

COMMENDABLES

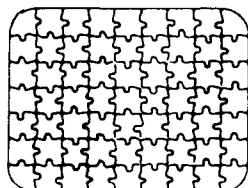
A Dangerous Classic

Richard M. Weaver: *Ideas Have Consequences*; University of Chicago; Chicago and London.

Richard Weaver was among the rarest of rare birds: an American political philosopher. His intellectual roots reach back through the Nashville Agrarians (Donald Davidson, especially) to Calhoun and ultimately to Thomas and Aristotle. A professed enemy of the Whig Liberal tradition, Weaver saw the virtues of social hierarchy, chivalry, and authority in an era when such notions had become museum relics everywhere outside of places like his hometown, Weaverville, North Carolina. Almost single-handedly, Weaver took up the defense of the per-

manent things in postwar America and held on to a religious vision of society that was so old-fashioned it had come to seem an innovation.

The University of Chicago Press is to be commended for reissuing *Ideas Have Consequences*—Weaver's most profound and influential work. It is above all a dangerous book, hazardous to the complacency of all the Marxists and libertarians who wish to reduce the whole of life to market forces. Weaver, if he were writing today, would be hard pressed to find a publisher. □



Ideological Body Count

Timothy J. Lomperis: *The War Everyone Lost—And Won: America's Intervention in Viet Nam's Twin Struggles*; Louisiana State University Press; Baton Rouge.

Ideas are among the casualties in any war. The Mikado's divinity, for instance, perished along with thousands of sailors and soldiers in the South Pacific. And if the concept of state's rights did not die at Gettysburg and Antietam, it was at least seriously wounded. Now that America has belatedly—and insufficiently—honored those who perished on her behalf in Vietnam, the time is ripe for assessing what ideas met

their demise in that conflict.

The belief is common in the Western intelligentsia that in Vietnam the communist theory of "people's war" of national liberation utterly vanquished the American theory of containment. It is true that when the smoke had settled North Vietnamese tanks were in possession of Saigon and the Americans were nowhere to be seen. However, precisely because North Vietnamese armor and not pajama-clad Viet Cong were finally responsible for the defeat of South Vietnam, we have reason to suspect that somewhere along the line the "people's war" fell apart. Indeed,

in *The War Everyone Lost—And Won*, Timothy J. Lomperis convincingly demonstrates that as ill-conceived as it was in many respects, the American intervention did succeed in utterly demolishing the communist formula for victory with legitimacy. Communist efforts to maintain even the semblance of an indigenous guerrilla movement in the south were faltering by 1967. After the decisive American and South Vietnamese victory in Tet, the war became almost entirely a conventional war of North Vietnamese aggression. But largely because the media misrepresented Tet as a communist triumph, Congress subsequently withdrew almost all American aid for a South Vietnamese government that probably required no more than matériel and air support to hold off an invasion.

"The United States," observes Lomperis, "... won a war it thought it lost, and lost by default what it could have won."

Yet even with the advantage of historical hindsight, many Western intellectuals are, as Professor Lomperis notes, strangely myopic in drawing their lessons from the Vietnam experience. They respond to every American attempt to check communist aggression in Africa or Central America with dire warnings about "another Vietnam." To them, the people's war theory is still alive, its potency forever proved in the jungles of Indochina. Since this beloved theory has actually been a corpse for at least 15 years, those who persist in dragging it out so often should not be offended if we now plug our noses. (BC) □

Fighting the Media Moguls

Reed Irvine: *Media Mischief and Misdeeds*; Regnery Gateway; Chicago.

Ignorance may not be bliss but it is preferable to misinformation. This was understood by the millions of Americans who cheered when President Reagan refused to allow journalists into Grenada. Their experience with the media over the past two decades had convinced them that a news blackout was better than broadcasts and wire stories twisted by a reportorial animus against patriotic impulses as well as against the military and conservative administrations. But as superior as silence is to distortion, neither is as satisfactory as in-depth knowledge. Reed Irvine, chairman of Accuracy in Media, has spent the last 15 years providing such knowledge through an unusual sort of investigative reporting. What Mr. Irvine chiefly investigates is reporters them-

selves, ferreting out the dirty little secrets that newspaper readers and television viewers really do have a right to know. *Media Mischief and Misdeeds* is a collection of the 1983 newspaper columns in which he repeatedly catches the media violating its own professed standards of fairness and objectivity by truncating, obscuring, and falsifying everything that

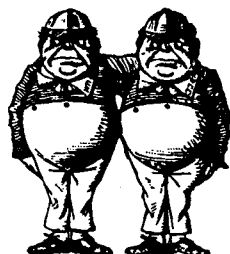


does not fit their biases. If all anchormen, columnists, and correspondents were as clear-sighted as Mr. Irvine, we could only rejoice to see them sent to Grenada—or Washington. □

Of Puerile Pedagogy

Richard H. Powers: *The Dilemma of Education in a Democracy*; Regnery Gateway; Chicago.

In a universal referendum, the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which predicts the universe's eventual dissolution, would not win approval. But few people are qualified to evaluate the laws of physics. Science cannot proceed on the democratic principle of one man, one vote. The 19th-century promoters of public education argued eloquently that democracy needed educated voters. What they left unsaid was that academic principles must themselves remain beyond the reach of the public will. Richard H. Powers demonstrates that the triumph of democracy over scholarship has made American public education an expensive fiction. The Second Law of Thermodynamics may



not have been put to a vote, but along with all other concepts likely to expose the inherent inequality among students, it has been expunged from the curriculum. Professor Powers offers few original insights in his argument that egalitarianism has destroyed the nation's schools, but his sanity and candor make his analysis worthwhile. His book did deserve an index and more careful proofreading from the publisher—although most recent high school graduates will never notice the errors. □

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