

Custer, at the Grand Review of victorious Union armies, mastered a runaway horse. Dubbing this critter a “surrogate for the man’s animal self,” Slotkin suggests that “Thus brought again under strict discipline by the rider (the intellectual being), the presence of the hero reveals itself.” But then, only Slotkin would assume that in a magazine article by Custer he “solicits the aid of Delaware Indian scouts (Cooper’s favorite tribe)” in keeping with a Leatherstocking-like self-image.

Custer was, of course, ambitious. But Slotkin imagines a hero *always* the opportunist, facade always “on.” Cold-blooded calculation is insisted upon even in stating (wrongly) that the Custers were “childless by choice,” or that Custer endorsed Negro suffrage before a Congressional committee while privately condemning it, though his actual testimony records no such endorsement. The reduction of a complex man to a two-legged calculating machine climaxes in denying Custer ability to reveal his true feelings (if any) even in writing to his own wife about Indians raping a little girl. Slotkin concludes: “This is of course the archetypal *raison d’être* of the Indian war, and Custer responds appropriately: ‘Woe to them if I overtake them.’” A more levelheaded writer might assume that the fiery Custer desired retribution.

While fair-mindedly terming Custer one of our Army’s best Indian fighters, discounting silly stories of alleged presidential ambitions, and exploding his buffoonish modern image (the Montana disaster “retroactively discredits his professionalism”), Slotkin repeats several hoary fables. He writes of Custer’s supposed cohabitation with a female Cheyenne captive. (It would be interesting to find out whether similar liaisons of Seventh Cavalry officers with Cheyenne women involved coercion, as Slotkin believes, or simple sexual collaboration with the white enemy.) Higher standards of evidence might also have benefited his interesting thoughts on Custer’s “hunger for cash” and “rather flexible” Gilded Age business ethics. He even tries to establish Custer as the railways’ tool, partly by charging him with plagiarism from a Northern Pacific propaganda brochure—though the two paragraphs he quotes have virtually nothing in common.

In the book’s final section, “The Last Stand as Ideological Object, 1876-1900,” Slotkin credits the newsmen of Custer’s day with some awareness that the Little Big Horn “would become a ‘legend,’” because in writing about it they used “the full range of legendary references and metaphors, from the Trojan War to Horatius at the Bridge, to the Alamo and the Charge of the Light Brigade.” (Considering the inability of modern electronic reporters to come up with anything deeper than the usual “It was like something out of a spy movie,” Slotkin’s misconceptions are explicable, if not pardonable.) The Last Stand, though an ill-wrought fable in an age of rapid but irregular communications, became an “exercise in applied mythology” for a generation painfully aware of the final death of the Frontier. Custer became cast as civilization’s martyr, while his foes achieved status as mythic savages. The Indians’ stunning success actually inspired demands for “extermination”—though, as the author observes early on, the more such rhetoric was broadcast, the less killing seemed to get done. Of course, the Custer “legend” is capable of assuming many shapes, and we may doubt not only the author’s assertion that the “Boy General” had achieved “mythic” status even *prior* to his death but also the importance assigned to Custer as an element of scholars’ race-war myth.

Aware that his “Myth of the Frontier” is but part of the mythic West, Slotkin ignores certain well-known legends (such as those of outlaw-heroes or lawmen) as well as many familiar modern fantasies (though his *Gunfighter Nation* promises to carry his trilogy’s “myth” into our own era). Instead, he provides neglected information and a fascinating thesis which may permanently alter, or at least stimulate, the reader’s thinking on Westward expansion. Yet an academic sterility hangs over it—a coldness that does little justice to frontier, frontiersmen, or even Eastern stay-at-homes. The West, and America itself, seem barren places, and we are left, intentionally or not, with crass racialism, greed, paternalism, and “contradictions.” It is hard to help feeling there was more—if only that hard-bitten love of individual liberty we associate with the Frontier.

Or that sense of opportunity, however exaggerated, that moved Irish-born Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Myles Keogh, destined to die with Custer, to write that in America—that “queer country” where “impudence and presumption” carried great weight and “a certain lack of sensitiveness” was vital to success—“you are judged only by your merits as a man.” It was no Eastern journalist but a simple cowboy who, asked by an English visitor whether his “master” was at home, summed up the Frontier philosophy by remarking: “The son of a bitch hasn’t been born yet.”

Pseudo-History of Events

by John C. Chalberg

Hold On, Mr. President by Sam Donaldson, New York: Random House; \$17.95.

Horace Greeley may have had it right for his 19th-century compatriots, but the proper direction for the ambitious voyagers of this century has too often been eastward. Just ask New Mexico’s own Samuel Andrew Donaldson.

No one asked her, but Chloe Hampson Donaldson thinks she knows why her son strayed from the straight and narrow path: “Sam was always an obedient child until he went back east.”

Politicians make the trek, and budding journalists have similar experiences. Happiness was not to be Sam Donaldson’s until he had retreated within the beltway before there was a beltway to hunker down within. There, still wet behind the earphones, he went to work for a Washington television station in 1961; and there, still a loyal Westerner, he cast a vote for Barry Goldwater in 1964.

Three years was apparently not enough for Washington to work its magic on a fledgling newsmen who barely eight years earlier had organized the Young Republicans of El Paso and welcomed a campaigning Richard Nixon to west Texas. However, a quarter of a century of the Washington high life has turned Chloe Donalds-

on's "obedient child" into an institution, obedient only to deadlines and his network bosses.

What happened? Twenty of his Washington years Mrs. Donaldson's second son spent in the employ of ABC News, 10 under the direction of Boone Arledge, erstwhile boy wonder of televised sport. The result? Sam Donaldson, unknown neophyte, has been transformed into Sam Donaldson, veteran celebrity. Hence this book.

We Americans pride ourselves on either the absence of an American class system or in its fluidity. In truth, in America there are two classes: celebrities and all the rest of us. Andy Warhol notwithstanding, 15 minutes in the limelight doesn't really count. Twenty years among the stars does. It also destroys.

We Americans also pride ourselves on our treasured personal freedom. In truth, in America there are the free and the unfree—not only are the celebrities denied the all-American pleasure of bellying up to an all-American bar, in full assurance of their all-American anonymity, but they are also doomed to act out whatever role their public has assigned to them.

The producers of *This Week With David Brinkley* understand typecasting. So does Sam: "David Brinkley is the leader. George Will is the intellectual. I am the district attorney. . . . Because of David, no one leaves offended. Because of George, no one gets away with delivering fuzzy arguments. Because of me, no one gets a free ride."

Everyone has a role to play, and the play must go on. Is the ordinary Washington pol genuinely terrified of an assault in the form of a Donaldson-held microphone thrust before him? Sam would have us believe so, but the nature of his business makes it doubtful. Any public figure worth at least a dash of salt is not shaking at the sight of Sam Donaldson. They know the value of free TV exposure, and they know that a game is being played. One wonders if Sam does.

Ronald Reagan, the actor, was often the victim of typecasting. But Sam Donaldson, ill-mannered reporter and TV star, is just as typecast and just as much an actor as President Reagan was—or is. The only difference may

be that Donaldson has the less firm grip on the reality of his (non-Hollywood) lot—perhaps the shout ought to be "hold on, Mr. Donaldson, hold on."

About the time Sam Donaldson came to Washington, Daniel Boorstin wrote *The Image* (subtitled "a guide to pseudo-events in America"). "Pseudo-events" are called into being by the media; they have no independent reality. News, according to Boorstin, was not being reported on such shows; it was being created.

Donaldson gives no hint of any awareness of Boorstin's insight. He simply asserts what to him is both obvious and commendable: *This Week With David Brinkley* is a success precisely because it is a newsmaker. A month after the program debuted, its reputation was "established" when Muammar Qaddafi was given air time to deny that a Libyan hit squad was headed for Washington and label President Reagan a liar. The result was a "banner headline" in the *Washington Post*. What more could a Sam Donaldson ask for?

A few years later an appearance by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos produced what Donaldson can only describe as a "remarkable moment." Daniel Boorstin might agree but would be deeply troubled by what actually transpired. In response to a George Will query regarding the possibility of advancing the scheduled date for Filipino elections, Marcos instantly called a "snap election."

A pseudo-event (the Brinkley show) called into being a historical event—was the result hard news or manufactured news? And what of Marcos' role? Did he act on impulse? Did he

use the panel—or did the panel use him? Should the media applaud themselves for becoming not only part of newsmaking but also part of the newsworthy result? None of these questions seem to trouble Mr. Donaldson.

Those who do have questions of Mr. Donaldson will be much disappointed as they whip through the froth of his memoir. Why did a young Sam Donaldson decide to become a television reporter in the first place? What qualifications, aside from sheer ambition, did he bring to his chosen field? How has television news, not to mention Sam Donaldson, matured—or at least changed—over the past quarter century? Is Donaldson himself an Exhibit A for those who believe that life as a network talking head draws one both eastward and leftward? Do celebrityhood and television subtly, but inevitably, corrupt the process of news gathering and news dissemination?

Such questions are neither asked nor answered. Television, already intruding into living rooms and bedrooms, may play an intrusive role in policymaking itself. TV reporters are free to barge into the private lives of public figures. But Sam Donaldson, the television journalist, apparently refused to intrude upon the recesses of his own mind when he sat before his word processor.

Donaldson can never be accused of engaging in "happy talk" on the evening news. But he forgets that "nasty talk" can be just as superficial. With him as memoirist, what we have seen and heard is apparently all we are ever going to get.

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TWL5



Letter From Philadelphia

by James L. Sauer

Swan Song

"Did you hear what happened to the swan?"

Tucked away in the residential area along suburban Philadelphia's main line lies the idyllic campus of Eastern College. For the last four years this Christian academic institution has sponsored the Evangelical Roundtable: an attempt to find definition in the ideologically shattered realms of Evangelical-land. "The Roundtable," says the promotional material, "is designed as a forum for key evangelical leaders." I'm not sure whether that means that the key Evangelical leaders were the peons in the audience or the fellows they have speaking. I think both. So I guess that makes me one of those who, as the publicity sheet goes on to say, "command a special presence in their respective communities." I know that after the conference I received much more respect at the breakfast table.

The first years in which the round table was held touched on the issues of the Arab-Israel conflict, the success of Evangelicalism, and the Latin American problem. This year's conference was on the sanctity of life, a topic which one hopes might provide the basis for unity among Christians against the 20th century's assault on human dignity. Certainly, one would think, Christians could agree that little babies shouldn't be turned into pâté. But hope against hope.

Unfortunately, the conference displayed the "historical contradictions" now ripping Evangelicalism apart. Unlike the charismatic media-magnates who are destroying Christian witness through their power-perversed addiction to wealth, fame, and unrepentant

sin, the Evangelicals are fighting through an identity crisis between their traditionalist catholic, call it Puritan, wing and their mystical, millennialist "immanentizers of the Eschaton." Having no ecumenical Office for the Repression of Nasty Heresies, Evangelicals have come to tolerate such a variety of weird birds in their nests that they can't tell a dove from a pig with wings.

Yet it was quite a wingding, and a good time was had by all during the three-day conference. Ted Engstrom, soon to retire as president of World Vision, was a conference M.C., cracking amiable jokes which won him the "Johnny Carson of Evangelicalism" appellation. R.C. Sproul, an orthodox Presbyterian and scratch golfer, "the Jack Nicklaus of Evangelicalism," gave after-breakfast devotions. In fact, there were representatives present from every portion of Christ's spiritual body, Evangelical Division: Ron Sider, a liberal seamless garment pro-lifer; Kay Cole James, a super articulate public affairs director from the National Right to Life Committee; John H. Yoder, a clear spoken but humorless pacifist; Harold O.J. Brown, a fuzzy spoken but witty Just-Warrior; and Eastern College's own Evangelical controversialist, Tony Campolo.

Nothing displayed the spiritual schizophrenia that infects Evangelicalism, however, like some of the speeches on the first day of the conference by Chuck Colson and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. It was like listening to the Apostle Paul and a priestess of Moloch.

Colson was in form. As keynote speaker, he rose to the occasion and, like a master musician, touched the keys which called forth the symphony of biblical orthodoxy. His was the call for human dignity in a world gone mad with Nietzschean will. His was not the philosophy of our moment; but looking back to a Maker, to the ordered

creation, to the inerrant revelation of a Maker's will in history, he traced the theme of human dignity across time, invoking the witness of the saints: Pascal, Solzhenitsyn, Edmund Burke, Walker Percy. He called for the end of our nightmare of ghoulish practices of abortion and genetic engineering and for a return to Christian orthodoxy, to Christian reason, and to Christian living. The choir was delighted.

"Did you hear what happened to the swan?"

Mollenkott rose before us like a goliath to challenge the army of the living God. Just when you thought the old heresies had died out, someone like Virginia Mollenkott steps forward to renew one's faith in the depravity of man. Er, excuse me, depravity of persons. Antinomianism lives. When the Apostle Paul asked, "Shall we sin that grace may abound?" Virginia said yes.

Dr. Mollenkott, an English professor from Patterson College, is one of those queer birds who call themselves Evangelical while attacking everything that Evangelicalism stands for. She is coauthor with Letha Scanlon of *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*, a seminal debauchery of scripture which advocates "covenantal homosexuality." But it is not just chastity that she's against; she's against sexism, ageism, elitism, classism—all that bad stuff.

Does she believe in the authority of Scripture? Only as it is validated by her own warped reason and sin-soaked experience. Does she worship the Father through the Son? Only as she remakes the Maker into her image, desexing the Divine Manchild and refashioning the Deity into a She/He/It, a Trinity of Parent, Child, and Significant Cosmic Other. Does she hold to the biblical order of sexuality? Only as it is reinterpreted to allow for what Falwell has called Adam and Steve. And does she affirm the sanctity of human life? Only if it allows us to rip limb from limb the helpless torsos