



J. Gordon Coogler circa 1897

instance, Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin. Goodwin is actually boasting of her plagiarism as the mark of a very hard-working "wife and mother." Doubtless she will remain an esteemed figure.

And so it is that this year in recognition of this promising trend in our intellectual life the J. Gordon Coogler Award for 2001 goes to the most gifted of the New Charlatans, Professor Michael Belle-

siles, author of *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture*.

A year ago this past April, the book won America's most prestigious award for history, the Bancroft Award, despite its fabricated sources, misstated historical events, implausible thesis and the author's inability to defend its integrity. For over a year, ever more of the book's deceptions have been exposed, yet the Bancroft still glitters on Bellesiles' chest. He stands by his story as adamantly as Alger Hiss once stood by his. And his thesis really is implausible. Bellesiles claims that up through the mid-19th century guns were relatively rare in America. Apparently the early American held off angry Indians and secured dinner for his frontier family by resorting to wholesome fisticuffs, perhaps heaving a few stones at the passing fauna and coaxing a nearby war party to calm down. And Bellesiles defends his position by citing documents that no other scholars can find. The book is a nonsense and a fraud. It wins the Coogler for the year 2001.

Let the carpers complain that the book was actually published in the year 2000. To us modernists on the Coogler Committee, it all depends on the meaning of the word year. Besides, *Arming America* came out in paperback in 2001.

Skeptical readers will also recall the columnists who so often get caught passing off their infantile fantasies as real people ground down by cruel America. Remember Mike Barnicle of *The Boston Globe*, gone from the *Globe* now but still huffing and puffing on cable television. Recall Michael Daly's resignation from the *New York Daily News* for passing off a fictional character as real flesh and blood or Patricia Smith's sad departure from *The Boston Globe*.

As I say, these hoaxers are not necessarily discredited by being exposed. Many go on to higher things, for plagiarism and fraud are becoming marks of genius among some of America's most famous intellectuals. Barnicle survives as a TV sage. Daly went on to *New York* magazine. Smith, though always dubious, had been nominated for Pulitzers. Then there is the inimitable Michael G. Gartner who in 1993 resigned as president of NBC News after acknowledging that one of his news teams had broadcast a hoax. He left for a small Iowa newspaper where four years later the Pulitzer Committee awarded him a Pulitzer for "editorial writing." An essential technique in this growing intellectual movement seems to be an aptitude for plagiarism. Within the past year, illustrious historians have admitted to repeated acts of plagiarism, for

BLINDED BY THE BIAS

Why bother being serious?

BY JOHN CORRY

Political and social commentary is a game anyone can play. No expertise is needed, and if you play the game properly, you can make a tidy living. You need only to pretend to know what you're talking about, and while you may know nothing at all, you will never be penalized for being wrong. In fact, you probably will be asked to appear on cable television. Conservatives as well as liberals can, and do, play the game, and while both can be tendentious and tedious, liberals have an advantage. The dominant media culture is more supportive of them than it is of conservatives, and they are encouraged to roam about more freely. You never know where one will pop up next.

Often, of course, they are perfect-

ly harmless. No one will take them seriously. Andy Rooney of *60 Minutes*, for example, goes on *Larry King Live* and tells Larry that Attorney General John Ashcroft has put "the fear of God into reporters," who are now afraid to ask him questions. And that, according to Andy, is how "dictatorships get started." Oh, come on, Andy, you think? Dan Rather, your CBS colleague, dumps on Ashcroft all the time. What in the world are you talking about?

There is, however, a more pernicious side to the dominant culture. At a panel discussion entitled "Writers and Cold War Culture," sponsored by *The New York Times* (and more about the *Times* later), Norman Mailer talked about life as a writer in the 1950s. "We writers felt much more excitement than today," he said. "We felt like the Russian dissidents felt later." But in the 1950s, as *National Review* tartly noted, Mailer was co-founding *The Village Voice* and "flacking for the Soviet Union," and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was in the Gulag, writing on scraps of paper, which he then had to

Brock's book, *Blinded by the Right*.

Mayer, I suspect, knows it's a lousy book, even if she can never quite bring herself to say so. It is not that she likes or admires Brock; in fact, she thinks he's a snake. But she finds that his book has its uses. She likes the idea that malicious, half-crazed conservatives planted stories about Bill Clinton (especially in *The American Spectator*) and that the stories were "distorted and in some cases fictionalized, and presented without context," and then picked up by the national media. One such *Spectator* story, she writes, was about the "murder"—the quotation marks are hers—of Vincent Foster. Her source, of course, is Brock, and while she admits he may not be entirely trustworthy, she says that "for the most part he is writing here about episodes he witnessed firsthand." Moreover, Mayer says, on the things she herself knows "firsthand," Brock is telling the truth.

So let me make a small rejoinder. I have not read Brock's book, and because it has no index I could not look up pertinent refer-

ence of a vast right-wing conspiracy were to be discredited, liberal-left politics might never recover. Toward the end of her piece, Mayer quotes Brock's contention that the players at "the heart of the anti-Clinton conspiracy turned out to be a virtual Bush government in exile," and then draws her ominous conclusion: "With the publication of *Blinded by the Right*, Brock is more of an outsider than ever. But many of those whose secrets he tells are now on the inside, where, instead of rewriting history, they now can make it."

In other words, the right-wing conspirators won, and with Bush in the White House they are even more dangerous now than before. But Mayer and her like-minded colleagues have learned from the past and will do their best to keep the old conspirators from making new and even more terrible mischief. Constant vigilance is needed, however, and should vigilance fail, remember the warning from Andy Rooney: That's how dictatorships get started.

Or so goes, more or less, the working assumption now in the dominant media culture; and in fact the media are supposed to keep an eye on things, and vigilance is often required. But the media see only what they want to see, and when the culture demands it, they will see nothing at all. Worse, they will insist it is inappropriate even to look. Protected sensibilities—feminist, gay, minority—must not be offended. The sex abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Church, for example, has generated an enormous amount of coverage, although virtually all of it has been misleading. No matter what the factual context, the words "homosexual" or "gay" are usually missing.

But as Mary Eberstadt noted in an important piece in *The Weekly Standard*, "There is no outbreak of heterosexual child molestation in the American church," and "this crisis involving minors—this ongoing institutional horror—is almost entirely about man-boy sex." Nonetheless, the media decline to recognize this, and instead practice journalistic sleight of hand. Thus the scandal is never about predatory male homosexuals. The dominant culture protects them, and the scandal is supposed to be about something else.

As evidence, Eberstadt quotes *The New York Times*: "It should be clear by now that this scandal is only incidentally

The media see only what they want to see. When the culture demands it, they will see nothing at all.

destroy after memorizing what he had written. In the 1960s, when Mailer was protesting the Vietnam war and generally being lionized, Solzhenitsyn was having his manuscripts confiscated by the police.

Mailer's self-identification with the Russian dissidents was delusional. But you imagine the other old literary relics from the Cold War all nodding in agreement when they heard him: Yes, we were just like the Russian dissidents when we fought the Eisenhower terror. The literary world knows what it knows, and its thinking is cast in cement. Politics is one of its specialties, and its principal intellectual organ is *The New York Review of Books*. Some of the articles there are very fine, while others are windy, fatuous and much less so. But nowhere is the cement more evident than in the articles that touch on politics. The view is always from the left, and the right is consigned to darkness. There is a nice example of this in Jane Mayer's review of David

ences. Friends, however, tell me I am mentioned twice. On one occasion I am supposed to be remorseful over a project I am involved in with Bob Tyrrell, and so I go out and drown my sorrow in drink. But in fact I was quite pleased with myself on that occasion, and anyway I do not drink.

In my second mention, Brock notes that I wrote for the *Spectator* about a book entitled *The Strange Death of Vincent Foster*. But he neglects to say what I wrote about it, and the omission, I am sure, is purposeful. I said that the book—which suggested that Foster had been murdered, and was a pet project of the financier Richard Mellon Scaife—was paranoid right-wing junk. I also said Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr was right: Foster had killed himself.

But obviously it would not do to mention that. The idea that the *Spectator* was promoting conspiracy theories might begin to unravel, and there is no telling where that might lead next. If the belief in the

John Corry is a senior editor of *The American Spectator*.

Digital Technology

Atomic accuracy in any U.S. time zone

Atomic digital watch keeps time and date accuracy by reading from the official time transmitter.

The world has become a smaller place in the past few decades. Transactions take place across the world in an instant. Having a timepiece that can not only keep perfectly accurate time, but keep track of the time zones can be really helpful and convenient. Now there is a watch that can scientifically give you the right time in all zones within the 2,000-mile radio signal range.

If you travel—this watch is a necessity.

The Atomic Digital Watch from LaCrosse Technology is radio-controlled, maintaining its incredible accuracy by automatically reading from the official standard frequency and time transmitter in North America. This WWVB radio signal gets its time from the most precise clock in North America based in Colorado, and transmits its signal over a 2,000-mile range. When outside the range, the timekeeping operates off a 3-volt lithium battery. The Atomic Digital Watch gives you a selection of 24 time zones. This ultra-accurate radio-controlled timepiece has a perpetual day and date calendar, signal reception indicator and is powered by a 3-volt lithium battery expected to last three years.

A timely gift.

In addition to its accuracy, the watch is water resistant, and has a battery-saving "OFF" function. The stainless steel butterfly clasp and removable links to adjust the band size make it a good fit. This watch is a great gift for anyone who values precision and technology.

Does anyone really know what time it is?

Well, the U.S. Government wants to, so they created the National Institute of Standards and Technology, a component of the U.S. Department of Commerce. The Time and Frequency Division, located in Boulder, Colorado, maintains the F-1 Fountain Atomic Clock, the nation's standard of time. This clock neither gains nor loses a second in 20 million years. This watch is the next best thing to having your own atomic clock, because it automatically displays the precise accurate time. It sets itself to the F-1 Fountain Atomic Clock using a working battery,



it adjusts itself for daylight saving time and leap years, and it features a variety of practical and convenient features to fit your lifestyle.

Try it for yourself.

Advances in electronic technology let you get precise timekeeping at an affordable price. Now, thanks to a factory-direct relationship with the manufacturer of the Atomic Digital Watch, you can try it for yourself with TechnoScout's exclusive home trial. Try this product for 30 days and return it for the full purchase price if not satisfied, less shipping and handling.

Atomic Digital Watch-Silver Finish

ZY-1713 ~~\$69.95~~ \$49.95 + S&H

Please mention color and promotional code 22944.

For fastest service, call toll-free 24 hours a day

800-399-7858 

To order by mail with check or money order, or by credit card, please call for total amount plus S&H. To charge it to your credit card, enclose your account number and expiration date.

Virginia residents only—please add 4.5% sales tax.

 **TECHNOscout.**
1998 Ruffin Mill Road
Colonial Heights, VA 23834

30256

about forcing sex on minors." And *The New Republic*: "We all know the sexual abuse of minors is horrific; but somehow the bishops did not react with horror. That is what truly shocks." And *The New Yorker*: "The big shocker has been not so much the abuse itself . . . as the coldly bureaucratic 'handling' of it by hierarchs." And, inevitably, *The New York Review of Books*: "The current scandal is not a sex scandal."

This is absurd, but that's how things are. When George Will tried to raise the issue of homosexual priests on ABC's *This Week*, Cokie Roberts shouted him down. Media people may see themselves as independent thinkers, but only rarely are they called on to test their perception. Most live in a world where everyone believes the same as they do. Liberal attitudes are the norm and conservatism is an aberration. The pretense is that this has no effect on how news is reported, but it does. A reporter who wrote that gay priests were a grave problem for the Catholic Church would not be making a good career move. Better he should criticize the hierarchy than be accused of homophobia.

Meanwhile, the *Times*: It is a very great paper, and with its abundant resources and talent, it does things no other paper can do. But as *The New Yorker* has now reported, even if it didn't quite mean to, the *Times'* editorial and news pages, once thought to be separate and distinct entities, are now considered as one. A 22-page *New Yorker* article about the *Times*—media people love to read about one another—says, among other things, that publisher Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., executive editor Howell Raines, managing editor Gerald Boyd and editorial page editor Gail Collins meet for lunch once a week. They make up the paper's "steering committee." News stories in the *Times* read increasingly like editorials, and now we know why. Things get put together at lunch.

DRUGS AND ME—AND YOU

BY LAWRENCE HENRY

This morning, I picked up two prescriptions at the local pharmacy. For a month's supply of prednisone, I paid 63 cents. For a dozen Becton-Dickinson 3-ml syringes, I paid 56 cents.

Thereon hangs a long tale about prescription drugs, what they cost and what they do. It is also a tale about how the U.S. health care system works—and it works better than it is popularly supposed to work, if not yet quite as well as it could. Pay attention.

I have a kidney transplant. It has worked for 21 years, but, in the last several years, it has gradually started to fail. My basic drug regimen for most of those years consisted of Imuran, a brand-name immunosuppressant, and prednisone, a generic anti-inflammatory.

A month's supply of Imuran costs \$11.60.

Why these varying charges? My wife and I have chosen a so-

called "80/20" health insurance plan, classic indemnity insurance. The insurance company pays 80 percent of medical charges; we pick up the remaining 20. The alternative, which most insured people choose, is a "co-pay" system under an HMO (health maintenance organization) or PPO (preferred provider organization). Under the HMO/PPO system, you pay a flat fee for every doctor visit or every prescription, typically \$5 or \$10.

The co-pay system sounds like a good deal, but it may not be. My month's supply of Imuran and prednisone costs me \$12.16. Under a co-pay system, I would pay either \$10 or \$20, for the same thing. Add a third regular generic drug to my regimen, and I would save money, even with an Rx co-pay of only \$5.

Co-pays disguise cost, both from the consumer (who ultimately pays, one way or the other) and from the doctor, who prescribes without taking cost into account. What

Lawrence Henry is a writer in Westfield, New Jersey. This article originally appeared on TheAmericanProwler.org, TAS's daily web publication.

