

THE WASHINGTON MONTHLY

Journalism Award

for September 1989 is presented to

Chuck Neubauer
Mark Brown
Chicago Sun-Times

This series reveals how, in a city virtually devoid of low-cost housing, the Federal Housing Administration committed itself to wildly speculative luxury construction projects. As a result, eight deluxe apartment buildings in Chicago with FHA-insured mortgages totaling \$230 million have defaulted within the past three years, leaving taxpayers on the hook for sundecks, hot tubs, private health clubs, a marina, and a private park. The articles also report that when the HUD inspector general questioned these expensive projects, local HUD officials justified the loans by saying that Congress had never made it clear to them what low or moderate income housing was.

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to the best newspaper, magazine, television, or radio story (or series of stories) on our political system. Nominations for any newspaper, magazine, or radio or television station in the country are welcome. The subject can be government in its federal, state, or municipal manifestation. Please send nominations to Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009. Two copies of the article or broadcast text should accompany the nomination.

The award for stories published or aired in October will be announced in the January issue. Nominations for stories published or aired in November will close December 15. The winner will be announced in the February issue.

vulnerable to them. When the community action agency in Newark helped stage a play by LeRoi Jones that portrayed Rochester from the Jack Benny Show righteously killing white people, the stock of the entire community action program went down.

Community action was created in a spirit of mistrust of the established political order, especially in the South, and it was designed to distribute its monies outside the usual political channels. This meant, however, that it started life with an extraordinarily powerful set of enemies, including the established federal domestic departments, such as Labor, Agriculture, and Health, Education, and Welfare, and those governors, mayors, and members of Congress who were unable to control the antipoverty funds going into their districts. As a result, the primary political battles over the OEO were about form (who ran the community action agencies) not function (what the community action agencies actually did to fight poverty). Even if there had been no Vietnam, the OEO would have been in political trouble; Johnson himself soon turned against it, feeling (not inaccurately) that it was a nest of admirers of his archenemy, Robert Kennedy.

OEO scoreboard

The War on Poverty also suffered because, about a year into its existence, its intellectual rationale became passé. In 1964, when the war was planned, most liberals (except economists) believed that the crucial task was to break the hold of the "culture of poverty" by offering poor people a lot of special education and training. By 1965, the culture-of-poverty thesis was on its way to becoming anathema to intellectuals because it seemed patronizing and social-workerish. Instead, poverty should be fought either by giving poor people cash or through economic-development and political-empowerment schemes in poor areas. Even the leaders of the poverty program did not spend their main energies selling ideas like Head Start.

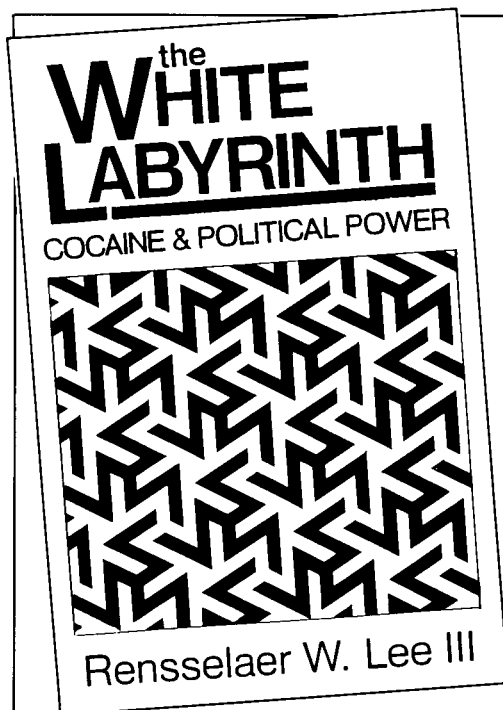
In retrospect, it seems obvious that everybody should have been focusing on the question of whether or not the OEO's programs were helping poor people. Everybody wasn't, though, and as a result the successes of this extremely high-profile agency were curiously obscure. There were many things the OEO did that worked. There is a demonstrable difference in early development between poor children in Head Start and poor children not in Head Start. Job-training programs like the Job Corps and the Neighborhood Youth Corps, while expensive, did raise their trainees' subsequent earnings. The impact of VISTA and the Foster Grandparents program

(which was created by the OEO, not Nancy Reagan) is probably impossible to measure, but both helped create some sense of common cause between the poor and the not-poor. By raising the nation's consciousness about social-welfare issues, the OEO helped create a climate that made later antipoverty advances, such as food stamps and Social Security disability payments, possible.

It's important to demythologize the War on Poverty. The OEO, a smallish federal agency, didn't create the underclass. It won't do to cut off the debate about social programs by saying that the OEO's failure proves that no program can work. Actually, we know quite a bit about what the War on Poverty did and didn't do well. Broadly speaking, what poverty programs haven't been able to do well is to turn very poor neighborhoods into stable working-class environments with safe streets, good schools, and plentiful jobs. The main reason for this is the heavy out-migration from very poor neighborhoods. Discussions about helping the underclass today concentrate too much on the idea of community development, and not enough on assisting this natural process of up and out.

Probably the greatest success of the War on Poverty was as a jobs program. The OEO put many thousands of blacks on the road to becoming middle class by putting them on the government payroll. In 1970, during the sunset period of the Great Society, 57 percent of black male college graduates and 72 percent of black female college graduates worked for government. The irony here is that the planners of the War on Poverty explicitly rejected the idea of fighting poverty through a big job-creation program. The second overall success of the OEO was in what might be called acculturation: efforts designed to impart the mores of mainstream American society (good prenatal care, literacy, work skills, and habits) to the poor. Head Start is an example. But this is an uncomfortable truth too, because it bears out the verboten culture-of-poverty thesis.

There are some problems that the War on Poverty and its ripple effects did alleviate, most notably elderly poverty. But the problem of ghetto poverty is even more urgent now than it was then. We need to solve it, and we can solve it. A lack of intellectual honesty about the OEO is one of the main road-blocks. □



THE WHITE LABYRINTH COCAINE AND POLITICAL POWER *Rensselaer W. Lee III*

This book is an in-depth examination of a problem that is of paramount public concern – narcotics trafficking. Cocaine imports have increased five-to tenfold from 1977 to 1987, and abuse of cocaine and its derivative "crack" has become a serious social dilemma in the U.S. By exploring the economic and political pressures in producing countries, *The White Labyrinth* explains why effective action is so difficult. It analyzes the devastating pressure tactics of "coca lobbies" and cocaine trafficking syndicates, it explores the complex relationships between the cocaine industry and leftist revolutionary movements, and it reveals the unexpectedly negative consequences of actions taken by Washington.

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When Criminal Rights Go Wrong

*Forget liberal. Forget conservative.
Think common sense.*

by Paul Savoy

It has become one of those commonplaces of bicentennial speeches and Fourth of July orations to cite reports by pollsters that if the Bill of Rights were put to a vote today, a surprisingly large number of citizens would fail to ratify some of our most fundamental freedoms. A 1989 survey conducted by *The National Law Journal* showed that Americans are so fearful about the drug-driven crime epidemic that more than half of those polled who expressed an opinion favored cutting back the constitutional rights of criminal defendants and overruling Supreme Court decisions that limit police conduct in gathering evidence.

When Americans reject the ideals of one of our founding documents, we are urged to believe, as Gary Wills observed on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, that something has gone wrong with America; that somehow, in failing to subscribe to the Supreme Court's interpretation of certain 18th-century ideals, America "has ceased in part to be itself." What we have failed to consider is the possibility that what may be misguided are the orthodox teachings of the American legal establishment, not the majority opinions of the American people.

Paul Savoy, a former prosecutor and law professor, is working on a book about the Supreme Court.

The approach of the 200th anniversary of the ratification of the Bill of Rights provides a timely opportunity for the legal profession to consider an unsettling idea: There may be considerable validity to the profound, though poorly articulated, intuition of the public at large that the procedural guarantees of the Constitution are not to be used to undermine a defendant's responsibility for his criminal acts. Because readers will be (and should be) extremely skeptical of the claim that much of what law schools have been teaching and courts have been espousing since the advent of the Warren Court era may be fundamentally flawed, a heavy burden rests with those who would challenge the prevailing orthodoxy.

Taking rights too seriously?

Having provided the framework for what was surely the most ambitious and idealistic effort in the history of the Supreme Court to bring the Constitution to bear upon flagrant abuses in the administration of criminal justice, liberals have become willing to accept the assumptions and principles of that 1960s revolution as dogma beyond accountability to serious moral or intellectual inquiry. Deeper and more mature reflection on the history and purpose of the procedural guarantees of the Constitution—including most prominently the Fourth Amendment