

government is and how we may best live with it. It has, however, several serious weaknesses. One is a tendency to overuse the technical tools of economics (both authors are economists) in contexts where they add little to the argument. The book is filled with diagrams of the sort used to ornament microeconomics texts; in most cases they tell us only what the verbal argument has already demonstrated—that a particular result (the superiority of one tax to another) is likely to occur but might not. One occasionally has the impression that the authors, having produced a long article's worth of interesting ideas, had to find something to fill up the rest of the book.

The book's most serious weakness, however, is not what is in it but what is not. If at the constitutional level we can impose binding restraints on government, why should we restrict tax collections in a clumsy and expensive way by restricting the government to certain limited taxes instead of restricting taxes and expenditure directly? The authors raise this question but do not resolve it. Until they do—until they offer some serious explanation of what sorts of restrictions can or cannot be enforced upon government—they are open to the charge of having done an ingenious job of explaining the wrong way to do the right thing.

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## Sense and Nonsense About Sociobiology

### **Sociobiology Examined.**

*Edited by Ashley Montagu.*

*New York: Oxford University Press.*

*1980. 355 pp. \$5.95 paper.*

**Reviewed by William R. Havender**

**T**he continuing public debate over sociobiology is the most boring in the world. On the one hand there is the sweeping and preposterous *braggadocio* of the claim by Harvard University's Edmond Wilson (the "father" of sociobiology) and his crowd to having reduced the social sciences to, in essence, mere satrapies of evolutionary sociobiology—a claim that, while accorded a measure of respect since it issues from an eminent scientist, is wholly unsupported by compelling fact. On the other hand there is the vast outpouring of defensive and usually biologically ignorant articles by

those practitioners in the humanities whose turf seems in danger of being colonized by sociobiologists.

The whole is then overlain with a vicious attack upon sociobiologists' political motives by a small, hollering group of self-styled "Marxists" whose verbal sallies are as tough and uncivil as they are false. As a result, the debate has a curious, insubstantial air about it, as though Indonesian shadow puppets were throwing, but never landing, roundhouse blows.

So I was prepared to be bored when I was asked to review *Sociobiology Examined*, a collection of critical essays, most of which have been previously published in journals as variant as *Science*, *Philosophy*, *American Psychologist*, and the *New York Review of Books*. Mercifully, however, the "Marxists" are here represented by only two token pieces (by Steven Rose and Stephen Jay Gould). Most of the rest are honest attempts that have at least a few useful insights, and—surprise of surprises!—three are simply outstanding. Two of these, by the philosopher Mary Midgley, are exceedingly clever and marvelously intelligent commentaries that, among other good deeds, skewer Richard Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene* quite neatly.

The third, by the anthropologist Derek Freeman, is the best of the lot, because it develops with a wealth of interesting and pertinent empirical detail the most important idea competing with sociobiology for pride of place. This idea is that culture itself is the raw material of evolution-like processes having nothing whatever to do with changes in the genes. Thus, new ideas and practices could be discovered (corresponding to a new genetic mutation), and these could perhaps spread, in competition with existing practices and other novelties, through the population and to succeeding generations (thus corresponding to Darwin's "survival of the fittest").

Instances of this kind of process are all around us—the spread of fashions, new songs, language changes, modernity, even political individualism. In this way, the pattern of cultural practices that led sociobiologists to think Darwinian genetic evolution must be at work—such as Wilson's "universals" of aggression, incest taboos, sex-role differences, altruism, and religion (see his recent *On Human Nature*)—is readily explainable by the idea that such customs confer real benefits on the societies that optimally develop them and then prosper and thrive relative to the rest. A society that

failed, after all, to practice predominantly nonincestuous mating would not be long for this world, nor would one that failed to develop some means of fostering moral consensus (such as, by means of religion.)

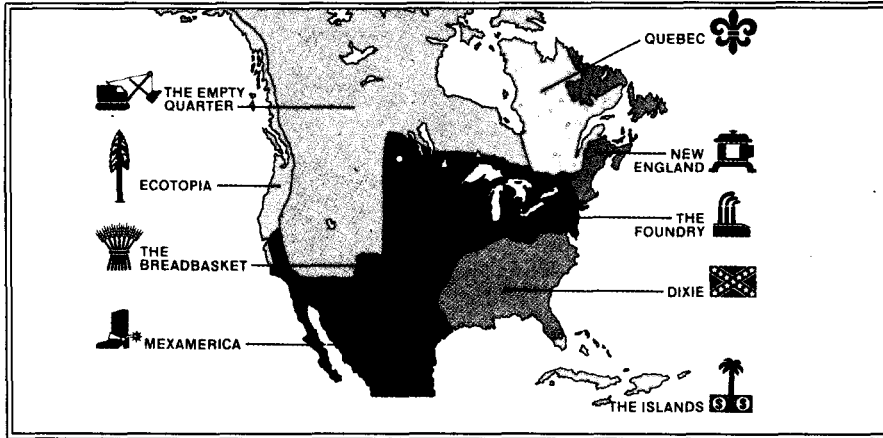
No recourse to the genes is needed at all, then, to account for such universals. It is the great virtue of Freeman's essay that he understands this fundamental concept and fleshes it out with specific examples.

**F**reeman also points out the basic problem with locating the source of cultural practices and values in the genes: that the pace of genetic change is much too slow to keep pace with the rapid shift of culture. Put in other words, the only aspect of the cultural environment that is likely to be constant over many generations is its fluidity; hence, the only "constant" likely to be "seen" by the genes against the background of short-term cultural shifts is the enduring need for flexibility of response. In this view, the genes would be driven to extend rather than to constrain the range of human choice. This realization then liberates this topic from the burden of predetermination and immutability of the existing status quo (with its sexism, hierarchy structure, etc.) that has encumbered the public discussion.

In short, this book supplies a partial antidote to the overall poor quality of the debate on sociobiology as it transpires in popular articles, TV specials, and *Time* covers; one can gain some useful insights here. One should also, however, read F. A. Hayek's essay, "The Three Sources of Human Values," which remains the single best commentary on this matter to date.

What special interest might sociobiology hold for political individualists? One fascinating aspect is that the animal kingdom offers a multitude of instances of "spontaneous order," since *all* social order observed in the lower animals is obviously spontaneous and unplanned. An examination of these might prove fruitful in uncovering clues to general principles—concerning signaling, communication, homeostasis, etc.—that could prove useful in effecting the transformation of human society that *we* would like to see: the release of an ever-expanding range of social activity from the leech-like clutch of government and its delegation to the beneficent action of the spontaneous order.

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## A Continent Divided

### The Nine Nations of North America.

By Joel Garreau.

Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1981. 427 pp. \$14.95.

Reviewed by David F. Nolan

Every now and then you come across a book that fundamentally changes the way you look at the world. It gives you a new map of reality that makes more sense, somehow, than the maps you were using before—and, after reading it, nothing seems quite the same, ever again. Try as you may, once you've read such a book, you can never go back to thinking about things in just the same way you thought about them before. The old maps are still there—and perhaps even still useful—but the new map has been superimposed on them and won't go away.

Howard Katz's *The Warmongers* is a book like that. So are some of Robert Anton Wilson's writings, in an odd way. And so is Joel Garreau's *The Nine Nations of North America*.

Garreau contends that you get a clearer picture of the social, political, and economic affairs on this continent if you ignore artificial national, state, and provincial boundaries and instead view things in terms of nine identifiable cultural and economic regions. Each of these regions, he maintains, has its own special characteristics that make it an identifiable entity, clearly distinguishable from the other "nations." And the cultural and economic factors that set each of the nine apart from one another are the underlying reality that shapes affairs within each "nation" and the relations among them.

The nine nations Garreau describes range from the Foundry (the industrial region surrounding the Great Lakes) to Dixie, MexAmerica (southwest United States and Mexico), and Ecotopia (a strip of land running along the West Coast from central California all the way to southern Alaska). Of the nine, only two—Dixie and Quebec—are wholly contained within a single country; perhaps the most fascinating of the nine is the Islands—a Caribbean confederacy stretching from Miami to Caracas.

A newspaperman by trade, Garreau traveled over 100,000 miles gathering material for *Nine Nations*, and he writes with a journalist's flair. By the time you finish his grand tour, each of the "nations" has come alive; "the Breadbasket" is now a place more real for me than, say, Indiana.

The book has its flaws; much of Garreau's writing is impressionistic and selectively focused to strengthen the national identities he postulates. On more than one occasion one wishes for more hard facts and less symbolism. And at times, his style treads a precarious line between profundity and cutesiness. (Example: his description of the border between the Empty Quarter and the Breadbasket as "the place where carbohydrates become more important than hydrocarbons." On one level, that's pithy and insightful; on another, it's a bit too glib.)

Nonetheless, *Nine Nations* is a book well worth reading. By the time you're through you understand, in a broad sense, the social, economic, and political dynamics of North America in a way you probably wouldn't if you thought only in terms of traditional political boundaries.

(In a section entitled "Aberrations," Garreau allows that some places—Manhattan, Hawaii, Alaska, and Washington, D.C.—are enclaves unto themselves. Writing about Alaska, he notes that "the

far right is so far right that it has been known to link up with the left on some issues. . . . The only two Libertarian Party members in North America elected to state office live in Alaska.")

As Garreau himself cautions in the preface, the book is not to be taken too seriously. Regional identities notwithstanding, the United States and Canada, Colorado and Indiana, will continue to exist as political units. The new map does not entirely supersede the old. But *Nine Nations* is likely to be a hot topic of conversation on the cocktail party circuit these days, and deservedly so. Score some points by being the first on your block to read it.

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## Siberian Terrors

### Kolyma: The Arctic Death Camps.

By Robert Conquest.

New York: Viking Press. 1978. 254 pp. \$10.95.

### Kolyma Tales.

By Varlam Shalamov.

New York: W. W. Norton. 1980. 222 pp. \$9.95.

Reviewed by John Hospers

What remains to be said about the Soviet penal system after Solzhenitsyn's monumental three-volume work *The Gulag Archipelago* and Robert Conquest's definitive scholarly work *The Great Terror*? Much still remains. Both these works take us only through 1966. And Solzhenitsyn, as he himself says, has little to relate about Kolyma, since it is so remote (almost 5,000 miles east of Moscow) and he encountered so few survivors. Yet Kolyma is the most dreaded of all the camp complexes, located in the most inhospitable region on earth outside of Antarctica, the Kolyma River region of northeastern Siberia. In the Soviet Union the word *Kolyma* arouses the same terror as the word *Auschwitz* does to survivors of Hitler's regime.

Why would anyone wish to go there, even to conduct slave labor? Because it happens that one of the world's largest deposits of gold lies in that region. The Soviet government, says Conquest, "was faced with great difficulty. On the face of it, it could either give concessions to free enterprise or invest a great amount of