

of evil, etc., etc., have floated away, drifted away after the first third of the book to be replaced by stories of work at the office, Andy's Bar Mitzvah and mother-daughter reunions. All of this wandering away from topics or themes of any significance makes *Ghost Waltz* a flawed and limited work. Rather than a reflection on history, human values or human motivations, *Ghost Waltz* becomes instead only a chatty book, of interest, perhaps, to Day's friends, who may find descriptions of her life and musings of value. The reader who seeks from *Ghost Waltz* an understanding of the topics the book purports to investi-

gate will be severely disappointed by its lack of focus and design and severely frustrated by its aimless rambling from topic to topic. Had Day desired to write a diary of her thoughts over the years on her family and her life, *Ghost Waltz* would be an effective, though uninteresting, means to accomplish that end. As a book which lays claim to some measure of authenticity and some measure of concern with significant issues, *Ghost Waltz* is a failure. Day is not a philosopher, neither is she an historian; why she would endeavor to write a work requiring skills she does not possess one can only wonder. □

## Subverting History & Tradition

Garry Wills: *Explaining America: The Federalist*; Doubleday & Co.; New York.

Harry C. Boyte: *The Backyard Revolution: Understanding the New Citizen Movement*; Temple University Press; Philadelphia.

Michael Walzer: *Radical Principles: Reflections of an Unreconstructed Democrat*; Basic Books; New York.

by Edward J. Lynch

American politics is commonly characterized as nontheoretical politics. Our national debates lack the contributions of a Plato, an Aristotle, a Hobbes or a Rousseau. Many of our scholars actually revel in the absence of this theoretical dimension, claiming that it enables us to avoid much of the turmoil associated with such fundamental thinking. The only book that appears to challenge this stand is *The Federalist*, and most Americans avoid the theoretical questions tackled there by ignoring the book. Garry Wills's interpretation

of the eighty-five essays comprising that volume is one of the handful of books published in this country devoted to this defense of the Philadelphia Constitution. Although the Wills essay has some merit, one can still say that we are awaiting the first accurate interpretation of *The Federalist*, one that takes the book on its own terms, using it to argue against those elements of the philosophical tradition that it rejects, building on the blocks that it provides and seeing the profundity of the actual work. To date, no one seems to have read the book whole.

The absence of an accurate understanding of *The Federalist* to inform our political discussion is one indication of the extent to which the American people have become divorced from their heritage. Each of the volumes discussed in this review contributes to this separation in its own way. Nonetheless, each of these volumes reflects powerful trends in current political thinking, and the distance between them and *The Federalist* demonstrates the degree to which "We the People" have lost vital parts of our tradition of liberty.

One can properly appreciate the revolutionary character of Publius's work

only by placing *The Federalist* back into the context in which its authors wrote. The modern world assumes the desirability of the democratic form of government. Until the completion of the American Revolution, however, democracy was a form of government that lived in a state of disrepute. Athens had indeed provided a model of democracy, as had many other Greek city-states. These ancient models had hardly provided a shining example to others who would institute democratic government, however. To read the popular impression of democracy reflected in *The Federalist* reminds one of a rather Hobbesian world. Democracies had provided little stability and no security to human rights. The history of democracy on the Hellenic peninsula was a story of petty strife and continuous struggle, with the regimes being as short in their lives as they were violent in their deaths. Following these experiments, few societies prided themselves on their democratic character for nearly two thousand years. The tradition of political philosophy that developed in the interim contended that democracy was a form of government suitable only for small cities isolated from neighbors and composed of homogeneous groupings of virtuous citizens. The larger nations of Europe were content to develop stable monarchies to maintain order among their peoples and themselves.

In striking contrast to this historical lesson, the American founders believed that they could reconcile the republican (i.e., democratic) form of government with the security of rights that had been central to the principles of the Revolution. Moreover, they rejected the historical lessons that argued for a small regime and a homogeneous people. In contrast to the bloody foundings that had characterized other great nations, the American founders sought to institute good government by "reflection and choice," a form of government that required the perpetual involvement of its people, that promoted the idea of government by "the deliberate sense of

*Dr. Lynch did his doctoral dissertation on The Federalist.*

What do *The Lincoln Review*, *Saturday Review*,  
*Continuity*, *Education*, *Harper's*,  
*The American Journal of Jurisprudence*, *Renascence*,  
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the community" rather than merely by power, including majorities that might base their rule on power rather than right.

Publius has been given sufficient credit for the "new science of politics" that he developed following the guidance of David Hume. In passages that have commonly been cited as examples of political physics, Publius showed the method of separating powers between the branches of the legislature (and Wills is especially good in emphasizing the primacy of the legislature in the government defended by Publius) and of dividing the society itself into a multitude of kinds of property. Once the society itself was sufficiently fragmented, one could balance, by appropriate combinations of duties and interests among officials, any insufficiency of decent motives among the people themselves. Legislators would not merely reflect the opinions of average citizens; they would serve as filters, intended to "refine and enlarge the public views." With appropriate people in office (those who adhered to the true principles of our Revolution), we could sustain the democratic form as well as safeguard the liberties that good government is intended to secure.

The size of the republic was crucial at two critical points in the theory. If the republic was sufficiently large, and the forms of interests within it sufficiently diverse, it was believed unlikely that any common impulse of passion or of interest would cultivate in the people an urge to violate the natural rights of citizens. Some region of the country might be infected with this base passion, but it need not captivate the people as a whole. Majorities could thus provide the checks on vicious impulses through the routine operations of democratic procedures. The people would have to safeguard their own liberties, but they would not be at the mercy of overbearing (and fleeting) majorities when they tried to do so.

The second crucial factor arguing for the large over the small republic

involved considerations of international affairs. Much of *The Federalist's* direct discussion of international affairs is confined to the less-than-popular papers attributed to John Jay, but the other wielders of Publius's pen discussed these matters frequently in the course of treating other topics. The essence of the teaching of *The Federalist* in the international arena is that bigger is better. Large nations have more resources with which to enrich themselves, hence to engage in commerce. They are also more likely to build the kind of unity that will deter assaults from other nations. Because a commercial nation of substantial size is likely to have far-flung interests, it will have

greater need to develop the capacity to protect those interests, hence it will develop the deterrent that will make it a less inviting target for any potential assailants. Plato had argued in *The Laws* that the good city will be ruled by bad cities, at least to the extent that the good city must prepare to defend itself against the vicious tendencies of its less virtuous neighbors. The large republic offered a means of protecting oneself against small and vicious neighbors.

Wills is excellent in treating the discussion of the character of the people assumed by Publius, and he offers a needed corrective to those who be-

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture*:

## Books and the Youthful Mind

"The major writers of our century have had a deep sense of things falling apart: Eliot, Yeats, Pound, Faulkner, Hemingway, Fitzgerald. Having that perception during the modern period is itself part of the definition of a major writer. For the past one hundred years writers have been repelled by secular modernism and its celebration of the Empiric Economic Man, The Individual let loose. To hold firmly to a sense of the real, writers were forced to be, consciously or otherwise, antiprogressive, antiliberal, even reactionary. Lionel Trilling, who held impeccable liberal credentials, wrote . . . 'liberal ideology has produced a large literature of social and political protest, but not, for several decades, a single writer who commands our real literary admiration . . . no literary figure of the very first rank . . . who, in his work, makes use of or gives credence to liberal or radical ideas.'"

—from "Snobbery as Spiritual Riches"  
by Joseph Schwartz

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Music—Correspondence—Liberal Culture  
Journalism

lieve that the American founders sought a physics that would make democracy desirable, even for a vicious people. Our founders were idealists; they were not dreamers. *The Federalist* No. 55, among other papers, noted that republican government, more than any other form, presupposed the domination of the decent instincts of the people.

Wills avoids the superficial mistakes that have flawed most discussions of *The Federalist*. He recognizes that the three authors who held Publius's pen were engaged in a cooperative effort and that they made a consistent argument. He is not captivated by the positivist rebellion against metaphysics and can therefore refute Robert Dahl's effort to reduce the argument to a series of syllogisms. Although he does not reach out to the whole book, he understands that serious interpretation of it requires reading more of it than merely the Tenth Number. He is aware that the book is more than Locke adapted to an American setting.

Nevertheless, the context in which Wills places *The Federalist* is his own rather than the authors'. Wills offers this volume as the second essay of a projected tetralogy interpreting our nation. His first volume, *Inventing America*, was an analysis of "Jefferson's Declaration of Independence," a document that must be differentiated from the one adopted by the Second Continental Congress as the core of our national heritage. Following this volume, Wills intends to offer his readers an essay interpreting the Constitution. His concluding volume, tentatively entitled *Judging America*, will deal with the Supreme Court. Glancing at this sequence, beginning with a democratic republic and ending with panels of appointees as judges of the republic, hints at a sequence differing from our traditional understanding of these relationships. Wills understands the American tradition differently than our greatest statesmen have understood it, and he aims to replace the self-understanding that they have cultivated with his own

perception.

Although Wills implicitly concedes the democratic roots of the Constitution discussed in *The Federalist*, he never directly confronts the question of the democratic character of the Constitution defended in the book. Although the authors of *The Federalist* sought to maintain their ties to the American Revolution and its principles, Wills has little to say about the relationship of their book to those principles, whether from their perspective or from the perspective of the Declaration of Independence that he offered a few short years ago. Wills's *Federalist* does have a context, but it is not the one established by Publius. His essay is one more example of the manner in which the political philosophy that animated the founding of this nation has been unmanned by the heirs of that founding.

Wills is somewhat weak in discussing other topics that *The Federalist* treated in an important fashion. He ignores Publius's treatment of the concept of federalism in No. 39. One finds no discussion by Wills of the potential size, and the bias toward expansion, built into the federal system by its founders, although he does concede that the book is a defense of strong government. He ignores the character of the representatives discussed in No.'s 35 and 36, and slights foreign-policy considerations. He mentions Willmoore Kendall in passing, but his treatment of Kendall's reading of *The Federalist* is a caricature. Martin Diamond is the most serious analyst to publish professional articles discussing the book in the past generation; Wills ignores him almost completely. Wills never addresses the critiques of Diamond that have surfaced among conservative scholars. He bases his work on the scholarship of Douglass Adair, yet Adair's major contribution to scholarship on *The Federalist* (allegedly identifying who wrote which of the papers) is irrelevant to the points that Wills wants at the center of his novel interpretation of *The Federalist*. Diamond, among others, had recognized this be-

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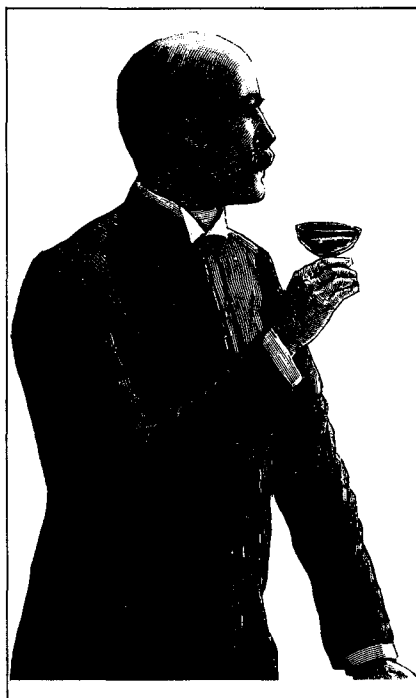
fore Wills.

Wills's theme unifying the assessment of Jefferson's Declaration of Independence and this analysis of *The Federalist* is an argument that the political thought of the American founding is more properly traced to the "common sense" philosophy of the Scottish enlightenment than to the natural-right philosophy of John Locke. *The Federalist* clearly reflects the influence of something beyond John Locke, but that something is not limited to the Scottish enlightenment. Wills ignores the classical roots of American order and has little to say about the Christian influences on American politics. These omissions suggest that Wills does not want to tell a complete story.

Wills would have us believe that the natural-rights philosophy animating the American founding was merely a result of historical circumstances, something that might have been valid in the 18th century, but that human knowledge has transcended, much as science has progressed, in the interim. As Newton's physics has been found inadequate, such historicism would have us believe that the principles of the American founding must be superseded. At base, Wills's project is an effort to undermine the roots of American order.

Garry Wills provides evidence of the manner in which political roots are loosened through distortion and oversight, leading a people to forget the notions of right through which they could govern themselves and to embrace a "might makes right" theory of majority rule. Also called the Stephen Douglas Theory of Majority Rule, this axiom states that one need not care what the majority decides; whatever they want is the politician's duty. Politics, in such an atmosphere, is reduced to the clash of different sides attempting to win office in order to serve their selfish interests. Losing an election becomes a problem because "we won't get ours." In a federated society such as the United States, those who lose at one level have

many other levels of government to achieve their ends. Harry Boyte's *The Backyard Revolution* shows some of the ways in which local groups are organizing and acting to shape policies in their jurisdictions when national



leaders are indifferent or hostile to their causes.

Where Wills attempts to discuss political theory, Harry Boyte has no need for theory. In his universe, theoretical questions are settled along a "left is good, right is bad" axis, and we can proceed in the identification of heroes and villains. Boyte is captivated by a Saul Alinsky-Ralph Nader faith that, if ordinary Americans organize, they will do so for purposes sympathetic to the political left. The movements of concern to Boyte are consumerist-oriented efforts, rent-control teams, local rebuilding concerns where funds are obtained by legal coercion to stop banks from red-lining neighborhoods, fights against insurance and utility companies, and similar struggles that fit into this framework. Boyte asserts that any movement from the political right is animated by an envy of what others are gaining from

the political process, a selfish desire to preserve property instead of helping people, and he alleges that such movements are financed by business-dominated conspiracies. Boyte heaps abuse on those who led the tax revolts; he ignores the right-to-life movement, overlooks efforts to elevate the standards of teaching in public schools, and gives short shrift to other movements currently identified with conservatism. The book relates organizational successes and preaches (to those who can plod through the jargon of academic sociology) that people can accomplish what they want by organizing properly.

The ability of Americans to combine in private voluntary associations was considered by Alexis de Tocqueville to be one of the traits that would make democracy decent among us. Such organizations allow people the sense of controlling some aspects of their lives and train them, on a small scale, for the responsibilities associated with higher positions on a national scale. Association and organization, of course, are tactics that can be used by both the virtuous and the vicious. Publius knew this and contended that the large republic would enable people to contain vicious organizations, localizing them into particular regions and preventing them from working their will with national political machinery. Boyte demonstrates that a good number of such organizations exist at the local level, that the idea of civic involvement in America is still strong and that some people have won their way in such political battles. Others will have to address the question of whether these groups promote the public interest or work "adverse to the rights of other citizens and to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community."

Whether these organizations are a sign of the health or the decline of American society, it is clear that they are inevitably parochial in their concerns, thus unsuited to address large national questions. Boyte's book assumes that local politics is the important

politics, and he evades questions of international conduct. This is to say that the concentration on the local necessarily leaves less time for the national. Boyte's omission of international politics merely indicates that the concerns of the large republic are beyond the span of those who address the concerns of the small republic. If Americans organize for decent purposes, they might sustain the civic virtue that would keep democracy a decent form of government for us. Boyte's groups invariably organize for self-interested reasons, indicating that their concerns are their monetary matters rather than large matters of the permanent and aggregate interests of the community. As such, Boyte's groups are not properly citizens' groups, for they lack the element of common public concern that makes activity truly political. Rather, they are organizations united for specifically private purposes shared by local people, however large the local groups might

of reconciling democracy with human rights.

Walzer is also a committed socialist, and most of the essays compiled for this volume, *Radical Principles*, were originally published in the pages of



*Dissent*, the American socialists' quarterly. He is, however, a socialist with a

"Clearly [*The Backyard Revolution*] is a visionary politics for an age of sophisticated despair."

—*The New Republic*

become. They are a start in the direction of political participation. To become fully political, they must shift their focus to matters of interest common to all citizens.

Michael Walzer is one of the most respected professors peddling political theory in contemporary American universities. Even his most intense critics concede his unfailing civility and his sincerity in conveying the conclusions that he reaches. He claims to be a democrat, that is, one who sees democracy as an ideal for all people at all times. He is unwilling to temper his democratic enthusiasm in these less buoyant times. He is unfailingly committed to the democratic organization of every aspect of civil society, and this precisely is the commitment that blinds him to the central problem of the political philosophy of the American founding: the problem

difference. He concedes the failure of the Soviet experiment with socialist government and hopes that the socialism and the democracy that he advocates can be reconciled.

Democracy is a form of government that makes any discussion of the ends of politics very difficult. Yes, each group of candidates offers a program at each election, but no group is capable of claiming that its solution to any particular problem is definitive for all time. The authors of *The Federalist* understood this very well and did not speak of a grand design for American society within the pages of that book. They were merely establishing a form of government. Future generations of Americans, speaking through their elected representatives, would have to define the direction, and the ends, of the policies of government. By incorporating the right to revolution into the Consti-

tution's amending processes, the American founders secured the permanent right of the people to alter or abolish the forms of government to which they might become accustomed. Whenever the American people become dissatisfied with the long-term budget projections of one administration, they vote another one into office. Rigid projections, even for an ideal future, are difficult as long as the people retain the power to elect people to change the plans.

Socialism arises from the belief that "bourgeois" life is too concerned with people as production functions and insufficiently concerned with the breadth of human interests. In *The German Ideology*, Karl Marx sketched a situation in which the socialist citizen would hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening and play the critic after dinner. The image delights everyone who believes himself stifled by the routine of modern, specialized, mechanical employment.

Socialists before Walzer have noted that few people are sufficiently diverse in their talents that they could be good at any of these activities, let alone the other varieties of possibilities that might occur to some folks. Others have noted the curiously apolitical character of this socialist "ideal." Oscar Wilde commented that the problem with socialism is that it would take too many evenings. Walzer sees this as one of the serious objections to socialism. A more accurate depiction of the socialist's day would involve a meeting of the wildlife concerns in the morning, a meeting of the fish commission in the afternoon, a meeting of the medical board in the evening and the discussion of a play after dinner. Each session would be devoted to some aspect of the public's business, and everyone would be invited. Marx's socialist "ideal" had involved a curiously isolated individual. Walzer reinserts him into political activity and makes politics the dominant part of his life. Not that average people will really get involved on a continuing basis in deciding such matters. Walzer's

socialist ideal treats us as a nation of kibitzers and contends that those who have been making decisions owe the kibitzers a respectful hearing on the occasions that they do not get involved.

Such openness to kibitzing presupposes a future without much accomplishment. With each proposal for action comes another round of debate, another round of studies, a consideration of counterproposals and a new decision, followed by openings for new kibitzers. Walzer's socialism makes no provision for accomplishment after the decision has been reached. In the place of Marx's man in the fields, Walzer has found the future socialist in an eternal faculty meeting.

The most curious feature of this conception of socialism as a continuous kibitz is that the basic premises of socialism are not open for discussion. Socialism originates with a conception of human history as class warfare in which the rich masters are overcome

by the poor slaves in succeeding sequences until finally classes are abolished and a state of material equality is achieved. Walzer adheres rigidly to the idea of equality as a goal of politics and conceives of this equality in material terms. He does not believe that money is an appropriate reward for the expression of diverse talents; pride of success and satisfaction of achievement should suffice. Access to human needs should be distributed equally. The responsibility for defining and meeting those needs is society's rather than the individual's. Thus, the provision of "human needs" (even private ones) becomes a public province. Walzer adheres firmly to this goal. He hopes that it might be reached through democratic procedures, but he never addresses the possibility that it might be reversed through majority rule. He also fails to indicate where he might find enough folks sharing his indifference to wealth as a reward to bring about his first victory.

The political theory of the American founding, of course, moves in precisely the opposite direction. It starts with the premise of human equality, but recognizes that original equality as a rather miserable condition. Achievement requires equal liberty, but the diverse talents of free people do result in material differences. *The Federalist* claimed that the first responsibility of government is to protect the natural rights, that is, diverse and unequal talents for acquiring property, of different people. Different people will find their reward in different kinds of property—some in their religion, some in their status as prestigious professors, most people, most commonly, in the store of riches that they are able to attain. The only equality required by democracy is the equality expressed when each citizen has the opportunity to cast one vote on election day. The equality required if a democracy is to secure natural rights must leave to each citizen the opportunity to achieve as much inequality in wealth and status as he can, allowing us to honor those occupations that we find

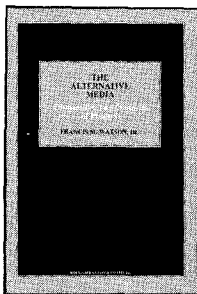
worthy and to overlook, or suppress, those that degrade the character of democratic citizens.

No government can safely remain indifferent to the opinions formed among its citizens. Garry Wills is right in observing that the authors of *The Federalist* recognized this and assumed that the democratic form of government required a decent people. Publius, however, wrote to a people who were in close contact with the roots of liberty and who understood the need to nurture those roots in succeeding generations. These three tomes record our distance from those roots.

Securing the American experiment in liberty requires an understanding of the relationship between the principles of liberty and the form of government that we have, between the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. *The Federalist* provides that understanding better than any other single book. Each of these volumes, in its own way, falsifies that understanding. Boyte simply assumes the virtue of those who are active in causes that he likes; he proceeds on the assumption that democracy can be decent if it degenerates into rule by people pursuing policies that work to their personal benefit, with no moderation for the concerns of the entire society. Walzer understands that he is arguing against the American experiment with liberty, but he believes that the equality that he espouses is preferable to liberty. Wills also understands that he is arguing against the political argument of the American founding, but he is clever enough to know that he must disguise his argument to render it palatable. Americans simply will not buy an overt denunciation of their heritage. These volumes provide eloquent testimony to their authors' ingenuity at wrapping the message in different book jackets. The political question of the coming generation is whether the American people have retained the character to rise above these falsifications of their heritage. □

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## Counterfeiting Scholarship & Idealism

William Appleman Williams: *Empire as a Way of Life*; Oxford University Press; New York.

by Charles R. Kesler

Last August *The Nation* devoted a special issue to William Appleman Williams's "astonishing analysis" of the course of American imperialism. The issue was distributed to delegates to the Democratic National Convention as a "history lesson" proving that both "internal reconstruction" and a "democratic" foreign policy require Americans to "come to terms with our life as an empire." With this essay, now published in expanded form as *Empire as a Way of Life*, Williams has done this nation a valuable service—even for those of us who do not read *The Nation* regularly: he shows historical revisionism stripped of its scholarly apparatus, though not of its scholarly pretensions, and standing forth proudly as the continuation of radical or new-left politics by other means.

As with all expressions of political radicalism, *Empire* consists of two vastly disproportionate parts: a tortured and voluminous critique of the American past and present ("empire") and a vague and exiguous promise of a radically new American future ("community"). According to Williams, American history has so far been defined by the question, "How does one use the evil of empire to sustain, extend, and guarantee the good of freedom, prosperity and security?" To demonstrate this continuing tradeoff, Williams, the so-called "dean" of revisionist historians, has to revise and otherwise distort a great deal of history; but he eases the burden by coolly eliminating all footnotes and bibliographical information so that it is virtually impossible to check the source

of his evidence and the context of his quotations. Although I give him credit for trying to wipe off his fingerprints, his counterfeiting does not go undetected. Witness, for example, some of the factual errors contained in the book: that the Chinese have never had an empire; that John Quincy Adams introduced "amendments to the Constitution to legitimize secession"; that Lincoln addressed the Young Men's Christian Association in the 1830's (the Y.M.C.A., according to Carl Degler, did not exist in the U.S. until 1851). It must, besides, be a strange kind of "empire" that makes newly acquired territories into states and admits them to the Union on equal terms with the older states, guaranteeing to each a republican form of government.

As a psychopathology of the American way of life, *Empire* culminates in false and increasingly bizarre indictments of the United States for provoking the Second World War, the Cuban missile crisis and the taking of our hostages in Iran. As for the Soviets, Williams holds that we have nothing to fear from them, for even if the Soviet Union were to replace us as "the superior imperial power," we "do not stand to lose much by that" since "a rational conception of American security . . . does not depend upon the kind of global superiority" that we have enjoyed from 1945 until recently. Apparently we do not stand to lose much because American imperialism is fundamentally the same as Soviet imperialism, which suggests that America is fundamentally the same as the Soviet Union. It seems that *Empire as a Way of Life* could just as well have been written about the Soviet

Union—though as it stands it could very well have been written *in* the Soviet Union.

But what if America were, or had been, an imperial power? Is there no difference between an "empire for liberty" (Jefferson's phrase) and an empire for tyranny? Why is empire per se an evil? Williams gives no clear answer to this simple question, except to suggest that the assertion of rule or "power" by one independent people over another, or even by one "unit of population" over another, is somehow wrong. But how does a population become a "people," and what entitles a people to independence? Here he might have resorted, as American statesmen have for two hundred years, to the Declaration of Independence as an authoritative guide to the principles of free government. Instead he adverts to the Declaration, at points scattered throughout the book, as a Machiavellian charter justifying a single act of anti-imperialism for the sake of a thousand acts of future imperialism; proclaiming the American Revolution in order to silence all future revolutions; dismantling the British Empire in order to build the American one.

In fact neither part of his accusation is true. The Declaration is not an anti-colonial or anti-imperial manifesto, but neither is it the ideological expression of America's secret ambitions. The Declaration states simply that one people has decided "to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another," bands which in better times it had consented to maintain. There is no claim of an automatic right for colo-



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Mr. Kesler is a graduate student at Harvard.