

into a cultural Fury, all-powerful, all-pervasive, and unleashing a national "flight from reality and the erosion of compassion."

Fiat Glitz. Miss Silverman's repeated vague, unquantified references to growing hunger, poverty, and callousness in American society at a time when a larger percentage of the population is employed than ever before, and both government and the private sector are spending more on social welfare, are as childish as they are irrelevant. They are rooted not in a positive, compassionate worldview, but in leftist-elitist pique at a society that will not be bullied into confiscatory statism and which, in its own sweet time, will decide what is art and what is tasteful with a minimum of professorial scolding.

That many wealthy people, like most poor people, have less than perfect taste goes without saying. And, though some of my best friends are flush, I

would be the first to admit that a good many of the current generation of the newly-rich are rhinestones—rather than diamonds—in the rough. Any fool who reads the gossip columns knows as much. It was ever thus.

But that contemporary America is more vulgar, crass, plutocratic, and callous than it was in the past is unlikely; to suggest that Bloomingdale's, Diana Vreeland, and Ron and Nancy could make it more so, even if they wanted to, is sophomoric. It is certainly unsupported by the hard facts of voluntary charitable support for the arts, the humanities, and the needy, and unprecedented governmental largesse which, unfortunately, often perpetuates the very cycles of poverty, degradation, and dependence it was meant to cure. Certainly, nothing contained in Miss Silverman's labored polemic makes a convincing case to the contrary. Which, I suppose, is a rather roundabout way of saying give it a miss. □

The plainspoken memoirs of "one of the giants of American intellectual life"

—R. EMMETT TYRRELL, JR.

From World War I to the present Sidney Hook has been in the thick of nearly every major political and academic struggle. His memoir *Out of Step* is both an appealing personal history—rich with anecdotes involving John Dewey, Albert Einstein, Max Eastman, Bertrand Russell, Norman Thomas, Bertolt Brecht, Arthur Koestler—and a challenging commentary on the great issues of our age.

"He has lived the life of the mind and his memoir is a history of the large ideas of this century."

—GEORGE WILL

"Brilliant...required reading for those who care about freedom."

—JEANE J. KIRKPATRICK

"An outstanding book, a key to understanding our century, especially the century's leading intellectuals."

—JEAN-FRANÇOIS REVEL

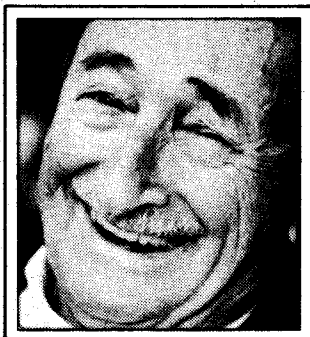
OUT of STEP

An Unquiet Life in the 20th Century

SIDNEY HOOK

Harper & Row

At bookstores or call toll-free (800) 638-3030. Major credit cards accepted.



© 1984 Victoria House

LESSONS: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Dr. An Wang, with Eugene Linden/Addison-Wesley/\$17.95

Michael A. Scully

There is a great deal of talk these days about improving the quality of American education. Since the decline in educational standards roughly coincides with the introduction of huge federal expenditures on education, and levels of total expenditure greater than at any time in history, it occurs to some people that the commonsense view was right all along. Namely, that the successful education of the young is not, in any simple sense, a function of spending money. It is, for example, much more a function of students' motivation.

Thus this modest proposal: why not put all that audio-visual equipment to good use, by developing and distributing to schools videotapes of interviews featuring successful living Americans—"Horatio Alger stories." (A corollary proposal, this one for a foundation: finance well-written Spanish and Portuguese adaptations of some of Alger's books and cast them as bread upon the waters of South America and the Philippines.)

The "Horatio Alger" story succeeds insofar as it convinces the reader that the improbable is possible. Of course, such stories easily degenerate into the merely formulaic, becoming parodies of themselves, and boring as well. That is the charge critics level against most of Alger's own 100-plus books, and surely they are right about many of them. Yet what critic ever awoke in a boy a willingness to try, as Alger did, with the story of a street waif named "ragged Dick," who slept in a box in an alley near Fulton Street?

It is often suggested, especially by people who denigrate "Horatio Alger stories" (though few of them have read one), that they are unbelievable—that they are, literally, fantastic. Yet the "ragged Dick" of Alger's first book did not grow up to be rich as Croesus. He managed, by application and some luck, to become respectably middle class.

And that is not unbelievable at all—

Michael A. Scully's articles and reviews have appeared in *Harpers*, *Fortune*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and many other publications. His anthology, *The Best of THIS WORLD*, was recently published by *University Press of America*.

not then (the 1850s), not now. In the next couple of decades, *thousands* of kids who sleep in boxes in the stinking streets of Third World cities will do it. Had they a Horatio Alger, they might be *hundreds of thousands*.

One superb candidate for the video library of inspiring American stories is Dr. An Wang, the founder of Wang Laboratories, nowadays best known for its office computers. There is no doubting Dr. Wang's genius, an attribute shared by few. It is his good sense, however, and his willingness to share it, that makes his autobiography, *Lessons*, worth reading. And, of course, there is also the encouragement that comes from knowing that the improbable is possible.

An Wang was born the eldest son of a middle-class family in Shanghai, China, in 1920. His father taught English in a private elementary school in a nearby city. At 13, young Wang left home to attend a boarding school ten miles away, and at 16 entered Chiao Tung University in Shanghai. Japan invaded China about this time, and Chinese authorities moved the university to leased buildings within the French concession inside Shanghai's International Settlement, a border the Japanese respected until Pearl Harbor. (The "concessions" were a nine-square-mile area which had been under the control of foreign powers, including the U.S., British, and French, since the Opium War of 1839-42.) Wang spent the next three years in the International Settlement, isolated from the war whose sounds he could hear all around him.

A sensible man, Wang appreciates the importance luck plays in shaping a life. Indeed, like many remarkable men, he seems to have had a genius for good fortune. He remarks toward the end of one of his early chapters:

... I never dismiss luck as a factor in a person's destiny. How foolish it would be for a survivor of war and anarchy not to believe in luck. In fact, I believe that it is self-deceptive—even dangerous—to think that one's life is entirely the product of one's own decisions and actions.

At the age of 20, Wang graduated

from the university. He spent a year teaching there, before sneaking to one of the Central Radio Corporation facilities in the interior of the country, where he and his colleagues designed and built radio transmitters for Chinese government troops, often with scavenged and improvised parts. The International Settlement was overrun by the Japanese within months of his departure.

In 1945, Wang took advantage of an opportunity to spend a year in the United States. Shortly after arrival, it occurred to him to apply to study physics at Harvard. Since few G.I.'s had yet returned from the war, admissions were easier than they would have been in subsequent years, so Wang insists, and attributes his admission to the lucky timing of his arrival. After about a year, Wang took a job in Canada, but almost immediately returned to Cambridge, to a seven-dollar-per-week boarding house, and pursuit of his doctorate. Sixteen months later he had his Ph.D. in applied physics (a result of hard work, not luck).

Wang soon found a job as a research fellow at the Harvard Computation Laboratory, which was nurturing an infant technology, computers. In the most engaging section of *Lessons*, Wang describes how, within the next several years, he invented one of the essentials of computer technology (memory cores), patented his discovery, and founded his one-man company in an unfurnished 200-square-foot office.

Wang stresses the importance confidence played in his decision to enter business for himself. A man naturally moderate and prudent, he determined to build his business at a steady pace, one within the bounds of his own growing knowledge of business.

Within the course of the next 25 years, Wang essentially re-founded his company three times. In its first incarnation, Wang Laboratories sold memory chips and the computer expertise of Dr. Wang and a small group of colleagues. In the early and mid-1960s, Wang Laboratories developed and sold the first desk-top calculator, called LOCI (an acronym for logarithmic calculating instrument). It was an enormous success, especially on Wall Street. This, too, was a stroke of good fortune, as Dr. Wang discovered when he took his company public in the late 1960s.

One of the marks of a great entrepreneur is the ability to foresee changing circumstances and alter his company accordingly—though that means, in a sense, erasing part of his own life's history and legacy. By the early 1970s, Dr. Wang could foresee that the microchip would make calculators into a commodity. Sales would

be based merely on the lowest price. Thus he transformed Wang Laboratories once again, this time pioneering the office computer market, which Wang dominated for most of the 1970s.

My favorite passage in *Lessons* is rendered all the more delightful by the reader's sense that Dr. Wang has made his living doing what he likes doing, and he considers that the mark of his success. The paragraph is as follows:

We established the [family] trust with Marty Kirkpatrick as trustee [in 1957], and . . . a fifteen-thousand-dollar par debenture. . . . This is the only asset I ever gave the trust. . . . Today, although the Family Trust is some fifty-thousand times larger than it was at the outset, Marty is still the trustee.

Joseph Epstein has written that readers lose interest in biographies at precisely the point at which the hero succeeds. Dr. Wang is a great man, who

has done great things, and given greatly to improve life in and around Boston. Unfortunately, however, his autobiography does not escape Epstein's dictum.

The last third of the book engages neither its readers nor, it seems, its writers (*Lessons* was written with the assistance of Eugene Linden). The further one reads beyond the first half of *Lessons*, the more its prose and perspective degenerate into those of a corporate annual report.

Of course, the truth behind Epstein's wise comment is that people read biographies out of self-interest. The business biography, especially, is a high-class form of self-improvement book. The further *Lessons* proceeds, the more its focus shifts from Wang the man to Wang the company. Yet it is Dr. An Wang who interests us, whose life inspires, and whose lessons we seek to learn. □

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL:
ROAD TO VICTORY 1941-1945
Martin Gilbert/Houghton Mifflin/\$40.00

Spencer Warren

Surely the longest biography ever written, Martin Gilbert's magnificent life of Winston Churchill reaches its seventh volume in *Road to Victory*, which takes us from America's entry into the war in December 1941 to Germany's surrender in May 1945. As the authorized biographer, Gilbert sees his role as chronicler rather than interpreter. He has artfully spun Churchill's government and private papers, as well as memoirs and diaries of Churchill's colleagues and staff, into a compelling narrative of 1351 pages, charting Churchill's course, often day by day, through the momentous decisions of the war.

Of the countless strategic and political issues confronted by Churchill and recounted here by Gilbert, the most important are the timing of the opening of the second front in France and Anglo-American dealings with the Soviet Union. After America's entry into the war, the American chiefs of staff, led by General Marshall, proposed an invasion of France for September 1942. Both the Americans and the British saw northwest Europe as the decisive

theater of operations and also felt the keen imperative of relieving pressure on Russia, where the Germans, a year before Stalingrad, still had the upper hand. Stalin was pressing, almost pleading, for a landing in France. But Churchill and his chiefs of staff (led by General Sir Alan Brooke), who, unlike the Americans, had had first-hand experience of German might, had a far more realistic appreciation of the difficulties of a cross-Channel invasion.

At their frequent conferences in 1942 and 1943, Churchill and his service chiefs persuaded their American colleagues of the advantages of campaigns first in French North Africa and then in Sicily and the Italian mainland; the British were already engaged against the Germans in Egypt and Libya, and Algeria and Morocco were occupied only by the forces of Vichy France. Meantime, they reasoned, forces could



Spencer Warren is vice president of the Washington International Studies Center and served in the Reagan Administration as a member of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff.

be built up in Britain for a cross-Channel invasion. President Roosevelt agreed, seeing this as the best way to get Americans into combat in the European theater in 1942, and thus solidify his Germany-first strategy. The landings were made in Algeria and Morocco in November 1942, but American timidity prevented the British landing in Tunisia. This allowed the Germans to counter with powerful forces, delaying conclusion of the campaign for many months, until May 1943.

During the stalemate in Tunisia, the Anglo-American dispute over the second front came to a head at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943. Marshall advocated closing down Mediterranean operations after Tunisia in favor of an invasion of France as soon as possible.

But Churchill's influence with Roosevelt and the force of the British chiefs' arguments that the enemy should be continuously engaged (an invasion of France was not possible until later in the year) carried the day. The Allies agreed the next objective would be clearance of the Mediterranean for shipping and, to facilitate this, a landing in Sicily. Finally, in Washington in May 1943, they agreed an invasion of France was not possible that year (ironically, in part because the Americans were sending too many landing craft to the Pacific despite the Germany-first strategy). Operation Overlord, as the cross-Channel invasion became known, was set for May 1, 1944.

Following the liberation of Sicily in the summer of 1943, Churchill succeeded in persuading the Americans to continue on to the Italian mainland. He again argued that Allied forces had to be kept engaged somewhere, rather than sit idle till the next spring and let the Germans catch their breath (and probably reinforce France). He also stressed the advantages of knocking Italy out of the war.

As the Italian campaign proceeded, and Mussolini was overthrown, Churchill's fertile imagination was fired by the possibility of a rapid advance up the peninsula, followed by a strike into southern France or eastern Europe. Deeply troubled also about the hazards of Overlord, he fought against withdrawals of troops for that operation and came to see Italy as the main theater. In this he was wrong and the Americans right. There was no "soft underbelly" of Europe and Italy was not the road to Germany; the Apennines made rapid advance difficult and, beyond them, the Alps barred the way. Northwest Europe was indeed the place to make the massive, decisive blow. →