

bet she was one-dimensional.

At the trial in which I participated, the defense was more polished and much better paid than the prosecution, and it was a challenge matching wits with him. I did it, incidentally, in part to match wits, to have that experi-

ence, and because no one from Social Sciences would do it, though it was to them that the County Prosecutor, one of their graduates, originally appealed. They *did* agree to see the flicks, requisite to qualifying to testify one way or another. They all declined to witness,

though, in general, on grounds that if "that's what people want to pay their money for. . . ." All of them were liberals. It was fun to see them for once favor the Marketplace. cc

The Costs of Culture by M.E. Bradford

"The choice of a point of view is the initial act of culture."

—Ortega y Gasset

Stephen Miller: *Excellence & Equity: The National Endowment for the Humanities*; University Press of Kentucky; Lexington.

A Report to the Congress of the United States on the State of the Humanities; The American Council of Learned Societies; New York.

Because I have spoken sharply to the general question of Federal support for arts and letters, and because my name is connected with certain facets of the public business, I receive through the mails a mass of publications designed to justify past or projected government funding for cultural activities. Some of these enterprises come under the heading of international relations or educational exchanges and are administered by the United States Information Agency. Others are within the Department of Education, such as language programs and area studies. And there are many more—within the Library of Congress, the Archives, the Smithsonian Institution, the great museums, and elsewhere. They all have industrious and eloquent defenders. But with respect to politics and the intellectual atmosphere in these United States, the most important of these writings concern the National Endowment for the Humanities—that now-20-year-old

agency of the government brought into being to foster humane letters and the distribution of such learning or wisdom as proceeds from reflection or research in those fields that make up what we conventionally call "the humanities": in such studies as are occupied with men and manners, language, persuasion, conceptual truth, aesthetics, the formation of character, and historical explanation.

Generally speaking, the promotional literature I see minimizes the history of whatever has been tendentious or merely partisan in the administration of this agency's now more than \$140 million budget and emphasizes instead the utility and potential of the Endowment as a civilizing instrument operating within an area of the nation's intellectual life that is still more than 90 percent dependent on private resources. In the pages of this literature there is much "uplift," puff, and burble, all of it officially oblivious to the fact that no public body can be expected to agree on what constitutes appropriate support for the humanities. But sometimes (and more wisely) these apologies and appeals speak not of fond hope but of the political problems surrounding NEH in its relation to the Congress and the groups which make up its constituency, the conflicts between such powers and the difficulty of satisfying them all. It is these documents which interest me, for they raise questions about the character of a regime which has such difficulty in calculating the costs of a commitment to culture and in determining the essential nature of the humanities as it relates to unavoidably political considerations.

Two works in this last category, which I have examined recently, are the 1985 *A Report to the Congress of the United States on the State of the Humanities*, issued by The American Council of Learned Societies, and Stephen Miller's *Excellence & Equity: The National Endowment for the Humanities*, a monograph of institutional history and functional analysis prepared with the support of the Twentieth Century Fund.

The ACLS *Report* offers a way into the narrative, which Miller provides, and a justification for the caution of his suggestions for reforming NEH. The purpose of the ACLS statement is to encourage reauthorization of the Endowment and to control what sustained funding will mean for the member organizations which make up the Council: to get their view of NEH written into law by a Congress thus far reluctant to be specific with its instructions. Appearing in its several chapters, each of which represents a particular learned society, is also much talk about depoliticizing the Endowment—*sententiae* contra the Reagan regime provided by such "nonpartisan" authorities as are prepared to impose their own version of political activism upon it through the use of academic "experts"; *sententiae* presupposing (in the face of the last two Presidential elections) some version of Rousseau's obnoxious doctrine of the "General Will"—what we would want NEH to be if we understood matters so well as the savants for whom ACLS has spoken.

A sample of this collective presumption appears in the chapter speaking for the Modern Language Association of America: "The NEH should maintain and if possible expand all of its programs." Elsewhere in the *Report*, the American Studies Association complains of NEH's retreat from "a sense of social purpose and idealism" toward support for the "more conven-

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tional, least controversial kinds of scholarly research." We can very well imagine what kind of work, as opposed to the "conventional," that "social purpose and idealism" might engender. Yet we should not be surprised by such blatant mendacity and open arrogance. Instead, having converted the interests of learning into just another lobby, we should react in astonishment only when some scholarly organizations refuse to "play ball" and argue to the contrary (as did this year the Renaissance Society of America) that "the NEH should continue to avoid investing its resources in projects and activities that claim to belong to the humanities because of popular confusion or interested distortion but which in fact belong to the arts, to the social sciences, or to social and political activities."

Such, of course, are the implications of Miller's history and analysis but—because he is a Washington "insider," a career public servant and unaware of the meaning of elections—not the points that he makes. Even so, his book is indispensable as an introduction to its subject and as an account of the 1965 rhetorical origins of NEH.

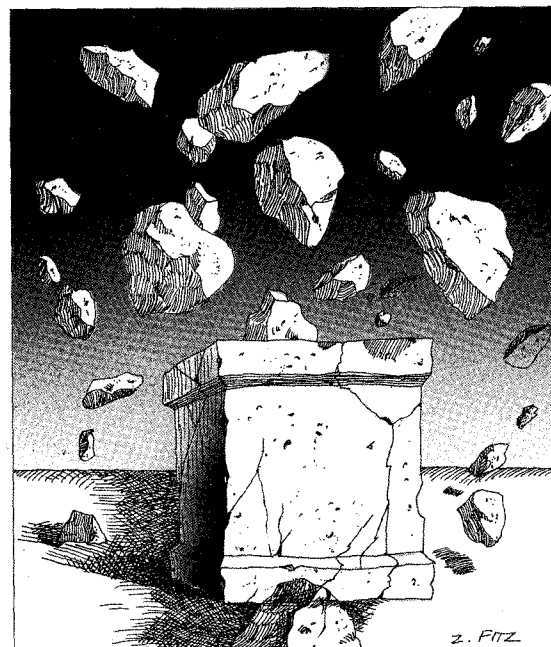
As I have argued elsewhere, it is very important that the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts not become a "ministry of culture" in the European sense. For if they had such power, they would soon face a considerable pressure to create and enforce a *national* cultural policy. Literary scholars hear already about an "official" revision of the literary canon in a more "pluralist" direction and historians of a history curriculum free of "bias" toward Western values. However, for the moment, the danger of modernist cultural totalitarianism has abated. Miller suggests moving all NEH activities connected with "cultural dissemination" into a new and expanded version of NEA and insulating from White House influence the process by which the NEH chairman is selected. This, he argues, might end the suspicion of partisanship which hangs like a "cloud" over the agency and the old debate of elitism v. populism among the friends and critics of the Endowment. To which we respond, "Not unless the absolutely po-

litical character of the American academy is radically and mysteriously transformed."

To be sure, NEH programs of obvious topicality and partisan inspiration—the sort of activities sanctioned by Jimmy Carter's cultural czar, Dr. Joe Duffy, at his worst—should be (and have been) discontinued: grants to unions, to protest and special interest groups—to women *because* they were women and to minorities *because* of their race or preference in language. But to take away appointive control of NEH from the President of the United States would be merely to turn that organization over to management by the left on a more regular and restrictive basis. Even the administrators chosen by some ostensibly nonpartisan body would emphasize credentials in selecting chairmen to govern the agency; and conservatives would, by definition (having been out of power for 50 years), lack the credentials; which is what anyone who has worked since 1981 in the branches of government concerned with cultural affairs could predict without hesitation.

In *Excellence & Equity* we read that the authors of the March 11, 1965, "Act to create a National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities" argued for their legislation that it was needed to correct an imbalance in the nation's intellectual life brought on by the Federal power's "limiting preoccupation with science." The bill, in other words, avoided a direct appeal to a theory of cultural Federalism, a doctrine of the essential obligations of government to foster arts and letters, and spoke instead of circumstantial reasons for at least "some" Federal funding of high culture and humane learning, a modest foil to the National Science Foundation.

Even the most intemperate advocates of cultural spending are reluctant to suggest that a major attempt to revise the standing prologue to this original authorizing bill, a new "Declaration of Purpose," be attempted in conjunction with the necessary legislative recommitment to NEH. They are well advised to be careful in tampering with language which both satisfies the Congress and leaves the Endowment free to function *primarily* as a nucleus around which a pattern of private support has gathered—to be, despite con-



fused efforts at leveraging upward levels of public taste and sensibility, most of what it should be, or all that it can be, given the nature of the regime. For larger ambitions would lead not to the fulfillment of NEH's highest potential for service to arts and letters, but rather, following protracted political debate, to its destruction.

Our political guardians, despite their myopic inability to recognize that the cultural Endowments *should* serve the general population *by serving culture per se*—that they should expect representatives of the party in power to follow that order of priorities in administering an agency and to win political credit through stewardship of a common good—are not (contra Miller) mistaken in their refusal to imitate the French or British pattern of government support for cultural activities. On questions of taste and value, as on questions concerning the *telos* or purpose of our political order, Americans have never been a people well agreed—homogenous underneath the wide variety of our cultural disputing, as are the intellectual *aristoi* of those older societies. Hence, we will not tolerate artificial instruments for encouraging or pretending to such unity where it has not occurred; nor, in my opinion, should we. Though it serves a purpose, especially in promoting study of the American things, we have in place all of the National Endowment for the Humanities that we can abide. cc

All Gone in Search of America

(continued from page 5)

schools and colleges, and workers, managers, or owners at a place of business. If (as the song goes) we've "all gone to look for America," we should be looking in homes, churches, and town halls instead of writing propaganda about an abstract country that has never existed and, *deo volente*, never will.

What does that mean, in practical terms? For one thing, it means taking a second look at our history and recovering a sense of reverence for the myths and heroes that bind us together in a nation. It means recognizing that there is a core of America that is thoroughly British—language, literature, values—that we cannot give up without giving up ourselves. It is the one heart for which there is no transplant possible. But there is also another layer—a sort of common European inheritance through which we have broadened and reinterpreted the original identity and further—a general sense in which we are heirs of that Western civilization handed to us by Greeks and Romans. Beyond this point, even with all the goodwill in the world, it is difficult to go. Refugees from other civilizations—Asian, Aztec, African—will either learn to become naturalized Westerners or condemn themselves to remaining alien bodies in the American bloodstream.

This brings us back to the English Language Amendment. In one sense, the amendment is only the latest effort to impose a standard identity. However, it is not entirely unjustified. It has been government—state and Federal—which has attempted to impose bilingualism and biculturalism on the entire United States. In principle, Latin American immigrants are no different from any others. However, our long and virtually open border with Mexico has meant an influx of illegal immigrants in such vast numbers that they threaten to overwhelm the residual American culture of the Southwest.

It is not the numbers alone that create a danger. Latin

Americans are the first immigrant people who can go home at any time to renew their ties with the old country. What is worse, the history of bad feelings between gringos and "Hispanics" goes back at least to the Alamo and the Mexican War. If something is not done to close the border and maintain the preeminence of English in the Southwest, there is a perfect scenario for a massive Hispanic irredentist movement, which would see Mexico—not the U.S.—as the Fatherland.

But a sense of national unity will depend on more than the English language—or, for that matter, hamburger chains, TV shows, and pride in Pete Rose. The hardest part is religion. What unity can there be among Catholics and Protestants, Mormons and Buddhists, Jews and Moslems, believers and atheists? It is small wonder that many Americans have fallen back on the idea of a secular consensus. But driving religion out of the public schools and town squares will accomplish nothing, except the further deterioration of the national identity. No society has ever held together out of mere self-interest or the agreement to disagree.

The great religious struggles of the past were not so much about doctrine as they were about nationality. Could a Christian be a good Roman? Could a Catholic be an Englishman, a Protestant a Frenchman? The quarrels within Christendom may seem silly from a distance, but both the persecutors and persecuted recognized something we might like to forget: that human beings define their communities in reference to a power that lies beyond their experience.

It is not just the ancient children of Israel or the Athenians (Athena's people). Even an atheist acquainted with the tenacity of modern Israelis or the stability of the Mormon church will concede some truth to T.S. Eliot's declaration that there is "no community not lived in praise of God." But how are we to praise Him—in what tongue, with what formula? Ecumenical leaders might content themselves with Aeschylus' invocation:

Zeus, whosoever he is; if by this name he likes to be called. . . .

But a generalized civil religion is almost worse than institutionalized "humanism."

Historically, we have considered ourselves a Christian people. Even our "deists" and skeptics—like Jefferson and Lincoln—have inevitably expressed their deepest convictions in a Christian language. It is still possible—and desirable—for us to recover a sense of that "mere Christianity" that we experienced at school and on public occasions. Many Jews and Moslems are uncomfortable with the idea of a Christian nation, but what is the alternative? As Irving Kristol has pointed out so forcefully, the great persecutors of Jews in this century have not been Christians, but quite the opposite. When a formerly religious people turns away from their God and creates a total and transcendent state, it is then they set out to destroy all vestiges of an alien faith as impediments to unity. If the United States ever does turn to persecution, it will be because its people have abandoned their religion and, like the Communists and Nazis, have made an idol out of the state.

—Thomas Fleming

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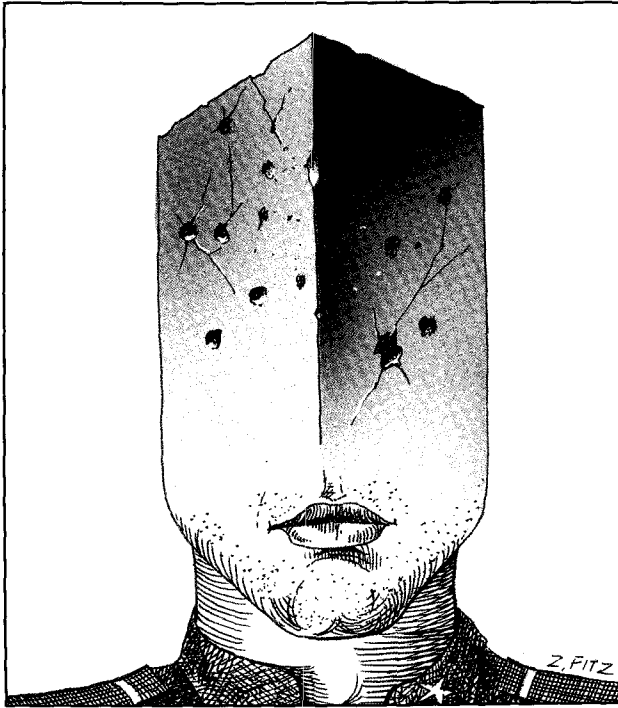
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STILL IN SAIGON—IN MY MIND

by E. Christian Kopff

"The earth outside is covered with snow and I am covered with sweat. My younger brother calls me a killer and my daddy calls me a vet." So the Vietnam veteran appears in a popular song recorded a few years back by Charlie Daniels (written by Dan Daley). The Vietnam War is over, but the matter is not settled in my mind, and more importantly, in the imagination of the American people. Officially, the consensus on the war is nearly complete. "Everybody knows or else should know" what editorial writers and college professors tell their more or less captive audiences: the evil of the war, the careless blundering of the



Washington technocratic elite, the glorious victory of the Vietnamese people as the justice of their cause was presented on television to the American people. Yet in the rag and bone shop of the heart that provides the themes for popular art and entertainment, questions echo and re-echo that editorial writers do not address: How could such a strong and wealthy nation lose a war to a small and weak one? What happened to us in those days? What happened to our soldiers, the ones who hurried back and the POW's

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who came later and the MIA's who never came back?

The Received Version of the War is a *Märchen*, Jack the Giant Killer or David and Goliath, with the pleasingly simple folkloristic motifs of brave young warrior defeating his bulky, conceited, but vulnerable foe. In this case the giant's fall not only restores the promised land to the people, it is one of many steps on the way to the establishment of the true Messianic kingdom over the entire earth. Despite its folkloristic roots, no popular art has been built on the foundation. This is a fairy tale published in editorial pages and college poli. sci. courses and on Public Television.

Whittaker Chambers was able to discern little sense of tragedy in the American people. As a criticism of the intellectuals among whom he spent his younger days, the insight hits the mark. If the state was a tree for the Romantic poet, for the 20th century intellectual history is a train, subject to delays and strange detours, no doubt, but moving steadily towards one far-off secular event. In this inevitable, mechanical progress, there may be backsliders and there will be martyrs, those who die for the cause. But the rightness of the cause and the inevitability of its triumphs are assured.

The American people live in a different sort of fairy tale—the world of Vergil's Aeneas. Aeneas loves his home, Troy, and fights to prevent its fall to the brilliant and tricky and ruthless. He moves into the future and Italy, losing wife and home, to win a new home for his people where, at least for a little while, they can be safe to build and grow again, until they must once more defend themselves against violence and trickery in themselves and from the outside. He can never console himself that the losses are not real losses but so many Lenin-esque eggs broken for the glorious omelette of the future. *Italiam non sponte sequor*. I am not going to Italy because I want to, he tells Dido. The deaths of brave young men represent real and irreparable gaps in the new state Aeneas is founding.

The modern intellectual is, like Hazlitt's Iago, a tragic poet in real life, who cannot feel the desolation in the departure of each individual sacrificed for a future that is and must remain an abstraction. America's commitment to Protestantism and individualism has many negative sides, but it does make loss and sacrifice real. Whether he knows it or not, the typical American has had his mind formed on the hero who feels the loss and yet goes on to create. He is Aeneas, and he stands opposed to the martyr of the inevitable future, Ché Guevara, say, or Martin Luther King.

Around Vietnam the American popular imagination has played with themes that involve real loss and real sacrifice. It began early. At the height of the war, John Wayne