

The Price of Empire

By J. William Fulbright
with Seth P. Tillman
Pantheon Books, 243 pp., \$17.95

By Marshall Windmiller

AS IN AN EARLIER BOOK, FORMER Arkansas Sen. J. William Fulbright reminds us that in foreign relations there are really two Americas. One is generous, humane, self-critical, good-humored and judicious. The other is narrowly egotistical, self-righteous, pontificating and arrogant. These two Americas compete for control of U.S. foreign policy, alternating in dominance.

In this book—part memoir, part polemic, part apologia—it is apparent that there are also two William Fulbrights. One is a scholar and teacher, the other a politician. One seeks to find the truth, understand and analyze it, and then educate the public. The other makes compromises in order not to be cast out of the club, compromises that both Fulbrights later regret.

There has always been a tension between the two. At times the politician dominated. Now, in his 80s and with the levers of power no longer within grasp, the scholar is clearly in control. He tells why the politician did what he did and what he now thinks of it. He is frank about his mistakes and regrets their consequences.

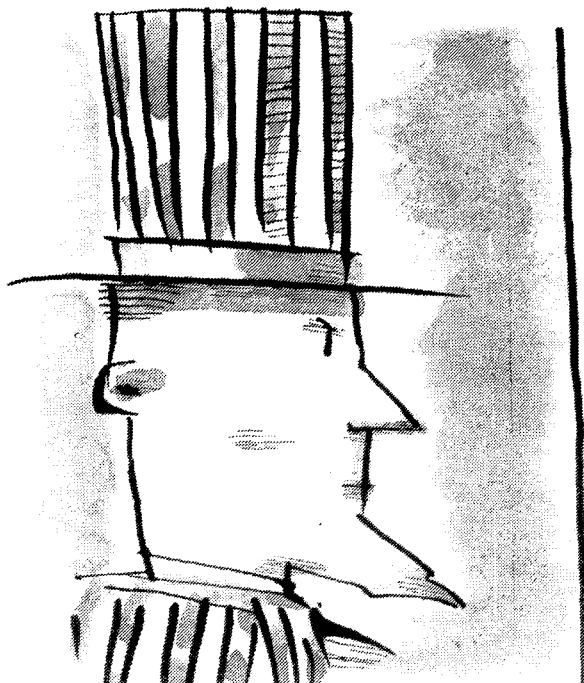
Few men have been better placed to understand international relations and influence foreign policy. When he was defeated for re-election in 1974 he had chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Committee longer than any other senator in history. His political education had begun as a Rhodes scholar from the University of Arkansas in 1925. It changed his life. "The intellectual sophistication of these young Englishmen astonished me," he writes. "I was embarrassed by my own inadequacy."

A rapid rise: So he began to read, concentrating on history. Later, back in Arkansas, he taught constitutional law, and at 34 became the university's president, the youngest in the nation. Dismissed for political reasons by a newly elected governor, Fulbright was elected to Congress in 1942, and to the Senate two years later.

From the beginning of his political career, foreign affairs were his obsession. While still a freshman congressman he authored the resolution that cleared the way for U.S. participation in the U.N., and this remarkable achievement, in a climate still dominated by isolationists, gave him national prominence as a foreign-policy trailblazer.

But there was a price to pay for the platform he used so effectively: surrender on civil-rights issues to the pervasive racism of his state. "If you oppose your constituents

c 1989 Peter Hannan



Studying history on a Fulbright

too directly on an issue too close to their hearts, you are not going to get elected," he writes. "In those days in Arkansas my constituents were not about to be persuaded on civil rights."

So Fulbright supported the poll tax, signed the infamous Southern Manifesto calling for legal resistance to the Supreme Court's integration ruling, and refused to criticize Gov. Orval Faubus when

POLITICS

he tried to block the integration of Central High School in Little Rock. "I avoided taking a stand. I could have committed political suicide very easily," he confesses. "I don't think that the 'gradualist' school that I belonged to, looking back now, will receive the approval of history."

The Suez slip: Having lost the support of blacks, Fulbright then incurred the hatred of Zionist Jews for backing U.S. financing of the Aswan Dam and opposing an amendment to the aid bill that would have required Egypt to open to Suez Canal to Israeli shipping. "I just didn't think it was proper to put that provision in an aid bill," is his lame explanation.

It was a serious mistake and a curious inconsistency, for Egypt was in clear violation of international law, and respect for the international legal system was at the foundation of Fulbright's philosophy of international relations.

When he was invited to lecture at Tel Aviv University in 1959, he was picketed by students, and hecklers forced him to abandon the podium. Today, despite his concern for the survival of Israel and his support of sensible peace proposals, Fulbright is still anathema

to Zionists. He calls for Israeli negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leading to a Palestinian state, special status for Jerusalem, and "an explicit, binding treaty guarantee of Israel" from the U.S.

Fulbright has no illusions about Congress supporting such a solution. The only hope, he says, is to reach an understanding with the Soviet Union, which would, he believes, undermine the power of the Israeli lobby in Washington. That is why the Zionists oppose detente. Congress believes it must appease the Zionists just as Fulbright had to placate the racists of Arkansas. Fear of political suicide is not confined to the Ozarks.

But William Fulbright is not going to be remembered for his stand on civil rights or the Middle East. His greatness as a senator will be assured by what he did about Vietnam and education.

Adult education: Fulbright approached Vietnam with what he now admits was ignorance and naivete. "It never occurred to me that presidents and their secretaries of state and defense would deceive a Senate committee." And so he voted for the Gulf of Tonkin resolution with which President Johnson expanded the war. But then Fulbright began to educate himself, especially with the books of Jean Lacouture and Bernard Fall.

In April 1965 he sent Johnson a memo saying that "it was compatible with our national interests for Vietnam to be unified under the rule of Ho Chi Minh." It was a bold suggestion given the prevailing anti-communist paranoia. Supporting Ho's nationalism would restrain Chinese expansionism in Southeast Asia, he argued. But while he privately criticized U.S. policy, Fulbright avoided

public controversy.

His break with Johnson came when the president sent the Marines into the Dominican Republic in 1965. He thought this kind of interventionism was a serious mistake, and he said so in a speech in the Senate. Johnson responded with his renowned pettiness. He struck Fulbright's name from the White House guest list and took away the jet Fulbright had used for his foreign travels. They never spoke again except at formal state occasions.

After the break, Fulbright spoke out more frequently. Believing that U.S. China policy was responsible for the war in Vietnam, he began hearings on China in 1966. He concluded that it had been a fateful mistake for the U.S. not to have recognized China in 1949, just as today he believes we should restore diplomatic relations with Vietnam. We have learned "apparently little or nothing" from the Vietnam War and under Reagan repeated our Vietnam mistakes in Nicaragua.

An anti-war mover: The China hearings were severely criticized by the hawks in the press and the Senate for aiding the war protes-

"I don't think that the 'gradualist' school I belonged to, looking back now, will receive the approval of history."

ters. They said that more than any other politician, Fulbright was legitimizing the anti-war movement. They were right. Many times, those of us who spoke out against the war supported our arguments with quotes from these hearings and from Fulbright's speeches. As long as the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee agreed with us, we were not com-

pletely beyond the pale.

"The protest that we legitimized was peaceful and lawful," he says. "My only regret is that I was not more effective. I thought I was going quite far at the time." And he was right. Only Senators Wayne Morse (D-OR) and Ernest Gruening (D-AK) went further. They cast the only two votes against the Gulf of Tonkin resolution.

But Fulbright's greatest and most lasting impact on public education has been the international scholarship program that bears his name. Hundreds of scholars and teachers have been exchanged between the U.S. and foreign countries as a result of this legislation. He conceived it and pushed it through Congress.

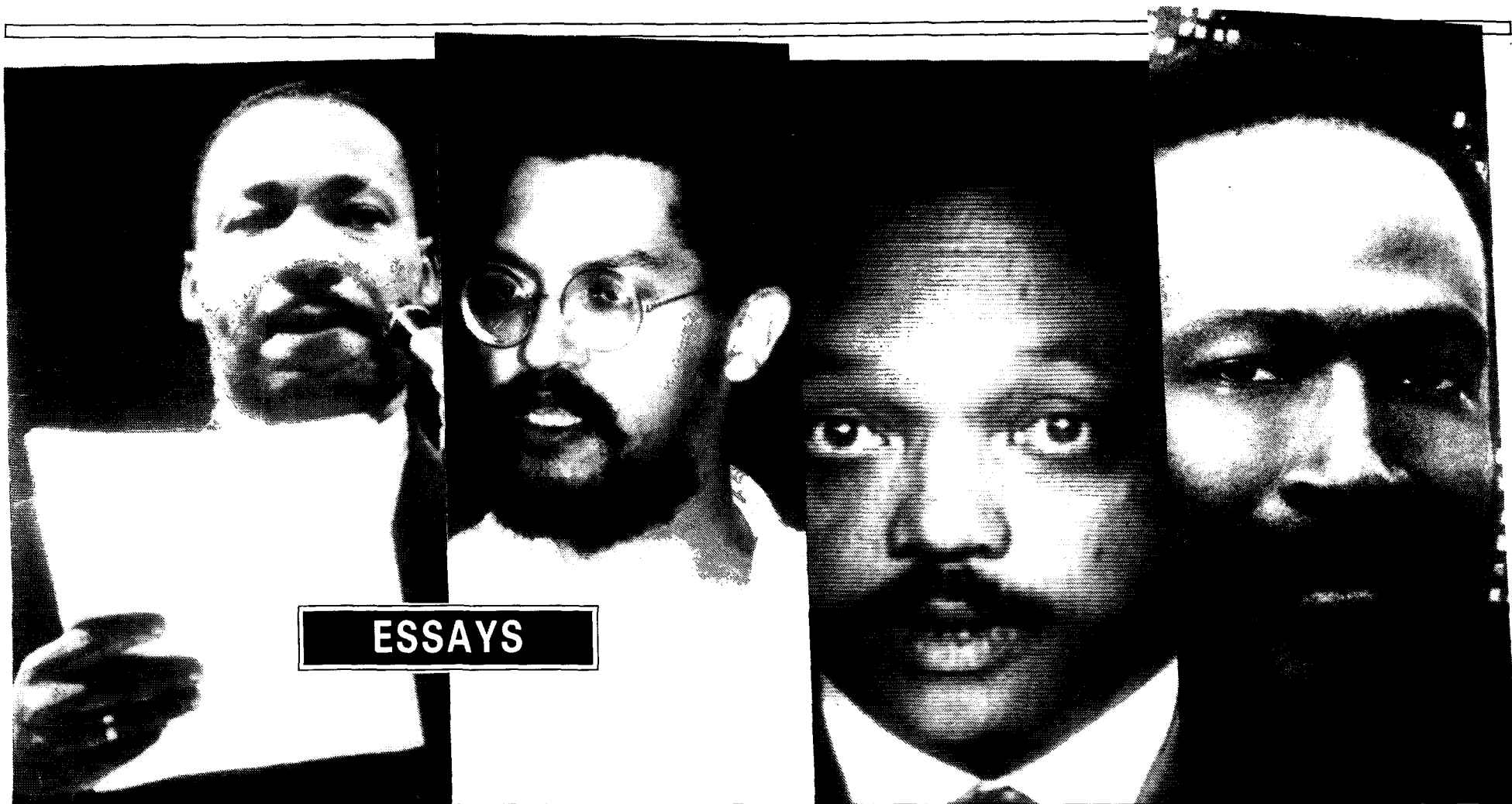
There is no way to measure the impact that this has had on improving international relations. How does one assess the fact that Alexander Yakovlev, now in the Soviet Politburo, was a Fulbright scholar at Columbia in 1958? How does one evaluate the effect on what is being taught in hundreds of classrooms by teachers who have lived, studied and taught in foreign schools and universities under Fulbright scholarships? Certainly it has been profound.

This is an easy-reading book, written as if prepared from the transcript of an oral history. Perhaps as a consequence it contains contradictions that a different style might have avoided. For example, on page 41 he says that "the superpowers alone have the power—and with it the responsibility—to maintain a semblance of order in our turbulent world." But on page 169 he criticizes Lyndon Johnson by saying that the "view that the world can be easily shaped and dominated by the great powers is a source of endless folly."

Fulbright's philosophy of international relations was a product of his youthful study at Oxford and was greatly influenced by his tutor, R.B. McCallum, an admirer of President Woodrow Wilson, also a great politician and teacher. "I am sure all this influenced my later ideas on the Fulbright exchange program and the kind of significance it could have on the attitudes of individuals interacting with different cultures," Fulbright writes.

Undoubtedly it did. From Woodrow Wilson at Princeton to McCallum at Oxford, to Fulbright at Arkansas and to the U.S. Senate and the entire world, the torch of enlightenment was passed. In the end, it is the scholar-teacher in these men, not the politician, that has shaped history. Teachers now in their classrooms may take heart from such examples. Their own potential may be greater than they think.

Marshall Windmiller is professor of international relations at San Francisco State University.



ESSAYS

Divining the truth and unearthing inspiration: Cornel West sings the scholarly body eclectic. Above, Martin Luther King, Manning Marable, Jesse Jackson, Marvin Gaye.

Prophetic Fragments

By Cornel West
Wm. B. Eerdmans
294 pp., \$17.95

By William E. Cain

PROPHETIC FRAGMENTS COLLECTS Cornel West's essays, reviews and occasional writings, mostly from the early to mid-'80s, on politics, religion and culture. Like his previous book, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (1982), *Prophetic Fragments* is the work of a formidably learned, passionate intellectual whose commitment to scholarship is enhanced by a deep sensitivity to exploited and marginalized people.

This collection shows West's skill in probing the subtle shortcomings of Marxist theory and in identifying concrete difficulties that plague the pursuit of a truly "progressive" Christianity. But while he attends to the left's conceptual and practical problems and sees clearly the daunting obstacles to social change in America, he remains fervently hopeful about possibilities for peace and justice.

From hermeneutics to rap: West can be a tough-minded polemicist, as when he responds severely to black neoconservatives and inveighs against the "existential emptiness" that, in his view, pervades American religious life. Yet he also takes an appreciative—but never uncritical—interest in figures and topics in both academic and popular spheres ranging from Alasdair MacIntyre and Leszek Kolakowski to Motown and Marvin Gaye, from biblical hermeneutics to rap music. West constantly seeks new sources of insight and demonstrates a marvelously capacious sense of how an engaged intellectual should behave.

Prophetic Fragments also contains adept critical portraits of Martin Luther King, Michael Harrington and Reinhold Niebuhr, and first-rate analytical overviews of religion and the left, critical theory and Christianity, and socialist theory and racism. The collection's book reviews are sometimes too brief, but they are generally shrewd and independent-minded, particularly those that treat Manning Marable, Paul Holmer and Harvey Cox.

One shortcoming of *Prophetic Fragments* is that West didn't provide a detailed, comprehensive introduction for it that might have updated or expanded upon earlier positions. When he deals with "Black-Jewish relations" in a 1984 essay, for example, he concludes with a call for "rational dialogue." No one would object to this, which is exactly the problem. From West, one expects more firmness and precision—and a greater willingness to take a stand on the controversial issues that such an urgent dialogue must confront. Does West judge that such a dialogue has occurred? If so, has it led blacks and Jews to bridge their differences, or has it intensified feelings of suspi-

Cornel West constantly seeks new sources of insight and demonstrates a marvelously capacious intellect.

cion?

A 1986 piece on "Left Strategies Today" is similarly unsatisfying. In it West speaks forthrightly of the Jackson campaign's progressive potential, and he vigorously maps the "space" for social-democratic discourse and action that the Rainbow Coalition has done so much to create. But West does not zero in on the highly problematic linkage that existed then—and exists now—between Jackson as presidential candidate and the broad left and liberal battalions that have rallied behind him.

Triumph and tragedy: In Jackson we arguably have a political leader who is both the triumph and tragedy of the contemporary progressive movement. With extraordinary courage and conviction, he has brought together blacks, poor people, women, white blue-collar workers and farmers. But Jackson has seemed intent upon organizing this movement only when elections roll around: he has failed to build serious, sustained political structures that would be important for, but finally independent of, his runs for the White House. Maybe it is time for members of the Rainbow Coalition to contest Jackson on this point and query him on his slow but steady drift toward the political center since his 1984 campaign. Jackson was less "left" in 1988 than he was in 1984, and all signs—including his recent self-serving meeting with George Bush—indicate that he will be even less left in 1992.

West is a provocative thinker and keen observer. But, as his weak commentary on Jackson testifies, he sometimes suffers from an overly

congenial militancy. His voice is strong and stirring, and he backs up his arguments with an imposing array of texts in critical theory, economics, religion, politics and philosophy. At his best, he enlightens and energizes readers with an authority that only a handful of intellectuals today wield. But his writing seems

limited by an unwillingness to press home positions that might disturb or risk dividing his audience—positions that the left badly needs to hear in order to shake up its complacent attitudes and strategies. ■

William E. Cain is an associate professor of English and director of American studies at Wellesley College.

NOTEBOOK



The Cuba Reader: The Making of a Revolutionary Society
Edited by Philip Brenner, William M. LeoGrande, Donna Rich and Dan Spiegel
Grove Press, 564 pp., \$14.95

This is the most up-to-date, balanced, comprehensive survey of Cuba available. The editors have expertly selected 56 readings on 17 different topics, roaming through Cuba's history, both pre- and postrevolution, its political and economic system, including the zigzags of the past few years, its foreign policy and its daily life and culture.

The tone throughout is sym-

pathetic without being sycophantic; readings include several recent investigations into human rights that are straightforwardly critical without descending into Reagan administration exaggeration. (Although the editors should probably have included readings discussing Armando Valladares, the long-term prisoner whose recent memoir, *Against All Hope*, raised questions among some people about his veracity.)

One of the best offerings, by Saul Landau, the veteran filmmaker and journalist, argues persuasively that the wrong questions are asked about Cuba. Many scholars have dug into whether Fidel Castro was secretly "Communist" and "pro-Soviet" before he won power. But Landau asserts that a more relevant question is whether any leader who wanted genuine economic independence for Cuba in 1959 could have done without Soviet aid, and the inevitably accompanying influence. It is an open question, and this big collection is a good place to begin answering it, and many others. —James North