

Unjust War

by Gregory Pavlik

"War is the trade of kings."

—John Dryden

**The Costs of War:
America's Pyrrhic Victories**
edited by John V. Denson
New Brunswick: Transaction;
494 pp., \$49.95

◆

The single greatest force for consolidation of the national state is war. A truism, but one that American conservatives have been loath to admit. Ideologically committed to anticommunism, the conservative movement fell into lockstep with liberal troops in the Cold War, in the process absorbing liberal platitudes and integrating them into their own worldview. The old wisdom, expressed by the high Federalist Fisher Ames, that a "military government can make a nation great, but it can not make them free," fell by the wayside and, judging by the editorial stand taken in *National Review* and the *Weekly Standard*, has remained there.

The neoconservative dream of empire bears no resemblance to the principled opposition to war and militarism of older conservatives—whom William Appleman Williams labeled the only true non-interventionists of the 20th century. Whether the close relationship between conservative ideologues and the expansive military state will remain intact is an open question; state patronage and respectability in the eyes of a liberal/neo-conservative establishment may trump whatever limited commitment to principle exists on the right. On the other hand, as conservatism in America becomes increasingly divorced from place and circumstance, continuing its em-

Gregory Pavlik is the editor of *Forgotten Lessons: Selected Essays of John T. Flynn* (Foundation for Economic Education).



H. Ward Sterett

brace of each previous set of liberal reforms and ideological spasms, it continues to produced outraged voices of principled dissent. One likely result will be a rethinking of conservative support for American foreign policy.

To a certain extent, this process has already begun. In recent years, some effort has been made to restore the anti-war critique of previous generations of right-wingers to its place of centrality in American conservative thought. *The Costs of War* is a part of that project, and certainly the most comprehensive work of its kind. The anthology centers on a series of papers delivered at a conference of the same title hosted by the Ludwig von Mises Institute in 1994. The contributions cover a range of topics, which rather loosely include studies of American involvement in war, analyses of the long-term effects of an activist foreign policy, and specific theoretical papers examin-

ing the costs and causes of war. Yet the single element that holds sway is the sociopolitical transformation promoted by a belligerent foreign policy. In particular, the costs to republican institutions, decentralized government, individual rights, the national economy, and social norms are measured in terms of the changes effected upon them.

All of the chapters dealing with particular wars and the issues surrounding them are instructive. *The Costs of War* illustrates a number of important lessons, most notably the utility of war for business aggrandizement and the strengthening of state power over private domestic affairs as a consequence of war. A slightly different approach is taken by the late Murray Rothbard in his chapter, "America's Two Just Wars." Those two conflicts—the wars for American and Southern independence—were largely defensive and decentralist. The real importance of Rothbard's paper is the attention it pays to classical international law and to the primacy that classical international jurists placed on neutrality. The modern interventionist creates a largely mythical version of a conflict, drawing a stark contrast between the forces of Good and the forces of Evil. According to the interventionist logic, once the forces of Good have been identified, it is incumbent on all moral peoples everywhere to intervene on their behalf. Yet, as Rothbard notes, "classical international law . . . was virtually the opposite. In a theory which tried to limit war, neutrality was considered a positive virtue." This is, of course, in stark contrast to the interventionist condemnation of neutrality as somehow morally delinquent, if not odious. Not only was neutrality itself respected, but neutral states had rights, including the right to trade freely with any and all belligerents. Rothbard shows that modern international law, which does

not recognize the legitimacy of neutrality, is fundamentally incompatible with a foreign policy dedicated to peaceful interaction with all nations.

Rothbard demonstrates that today's interventionist moralism is a perversion of a natural law tradition that once operated in the interest of peace. In contrast to the "isolationist" insult flung at modern critics of American wars, the early classical liberal Richard Cobden, who advocated free trade, peace, and neutrality, earned the title "the international man." The new "internationalism" has gone hand-in-hand with the modern era's "advance to barbarism" (the phrase is F.J.P. Veale's, in reference to the complete abandonment of the civilized code of conduct in warfare in this century, a trend distinguishable by the targeting of civilians). The code of warfare, operating through the 19th century to a certain degree, was one of the high points of Western civilization, protecting the individual from the most obscene manifestations of interstate warfare.

The authors, however, hold no brief for pacifism. The chapters concerned with both the morality of war in general and in past conflicts make a clear case for the legitimacy of defensive wars, meaning wars to defend one's family and home against invasion and foreign domination. This is the basis of Thomas Fleming's learned contribution defending the attempt of the Confederate States of America to repel the invasion of their homeland.

But Fleming greatly broadens his case by appealing to the literature of ancient Greece. The Greeks were ambivalent about war, celebrating the warrior's heroism while decrying the attendant slaughter and destruction. Euripides's *Trojan Women* is a case in point, contrasting the defenders of a homeland with its imperial conquerors. Fleming quotes Hecuba's daughter, who said of the Greeks that they "came to the banks of Scamander, [and] died, not defending their frontiers. . . . Whom Ares killed, they did not see their children and were not laid out for burial by their wives." Not so the conquered Trojans, who "died, first of all, for their native land, the best thing that can be said of anyone, and their friends buried them in the bosom of their ancestral earth."

The book ends on a theoretical note with a detailed paper by Hans-Hermann Hoppe on the essentially warlike nature of modern democratic states. He ana-

lyzes the process by which civilized society comes into being; in particular, he considers the necessity of a steady decrease in the rate of time-preference (the willingness to suspend capital consumption in favor of savings and investment) in order to increase production and living standards across the population. This rate of preference, he argues, tends to decline in a free and stable society. Yet Hoppe notes that two forms of systematic violation of property rights may interfere with this tendency. These are criminal actions and governmental interference with private property: "the process of civilization is permanently derailed whenever property-rights violations take the form of government interference."

Professor Hoppe's analysis of the tendencies of democracies to engage in aggressive and murderous foreign policies is most telling. Democracies, unable to expand through peaceful means such as marriage, tend to expand their territory of control by violent means. Where wars were once clearly an exercise of the monarch, who had to raise funds to pay professional soldiers, now wars are conflicts of peoples. The results include conscription on a massive scale, violence against whole populations (including the military assault on civilians), massive compulsory taxation, hate propaganda campaigns, the hidden costs of inflation, and radical capital consumption on a scale unimaginable before the democratic age. In contrast to Wilsonian and Rooseveltian gibberish about peace-loving democracies, Professor Hoppe asserts that the first step to reducing political violence is the delegitimization of the democratic ideal.

Two central problems in the history of American foreign policy are neglected in *The Costs of War*. The first concerns expansionism as an ideological underpinning of classical republicanism among the Founders. Although they were, in fact, cautious with regard to entanglements in European wars, there was near universal agreement that continental expansion was desirable. While the Hamiltonians may have envisioned American imperial growth along the lines of the European powers, the Jeffersonians generally adopted the view that America's destiny lay in the conquest of the continent. With the exception of certain of the Tertium Quid republicans, the ideology of expansionism was

unchallenged in elite political discourse. The extent to which later (and more explicitly imperialistic) exercises were manifestations of the same spirit of expansionism is not considered in this collection. To the extent that continental expansionism is mentioned at all—for example in Justin Raimondo's otherwise superb chapter on the history of anti-interventionism—it is treated as a benign nonissue.

The other oversight—indeed, the only glaring hole in the volume—is the absence of detailed discussion of the unique costs of the Cold War. Perhaps more than any other factor in American history, the Cold War was responsible for the ascendancy of the contemporary liberal hegemony. Ironically, conservatives have more often than not been apologists for the Cold War. The price of that conflict has been economic control and regulation, military socialism, nationalism at the expense of states' rights and regionalism, lax immigration laws, and a general relaxation of controls on the central state. Outside the context of the Cold War and America's global engagements, the civil rights revolution and the immigration "reform" of the 60's would have been unthinkable, as would the permanent establishment of a military-industrial complex. Robert Higgs has pointed out that toward the end of the Cold War years, the United States' war apparatus was the third largest planned economy in the world, following only the Soviet Union and Communist China.

Right-wing opposition to war and militarism once included a critique of the Cold War. John Flynn, Harry Elmer Barnes, Garet Garrett, the old *Freeman*—all remained true to their noninterventionist principles, even as the conservative movement became increasingly entwined with the warfare state. Any contemporary reader of Barnes' "How 'Nineteen Eighty Four' Trends Threaten American Peace and Prosperity" will be jarred by the utter abhorrence with which many on the Old Right regarded the Cold War. Even more striking is the prescience and accuracy of their predictions.

These omissions notwithstanding, *The Costs of War* thoroughly and convincingly makes a case for a peaceful foreign policy, and no other book takes such a broad look at the terrible consequences of militarism and violence in foreign affairs. May it be a harbinger of changing times.

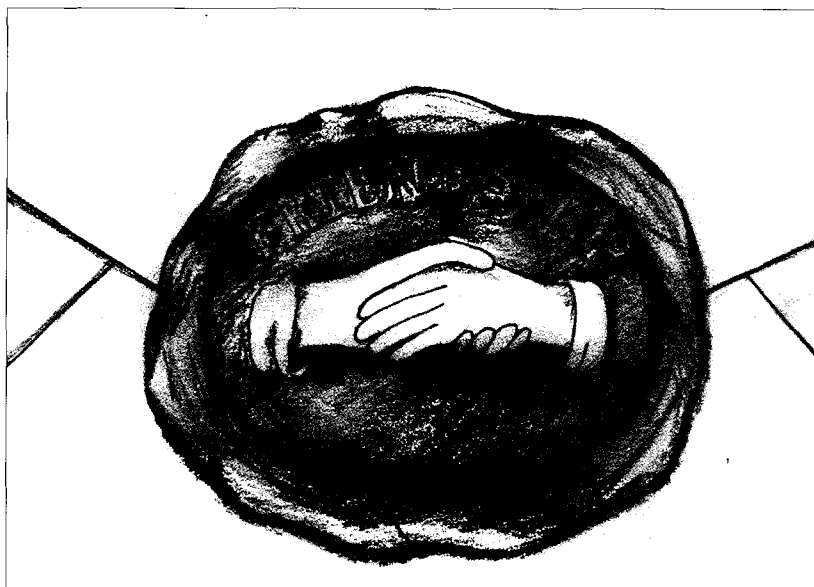
c

The Last Gentlemen

by Loxley F. Nichols

"Friendship is like two clocks keeping time."

—Anonymous



H. Ward Strett

Walker Percy: A Life
by Patrick H. Samway, S.J.
New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux;
506 pages, \$35.00

**The Correspondence of
Shelby Foote & Walker Percy**
edited by Jay Tolson
New York: W. W. Norton;
310 pages, \$29.95



Walker Percy was born in Birmingham, Alabama, on May 7, 1916, the eldest son of a prosperous lawyer and a Georgia socialite. In addition to patrician lineage, Percy enjoyed a birthright of wealth and privilege. With these amenities, however, came a familial predisposition to depression and suicide. After their father's suicide in 1929 (and that of their paternal grandfather), Percy and his brothers moved with their moth-

Loxley F. Nichols teaches in the English and Writing departments at Loyola College in Baltimore, Maryland.

er to their Grandmother Phinizy's house in Athens, Georgia. The following year their bachelor cousin, William Alexander Percy, invited the displaced family to come to Greenville, Mississippi, where he felt the boys would receive greater cultural advantages. Delighted with the stimulating life at Uncle Will's house, where writers and intellectuals came to visit routinely, the boys prospered until the bizarre death of their mother who, with her youngest son Phin in the car, drove off a bridge and drowned. Although her death was never determined definitely to have been a suicide, Phin suffered for years recalling that his mother had not only refused to swim out of the car but tried to keep him from escaping as well. Although he seldom talked about his father and mother, Walker Percy's grief and perplexity at their deaths continued to haunt him throughout his life.

Never completely alone or without resources, however, 15-year-old Walker, 14-year-old LeRoy, and ten-year-old Phin were adopted by Will Percy: planter, lawyer, poet, and author of

Lanterns on the Levee. The Percy boys' devotion and gratitude to their uncle and his dramatic influence on their lives cannot be overstated. Even Shelby Foote, the young friend whom Will Percy recruited to help make his cousins feel welcome in Greenville, found himself similarly enthralled by the possibilities that life at Mr. Will's house offered.

When Walker showed aptitude in science, Will Percy encouraged him to study medicine. Thus, following graduation from Greenville High School, Percy spent four years at Chapel Hill and then entered Columbia Medical School, where he specialized in pathology. When not in class or studying, Percy went to the movies and read, pastimes he pursued in earnest throughout his life. He also underwent psychoanalysis, an experience of apparently negligible value despite the frequency of the sessions and the duration of the treatment. After graduation, Percy returned to New York to intern at Bellevue Hospital, but his training was interrupted when he contracted tuberculosis. Forced to withdraw and seek rest cure, Percy spent the next