

Dubious venture

BARTON J. BERNSTEIN

THE KOREAN WAR COST the United States more than 54,000 dead, 103,000 other casualties, and \$75 billion. The war fanned the flames of domestic anti-communism, aided Joseph McCarthy's witch-hunting, tripled the military budget, and spurred the re-militarization of Europe. The Truman administration's decisions in summer 1950 to expand the war across the 38th parallel and toward the Yalu provoked China's intervention in the autumn, led to a bloody rout of UN forces, blocked relations with the People's Republic for nearly two decades, and encouraged the desire of General Douglas MacArthur, the American and UN commander in the Pacific, to attack China. Condemning him for recklessness, Truman ultimately fired him for insubordination, but the administration secretly flirted with similar strategies of expanding the war.

For two years, from July 1951 to July 1953, Truman and then Eisenhower sought to negotiate an armistice while trying to restrain Syngman Rhee, the South Korean president, from sabotaging the effort. Ultimately, the United States and the communist powers agreed to an armistice at the 38th parallel, and Eisenhower gave Rhee a security pact in return for his acceptance of the armistice.

Over the years, journalists and scholars have continued writing about this three-year war, but the subject never inspired the flood of books and articles that the lengthy Indochina war produced. Because of the leaking of the Pentagon Papers, the once-secret documents on the Indochina war were more available than those on the earlier Asian conflict. In the past few years, however, with the declassification of official military histories,

the opening of some archives, the State Department's publication of key documents, and the use of the Freedom of Information Act, there has been a renewed spurt of literature on the Korean War—its background, America's decisions to intervene and expand it, the Truman-MacArthur controversy, Ike's efforts to end the war, and the struggle to contain Rhee.

While not acknowledging this new scholarship, Joseph Goulden, author of ten books ranging in subject from H. L. Mencken to the Gulf of Tonkin affair, has exploited many of the declassified materials in this large volume on the entire war. His is not the "untold story" or the "Pentagon Papers of [this] war," as Goulden claims, but an interesting and curious amalgam of the familiar, the little-known, and even the dubious. Substantial parts of the volume draw from a recently declassified, richly revealing history of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but the book sometimes relies uncritically on questionable American documents and suspect recollections by interviewees, including an ex-CIA agent. About 550 pages focus on the first year of war, and only the last few chapters treat the armistice negotiations, the difficulties of dealing with Rhee, problems of keeping the Western allies in line, and Ike's nuclear threats.

American policy makers are not unalloyed heroes for Goulden. He often finds Secretary of State Dean Acheson and Truman shortsighted as they expanded the war without foreseeing the consequences—including China's entry into the war—or understanding the fears of European allies. MacArthur is often the villain of Goulden's story, and the author delights in lacerating him, uncovering ugly aspects of his career, and even harshly interpreting his personality. The Joint Chiefs are periodically scolded for not restraining MacArthur, and General Matthew Ridgway, MacArthur's successor, emerges as a stainless hero for halting the UN retreat, and accepting the constraints of limited war.

Goulden commends the Acheson-

Truman decision to enter the war; it was, he feels, necessary to maintain American prestige and power. Too easily, he dismisses the more plausible view that the conflict was basically a civil war, that Truman and Acheson erred in interpreting it as part of the cold war and as a Soviet-instigated attack, and thus that they committed troops to a dubious venture. Had Truman stayed out of the war, according to this revisionist interpretation, America might have briefly lost some prestige, as the National Security Council had forecast in 1948 in counseling withdrawal from Korea, but the prestige could have been recouped and much of the angry politics of the fifties avoided. To put matters bluntly, the administration should have followed its own 1948 advice, and stayed out of the war. American entry in 1950 was a mistake.

For Goulden, as for many analysts, much of the story of the early war focuses on the struggle of Washington with MacArthur. The general, a master of hokum according to the author, was insecure, mother-dominated, and sexually maladjusted, and thus, presumably, inclined to bluster, arrogance, strained heroics, and fears of failure. General Thomas Jefferson Davis, a former MacArthur aide interviewed by Goulden, revealed that MacArthur used to entertain prostitutes. "He'd never screw them," Davis recalled; "he would just sit there in an armchair and let the girls admire what a great man he was." On other occasions, MacArthur would reveal his "sadistic streak." He would pick up a girl from a Baltimore whorehouse, wine and dine her, and, when she would pressure him, MacArthur "would denounce her as a 'little whore,' and walk away. He'd laugh at her later, on the ride back to Washington." According to Davis, MacArthur also periodically threatened suicide, fearing that he could not live up to the role of a hero, that he might fail at some critical point. This material, according to Goulden, is from a report that Davis prepared in August 1950 when MacArthur was undercutting the Truman administration and a State Department official decided to gather information for the Joint Chiefs on the general.

Even in the first days of the war, as the author reminds readers, MacArthur violated orders. The Joint Chiefs' early order permitted him to bomb the North Korean enemy only south of the

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38th parallel, but MacArthur itched to bomb in North Korea. "How can I bomb [there] without Washington hanging me?" he asked an associate. He hit upon the strained interpretation that the Joint Chiefs' directive was permissive, not restrictive, and thus that he could bomb North as well as South Korea. Truman, Acheson, the Secretary of Defense, and the Joint Chiefs did not challenge the general.

He could get away with such brazen tactics. A certified American hero, he was a Republican favorite and politically powerful. The administration and the Joint Chiefs feared an open battle with him. Moreover, because he was usually pushing for military strategies that Truman and Acheson favored, they were not likely to quibble about details or scold him for violating orders.

WHEN MACARTHUR wanted to send ground troops across the 38th parallel and unite Korea, his plans jibed with the hopes of Truman and Acheson. They all believed that China would not intervene in the war. Truman and Acheson even lectured the People's Republic that its real enemy was Russia, disregarding the Chinese warnings. In mid-October, when MacArthur and Truman conferred at Wake Island, neither worried about China's intervention. Full of optimism, the general and the president concentrated instead on American policy after *victory*—how soon they could shift troops to Europe and how they would rebuild Korea into an anticommunist bastion.

When China did enter the war in late October and bloodied the UN forces, Washington briefly panicked. But when the Chinese "volunteers" melted away in early November, Acheson and Truman saw no reason to revise their strategy and order MacArthur not to unify Korea. It was not that the president and secretary were intimidated by MacArthur; rather, like him, they were confident that China would not send in massive numbers and block the American goal. They were wrong.

Acheson and other administration members blamed the debacle on MacArthur. He was reckless and Washington feared restraining him, they charged. They were partly correct. He was reckless. But so was Washington. Just a few days before the massive Chinese entry of late

November, Acheson, Secretary of Defense George Marshall, and their assistants discussed whether to offer China a buffer zone along the Yalu *before* or *after* America vanquished all North Korean forces and "liberated" Korea. The recently declassified record of this high-level discussion underscores the hubris of American policy makers.

In April 1951 Truman cashiered the general when he again violated orders. MacArthur issued a letter (soon made public) undercutting the administration's policy and then sabotaged the administration's quest for armistice negotiations by calling publicly for a officials that he planned to attack China and "dispose of the Chinese communist question." MacArthur did communist surrender. In a fanciful claim, Goulden argues that MacArthur was also fired because the government intercepted a foreign cable disclosing that he had told European cherish such hopes, but Goulden fails to establish that Truman had an intercepted cable.

Like many previous interpreters, Goulden stresses that the administration was struggling to keep the war limited and that MacArthur was threatening a wider war. Yet the author neglects important evidence that some presidential advisers were *also* urging an attack on China and that Acheson told Prime Minister Winston Churchill in January 1952 that America might soon bomb Manchuria and China if the communists would not accept American terms for an armistice.

Strangely, in 1952, a year after firing MacArthur, Truman appointed as the new Pacific Commander General Mark Clark, an admirer of MacArthur's goals in the war. Like MacArthur, Clark wanted to expand the war, seek victory not stalemate, bomb across the Yalu, and even use atomic weapons. Why was Clark appointed when safer generals were available? The author, often too tied to the narrative of events, does not ponder the question.

Goulden sketches the little-known story of Rhee's opposition to the armistice, his threats to withdraw South Korean troops from the UN command and take the war to the north, America's plans to depose Rhee, and his success in blackmailing Eisenhower into granting the South Korean-American mutual security pact. That treaty, wrung from a reluc-

tant Ike who considered having Rhee overthrown, remains the legal basis for the present South Korean-American alliance and the stationing of American troops in Korea.

After the armistice, Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles claimed that they had used nuclear threats to end the war. Newly declassified documents, used by Goulden, reveal that on May 19, 1953, the Joint Chiefs proposed using nuclear weapons and that the National Security Council promptly ratified that recommendation. Fortunately, America never moved beyond its secret threats.

Eisenhower continued to think of using nuclear weapons if war erupted again in Korea. Four months after ending the war, according to a document not used by Goulden, Ike told a worried Churchill that if the communists attacked in Korea, the United States might bomb across the Yalu and use nuclear weapons against enemy supplies and troop concentrations. Ike said "that he did not think that an attack on the West by the Soviets would be the consequence. . . ." Churchill, in contrast, feared "a third world war and the destruction of London." ■

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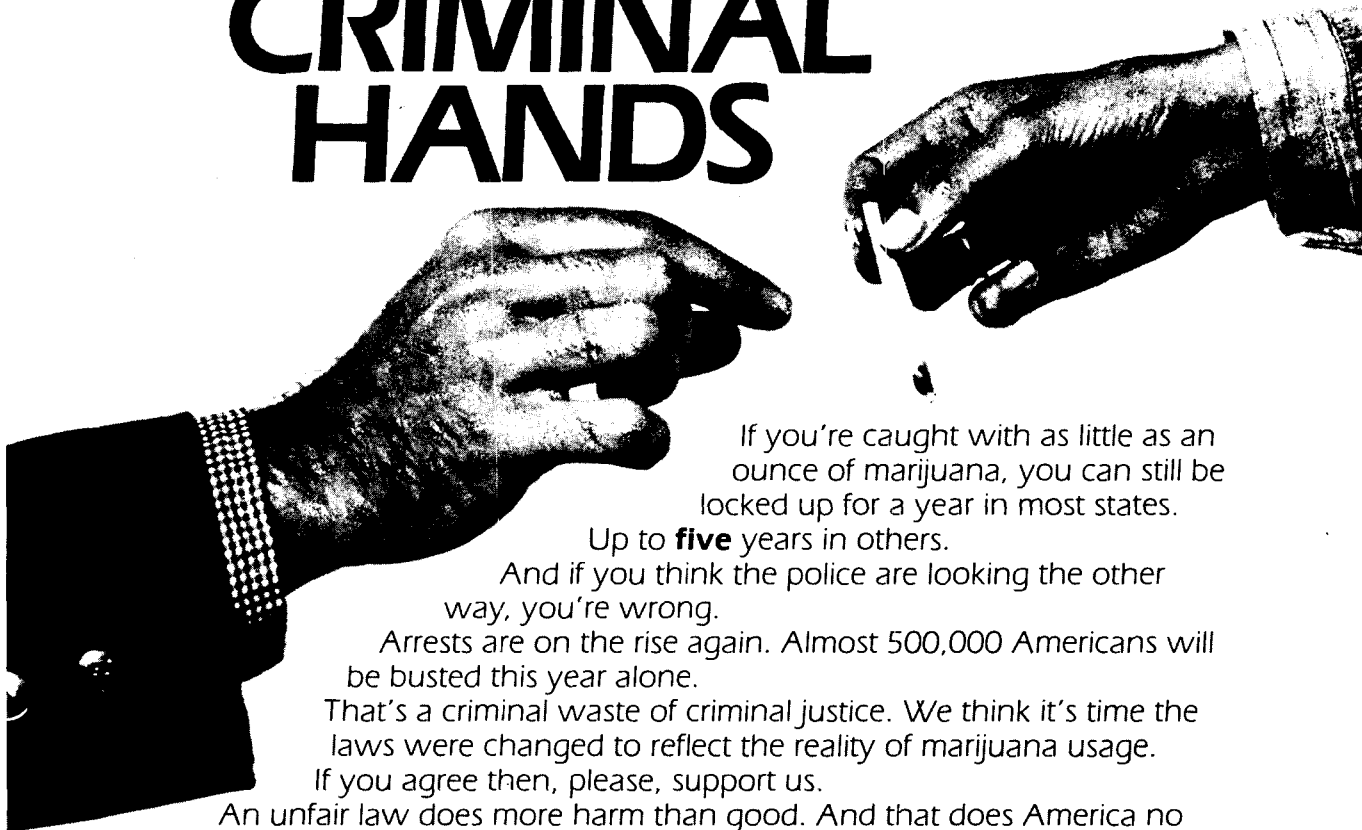
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A proper Epicurean

P. J. O'ROURKE

JUDITH MARTIN INTRODUCES politeness and mirth to a society where "have a nice day" passes for courtesy and a film like *Porky's* is thought to represent humor.

Miss Manners' Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior is based on the syndicated "Miss Manners" newspaper column written by Ms. Martin, and it is a delightful book. I am no fan of weddings, anniversaries, funerals, or celebrations thereof, but I read this instruction on formal etiquette from cover to cover without any temptation to jam a three-and-an-eighth-inch by two-and-a-half-inch engraved card down someone's throat or throw pork fried rice at newlywed couples.

This is partly the result of Ms. Martin's excellent wit. When asked if there is any preferred date for weddings in modern life, Miss Manners replies, "It is preferable to hold them after the divorce and before the birth of the baby." And on the subject of publicity she says, "The old rule . . . was that a lady should allow her name to appear in the newspapers only three times: when she is born, when she marries, and when she dies. This is no longer workable. . . . A modern rule might be: A lady never gets married, gives birth, or, if possible, dies, on television—even if she is offered a free refrigerator for doing so."

But to call this volume "a funny etiquette book" would be something like calling *Ulysses* "a cockeyed look at the Micks." Lighthearted though it is, *Miss Manners' Guide* is a sophisticated and well-reasoned paean to self-control. Unrestraint, particularly emotional unrestraint, is condemned: "Contrary to the credo of this society, Miss Manners firmly believes that there are certain honest, understandable, deeply felt emotions that ought never to be expressed by anyone." And all intemperate behavior is reproached: "Miss Manners does not

want people to act naturally; she wants them to act civilly."

Miss Manners brings us the message that the difference between civilization and the lack of it is mastery of self. How did we happen to forget this? How did we come to be a nation full of grown men and women who cry constantly at the top of our lungs, immediately break all our toys, and soil ourselves in public without embarrassment?

It is an irony of the twentieth century that the worst threat to our way of life is totalitarianism while the second worst threat is everyone doing as he merry well pleases.

The careless, selfish, unthinking anarchy of daily social existence beggars description let alone response. Who has not wanted to take a yammering cab driver, sew him up in a sack full of cats, and place-kick him into the East River? Or grab a moron teenager with Voice-of-America-sized broadcasting equipment on his shoulder and pour Drano in his car? Or slice open an old friend with a new diet/religion/therapy/wife and tie a clove hitch in his entrails? One knows these actions would only add to the sum total of rudeness in modern life. But, though we have such august institutions as Alexander Haig and the \$1.6 trillion defense budget to protect us from totalitarianism, what will protect us from shovers, whiners, fondlers, and shirt collars that extend past sportcoat lapels? Perhaps Miss Manners will.

Armed only with kindly jest and thoroughgoing knowledge of tradition, Miss Manners does combat with all the world's ill breeding. And she is so clever, so firm, and yet so sympathetic that she might just win. (Although an occasional dose of ear Drano or sack of courtesy cats would probably help her cause—not that she'd approve.)

Miss Manners' Guide is the first really valid and forceful reply to the modern assault on etiquette. For sixty years manners have been under attack as hypocritical and unnatural. Finally someone has the nerve to say that of course they are. "The world needs more

false cheer," says Miss Manners, "and less honest crabbiness."

Disguised as a source of amusement and practical advice, *Miss Manners' Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior* is actually a book of Epicurian philosophy in the proper sense of the term. It may be the most important work in that genre since Titus Lucretius Carus wrote *De Rerum Natura* around 60 B.C.

Ms. Martin shows manners to be a set of conventions by means of which humans may conduct their lives with the maximum amount of mental and physical comfort while providing complete opportunity for others to do the same. This is precisely the "ataraxia," or serenity, of Epicurus.

Ms. Martin denies that her rules of etiquette have any moral, political, or religious implications. But the reader will politely dismiss this modesty. Morals, politics, and religion are tawdry things compared to the kind of manners Ms. Martin advocates. Morals are nothing but an attempt to make human courtesy abstract and consistent. Politics is worse. It is the enforcement of some form of that courtesy with guns. And religion is just a last-ditch attempt to make people behave when, for instance, they aren't intellectual enough to understand morals and are nearly as well-armed as the government. Failing all else, religion tells people to act nice or great horned things will get them.

Ms. Martin indulges in no such threats or any sophistry or gunplay. She postulates that everyone would like to be as mentally and physically comfortable as possible. From that given, she deduces that the only way for such a thing to be achieved is for everyone to act civil and courteous. She then shows us the traditional Western European conventions of courtesy and civility, gives the reasons for their existence, suggests modifications in those conventions which contemporary circumstances have rendered awkward, and urges us to preserve the rest for the sake of symbolism as well as practical value.

The result of this meditation on life is an attitude and a pattern of behavior as logical as plane geometry, as polished as the Japanese tea ceremony, and as merciful as Christianity before it spread to more than twelve people and got confused with going to church.

This is good medicine for a nation with 200 million people in a position to enjoy material and intellectual

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