

# political book notes

*Public affairs books to be published in September*

**American Dreams: Lost and Found.** Studs Terkel. Pantheon, \$14.95.

**The American Establishment.** Leonard Silk, Mark Silk. Basic, \$13.95. In this book, the latest attempt to reduce American society to a set of flash cards, everything boils down to the mighty monoliths of Business, Government, and what the authors call "the third force, the Establishment." Three separate and distinct entities, with no interlocking directorships. Small wonder poor Nelson Rockefeller was so confused.

The Silks' book consists of a long-winded dissertation on what the word "Establishment" means, followed by brisk but aimless sketches of its standard-bearers—Harvard, *The New York Times*, the Ford Foundation, Brookings. The authors lay on with a trowel their notion that Harvard is the central institution of the cosmos, if not beyond. The entire Establishment, they say, "can trace its roots to a real religious establishment, the Unitarian Church of Massachusetts," simply because Harvard was once Unitarian.

After going to great lengths to color-code the behavior of Establishment forces, the Silks make no effort to suggest what any of it has to do with anything. Among their limp conclusions: "Prestige counts. When the Establishment talks, people listen. An echo chamber seems to exist out there in the country for what the Establishment says."

—Gregg Easterbrook

**Counting Our Blessings: Reflections on the Future of America.** Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Little, Brown, \$12.95.

**Crackers.** Roy Blount, Jr. Knopf, \$10.95. Even if you never want to read another word about Billy... or anyone else name of Carter... don't let that keep you away from *Crackers*. Whatever it is you're doing that seems so terribly important, put it down and go get yourself a copy of this book and about nine cold cans of Pearl beer and all your old Chuck Berry records, and send the kids off to play with their friends so you can sit somewhere comfortable and laugh out loud without feeling self-conscious. Be grateful to the South for producing writers like Roy Blount, and promise yourself not to feel guilty if you never read another word on the op-ed page of the *Times*.

Blount lives in the North now and hangs out with some suspicious people in Manhattan and worries too much about explaining himself to them. A.J. Liebling observed that "Southern politicians, like sweet corn, travel badly." Southern journalists run the same risk. Read Blount now, while the kernels are still full of juice and texture.

—Thomas N. Bethell

**Entropy: A New World View.** Jeremy Rifkin with Ted Howard. Viking, \$10.95.

**Empire as a Way of Life.** William Appleman Williams. Oxford, \$14.95. Historians perform a valuable service. They tell us which things Don't Count. The things that Don't Count for Williams are any instances when the United States behaved morally.

The author's thesis is that "imperialism is the opiate of the American people." All U.S. history, to him, has been one uninterrupted progression of a fiendish "apocalyptic imperial strategy" to subjugate the world.

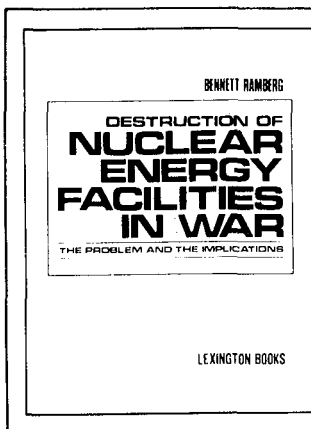
There have been, of course, far too many times—the Spanish-American War, Chile, Iran—when pure lust overcame the principles we claim to represent. But to conclude from this that our sole national yearning is to "take wealth and freedom away from others," as Williams maintains, is like concluding that anyone who has eaten chocolate speaks Dutch.

Williams dismisses as Don't Count the inconvenient fact that we have not made a move against our wealthiest and most desirable neighbor, Canada, since 1812. Is there another country anywhere whose last war with a rich and vulnerable neighbor is 170 years in the past? If imperialism is our "opiate," someone's not passing the pipe.

Particularly awkward for Williams's analysis is the greatest single argument in favor of America as, generally, a moral nation. Namely, our almost serene inactivity from 1945 to 1949. The U.S. had a churning industrial machine reamed out to full capacity, while the rest of the world was still smoldering; we had the irresistible atom bomb and the means to deliver it. We could have brought the world to its knees. We didn't even try.

That America didn't attack Russia, didn't nuke the Maoist hordes, and didn't annex

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