

Oswald's own one-man pro-Castro operation was headquartered in the same small building that provided offices for two violently anti-Castro organizations.

And another among the scores of intriguing facts: on the night he was arrested, Oswald tried to call a number in the Raleigh, North Carolina, area. Secret Service agents blocked the call. There is no record of his knowing anyone there. But according to Vincent Marchetti, a former high-ranking CIA official, Naval Intelligence in those years operated a secret training facility for phoney defectors to the Soviet Union.

Does this mean anything? Belin chooses to ignore it. Or what about the fact that in 1960, when Oswald was living in the USSR, no less a figure than J. Edgar Hoover sent a memorandum to the State Department's security office warning that "there is a possibility that an impostor is using Oswald's birth cer-

tificate"? You won't learn about these matters in David Belin's "full truth about the assassination" because they weren't in the Warren Commission report.

One last uncontroverted fact, which the House Assassination Committee was able to adduce but which Belin passes over in silence: three hours after the President's death, the always-broke Jack Ruby showed up at his bank—where the balance in his business account was only \$246—with \$7,000 in large bills stuffed in his pockets. Where did he get the money? The Warren Commission never asked and no one to this day has a clue. But Belin is satisfied with Ruby's assurances to his rabbi, and the rabbi's assurances to Belin, that Ruby had no hand in any conspiracy. Well, that's one way to come to a conclusion about a central issue in an assassination inquiry. But it would have been more compelling if

the Warren Commission had accepted Ruby's desperate plea to be allowed to go to Washington "to tell you the truth"—a plea that Chief Justice Warren personally rejected on the curious grounds that "it could not be done."

There is a great deal more of this sort of thing, as I reported in these pages back in October 1981—high-quality investigative material developed by the House committee and by independent researchers such as Summers and

Thompson. But Belin ignores practically all of it and focuses instead on the one or two points where the committee or a particular author turned out to be wrong.

As gamesmanship, that's a pretty clever way to play; and certainly any competent lawyer (and Belin is a very good one) would recognize the tactic. But for anyone interested in learning more about the dreadful events of November 1963, *Final Disclosure* is an almost total waste of time. □

GEORGE WASHINGTON: A COLLECTION

Edited by W. B. Allen/Liberty Fund/561 pp. \$22.95

William McGurn

Brothers: I am a Warrior. My words are few and plain; but I will make good what I say.
—George Washington
Speech to the Delaware chiefs
May 12, 1779

How refreshing for the chiefs to hear such straightforward language from the mouth of a white man. In this address the Commander in Chief of the Continental Army told the Delaware that cooperation with the United States would be rewarded as much as confrontation would be punished; they had his word on that. Such was the popular trust reposed in the name George Washington that less than a decade later the establishment of the American nation would rest on much the same foundation: his honor.

Two centuries of accumulated political hagiography have unfortunately left the Father of the American nation more myth than man. In sharp contrast to Lincoln, whose backwoods Illinois manner and awkward physique make his memory so human, Washington remains the marble bust in the pantheon—America's cold Cincinnatus. But now the Liberty Fund has taken a singular step toward a more lifelike portrait with the publication of *George Washington: A Collection*. Edited by William B. Allen, a professor of government at Harvey Mudd College at Claremont, the work assembles some 235 letters, notes, and speeches as brushstrokes to fill in some of the missing detail surrounding the first President. Professor Allen explains that the collection is designed to be "a tool of general information" and not a

critical study, and so apart from some helpful introductory notes to each section, he remains unobtrusively in the background. The voice is Washington's own.

The story that thus unfolds is of a life fixed on one central idea: the union of thirteen fractious British colonies into a single nation. "Nothing I more sincerely wish than a union of the colonies," writes Washington in April 1756. The time was the French and Indian War, Washington was in the service of the Crown, and the words were therefore in the context of colonial self-defense. Yet when his sovereign's Parliament began deliberately to trample on "the valuable rights of Americans, confirmed to them by charter," Washington easily came to argue for an *independent* union. In today's climate, such single-minded devotion to a nation that hardly existed outside his own circle would have Washington dismissed as an ideologue. George III would be the pragmatist.

Without union, in fact, the defeat of the British appeared to Washington a colossal waste. "We now have a National character to establish," said the General, still speaking of a United States before it was a fact. In his announcement of the end to the War of Independence, he referred to it as the "laying of the foundation of a great Empire" upon which "the destiny of unborn Millions" would depend. The basis for this experiment would be liberty—properly understood, as they said back in those days:

Liberty, when it degenerates into licentiousness, begets confusion, and frequently ends in Tyranny or some woeful catastrophe,

William McGurn is deputy editorial page editor of the Asian Wall Street Journal.



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and to suppose that the Affairs of this Continent can be conducted by thirteen distinct Sovereignities, or by one without adequate powers, are mere solecisms in politicks. It is in our United capacity we are known, and have a place among the Nations of the Earth.

Nor was the General above hyperbole in pushing the point. In his famous Circular Letter to the States he likened Americans to "actors on a most conspicuous Theatre, which seems to be peculiarly designed by Providence for the display of human greatness and Felicity." Characteristically, he added that if his countrymen should fail in this endeavor "the fault will be intirely [sic] their own."

This dry appreciation for the human capacity for mischief is a side of Washington all too obscured by tales of cherry trees and wooden teeth. As a man of the Enlightenment he obviously believed in the primacy of liberty and reason. Yet as a seasoned officer the General had little patience for the refashioning of mankind. "We must take the passions of Men as Nature has given them," he writes to John Bannister from Valley Forge, though he did not necessarily mean to put up with them. Washington's Orders of the Day, for example, are full of references to soldiers being court-martialed and executed for various infractions; there is no hint of agonized waffling. Certainly the letters also show that he was always willing to go the extra mile, but no further. In his second term as President he showed this by calling out 15,000 militiamen to deal with Pennsylvania farmers who were defying a congressional tax on spirits and had rejected all reasonable overtures. This was much the same sentiment made explicit in his second Presidential Address. "If we desire to avoid insult," he said, "we must be able to repel it." Evidently the man from Mount Vernon was of the speak-softly-and-carry-a-big-stick school.

Washington showed similar resolve on political issues when he thought Congress was poaching on his executive powers. At the end of his first term, he refused a House request to disclose the instructions he had given his emissary in negotiating the Treaty of Paris with Great Britain. He told Congress that, although he had "no disposition to withhold any information which the duty of my station will permit," he would "admit then a right in the House to demand, and to have as a matter of course, all the papers respecting a negotiation with a foreign power, would be to establish a dangerous precedent." It was an elegant, eighteenth-century version of "Read My Lips."

Finally, there is the private side. On

learning of the marriage of the Marquis de Chastellux, for example, Washington takes a break from his furious lobbying on behalf of the draft constitution to offer an amused commentary on the fatal lure of domestic felicity. "A wife!" he writes. "Well my dear marquis, I can hardly refrain from smiling to find you caught at last." There is his long correspondence with Lafayette, which as years passed would

come to reflect Washington's concern at the appalling developments in Revolutionary Paris. And there is, too, Washington's last will and testament, in which the President granted all his slaves freedom upon the death of his wife, with the firm command that his wishes in this matter were not to be crossed by the sale of these slaves "under any pretence whatsoever."

Still, concern for the Union is nev-

er far away in Professor Allen's collection; as Washington himself admitted to Alexander Hamilton, "all my private letters have teemed with these sentiments." For all this passion, however, what also emerges from this correspondence is that Washington's chief political virtue was prudence: firmness of principle matched by flexibility of means. In the city that today bears his name this is a lesson worth reviewing,

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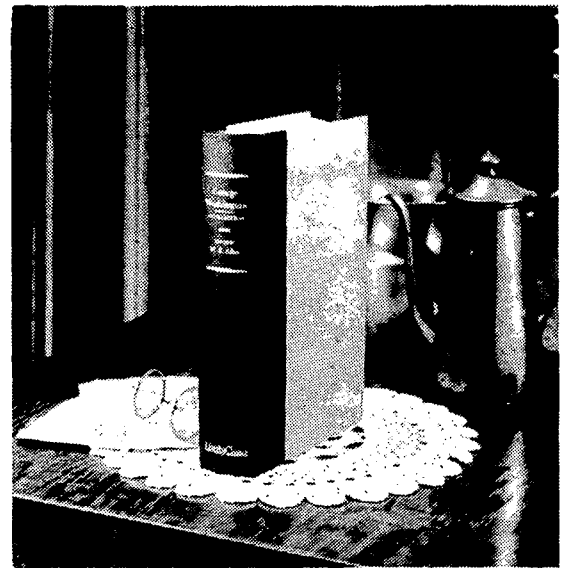
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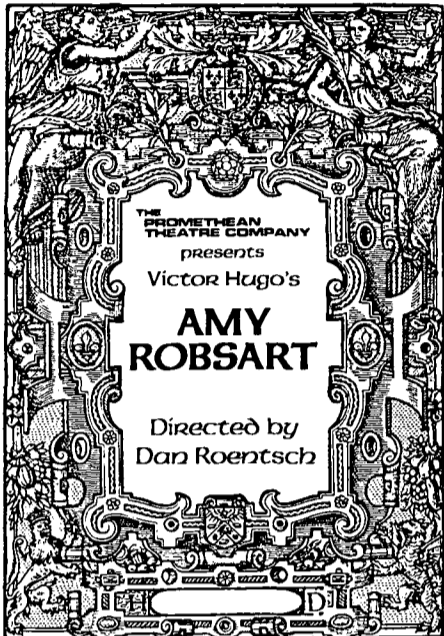
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in that it was precisely the former that permitted the latter.

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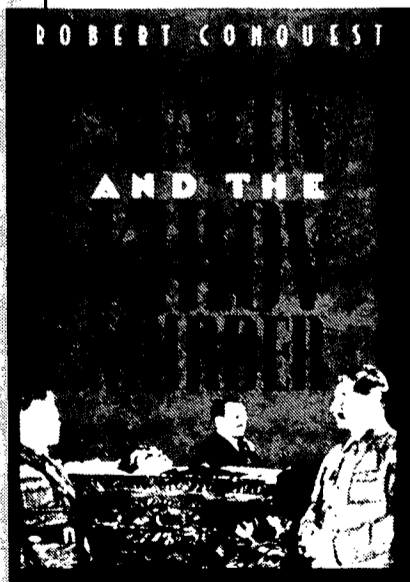
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CORRESPONDENCE

(continued from page 9)

sonae: they demanded that readers educate themselves to understand the new literature.) Thus, the writer as literate philistine has become a part of England's mental landscape.

Kenner is obviously annoyed at this situation. As he sees it, important poets (Tomlinson, Bunting) are ignored because the English reading public has been told the proper response to modernism is laughter. Good books are supposed to be easy. When criticizing Philip Larkin, Kenner is clearly focusing on the average joe role that Larkin cultivated ("Who's Jorge Luis Borges?") rather than Larkin's poetry (which Kenner praises).

Because Kenner's subject is the fate of modernism in England, he is under no obligation to discuss every good twentieth-century English writer. Moreover, he is explicit on this point: "So intricate is our story that narration must be highly selective. . . Many good writers who simply did their job—Ivy Compton-Burnett comes to mind—are simply left unmentioned." (This simple statement of intentions can be found on page seven. Mr. McCartney must have missed it.)

Finally, anyone familiar with Hugh Kenner's criticism should know that he doesn't esteem difficult books merely because they are difficult. In the past, Kenner has praised such nonmodernist texts as the letters of Shaw, the apologetics of Chesterton, and the detective novels of Ross Macdonald.

If *TAS* is not going to cover culture accurately, maybe it shouldn't cover it at all.

—Jiet Heer
Toronto, Ontario

George McCartney replies:

Whenever I'm charged with provocation and ignorance through the U.S. mails, I enjoy taking a moment to respond. Call it one of my clubbish eccentricities.

Now let me see where to begin. Let's consider Mr. Heer's admonishment to "cover culture accurately" or not "cover it at all." While some might think this excessively stern, I couldn't agree more. And to demonstrate my support of Mr. Heer's challenging severity, I'd like to point out how he himself might improve as a culture coverer. He might start by re-reading Hugh Kenner. There he'll find ample warrant for my comments regarding *A Sinking Island* and *The Mechanic Muse*.

Mr. Heer says that modernism is Kenner's subject in *A Sinking Island* and that I have no right to suggest otherwise. Kenner, however, begins by telling us that "one theme this book addresses" is "how the mother-country of 'English' became a headquarters for articulate Philistia" (pp. 5-6). He then spends the next 240 pages alternately patronizing and dismissing writers he thinks inferior to his canonical roster of modernists. The only justification he provides for treating them this way is that they've not prostrated themselves before his version of the modernist altar. This, it seems, gives Kenner leave to hand down ex cathedra pronouncements: Ivy Compton-Burnett was one of those "good writers who simply did their job"; Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* is "leaden"; Evelyn Waugh is a "literary genius of an unmistakable if minor order" who "plagiarized" Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*; Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* suggests the "high-toned dither" found in the *New Yorker*. And on and on, with almost never a pause to present evidence, argue a case, or otherwise do the work of criticism. Finally, he concludes that "it's time to announce explicitly the post-war news that . . . there's no longer an English literature" because there is no "center" around which talent can gather. Which means, if anything, that talent no longer gathers around the center Kenner has made his critical turf. If this isn't high-horse, I confess I don't know what is.

It seems clear to me that Kenner had something more in mind than "the fate of modernism in England," as Mr. Heer so delicately puts it. There's no mistaking that one of his primary objectives is to belittle everything that doesn't fit his definition of literary worth. Kenner is entitled to his opinions, but, if he wants to air them publicly, he should back them with

something more than sneering condescension.

Mr. Heer says that Kenner "doesn't esteem difficult books merely because they are difficult." No? Then how does he explain Kenner's disparaging remarks about Auden's "easy" poems or his facile argument that the difficult, "resistant" book had been the cultural norm until the rise of mass literacy made the "easy" book today's false standard? In fact, Kenner gives the game away when he observes that, rather than a "strange newcomer" at this century's beginning, modernism was actually a reversion to "an old tradition, still just sufficiently alive in universities to furnish the nucleus of a readership." He invokes *Paradise Lost* and *The Divine Comedy* as examples of resistant books that required scholarly mediation before the untutored could paw their pages. "Joyce," he chuckles, "was never in higher company than when he jested that he made no demands on a reader save a lifetime's attention." Notice the elitist aroma of "higher." The unmistakable corollary of Kenner's position is that to establish itself in the first rank, a literary work must require a caste of priestly academics to explain its mysteries. I find this a somewhat narrow view of what it takes to achieve literary excellence. And I think Dante and Milton would agree. After all, one decided to write in the vernacular and the other chose to retell an awfully well-known story. Then there's Chaucer, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Swift, Dickens, Orwell, and . . . but the point's made, I think.

Over the years, Kenner has provided us with important critical insights and I said as much very clearly in my review. But Mr. Heer never mentions this. He doesn't mention that my piece also dealt with Kenner's 1987 book, *The Mechanic Muse*, a work which I found to be much more engaging precisely because in it he limits himself to what he does best: re-creating the historical contexts of his favorite modernist authors. Nor does Mr. Heer notice that I had some good things to say about *A Sinking Island*. For despite its smugness, it does occasionally wander into good sense. Like his idols, Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis, Kenner can be exasperatingly wrong-headed, but he always redeems himself by making you rethink issues that once seemed settled.

That Mr. Heer has chosen to review my review so selectively suggests he lacks some of the precision he demands in others. □

(*The American Spectator* welcomes letters to the editor, particularly those that do not threaten libel action. Please include a daytime phone number with all correspondence for purposes of verification by our standing army of fact checkers.)

THE CAMPAIGN SPECTATOR

DOWN THE TUBE

by Andrew Ferguson

For most of us, the campaign of '88 is over, and we can take a well-earned breather from the rigors of representative democracy. But the machinery of campaigning—the infrastructure, so to say, of mailing-list brokers, polling specialists, computer software hackers, and well-dressed “consultants” in plush offices on Connecticut Avenue whose monthly plant-care payments are more than your mortgage—this human machinery grinds on, ever onward. To keep themselves well-oiled for 1990, they faithfully read the *Post*, these men and women do, from A-1 straight through to the automobile ads. They wait for their hand-delivered weekly copy of the *National Journal*. They put in calls to the Hill. They pore over charts and graphs. They have lunch. They xerox the *Campaign Industry News*. They watch videotapes.

They watch, for example, their own work (if they're lucky) and the work of their competitors on “The Best Campaign Commercials of 1988,” as compiled by Aristotle Industries. Aristotle specializes in “political technology,” and its slogan is “Democracy is a Growth Business.” In Washington this is undeniable, which is why sales of the “Best of” tape have been brisk: “Four or five a day,” according to Aristotle's Jeffrey Easton. Easton edited the tape, which lasts about an hour, using, he says, only 5 percent of the available material. For any non-professional who has watched the “Best Campaign Commercials of 1988,” this is a weighty fact, for it means that out there somewhere are twenty more hours of the same sort of stuff—*only worse*.

Why are the best of the ads so bad? I don't think it has anything to do with the vaunted “negativity” of the 1988 campaign; all campaigns are essentially negative. I suspect, rather, that the answer lies in the curse of “professionalism”: since TV campaign ads have become a growth business—a profession—a class of pros has arisen that thinks of its work in a high-minded way, and there's nothing lower than a high-minded TV commercial. As the tape makes clear, the effort to create a video glow around an American politician can result in all manner of implausibilities: Pete Dawkins, for example, wearing blue jeans and sauntering down a crack alley in Newark, with an all-in-a-day's-work air about him. And an ad for Senator John “Call Me Jack” Danforth of

Missouri begins *in media res*: We catch Jack sitting alone in his office, the lights low, with a slide projector humming and casting pictures of him against the back wall. Is he embarrassed that we interrupt him in this session of shameless narcissism? Not at all. “I was just reminiscing about my years in public office,” he says, congenially, “and I thought you might like to join me.”

Then there's Mike Bernhardt, who unsuccessfully challenged Governor Kunin of Vermont, and who outdoes even Danforth for high-minded implausibility. In his commercial, Bernhardt just happens to be walking through a playground when a group of teenagers just happens to be starting up a basketball game, and when one of the teenagers just happens to drop his backpack, which just happens to cause \$400,000 in cocaine to spill from the bag, Bernhardt just happens to see it. Nothing gets Bernhardt angrier than the sight of all that coke going to waste, apparently, so he runs over to the bag, grabs it, and—freeze frame. End of commercial. A powerful antidrug statement, perhaps, but not a scenario played out daily in Vermont.

The implausibility descends to baseness in a commercial for Chuck Robb, the Vietnam vet and former party boy who now serves the people of the Commonwealth of Virginia in the United States Senate. First we see Robb as he chats with a couple of Marines and lets slip the fact that he had soldiers die in his arms in Vietnam, an experience whose marketability he might not have foreseen at the time; then he grabs his daughter and drags her to the Vietnam memorial on the Mall, which, the voice-over assures us, “he has visited many times.” Finally he sits the girl down and lectures her on the dangers of entangling alliances. This is not your usual topic for a father-daughter heart-to-heart—unless, of course, “entangling alliances” is understood metaphorically—but she struggles nobly to appear interested anyway. Heroics run in the family.

“In the end,” says Senator Bingaman of New Mexico in one of his ads, “we're *all* family,” and the videotape makes clear who precisely wears the pants in our big democratic family. You wonder, watching the tape, whether there was an American over

the age of sixty-five who *didn't* appear in a campaign commercial last year. Whole retirement villages seem to have been emptied to meet the casting calls. And politicians everywhere pledged “not to turn [their] back on the people who built this country” (Leo McCarthy's phrase), or on “the ones who raised us” (Bingaman), or on “those who have given us so much” (Trent Lott), or on the bloc of voters “who will ruin a politician's career if he so much as touches a dime of Social Security” (me). The pols scrambled after elderly votes with all the dignity of kids lunging for party favors. To judge from his ads, in fact, Senator Durenberger of Minnesota spends the majority of his waking hours walking in parks with senior citizens. And no wonder: he's “Senator Health Care,” who “presided over a 104 percent increase in Medicare!” As perpetual senior citizen Walter Brennan used to say: no brag, just fact.

Facts, of course, do not take up too much room in the political consultant's bag of tricks. I myself don't find this cause for any particular alarm, as some guardians of the public good do, but neither do I think it's too much to ask that the admen at least entertain the viewer if they insist on wasting his time. My own favorites among this cream-of-the-crop selection are of the kind which research shows to be the least effective—that is, the kind which are purely frivolous and content-free. These involve, not surprisingly, a heavy emphasis on animals doing stupid things, and for people like me who are forever seeking to recover the lost bliss of childhood by watching re-runs of “The Three Stooges” and “Mr. Ed,” the gambit is a sure-fire attention-getter. Jeffrey Easton says that the animal strategy usually emerges “when you're twenty points down with a week to election day.” Obviously that explains why the political experts have deduced that the strategy doesn't work: only sure losers try it. The tautology aside, the fact remains that when Senator Melcher of Montana brought out commercials starring a herd of talking cows, his opponent, Conrad Burns, was already waltzing to victory. The best commercial on the tape was aired by Bob Jordan, who challenged North Carolina's Governor Jim Martin by portraying the governor's budget staff as four chimps, dressed in business suits, sitting around a conference table.

One chimp flailed his arms, another punched a calculator, a third smooched a telephone receiver, the fourth drank a can of soda and did consecutive backflips on the table—in rollerskates! It's enough to restore your faith in the democratic process. □

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