

stop there. Why should a college be able to “tax” paying students to subsidize non-paying students? Like cost-shifting in health care, we need to stop including social goals in the price of our products.

Remember, this industry is *nonprofit*. It has never felt the sting of real competition and has grown bloated, inefficient, bureaucratic, and oblivious. It is amazingly out of touch with current business practices and does not recognize how vulnerable it is. Its vision is of the past, not the future. It stubbornly adheres to a tradition and model that is over 1,000 years old. It is a high-cost anachronism that is imposing staggering economic demands on middle-income parents.

The key concepts in business today are almost completely unknown on campus. Yet the ability to consolidate, merge, downsize, and outsource is as great in higher education as it is in other places where we have made large profits, such as banks, radio stations, television stations, and health care. We earn profits by rationalizing an irrational market.

We seek to reconceptualize higher education. It is our intention to do to higher education what Charles Schwab did to the securities industry and Sheraton did to hotels. We will gain control of some key institutions nationwide, fire most of the employees, and replace them with lower paid but equally competent workers. We will then hire some of the best-known academics and have them telecommuting and/or teleconferencing to all our subsidiaries at the same hour on the same day. We feel that the information revolution has created a massive oversupply of professors. The Internet and telecommuting and/or teleconferencing can replace most of the teaching functions of colleges or universities. Students in much more comfortable classrooms will watch the world’s best professors on a giant screen. We will sell ads to be run before and after the lectures, and we have Seinfeld already under contract to promote our common curriculum. We will hire proctors to replace professors and cut out many unnecessary and superfluous functions. We will stop taxing half the students via higher tuition to support all or part of the other half of the students. We will run education like a business. If government wants to subsidize poor students, let it do so directly instead of by cost shifting.

We figure that, with the Internet, we can cut the cost of libraries in half and save bundles just by discontinuing a

bunch of journals that nobody reads anyway. We will stock the library with only the best books on every subject, which we estimate can cut our library acquisition costs in half.

We also have under contract some of the key entrepreneurs who took over and consolidated the mortuary business, builder’s supplies, barber shops, etc. They realize the power and efficiency of mass purchasing and common management. We estimate that we can cut the cost of tuition in half and still make gargantuan profits. In many areas we can buy three institutions and merge or close one (the business plan of Columbia HCA). We can discontinue discounts (called scholarships) and undercut the existing system. We feel that the political climate is ripe to privatize those institutions now under both private and public control.

We feel that we can produce as good or better products—called graduates—as the current system does for a fraction of the cost. After all, whoever has custody and jurisdiction over young people as they age from 18 to 22 is bound to see massive improvement in those customers. We have human maturity working for us, for which we can take partial or even full credit.

Our research department hasn’t been this excited about an industry since computers. Market-driven higher education can yield a good, standard quality product for a fraction of the present price. For a prospectus, call . . .

*Richard D. Lamm is a former governor of Colorado.*

## POLITICS

### The Sin of Adam’s Mark

*by Philip Jenkins*

Most academics belong to at least one of the various professional societies which can be of decisive importance in shaping careers. These societies award prestigious prizes and grants, and some, like the Modern Languages Association and the American Sociological Association, achieve their greatest signifi-

cance during annual conferences that are, in effect, the national conventions of particular branches of scholarship. With this in mind, it is easy to understand the shock scholars felt this past February when they received an e-mail warning that the Organization of American Historians (OAH), one of the two largest associations in the historical field, was threatening (on very short notice) to cancel its annual meeting for 2000 and to pay financial penalties which would have destroyed the organization altogether. Though the OAH managed to avoid committing total *hara-kiri*, the whole affair offers striking testimony to the current state of the academic profession, and to its ideological coloring: We find here yet more proof that a sizable number of college professors are still mired in a 1960’s dreamworld.

The crisis began with a legal dispute concerning the 21-hotel Adam’s Mark chain, which allegedly practiced systematic discrimination against black guests. Reportedly, Adam’s Mark hotels repeatedly gave blacks inferior rooms at higher rates and even forced black guests to wear identifying armbands to prove their right to be on the premises. These practices came to light during a major event called the Black College Reunion, held in Daytona Beach, Florida. Late last year, in response to complaints from the NAACP, the Justice Department began a formal lawsuit against Adam’s Mark, which was denounced in harsh public statements by Janet Reno and Bill Lann Lee. Now a moral leper, Adam’s Mark hotels found themselves boycotted by various liberal organizations, which suddenly canceled plans for meetings or conventions. The Episcopal Church announced one boycott, followed shortly by a gay and lesbian group, the Human Rights Campaign Fund.

Meanwhile, the OAH found itself in crisis because its annual beanfeast was scheduled to be held in an Adam’s Mark hotel in St. Louis in April 2000, and the governing board was besieged by members demanding either cancellation or a shift of premises. At this late notice, the hotel would be entitled to substantial penalties: The OAH would have to pay the hotel \$425,000, while the organization would forfeit another \$200,000 in registrations and exhibitor fees. Basically, the organization would lose about half its annual budget, while Adam’s Mark would come out far ahead financially, as it would have no problem reselling the

rooms previously allotted to conference-goers.

Nevertheless, OAH members continued to demand withdrawal:

By e-mail and fax, they have argued that to meet in the Adam's Mark is to compromise with racists. In order to take a bold stand against injustice, they have said that the organization must cancel the contract even though it would suffer serious financial consequences.

After some fevered days of debate and agonizing, the OAH executive came up with a solution a little this side of Armageddon: The conference would proceed, although the organization would "move registration, sessions, and other events out of the convention hotel as alternative venues in St. Louis are located." The organization would still owe Adam's Mark major compensation, but not the full cancellation penalty. In addition, the OAH would devote an unprecedented number of panels and sessions to issues of race and discrimination, and would support anti-discrimination demonstrations during the conference. This compromise was announced in a smug press release which boasted how historians were once again contributing to destroying racism, that "scourge on the land."

If the charges against Adam's Mark are true, then the practices described are indefensible morally, legally, politically, and economically: They are obnoxious, reprehensible, and socially destructive, and personally, I would have no wish to patronize a business of this kind. Boycotts do have their place, and can be enormously powerful instruments of social change. But in all the crusading furor, other important principles are being ignored, particularly the issue of proof. All the allegations have been presented in the course of civil litigation, and historians, who ought to know how to read documents critically, should know better than to take *parti pris* documents as objective fact. There is another side to the story, and Adam's Mark strenuously and specifically denies all the charges.

Rebutting the discrimination lawsuit, the chain counters that some of the specific problems raised by black guests resulted from the overwhelming pressure of numbers during a very well-attended Reunion, while other allegations are simply false. Corporate statements are sup-

ported by some African-American leaders, who have nothing but praise for the way in which the chain has, in bygone years, sponsored and hosted events like the Black College Reunion. Further contradicting the image of Adam's Mark as some kind of Klan subsidiary, the firm has a solid record of donations to black causes and charities.

I don't know exactly what happened at the Reunion in question, but I believe there is enough doubt about the case to forestall any rush to judgment. My doubts grew when I observed how the Adam's Mark case blew up in the first place. NAACP charges against the chain were leapt on by a Justice Department which, over the last eight years, has an abominable track record of using litigation threats in order to intimidate and shake down businesses and public institutions. In education, for instance—which should be a concern of professional historians—the Justice Department recently warned colleges that using standardized tests of any kind to determine admissions was probably an *ipso facto* violation civil rights law. Under demagogues like Bill Lann Lee, the Clinton Justice Department has committed itself to the most rigid and unreasonable interpretations of affirmative action, and the fact that this thoroughly partisan body is investigating or suing a particular corporation tells us precisely nothing about the truth of the charges. We might recall the complaint by the Victorian Lord Salisbury about the self-serving nature of official statements: "If you believe the doctors, nothing is wholesome. If you believe the theologians, nothing is innocent. If you believe the soldiers, nothing is safe." And, he might have added, if you believe the Justice Department, everything in contemporary America is racist.

The nature of civil rights suits in recent years is well-enough known to make nonsense of the main OAH demand, namely, "securing agreement by the Adam's Mark to a consent decree which assures the adoption of antidiscrimination policies with federal oversight." A consent decree is basically an admission of guilt, a capitulation, so that neither side has to face a long and costly trial: It is a device singularly favored by federal litigators with a weak case, who hope they can browbeat their target into caving in to avoid huge legal bills. In other words, the OAH is demanding that Adam's Mark have the good grace to surrender forthwith, without waiting for the formal-

ity of a trial, or even an impartial investigation. It is a scene which is played out thousands of times daily in police precincts across the land: "Why not just plead guilty to manslaughter and get it over with?" "But I didn't do anything!" "Don't waste our time—confess to the lesser crime, or we'll take you to trial for murder." In the Adam's Mark affair, OAH declares that "the recalcitrance of the hotel has made it impossible for the OAH to conduct its international scholarly meeting there as planned" ("recalcitrance" in this instance meaning a refusal to concede everything in an expensive lawsuit). After all, the OAH had made its own extensive inquiries of objective sources, including "regional and national leaders of the NAACP, the Department of Justice, and civil rights attorneys." Well, that should cover all possible bases, right? I have no personal knowledge of whether the hotels discriminated, but unlike the wise leaders of the OAH (and the Episcopal Church, and other worthy bodies), I do not believe that every allegation in civil lawsuits should be believed without thought or question. Nor do I believe that, just because the U.S. government has begun litigation in a particular case, its claims must be accepted automatically. Just call me a bigot.

To understand the OAH's war against Adam's Mark, it also helps to know the historical profession's own curious record of defending moral and ideological purity. One reason why the St. Louis debacle threatened to be so devastating was that historians were painfully aware of the results of the last explosion of moral outrage, when the American Historical Association canceled its 1995 meetings in Cincinnati following that city's passage of what was cast as an anti-gay ordinance: The AHA is still picking up the pieces, in terms of financial damage and personal rancor. For a large section of the profession, as for many of their counterparts in the humanities, the issues and tactics of the New Left years are still very much alive, and it is a constant source of regret for radical professors that they missed the golden age of protest in 1968. Lacking an authentic mass movement like those protesting segregation or the Vietnam war, they have no alternative but to pounce on anything which offers a reasonable facsimile. Standing alongside the whole graying generation which is spiritually stuck in fighting the Nixon administration, we find the younger folk in their 30's and 40's, for whom successive

boycotts and demonstrations are best seen as a kind of passionate historical reenactment, rather like those weekend warriors who are constantly dressing up to refight the Civil War.

Once you do go looking for a target for activism, it is only too easy to find one: It is all but impossible to name a corporation or institution, a city or region, which cannot be blamed for something if someone decides to do so. Given the complex spider web of business relationships, virtually any hotel or resort, any restaurant chain, is likely to have a link to another firm which carries some political stigma, which can be claimed to have violated gay rights or women's rights, trodden on the wrong toes over abortion or pornography, been too enthusiastically pro- or anti-Israel, or—an up-and-coming favorite in the protest stakes—which operates “sweatshops” in low-wage countries. And any corporation which invests outside the continental United States risks charges that it is supporting tyrannical regimes and acquiescing to human rights violations. There is no need to suggest that a particular company which attracts public obloquy is any more guilty of these kinds of abuse than any other: The corporate target *du jour* usually happens to be the latest one identified in media reports, or at odds with some bureaucratic agency. It is rather like the calls we hear occasionally for U.S. military intervention around the globe: The situation involved is rarely the most destructive to human life or threatening to international security, but rather that which CNN has nominated as its latest obsession, the place where Christiane Amanpour is currently donning her designer flak jacket. If you are determined to go through life having nothing to do with any institution or corporation which is somehow tainted by some controversial association, the only real solution is to find a well-watered hillside somewhere and live as a hermit. If you want to attend a convention in a major city while avoiding tainted hotel chains or restaurants, then sleep in the streets and enjoy whatever goodies you can find in the dumpsters.

For all its grim financial consequences, the OAH's action over Adam's Mark proved immensely rewarding to many within that organization. It permitted activists a great deal of emotional satisfaction and gave them the opportunity to indulge a little old-fashioned rhetoric, even to pretend that the good guys were still facing down Bull Connor in the Al-

abama of the early 1960's. A little play-acting is always enjoyable, though there can also be costs. Venting so much outrage on something so ambiguous as the Adam's Mark case discredits campaigns on more serious issues, while the incredibly self-destructive nature of recent boycotts tends to drive away moderate members who resent the waste of their membership dues. In the process, the OAH is reduced to an assembly of true believers, a New Left Re-Enactors' Guild. This is a shame since, as I've remarked, there are occasions when boycotts and principled resignations are justified and necessary. Me, I'm starting by resigning my membership in the OAH.

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## FILM

### A Waste of Space

by George McCartney

#### Mission to Mars

*Produced by Walt Disney Productions*

*Directed by Brian De Palma*

*Screenplay by Lowell Cannon, Jim Thomas, and Graham Yost*

*Released by Buena Vista Pictures*

Instead of insulting our intelligence, as so much third-rate science fiction does, director Brian De Palma's second-rate *Mission to Mars* is just good enough to do something much worse: It insults our hope in a purposeful universe. It does so by invoking the now standard-issue movie metaphysics in which traditional theology is replaced with extraterrestrial teleology. Whether De Palma's reliance on this arthritic commonplace indicates a failure of imagination or a commercially minded cynicism is a delicate question. A glance at his career to date, however, may suggest an answer.

From his earliest efforts, De Palma has been the perfect film student. Glib and overtrained, he's always been eager to borrow from his idols, Alfred Hitchcock, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Howard

Hawks. *Sisters* was his *Rear Window*; *Obsession*, his *Vertigo*; *Blowout*, his *Blowup*. Then, of course, there's *Scarface*, his lurid and ludicrous remake of Hawks' *Scarface*. In each, you can see him appropriating the camera moves, compositions, and pacing of his masters. But he does so like a talented child copying his favorite cartoon characters. The resulting images may formally resemble the originals, but they have none of their subtlety and little of their energy. Everything is laboriously overdone and consequently heavy, even oppressive.

That is why his films generally feel empty and unengaging. This is a shame because he can be a very good director when he stops being a chameleon of pure style and comes out on his own. He proved this with his hugely enjoyable and often trenchant 1987 film, *The Untouchables*. But even with a tough, driving script and strong actors, he couldn't resist some flashy filching. The film almost founders on one overwrought scene designed as a smirking homage to Sergei Eisenstein. In it, De Palma reworks *Potemkin's* famous Odessa steps heart-stopper with his own toddler in a carriage careering down the stone steps of a train station while Eliot Ness's feds shoot it out with Al Capone's mob. This spectacular but enormously self-indulgent set piece is not storytelling; it's just vulgar preening.

This is De Palma's signature failing. For him, filmmaking is almost always about previous filmmaking. It's preeminently an exercise in form over substance. Worse, operating in a postmodernist mode, he feels compelled to prove he's cooler than his subject matter. Irony must always trump mere meaning.

Given this background, I'm persuaded that the trouble with *Mission to Mars* is the unacknowledged mockery at its frigid heart. This time, De Palma has stolen from another master. He's broken into Stanley Kubrick's one indisputable masterwork, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, released in 1968, and ransacked it thoroughly. Like most thieves, however, he has little respect for his loot. He only values it for what it can do for him.

Like *2001*, *Mission* focuses on astronauts who stumble upon the remains of a mysterious alien force. Instead of Kubrick's black and seamless monoliths, De Palma has given his aliens a human face in the form of a huge, somewhat Egyptian sculpture, its elegant nose rising a couple of stories above the peak of a Martian mountain. When approached