

in their homes and at family gatherings." The resulting story is an engrossing journey into a subculture most Americans will never experience—and just as well. It is a desperate and tawdry existence.

But what we learn above all is that the cocaine kids are mostly just kids. Williams has succeeded in obliterating the easy stereotype. These are ordinary teenagers struggling to impress girls and worrying about their favorite baseball team (the Mets). Like other Americans, they measure success by material wealth. Our current drug laws present an extraordinary opportunity for their enrichment.

**B**ut while they make huge sums of money, amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, very little of it sticks to their fingers. These immature kids squander almost all of what they make on their own drug consumption and continuous "partying." The only member of the ring who managed to accumulate any wealth quit after five years to open a legitimate business. The ring's Colombian connection, however, reaped enormous profits—an estimated \$8 million through the kids' efforts.

These kids aren't without values. They just live in a different world. While all of the kids snort cocaine regularly, Williams reports that the use of crack is generally frowned upon: "Most dealers see crack smokers as obsessive consumers who cannot take care of business; crack users, they say, tend to become agitated, quickly lose control and concentration, and take one dose after another at the expense of everything else."

The crack smoke itself is considered so precious that users go to bizarre lengths to preserve it. Williams describes regulars at one South Bronx crack house who are known as "balloon heads." They blow their excess smoke into a balloon, holding it closed with a finger until they are ready to inhale again. Who really believes they'll be deterred by "user accountability"?

The book provides no indication that current drug laws or law enforcement are having any noticeable impact on the cocaine trade. In fact, Williams points out that the rise of the cocaine kids was an

unintended consequence of an earlier drug war.

New York's harsh "Rockefeller laws" mandated a prison term for anyone over 18 in possession of an illegal drug. This led heroin dealers to use kids as runners. Cocaine dealers simply followed the pattern. Williams writes: "Young people not only avoid the law but are, for the most part, quite trustworthy. They are also relatively easy to frighten and control."

*The Cocaine Kids* reveals the folly of our current drug laws and helps make the case for decriminalization or legalization. Legalizing the sale of most drugs to adults would reduce crime and corruption virtually overnight by disempowering the drug cartels and impoverishing drug dealers.

How will legalization affect the cocaine kids? It will take away their bailiwick and deprive them of their livelihood. But almost all of them eventually end up broke anyway.

Legalization won't help teenagers who are undereducated and underqualified. But it can save them from the temptation to deal in drugs by removing the lure of great wealth that currently beckons them. And it can greatly reduce the power of drug-financed gangs to influence kids in our inner cities.

Readers of *The Cocaine Kids* will no doubt conclude that a decent society shouldn't produce children like this. Their story is the American dream perverted. Readers may also conclude that a decent society shouldn't tempt children with the kind of money that results from current drug policies.

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**Dave Barry Slept Here: A Sort of History of the United States**, by Dave Barry, New York: Random House, 178 pages, \$15.95. "At this point Mexico owned the territory that we now call 'Texas,' which consisted primarily of what we now call 'dirt.'" This is history? Only in the warped mind of Dave Barry, the Pulitzer Prize-winning humorist for the *Miami Herald*. His latest book, *Dave*

*Barry Slept Here*, may not do to history what *Airplane!* did to disaster movies, but it's a good start.

Barry has a noble purpose. Relaying the sad truth that Americans know little about their own history ("78 percent of [high school students tested] identified Abraham Lincoln as 'a kind of lobster'"), Dave tries to set us straight. He presents a book that leaves out all the dull parts (mostly the facts).

You can astonish your friends with the following anecdotes (which Barry made up): Abe Lincoln's family was so poor that he grew up in a log cabin made of one log. Andrew "Dale" Carnegie made a fortune by conducting seminars in which he taught people how to win friends by making steel. And Jimmy Carter claimed a large attack rabbit chased him while canoeing. (Oops, that really happened.)

Barry even has the audacity to occasionally stumble upon the truth. For example, he explains how the Founding Fathers paid the Revolutionary War debt. Alexander Hamilton came up with an idea "so brilliant—and yet so simple—that it remains extremely popular with governments to this very day. 'Let's print money with our pictures on it,' Hamilton suggested."

And here's how Barry explains the Monroe Doctrine:

"1. Other nations are *not allowed* to mess around with the internal affairs of nations in this hemisphere.

2. But we are.

3. Ha-ha-ha."

Barry is an impressive humorist. In the spirit of Mark Twain, Monty Python, and "Saturday Night Live," his humor is fast, irreverent, and not cynical. He's quite willing to make himself part of the joke.

Perhaps the greatest danger the reader faces is his uncontrollable desire to read portions of the book aloud to friends or loved ones. AVOID THIS TEMPTATION! Unscientific statistical sampling has shown that these readers start giggling involuntarily during the performance, blowing the punch lines and diminishing Barry's humorous impact. By all means buy this book, but let your friends enjoy it on their own.

—Rick Henderson

# TANKS, BUT NO TANKS

BY THOMAS W. HAZLETT

So there we were, zipping along into the 20th century, a war here, a holocaust there—and blammo! Suddenly, we're in geopolitical heaven. Tyrants are toppling like so many bowling pins at the epicenter of an 8.0 earthquake, with mountains being heaved by masses of humanity yearning to breathe free. These are not the capitalist coffeehouse revolutionaries of Madison, Berkeley, or Soho, mouthing the witticisms of the brothers Marx or the sisters Lenin and ranting of The Struggle while designer costumed in the garb of this season's fashion-conscious Vanguard. No. These are simple men and women who have gone marching without scripts, props, or propaganda.

These quiet folks are the girders upon which all societies hang. But they are flesh and spirit, not iron and ore. And they have finally been given the word: "The coast is clear. You can come out to play now." The souls of common men have emerged from their secret hiding places and have asserted their will over the very governments which were so freely having their way with them. Instantly, the entire world is transformed. And all because of one teensy-weensy policy reform: *No Soviet tanks*.

Eric Hoffer condemned the 20th century as bloodstained and maniacal beyond imagination: "Some of the disastrous absurdities of the 20th Century: the First World War, the Russian Revolution, the Versailles Peace Treaty, Prohibition, the Great Depression, the Roosevelt Administration....the Hitler revolution, the Second World War, the 1960s."

But while the innocents have suffered for the sins of our time, painfully and en masse, they have not been altogether blameless, he noted: "The sickness of the 20th Century has been cowardice—the cowardice of millions allowing themselves to be liquidated by communists and Nazis without hitting back....The mystery of our time is the inability of decent people to get angry."

But personal anger vs. Soviet tanks produces a very large point spread. And the smart money is still on the tanks. Warsaw's Jews did rise up against the oppressor during the very darkest days of this century, and dug (literally) their own graves. Not that their long-term prospects were bright. But they were decent, and they got angry.

So did the East Germans in 1953, the Hungarians in 1956, the Czechs in 1968, the Poles in 1981. But the Soviet tanks were all gassed up and ready to roll. The tanks won. The heroic dead were a two-fer for the Communist State: (1) the worst "parasites" were flushed from the Body Politic; (2) everyone else learned a basic lesson. A steep learning curve pointed decent people toward cowardice, simply because they were unable to shake off the instinctive biological presumption of all non-extinct species: choose life.

History shows that the demonstration of just a few tanks is very instructive. Unhappily, our files are continually updated; the behavior of approximately one billion human beings has been recently tamed by the dramatic and well-publicized extermination of 500 or 1,000 pop-offs in Tiananmen Square. My, aren't they well behaved, those Chinamen?

**P**ropaganda can help the rulers economize on ammunition, but it is never enough. The Party Line is a joke, minus the bullets to back it up (which make it much less funny, indeed). No sooner had M.S. Gorbachev pulled the plug on the Soviet tank battalions than the Emperors Without Clothes were just a bunch of preposterous, cranky old commies. And, without tanks on the horizon, buck naked. Ceausescu, the one with his own tanks and secret police, went down hardest and best. But there is the little matter of the 4,500 who volunteered to stand before the first line of fire and consecrated Romanian liberation with their blood. (Nicolae's self-designation,

"Hero of Heroes," now brings tears, rather than smirks, from those who knew both the poseur and the real thing.) These were decent men, women, and children, and they got angry. They, and their genes, are gone.

Mao's NRA-endorsed postulate about political power omitted certain footnotes. The peoples of the Eastern Bloc had 40 years to get with the program, yet support for Official Truth was so thin that, for example, jury selection in the Ceausescu case was irrelevant; no 12 people in the entire country could be assembled who did not wish "The Truth Itself" dead. Firepower did not buy allegiance.

It did, however, procure demoralization in bulk. Czeslaw Milosz, the great Polish writer, ends his novel of the post-war communization, *Seizure of Power*, with the protagonist—a troubled man of conscience—pondering the darkness descending over his nation. To him "the only important question [was] how a man could preserve himself from the taint of sadness and indifference."

We have learned of countervailing forces; brutal oppression works to destroy men's audacity, but that force is itself an admission of failure which makes it impossible to win men's minds. (Thus, the inner contradiction of Marxism?) "Totalitarianism" turns out to be a misnomer. Terror depresses, but it cannot control the vital human juices which, in time, fill men's veins with hope and freedom.

The virulence of communism was that it proved a crafty motivator, giving men messianic payoffs for believing, accompanied by quick and cruel paybacks for doubting. We have learned from our bitter century that tanks can tame men's actions. But what we now know is that tanks may not corral their souls. We are not yet out of angry, decent people.

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