

celebrating Glenn's flight, even the traffic cops cried ("They were right out in the intersections in front of everybody, bawling away—tears streaming down their faces, saluting. . . . The New York cops!").

Wolfe is brilliant, too, at portraying the mindlessness of the television coverage that orchestrated the national response to the Mercury flights. Or rather, the mindlessness of television itself, the vacant idiocy written into the nature of the medium. I cannot resist the urge to quote; here are the reporters gathered around the house of Alan Shepard as he lies wedged in his capsule awaiting lift-off. Louise Shepard is inside, behind drawn curtains:

They wanted a moan, a tear, some twisted features, a few inside words from friends, any goddamned thing. They were getting desperate. Give us a sign! Give us anything! Give us the diaper-service man! The diaper-service man comes down the street with his big plastic bags, smoking a cigar to provide an aromatic screen for his daily task—and they're all over him and his steamy bag. Maybe he knows the Shepards! Maybe he knows Louise! Maybe he's been in there! Maybe he knows the layout of *chez* Shepard! He locks himself in the front seat, choking on cigar smoke, and they're banging on his panel truck. "Let us in! We want to see!" They're on their knees. They're slithering in the ooze. They're interviewing the dog, the cat, the rhododendrons. . . .

*The Right Stuff* is brilliant, last of all, as a portrayal of politicians abasing themselves before the unreal idols of their own creation. There is John Kennedy inviting one after another of the Mercury astronauts to the White House, even to private parties at Hyannisport, with the tacit understanding that they have become the public relations symbols of his New Frontier. There is Lyndon Johnson at a reception for Glenn, "oozing protocol . . . , straining to get at John and pour Texas all over him." There are senators and congressmen bellying their way through the room, crazy just to get next to one of the astronauts. There is, astonishingly, the picture of an astronaut addressing a joint session of Congress: "There was John standing up there at the podium, with Lyndon Johnson and John McCormack seated behind him, and the rest of them *looking up at him* from their seats. In adoration, too!"

The source of this brilliance is not, I think, far to seek. The usual charge against the New Journalism is that it trivializes, lacks a moral center, dwells eternally on the surface of things. And these were precisely the qualities of Project Mercury, a huge national exercise in

triviality, a noisy drama with no real center, a gigantic monument to the superficial. In the American space program of the early sixties the New Journalism at last discovers a subject suited to its peculiar genius. □

**NOT TO THE SWIFT: The Old Isolationists in the Cold War Era, by Justus Doenecke. Bucknell University Press, 289 pp., \$8.95 (paper).**

## Stand against history

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ROBERT BRESLER

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**F**ROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF a generation chastened by the dangers of military intervention, it may be difficult to comprehend why the old isolationists of the early Cold War years were so often ridiculed and so frequently defeated. Many liberals, in particular, have come to regret their dismissal of Harry Elmer Barnes and Lawrence Dennis—not to mention Senator Robert A. Taft, Sr. (R-Ohio), and Senator William Langer (R-N.D.).

Justus Doenecke's *Not to the Swift* is not, however, another romantic rediscovery of these one time pariahs. Doenecke's account is sympathetic, but it also forces us to accept the ambiguous nature of their legacy. We see this extraordinary collection of prophets and

fused to heed their advice, for their advice, often inconsistent and confusing, was rarely easy to follow.

Their story, which Doenecke tells with meticulous care, is tragic and painful. After Pearl Harbor the choices were increasingly difficult. It was no longer possible to be both a militant anti-Communist and a militant anti-interventionist. World War II had profoundly changed the world of these old isolationists. The patriotic symbols of these former America Firsters had been usurped by the interventionists. By 1947 a powerful centrist coalition was arrayed against them. The Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers, which had remained aloof from the foreign policy debate of 1940–41, became solid supporters of the Marshall Plan. Many of the isolationists' most effective and articulate leaders—Burton K. Wheeler, Robert LaFollette, Jr., and Gerald Nye—had gone down to political defeat.

What held this disparate collection of conservatives, reactionaries, pacifists, and radicals together was, Doenecke insists, not "social caste or geographical location" but a nostalgic vision of America. Military intervention required a mobilization of society that was to shatter the old way of life. As wistful as their vision may always have been, it was still far easier to dream of the American Arcadia prior to World War II than after it. Each battle the old isolationists lost, from lend-lease to the Truman Doctrine to the Bricker Amendment, created new political realities and made the next battle even more difficult.

Having already sacrificed so much for European independence and stability, Americans were not likely to refuse the

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***The advice of the isolationists, often inconsistent and confusing, was rarely easy to follow.***

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curmudgeons for what they in all likelihood were: intellectually courageous, historically prescient, personally embittered, and politically opportunistic. Blame for their political failure cannot be placed entirely upon those who re-

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multibillion dollar loan to Great Britain in 1946 or, for that matter, to vote against Marshall Plan aid. New economic realities were also difficult to ignore. In endorsing the loan to Britain (a country that symbolized to many old isolationists the twin evils of socialism and imperialism), Senator Arthur Vandenberg (R-Mich.), a recent convert to internationalism, confessed, "one out of

five workers in my home state of Michigan normally depends upon export orders for his job."

Many crucial leaders of the old isolationists changed with the world and could not resist the temptation to sign up for the anti-Red crusade. The debate over the Truman Doctrine was a symbolic turning point. Salvaging the British-sponsored royalist regime in Greece was a distasteful task for many old isolationists. But it was not *that* distasteful a task. Representative Karl Mundt (R-S.D.), a former America Firster, supported Truman and insisted that "the Red torrent be kept from our shores." Vandenberg, who in the 1930s wanted a constitutional amendment barring war profits, sounded like a born-again globalist. He warned of a Soviet threat reaching "from the Dardanelles to the China Sea and westward to the rim of the Atlantic." Vandenberg carefully outmaneuvered his old allies in the course of the debate. He deterred the efforts of two persistent old isolationists, Senator Edwin C. Johnson (D-Colo.) and Representative George Bender (R-Ohio), to delete military aid to Turkey from the bill. There were others who remained faithful to their anti-interventionist principles, among them Joseph P. Kennedy, Frank Chodorov, Edwin Borah, and Representative Claire Hoffman (R-Mich.), but their ranks had been seriously depleted.

Doenecke ruefully notes that one third of the old isolationists remaining in the Senate voted against the Truman Doctrine and in the House only slightly more than half opposed the President. But beyond these figures was something far more serious. Many of the old isolationists were adopting the concepts of deterrence and credibility, concepts that were to be part of the catechism of interventionist theology.

**H**AVING SO COMPROMISED their position during the Truman Doctrine debate, many old isolationists found it difficult, two years later, to muster a consistent and effective argument against the NATO Treaty and the accompanying Military Assistance Program (MAP). Taft and Senator Ralph Flanders (R-Vt.) offered to replace NATO and the MAP program with a unilateral extension of the Monroe Doctrine. What Taft was proposing could no longer be called isolationism. It was rather a policy of interventionism based upon an air/sea strategy inspired by General Bonner Fellers. The atomic

bomb and the intercontinental bomber provided Taft and others with a technological fix—a means of reconciling their hatred of the Soviet Union with a genuine desire to avoid American troop commitments. A nuclear umbrella would be extended over all those areas having interests vital to the United States. By 1951, Taft wanted to place under that umbrella North Africa, Spain, the Suez Canal, Singapore, and the Malay peninsula. One can see from here direct lines to Dulles's massive retaliation and the erstwhile Nixon Doc-

trine. What had been in 1941 a crackling debate over America's role in the modern world had evolved, ten years later, into a technical debate over effective strategies of intervention. It was hard to imagine that prior to Pearl Harbor Taft had questioned the interventionist dogma that America's frontier lay on the Rhine.

Much of the old isolationists' contribution to the debate over China and Korea was more incendiary than restrained. The fall of Chiang's government, the Soviet development of an

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### Reflections on History

By Jacob Burckhardt

Jacob Burckhardt, the nineteenth-century Swiss historian and humanist, was a friend of liberty and a skeptic of power. He foresaw the coming of collectivism, and Nietzsche found in Burckhardt an historian who "was not dominated by the general whims and dared to see things realistically." First translated into English in 1943, *Reflections on History* was previously published in the United States under the title *Force and Freedom*. With an introduction by Gottfried Dietze. "No one predicted the modern totalitarian state more accurately"—Reinhold Niebuhr in *The Nation*. "A guided tour through the history of civilization"—*Saturday Review of Literature*. Hardcover \$9.00, Softcover \$4.00.

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atomic bomb, and finally the Korean War provided Taft and former President Herbert Hoover with an irresistible opportunity to break through the bipartisan coalition Truman and Vandenberg had so carefully crafted. In 1949, Hoover opposed the recognition of the People's Republic of China and urged American naval protection of Formosa, the Pescadores, and Hainan Island. While few of the old isolationists were enthusiastic about our entry into the Korean War, many were soon endorsing General MacArthur's plan to expand the war to China. Hoover went so far as to call the general, himself a globalist, "a reincarnation of Saint Paul." Doenecke notes that when Senator Edwin Johnson, in May 1951, called for a "mutual withdrawal of American and Chinese troops from Korea and an armistice on the 38th parallel," of the old isolationists only Senator Langer joined him. Lawrence Dennis wrote Harry Elmer Barnes that his old allies had become "Asia Firsters" and that they "don't believe in neutrality. They just don't like one pattern of intervention and wish to replace it by their own."

Although Doenecke cites the Bricker Amendment debate of 1954 as the last stand of the old isolationists, the most poignant moment of the book describes their alliance with Senator Joseph McCarthy. Many saw McCarthy as the avenging angel against those Eastern liberals who had so eagerly smeared Lindbergh, Wheeler, Nye, and the America First movement as being "soft on Nazism." Senator Langer called McCarthy's attack on General George C. Marshall, "one of the most important speeches that has ever been made on this floor." Even such consistent anti-interventionists as John T. Flynn and Frank Chodorov succumbed to wreaking revenge on the hated liberals. Only Barnes and Dennis, men with ample reason for bitterness and motives for revenge, stand out for refusing to take part in McCarthy's crusade. For those old isolationists who followed McCarthy, the American Eden was to be a purged and cleansed society bearing a greater resemblance to Orwell's *1984* than to Arcadia.

Although Doenecke tells this story without wincing, it is indeed a painful one. As the Cold War ground on, the voices of the old isolationists were never to be as clear nor their advice as wise as before Pearl Harbor. The lessons they had once tried diligently to teach us would have to be learned by another generation all over again. □

# F I L M

**THE ONION FIELD, directed by Harold Becker.**

**TIME AFTER TIME, directed by Nicholas Meyer.**

## Word-pictures

STEPHEN HARVEY

ONE OF THE SONGS INCLUDED in Stephen Sondheim's score for the musical *Company* was a poignant number called "Sorry—Grateful"; while the specific subject of the lyric is matrimony, the title expresses a state of mind that could apply to all sorts of situations—emphatically including that of the fiction writer who sells the fruits of his labors to the movies. Scarcely a novelist exists with a commercial instinct who hasn't entertained visions of a lucrative movie sale, followed by grim hallucinations of what may be in store once some would-be *auteur* lays his hands on the tome.

Movies being a visual medium and all that, and most production deals being what they are, authors tend to have little say in the matter of transforming their prose into someone else's *mise-en-scène*. Nevertheless, most of them know the proper role for such occasions; it consists of ranting against those oafs on the Coast in an interview with the *Village Voice*, usually after a discreet interval has passed since the last profit participation point was tallied.

Recently the ranks of well-paid malcontents have been broken by a few obdurate souls with the private means or personal forcefulness to take the situation into their own hands. Last year Michael Crichton directed the movie version of his own thriller *Coma*, which probably turned out neither better nor worse than it would have with someone more experienced at the helm. And Joseph Wambaugh has produced the film adaptation of his *The Onion Field*,

thus ensuring that his screenplay couldn't be altered to subvert his original intentions—having learned the hard way with *The Choirboys*. Meanwhile, Warner Bros. has entrusted Nicholas Meyer with the direction and adaptation of *Time After Time*, a yarn with a gimmick inspired by Meyer's own *Seven Per-Cent Solution*, although as far as I know; Meyer has heretofore never filmed so much as a Super-8 home movie. On screen as in print, Wambaugh and Meyer have safeguarded against any tampering with their respective visions, such as they are. In both cases, the results give audiences much to be sorry—grateful for as well.

Actually, if Wambaugh hadn't taken it upon himself to bring *The Onion Field* to the screen, it might never have been filmed at all at this late date. The rights to it had languished at one of the major studios for years, and understandably so; whatever its merits as drama, it goes against the prevailing winds as far as current movie subject matter is concerned. Time was, in the early seventies, when the awareness of daily guerrilla warfare in the inner city suddenly became omnipresent, and TV and the movies supplied grim release from these tensions by presenting the blue icons of law and order as figures of hero-worship. (That all this happened to occur while the Nixon regime was at its zenith may be worth a passing mention.) Wambaugh himself played no small part in this campaign aimed at glorifying the American cop, what with his novel *The New Centurions*, the subsequent film version, and his TV efforts such as *Police Story* and *The Blue Knight*.

Trends, however, follow the public mood, and even Clint Eastwood seems to have hung up his badge for the foreseeable future. Yet *The Onion Field* stubbornly persists, with its refrain of the policeman as existential hero struggling to preserve his integrity and equilibrium despite the self-induced myopia of the brass at headquarters, the criminal-coddling inefficiency of the courts, and the savagery of the animals stalking the streets in human form.

Considering further that the world described in *The Onion Field* includes only two subspecies of females, the stoic, compliant wife-mother and the lubri-

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