

of his film, for it jars both with Woodrell's book and the film itself. In an essay found on the website for the movie, Lee admits that he both identifies and sympathizes with the Southerners. However, he goes on to argue that it was necessary for progress that the North win the war. He starts by noting that many people throughout the world are complaining that their countries are being Americanized. According to Lee, the American Civil War is where "it all started." What he describes as "the Yankee invasion and victory" was a victory for "the Yankee principle" that "everyone is equal, everyone has the right to fulfill himself." Moreover, the Northern victory led directly "to the new world that we are living in today: the world of democracy and capitalism." Lee also misinterprets the novel as being about "the emancipation" of the "two outsiders (the German immigrant and the black slave)." Lee seems to have forgotten that Roedel was not an immigrant but the son of an immigrant, and that Holt was not a slave but a freedman.

Despite this Lincolnesque spin (which sounds to me like an attempt to counter criticism that the film portrays the Northerners as the bad guys), Lee has created a movie well worth seeing. At times, it reveals an understanding of the war that is stunning. In one scene, a local planter confesses to some of the guerrillas over dinner that he fears their side will lose. Why, they ask? The planter explains that, when the Yankees settled Lawrence, the first thing they did was to build a school, not a church, and then they forced the children from everywhere around to attend. The Yankees, he says, want everyone to think and live like they do, but we Southerners don't care how others live. That is why we will lose.

Ride With the Devil brings to light a largely forgotten but fascinating chapter of Southern history during the War Between the States, and it presents the Southern side of the war with sympathy and fairness. Perhaps this is why, after an early release in mid-December 1999 to 60 theaters nationwide, and despite good reviews, Universal Pictures canceled the main release and sent the movie straight to video. This, plus the fact that this fine movie received not a single Academy Award nomination, leads me to suspect that Hollywood is ignoring a film that does not convey the "right" moral lessons. *Ride With the Devil* is simply far too complex and realistic to be approved or rewarded by the contemporary enter-

tainment industry.

H. Arthur Scott Trask is descended from Missouri Confederates.

EDUCATION

The Life of the Mind in Glitter Gulch

by Francis J. Beckwith

For seven years (1989-96), I was a full-time faculty member at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). I grew up in Las Vegas, earning a B.A. in philosophy from UNLV in 1983 before going to graduate school. In August 1996, my wife and I left Nevada and moved to Southern California, where I had accepted a tenure-track position at Whittier College. Although leaving our family and friends in Las Vegas was difficult, our departure from Glitter Gulch has provided me with a new perspective on casino gaming and the culture of Las Vegas.

As a social conservative who grew up in Las Vegas, I used to be defensive about my hometown. In 1989, at a professional conference of evangelical Christian scholars, I met a professor from a Southern Bible college who had attended that year's meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Las Vegas. Noting that I taught at UNLV, he said in a deep Southern drawl, "I'll ne'er forget walkin' through them casinos and feelin' the sin in the air," to which I replied, "Similar to the feeling you had during the days of segregation?" He turned and walked away, and I felt pretty proud of my clever comeback. Yet he was perhaps closer to the truth than I would have cared to admit at the time.

The problem is that the life of the mind is inconsistent with the cultural values of Las Vegas. This is why I believe that academics in communities that are considering the legalization of casino gambling should be in the forefront of opposition to such measures. Moreover, I do not believe that the study and teaching of gaming has a place on a university or college campus, except perhaps to examine the social and economic consequences of gaming and the historical and

philosophical justifications for it. A university or college should not give aid and comfort to an industry which promotes values antithetical to the mission of higher education.

That is not to say that higher education in Las Vegas is impossible, or that gambling *per se*, as a form of personal amusement (e.g., church bingo, playing poker with "the boys," or making a friendly bet on a ballgame), is wrong. But the cultural values that permeate southern Nevada make it extremely difficult for the community to understand why a university education is important and should be supported. That is why this metropolitan area of 1.7 million people has only *one* university and *one* community college, and why southern Nevada will never be a center in which academic excellence at the university level is cherished and promoted.

The cultural values of Las Vegas emphasize instant gratification, getting something for nothing, and the belief that a thing is worthwhile only because it has instrumental value. The gaming industry and its culture promotes these notions with a vengeance—for without them, gaming would not have become the multibillion dollar industry it is today.

All three attitudes are antithetical to the life of the mind. Intellectual achievement is challenging and requires a life-long commitment to excellence. The results can be personally rewarding, but rarely does a scholar hit the jackpot financially, and never instantly or through mere luck. Even if she does succeed financially, that is not why she pursued scholarship in the first place. The idea of instant gratification has a detrimental effect upon the intellectual and academic community. A university that names classrooms and buildings after people who promote these ideas sows the seeds of its own destruction. The students who sit in those classrooms become the citizens who decide how higher education will be funded and whether it is worth the cost.

The life of the mind is valuable because it is intrinsically good in itself. Although it certainly may have instrumental value (i.e., it can help you get a good job), that is not the reason why people should attend universities. If you think that the purpose of higher education is merely instrumental, then you should seek out a two-year vocational program at a community college or trade school.

The culture of Vegas tells us that

things only have instrumental value. You can see this in the slots, the gaming tables, the \$3.95 all-you-can-eat buffets, the call girls, the sports books, and the video-poker machines. Outdated Las Vegas casinos (e.g., Dunes, Sands, Hacienda, Landmark) are demolished and replaced by new and more elaborate façades which can separate the tourists from their money. Casinos, of course, do not give customers anything in exchange for their "investment." The wealth acquired by the casino industry, or by the few gamblers fortunate enough to beat the house, is not produced. "[T]he money flowing into casinos, riverboats, and slot machines is money that is being diverted from goods and services in other local businesses," explains Prof. Robert Goodman in his book *The Luck Business*. "Instead of bringing in new wealth to the community, convenience gambling enterprises cannibalize the local economy." Another authority on the economics of gambling, John Kindt, a professor of commerce and legal policy at the University of Illinois, has demonstrated that the state loses three dollars in increased social welfare, criminal justice, and other costs for every dollar it makes on gambling.

A culture based on instrumental value leads its citizens to make such philistine inquiries as "Why study Plato's *Republic* or Hobbes' *Leviathan* if it won't result in a good-paying job?" while never pondering the Socratic comeback, "What good is money if your soul is impoverished?" Of course, instrumentalism is not limited to Las Vegas. But it is exacerbated in a culture that *promotes* it as an unquestioned moral good and whose most famous resident, Andre Agassi, declares in a Canon commercial, "Image is everything."

Rather than promoting casino gambling, colleges and universities ought to be opposed to it. Instead, UNLV has established an International Gaming Institute (IGI). According to its web page, the institute "was created in 1993 in response to the increasing demand for gaming education, training, and research. The Institute is the premier source of information and training for the gaming industry." Its "mission is to provide educational programs, conduct gaming research, and disseminate gaming knowledge via seminars, classes, and publications to businesses, governments, and students throughout the world. One of the most challenging and crucial tasks of the Insti-

tute is to stay current in the ever changing gaming industry." It sponsors seminars such as "Slot Volatility/Slot Revenues/Profit Per Square Foot," "Creating Objective Player Rating Systems," and "Mathematics of Casino Table Games/Rule Modification as a Marketing Tool." Some of the courses offered for college credit include "Introduction to the Casino," "Protection of Casino Table Games," and "Seminar in Casino Management." My favorite is "Gaming Internship," which is described in the catalog as:

a field-based learning experience at a major casino operation designed to increase students' awareness of "how" gaming operations are managed. This course offers a "hands-on" approach and offers applied theory value.

If you believe there is any possibility that the IGI would publish papers or pursue research that reflects negatively on the gaming industry, think again. The IGI is the recipient of numerous financial gifts from the gaming industry. In October 1995, according to a UNLV press release, the IGI

received a \$100,000 grant from ACE Denken Co. of Japan to compile a training manual for the gaming industry. . . . ACE Denken Co., a manufacturer of gaming equipment for the pachinko industry, has been a strong supporter of UNLV's William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration. A \$2 million

endowment created by the company and its president, Takatoshi Takemoto, in 1992 enabled the college to launch its Ph.D. program in hospitality administration and a research journal.

According to a May 17, 1995, press release, "a \$1 million donation from International Gaming Technology to UNLV will establish the International Game Technology Library, featuring the Gary Royer Gaming Collection, in the UNLV International Gaming Institute."

I am not disputing the legal right of such an institute to exist nor the need for the serious academic study of gaming. But an institute or program that promotes casino gambling should not be supported by a college or university which is supposed to be nurturing the life of the mind. If, as Aristotle believed, "statecraft is soulcraft" and "the state exists for the sake of a good life, and not for the sake of life only," then academics should be in the forefront of resistance to the incorporation of casino gambling in our communities and in the curricula of institutions of higher education.

Francis J. Beckwith is an associate professor of philosophy, culture, and law and the W. Howard Hoffman Scholar at the California Campus of Trinity Graduate School (Deerfield, Illinois). He is also a senior research fellow at the Nevada Policy Research Institute. His most recent book (with G. Koukl) is Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air (Baker Books).

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In The Dark

by George McCartney

The Best Reality Money Can Buy?

With few exceptions, there is an inverse relationship between a film's special-effects budget and its artistic imagination: Call it the Jurassic Law. When Steven Spielberg sicced his computerized dinosaurs on us, he proved unequivocally that the more money spent on making things look dazzlingly real, the slacker the plot and the flatter the characterization.

The Perfect Storm conforms perfectly to the Jurassic Law. Director Wolfgang Petersen was given a cool \$130 million to adapt Sebastian Junger's best-selling account of the devastating storm that hit the Northeast coastline in 1991, sinking, among other things, the ill-fated fishing boat *Andrea Gail* off Gloucester, Massachusetts. He spared no expense lavishing the screen with computer-generated images of monstrous weather and savage seas. Spectacular? Without question, especially the weirdly (if improbably) illuminated night scenes. They're nothing less than darkness visible.

As hellish spectacles go, however, this one quickly loses its power to unnerve. Other than actually drowning, the worst thing about being lost on the high seas, even vicariously, is the sheer monotony of the experience. Watching waves approach in an endless, swelling parade numbs the emotions, making on-screen drama difficult to sustain. Stephen Crane recognized this problem in "The Open Boat," in which he recounted his experience of being adrift in a lifeboat after suffering shipwreck. He remarks that "a singular disadvantage of the sea lies in the fact that after successfully surmounting one wave you discover that there is another behind it just as important and just as nervously anxious to do something effective in the way of swamping boats." In these conditions, he sourly concludes, "one can get an idea of the resources of the sea in the line of waves." Crane resorted to irony because he knew there was no other way to make his reader pay attention to his waterlogged predica-

The Perfect Storm

*Produced by Baltimore Spring Creek
and Warner Bros.*

*Directed by Wolfgang Petersen
Screenplay by William D. Wittliff,
based on Sebastian Junger's book
Released by Warner Bros.*

The Patriot

*Produced by Centropolis Entertainment
and Mutual Film Company*

*Directed by Roland Emmerich
Screenplay by Robert Rodat
Released by Columbia Pictures*

ment.

Unfortunately, Petersen doesn't have Crane's wit. To avoid trying our patience, he repeatedly cuts to another crisis, that of the sailing sloop *Satori*, caught in the same storm off Hyannisport. There's warrant for this juxtaposition in Junger's book, but on the screen it only succeeds in disorienting the viewer. Raging seas off Gloucester look remarkably similar to those off Hyannisport; pretty soon, you don't know where you are. What's worse, you don't really care. Like the poor souls in their boats, you feel trapped in a hideously unvarying nightmare.

As for characterization, Peterson leaves it so undeveloped that the fate of the *Andrea Gail*'s crew seems less tragic than irritating. If he and his scriptwriter, William D. Wittliff, have it right—and that's a big "if" in this speculative recreation of events to which there is no living witness—we are to believe the fully seasoned and highly regarded Captain Billy Tyne (George Clooney) would have been boneheaded enough to try to get home by sailing directly into the storm, when he could just as easily have stayed out of its range. Furthermore, he is supposed to have made this decision after discovering that his radio was out of commission.

The script tries to make this decision plausible by having the ship's refrigerator

break down, thus leaving the men with a profitable catch of swordfish that will spoil unless they return home as soon as possible. I may be an ignorant landlubber, but this doesn't wash. This was not a Caribbean cruise; it happened in October off the coast of Gloucester. In the film, the men are always dressed in thermal shirts, sweaters, rain slickers, and woolen caps. We're never shown a thermometer, but I suspect the temperature was rarely above 40 degrees Fahrenheit and often considerably lower. Just how quickly would the fish go rotten? Would there not have been time to wait the storm out? Whatever happened on the *Andrea Gail*, the film's scenario seems more ersatz pathos than honest realism. Petersen wants us to see Clooney and his crew shouting their defiance at the storm and plowing bravely into its tumult. "We're Gloucester men," Clooney reminds his stalwart crew, as if this were reason enough to behave with suicidal disrespect for nature. I can't help suspecting Tyne and his men have been done a grave disservice.

Although there are no storms to speak of in *The Patriot*, it nevertheless sinks of its own leaden clichés. Still, there's much to commend in this story of a man drawn reluctantly into the American Revolution.

First, there's the recreation of revolution-era South Carolina, seemingly exact in every detail. Charleston's pastel row houses, its merchant's exchange, the sea wall, the surrounding estates all look absolutely convincing. Then there's the reenactment of 18th-century warfare that powerfully captures the sheer madness of men marching across fields in formation, firing their muskets at each other. These youths present themselves to their enemies as living targets, occasionally vomiting and wetting themselves with fear. There's a harrowing dreamlike quality to these clockwork engagements, with each row of soldiers taking its turn to load and fire. With each fusillade, another 20 or so men pitch forward, spurting blood from bullet wounds. In one scene, a British cannonball whizzes through the line, taking with it the head of a hapless