

the ways and means of compelling Japan to surrender.

Nobile and Bernstein reveal nothing new about these discussions. It is no surprise to learn that, among those charged with the dread responsibility, opinions tended to differ. Nor, for that matter, is it news that in subsequent years many prominent Americans (Dwight D. Eisenhower, Herbert Hoover, William D. Leahy, John Foster Dulles) expressed strong reservations about the use of the bomb. In any case, absolute consensus is impossible. We are no more likely to achieve unanimity of opinion on Hiroshima and Nagasaki than on whether McClellan could have pursued Lee into Virginia, or Pope Clement VII should have granted Henry VIII a divorce from Catherine of Aragon.

People may disagree about whether it was right or necessary to inflict the Bomb on Hiroshima, but they cannot reasonably argue that the decision was taken lightly. In the midst of a vicious war to the death in the Pacific, the American government had the time and inclination to study the nature of the bomb. Another point is the studied indifference of Nobile, Bernstein, and friends to the prospect of American casualties in Japan. Even if we accept the lowest estimates, 26,000 dead Americans is a lot of corpses. It is no wonder that those who were poised to invade Japan—William Manchester, Paul Fussell, William Styron, and others, fresh from the killing fields of Iwo Jima and Okinawa—were delighted to be spared, and “thank God for the atom bomb,” in Fussell’s memorable phrase.

Nobile is correct that the text of the Smithsonian exhibition is not quite what its critics contended: In some ways it is better, but in other ways it is worse. He is also correct that history can be dangerously vulnerable to influence. In this instance, the political pressure applied to the scholarly process—from the American Legion, from Congress, from the press—was valuable and largely right. In the future, however, there is no reason to doubt that other interested parties, in subsequent exhibitions, will make their views known, and to the detriment of history. I am just as uncomfortable about the Air Force Association exercising veto power as I would be about the National Organization for Women. But, after all, the Smithsonian is a public

institution, not a private preserve for the amusement of its curators. The fact that the national legislature should take an interest in the uses to which tax revenues are put is neither surprising nor im-

proper. This is not a question of censorship, but of judgment. Should the veterans of one-half century ago have been insulted by their government, or graciously acknowledged? □

THE SNARLING CITIZEN: ESSAYS

Barbara Ehrenreich

Farrar, Straus & Giroux / 245 pages / \$20

reviewed by ANDREW FERGUSON

Barbara Ehrenreich’s career as a journalist has followed an interesting trajectory. She is a witty, graceful stylist who first came to prominence in the *Nation*, *Ms.*, and *Mother Jones*. Unlike Molly Ivins, she’s a mom—a working mom!—and unlike the late Anna Quindlen, she never whimpers. The fat cats of “mainstream” journalism do not allow writers with Ehrenreich’s attributes to languish on the leftward fringe, and so for the past several years she has been a featured essayist on the back page of *Time* magazine, where her unabashedly left-wing views make a pleasant contrast to the abashedly left-wing views found in the pages preceding it. She is now so certifiably mainstream that mainstream publishers are happy to get out collections of even her most quotidian pieces. Hence *The Snarling Citizen*, a loosely packed duffel of Ehrenreichiana previously published in *Time*, the *Nation*, the *Guardian*, and elsewhere.

The essays here are brief without exception; the longest couldn’t be longer than 1700 words. To impose coherence she has grouped them under chapter headings: “Trampling on the Down-and-Out,” “Sex Skirmishes and the Gender Wars,” and so on. The collection begins with “Life in the

Postmodern Family,” raising the question, right at the start, of what a postmodern family might be. I don’t know, and neither, I suspect, does Ehrenreich, but “postmodern” is one of her favorite words, recurring even more often than such phrases as “apocalyptic frisson,” “post-Judeo-Christian generation,” “posttrend era,” “post-feminist era,” and “advanced capitalism”—the big, blowy tropes that dazzle editors while allowing a writer to elide from the concrete to the dubious, and from the self-evident to the debatable, without debate.

This stylistic trick is essential to her appeal as an essayist, for when Ehrenreich does offer a straightforward observation or assertion of fact, she tends to wobble. Her facts, for example, aren’t really facts. She opens her first essay on the family with the statement: “The U.S. divorce rate remains stuck near 50 percent.” This is a chestnut of newsmagazine chin-waggers, but in fact the divorce rate is 4.8 percent per 1,000 Americans. “According to surveys [block that phrase!], somewhere between 26 percent and 41 percent of married women are unfaithful.” The most recent and exhaustive survey, *Sex in America*, puts the figure at less than 15 percent. She writes: “Studies show [ditto!] that teachers tend to favor boys by calling on them more often, making eye contact with them more frequently, and pushing them harder to perform.” Actually, “studies show” that teachers

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don't "call on" boys more often, they call them out more often—reasonable enough, since schoolboys make more trouble than schoolgirls, requiring more frequent eye contact and more pushing to perform.

Ehrenreich's journalism is filled with such casual misstatements—little wisps of faulty data upon which she builds whole cathedrals of commentary. The errors of fact don't make much difference to the quality of her arguments, for Ehrenreich, as an ideologue, is impervious to any data that don't serve the larger points she wishes to make. And her points are larger than you can imagine. When she deals with "the family," as she often does, she can be funny but uncomfortably bitter—imagine Erma Bombeck, if Erma Bombeck's husband ran off with a call girl and her son decapitated the family cat. Erma's treatment of the family, jaundiced as it was, was at bottom affectionate, confined to small but endearing frustrations; Ehrenreich's balloons into a genuine, ill-disguised hostility toward civilization itself. When she makes an argument she tends to jump around.

Americans act out their ambivalence about the family without ever owning up to it. Millions adhere to creeds—religious and political—that are militantly "profamily." But at the same time, millions flock to therapists and self-help groups that offer to heal the "inner child" from damage inflicted by family life. Legions of women band together to revive the self-esteem they lost in supposedly loving relationships and to learn to love a little less. We are all, it is often said, in recovery. And from what? Our families, in most cases.

It would be difficult to write a paragraph with more confusions than this one. "Act out" is a cant phrase, coined by counselors and facilitators. The two sentences about millions being religiously pro-family and millions flocking to self-help groups are logically

unrelated, but the juxtaposition is meant to imply that the second sentence discredits the first. And what's an "inner child"? How do you "learn to love a little less"? It is indeed often said that "we are all in recovery," but that doesn't mean it's true, or that the phrase has any content at all. This is Oprahspeak, unbecoming a writer who fancies herself a skeptic.

But here in postmodern, postfeminist America, Oprahspeak seems all that's left to the left. "There is a long and honorable tradition of what might be called 'antifamily' thought," she writes, invoking authority to buttress her case. But the line of authority trails off. Ehrenreich traces the tradition to the Rousseauian philosopher Charles Fourier, through unnamed "early feminists" and "radical psychiatrists," to the renowned British crank Edmund Leach.



As an intellectual genealogy it's not quite Aristotle-to-Aquinas-to-Kant, but it will have to do. We live in a post-traditionalist age.

So where is a left-wing polemicist to turn—when facts fail you, when the "surveys" don't "show" what you want them to, when your intellectual tradition is neither long nor particularly honorable? There will always be straw men, and the book is overstuffed with them. One essay—to choose a typical instance—attacks the "dangerous" idea that "history repeats itself." She writes:

"Everything that happens, we are led to believe, is a historical reenactment," and the belief makes us putty for the forces of reaction. Ehrenreich herself is undeluded. She argues against the notion with great force and indignation, mustering facts and examples, moving elegantly from the specific to the general, from the personal to the universal and back again, without once stopping to consider that nobody in his right mind takes the idea literally. It's like watching Fred Astaire dance with a mop.

She has her gifts. She's good with a joke—about that most public recluse, Salman Rushdie, she writes: "What is it with these fatwa guys—can't they get a copy of Rushdie's schedule from his publicist, like everybody else?" And you can't completely write off a woman who has the taste to call Jack Valenti an "ancient lounge lizard." (Query to *Time* editors: Ageist? Offensive to the amphibian community?) She knows that caricature can be a verbal art, with the capacity to expose an essence more quickly than a dozen arguments, but too often her fondness for exaggeration and hyperbole drags her into mere buffoonery. Why do we watch the Academy Awards? "We watch for what might be called political reasons: because everyone knows that the movie-star class now rules the earth." How clever, how unconventional, how not even remotely true!

Even so, I agree with the many blurbsters on the dust jacket—Susan Faludi, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Ellen Goodman among them—who suggest that Barbara Ehrenreich may be the best polemicist the left-wing can produce nowadays. This alone makes her stuff worth reading. For liberals she distills contemporary liberalism down to its essence, which by now is nothing more than a series of attitudes and poses and sneers. For conservatives she is cause for rejoicing, a knowledgeable, highly credentialed, top-of-the-line tour guide to the Potemkin Village they hope to overrun. □

POLITICS AS A NOBLE CALLING:
THE MEMOIRS OF F. CLIFTON WHITE

F. Clifton White (with Jerome Tuccille)

Jameson Books / 269 pages / \$21.95

GOLDWATER:
THE MAN WHO MADE A REVOLUTION

Lee Edwards

Regnery / 542 pages / \$29.95

reviewed by VICTOR GOLD

Clif White was one of the fathers of professional campaign management, but don't hold it against him. He is no more responsible for the current state of the political art, as practiced by James Carville and other modern slash-and-burn "handlers," than the inventor of the internal combustion engine is for highway accidents.

The title of White's memoir, *Politics As a Noble Calling*, says as much. A book that covers the American political scene from the post-Roosevelt to the post-Reagan years, it offers the AARP set a refresher course on that period, while at the same time shedding light, for younger political junkies, on how-we-got-here-from-there.

White, who died in 1993, saw his calling as one that moved the political process out of the smoke-filled room by galvanizing people at the grass roots. To that extent he was, as Newt Gingrich uses the term, a revolutionary. Indeed, when Gingrich was still a precocious college boy touting Nelson Rockefeller for president, Clif White was leading the charge in the first conservative Republican revolution—the Goldwater nomination of 1964.

Victor Gold, The American Spectator's national correspondent, was deputy press secretary for Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign.

White came to his calling when the politics of big city machines, with its street-smart bosses, was giving way to the politics of polls, demographic studies, and phone banks run by college-trained organization men. After graduating from Cornell in 1940, he became a social science teacher in an upstate New York high school, and shortly thereafter was bitten by the political bug, spending part of his honeymoon observing the Democratic convention in Chicago (where Franklin Roosevelt was re-nominated after a demonstration triggered by the infamous "voice from the sewer"). After combat duty with the Army Air Corps during World War II, White returned to academic life, teaching at Cornell, and re-entering the political arena, handling communications for Thomas E. Dewey at the 1948 Republican convention in Philadelphia.

It was, by today's convention standards, a primitive operation:

Protocol dictated that the candidate never appeared on the floor of the convention until after he was nominated. Meanwhile, it was imperative that a line of communication be maintained between the candidate and his staff and his people on the convention floor.

The only effective means of doing that was to literally hog a telephone line and secure it against all attackers. So, Yours Truly sat in a telephone booth

right off the floor with a mountain of nickels in front of me, which I fed one at a time every three minutes . . . to keep a line open to the Dewey suite.

Sixteen years later, White would change the way political conventions were run, by placing a 55-foot electronic trailer behind San Francisco's Cow Palace, connecting Barry Goldwater's hotel suite to seventeen strategic locations on the convention floor. No candidate had ever before used this kind of communications set-up; no candidate thereafter would succeed without it. A jaded national press corps, though busy portraying his candidate as a horse-and-buggy reactionary, was suitably awed. F. Clifton White's reputation as a serious political player was made.

If there is an irony here, it is that the man who engineered Barry Goldwater's conservative takeover of the Republican party had honed his tactical skills as a New York Young Republican working for Tom Dewey, who preceded Nelson Rockefeller as the Eastern establishmentarian the GOP right-wingers most loved to hate. But White's true bent, as he demonstrated after Dewey's retirement, was toward the heartlanders who supported Bob Taft in 1948 and '52. Along with Bill Buckley and Bill Rusher, he would form the nucleus of the young conservative movement that not only nominated Goldwater but transformed the Republican Party and American politics in the second half of the century.

White would be a major participant in other presidential campaigns—Reagan's, Nixon's, Ford's—and the mastermind of James Buckley's upset victory in the 1970 New York race for the U.S. Senate. But it was the Goldwater campaign—the first, and only, genuine draft in presidential campaign history, for the original anti-Washington candidate—that would give the tall, soft-spoken New Yorker his finest hour as a practitioner of his "noble calling."

In *Goldwater*, Lee Edwards, author of a previous book on Ronald Reagan, takes the most comprehensive look to date at the life and legend of the Arizona Republican who, in his prime, was portrayed by the liberal establishment as a combination, in Edwards's words, "of Huey Long, George Lincoln Rockwell, and George Patton."

Not to forget Attila the Hun.