

BEST INTENTIONS: THE EDUCATION AND KILLING OF EDMUND PERRY

Robert Sam Anson/Random House/\$17.95

David Brooks

In June 1985, Edmund Perry was the academic star of 114th Street in Harlem. He had just graduated from Exeter Academy and was due to attend Stanford, on a full scholarship, in the fall. On the evening of June 12 an undercover policeman, Lee Van Houten, was patrolling Morningside Drive when he was jumped by two muggers who, he claimed, choked and beat him, continuing even after Van Houten identified himself as a policeman. When one of the young men shoved the officer's Adam's apple into his windpipe—a potentially lethal maneuver that expert muggers use to knock their victims unconscious—Van Houten pulled out his gun and shot and killed Eddie Perry.

New Yorkers reacted to the incident as if it defied the laws of physics. You redevelop a ghetto block with \$25 million in HUD grants. You take one of the smarter kids from the block and send him, on scholarship, to an elite prep school. You see that he gets a \$175-a-week summer job at Kidder Peabody, and you see that he gets a full ride to a prestigious university. Such kids don't go mugging undercover cops, especially kids like Perry, who, by all reports, had an Eagle Scout personality—close to his mother, respectful of authority, committed to black progress, friendly with peers, active in church. "Our shining star," a cousin called him.

When the story broke, Reverend Preston Washington, Eddie's pastor, declared, "They kill and ask questions afterward. It's a new form of lynching. The police don't value black life at all." C. Vernon Mason, a black candidate for District Attorney, thundered, "Officers of the New York City Police Department, your arms and hands are dripping with blood!" The *Village Voice*, calling Eddie "a future Moses for his people," raged, "If you're a young black person, each moment near a New York City Policeman has to send a blast of anxiety into your heart. Was Edmund, like so many other victims in this city, just too black for his own good?" Jimmy Breslin and others joined the angry chorus.

David Brooks is book editor at the Wall Street Journal.

And, indeed, at first there seemed reason to believe that Van Houten was lying. Robert Sam Anson, a former *Time* reporter and author of such books as *McGovern: A Biography* and *Exile: the Unquiet Oblivion of Richard Nixon*, had a son in Exeter with Eddie. Intrigued by the incident, he set out to discover what really happened. After a few weeks of digging, however, he learned that the policeman's account was true: Eddie and his brother Jonah (who was attending Cornell) did brutally attack Van Houten.

The more disturbing question is, Why? In *Best Intentions: The Education and Killing of Edmund Perry*, Anson journeys into Eddie's past. By trip's end, the flurry of demagoguery that greeted the Perry killing seems tinny and inconsequential. The jagged fault-lines in Eddie's personality which Anson uncovers make the crime seem at least comprehensible, if no less troubling.

Eddie Perry's father is an alcoholic who seldom spent time with his son, but Eddie's mother more than compensated. It was she who got him off to church every week, who enrolled him in special programs in school, who got him into Fresh Air Fund summer camps, and who pushed him to succeed in school. He rewarded her efforts with lavish displays of affection and by earning good grades.

With the help of his mother and a local teacher, Eddie was accepted into a program called A Better Chance, which sends ghetto kids to fine public and private schools. By virtue of his grades, he was accepted at Exeter. Eddie was no token student; he was bright enough, and more self-disciplined than the average Exeter pupil. He did very well his first year. "Being at Exeter, seeming so educated, I thought he was from some nice East Side neighborhood," a fellow student told Anson.

But with total acceptance within his grasp, he turned away. By his second year, he was exaggerating his Harlem, street-wise background. When he scraped a knee riding a bike during vacation, he told classmates he'd been injured in a fight. Later, he told them that he'd hit a teacher in junior high

and that he'd had three friends murdered in Central Park. All of it made him seem cooler than the average prep-pie, but none of it was true.

By senior year, after a year of schooling in Spain, he'd built an entire persona around this ultra-black, ghetto-tough image. Harlem and blackness became his dominant, some say only, topics of conversation. He increased his use of profanity, and overplayed the strut in his walk. He cultivated the black stud stereotype by joining a secret "sex club" whose members passed initiation by having intercourse, blindfolded, with a stranger on a seminar table in one of the Latin classrooms. He began dealing drugs, selling marijuana and PCP to fellow potheads.

Politically he adopted a Black Panther militancy, denouncing Martin Luther King in class and declaring contempt for white culture, especially for attempts by whites to help blacks. He persuaded other black students to drop

out of Exeter. He stopped studying and became furious when contradicted in discussion. He capped his Exeter stay by reading a vicious racial tract to a schoolwide assembly. It screeched with the anti-white, anti-American, anti-assimilationist rhetoric of the black power movement at its angriest. He even alienated a corps of fellow rebels (all white) when he suddenly and brutally attacked one of them. By the end, Eddie was almost totally isolated.

Meanwhile, back in Harlem on vacations, he worked overtime to establish his blackness. He told his drug supplier that he'd clubbed two Exeter football players for racial reasons. The clash of cultures was obviously taking its toll. After four years at prep school, he no longer fit into Harlem, despite his best efforts. "You've been living in an entirely different world," says one of Anson's sources, who made a similar ghetto-to-prep school trans-

The Late Senator John East on The Origins Of The Conservative Movement

"John East was a quiet and effective legislator who never wavered in his belief in principle and in his determination to keep our country strong."
Ronald Reagan

Essential Reading For All Those Wishing To Understand Conservatism
And Its Relationship To Contemporary Politics



The American Conservative Movement: The Philosophical Founders is a book of lasting value and importance that examines the political thought of Russell Kirk (the Bohemian Tory), Southern partisan Richard Weaver, Frank S. Meyer, Willmoore Kendall (the inveterate dissenter), Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and the classical liberal Ludwig von Mises.

To order, call toll-free 1-800-448-8311, or use the handy coupon below.

RETURN TO:

Regnery Gateway, Inc. Distribution Center
Department A
950 North Shore Drive
Lake Bluff, Ill. 60044

Please send me _____ copies of *The American Conservative Movement: The Philosophical Founders* at \$18.95 each plus \$2.00 for shipping and handling (regardless of quantity).

I enclose my check for \$ _____

MasterCard/VISA # _____

(Expiration Date) _____

Signature _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Published by Regnery Gateway, Inc.
Editorial Office:
1130 17th St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Senator East spent the last days before his tragic death correcting the proofs of this, his first and only book. *The American Conservative Movement: The Philosophical Founders* is, says Russell Kirk, "the most serious study so far" of the American conservative movement. "Lively in style and sagacious in observation," it is a fitting tribute to the Senator and can justly be called his life's work.

"Senator John East is probably the most thoughtful and intellectually sound spokesman for conservative politics in the United States Senate."
Former Senator John Tower

REGNERY
GATEWAY, INC.

1130 17th St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

Quality books for 40 years.

formation. "Instead of jiving down on the corner, you've been getting turned on to Nietzsche and Thoreau. Still, you've got to fit in with your friends. How do you do it? . . . You got to snort more coke, smoke more reefer, shoot more baskets, give up more poontang." In Harlem, the stereotype Eddie cultivated led him to drugs and crime. Black militancy didn't go over well there. He saved that for Exeter, where everybody thought it was legitimate black rage.

Eddie's problems, which took racial forms, seem to have had non-racial causes. There had been some racial tension at Exeter—some students objected because blacks found it easier to get into Exeter, had grades leveraged up while there, and, with poorer academic records, were getting into better colleges than many white kids. But few students were overt racists.

Instead, his problems were pretty typical adolescent traumas—he had trouble with girls, he wasn't the center of attention any longer, he missed his mother, he had difficulty keeping

friends, he felt anxious, insecure, and alienated. He channeled those traumas into a radical black consciousness, which privileged society told him was the healthy thing to do. His teachers and peers seemed to assume that black was not only beautiful, it was everything; the purer the better.

Best Intentions is a straightforward, profoundly troubling look at this perplexing personality. Wonderfully disciplined, Anson does not mar his story with pop-psychology, pseudo-sociology, or much commentary of any sort, though he gives his sources ample room to ventilate their common-sense conclusions.

A study by researchers at the University of the District of Columbia recently found that black high school students limit their academic achievements so their peers won't accuse them of "acting white." Such are the effects of racial stereotypes. Edmund Perry seems to have died because he saw himself primarily as a racial entity. Nobody showed him how enslaving that perception is. □

THE RED PRESIDENT

Martin Gross/Doubleday/\$17.95

John R. Dunlap

In November 1943, when an 18-year-old Martin Gross was in training to become a flight officer in the Army Air Corps, Winston Churchill was at the Teheran Conference with Roosevelt and Stalin. Near the end of the conference, Churchill muttered to his aide Harold Macmillan: "Germany is finished, though it may take some time to clean up the mess. The real problem now is Russia. I can't get the Americans to see it." Half a century later, Martin Gross—a teacher, editor, and prolific freelancer for most of his 62 years—has the same complaint, which he mutters in the style of a practiced muckraker. Following the tradition of *The Manchurian Candidate*, *The Spike*, *The Hills of Summer*, and suchlike novels, *The Red President* is message by melodrama.

Gross belongs to an interesting generation in the real-life melodrama of twentieth-century American history. To judge from his novel, he seems to fit the political pattern for that generation, which is to say his instincts are of the crusty Truman-Johnson variety, indifferent to what Terry Teachout calls the "conservative iconography," but contemptuous of what a character in *The Red President* calls "head-up-your-ass liberalism."

The character, a rotund conservative columnist named Jack Granick, is trying frantically to get Doug McDowell, a liberal newscaster, to look at evidence Granick has acquired regarding the sinister political connections of a Democratic candidate for President. (It is five months before the next presidential election: probably 1996—the date is vague, but it can't be earlier, as we'll see.) McDowell is a rising young media star, and he is not about to let his career be jeopardized by putting up with a Commie-baiter like Granick, whom he kicks out of his Washington office.

But shortly thereafter, Granick's body is dragged from the Potomac, and McDowell is unsettled by news of the mysterious murder (mysterious to McDowell: the reader knows that the KGB did it, dramatic irony be-

ing the crucial device in the plot). Eventually McDowell is, in Irving Kristol's tired formula, "mugged by reality"—literally: he is manhandled and kidnapped by a couple of KGB thugs when he gets too close to the truth. By this time—eight months, 46 chapters (of 104), and many subplots later—the truth is that America has a Communist for a new President.

Meanwhile our hero has emerged: John "the Baptist" Davidson, a 68-year-old retired CIA operative and self-described liberal (albeit of the more polished Acheson-Rusk variety), whose favorite admonition is "keep up your paranoia." Davidson is apprised of the situation by Agent Sam Withers, a renegade on the run from his own (compromised) CIA as well as from the KGB after he had gathered a file on the presidential candidate by following up on some freelance intelligence work. To expose the conspiracy, Withers had first tried Granick, but now Davidson is his only hope.

The file, we soon learn, concerns a Soviet operation code-named Oval Red, the brainchild of Col. Lev Andreievich Orlov, head of the Active Measures unit in the American Section of the KGB. Among several fade-outs to Moscow, one scene has Orlov modestly demurring at the effusive praise of the Politburo and insisting that the credit belongs to America, no other nation being "so anxious to distort and scourge itself."

But the Soviets hedge their bets, fully expecting that the tenure of America's Red President will last no more than six months before the traitor is either assassinated or impeached; they have to work fast if they hope to neutralize America permanently with operation STAND DOWN. And Davidson must work fast, through a web of contacts and favors owed, to find out exactly what STAND DOWN is about and to try to put the skids on it.

For the most part, Gross delivers the goods one expects in this sort of novel: scrupulous plotting, with a great mass of technical detail mixed into the narrative to give it an authentic flavor. He does, however, get a mite careless here and there.

John R. Dunlap teaches English at Santa Clara University.



SARKES TARZIAN INC

WRCB, CHANNEL 3, CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE

KTVN, CHANNEL 2, RENO, NEVADA

WTTS, 92.3 FM, BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

WGTC, 1370 AM, BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

WAJI, 95.1 FM, FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

CORPORATE OFFICE BOX 42, BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA 47402
TELEPHONE 402-332-7261