

South Africa as well as against Communist countries, giving military assistance to the contras as well as to the Afghans, and so on. And finally, to counterbalance the increasingly ineffective United Nations, he suggests the creation of a League of Democracies, in which, inevitably, the United States would play a leading role.

A number of Fossedal's positions are well founded, others much less so, and even the former do not necessarily imply the policies he recommends. Fossedal is right that most people, in widely different countries, opt for democracy when given a chance; he leaves out the fact that this option may be quite fickle and that, under changed circumstances, people may opt for something else again. It is quite true that Americans have long felt that the fate of their own democracy is inextricably linked to the advance of democracy abroad; it is not at all evident that they are right in this assumption. Fossedal is on very sound ground empirically when he maintains that human rights are best protected by democratic regimes. The relationship between democracy and economic development is much more complex than Fossedal asserts: there is no empirical warrant for saying that democracy fosters economic development in its "take-off" phases—indeed, the opposite may well be the case; it is almost certainly valid to say that *successful* development releases democratizing pressures, as in many of the newly industrialized countries today; but, alas, it may also be the case that, at a later stage again, democracy may bring with it increasing economic stagnation, as an ever-expanding system of entitlements, created by what Mancur Olson has called "distributional coalitions," slows down economic growth and stifles all forms of productive enterprise. And while there has indeed been of late a wave of democracy in much of the world, there is every possibility that this trend may be reversible: one long look at Latin America today should have at least raised the suspicion in Fossedal's mind.

Further, Fossedal is too sanguine about the results of American pro-democracy actions abroad. Perhaps the paradigm for such actions is Woodrow Wilson's great crusade during and just after World War I: among other things, it destroyed the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and created a bevy of violently nationalistic states in central Europe, at least contributing to the discontents that held the roots of World War II; and domestically, as Robert Nisbet has argued, it brought about a quantum leap in the powers of the federal government; neither accomplishment can be looked upon as a triumph of democ-

cracy. More recently, the United States did indeed impose democracy on the defeated Axis powers, with enduring success. Its attempts to do the same, usually by less violent means, in the postwar Third World are a mixed bag of successes and failures. What is interesting, though, is that Fossedal, in arguing against the skeptics, consistently discusses the *efficacy* of pro-democracy interventions; he barely touches on the question of the latter's *moral legitimacy*. Is it really so self-evident that democracy represents the moral apex of man's political history? And, even if that were so, by what right can the United States arrogate to itself the national mission to promote this particular form of government at all times and in all places?

Democracy is a morally ambiguous, empirically ramshackle construction. Its achievements are very mixed: some truly great, such as the relatively reliable safeguards for human rights that Fossedal mentions; others deplorable, such as the institutionalization of demagoguery and resentment. Under modern conditions it is very probably the best form of government to be had. It is a means to certain ends, such as the protection of individual liberties; it is not an end in itself. Is such a regime worth defending? Of course it is, especially against the thoroughly repulsive alternatives that are currently available. But it would seem very dubious to identify its promotion with the national purpose of a great power, and even more so to make it the guiding principle of the latter's actions on the international stage. Put simply, Wilsonianism is not to be recommended as the ruling norm of American foreign policy.

To say this, however, is not to recommend the opposite, a *Realpolitik* utterly devoid of normative content; such a course not only would be morally reprehensible, but the American people would not stand for it. What emerges from such considerations is a middle position, in which one seeks to balance interests and ideals, prudence and principle. There is nothing new in this. It has always been the position of those who sought to balance power and conscience, *kratos* and *ethos*. This is not an easy course to take, and one that requires political leadership (especially in the presidency) that is cool-headed and articulate. It is *not* the stuff of which crusades are made, and we can be thankful for that. Crusades rarely reach the promised land, and when they do they often bring about more evils than they set out to combat. The volunteers of the Lincoln Brigade (even when all their particular misjudgments are bracketed) are not exactly models to be emulated. □

A TURN IN THE SOUTH

V. S. Naipaul/Alfred A. Knopf/307 pp. \$18.95

Dave Shiflett

V. S. Naipaul is a man without roots, a wanderer on a spinning planet, not the kind of guy you'd find sitting on a front porch whittling ducks. He is, however, interested in the idea of home—a place where you fight your fight with life on the same dusty floorboards, where your family chants the Beatitudes around your deathbed; a place where you are buried and await the worms and the archangel's trumpet while your grandchildren chase butterflies beyond the graveyard fence. Mr. Naipaul had heard there were people in the South who lived this way and went there for five months to see for himself.

He had other interests as well. Like most people, he wanted to know something more about the racial situation, perhaps especially because he comes from a place where slavery also existed. But his interest in race soon faded, not because race is a minor part of Southern life. It just isn't the biggest one.

He met plenty of people straight out of central casting. There was the retired newspaperman in Charleston, South Carolina, who knew every tree in the county and every cloud in the sky. He possessed the sense of place Southerners are famous for, that love of tree stumps, fishin' holes, and bird dogs that is often mistaken for pantheism.

But as Mr. Naipaul discovered, the old newspaperman didn't really worship nature; instead, he saw it as his stage and had even prepared a skit to be performed after his death. His tombstone will read "Have One On Jack"; a fund will provide the whiskey with which the living will toast the dead. Here was a mind that entertained two opposite ideas simultaneously and not only functioned but also prospered. Mr. Naipaul liked that spirit and sensed a bigger story; you can see him crack a smile and lick the lead of his pencil.

Such a spirit was not confined to the newspaperman, and over the course of his journey Mr. Naipaul discovered what is probably the most widespread characteristic of Southerners: they are often quite close to the land—even tied to it—but they are also strangers to the earth. Which is to say they might spend

their lives following a mule, but all the while their minds are on the Garden of Eden or the fireworks of the Apocalypse or some other unseen and perhaps supernatural event. Supernatural or not, however, the Biblical events are more real and sustaining than the food in their bellies: given the choice between their lives and their religion, they'd quickly give up the ghost.

All of which made for an interesting situation, one in which the potential for conflict between author and subject was great. In one corner was Mr. Naipaul, a lapsed Hindu, a sophisticated world traveler, a man not known to put any stock in the metaphysical explanation. In the other corner were many simple people who never left home, yet whose minds traveled to places Mr. Naipaul didn't believe existed, and whose culture was permeated by religious ideas. This had the makings of another "Sahara of the Bozart."

But it didn't turn out that way. Something got to Mr. Naipaul. It might have been the woman Baptist preacher who kept figurines of a black Jesus and

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Dave Shiflett is a writer living in Virginia.

a white Jesus, she not wishing to lose a convert on a technicality. Or maybe it was the businessman exercising his Christian responsibility by teaching a black man to read. Many times Mr. Naipaul heard people attribute their good works to a religious obligation.

Or maybe timing had something to do with it. Mr. Naipaul is a tired man. Over the course of his life he has found much to dislike in the world: its pettiness and hatred have driven a stake very close to his heart. So along come the Southrons, the lowliest of whom is animated by the grandest of ideas: order out of chaos; love answering hatred; life following death. This is not, he found, an idiot, feel-good religion. Their lives are battlegrounds of hope and despair, longing and dread, paradise and hellfire. Southrons spend their lives in darkest Gethsemane.

No account as they are, however, they are not petty, and what's more, even if there's a tear on their cheek, there's also a grin on their face because they figure it'll come out fine in the end. In short, they're full of hope, which Mr. Naipaul seems to be short of. And even if he doesn't believe their ideas, there's no arguing that they are more worthy of the human mind than the modern preoccupation with your gonads, my gonads, and sports cars.

Whatever the reason, Mr. Naipaul is inspired by the Southern spirit and actually has some fun, showing exceptional interest in a central figure in Southern culture—the redneck. He quotes a local expert as they observe one slouching about a motel lounge: “He’s [the redneck] probably thinking, with that hair and beard, that he’s God’s gift to the world. But he’s just a neck. He’s as lost as a goose. He’s never been on a tiled floor in his life.”

Where do they come from, Mr. Naipaul wonders.

“They’re Scotch-Irish in origin. A lot of them intermarried, interbred. I’m talking about the good old rednecks now. He’s going to have an eight-to-five job. But there’s an upscale redneck, and he’s going to want it cleaned up. Yard mowed, a little garden in the back. Old Mama, she’s gonna wear designer jeans and they’re gonna go to Shoney’s to eat once every three weeks.”

Is Shoney’s preferable to McDonald’s?

“At Shoney’s you’ll get the gravy all over it. That’s going to be a big deal. They’ll love it. I know these sons of bitches.”

Mr. Naipaul, heart and pencil racing, also asks about redneck women.

“They just sit at home. They’re worrying about where the next sack of potatoes is coming from. But they can live on a hundred dollars a week.

Cheaper than you and I. And they’re not skinny. Some of them are big and fat. What am I saying? They’re *all* big and fat.”

In this case, Mr. Naipaul’s guide misleads him, as some redneck women are quite skinny—it takes two of them tied together to swab a gun barrel, as the saying goes. But he later sums up the carbohydrate situation with considerable skill:

Ever since the Charleston hotel (and especially the busy business people in Atlanta) I had been aware of very fat people, people who had risen (like dough) to special spheres of obesity. Not one or two; they were almost a class. Charleston was a resort town. They had appeared there, in the hotel, in gay holiday clothes that were on them doubly and trebly exaggerated; and they had, bizarrely, also appeared in couples. At one time there were at least four such couples in the hotel—gargantuan, corridor-blocking, and (no doubt the effect of numbers) not without aggression.

Those readers who have a feeling for Mr. Naipaul are happy at his levity, but many reviewers have criticized the book

for not paying enough attention to race and the region’s other ills—for not being another “Bozart.” These indictments, generally written upwind of Harlem, are in keeping with the usual approach to the South: slice up the current sinners, then strafe the graveyard.

Mr. Naipaul’s contribution is to look deeper into the soul of the South. Great stretches of the text are taken up with interviews, most of them notable for their candor and the willingness of their subjects to return time and again to their own shortcomings. He provides enough descriptions and comparison (this Southern town smells like that African village) to remind us that it’s his book, just as the interviews are reminders that he is visiting a world that is new to him. And so that world becomes more familiar.

Mr. Naipaul seems to feel somewhat at home there. He finds some relief among the prisoners of hope. He plans, he says, to complete one more book and then give up writing. At that time, perhaps he should settle in Savannah and take up the banjo. □

**BORDERLAND:
ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN SUBURB, 1820-1939**
John R. Stilgoe/Yale University Press/353 pp. \$35.00

Christopher Caldwell

When universities try to purge frivolous courses, Suburban Architecture can find its way onto the hit list, between the History of Sports and the Poetry of Rock and Roll. In telling us that “suburbs deserve scrutiny,” John Stilgoe, professor of history of landscape at Harvard and author of *Common Landscape of America: 1580-1845*, pits himself against a snickering academic consensus to the contrary. *Borderland* is a brave attempt to correct the prevailing orthodoxy that Americans living just outside of major cities have only shallow roots in history and a relationship to the major achievements of American culture that is tenuous at best. In an age when academics make extravagant claims for the most marginal cultures, yet continue to view suburban America as if it were just one long “Dick Van Dyke Show,” Stilgoe is breaking important new ground.

Stilgoe believes the suburban landscape is the product of a uniquely American experiment as daring as—and similar to—that upon which the pioneers embarked. While never ignor-

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ing the historical reasons behind it (climbing real-estate prices, unclaimed farmland nearby, and so on), Stilgoe considers urban flight primarily the product of an intellectual movement of major dimensions. Prettily illustrated (were it in color, I’d have said *lavishly*) with maps, paintings, photos, and drawings, *Borderland* covers the suburban development of six cities—Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Chicago—and discusses briefly the early automobile suburbs of the West Coast.

Cholera, pollution, and other urban health hazards; the triumph of Jacksonian democracy and, with it, the collapse of urban-based Federalism as a political force; the growth of a new, romantic aesthetic—Stilgoe credits a complex web of factors for the move to the borderlands that began in the 1820s. Americans shaped their retreats as fantasies, perhaps in a grudging realization that the populated parts of Europe were somehow more picturesque. It was a matter of balancing “the beauty of scenery with the need of neighbors”; the beauty of Constable, of Van Ruisdael, was what the early borderlands were after. Persistent nos-

talgia for the English landscape was another factor.

The nineteenth century was marked by an unusual diversity of suburban architecture: country seats, gentleman farms, Gothic “follies,” *cottages ornes*, villas, even triple-decker apartments. Stilgoe invites us to see a similar variety in our own suburban structures, and he’s keen to explode the myth that suburbia is a spanking new invention. “Little boxes” did not come in with Levittown; the houses of Colinsville, Connecticut, were built on uniform plans in 1826. The single-horse stable was playing the role of the modern garage by the time of the Civil War. And that most grotesque of modern American sights—the neon “strip”—didn’t come in with the superhighway; it had its beginnings in the late eighteenth-century “ribbon village,” the one-street village gradually bleeding into other one-street villages.

Early suburbia was not merely a matter of cities growing, oozing ectoplasmically into the hinterlands; most early commuters lived well away from the big city. Yet, around the 1870s, with expansion in public transportation, urban sprawl began to take on the form in which we know it today. The new “streetcar suburbs”—Allston/Brighton, Brooklyn, South Chicago, West Philadelphia—were not really suburbs at all, as Stilgoe points out, though developers did rely on a vestigial countryside and positive mythology about borderland living to lure prospective homeowners. Rents were rising (Stilgoe blames “industrial capitalism”), and for the first time people were fleeing the city not out of philosophical belief but out of economic exigency; these are hardly the adventurous transcendentalists associated with early nineteenth-century borderland living.

That suburbs could be crowded, unprivate, and dirty was a rude awakening to the wealthier areas, and they began to take on the accoutrements of what we call suburbia today: neighborhood associations and charters, zoning laws, minimum lot sizes, and the obsessive planting of trees, in order to both reaffirm the ruralism of the place and protect one’s privacy. This last is a radical departure from traditional neighborly attitudes: hedges, fences, and other obstructions, said Edward Payson Powell, “give an air of exclusiveness that is un-American.” Yet, while the glamour and *bon ton* of the “exclusive” suburb persisted into this century (Faith Baldwin’s society novel *Station Wagon Set* enjoyed brisk sales in 1938), by the Second World War writers and academics were calling the borderlands conservative, petty, tacky, and anti-intellectual.