for him during the last years of his life, could run guided tours through the abode of the mad philosopher. Public demand for news of Nietzsche's person or private life is nothing new in Germany.

In Great Britain and the United States, this demand was dampened by Nietzsche's reputation as a philosophical founder of Nazism. Now Ronald Hayman's book supplies it to an extent hitherto unavailable in the English language. Every detail which one could reasonably wish to know, and more, is here: not only Nietzsche's birth (October 15, 1844, in a parsonage in Prussian Saxony), but also his breakfast menus, and the state of his bowels and of the sofas in his quarters. Not content with mere

documentation, Hayman also attempts to bring order to this mass of detail by engaging in psychobiography. In this genre, trivial gossip can appear to be important. Indeed, Hayman asserts that no adequate understanding of Nietzsche's writings is possible without the information supplied by this book.

If psychobiography were a worthwhile scholarly enterprise in any case, that would be the case of Nietzsche. From his student days onward, he delighted in interpreting the greatest works of the greatest philosophers in the light of their personal prejudices, idiosyncratic tastes, foibles, gaffes, and stomach troubles. All thoughts, Nietzsche thought, are psychosomatic responses. Therefore, philosophic thought is pathological, because philosophers pride themselves on thinking free of every prejudice, feeling, and bodily desire. Nevertheless, Nietzsche took seriously philosophy's traditional demand that thought free itself from all outside influences, and accordingly, he felt compelled to interpret his own thought psychosomatically. For example, he attributes some of his writings to the mountain air, others to his father's influence, others to diet or indigestion; none, I believe, are attributed to flatulence. Thus, one is not surprised to read that "it was Freud's opinion that Nietzsche achieved a degree of introspection never achieved by anyone else and never likely to be achieved again." Moreover, others were no more reluctant to preserve the results of Nietzsche's self-analyses than he was to write them down: "By the time he was eight, his six year old sister was trying to preserve everything he committed to paper." Nietzsche's archives are a goldmine for psychobiographers, and Hayman has dug deep.

Unlike his books, Nietzsche's private life was ordinary. Of course, he was an intelligent child, who worked hard and did well at school. At Leipzig University, he impressed professors and tried to overcome his reputation as a drudge by joining a fraternity. Before he finished his dissertation, he was appointed at Basel. There he worked hard teaching classics and philosophy (thirteen semester hours, three to five preparations), and publishing. All the while, he hoped for better students. One could hear the same story from any tenured faculty-member at any American university. This is not to deny that Nietzsche was a pleasant fellow, a good pianist, and a valuable friend. And an excellent teacher. For

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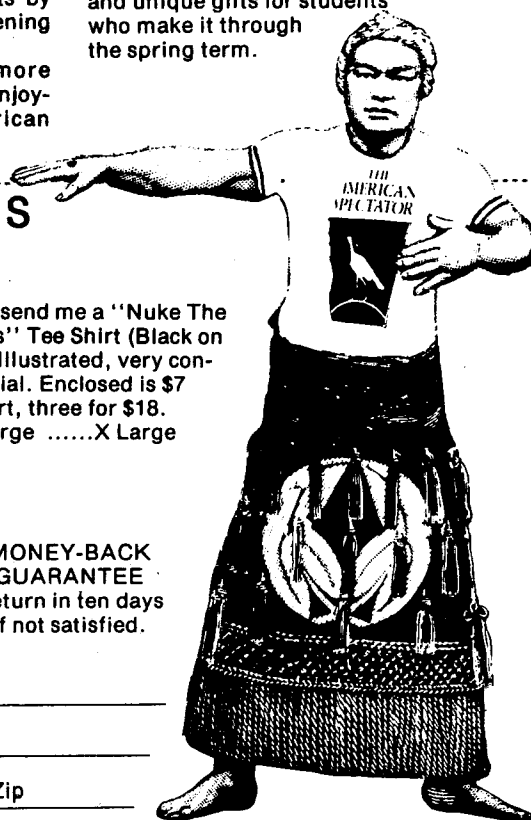
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example, two or three hundred students attended his lectures. Moreover, he endured his share in human suffering: At thirty-six, illness forced him to retire from Basel; thereafter, he was either well enough to write, or too sick to write. This man was not built for action. His military career was cut short in a characteristic manner: Because his eyes were so poor, he collided with the pommel when trying to mount his horse (the best in the stable), injuring his chest severely. In sum, nothing in Nietzsche's private life could have inspired the least interest in anyone but his personal friends and family, if he had not written important books. More precisely, his only remarkable action was writing, and of this activity itself, we can have no record, because he was too busy doing it. Or, as Nietzsche himself concluded in his psycho-autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, "I am one thing, my writings are another matter."

This conclusion would have been inconvenient for our author. Nevertheless, Hayman does not attempt to refute the preemptive psychoanalysis of *Ecce Homo*. Rather, he hopes that Nietzsche's life—his insanity—will refute Nietzsche's philosophy. If Nietzsche's own radical relativism could be shown to have driven him mad, i.e., rendered him incapable of leading a fully human life, then, the author supposes, it would be proven that "the belief that every belief is false . . . is not available to humanity." Hayman's thesis is beautiful, but it is also difficult to demonstrate.* On the one hand, the demonstrator would have to think through Nietzsche's inhuman thoughts, thus rendering himself mad, and so unable to publish the results of his inquiry. On the other hand, if the demonstrator is not driven mad, the thesis is trivial: At best, he would have demonstrated that relativism was bad for Nietzsche (assuming, of course, that insanity was not good for him). Hayman's publication is, I think, quite sane.

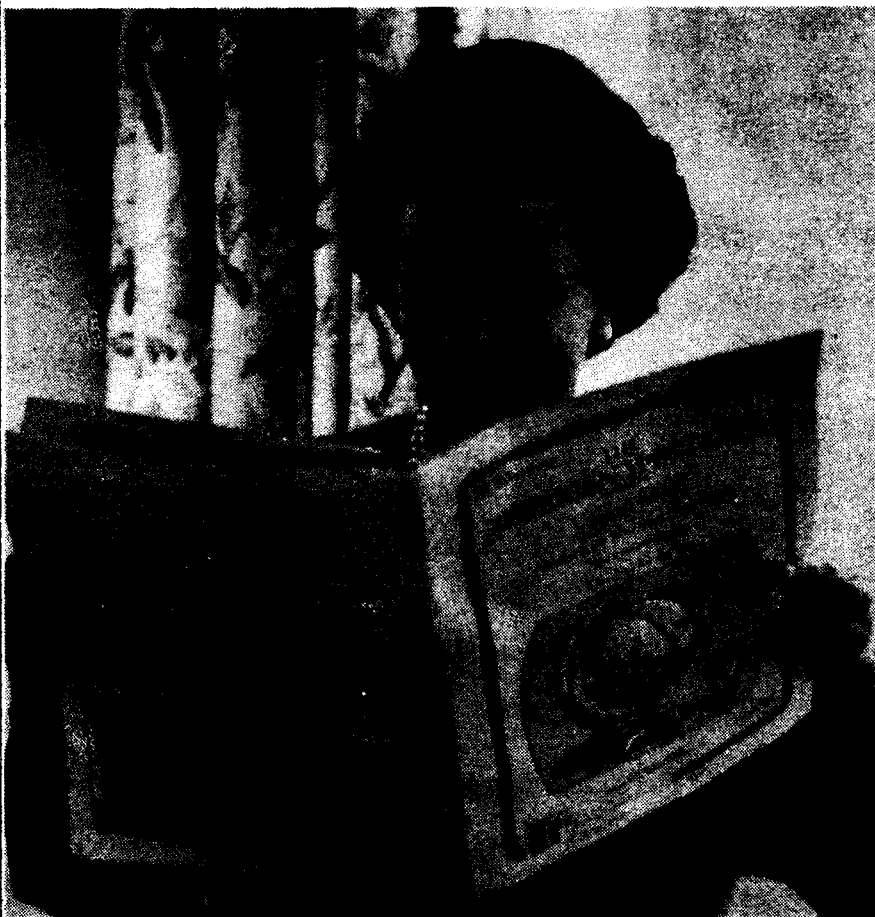
Nietzsche did not let matters rest at "believing" that no belief (including this one) is true. He tried to persuade his readers of this view. Accordingly, he tried to demonstrate the falsity of all the most sacred beliefs of late modern, European culture. Ruthlessly, he criticized everything that existed: socialism, conservatism, atheism, Christianity, "progressive ideas," tradition, egal-

itarianism, rationality, and every other cherished conviction of modern, Western civilization. Because these "values" (as he called them) were symptoms of the progressive degeneration of European life, Nietzsche's criticism of them constituted both a diagnosis and a cure.

By undermining Western beliefs, Nietzsche hoped to force a crisis; at which point, Western civilization—and therefore humanity—would either die, or regain health. Sometimes he presented the crisis of the West as a choice between "the last man" and "the super-man." The last man is the type which contemporary Western culture aims to produce, a being that lives for the sake of comfortable self-preservation. The super-man is the type to be created by a culture dedicated to values loftier than those of any previous civilization. Nietzsche did not suppose that the super-man would be the Nazi's "Blond Beast," but rather a "Caesar with the soul of Christ"—a different specimen. Although he never specified the values of the super-culture, he left no doubt that, in his opinion, all lesser cultures and human types could be annihilated for its sake. Thus, when Nietzsche defined philosophy as the legislation of the future, he meant it: Values define civilizations, and philosophers make possible or, like Nietzsche, impossible belief in (certain) values.

Hayman cannot take Nietzsche's definition seriously. To him, it is a first sign of madness, a delusion of grandeur. Nevertheless, he admits that he was, is, and must be "influential." "We have no option but to follow him," he asserts. After all, that is what Wittgenstein, Freud, Foucault, and any number of other contemporary intellectual heroes, and not a few culture-vultures, have done. Indeed, Hayman's book itself is sufficient evidence that Nietzsche is now respectable in the English-speaking world. Yet Hayman urges that Nietzsche's lead not be taken too seriously. In politics, Nietzsche's influence is or ought to be small, because he had contempt for the day-to-day maneuvers of politicians, and was "anti-democratic" and "intolerant" (sic) of "the lower orders." Still, his "cultural and intellectual influence" are "hard to exaggerate." This optimistic disjunction of culture from politics is not only un-Nietzschean, it is unrealistic. For example, Nietzsche's critiques of Kant or Rousseau cannot be cited authoritatively without lending some weight to his contempt for everything egalitarian, and indeed for justice itself.

Who reads The American Spectator?



Anne Armstrong.

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*Most scholars believe that his insanity was caused by syphilis. Hayman presents some good reasons for doubting this diagnosis.

Hayman supposes that this difficulty can be avoided by remembering, whenever one reads Nietzsche, that these are essentially the works of a madman, fragments of a shattered soul from which any sane person can select whatever happens to please. As I have suggested, however, Nietzsche's books are not mere magazines of momentary, mad insights, devoid of internal coherence. No serious

interpretation of them is possible without facing the present crisis of the West.

As Nietzsche remarked, "The only thing of interest in a refuted philosophy is the personal element." Ronald Hayman to the contrary notwithstanding, the converse does not hold: Not even Nietzsche's philosophy can be refuted by its personal element. □

AMERICAN DREAMS: LOST AND FOUND

Studs Terkel / Pantheon Books / \$14.95

Mark Lilla

I've never thought much of "oral history" before. Whenever I've taken a look at anything that claims to belong to this genre it has struck me as a pathetic excuse for proper scholarly history or a pretentious way to package a political tract. Worse, it can degenerate into the most unseemly kind of academic slumming—the young upper-middle class female graduate student, clad in overalls and babushka, harassing some poor working joe or farmer with a shining new Sony cassette recorder, sticking the microphone into his face and *begging* that he spill his guts out about the most important and painful moments in his life, but to do it ever so quickly so she can get back to campus and finish her dissertation. Worse than romanticizing lower-class life, "oral history" can put ordinary working people into an academic zoo and rob them of whatever dignity they may have managed to retain in their struggle to make a better life for themselves and their children.

It was with trepidation, then, that I picked up Studs Terkel's *American Dreams: Lost and Found*, a book of 100 interviews on "the American dream" put together by a man with clear socialist sympathies. It looked like a set-up. But to my surprise, Terkel's book turned out to be a humorous, interesting, and fair snapshot album of 20th-century America. It was a pleasure to read precisely because it makes no pretense of being "history," and whatever political purposes the author had in choosing the interview subjects are obscured by the diversity of their

dreams. Though I've never read Terkel's other books of interviews, the manner in which he lets all his subjects reminisce at length makes it evident that he has a better feel for Americans, and a greater love for them, than others who sell themselves as observers of American culture and history. Terkel's America is that of John Dos Passos, Ring Lardner, and James T. Farrell, not that of professional voyeurs Robert Altman or Pete Seeger. You get the impression that, politics apart, Terkel really *likes* the rhythm of American life, he *likes* our idiosyncracies and tastes—all rather unusual today.

Since the subject of the interviews is the American dream, a good number of them center on success and failure in business and work. There is Wallace Rasmussen, former chairman of Beatrice Foods, who tells how he worked himself up from Depression poverty in Nebraska to the executive suite because "my only ambition in life was to be just a little bit better off the next day than I was the day before." S.B. Fuller, a 79-year-old black businessman, born of a sharecropper, who made and lost a fortune in his lifetime, discourses on the importance of initiative and the way in which welfare can stifle it in young people.

And of course there is plenty of anti-business sentiment here (which, like it or not, is as American as Wonder Bread). There are many perhaps too many, stories about working people who got fed up with their bosses and the conditions under which they worked, and organized a union to protect themselves. Some were immigrants who brought union socialism with them from Europe;

others grew up in the mountains of Appalachia. What is refreshing about hearing these people talk is that they don't use the language of the professional or academic socialist—they are merely reacting, sensibly or not, to what they have seen and lived, and most still like America and have faith in its future. Ed Sadlowski, the renegade Chicago union leader who unsuccessfully tried to unseat the corrupt leadership of the United Steel Workers, put it well: "I place my faith in the working stiff, regardless of his hangups. He's still the most reliable guy on the street when push comes to shove."

But to really appreciate this collection the reader must put aside his Manichean razor and just *listen* to America talking, talking about how American dreams, *not* fantasies, can come true.

Terkel interviewed many immigrants, some who have just arrived and some who have been here for decades, but all of whom came here because the rest of the world recognizes what we often forget: There is tremendous economic opportunity in America. Few have had it easy. Dora Rosensweig was born in a Russian *shtetl* in 1885 and, when life became unbearable for her parents, was smuggled through Germany and Britain to the United States when she was six years old. In *American Dreams* she tells of growing up in Chicago, learning English, taking a job with a cigar maker, and forming a union. She was married before World War I, moved by stagecoach to South Dakota when it was still accepting "settlers," and learned to cook and sleep outdoors. Today she lives in a comfortable bungalow in Los Angeles and has a washing machine.

Despite the hardships, millions of immigrants still come to fulfill their dreams. Leonel Castillo, former U.S. director of immigration and the son of a Mexican immigrant, put it well:

The old dream is still dreamt. The old neighborhood Ma-Pa stores are still around. They are not Italian or Jewish or Eastern European anymore. Ma and Pa are now Korean, Vietnamese, Iraqi, Jordanian, Latin American. They live in the store. They're making it. Sound familiar?

Many don't make it, of course, either because they haven't got what it takes or they are beaten back by private injustices, misfortune, or their own ignorance. But most rise above their circumstances to become genuine American heroes. Vernon Jarrett, columnist for the *Chicago Tribune*, tells of his black father, a child of an ex-slave who spent his

whole life being called "boy," but who lived to see his son get a master's degree in a college auditorium he helped build in 1893. There is Erma "Tiny" Motton, a black mother of five in rural Missouri, who felt so demeaned by welfare that she took two jobs to put herself through high school, then college. Now she can respect herself.

Tiny's a long way of bein' out of the pocket, but just like an ant, I'm wigglin' hard. You know I'm there. What the dream means to me is for my children to be able to live anywhere they want to, even be able to come back home where they were born and raised, and get a good job, hold their head high. Not given something because they're black, and not something taken away from them because they're black. But given something because they're a man and they deserved it. That's my American Dream. I do believe something's stirring.

And then there are the oddballs, the assorted American zanies. Terkel interviewed disaffected "community organizers," psycho-babbling residents of Hollywood, an "unemployed humanist," and a woman who spent her entire life savings to put out a magazine commemorating the death of Elvis Presley. My favorite character is Matt Matejkowski. Mr. Matejkowski is a 54-year-old patent attorney living in Connecticut who got it into his head he could write fiction. His novel, "about a twelve-year-old Picasso-like Huck Finn growing up in New England in 1937," was rejected by all the major publishing houses for the peculiar reason that "it stinks." Undaunted, Mr. Matejkowski did some meticulous market research and found out that he could probably sell his book in paperback. ("The average person buying a hardcover novel today is either quite rich, doesn't care about money, or is a darn fool.") He then lined up a vanity publisher in Chicago, had the book published, and proceeded to sell it, store-to-store, by taking boxes of the books to store managers. *By Raz—1937* can now be purchased at your nearest Marshall Field or K-Mart. Mr. Matejkowski's secret?—"All novel writing is twenty-five percent what you yourself have seen, envisioned, and seventy-five percent is kielbasa."

By putting together such a marvelous gallery of Americans and leaving them with their dignity intact, Mr. Terkel has done his readers a favor. A steady diet of political reading and writing is bad for the mind—it dulls you, makes you cranky, and lets you forget all the contradictions and paradoxes inherent in "the American dream." I always find it depressing

Mark Lilla is Managing Editor of the Public Interest.